The Small Brothers Among us: Mukhtars and Authoritarianism in Turkey

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Abstract

This thesis aims to explore mukhtars' roles and responsibilities in authoritarianization of Turkey that took place after 2014. It also perpetuates to find out the rationale of the incumbent alliance for pursuing policies on mukhtars and how these sustain and consolidate authoritarianism starting from the local level. With this purpose, in addition to collecting their brochures, in-depth interviews were conducted with mukhtars in 10 neighborhoods of Istanbul with different income levels and political leanings. The findings indicate that the extra-legal position of mukhtars sustain authoritarianism in the local level in both economic and political aspects, particularly in lower income neighborhoods. While the incumbent tries to incorporate them through a new set of policies and political party pressure at the local and bureaucratic levels; mukhtars attempt to retain their autonomous structure. The way political actors deal with this power exchange and the way political contestation takes place demonstrates how state institutions are permeated by the incumbent alliances and are used for their own ends, such as clientelism and various methods for electoral manipulation that sustain authoritarianism in the local and in the bureaucratic levels.

Acknowledgements

"I,myself cannot possibly leave this city. All alternatives and remedies have melted away. However, I cannot be happy in a world like this either-so I dream. I dream of a bright, joyful, blooming world where no one exploits others, no one is in deep fear or suspicion towards his fellowmen or no one glares at others in enmity with clenched teeth…   "

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I want to dedicate this thesis to all the people of my beautiful and lonely country. Like Nazım says: This heaven, this hell is ours. Everything is going to be alright.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

On 27th of January 2015 the newly elected President of the Republic Erdoğan initiated the 'Mukhtars Meetings' aiming to gather all 50,229 mukhtars in the Presidential Palace on a weekly basis. In the first meeting, he addressed to mukhtars "The vision to become a great state begins at the local level. If the perspective and direction of the country does not match with the perspective of our smallest administrative unit, our villages, and neighborhoods, we cannot achieve a healthy growth (...) we will continue to strengthen our mukhtars in terms of authority, means and rights, Mukhtars will be their (President's) eyes and ears in every neighborhood and village."[1], he put so much emphasis on mukhtars that he proclaimed himself as the 'Headmukhtar of Turkey'. Indeed, an encompassing system was established that linked mukhtars directly to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, giving mukhtars a chance to bypass the bureaucracy in between and directly reach out while expanding their rights and authority significantly. 7 months after, following the general elections that took place in June 2015 in which AKP failed to form a government on its own[2], Erdoğan addressed mukhtars once again in one of these meetings to "inform him about every people's situation, such as who is living in the house, how are they, who are they, in line with their responsibility towards the state"[3]. In the second elections[4], AKP managed to increase its vote by 8,6% and clung to the solitary rule in November 2015.

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[1] https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/3406/president-erdogan-addresses-to-mukhtars-the-vision-to-become-a-great-state-begins-at-the-local-level
[2] HDP, the Kurdish Party, managed to pass the 10% electoral threshold for the first time, hence AKP could not form a government.
[3] http://bianet.org/bianet/toplum/166772-iki-muhtardan-erdogan-a-yanit-mahalleliyi-ihbar-etmeyiz
[4], Erdoğan did not give the right to form a government to the opposition, thus the elections were repeated in November 2015.

Mukhtars can be defined as the smallest unit of state authority working in a neighborhood, who are elected on a 5-year basis with elections[5] but they cannot be affiliated with any political party. Etymologically mukhtar means 'the elected and autonomous' and they still keep their autonomous structure to a certain extent while at the same time they are the closest unit the bureaucracy has to reach the citizens thus they represent both a link between the state and the citizens and the authority (Gül et. al 2014: 227). They have been a part of the state bureaucracy since Ottoman times which were established in the early 1800s to increase the presence of the Ottoman state throughout the vast empire (Köklü and Gül, 2017: 2) however with the growth of the cities with rapid urbanization, their importance in the state bureaucracy had decreased significantly. After 2014 though, there has been an increasing attention paid on mukhtars through clear-cut policies that gave them an unprecedented power which is claimed by Elise Massicard to be the first leader in the world history to pay this much attention to a minor governor in bureaucracy such as mukhtar[6].

Why did Erdoğan turn to mukhtars, who have not been even taken seriously for all these long years? I argue that the political sociological position of mukhtars in neighborhoods give them a very unique position in terms of authority, and their extra-legality within the neighborhood-level leaves a gray zone for various political and state actors to contest them for their own economic and political ends. The policies on mukhtars, I argue, also reveal how Turkey has been going authoritarianized after late 2013 and demonstrates a significant aspect of how authoritarianism is sustained starting from the local level.

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[5], In fact, mukhtar elections compose the first attempt to establish democratic elections in Ottoman Empire https://www.haberturk.com/yazarlar/murat-bardakci/1082189-biz-secimlerle-ilk-defa-1833te-tanistik-ve-43-yil-boyunca-sadece-muhtar-sectik
[6]http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/siyaset/655497/Basmuhtar__Tepeden_ucuna_dek_t ek_devlet.html

In the following part I present the context of my research, the puzzle I am attempting to solve and my research question. Then I continue with a concise description of the methodology, and how this research contributes to the wider political science literature.

Following the clashes between Erdoğanists and Gülenists, who were mainly the 2 main constituent factions of AKP, started in the late 2013 and soared to a peak intensity especially after the Gülenist coup attempt of 15th of July 2016; Turkey started experiencing a huge democratic backsliding (Levitsky and Zibatt, 2018; Somer, 2016 and 2019; Öktem and Akkoyunlu, 2016). The Freedom House rating of the country is even lower than 1980[7] in which the country was ruled under the military junta. In the midst of huge political crises that shook AKP's rule and their relationship with their best and most powerful allies, Gülenists, Erdoğan allied with Nationalists and particularly the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which was controlled by the Gülenists previously, was left to Nationalist allies. After this move, a series of policies has been implemented to strengthen mukhtars.

First, all the villages are transformed into neighborhoods in Turkey thus more inspection and control has been put upon remote villages through state administrative and municipality integration; and second is the Mukhtar Meetings Erdoğan initiated in 2015 and the online informative system that was built under the new Minister of Internal Affairs (Arıkboğa, 2018: 31-33). Additionally, in 2016, neighborhood night watch was installed to work in cooperation with mukhtars and a new law was enacted in 2016 which armed mukhtars[8]; and in 2017 another law was enacted by Erdoğan with a presidential decree that assigned mukhtars to follow presidential orders in the neighborhood-level if necessary[9].

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[7] 1981 Report categorizes Turkey as Partly Free while 2019 report categorizes Turkey as Not Free. Check the table on page 25 in (Gastil et. al, 1981) and (Freedom House, 2019).
[8] http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2017/12/20171224-22.htm
[9] http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.3.4541.pdf

These Mukhtars Meetings had been interpreted as a substitute for Party talks[10] to address both domestic and global issues to a group of people[11]. On the deeper side of these discussions though, in addition to what had been acknowledged by the journalists, I argue in line with Arıkboğa (2018: 32) that it is a part of the new local administration policies enacted through empowering mukhtars, culminating into an expansive state capacity incorporating the smallest link of bureaucracy. Despite these aforementioned legal changes and a clear turn to mukhtars, and them have always been being the closest link of the state bureaucracy to the people throughout history, not much academic attention had been paid to Erdoğan's politics on mukhtars (Ülgül, 2018: 69).

AKP has been using its bureaucratic party structure in a clientelistic manner to ensure an encompassing hold over the people by engaging them into daily politics in the neighborhood-level (Doğan, 2016). The same rapid urbanization process Turkey experienced with import substitution model, left an enormous amount of people in the urban periphery without proper services and care[12]. This chance was grabbed by the Islamic movement in early 1990s, in which they used it to increase its activities and roles in the urban peripheries by establishing a very structured and a robust organization that lead to Erdoğan's first electoral victory as the mayor of Istanbul in the 1994 local elections (Tuğal, 2009; Doğan, 2016; Birand, 2019). The level of engagement they built can be explained in a single quote by the head of the women's movement within the Islamic movement: "Erdoğan was taking care of everything himself, and was telling

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[10] Erdoğan had to resign from his position as the leader of AKP to be nominated for the Presidential elections in 2014. Hence he lost his chance to address these issues in party meetings after being the President.

[11] http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/koseyazisi/378409/Muhtarlar_toplantisi.html

[12] Due to the growth of urban areas, millions of people migrated from Anatolia to Istanbul. Istanbul's population has grown with a yearly rate of 40-50% from the 1970s to 1990s http://www.ibb.gov.tr/tr-TR/BilgiHizmetleri/Istatistikler/Documents/demografi/t211.pdf

us to check streets at night to see whether someone was awake, or whether there was smoke coming out of chimney or not"[13] (Sibel Eraslan in BBC Turkey, 2019).

With the recent changes though, the country started experiencing the inclusion of elected independent state administrative local bodies within this framework as well. Holding the detailed information of all people living in the neighborhood and engaging with them on a daily basis, within the sociological structure of neighborhoods in Turkey; mukhtars can actually track every detail that has been going on in a neighborhood very closely. What makes them unique is their extra-legal position, most of the responsibilities they are supposed to take care of are not recognized legally (Massicard, 2016: 274) and they are so minor to be mentioned in national-level newspapers. Mukhtars usually have other occupations within the neighborhood, they are more than familiar with their subjects, and actually, their primary role ended up being solving personal problems rather than dealing with neighborhood-level problems (ibid, 253). Most of their responsibilities do concern municipalities, but they follow the state hierarchy bureaucratically (ibid, 274-5). They do not have any salary, but they have an allowance from the district governorship's budget, which is a very low amount for the work they are supposed to run. Also, even though they are subjected to civil servants' law if they commit any guilt, they do not have the rights of a civil servant. Thus, to do their jobs successfully, mukhtars have to be constantly active and build up networks independently to stay in power (ibid, 264). Hence, they are prone to political clashes as their position concerns a triangular power clash between personal power, political parties and the state.

On paper, in fact, mukhtars are responsible from a very small number of errands officially; such as providing life and accommodation certificate to citizens[14], tracking all citizens in the neighborhood to see whether they are eligible for military conscription, providing

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[13] Especially organized as a robust movement in the poor peripheries, this was done to see whether someone was ill in the house, or whether they have enough coal for heating or not.
[14] This can also be done online, however, as also stated by my interviewees, people in low-cost neighborhoods do not have access to online systems thus they have to rely on mukhtars.

poverty certificate for those who are in need of social assistance by the state, distributing written notifications to people, notifying concerning institutions about infrastructural needs and implementing President-level decisions in the neighborhood if it is necessary (Mevzuat, 1944). What remains puzzling in this case is the less heard and unwritten responsibilities they have and how they implement these that contribute to authoritarianism.

