



## Moving Beyond European and Latin American Typologies: The Peculiarities of AKP's Populism in Turkey

Yaprak Gürsoy

To cite this article: Yaprak Gürsoy (2019): Moving Beyond European and Latin American Typologies: The Peculiarities of AKP's Populism in Turkey, Journal of Contemporary Asia, DOI: 10.1080/00472336.2019.1665196

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2019.1665196>



© 2019 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 25 Sep 2019.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

## Moving Beyond European and Latin American Typologies: The Peculiarities of AKP's Populism in Turkey

Yaprak Gürsoy 

Department of Politics and International Relations, Aston University, Birmingham, UK

### ABSTRACT

Despite the growing literature on Turkish populism, there is yet no consensus on how best to categorise the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi or AKP). This article argues that this lack of consensus is due to a selective focus on the attributes of AKP's populism. Indeed, when the party's features are examined holistically, it does not neatly conform to the dominant typologies of populism, which were conceived mostly for European and Latin American examples. For historical reasons, AKP's populist discourse defines "the people" versus "the elite" in civilisational terms and combines this with strategies of neo-liberalism, strong party organisation and grassroots mobilisation. This blend of populism distinguishes the AKP case from the exclusionary/inclusionary and classical/neo-liberal/radical typologies previously identified by the literature. However, the Bharatiya Janata Party in India and the Thai Rak Thai Party in Thailand have similar attributes to the AKP, drawing attention to the need to move beyond the existing ideological and strategic approaches to populism and towards a more comprehensive socio-cultural approach. The article contributes to the literature on populism by highlighting possible avenues for further research based on such a comprehensive understanding of populism based also on cases from Asia.

### KEYWORDS

Neo-liberal populism;  
exclusionary populism;  
Islam; Turkey; India; Thailand

The Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* or AKP) in Turkey won the general elections first in 2002 and until 2019 has renewed its mandate in every poll, except for the June 2015 elections, in which the party received the plurality of votes but not the majority of the seats in parliament. The party also called three successful referendums in 2007, 2010 and 2017, fundamentally changing the 1982 constitution and securing a presidential system of government with an exceptionally powerful head of state. In the June 2018 elections, this new system gave AKP leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan the presidency, with expanded powers, while the party (along with a partner) received the majority of seats in the now weakened parliament. The strength of the AKP and Erdoğan over a span of more than 15 years has often been attributed to its populism (Dinçşahin 2012). Hence, their longevity is not only interesting for specialists of Turkish politics but raises important issues for the broader literature on populism.

The AKP illustrates how populism in an already fragile democratic regime can further erode freedoms and increase polarisation, leading to authoritarianism (Castaldo 2018; Esen

**CONTACT** Yaprak Gürsoy  [y.gursoy@aston.ac.uk](mailto:y.gursoy@aston.ac.uk)  Department of Politics and International Relations, Aston University, Birmingham, UK.

© 2019 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.  
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

and Gumuscu 2016; Levitsky and Loxton 2013). Turkey is one of the few countries that highlights the dangers of prolonged rule by populists and thereby contributes to the literature on the relationship between populism and democracy and what happens when populists are in power (for examples of this literature, see Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015; Müller 2016; Rovirra Kaltwasser 2012).

Partly due to these consequences of AKP's populism, in recent years, scholarly works looking into the Turkish case have burgeoned, both as single-case studies and in comparison with others. Although these studies have yielded insightful results, there is no consensus on what type of populism the AKP belongs to. Most describe it as "neo-liberal populism" (for example, Akcay 2018; Bozkurt 2013; Özdemir 2015; Yıldırım 2009). Others use various other adjectives, such as "Islamic" (Hadiz 2014, 2016; Göle 2017), "authoritarian" or "nativist" (Arat-Koç 2018) that are more in-line with a type the general literature refers to as "exclusionary populism." Similarly, some see affinities with Latin American cases (Aytaç and Öniş 2014; Castaldo 2018; Selçuk 2016). Others draw on similarities with Eastern European (see Yabancı and Taleski 2018) or Middle Eastern and Muslim-majority countries (Hadiz 2014, 2016; Kirdiş and Drhimeur 2016). Thus, the Turkey-specific literature exhibits no consensus regarding the type of populism and regional category the AKP fits into. Given the significance of the AKP for the broader literature on populism, however, it is necessary to ask: What is the best way to categorise AKP's populism? Only through this exercise can future research properly interpret the AKP's longevity in power and the consequences of its prolonged rule.

The divergence of opinion over the categorisation of the AKP results from a selective focus on one of its main attributes relevant to the study of populism. Studies on Turkey emphasise one of the following features of the AKP: (i) the ideological and discursive characteristics of the party and its leader; (ii) economic, welfare and distributive policies of the party in government; or (iii) political and organisational strategies, such as the linkages of the leader with his supporters. Scholars who focus on the first aspect, draw attention to the AKP's Islamic/religious, nationalist, nativist and exclusionary characteristics (Arat-Koç 2018; Erçetin and Erdoğan 2018). This interpretation results in comparisons with Eastern European, Middle Eastern or other Islamic cases (Kirdiş and Drhimeur 2016; Yabancı and Taleski 2018). This contrasts with those scholars who stress the AKP's economic and distributional policies as defining of its populism. These authors classify the AKP as a case of "neo-liberal populism" and/or situate it within the Latin American "family" of populisms (for example, Akcay 2018; Aytaç and Öniş 2014; Bozkurt 2013; Özdemir 2015; Yıldırım 2009). Similarly, those who study the organisational and leadership linkages of the AKP also tend to compare it with Latin American cases, but diverge on the classification as "movement populist" with a relatively strong grassroots intermediary organisation (Castaldo 2018, 474) or as more personalistic type of populism with unmediated links between the leader and "the people" (Selçuk 2016).