The research question I aim to answer in this thesis is: *What are the roles of mukhtars in sustaining authoritarianism in Turkey and how is this carried out in the local level and in the bureaucratic level?* Specifically, I research their existing roles within the sociological structure of neighborhoods, the unwritten responsibilities they are engaging in, and how these policies have influenced their roles and experiences as mukhtars that sustained authoritarianism from the local level.

To answer this question, I conducted interviews with mukhtars from both AKP-intensive neighborhoods and opposition-intensive neighborhoods, with varying degrees of income groups, in Istanbul to see how they use this new system, and ask what has changed in their responsibilities, to what extent they cooperate with the neighborhood night watch, whether they are working with parties' neighborhood-level groups and whether they receive any threats or not. I also collected brochures of every mukhtar to see how they promote themselves and the things they engage in. The comparative perspective will also enable me to check whether AKP is favoring any sides for these activities, or expecting and providing the same service from both sides[15]. I intentionally choose an urban setting, because Istanbul is the main site for exploring the activities of AKP at the local level, particularly in neighborhoods where poor people are concentrated; and secondly, Istanbul has always been the main focus and the primarily controversial city in terms of electoral manipulation through various ways. Additionally,

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[15] AKP's municipal politics and service distribution involves favoritism to an enormous degree. For a detailed analysis from 2002 to 2011, check (Gürakar, 2016).

population living in the cities are more prone to political and economic contestation and clashes; thus it would be more suitable to see how these policies are carried out in a metropolitan city such as Istanbul.

Since 2013, Turkey has been named under several categories connoting a defected to varying extents of a form of democracy: including competitive authoritarian (Levitsky and Way, 2010; Esen and Gümüşçü, 2016), illiberal democracy (Öktem and Akkoyunlu, 2016), electoral authoritarian (Arbatlı et.al, 2014; Yilmaz and Bashirov, 2018) , delegative democracy (Taş, 2015) informational dictatorship (Guriev and Triesman, 2015) all these categories attempted to explain the ways in which Erdoğan manipulates democracy and democratic means for his own benefit, such as media manipulation (Somer, 2016), polarization (Somer, 2019), electoral manipulation (Çalışkan, 2018), populist discourse (Müller, 2016 and Türk, 2018). There had not been an in-depth analysis linking democratic backsliding and how these can be conceived with reference to AKP's party structure and local-level politics, the power-sharing structures that consolidated AKP's power as the incumbent within the ruling elite and after the collapse of Gülenist alliance and the increasing popularity and responsibility of mukhtars.

Under this framework, my research contributes to the literature on authoritarianism in Turkey, specifically from sustaining the electoral authoritarian (Schedler, 2013) side, also adding a different case to Grzymala-Busse's (2008) state institutions exploited by the incumbent and transformed into rent-distribution and clientelist institutions, and to a large extent confirms the existing limited literature on mukhtars (Gül et. al, 2014, Massicard, 2016, Köklü and Gül, 2017, Arıkboğa, 2018, Ülgül, 2018) and expands them. Unlike what it has been stated; mukhtars are not a direct arm of the state bureaucracy that directly increase the presence of a state, but in fact they are in the middle of a power clash between their own networks, party politics and state politics; so, it is a contested institution that provides both information bureaucratically and strengthens incumbent's power in the neighborhood-level. These changes

in policies are to incorporate mukhtars within the state system through power-sharing both in bureaucratic institutions with Nationalists' powerful state mindset (Taşkın, 2015) and within neighborhood-level with local level actors that ensure AKP's hegemony at the local level (Doğan, 2016). Policies through power-sharing smoothen and consolidate the state capturing of the incumbent both politically and economically (Grzymala-Busse, 2008) which has been known with its clientelistic structure (Doğan, 2016; Tuğal, 2009) and continuous electoral manipulation (Somer, 2019, Çalışkan, 2018). The way political actors deal with this power exchange and the way political contestation takes place demonstrates how state institutions are permeated by the incumbent alliances and are used for their own ends, such as clientelism and various methods for electoral manipulation that sustain authoritarianism in the local and in the bureaucratic levels.

Nevertheless, this form of state and incumbent party's involvement to politics from the neighborhood-level exist in Latin America as well (Auyero, 2000 and 2007) and may also contribute to populism literature in the Latin American form (Roberts 2006) in countries such as Argentina, Brazil and Peru which often permeates into clientelism literature as well (Szwarcberg, 2015).

The Outline

In the first chapter I elaborate upon authoritarianization of Turkey, and justify why my research is a contribution to electoral authoritarianism by comparing it to other classifications on Turkey. Then I explore power-sharing mechanisms in electoral authoritarianism context, the consequences of it, and how it took place within Turkey. Here I also talk about a brief history of Turkey starting from 1990s within the power-sharing literature context. In the last section of the first chapter, I proceed to explore neighborhood-level politics and clientelism literature, and how AKP has been using it to consolidate its power in the local level. This part integrates with the electoral authoritarian and power-sharing parts as well and demonstrates the political

sociological positions of mukhtars. In the second chapter, I present my research methodology and justify why I chose Istanbul and the neighborhoods I did my research on. In the third chapter, I present my findings by separating them into three sections: first is mukhtars and their relationship to neighborhood, second is mukhtars and their relationship to political parties, and third is mukhtars and their relationship to the state. In the fourth chapter I analyze my findings and demonstrate how they fit into the existing literature I have covered in the thesis, and conclude with a brief summary, and possible ways to improve this research.

Chapter 1: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, I will follow a deductive approach, meaning that I will first clarify the context, and then will enter to Turkish case in the state level and lastly at the local level. This section contextualizes mukhtars and incorporates the limited literature on mukhtars as well. In the first section, I will give a broad discussion on gradual authoritarianization in Turkey by comparing differing views and justifying why my research is a contribution to Schedler's (2013) 'electoral authoritarian' concept and how it is sustained. Secondly, I will discuss how politics have been carried out through power-sharing in Turkey, and how these and changing elite alliances contribute to sustaining electoral authoritarianism. Thirdly, I will discuss the role of local politics and clientelism and the ways in which they contribute to electoral authoritarian practices through power-sharing in the case of Turkey. My theoretical framework for analyzing mukhtars is the combination of these three fields, mukhtars operate in a field where the political actors try to incorporate them for their own ends and they try to retain their autonomy; while the incumbent tries to retain its power within the state-level institutions through economic and political power-sharing in bureaucracy, party-structure and in the local level in an electoral authoritarian framework.

1.1 Political History of Turkey until AKP

Turkey has never been a complete democracy, it always had an illiberal aspect within the ruling elite that prevented the installation of full democracy in the country. Particularly the role of the military as the 'guardians of the secular republic' (Gürsoy, 2015: 119) had been the most influential, as Turkey has experienced 2 successful direct interventions, 2 indirect interventions and 1 serious coup attempt from 1960 to 2015. The last indirect military intervention occurred in 1997, in which the military compelled the Refah Party (Welfare

Party)[16] to bow to certain principles that were inherently against their political ideology, thus they were enforced to resign. This was an influential moment for the Islamist movement in Turkey as they gained the utmost momentum following the 1997 coup. Hence the overall history of the Turkish Republic can be named as tutelary democracy which emphasizes the capacity of armed forces to intervene in civil political affairs (Taş, 2015; Çalışkan, 2018). The latest coup becomes a defining feature of AKP which has yet to become the ruling party in 2002 as they instrumentalized the Kemalist policies that had been implemented throughout all these years by creating a discourse on the 1997 coup (Şık, 2016; Birand, 2019).

1.1.1 Authoritarianization of Turkey under AKP

Many scholars agree upon that AKP's first term, from 2002 to 2007 was a more democratic term for Turkey compared to the previous years, underlined especially by the EU accession process, high and stable economic growth and relative freedom on Kurds (Öniş, 2015; Yilmaz and Bashirov, 2018). Despite the democratization façade, these policies are seen as a mean for survival rather than a will for democratization by a significant number of scholars (Taş, 2015: 780; Somer, 2017: 1029). In AKP's second term, from 2007 to 2011 however, what we encounter under Erdoğan and AKP is "conquering the state rather than democratizing it" (Somer, 2017: 1026), as this period is characterized by the substitution of existing state bureaucracy with Gülenists (Şık, 2016) via a highly controversial trial series called Ergenekon, in which a group of army officials, journalists and academicians were accused of an alleged coup attempt against the state (Gürsoy, 2015). This period is acknowledged as the first footsteps en route to authoritarianism with adjectives.

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[16] The first Islamic Party that came to power in Turkey in 1996, formed under Necmettin Erbakan, who also worked as a teacher of Erdoğan in his early career. The two later followed different paths due to an ideological clash of Erbakan with Gülen.

1.1.2 Authoritarianism with Adjectives – A New form or an old one?

The evaluation of the period after 2011 is divided into many strands, which is without a doubt also shaped by the worldwide popularity for naming various democratic backsliding trends. Subsequently, the Turkish case can be best understood in an authoritarian context, because what we encounter is a gradual shift to a more personalized, less contested, less democratic, more polarized in a more centralized country. Not demonstrating the minimum standards for democracy (Esen and Gümüşçü, 2016: 1582), it cannot be evaluated under any democracy; thus it should be considered among forms of authoritarianism, not a democracy (Svolik, 2012: 23).

One strand among Turkish scholars claims that Turkey under Erdoğan and AKP is not witnessing something new, but rather this is an old authoritarian version that existed in Turkey before. They focus on the political-sociological aspect of the regimes, such as the retaining of centralized power, top-down control over the institutions as summarized by Somer (2016: 4). However, the opposing ones argue that Turkey had some forms of democracy, and integration of peripheral actors such as Kurds and Islamists to the active politics in the recent years, and thus what Turkey has been experiencing with AKP's second term should be considered as a democratic breakdown and a transition to a new form of authoritarianism (Öniş, 2015; Somer, 2016; Esen and Gümüşçü, 2016).

1.1.3 Why Electoral Authoritarianism?

The supporters of a new form of authoritarianism diverge mainly in two very similar poles and a third strand: competitive authoritarianism, electoral authoritarianism, and neoliberal authoritarianism. The slightly popular among authoritarian forms is competitive authoritarianism (Esen and Gümüşçü, 2016; Çalışkan, 2018), which is characterized by unfair access to resources and media, repression on the opposition, uneven playing field and unfair elections (ibid). Çalışkan (2018) on the other hand, underline the importance of competition by

relying upon Levitsky and Way's (2010) definition; he states that in competitive authoritarian regimes the incumbent allows competition and elections as long as he is sure about the victory, and they achieve these through subtle and open forms of repression, harassing and persecuting (Çalışkan, 2018: 9-10). Even though these seem right in the first place, Öktem and Akkoyunlu (2016: 470) claim that two main premises distinguish Turkey from its competitive authoritarian counterparts and thus should be considered as an illiberal democracy: first concerns with AKP's revisionist ideological mindset that was popular in the early 2000s; second is the existence of some influential political actors that is beyond the reach of AKP and Erdoğan.

The repetition of the general election in 2015 to indicate the existence of an informational lack, even though the opposition is harassed in the ways the scholars have acknowledged, what does not fit into the Turkish context is the level of information that is assumed in competitive authoritarianism. Also, the role of elections is not that emphasized in competitive authoritarian literature, as much as it is done in electoral authoritarianism. Competitive authoritarian literature focuses on what has been done in elections, and give a detailed analysis on how elections are skewed in favor of the incumbent; but what characterizes leaders such as Erdoğan are elections, they derive their legitimacy out of it, and it is also decisive upon power-sharing (Svolik, 2012: 87). Henceforth, the defining feature of the regime is not the nature or type of competition, but the role and the centrality of elections (Schedler, 2013: 3).

The third type of authoritarianism, neoliberal one, in the Turkish context can be analyzed under power-sharing mechanisms in authoritarian regimes, which I will do in great detail in the next section. Returning back to electoral authoritarianism, as I have stated, it is characterized mainly by two aspects; the informational uncertainty that Schedler (2013: 1) argues; and the centrality of elections, which is underlined by Schedler (2013: 5-6) again. The other features of electoral authoritarianism are not different from competitive authoritarianism,

as observed by Yilmaz and Bashirov (2018: 1817) the opposition is repressed, the elections are usually unfair, electoral fraud is common, and there is a widespread violation of personal freedom and rights.

1.1.4 How is electoral authoritarianism sustained in Turkey?

What is to be added in the analysis of Turkey, by using Schedler (2013) is that how the incumbent plays the game of uncertainty, and how the power-sharing mechanisms within the elite and party structure work together to establish the legitimacy through elections. Mukhtars, as an elected institution and a crude monitoring and informational mechanism play a minor, but also an indispensably influential role in the middle of wearing local politics which involve both formal and informal actors that shape social, political and economic relationships (Doğan, 2016: 36).

For Schedler (2013) this level of uncertainty is played within institutions, the politics exist as long as there are institutions (9), and the actors contending do so for domination and the exercise of state power (11) through a nascent coordination and alliances with varying actors within the state, but nothing is certain within this framework (12). The incumbent has to reach to a position to be able to influence the informational and institutional uncertainties and sustain them to its own good (ibid, 22), because any threat may occur from their allies, from an external actor, or from the people (ibid, 25-35). Authoritarians had to stabilize these uncertainties to stay in power and to enjoy the power they are holding with their allies. This is hard to do because as acknowledged by Schedler (2013) they operate in an uncertain informational environment (38), this is why they had to spend a lot of resources to ensure that everything is taken care of. An important section in this aspect is the emphasis put upon local politics; the authoritarian leaders make sure that local governors do not turn against them, so they establish institutional mechanisms that minimize the odds (Schedler, 2013: 66-7).

Because local politicians and powerful party structures become very effective in elections, particularly in Latin American countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Peru and Turkey (Doğan, 2016; Sayarı, 2011) the politics of incumbent on them, both through party mechanisms (ibid), and through allocation and adjustment of state capacities, which often permeate into one another as well as long-time clientelist policies transform certain state institutions to distributive mechanisms when exploited by the incumbent party (Grzymala-Busse, 2008: 646). As local notables also have power outside the general politics, they can act by using some other networks, but they are targeted to be curbed. In the Turkish context, the way how power is shared among the ruling elite usually is carried out through sharing different institutions, as I will demonstrate in the next section.

1.2 Institutional Power-Sharing Mechanisms

Svolik (2012) explores how authoritarian regimes maintain their rule through power-sharing mechanisms -institutions- that alleviate the problem of monitoring and establish a non-violent way for power control for the actors involved. He interchangeably uses authoritarian and dictatorship, however, as I have demonstrated in the previous section, there are some actors that are beyond the direct control of the incumbent in Turkey, such as the opposition winning in elections, thus power is not that centralized, but the politics is a game played on institutions; henceforth, Turkey cannot be considered as a dictatorship. Still though, Svolik's (2012) analysis on power-sharing within the ruling elite when applied to an electoral authoritarian such as Turkey, can explain why and how Erdogan has retained its power throughout these years, especially will illuminate the neoliberal authoritarian aspect, and will theoretically help in explaining the alliance with Gülenists and the rationale behind choosing the new allies -Nationalists- of Erdogan in the post-coup Turkey.

Authoritarian leaders do not come to power with enough resources, they had to ally with other existing actors to sustain an authoritarian regime (Svolik, 2012: 88). To achieve certain ends, they have to give up certain institutions or positions to satisfy the elite, and sustain the rule (ibid, 6-9), because "authoritarians inherently lack an independent authority to enforce agreements among key actors" (ibid, 14), and the authoritarian coalition prevails as long as all of the partners are satisfied, but there is always an uncertainty for the coalition partners as the power may skew to the incumbent (ibid, 57-9). Henceforth, the policies are made to satisfy the ruling elite and pacify the contenders to the rule. Elections in this manner, when thought together with Schedler (2013) work as a controlling arbitrator for the ruling elite, and a legitimacy mechanism for the people (ibid, 86-88); but the power is never vested upon a single actor or a party. The uncertainty that the ruling partners may always engage in a takeover attempt, but this is also never known because of the lack of information actors have (ibid, 61). Thus politics, turn out to be a game in institutions, which we also encounter in the fight between Erdoğan and Gülen that lead to unraveling of deep-lying political and economic alliances as a result of power-sharing.

1.2.1 The History of Incumbent Alliances from the 1990s to 2010s

Before passing to the relationship between Erdoğan and Gülen, a brief summary of the 1990s political history of Turkey has to be included. In the context of Turkey, throughout the 1990s the political power was dispersed among various actors, while the period is known with coalition governments and an unstable economy and a powerful army; the 1990s are also known with the flourishing of Islamic communities[17], and the emergence of a very violent war against Kurds in the East. The ministry of internal affairs gained unprecedented importance and popularity in this period, particularly the departments of intelligence and police because they

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[17] This is a post-Iran revolution trend in Turkey, these communities started flourishing everywhere following the relative freedom implemented in the 1990s after the violent military takeover of 1980.

were providing civil information and civil enforcement power to the ruling government besides the uncontrollable power of the military who was mainly keen on solving the Kurdish problem in the East and rising Islamism in the bureaucracy with crude power (Dündar, 1997; Birand, 2019; Şık, 2016). A very pragmatic nationalist [18], Mehmet Ağar, became very popular as the minister of internal affairs in this period, who is known with his close relationship to ultra-nationalist paramilitary forces, police forces, and mafia. This relationship came out as shocking news after the car accident happened in Susurluk in 1996, which resulted in the death of an ultra-nationalist militant who had been wanted for crimes including drug trafficking and multiple political murders; a senior police officer and a MP as they happened to be in the same car (Dündar, 1997; Birand, 2019). The state's main intention in this period was to protect the institutions from rising Islamism and mitigate the rising tensions with Kurds in Southeast Turkey, and the dominant pragmatic ideology was allowing any possible way to deal with.

Gülen, being himself an Islam preacher, was informing Mehmet Ağar about the radical Islamist groups within the police and intelligence departments during this period, as his main intention was to install his own men into these departments, which was done by Ağar through promotion, as Gülen was known as the face of 'moderate Islam' in this period and the internal affairs was making use of his knowledge (Şık, 2016: 101-5). Erdoğan was a member of the Welfare Party, thus a rival of Gülen; however, following the 1997 coup, a faction called reformists left the party under Erdoğan and was planning to form a different, a more pragmatic political party. Gülenists sensed this opportunity, and they formed a weak alliance from 2002 to 2007, Gülen's main target was Ağar's Democratic Party in AKP's first term because the army was still powerful and Gülen was afraid of being a target of anti-Islam sentiments (Şık, 2016: 167). However, Ağar's party did not grow out to be a contender for AKP, and AKP

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[18] It is beyond the scope of this thesis to talk about the structure of ideologies in Turkey, however, it has to be noted that the Right in Turkey, specifically Nationalism is known with its crude pragmatism which is later seen in Gülenist teachings and also in Erdoğan. Check (Bora, 2017) for a detailed analysis of the history of ideologies in Turkey.

managed to survive through this shaky period (Taş, 2015: 780). With the beginning of the second term, what Somer (2016) names as AKP 'conquering the state rather than democratizing it' started with an alliance with Gülenists.

Why did Erdoğan and AKP choose to ally with Gülenists? Because Gülenists had a long-lasting network of business both domestic and abroad that would provide funding for AKP and men in critical locations that would smoothen the struggles for AKP; and Gülenists needed a charismatic face, and a concrete party that would be ideologically compatible to survive within the politics (Şık, 2016: 158-164). Gülenists were mainly put into the judiciary and ministry of internal affairs, that was the price Erdoğan had to pay to make use of his services; and this alliance continued with ups and downs until 2012, in which the National Intelligence Service, which was mainly controlled by Gülenists, leaked some documents about Erdoğan (ibid, 178); and this fight continued sometimes subtly sometimes overtly until July 2016, in which Gülenists attempted for a coup that was failed.

Early 2014, when the corruption scandals loomed over the media, it was the turning point for Erdoğan in which he initiated an open war against Gülenists, and 1 year afterward he initiated Mukhtar meetings. During this period, Erdoğan and AKP allied with Nationalists[19] as a new ally in the bureaucracy and a young minister of internal affairs was assigned to the position that became extremely popular in 2 years, called Süleyman Soylu[20] who has been taking consultation from Mehmet Ağar to clear up the bureaucracy from Gülenists[21]. Subsequently, the politics on mukhtars, a stronger administrative capacity built by empowering governors and district governors, and the new online system that links mukhtars directly to the ministry of internal affairs was built under Soylu's administration; while this is the price

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[19] Conservatism, piety and nationalism have always been going hand in hand in Turkey (Bora, 2017).
[20] Became the most trusted politician in Turkey after Erdoğan https://www.birgun.net/haber-detay/en-guvenilir-siyasetci-suleyman-soylu.html
[21] Soylu was the second man in the party when Mehmet Ağar was the leader of the Democratic Party in the 2000s, he has switched to AKP in 2014 when the war against Gülenists became prevalent.