Acknowledging that a focus on one attribute of AKP's populism leads to divergences of categorisation, the primary aim of this article is to provide a comprehensive point of view by analysing the three aspects of AKP's populism *together*. After providing a brief overview of the existing approaches to populism, the first section applies the most commonly used typologies of populism based on Europe and Latin America to Turkey. This step would show that once the discourses, economic policies and organisational characteristics of the AKP are considered *together*, the case does not fit into any of the existent typologies.

Indeed, this finding explains the different categorisations and inconsistencies found in the Turkey-specific literature, as described above. The second section adopts a more comprehensive, socio-cultural approach to the study of populism, as recently advocated by scholars such as Hadiz (2014, 2016) and Ostiguy (2017) and moves beyond the typologies based on Europe and Latin America by looking at comparative Asian cases, namely the Indian Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Thailand's now defunct Thais Love Thais Party (Thai Rak Thai, TRT). Although there is no agreed upon "Asian type of populism," this exercise is justifiable because there are scholars who have noted AKP's similarities with the BJP (Harriss 2015; Ohm 2015) or the TRT (Bozkurt 2013; Yildirim 2009). However, these authors have not elaborated in-depth on these similarities.

The main finding of this article is that the AKP's populist discourse is civilisational, its main economic policies are neo-liberal and its mobilisation strategy rests on a strong party organisation with active grassroots support. This combination of attributes sets the AKP apart from most of its counterparts in Europe and Latin America, but has a similar blend of characteristics seen in at least two Asian cases, India and Thailand.

While this finding is significant for Turkish political studies, as the conclusion will discuss in detail, it is also pertinent to the broader literature on populism. By serving as a hypothesis-generating or theory-infirming case study, this article shows how the broader literature on types of populism can be refined and expanded by using more comprehensive approaches and by systematically analysing Asian cases in comparison with each other and with Latin America and Europe.

### **Applying Existing Typologies to the Turkish Case**

The literature on populism is wide and has been in a constant state of expansion since the 1960s. Despite divergent readings, most authors agree that an enmity between "the people" and "the elite" is the essential core of any populism. Most scholars also agree that populists diverge from each other when they refer to an "idealised heartland," advocate decisive action against an "extreme crisis" and when they act like "chameleon[s], adopting the colours of [their] environment" (Taggart 2000, 2). In other words, there is relative consensus in the literature that one case of populism would not exactly be the same as any other since there would be country and policy differences in different epochs, but all populists would pit what they believe to be "the people" against "the elite" in the name of the former. The AKP fits this definition of populism although the way it has demarcated "the people" and "the elite," as well as the extreme crisis, has changed from the party's inception in 2001 until 2018 (the timeframe of this article). The adaptive nature of the party and its lack of well-defined values is, in fact, one of the reasons why the AKP can be best described as populist (Özpek and Yaşar 2018).

Once scholars who work on populism move beyond this basic level of agreement, there are differences of opinion on how best to conceptualise, categorise and methodologically study populism and this is where AKP's categorisation also becomes divergent in the literature. There are at least three distinct, but not necessarily mutually exclusive, approaches: studying populism as an ideology, as a discursive style or as a political strategy (Gidron and Bonikowski 2013, 5–17). For the purposes of this article, the ideological and political strategic approaches are the most critical as typologies of these genres applied to Europe and Latin America have produced the most extensive body of work and have been

adopted by analysts of Turkish populism. In the following sections, I will look into the categorisations of these two approaches and demonstrate that, although the AKP shares many commonalities with exclusionary and neo-liberal types of populism identified by these genres, it also has attributes that are distinct and defies easy categorisation. This finding justifies the need to move beyond the ideological and strategic approaches and their typologies focused on Europe and Latin America.

### ***The Ideological Approach and the AKP: Exclusionary versus Inclusionary Types of Populism***

The ideological approach commonly defines populism in reference to Mudde's (2004, 543) oft-cited conceptualisation, as "a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite' and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people." The ideological approach argues that populism does not have the elaborate precision, coherence or "thickness" of traditional left and right ideologies, such as socialism or fascism, but "can be easily combined with [them]" (Mudde 2004, 544).

Moreover, the precise description of populism's core concept, "the people," might vary from one case to another, leading to inclusionary and exclusionary populisms. The inclusive type of populism sees "the people" as mostly the "plebeians, the common people" and aims to represent the groups that were previously barred from politics. As such, inclusive populism has the potential to incorporate the masses into politics and broaden democracy (Filc 2015, 265–266). In this type of populism, the difference between "the elite" and "the people" is mostly defined in socio-economic and class terms. The exclusionary populist type, however, sees "the people" mostly as a cultural and ethnic community. The antagonism between "the elite" and "the people" is outlined in xenophobic and nativist terms (Hellmann 2017, 165). Due to this narrow view, groups outside of the community are perceived as the threatening "other" and exclusionary populism aims to expel them from society. While the exclusionary type is associated mostly with radical right populism (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013, 155), inclusionary populism is mostly leftist (Filc 2015, 273–274). As stated by Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013, 148), "European populism is predominantly exclusive, while Latin American populism is chiefly inclusive."

Given these basic definitions, the AKP's populism is usually identified to fit in with exclusionary populism seen in Europe. This type of populism emphasises ethnic identities in defining "the people" and adheres to a "xenophobic version of nationalism" excluding the "non-native (alien) people and values" and seeing them as a menace to "the nation state" (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013, 168). As it will be elaborated below with its definition of "the people" in a way that excludes the opposition Kurdish ethnic minority, the non-Sunni and the secular, the AKP conforms to this type. Unlike the inclusionary type of populism which defines "the people" as heterogeneous, multi-ethnic and multi-racial, the AKP rejects those who are not believed to be "natives."