Erdoğan has to pay to make use of Nationalists' men in the bureaucracy, these power-sharing provides him votes and support and retains his position as the incumbent. Within this period, Turkey also experienced the regime change from a parliamentary democracy to presidential democracy with a referendum, though it was conducted under a state of emergency and was preceded by a set of presidential decrees. The gradual attempt for centralization of the state structure was implemented in line with the traditional Conservative-Nationalist ideology's mindset in Turkey; which take the survival of the state (*beka)* as their main concern and prioritize the necessity of a strong single hand rather than plurality (Taşkın, 2015: 249-251).

1.2.2 A Power-Sharing Form: State Capturing through Rent-Sharing

Strengthening the institutional power-sharing of Svolik (2012) with Grzymala-Busse (2008) in which she demonstrates how power-sharing through rent distribution contributes to state capturing of the incumbent, by the involvement of both state and party structures that mainly work on a clientelist fashion, as when the incumbent shares power with other actors, its cost reduces and the capacity for state capturing increases as it disperses the cost in the bureaucracy vertically and horizontally (641-5). Eventually, this rationale also explains the reasons behind choosing mukhtars; and their roles in monitoring and mitigating the uncertainty between allies and how they contribute to rent sharing distribution practices within authoritarianism (Grzymala-Busse, 2008: 646).

What kept Erdoğan in power, that created a stronger structure was the economic elite's support to him throughout the years because Erdoğan managed to stabilize the economy after the extremely unstable 1990s period, with a very neoliberal structure that put state and the capital in the middle of patronage and clientelism (Tuğal, 2009) caused some scholars to name this regime as neoliberal authoritarianism (Tansel, 2018); and the strong local-level clientelistic party structure that is inherited from the Welfare Party kept his power and relationships as well (Doğan, 2016). As put by Grzymala-Busse (2008) as well, state capturing through rent

distribution expands partisan control over the state, expands the provisions to be delivered, and works well monitoring recipients' support in formal and informal fashion (649-50). Gülenists were influential both in state institutions and within the economic elite as well; however, the shifting structures and changing alliances altered the type of policies for maintaining power. Mukhtars, nevertheless, forms the state feet of this provision in the new period.

Mukhtars, from Ottomans to the Turkish Republic had always served as the last resort of a continuous state bureaucracy that live side by side with the people and can witness their daily lives so that it can provide information to the relevant positions within the bureaucracy if needed (Massicard, 2016: 263-5), but their importance was in decline recently. These new policies, on the hand, are beyond Erdoğan's direct control, even though he strengthens mukhtars by the presidential decree, mukhtars' power is vested upon many dynamics because they are small bureaucrats in neighborhoods, as will be elaborated.

1.3 Neighborhood-Level Politics, Party Structure and Clientelism

As I have noted before, electoral authoritarian regimes do pay special attention to the local politicians to keep their electoral power intact, because they provide information and keep their hegemony in the lowest strata possible. How do they do this? The most common tactic is clientelism and patronage, which can be defined as "a form of relationship in which goods and services are distributed by individuals or parties in exchange for political support" (Sayarı, 2011: 656), and exploiting state institutions with party penetration to provide scrutinization over citizens to provide information to the incumbent (Grzymala-Busse, 2008: 639) and using it for rent distribution purposes (ibid, 646). Political parties in Latin America often engage in clientelism in this manner. This style of politics is also considered within populism literature particularly in Latin America, and clientelism is considered to be a reactionary response to the neoliberalization of the countries in that region (Roberts, 2006).

1.3.1 Clientelism in Turkey

The clientelism in Turkey, on the other hand, enabled a power-sharing system within the elite that boosted neoliberalization starting from the local which make many Islamists in the peripheries to participate into economy (Tuğal, 2009: 20-1; Buğra and Savaşkan, 2014: 18) which was also prominently strengthened by the bureaucratic party structure AKP built at the local level, as many official and unofficial members relied on these networks for gaining access to wealth and ensuring political support (Doğan, 2016).

Hence, diverging from Grzymala-Busse's (2008) examples, the Turkish clientelism is not solely a direct channeling of welfare-state funds to the people through clientelist institutions (649), even though the party structure is involved to the same extent for political monitoring purposes as well (643). Thus, the neoliberal take in Turkey creates more competition and composes a different case for mukhtars diverging from merely a state institution to operate in the neighborhood structure.

1.3.2 Neoliberal Urban Politics and Neighborhoods under AKP

Following the economic instabilities of 1990s, AKP managed to implement the neoliberalization policies and emanated wealth to a wider portion of population, which was channeled from the rich to the poor that opened up a space for the marginalized ones in the economy and politics (Doğan, 2016: 15-6); increased the popularity and intensified the activities of the party in the periphery of Istanbul. Therefore, what we encounter in the case of AKP is that, the party structure enabled many people living in the urban peripheries to participate into low-level party activities, and these low-level officers both did business, and worked for their parties because their position is dependent upon party's ability to channel capital into their district. This, nevertheless, gives birth to an immense field for a clientelist relationship built up by these low-level party member and businessmen (Sayarı, 2011: 660).

Under Erdoğan, municipalities were empowered and while their expenditures were cut, such as subcontractors were used instead of employing workers (Buğra and Savaşkan, 2014), and by assigning municipalities as the spearheading organization to derive political and economic power, the capital was urbanized and was commodified within municipalities, particularly through the construction sector (Doğan, 2016: 176-180). These policies influenced the party structure as well, as municipalities came out to be the main arena for power contestation within AKP because the local actors were allowed to participate and expand this volume (Doğan, 2016: 183), and while the volume is expanded through urban rent-seeking, area sales and property taxes, the level of distribution increased as well (ibid, 185). Hence participating into this sector via urban rent-seeking became an opportunity for low and middle-classes as well as the capital owners; creating a competitive party structure at the neighborhood-level as well (ibid, 188). Thus, individual elites benefit, but the main goal is to ensure that a wider portion of the party benefits from the resources to perpetuate its rule in this network of rent distribution (Grzymala-Busse, 2008: 651).

1.3.3 The Sociology and Politics of Neighborhoods in Turkey from the 1990s

How did neighborhoods still protect its importance even in the 21st Century despite the high urbanization in a city like Istanbul that urges AKP to turn into mukhtars? The industrialization attempts caused many people in Turkey to migrate to big cities such as Istanbul, which started in the 1950s and still continuing, and those who migrate from the same city got settled in the same place which was considered to be a periphery back in the day; and they formed their own power relations and living styles within these neighborhoods (Doğan, 2016: 28-30). Even though Istanbul expanded enormously during this time, most of the people continued living in the same neighborhoods; and with urbanization, bigger districts were formed out of these small neighborhoods creating grounds for clientelism due to the swelling

of the urban poor (Sayarı, 2011: 660-1), who are less costly to use and due to their economic position, are more dependent upon these clientelist relationships (Grzymala-Busse, 2008: 646).

The rapid urbanization could not meet with adequate services of the municipalities in many former-periphery districts causing great trouble to both mayors and citizens of Istanbul particularly in the 1980s and 1990s (BBC, 2019). The Welfare Party used this chance by initiating its neighborhood-level politics in such districts, and Erdoğan got a surprising victory in 1994 local elections and elected as the mayor of Istanbul (Sayarı 2011: 662). Later on, Erdoğan used the same networks that were built back then, both in local ways to enhance his power and channeling business into Islamist businessmen (Buğra and Savaşkan, 2014: 107).

People coming from the rural areas and directly trying to adapt to a multicultural environment, many cultural conflicts emerged that retained the patrimonial power relations of rural areas within these communities that maintained the conservative culture and practice within the neighborhood, which is called as 'neighborhood pressure' by Şerif Mardin[22]. This connotes a patrimonial relationship that composes the basis for clientelism; as it is a historical phenomenon from Ottomans that peasants tend to rely on local notables in the absence of an excessive state authority which emerge as brokers and intermediaries between the central government and its subjects (Sayarı, 2011: 658). Thus the relationship in the neighborhood involves both material and non-material aspects are enabled both for the patron and the client. Mukhtars, nevertheless, emerges as the *ayan* (ibid) in the Turkish Republic, who has higher authority and has a saying on both material and abstract matters that they derive from state authority; but they operate in a neoliberal environment and are more prone to political contestation.

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[22] A very contested concept, however it is useful in understanding the polarization within the population through certain cleavages; such as women, sexuality, alcohol consumption and religious sects. (Nuray Mert in Çakır and Bozan, 2008, 25) Through these certain practices and thoughts prevail in society starting from below.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

Hence, while neighborhoods serve as a sociological space for the state to penetrate into to strengthen the ideology through practice and ideas; it also created a power base for Islamists and for AKP to consolidate their party structure through a clientelist and patronage relationship, which was outsourced to businessmen that were close to the incumbent's ideology. Thus, local politics in neighborhood-level work as a way to strengthen power-sharing both politically and economically, while the ruling elite gets electoral support from these neighborhoods, it can also maintain its power starting from the bottom. However, the incumbent's involvement in neighborhoods via state bureaucracy is a recent policy implemented under the new alliance.

The dynamics that matter for mukhtars involve a power contestation between the incumbent party structure and its lower level officers and mukhtars' own networks and vested power, and to the ministry of internal affairs who is currently run by the Nationalists. Since they work within both legal and extra-legal structure, their involvement and contribution to sustaining authoritarianism must be carried out in a structural manner. Their parts in the authoritarianization of Turkey and how it is sustained involve threefold strata that need to be explored: the state, the party and their own networks and the neighborhood. The research I did is formed under this framework and concerns their way of involvement in sustaining electoral authoritarianism and how they act within these power-sharing mechanisms that contribute to consolidating authoritarianism both economically and politically from the local level.

I drew a wider picture of Turkey and local politics, and I will continue by investigating this new system by conducting interviews with mukhtars, and see how the new system works, and what it can and has already lead to.

Chapter 2: RESEARCH DESIGN

In this section, I will present how I conducted this field research in an authoritarian setting and why I selected a metropolitan city such as Istanbul as a case for my research question. I will also elaborate upon my selection of districts and among mukhtars, their profiles, and will present my interview questions. In the latest section, I will discuss the limits of my research and the ways in which this research could be improved in the future.

2.1 Case Selection

Mukhtars in Turkey are mainly divided along 2 lines, village and neighborhood mukhtars; even though all villages are now converted into neighborhoods the sociological and historical position of mukhtars do not change as rapid as laws[23]. In villages, mukhtars are known to be more autonomous because of the physical and geographical conditions most of the villages in Turkey have, and they are mainly responsible from a small number of people in a village. Whereas in cities, mukhtars are prone to political relationships; even though they are elected by the people independently and not assigned within the state bureaucracy, they are the smallest link of the ministry of internal affairs, hence the state bureaucracy.

Istanbul is a cosmopolitan metropolitan city with 39 districts and municipalities and is composed of 960 neighborhoods, thus 960 mukhtars in total. Despite living in an urban setting, most of the neighborhoods in Istanbul still protect its closed community; such as people migrated from certain cities do live in certain streets in these neighborhoods, these are the neighborhoods that low and lower-middle income people usually reside. Subsequently, clientelist politics can be best analyzed in these neighborhoods as well because these are the sites that the incumbent exercises its power over people.

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[23] http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/343508/Muhtarin_gorevleri_nelerdir_.html

The intensity of these roles, nevertheless, change from one neighborhood to another depending on the multiculturality of the neighborhood, their political leanings, and economic situation; and what makes mukhtars an interesting case is their extra-legal responsibilities and how these are shaped according to the aforementioned dynamics. Especially when there is a significant turn to them with the changing alliances for the ministry of internal affairs, these extra-legal duties do form a significant part in the authoritarianization of the country at the neighborhood-level. For instance, the sociological phenomenon that mukhtars have the neutral look in the eyes of the people because they are a part of the state, but as I have stated already and elaborate more in the research part, they are increasingly under a political struggle particularly rising after 2014.

2.2 Data Collection

Conducting field research in a non-Western society and in an authoritarian country requires additional care due to the possibly emerging problems a researcher may encounter. Particularly, since my research concerns state officials and their roles in the authoritarianization of Turkey, I had to follow a more careful path in terms of contacting my interviewees and conducting my interviews. Thus, while conducting this field research, I followed the guidelines drawn by Glasius et.al (2018) and Maltahaner (2014); while preparing my questions for the interview I adapted Leech's (2002) guideline for preparing the questions for elite interviews and adapted them into an authoritarian setting.

As stated by Maltahaner (2014), due to the trust problems in authoritarian settings, personal introduction to interviewees, or being recommended by someone the interviewee trusts (5) smoothens the issues related to trust building. Since I did not know any mukhtars beforehand, I had to rely on my local contacts for snowball sampling (Glasius et. al, 2018: 56). I also used them as intermediary trusted recommenders to reach out to other mukhtars. Two of my personal contacts, whom I found by relying on my family's hometown village's solidarity

association, in 2 overly AKP intensive neighborhoods told me that I would not be able to get anything out of these mukhtars if it were not them introducing me to the mukhtars. Which came out to be true in fact, because one of the mukhtars in Beyoglu was very reluctant during the interview and told me that no one would have time to separate for a researcher. Thus parallel to what has been written in the authoritarian setting field research literature, indeed personal contacts help and smoothen the relationship between the researcher and the interviewee.

A very expected problem was recording (Maltahaner, 2014: 18), because within the post-coup presidential context in Turkey in which many civil servants and bureaucrats are constantly repressed and questioned and are named as spies; none of the mukhtars felt safe with voice recording. I had to cope with this problem with an enormously fast note-taking because I had to refine my techniques according to the safeness of my interviewees (Maltahaner, 2014: 9). Since mukhtars are in the midpoint between citizens of the neighborhood and state officials, some of the interviews were carried out in an informal manner (Glasius et al, 2018: 64-5), sometimes even as a conversation with some of the residents of the neighborhood were included during the interviews as well. Also, due to their unscheduled work environment, I had to be fine with what they could offer in any environment; even though 7 of my interviews were scheduled beforehand, I had to travel a lot because mukhtars can go, and can be called from anywhere, at any time. In addition to semi-structured interviews, I also collected their brochures in which they describe their activities and promote what they can offer to the citizens, which also reveals how they identify themselves and to what extent they make use of their unconstrained working environment.

2.3 Methodology

While choosing the seven districts to conduct my research on mukhtars, I chose them by balancing among low income, middle income and high-income districts which I relied on

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municipalities' land price indices to age groups[24]; and also balanced it according to their political leanings: AKP intensive, evenly distributed, and the opposition intensive. Also, I did a balance in mukhtars' experiences to track the recent changes and also the motivation of the new mukhtars within this new context. Despite the efforts, slight weigh is put upon AKP and MHP because they are the incumbent power and they engage in these new set of policies upon mukhtars.

Among seven districts I have chosen[25] Sultanbeyli is known with being the fortress of Islamic Movement in the 1990s (Tuğal, 2009: 125), also while being the poorest among all, it is the district where AKP gets the highest percentage of votes in Istanbul[26]. This is the district where most political clashes take place and where AKP's neighborhood-level politics, specifically clientelism, patronage relations can be observed at its peak (Tuğal: 2009), and is the 38th district for living standards among 39[27]. Bağcılar on the other hand, is the most populated district of Istanbul, where 1% of the whole population of Turkey resides, and is also among the top 5 voters of the incumbent alliance with Güngören. Both were established as districts in 1992 due to the over-migration expansions with a low to low-middle income group; these districts are also home to a high number of Syrians and Kurds. Beyoglu is one of the most cosmopolitan districts of Istanbul, also the oldest among 7 districts I have chosen, which was used to be the home for the non-Muslim population during Ottomans in Istanbul, as can be seen on the map in the appendix, this is the most mixed district in terms of income groups. Bahcelievler and Uskudar are middle-class neighborhoods where the political leanings are not skewed strongly to one side. Kadikoy, on the other hand, is one of the oldest districts of Istanbul

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[24] A detailed explanation can be found at http://belediye.istanbul95.org/en, which I also used it for the map in the Appendix.

[25] Check the map in the appendix for a detailed view and income distribution among the districts. The table in the appendix provide neighborhood-level information, however due to my intentions for interviewee protection the name of the neighborhoods are not shared.

[26] https://secim.haberler.com/ is a useful site for checking all the elections results.

[27] http://www.milliyet.com.tr/istanbul-da-ilce-ilce-yasam-siyaset-2049547/

as well, being fortresses of CHP being home to upper-middle to upper-class people and the second district with the highest living standards[28].

While preparing the questions, I used the technique of semi-structured interview with a mixture of open-ended questions which provided mukhtars to elaborate upon certain aspects more on, and closed-ended questions which provided me the answers I am looking for (Aberbach and Rockman in Leech, 2002: 674). Even though the interviews were semi-structured, the overall ordering of the questions followed a mixed set of questions, each involving a flow from open-ended questions, such as describing a day in the office, to close-ended and politically-sensitive questions, such as the questions about neighborhood watch and on what exact purpose they are used. This guideline is explained in Leech (2002: 666-7) and is actually helpful in eliciting the information I needed, which involved both direct and indirect information about the authoritarian setting. The latter involves the questions some mukhtars skipped or gave me notices such as 'off the record' prior to answering, the ways in which ordinary people involved in the interviews and some specific wording mukhtars use. These are, I believe, equally valuable to the direct answers in understanding the relationships authoritarian regimes since these can signal some other things that interviewees cannot or does not describe in words.

My question formatting in terms of how the questions are categorized is as follows, however, the ordering did change depending on the flow of the conversations:

1- The demographics of the neighborhood, citizens' hometowns, whether there is any conflict or not; why did he become a mukhtar, is s/he happy or not, how is an ordinary day in this office; describing the latest responsibility.

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[28] http://www.milliyet.com.tr/istanbul-da-ilce-ilce-yasam-siyaset-2049547/

2- Thoughts about mukhtars in general, his/her perception of being a mukhtar; Erdoğan's mukhtar meetings, his/her thoughts, whether s/he attended or not; if yes, what happens there, how does it make one feel, what are its impacts

3- Mukhtars' roles in elections, whether s/he attended election security meetings or not

4- Neighborhood watch, whether they are necessary or not, what are their exact roles in what type of problems in this neighborhood, what are their relationship to mukhtars, whether they are in constant contact or not

5- The Online System that is established both by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Municipality, for what purposes do they use it; if not, how do they communicate within the bureaucracy

6- The relationship to political parties, whether they are a current or a former member of any political party, whether there are any neighborhood-level meetings political parties organizing, whether they are receiving any threats of any sort

7- The social assistance within the neighborhood, how do they carry it out, from where they find the funding or the resources, how is the social assistance network within the neighborhood

2.4 Limitations

Even though I conducted interviews with 10 mukhtars from various backgrounds working in different settings with differing responsibilities, there are 950 more mukhtars in Istanbul, in some other notorious neighbors as well, that can widen the scope and grasp of this research. I tried to be as diverse as possible, conducting interviews with mukhtars who graduated from primary school to ones with master's degree; who are from very diverse ethnic backgrounds and who are working in varying political conflicts in their neighborhoods and within different federations. Secondly, a thorough comparative analysis of mukhtars in villages and in neighborhoods may demonstrate the extent of this institution more, and from there the

incumbent parties' authoritarianization in rural areas may also be tackled down. Thirdly, the questions I have asked my interviewees included some sensitive questions that may cause trouble to my interviewees so there may be additional information that has not been provided to me. Additionally, since I could only record one of the interviews among 10, I may have missed some of the details.

Chapter 3: RESEARCH

In this section, I will present my findings from the interviews and brochures. My findings are to a large extent parallel to what I have presented above, with the recent changes in the ministry of internal affairs indeed turned the institution of mukhtars into a contended arena. The contestation may take place in the form of party versus party contestation; party versus mukhtar's own social network; state bureaucracy versus mukhtar's own social network and in the form of state bureaucracy versus political party. Also, as expected beforehand, most of their contribution to authoritarianism comes from the unwritten and extra-legal responsibilities that emerge from their political sociological position and political parties' exploiting these for their own ends.

Contrary to what has been presented in the literature though; mukhtars are not only a direct arm of state bureaucracy that can provide information to the state bureaucracy (Massicard, 2016; Köklü and Gül, 2017; Arıboğa, 2018). Most mukhtars that I have talked in fact have their own networks because they are long-time residents of their neighborhood, that may emerge from hometown relationships, may emerge from him taking the mukhtar position from their fathers. Thus, very parallel to institutions within electoral authoritarian regimes as I have elaborated upon in the previous sections, there is a clear contestation for mukhtar position which started after 2014 (Arıkboğa, 2018: 33), particularly on those who are known to be oppositional to AKP.

While the incumbent wants to incorporate mukhtars through state expansion with sharing the ministry of internal affairs with their ally, Nationalists; the local level politics that involve party officials, municipalities, local notables and mukhtar himself/herself wants to keep their power in politics. Thus, there is an immense political contestation and power exchange that has been going on with and through mukhtars, because they influence residents both materially and non-materially. While electoral manipulation is implemented through mukhtars,

political repression on some voter groups, such as Kurds and Syrians, are done through them as well.