Despite these similarities with the exclusionary type of populism, however, in two respects, the AKP's discourse and policies diverge from this grouping *in practice* (although not necessarily in theory). First, immigration has been one of the main issues in European radical right populism (see Stanley 2017; Taggart 2017). As Filc (2015, 266)

argues, “exclusionary populism expresses how certain social groups confront the threat of exclusion and subsequent dissolution of their identity and subjectivity by excluding weaker groups, that is, migrant workers or ethnic minorities.” While the Turkish case of populism fits into the “ethnic minorities” part of this expression, it does not conform to the “migrant workers.” In the AKP’s discourse and policies, immigration has so far never been an important element that distinguishes the natives from the aliens. From the 1950s until 2010, Turkey was a country of negative net migration since more people emigrated especially to Europe than those moving to the country (Net Migration Rate 2017). This makes immigration historically a non-issue. With the arrival of Syrian refugees, this has become a thorny matter in Turkish politics, but the emphasis on Islam in the AKP’s ideology has prevented Syrian refugees from being the basis of exclusion, at least until 2018. Thus, the so far open doors policy of the AKP resembles the inclusionary type of populism and their calls for “normalizing migrants’ citizenship status” (Filc 2015, 273).

The second element that distinguishes the AKP from the exclusionary variant of populism is its policies explicitly targeting the poor and the class dynamic that underscores the differences between “the people” and “the elite.” In this material dimension that sets apart inclusionary and exclusionary types of populism, the AKP approaches the former. As will be explained below, universal policies of welfare were abandoned by the AKP, but they were substituted with social assistance programmes in healthcare and distribution of aid, resembling Latin American populism’s aim to “establish ... the conditions for a good life for ‘the people’,” more than the European radical right’s “welfare chauvinism” geared towards the “protection” of already existing universal benefits from the immigrants (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013, 160). Through material distribution of aid, religious symbolism and political empowerment, the AKP and Erdoğan have given the conservative poor and the previously marginalised classes, including Kurds who vote for the party, a “sense of belonging” and “recognition and self-worth,” buttressed by “policies aimed at improving” their conditions, similar to Latin American populist leaders (Filc 2015, 266).

If the experience of colonialism is what leads to different versions of populism in Europe and Latin America, Turkey is, indeed, perpetually stuck in between (Filc 2015). It is a country that is heir to an empire that ruled vast territories for centuries, but that was substantially weakened after the eighteenth century and nearly colonised by the European powers after World War I. This identity as both a coloniser and colonised is reflected in the AKP’s populism today. On the one hand, Erdoğan has called himself “black” (Arat-Koç 2018; *Radikal*, March 17, 2014) and the AKP’s current discourse includes anti-imperialism and anti-Westernism similar to populist leaders in colonised Latin America. On the other hand, xenophobia and feelings of ethnic superiority, as well as pan-Islamic desires in foreign policy, are evident like populism in Europe. In short, the AKP does not perfectly fit into either inclusionary or exclusionary types of populism and these categorisations are insufficient in characterising the party.

### ***The Strategic Approach and the AKP: Classic, Neo-liberal, Radical Populisms***

The strategic approach to populism is in agreement with the ideological approach that the core aspect of populism is the antagonism between homogenously defined “elites” and “the people.” However, the strategic approach advocates studying the concept by considering



differences between “political choices, political organisation, and forms of mobilization” (Gidron and Bonikowski 2013, 10). Although there is significant divergence among scholars who adopt the strategic approach, their emphasis on “populism as a mode of political strategy” unites them.

Based mostly on the Latin American experience, populism identified in the strategic approach can be divided into three sub-types – classical, neo-liberal and radical populism – corresponding to mostly different time periods, but also related to various economic policies and organisational attributes (de la Torre 2017). The classical populism of the 1930s, exemplified by Juan and Eva Perón in Argentina and Vargas in Brazil, for the most part claimed to represent the workers and applied policies of import substitution industrialisation. They incorporated labour into politics by giving them more voice and expanding the political franchise. Neo-liberal populists, such as Menem in Argentina, Fujimori in Peru and Collor de Mello in Brazil, emerged in the 1990s and “abandoned nationalist and statist policies of their classical predecessors” by applying neo-liberal principles usually to the detriment of the collective benefits of labour (de la Torre 2017, 199). Finally, the radical populism of Chávez in Venezuela, Morales in Bolivia and Correa in Ecuador in the 2000s came to the fore as a result of dissatisfaction with neo-liberalism and representative politics. Among other policies, these leaders “relied on state intervention in the economy in the name of distributing wealth and reducing poverty and inequality” which they financed through the export of natural resources (de la Torre 2017, 201).

In terms of organisational attributes, most authors in this genre argue that “populism can be associated with a variety of specific organisational types that share one common feature: absence of autonomy within the movement” (Barr 2009, 42). No matter how “thin” or “thick” the party organisations are, populists form “plebiscitarian linkages” between the leaders and supporters, where the latter become subordinate to the former and participate “in the decision-making process ... only episodic[ally] and only at a specific point” controlled by the leader (Barr 2009, 36).

This commonality, however, does not mean that organisational attributes are unimportant. Such attributes are, in fact, associated with different types of populism. For instance, Roberts (2006, 129–133) argues that classical populists built strong party organisations and/or relied on the mobilisation of civil society (mostly labour unions). Like their historical counterparts, radical populists, such as Chávez, formed grassroots organisations and socially mobilised supporters to defend against elites if they were confronted with extra-electoral opposition forces, such as the military. Yet, for the most part, recent populists and most notably neo-liberal populists have not formed links with civil society and have chosen not to build strong party organisations (Roberts 1995). This lack of organisation in neo-liberal populism was also observed by Weyland (1999, 381), who defines populism (in contrast to others in this approach) as a strategy where “the leader reaches the followers in a direct, quasi-personal manner that bypasses established intermediary organisations, especially parties” (also see Weyland 2001). This is why neo-liberalism can be compatible with populism: at a moment when severe economic restructuring had to be carried out, the direct, non-organisational manner in which the populist leaders appealed to the masses became an advantage in carrying out reforms against vested and more organised interests.

On the face of it, the AKP and its economic neo-liberalism seem to belong to this variety and contrast with leftist populism in Latin America. It shares with neo-liberal populism the common elements of integration with global markets, privatisation and

retrenchment of universal welfare benefits (Aytaç and Öniş 2014, 49–51). It also shares with neo-liberal populism the use of selective and targeted distributions of benefits to the poor that rely on community-based projects (Akçay 2018; Bozkurt 2013; Özdemir 2015). Similar to Fujimori's Peru, in Turkey under Erdoğan, "social policies have relied on direct, highly paternalistic relationships that are conducive to the microlevel exchange of material benefits for political support, even in the context of relative macroeconomic austerity" (Roberts 1995, 106).

Yet, despite these similarities in economic policies, the AKP diverges from the Latin American neo-liberal populist pattern in its organisational attributes. Instead of weakening his party after getting elected like other neo-liberal populists (Weyland 1999, 386–387), Erdoğan has continued to rely on his party's grassroots network and municipalities to win votes and to distribute social assistance, in part to counter-balance neo-liberal policies. Perhaps more crucially, Erdoğan quickly mobilised his followers on the streets against the 2016 coup attempt, relying in part on this grassroots network. The ability and choice of mobilisation on the streets against an attack is similar to radical populists, but quite unlike neo-liberal populists. Moreover, although Erdoğan was directly elected as the president of the Republic – a position that could have allowed him to form more of an unmediated link with the voters – he deliberately chose to change the constitution so that the presidency would not be non-partisan and that he could continue to be the AKP's leader. Weyland (1999, 387) argues that "nonpopulist leaders rely on parties and reinforce them ... nonpopulist chief executives work with and through parties," which is a characterisation that can also be used paradoxically for populist Erdoğan's relationship with the AKP (and perhaps even with his coalitional partner since 2016, the Nationalist Action Party). Finally, although Erdoğan and the AKP have maintained a distance from *some* "associations of vested interests," such as labour organisations, they have had organic links with a number of business associations, charities and other pro-AKP civil society groups. It is precisely this intermediation of vested interests, such as the government-dependent trade unions and confederations (like Hak-İş, Eğitim-Bir Sen and Memur-Sen) and women's organisations (like KADEM, AK-DER), that has guaranteed continued loyalty across classes (Yabancı 2016).

Taking everything into consideration, the AKP has characteristics parallel to classical or radical populists in organisational terms, but is similar to neo-liberal populists in economic policies. Thus, its blend of populism does not resonate with the types of populism that were identified by the strategic approach and the literature on Latin America. This, however, does not mean that the AKP is a unique case. The main point of this section, along with the discussion on the inclusionary versus exclusionary categorisation of populism, was to show why it is not surprising that the AKP's populism in the Turkey-specific literature was labelled variously as neo-liberal, Islamic or nativist due to a selective focus on some of its attributes, rather than a comprehensive approach. This section also showed the limits of the literature on Europe and Latin America, as well as the ideological and strategic approaches' typologies based on these two continents, when applied to Turkey. As the next section will demonstrate, however, the AKP's populism may be similar to other cases from other regions, but making this argument would also entail adopting a comprehensive understanding of populism, which the next section will briefly discuss.



### ***Moving Beyond Ideational and Strategic Approaches to Populism***

By demonstrating how the AKP does not fit into any existent typology, this article advocates moving beyond the ideological and strategic approaches that dominate the literature. The ideological approach acknowledges that the core of populism can be combined with other country-specific features. Likewise, most scholars who work on the strategic approach agree that populists adopt different policies, organisational characteristics and mobilisation instruments. Thus, this type of comprehensive approach would not necessarily go against the existing research genres but expand their definitions and typologies.

There are several scholars who successfully combine these approaches. According to Ostiguy (2017, 92), for instance, populism is about ideology, discourses, strategies and more: it is “a spectacle, a show, a performance”; it “is always anti-elitist, though it can be quite top-down in its organisation and the nature of the elite antagonized can vary widely.” More specifically, “[i]n claiming to represent, and at times to embody, a – neglected – true ‘us-ness,’ it flaunts a politically or socially ‘unpresentable Other,’ a historical by-product of an allegedly ‘civilizing process,’ and champions it as the authentic ‘Self’ of the nation” (Ostiguy 2017, 92–93). The civilisational discourses and performances of populists may include religion and ethnicity, but populists also tap into historically shaped divisions that have led to feelings of social and cultural isolation and represent those who feel denigrated by the civilisational project of elites. According to Ostiguy (2017, 75–76), the “civilizational project” would not be the same in each country and it can range “from liberalism, to multiculturalism,” from European unification to racial tolerance. Despite the variation, in every instance, it would entail the creation of “official discourse and policies” by “the elite,” delineating what is “decent” and “proper.” This elite project would expect everyone in society to comply with the same “ways and manners,” scorning those who do not. In opposition to this “proper” civilisational project, populists represent those who were “allegedly both *damaged* and ‘swept under the rug’ by official discourses and policies.” Thus, according to this socio-cultural approach, the specific attributes of populism can be properly examined only through a comprehensive analysis of the social, cultural and political antagonisms that historically took shape in each context.

Hadiz’s approach to populism (2016, 20) concurs with those “that place the concerns of political economy and historical sociology at the forefront. This is in contrast to approaches that highlight populism’s discursive, ideational or organisational aspects.” In his study, Hadiz specifically analyses the possibilities of cross-class alliances for Indonesian, Turkish and Egyptian Islamic populists given these countries’ historical socio-political dynamics since the Cold War era, as well as their interactions with the market economy and globalisation.