All of my interviewees who acknowledged to be oppositional to AKP mentioned increasing rivalry within their neighborhoods, and even threats (Mukhtar 3 and 5) which are supported indirectly both by people who are related to AKP or MHP and some landowners. I will explore these by dividing the following section into three parts; in the first section I will elaborate upon mukhtars' relationships and their position within their neighborhood and their own networks; in the second section I will analyze mukhtars' relationship to political parties, and in the third part I will analyze their relationship to the state structure. Eventually, these will demonstrate how authoritariaization and power-sharing are sustained through mukhtars in the local setting.

3.1 Mukhtars and their Relationship to Neighborhood

All of the mukhtars I have interviewed have very intimate relationships with the residents of their neighborhoods, they have explicitly acknowledged that they know most residents' lives in detail. When asked, all of them said they wanted to be mukhtars because they wanted to serve to their neighborhoods, though more will be revealed with questions to follow. Only Mukhtar 9 told me that he is regarding this position as a step in his career, as he is a party member. However, the level of political and economic engagement of mukhtars are not identical, mukhtars of the lower income neighborhoods are much more decisive and central within the politics. These are visible in their brochures as well; the brochures of low and low-middle-class neighborhood mukhtars have their phone numbers written on their cards with a Whatsapp Logo[29], and have a team of 20+ people, with their hometowns written to get things done in their neighborhoods, which I will explore in detail particularly the ways in which these

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[29] To engage residents for further communication in an informal manner.

aspects contribute to the power relations between mukhtars and other actors in the following sections. On the contrary, the middle to upper-class neighborhoods emphasizes the democratic aspect of this institution with 5-10 people attached; such as Mukhtar 7 promotes social justice, peace, and collective living practices, while Mukhtar 5 mentions neighborhood-level parliaments to increase the collectivity of the neighborhood. They prefer a more distant, institutional approach; for instance, Mukhtar 4 promotes a new smartphone application in which the residents can tell infrastructural problems to the mukhtar.

3.1.1 Diverging Self-Images of Mukhtars

Subsequently, this difference in the style of approach creates a diverging self-image of mukhtars. While the mukhtars of low and low-middle level neighborhoods are engaged in more activities and define themselves as "the leader of the neighborhood with high respect" (Mukhtar 2) or as "The door between the people and the state" (Mukhtar 8). Mukhtars 1, 2, 3 and 8 acknowledged that they are taking walks in the neighborhood every night to see if everything is fine and well. The middle to upper scale neighborhood mukhtars are humbler and more passive in this respect. Mukhtar 7 defines the role of mukhtars sociologically and says that even though within the current modern state apparatus and technological opportunities this institution is unnecessary, but still people like to communicate. In this regard, Mukhtar 4 said,

"I don't know who comes or goes to this neighborhood, they have taken this role from us in the 2010s, now the district level registration office is taking care of those... If I try to build up an extensive network as they do in other neighborhoods, my residents would not like it. They are educated, people, they would question my intentions."

Whereas while I was waiting for Mukhtar 2, an elderly lady came and asked for a bank to the garden of her house, and the mukhtar said her address and her door number without a

mistake; when I asked him how he knows to this detail, he said he has to know to stay in power and he loves his job.

3.1.2 Diverging Levels of Involvement

This difference also alters the range of the activities that they are involved in and also influences the extent they can interfere with people's daily lives.

"The other day a woman came, whom I know from the neighborhood, she is x's wife. She is from Trabzon and unemployed. She said she wanted to get a divorce, you know these things are not very common in neighborhoods like this. I said 'Sit, let's have a talk'. I mean I don't know much about these, but at least she would feel better after talking with me"

(Mukhtar 1).

The range goes from here to attending marriages and funerals in the neighborhood, even sometimes paying for them in low and low-middle class neighborhoods. As can be seen from Mukhtar 2's brochure where he promotes the things he has done so far, he found the most efficient eventide home for 2 elderly ladies, got a homeless man surgery for his wen and dealt with drug addicts in 'his own means'. Even though the middle to upper-class mukhtars also provide these, they do in a more professional way, and "try to do without shaming or harming anyone" (Mukhtar 4). For example, Mukhtar 6 told me that she knew a woman who was visiting her frequently was experiencing domestic violence however could not tell to her even though she asked, she asked for professional support from the relevant institution and helped her in a more institutional way.

Thus, even though both provide both material and moral support, the way how things are done and how it is expected to be in low and low-middle class neighborhoods demonstrate how mukhtars can influence politics and economic flow at the local level. Particularly in the

low and low-middle economic setting, this ability to know and solving things gives them an upper hand in regard to the citizens and they emerge as an opinion leader in the neighborhood-level, which are in line with what Sayarı (2011) argues state officials being the access door to services in the poor neighborhoods (611). While I was conducting my interviews, residents of the neighborhood visited their mukhtars frequently to talk about the latest local elections in Turkey, and from what I have experienced, mukhtars give them their opinions and not an objective perspective. Using opinion leaders in these kinds of neighborhoods is a political strategy Islamic movement has been following since the 1990s, through these people they ensure the hegemony in the local level (Tuğal, 2009, 125).

3.1.3 Social Assistance Distribution

Social assistance distribution is another major unwritten responsibilities mukhtars have, even though they are supposed to be carried out by their seniors in district level which is funded through municipalities, in reality, this does not function this way as the distribution process comes down to pure politics. On paper they are supposed to provide documents providing a resident's poverty level, and the residents should access to these aid through district level institutions or from municipalities. However, in practice, mukhtars take care of these services.

This responsibility contributes to their centrality figure within the neighborhood as well, because they have a red list prepared according to the level of people's needs and decide on the flow of this assistance, and the official version of social assistance is rarely carried out in practice.

"City governors assign municipalities to carry out social assistance errands. I cannot understand why do not city governors ask us do not they have the money to loan lorries for logistics? They give to municipalities, municipalities distribute it politically, they give to parties as well, but the resident comes and asks us. They do not go to district governors

because they are shy, they come to us. I am the only one (in the bureaucracy) that can reach

out to all these people. " (Mukhtar 2).

Therefore, they have to mobilize their own networks to satisfy the emerging needs of people. Mukhtar 2 uses social media effectively to fundraise for people's needs and funders do not distinguish between people depending on their hometowns nor ethnic origins; however, not all neighborhoods have such a peaceful environment. Mukhtar 1 was constantly whining about Syrians living in the neighborhood because they did not know how to live in a city. However, he was fine about Iraqi Turkmens living there because they are of the same race with Turks. This is an example of how mukhtars can steer the flow of the economy and the direction of the limited amount of capital by engaging with the residents:

"No one can lie to us, because we know everyone living in this neighborhood. If I feel like it is

a lie, I go myself and check his/her house (...) The homeowners come to us and say that s/he

needs a rentier. I know an Iraqi Turkmen teacher from the school, I recommended her to one.

This trust relationship we have in this neighborhood speeds up processes" (Mukhtar 1).

In addition to ethnic conflict, another major problem that is common among all is the hometown networks. Mukhtar 3, who spent 100,000 liras (around 20,000$, by far the highest amount) for this position, has been experiencing a major upsurge in the neighborhood because he is of Kurdish origin and worked with Easterners in his campaign where the majority of the residents are from the Black Sea region.

"Before the elections, people were checking each shop's posters while deciding for

whom to vote for, and they were constantly disseminating gossip that I was a terrorist. They

say I am an imp because I was shot in the mountains while fighting against Turks (...) Even though I gave them free meat, they did not like me. X donates us money, tells us to not give any of this to anyone from the Black Sea region, how can I do this? I don't know" (Mukhtar 3).

These hometown networks are prone to exploitation, and can get more politicized such as in Mukhtar 5's case. While she was running for the position, her rival, who had several shops in the neighborhood and has clandestine relationships to the municipality and district governor; mobilized all doormen, they stole her brochures and threatened her with death. Why did all doormen do this? Because they can increase their low salaries if someone they know comes to power, and they would be getting social assistance first. Why would a political party or municipality engage in such an activity? I will explore this in the next section.

3.2 Mukhtars and their Relationship to Political Parties

As I have elaborated upon previously by referring to Doğan (2016), politics became a local phenomenon during AKP's reign, in which ordinary people participated in this power play to ameliorate their positions. Being a central figure within the neighborhoods mukhtars' relationship to political parties can be divided into economic and political sides. While the economic side will concern how AKP concentrates economic flow into its hands through the distribution of the capital among various actors; the political side will concern their roles in elections and how it contributes to the most central institution AKP promotes for the regime. These positions do reveal why Erdoğan started paying attention to mukhtars after he lost his allies within the party bureaucracy and economic allies.

3.2.1 Economy

As mentioned before, urban transformation projects compose a significant portion of AKP's growing popularity and power in Istanbul. Mukhtars need to sign the official papers regarding urban transformation if it is a public space. If it is a case where the mukhtar's and

municipality's stance on the subject is different, Mukhtar can cause great trouble to that project. For instance, Mukhtar 5 is a former activist which stood against a transformation project before being a mukhtar; she mobilized the residents of the neighborhood to stand against construction that involved a religious community, municipality, and some mafia dark figures again after she became a mukhtar.

"This area used to be a beautiful park, they demolished it to build up a cultural center 15 years ago. Even though we were not sure what type of cultural organizations they were going to organize, still we did not say anything. Then they said they are going to build up an administrative office, still, there was not any problem. However, we then learned that they gave this area to a religious community to build up a dormitory. We have the court decision to stop the construction, but you cannot do much as a mukhtar" (Mukhtar 5).

Once she got the attention from fellow political figures at the local level, she said she started receiving threats. In the previous local elections, she told me that district-level AKP and the municipality put up a rival candidate who owned several shops within the neighborhood and was also a partner of the mentioned construction site. On the other side, Mukhtar 3, who had spent the highest amount of money to become mukhtar, is a real estate agent and in his neighborhood, albeit being on the red list for urban transformation, has not been started to be transformed yet. In Mukhtar 10's case as well, he is a local power node with ties to various armed and civilian figures, he said that they are expecting an urban transformation in their neighborhood as well. Thus there is a huge rent-seeking potential yet to come, and as can be understood from his brochure which is designed in the same way as AKP's national-level campaign, he aims to use party-level networks from municipality and district to enhance neighborhood's trade volume. Additionally, mukhtars 2, 5 and 6 told that mukhtars can also

find some unused public land in the neighborhood, which stayed empty due to legal problems. When a mukhtar finds such a land, s/he can use his/her personal network or can use it for promotion within the political party as it is an additional source of income, because public land must be issued by the state officials, thus the parties require this mukhtar link. Hence, if it is not someone who has ties to the party, a great source of income for all actors involved can be lost, or capturing can be costly.