Ostiguy and Hadiz are not in explicit conversation with one another and have different goals. Ostiguy aims to define populism and establish the socio-cultural approach; Hadiz explains the relative success of various populist parties in Muslim-majority countries. Yet, they share a comprehensive understanding of populism and look at the historically shaped civilisational antagonisms and alliances that cross-cut economic interests. Both authors demonstrate that populism, using Ostiguy’s (2017, 77) terms, “connect[s] deeply with a society’s history, existing group differences, identities, and resentments” and does not necessarily and only reflect economic and material interests. Although Hadiz emphasises political economy, his approach is in tune with Ostiguy’s socio-cultural approach since

Hadiz also acknowledges that cross-class alliances are possible due to social and cultural dynamics shaped by history. More specifically, Hadiz observes that the AKP successfully brought together segments of the pious Turkish bourgeoisie, the urban and rural poor and the new urban middle classes in a neo-liberal setting associated with global capitalism. Hadiz defines (2016, 34) the new urban middle class as “lumpen-intelligentsia . . . people with comparatively high levels of education but who find themselves stuck nonetheless in the lower tiers of the socio-economic and political hierarchy.” In coalition with the urban poor and the pious bourgeoisie, these groups’ “aspirations and grievances [were] symbolically conveyed through the idioms of Islam,” but had material and political “interests” and “agendas” that united them (Hadiz 2014, 132).

While in agreement with his general argument, this article diverges from Hadiz (2014; 2016) in terms of methodology. Hadiz selects three Muslim-majority countries and focuses on Indonesia as the primary case, leading him to group them under the label “Islamic populism.” In contrast, this article’s primary case, Turkey, is grouped with India and Thailand, where there are no religious similarities. This case selection allows for more generalisation, taking into account civilisational divides, going beyond religion and including antagonisms within societies based on the elitist understanding of what is “proper” in contrast to the ways and manners of “the people.” This is in line with Ostiguy’s more general approach and reinforces Hadiz’s arguments that religion is not the only element in the AKP’s appeal and other religions can be used for similar purposes in other countries, including in India (Hadiz 2018, 568–569).

### **Turkey, India and Thailand in Comparison**

For various reasons in Turkey’s political and social history, the AKP’s populism is a blend that combines civilisational discourses with socio-cultural differences in defining “the people” and “the elite,” neo-liberalism with social assistance, a cross-class coalition with strong grassroots party organisation and mobilisation with personalistic centralisation. As will be shown below through a descriptive overview of the cases, this blend is similar to two Asian political parties, India’s BJP and Thailand’s now defunct TRT.

Taking shape in different religious, institutional, geographical and political settings, the commonalities between the three parties are not immediately obvious. The experiences of the parties themselves have also been different. The BJP was founded in 1980 by politicians with connections with the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (1951–1977) and the Janata Party (1977–1980). After leading a coalition government between 1998 and 2004, the BJP won an absolute majority of the seats and came to national power under the leadership of Narendra Modi in 2014, renewing its mandate in May 2019. The TRT was founded in 1998 under Thaksin Shinawatra’s leadership and won the national election in 2001. Five years later, the TRT government was overthrown by a military coup and Thaksin fled Thailand. Although the TRT was succeeded by two other parties, another military intervention in 2014 ended this experience as well. In the elections of March 2019, conducted under military rule, the Pheu Thai Party, as heir of TRT, won most seats in parliament despite a decline in its vote share. This article cannot detail the background of the BJP and TRT. The main purpose of this section is to demonstrate in systematic fashion what some scholars have so far ignored or mentioned only in passing – that the AKP’s populism has more commonalities with recent cases of populism in India and Thailand than with Europe and Latin America (Bozkurt 2013; Harriss 2015; Ohm 2015; Yildirim 2009).

### **Civilisational Discourse: Defining “the People” and “the Elite”**

Recent manifestations of populism in Turkey, India and Thailand have underscored a civilisation divide with historical antecedents in these societies, as highlighted by Ostiguy’s (2017) socio-cultural approach to populism. In line with this approach, the sections below will briefly analyse the Turkish, Indian and Thai populists’ discourses on nationalism and religion, how the antagonisms they highlight between “the people” and “the elite” reflect socio-economic and cultural divisions and how they address issues of minorities and migration.

#### **Turkey**

Since its foundation, the AKP has claimed to represent the hitherto politically repressed and marginalised masses against the state elite and the political establishment (Dinçşahin 2012, 618–640). This masses versus the state divide in Turkey can be traced back to historical dynamics and the establishment of the Turkish Republic out of the Ottoman Empire in the aftermath of World War I. The military leaders, who expelled European armies, set up the Republic and founded the Republican People’s Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* – CHP) regime that governed single-handedly until 1950. These state elites, including the military leaders, explicitly aimed to modernise Turkey along Western and European lines of republicanism, secularism and nationalism. Political change went in tandem with top-down social reforms, including major amendments to the daily lives of citizens, such as personal names, dress codes, family life and the use of language, which remain contested (Palabiyik 2018).

Such contested social reforms are now reflected in what Ostiguy (2017, 75–76) refers to as a civilisational divide, which is paralleled in the Turkish case with a rift between the religious and the secular (Çınar 2018). On the one hand, in the Turkish context, “the elites” has indicated an intellectual and economic upper class with a more Western-looking and “modern” lifestyle. These are the so-called white Turks, who have adhered to the revolutionary reforms dubbed Kemalism, named after the founder of the Republic, Kemal Atatürk. On the other hand, “the people” has corresponded to the lower classes from the Anatolian heartland and the poorer areas of urban centres, with Islamist and conservative outlooks and seemingly more traditional ways of life, referred to as the “black Turks” (Arat-Koç 2018, 397–401; Demiralp 2012).

The AKP is not the only political party in Turkish history to tap this divide. The party emerged from a long lineage of conservative parties that used religious symbolism and were repressed by consecutive military coups that also clamped down on leftist parties. With this historical background, in the early years of AKP rule, “the elite” meant most fundamentally the secular military and judicial establishment. During its first two terms in office, in seeking to break the secular state elites’ grip on power, the party emphasised goals associated with European Union membership and democracy. Once the military and the judiciary were brought under control following coup investigations after 2007, however, the enemies changed character and external culprits (mostly Europe and the USA), as well as their internal collaborators, gradually took centre stage (Aytaç and Elçi 2018, 99–100; Erçetin and Erdoğan 2018; Yabancı 2016, 598–600).

Domestic enemies were identified to include secular CHP voters, the “interest rate lobby” (Daragahi 2018), the religious movement led by Fethullah Gülen (Taş 2018) and the Kurds who do not support the AKP (Martin 2018). All were tarred by the same brush, accused of being “terrorists” or “coup sympathisers/putschists.” They are declared “traitors

to the homeland” and are said to pose an immediate (yet obscure) threat by weakening Turkey or preventing its rise (Selçuk 2016, 578). These enemies are then juxtaposed against “the people” who are referred to as the *millet*, which has ethnic and religious connotations (Akturk 2009, 893–909). Drawing on xenophobic beliefs of grandeur and a re-defined gloriousness of the Ottoman past, this conceptualisation of *millet* as the “Muslim nation” relates to a civilisational divide between the West and Sunni Islam (White 2014). This leads the AKP to also speak for pious Muslims around the world and most notably in the Middle East. In foreign policy, especially after 2007, the party has had “pan-Islamist” ambitions of having influence in areas where the Ottoman Empire once ruled (Ozkan 2014, 119–140).

The civilisational viewpoint has also led to the welcoming of around three million Sunni immigrants from Syria as religious brethren, giving some of them citizenship and making them “one of us” as opposed to, for instance, the opposition Kurds, who are an “Other.” The refugee crisis in Syria has given an opportunity to pose a civilisation discourse: according to the government “while Turkey opens its doors to the refugees, providing a protector place ... ‘they’ (the West) have failed to achieve, building discriminatory walls ...” (Erçetin and Erdoğan 2018, 389).

### India

This dominance of a civilisational divide that underscores populism is also evident in the case of India. The 2014 electoral victory of the BJP rested in part on socio-cultural exclusion. In terms similar to the AKP’s populism, the BJP used religion and nationalism in an intertwining way to designate “the Hindu people” and to distinguish them from “the corrupt elite” and to exclude the minorities (Chacko 2018, 541). In parallel with Turkey, the divide between “the people” and “the elite” has in part corresponded to a devout versus secular rift with clear civilisational undertones which attempts to pit Hinduism against Westernism (Roy 2018). As Jaffrelot and Tillin summarise (2017, 184), for BJP populists, “their enemies are not the establishment defined in socio-economic terms but an establishment defined in cultural terms, a group made of English-speaking Westernised – uprooted – elites who defend secularism at the expense of the authentic Hindu identity of the nation.”

Similar to the AKP’s opposition to the secular rulers represented by the CHP, the BJP (and its predecessors) have focused on the Indian National Congress party that has ruled India for most of its history since independence (McDonnell and Cabrera 2018, 489–490). Congress’ secular policies are inclusive of the Muslims and Christians while the official ideology of the BJP, Hindu nationalism (or *Hindutva*), stresses that Hindu culture and religion cannot be separated from Indian nationhood. *Hindutva* aims at religious and cultural hegemony over minorities and the “reconversion” of Muslims and Christians to Hinduism (Palshikar 2015, 728). This xenophobic understanding is similar to the exclusionary type of populism of the European radical right.

However, the BJP is distinguished from the European radical right in two practical ways that show it as similar to the AKP. First, like Turkey, immigration has not been a core issue in India because of negative net migration levels since the 1990s (Net Migration Rate 2017). Moreover, the religious focus of the party resulted in a more nuanced treatment of migration. The BJP rejects Muslim immigrants from neighbouring countries in tune with its antagonism towards Muslims and in ways that are quite similar to the AKP’s “othering” of the Kurds in Turkey (McDonnell and Cabrera 2018, 490–492). Yet, Hindu immigrants, mainly from Bangladesh, are welcomed and promised citizenship (Daniyal 2015). Similar

to the AKP's policy of accepting "friendly" immigrants, the BJP has welcomed Hindu brethren escaping from neighbouring countries.

Second, unlike the welfare chauvinism of the European populists which seeks to "protect" the welfare state from immigrants, the BJP has increased its support among the lower classes with promises of an expansion of the nascent welfare state. The middle classes have traditionally supported the BJP more, but as Jaffrelot (2015, 20–21) shows, in the 2014 elections the party also increased its vote among the poor and the lower classes. The party, indeed, formed a cross-class coalition, using three methods: (i) the *Hindutva* was expanded to the Other Backward Classes in the 1990s and the ethnic discourse overcame class differences; (ii) the party outsourced to its affiliate associations the provision of public goods, such as health and education, building social relationships between the voters and activists that could be translated into votes (Thachil 2014); (iii) Modi used his own Other Backward Classes background as a tea seller symbolically to denote upward mobility for the aspiring lower classes (Sen 2016, 101). In its election manifesto, the party referred to the demands of the "neo-middle classes" "for better public services" and pledged various schemes (Jaffrelot 2015, 26). After the BJP came to power, a digitised welfare scheme was introduced partly in line with these promises (Chacko 2018, 557). When combined with the religious and nationalist discourse that does not translate into a general and strong anti-immigration discourse, this cross-class alliance that the BJP forged leads to the conclusion that the party does not lend itself neatly to classification as either exclusionary nor inclusionary populism. In the words of McDonnell and Cabrera (2018, 495–496):

The case of the BJP suggests the need to revise the idea that populism always appeals most to "the left behind." ... The BJP in 2014 combined neoliberal economic offer with social conservatism. The party thus seems something of a hybrid between neo-liberal (but not nativist) populists like Berlusconi's Forza Italia and protectionist (and nativist) populists like the French Rassemblement National.