As economics is involved to all aspects, and mukhtars' position is ambiguous within the bureaucracy particularly in terms of budget, mukhtars' relationship to relevant political party officials does play a crucial role in determining their capacity of power. With the recent changes of laws that assigned a part of budget responsibility to municipalities, if mukhtars are not from the municipality's party, they cannot get enough grants, or do not receive proper service.

"I swear I am someone who is open to communication, even though the elections are over, the municipality is still not granting any budget to us. They have always acted in a partisan manner, if he does not like you, then you cannot get anything. For example, our communications came to a total halt with the previous district mayor" (Mukhtar 7).

Mukhtar 6, on the other hand, explicitly declared that when she went to talk with the party officials regarding the lack of budget coming from Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality to district municipality and then to Mukhtar; the official said as long as you vote for CHP, do not expect us to give money to you. Thus, even though they are legally supposed to be neutral, they cannot get, because they are punished by the incumbent party officials if they get so. This was enabled by the recent law changes that politicized mukhtars' relationship even more.

3.2.2 Politics

Mukhtars, as explored, have a different position within the neighborhood, they have to be neutral officially and approach everyone equally. This premise gives them an upper hand and a truer stance in the eyes of the residents for the topics related to politics. During my interviews with all of the mukhtars, I have experienced many residents treating mukhtars as expert witnesses and exchanging their opinions on politics. Doğan (2016) explores the various actors in local politics that influence the thoughts of residents, such as hometown associations, some foundations, some shop owners, and definitely includes mukhtars as well (Doğan, 2016: 65 and Tuğal, 2009: 94; Sayarı, 2011: 658). Especially with AKP's recent turn on Old versus New Turkey comparison in 2014 local elections in which they targeted young people who are born after their coming to power, mukhtars, as experienced opinion experts, were used in promoting party politics with party officials (Doğan, 2016: 106-7). Mukhtar 9 told me that when he was an AKP party member, they were paying regular visits to people's homes to 'take their benediction'. He also added that from time to time, after 2014, mukhtars were also included in these visits because he is the administrative chief representing the state in this neighborhood, which was acknowledged by Mukhtar 2 and 4 as well. Sultanbeyli, in particular, is known with its development as the fortress of the Islamic movement in the 1990s which were strengthened through these opinion leaders and women's movement, by paying a visit to every home (Tuğal, 2009: 125).

While we were conducting the interview, a low ranked AKP-Sultanbeyli official was present as well, and they were discussing which of the mukhtars are from them and which are not, and told me that in the recent 5 years the party officials started to inform against[30] one another to get a promotion within the party, including mukhtars as well. This is why, Mukhtar

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[30] This was done to find Gülenists within the party structure, however it got out of control and some started to use it as a way for slandering.

9 told me that he has to be careful to get all the votes of all party supporters, but he has to pay extra attention to AKP officials. Later on, with the proposition of the mukhtar, three of us went together to get mukhtar's gun which is paid by the state. In Sultanbeyli therefore, the distinction between the state officials, Mukhtar, and party officials are so blurry that it practically does not exist. Even though Sultanbeyli is the best model for exploring mukhtars and political parties' relationship; the same model exists for the cases of all low and middle-level neighborhoods as well.

In addition to opinion manipulation within the neighborhood, as mukhtar's office is one of the central locations in the neighborhood, before the elections political party officials contact with mukhtars to leave their brochures to their offices or build up stands in front of the building. Mukhtar 4 told me that he does not let any political party enter into his building because this is a neutral area. However, what we encounter in mukhtars with close ties to AKP, such as in the cases of Mukhtar 8 and 9, they engage in promoting AKP's brochures in their offices. They also help party officials to find out who votes for which party, and help party officials to determine their list of home visits and give specific pieces of information for those in need (Mukhtar 2), which creates a situation where the party officials can work very efficiently and effectively by knowing whom to target beforehand.

3.3 Mukhtars and their Relationship to the State

This part will demonstrate the peak of my thesis, in which the changing policies on mukhtars at the state-level policies will indicate how these actors are used and are tried to be used for authoritarian practices. Mukhtars, as explained, do have a separate power they derive out of being neutral state agents, and being brokers; they do not have the resources, but they know how to reach out to others. Additionally, mukhtars are both in daily life within the neighborhood and are a part of neighborhood-level politics which is composed of both party officials and other notables. While this in-between position gives them space where they can

act individually or with party officials; the state started to pay more attention to them and implemented policies to tighten their grips on them. How are they used by the state administrative positions[31] for which policies and how this brings authoritarianization?

3.3.1 Policies on Mukhtars by the State

On legal terms, laws on mukhtars was changed in 2018 with direct presidential decree, which constrained the autonomy of mukhtars and increased the power of presidency over them, as they are now responsible from implementing any policy regarding the good of the people and the public enacted by the President, and have to help the neighborhood watch in doing their jobs while they got their insurances paid by the state and an unprecedented ease at getting weapons (Mevzuat, 1944). This is a vague legal change and can result in a bunch of things. I will try to show these legal and extra-legal duties mukhtars started to have and how they permeated into power relations even more in the last 5 years.

3.3.2 Mukhtar Meetings and its Impacts

The mukhtar meetings started in early 2015, in the aforementioned political context. President Erdoğan championed mukhtars for being elected through a hard process, and said that "They are the people itself, how much more democratic can this position get?"[32]. I asked my interviewees whether they have been invited and attended to these talks, and how do they feel about these talks. Mukhtar 1 said:

"They used to contact us through governors or district governors, now it comes

directly from the Presidency. Turkish Airlines give mukhtars 50% off for their tickets, I

haven't seen such a thing in my life. They give a lunch that shows off the glory of the state.

You go there, first, the President goes onto stage and talks about important issues to us. The

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[31] State and the incumbent's party permeate to one another often after 18 years of being in power?
[32] http://bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/172925-cumhurbaskani-erdogan-yeni-duzen-yeni-guneydogu

lunch is amazing, there is one waiter per 5 mukhtars, then you take a picture with Erdoğan (...) they make you feel like you are an important person in the bureaucracy, which is in fact true. As we are an institution that has roots back in Ottoman times".

Mukhtar 8 told me that these talks are very effective for them to feel important and do their work with more effort. However, the talks are not as direct or as democratic as they are promoted, as Mukhtar 2 says he went there 5 times, but only had 1 bare chance to address directly to the President, as his previous attempts were "immediately halted". In those talks, President Erdoğan tells mukhtars to use the ministry of internal affairs' system, or CIMER[33] not their own communication systems (Mukhtar 2). As mukhtars mostly do their communication to other positions through Whatsapp, Erdoğan wants to direct them to the ministry of internal affairs, where they bureaucratically belong to. While CIMER is used for more administrative errands as revealed by Mukhtar 8:

"I have used that system once or twice, I cannot say it works completely because they require your ID number so nothing goes anonymous. And if it is something that is related to your seniors or the municipality, they directly call them, and that person usually knows why they have called them. So he calls me and complains to me. It does not have any purpose".

3.3.3 The Ministry of Internal Affairs' Communication System

The ministry of internal affairs' system, on the other hand, is indeed an issue to be explored, though it remains a secret due to the level of seriousness the system carries. Some of my interviewees wanted to skip this question, one of them did not want me to take these as notes. However, it is used for informing 'security-related' problems, which is quite a vague term

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[33] An online system that can be used by everyone for contacting the Presidency.

to be filled especially in a country like Turkey, in which the voters of HDP are even named as terrorists. Subsequently, following the call of the President in 2015 between the two elections, for mukhtars to tell the names of HDP voters to the relevant positions[34] one of my interviewees told me that he knows a colleague that used it for exactly that purpose which resulted in a series of pressure both by the party officials and by the police itself.

3.3.4 Mukhtars as Informants

In addition to this link, mukhtars have close contacts to both neighborhood watch, which was installed back in 2015; and the police department, particularly the departments of drug enforcement and anti-terror. Drug enforcement has never been a top subject within the ministry of internal affairs' agenda until the current minister. All of the mukhtars acknowledged drug-usage related problems within their neighborhoods, however, it becomes more serious the more income level drops.

"Indeed an agenda is created in those talks, for example, drug enforcement (…) he wants us to name all drug dealers in our neighborhoods. I can name, I know all of them, I know where they sell, what they sell, to whom they sell. I know everything. But if I tell them, those dealers would cause me trouble. Okay, I know my ways to deal with those, but not all mukhtars are like me. Our next neighborhood mukhtar is a very elderly uncle. What if something happens to him because of that?" (Mukhtar 2).

But as mukhtars are a part of the bureaucratic chain that goes to the minister of internal affairs, they have to tell to their seniors and face the possible consequential problems. He added

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[34] http://bianet.org/bianet/toplum/166758-erdogan-dan-muhtarlara-muhbirlik-talimati

that the drug usage is not decreasing but increasing as well as the number of transactions despite all the promoted effort and continuous operations to sellers within the neighborhood [35].

The anti-terror department, on the other hand, came to a peak within AKP's agenda after HDP won in the June 2015 general elections. A series of bombings and violent attacks took place, and the voters of HDP were declared to be friends and supporters of terrorists. Simultaneously, ISIS was also active in Istanbul too. Hence, in the neighborhood-level, it created immense pressure for Syrian and Kurdish people, especially in low and low-middle neighborhoods. Mukhtar 1, 2, 3 and 7 told me that they are in frequent contact with police officers. Mukhtar 1 told me that the residents are always complaining about Syrians because they do not know how to live in these houses, that they do steal certain things, engage in rape and harassment, and this is why he reports these locations to the police often. Mukhtar 3 on the other hand, said

"Recently these two officers entered into my real estate office in a very rude manner, using slang words, because I am a Kurd they are doing this to me. They asked me about a Kurdish girl whom I know where she lives, I told them her apartment immediately. Why would I take a risk of losing this position? I'm new to here, I have to abide with what they say".

Mukhtar 2 explicitly declared that "Informants informants, we are the minor informants of the state. We say this is here, it is there to the state". The police need a mukhtar, legally, to enter into someone's house, they cannot act without us (Mukhtar 4 and 9). Hence while they

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[35] https://www.cnnturk.com/video/turkiye/muhtarlara-bagimlilikla-mucadele-egitimi
And proven by statistics on this site: https://www.dogrulukpayi.com/bulten/dunyada-ve-turkiye-de-uyusturucu-kullanimi. When the involvement of the dark sectors within the ministry of internal affairs are considered, this may be forming another income source as well, however, this is way beyond the purpose of this thesis.

have to inform relevant officials in the administrative bureaucracy, they also have to act with the police as well.