### Thailand

A similar conclusion can also be reached for the TRT. Thai politics has long been dominated by elites, united around the royal house and consisting of the military, business, judiciary and political branches (McCargo 2005). Responding to constitutional changes that followed a bloody civilian uprising against a military-dominated regime in 1992, the TRT won an election in 2001 by offering policies that were attractive for farmers and workers, and especially those in and from the poorer northern and northeastern regions. Most of the schemes offered to attract voters consisted of economic entitlements. Thaksin promised easy credit for rural communities, a three-year debt moratorium to the farmers and state health care that was essentially free (Montesano 2002). Before the 2005 elections, Thaksin added more promises to his list, such as allotting livestock, land titles, ponds, more credit and funds to farmers and affordable education and housing that appealed to workers. In what looked like an impossible task, the TRT campaign also talked about eliminating poverty altogether (Pasuk and Baker 2008, 67). TRT won a landslide victory but that win also marked the beginning of Thaksin's falling out with "the elite." While Thaksin did not neglect nationalist shibboleths, compared with India and Turkey, the inclusiveness of TRT's populism rested on economic distribution rather than nationalism and for that reason, the

TRT better matches inclusionary populism than the exclusionary form (Moffitt 2015, 293–316).

Thaksin's use of symbols of nation and state were restricted partly because the opposing elite groups and especially the royal family, held monopoly over such identifiers (Baker 2005, 131–132). Nevertheless, the underlying dichotomy between “the people” and “the elite” was also a civilisational one, as Ostiguy's (2017) approach suggests. This divide shared close affinities with the AKP's populism. As Zarakol (2013) shows, both the Ottoman and the Thai empires were not formally colonised but felt the need to modernise and centralise the state in order to compete with Western powers. While Kemalism and secularism eventually became the ideological foundation of these elites in Turkey, the military, monarchy and royalism underpinned the dominance of Thai elites. However, in both, modernity and Western-ness were key elements that also became part of middle-class identity. With the opening of the economies to global markets in the 1980s, in both countries new businesses and middle classes emerged, which shared in some respects the traditional lifestyles of the urban and rural poor. Both Erdoğan and Thaksin were identified as representatives of these new businesses, as well as the previously marginalised poor, vilified by the traditional elites as backward, ignorant, irrational and uncivilised. Thus, even though there was no overt emphasis on nationalism or religion in Thaksin's populism, the civilisational divide shaped by Thailand's historical circumstances is undeniable and a focus on only material concerns would “mask deeper patterns of stratification” (Zarakol 2013, 160). It was the elite around the Thai monarchy that was alarmed by the possibility of “the loss of state identity as they know it ... defined by a certain understanding of monarchy and its mission” (Zarakol 2013, 154). They accused Thaksin – amongst many “sins” – of “brainwashing” the rural poor and pandering to their “undisciplined needs and wants” (Hewison 2017, 433). By speaking to and for this “unpresentable Other,” Thaksin “flaunted” their ways as the “authentic Self” (Ostiguy 2017, 93) and increasingly embraced populism to break the old elite's opposition (Hewison 2017).

As noted above, Thaksin's discourse did not use much overt nationalism, but he was still a nationalist. For example, in 2003 Thaksin began a “war on drugs” which killed over a thousand people and raised concerns over human rights violations. During this “war,” Thaksin proclaimed himself as the redeemer of Thailand's morals and health and thus, reinforced nationalist sentiments. Likewise, during TRT's time in government, a Malay Muslim insurgency reignited in Thailand's deep south and the government responded with heavy-handed military repression (Croissant 2007). This resembles Turkey's nationalist fight against the Kurdish insurgents and the BJP's clashes with Muslims.

The similarity is also seen in responses to immigration. After having a negative net migration rate in the 1990–1995 period, Thailand had positive levels of migration between 1995 and 2015 (Net Migration Rate 2017). During these years, most immigrants to Thailand were from neighbouring countries, such as Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia. Overwhelmingly, they migrated for work. The governments before TRT portrayed migrant workers as a danger to the employment opportunities of the Thais, which included plans for forced deportation after the 1997 crisis (Darunee 2001). But the Thaksin government reversed this policy through a parliamentary resolution in August 2001 and lifted restrictions on migrant workers, regions where they could work and types of employment they could undertake. These policies of the Thaksin government were “widely criticized” for “giving away” employment “easily” (Darunee 2001). In contrast to India and Turkey, this



approach to migration was led more by pro-business attitudes than by ethnic brotherhood and affinities. However, it is clear that the TRT's approach to migrants was quite different from the exclusionary discourse used by the European populists due to different historical, economic and geographical circumstances and creating a blend of mixed populism similar to the AKP. Indeed, even in this case of populism, which was more explicitly class-driven and had no overt religious discourses, it is possible to find socio-cultural differences, identities and grievances playing a role as Ostiguy's definition of populism highlights.

### ***Economic Policies, Organisation and Mobilisation***

The similarities of populisms in Turkey, India and Thailand in terms of their strategic attributes are perhaps more striking than the civilisation discourses discussed above. In all three countries, the populist parties adopted pro-business economic policies that were also dubbed "neo-liberal." Yet, in tandem with Hadiz's (2016) approach, all three parties formed cross-class alliances, representing both business interests and the new middle and lower classes. Facing economic crises or forming during financial turmoil in the case of Turkey and Thailand, all three parties found ways to integrate with the global capitalist economy while claiming to represent the interests of their cross-class supporters. Organisationally, the personalistic leadership style of Erdoğan, Modi and Thaksin have been evident in all three countries, as expected of neo-liberal populism and discussed by Ostiguy (2017). However, all three populist movements also have had relatively strong mass organisations that can be mobilised, like the radical populist variant. As a result of their historically shaped socio-cultural and civilisational conflicts, all three populists on occasion mobilised their supporters to defeat their enemies.

#### ***Turkey***

The AKP has been coded as a party that has successfully combined Islamism with neo-liberal capitalism (see, for instance, Atasoy 2009; Tuğal 2009). Compared with the first era of neo-liberalism that started in the 1980s, the AKP's policies went deeper on the privatisation of state enterprises, setting up of new regulatory boards, decreasing public spending, the suppression of real wages and shrinking the agricultural sector (Aytaç and Öniş 2014, 50; Bahçe and Köse 2017, 578; Karaman 2013, 3416). In terms of maintaining growth rates, the party also appeared to do well, reaching an 11% growth rate in the peak year of 2011 and well above the 2% OECD average in the same year (OECD 2019).