However, in some cases, such as with Mukhtar 10, as he is a very strong local notable, he does not engage in the bureaucratic talk and can engage into his own politics with mutual benefit to state and him. "If something wrong happens here, he (minister of internal affairs) call me on phone directly, personally. Who am I to give an account to those bureaucrats?" (Mukhtar 10) . Therefore, for some cases, some mukhtars are allowed to retain their personal power even against the bureaucracy, which involves a mutual benefit relationship; as the state uses his separate power as a quick problem solver and he retains his position.

Mukhtar 6 told me that, she said she has been doing this job for more than 10 years but Soylu is the first minister of internal affairs that engaged this much with mukhtars; as the new governor and the new district governor gave their phone numbers to them this time, they are trying to increase communication.

"District governors are organizing events very often, where we, as all mukhtars of the district, the civil servants of district governorship attend and discussions. They ask about the problems we are facing, however, for the most of the time they pay attention to things related to 'security' because there is not any possibility that something happens in neighborhood and any mukhtar not knowing it" (Mukhtar 6).

The security aspect, as informed by my interviewees, involve all issues regarding terrorism, thus encompassing a group from Kurds to Muslims and Gülenists as well, since they are the closest to the neighborhood, they can track what these groups are doing and where.

The neighborhood watch works every night in accordance with mukhtar's instructions as well. All of the mukhtars told me that they are supporting the neighborhood watch because

it solves many problems regarding thievery and alcohol usage. The only problem, as told by Mukhtar 7, is the lack of education these watchers have, even though none of them complained about them, they are a part of the police department and to provide additional information to the state which is provided through mukhtars in the first place.

3.3.5 Mukhtars' Involvement in Electoral Manipulation

Mukhtars are summoned before the elections by the minister of internal affairs[36], under the name of Election Security Meetings, which takes place in district-level and other district-level officials join as well with mukhtars. Mukhtars 2, 4, 6 and 10 told me that they were present in those talks, but Mukhtar 6 told me that there was not anything suspicious regarding direct electoral manipulation. However, the party official present during Mukhtar 9's interview told me that, in the repeated election of 2015, the party put party members with guns in front of the streets where HDP voters are living, and a series of armed clashes took place between June and November 2015 elections in which HDP's district headquarter was burned by 'some men'. Also, he said that there were some armed men in front of some schools to ensure the security of the elections. This demonstrates how blurry the state/party/resident distinction can get in certain cases, which is put by Grzymala-Busse (2008: 639).

Another important change that increased authoritarianism and constrained mukhtars are the registration system, which was under the responsibility of mukhtars before but was assigned to the population registration office, which is composed of assigned civil servants. This comes out to be a crucial move for manipulating elections, as voting papers are prepared according to these registrations.

"As mukhtars, we could control these registrations because we know who lives where, even if not, we could have asked them somehow to check for themselves. I did control it on my

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[36] https://www.icisleri.gov.tr/muhtarlarla-secim-guvenligi-toplantisi-gerceklestirildi

own in this latest election, but it was very hard as they now mixed up people from various

apartments into one poll. In the past, people could track it easily because apartments were

completely assigned to one poll, now even sometimes people living in the same house vote in

different polls" (Mukhtar 5).

"The civil servant working in the population registration office cannot know about any

neighborhood specifically. I know a lot of incidents, in which even though I know that house

is empty, I see a registration. There is a lot of cases like this, increased especially recently.

Sometimes we can do something, but most of the time not all mukhtars can spare time for such

activities." (Mukhtar 6).

Thus, while some mukhtars provide this information to the relevant position, some try to fight against these on their own. Assigning additional voters to certain houses or apartments is a manipulation method AKP uses, while they take this role from mukhtars, they also use them in finding empty houses. As acknowledged though, not every mukhtar has the time and capacity to engage in fighthing against this.

Chapter 4: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

While mukhtars have long been forgotten in Turkey and in the academic literature as well, these policies on mukhtars demonstrate the level of authoritarianism in Turkey and how it is sustained. This research shows from where the incumbent attempts to control the flow of the economy and political information to increase his level of information. The increasing pressure from the district governors, the continuous meetings Erdoğan's meetings, and telling mukhtars to use the ministry of internal affair's system for communication and not their own also reveal that the state tries to incorporate them into the state structure and curb their autonomous structure. This is strengthened by AKP's showing a mukhtar candidate as rivals in all neighborhoods, and municipality's level of involvement into mukhtar's businesses; thus, there is indeed a series of efforts from the state and the incumbent to take mukhtars under control.

Even though mukhtars have been demonstrated as an institution which forms a direct arm from the state structure, my findings reveal the level of contestation and how they are left in the middle of the politics in the local level. The competition between their own network, other existing networks at the neighborhoods such as hometown networks, the party structure and their formal and informal members and the state trying to incorporate them into their own create an immense political conflict. The reasons for these networks to incorporate mukhtars and how the state uses these are shown in the research, and I will briefly summarize in this section as well.

As I have shown, this differs between low to low-middle income neighborhoods and middle-upper income neighborhoods. In lower-income neighborhoods mukhtars are more autonomous, and it is harder for the state to incorporate them into the structure. To some extent, even in an extreme case like Mukhtar 10, the state even lets them do their own business as long

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as the order is ensured within the local level. However, in middle-upper neighborhoods, mukhtars seem humbler, like Mukhtar 4 and 7, and can only cause trouble to the incumbent if they are really against to some of their policies, like Mukhtar 5 and 6. Even though these mukhtars engage in being informants to some extent as well, what demonstrates AKP's clientelist policies and contributes to sustaining electoral authoritarianism, is more visible in the low and low-middle income neighborhoods.

As elaborated upon, mukhtars hold a significant position in low-income group neighborhoods, which is a practice from Ottomans as Sayarı (2011) argues. Emerging as the main access means to goods, in addition to being brokers like Massicard (2016) demonstrates, mukhtars in this kind of neighborhoods hold a separate set of networks to keep their positions and get residents' jobs done. While this contributes to AKP's rent-distribution policies in the local phase if mukhtar is a formal member or an informal member of the party; it also culminates into controlling who gets what and to what extent. Thus, mukhtars can create a field for income for themselves by engaging in close economic relationship with residents. On the other hand, their involvement also contributes to bigger actors involved in politics from the local level through urban transformation projects as mukhtars are also responsible for these projects. As said, they may create resistance against the project for rent distribution such as in the case of Mukhtar 5, or may invest a lot themselves to attract the capital for their own network such as the case of Mukhtars 3 and 10.

Mukhtars can also emerge as the neutral opinion leader within a neighborhood, as I have explained in the previous chapter, the centrality of their buildings in the neighborhood and their roles make people discuss politics and personal and private matters with them. This is more visible in low-income neighborhoods, and is exploited by the incumbent party officials for party's promotion and using their sociological position for propaganda. Also, the level of information they have provides information to party officials to change their program at the

local level, and include them, including very specific issues regarding residents' needs, in their regular visits to residents' houses.

While electoral manipulation and informing is common in both lower and middle-upper-class neighborhoods, mukhtars are more central and powerful regarding this aspect in lower and low-middle class neighborhoods. As seen in the case of Sultanbeyli, the blurry line between the state, the party and the residents can end up being an utmost mechanism for pressure in elections that may involve guns and crude violence. Even though being an informant is a common aspect among the two groups of neighborhoods, because the voters that incumbent puts pressure on and directs their policies more live in the lower income neighborhoods, I can only find information regarding the system of ministry of internal affairs that is used for security purposes in these neighborhoods. The same logic applies to war against drugs and informing the drug dealers as well.

If a mukhtar is not a supporter of the incumbent, especially in middle-upper class neighborhoods, they may cause trouble regarding voter registration system, such as struggling for these empty houses that are used by the incumbent to register for extra voters and checking who is registered one by one despite the incumbents' efforts for complicating the situation by assigning everyone from the same apartment to different places with voting polls. They can cause problems regarding economic gains, may disrupt the flow of information from the local, and may choose not to inform, though this requires a serious level of self-power such as in the case of Mukhtar 2. As seen from the examples, if mukhtar is not a member of the incumbent party, there emerges a rival that is supported by the incumbent party, by the municipality and by some local notables directly or indirectly. Since these concern very informal relationships such as hometown networks, a robust group supports these so that the group members can have access to economic flow.

Further Discussion

In the wider context, this turn to strengthen state apparatus demonstrates how Nationalists try to curb a part of the state institutions to themselves, and Erdoğan has no other option but letting them do it, as long as these networks provide him votes in elections and sustain the economic hegemony. While this also indicates the re-emergence of the conservative-nationalist ideology of statism in Turkey, it also reveals how the supposed to be neutral state institutions are penetrated and exploited by party politics and the interests of the incumbent and the wider ruling elite. Particularly, tying mukhtars to municipalities for extra funding does reveal to what extent they are attempted to be disciplined by the state, if the politics do not go in the favor of the incumbent and as a way to control the Nationalist alliance activities in the ministry of the internal affairs.

The extra-legal position of mukhtars though, as my research indicates, are indeed exploited to a large extent, and despite being a state institution, it is intensely penetrated by the actors for their own ends. The ongoing struggle between all power ends is the reason why mukhtars do not serve as a direct totalitarian institution, but rather as an informational and a minor executional institution that would retain authoritarian politics both on economic and political premises. While it serves as a mean to put pressure upon groups such as Kurds, the government can also track Gülenists and their activities at the neighborhood-level as well. Thus, mukhtars do look minor, but are influential in the details of politics at the local level in sustaining authoritarianism.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Map of Istanbul showing the income of the neighborhoods
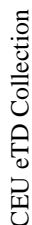
Appendix 2: the Profiles of Mukhtars

Name	District	Municipality Party	Neighborhood's Economy	Mukhtar's Experience	Mukhtar's Background
Mukhtar 1	Bagcilar	AKP intensive	Low	10 Years	Former Salesman
Mukhtar 2	Bagcilar	AKP intensive	Low-Middle	10 Years	Mukhtar – Federation
Mukhtar 3	Gungoren	AKP intensive	Low	1 Year	Butcher - Real Estate
Mukhtar 4	Bahcelievler	AKP – even	Upper Middle	6 Years	Factory Owner
Mukhtar 5	Uskudar	AKP – even	Upper Middle	3 Years	Former Civil Servant - Activist
Mukhtar 6	Kadikoy	CHP intensive	Upper	10 Years	Former Civil Servant
Mukhtar 7	Beyoglu	AKP – even	Middle	6 Years	Former Welfare Party Member
Mukhtar 8	Beyoglu	AKP – even	Low-Middle	10 Years	Former Salesman
Mukhtar 9	Sultanbeyli	AKP intensive	Very Low	1 Year	AKP Party Member
Mukhtar 10	Sultanbeyli	AKP intensive	Low	10 Years	Mafia

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