In its economic policies, the party appeased businesses, by legalising flexible, sub-contracted and temporary labour and by breaking the power of independent labour unions (Bozkurt 2013, 379–380; Yabancı 2016; Yıldırım 2009, 40–41). The AKP came to power in an alliance with Anatolian businessmen, whose conservatism, religiosity and lack of economic opportunities had put them at a disadvantage relative to more secular big businesses in Istanbul and the Marmara region (Hadiz 2016, 110–112). These "Anatolian tigers" have been systematically favoured by the AKP in public procurement and construction contracts awarded by national and local level public institutions, exposing the economy to clientelism, corruption and crony capitalism on previously unprecedented scales (Buğra and Savaşkan 2014; Gürakar 2016).

Despite the mismanagement of the economy in the long run, the AKP has held onto its constituency from the lower classes until at least 2018 by reforming the welfare state,

increasing lower-class access to bank loans and credit cards and distributing social assistance to the poor through charities, philanthropic organisations and private donors (Özdemir 2015, 10–24). These policies have led to mixed results for the lower classes: on the one hand, breaking their possible organised resistance, and on the other, awarding material benefits in exchange for party loyalty (Akçay 2018; Bahçe and Köse 2017; Bozkurt 2013; Eder 2014).

Party loyalty has worked hand-in-hand with party membership, which in 2017, stood at almost 9.5 million – eight times more than the CHP and about one in every nine citizens (Diken, February 24, 2018). The AKP has developed a strong party organisation with a hierarchically ordered and centrally controlled body that penetrates even the remotest corners of Turkey. Membership is controlled by the headquarters of the party and, because the main source of income is state subsidies (a feature of the Law on Political Parties), the grassroots is dependent on the higher echelons of the party for resources (Kumbaracıbaşı 2009). Thus, the party leadership is materially autonomous, but has at its disposal a party apparatus that can be used year-round, not only during election times.

In the AKP's organisational framework, the role of Erdoğan is critical. Although he was a first among equals when the party was founded in the 2000s, later he bypassed his comrades and became a personalistic figure (Castaldo 2018, 479). Rather than having messianic or divine characteristics, Erdoğan's leadership style rests on his meticulous control over his organisation, micro-management of every level of the party and a constant dynamism in holding mass rallies, meetings and speeches with party loyalists around the country (Baykan 2018, 106–141).

President Erdoğan commands a party base that can be used in activities related to elections, but also as a reserve force that can be mobilised on the streets against opponents. Erdoğan, for instance, threatened to mobilise his supporters following the Gezi Park protests in 2013 (Hürriyet, June 4, 2017). Three years later, on the night of July 15, 2016, Erdoğan *did* ask people to defend the government by going onto the streets against an attempted military coup. Thousands responded and the coup failed partially because of this unprecedented and quick mobilisation. For weeks after the coup, Erdoğan called on his supporters to stay on the streets in case of a second coup attempt, significantly demonstrating the capacity of the party to use its grassroots as a reserve army against opponents, similar to radical populists in Latin America.

## India

One of the reasons for the BJP's success in the 2014 elections was its campaign on the economy and the failure of the previous government to sustain economic growth and benefits to the middle classes. Modi highlighted his own success as chief minister of Gujarat for 13 years, touting the state's growth rates and economic development. He promised that he would reproduce this "economic miracle" nationwide by efficient governance, new developmental projects and building infrastructure. The neo-liberal agenda of the party was summarised in the slogan "maximum governance and minimum government" (Kumar 2014, 51). Such promises attracted India's big corporations and the wealthy families who owned them, as well as the BJP's traditional voter base, the middle classes.

Since coming to power, the BJP government has continued with neo-liberal policies. The party announced in early 2016 a privatisation initiative with the aim of selling US\$8.4 billion worth of shares in state enterprises (*Financial Times*, March 7, 2016). Under Modi's leadership, India increased foreign direct investment by nearly 40% between 2014 and 2016, in line with Modi's "Make in India" campaign (*The Wall Street Journal*, September 2,

2016). Although new welfare schemes were introduced for poor families with digitised databases and bank accounts, the new government also “weakened many labour protocols and environmental regulations . . . , reduced public spending in primary education and basic health and undercut many of the landmark rights-based acts that distinguished the tenure of the [previous government]” (Ruparelia 2015, 757–758).

Perhaps the most significant economic reform that Modi unleashed was the demonetisation drive which began in November 2016. The drive involved the removal of 500 and 1,000 rupee bank notes from circulation that amounted to the 86% of bills in circulation. One of the discourses for this radical move was from a populist playbook. The wealthy were evading taxation and “this crisis” that was generated by “the corrupt elite” required decisive and immediate action. Those who criticised the move were declared “anti-national,” “the people,” who were hurt were hailed for their sacrifice. The need to strengthen the formal economy, to move on to a “cashless society” and to increase the “financial inclusion of the poor and especially, the neo-middle classes” was also emphasised, similar to the AKP’s extension of new credit facilities to the lower classes. Modi’s policy also highlighted a neo-liberal desire, as one minister put it, to “flush” the banks “with funds” so that they can “lend it to productive sectors” (cited in Chacko 2018, 559).

Like the neo-liberal populism of the AKP, the BJP also diverges from its Latin American counterparts with its organisational attributes. The BJP is backed by, and Modi has been a member of, the National Volunteers’ Organisation (*Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* –RSS), a paramilitary group formed in 1925. The RSS and other Hindu nationalists are frequently mobilised and their activities lead to communal conflict and attacks against Muslims, including in Gujarat during Modi’s time as chief minister. Moreover, the BJP is well-organised at the local level throughout India. With its 88 million members (more than double the number of Congress members), it is arguably “the largest political party in the world” (*Quartz India*, March 31, 2015). As an organisationally thick party, commanding grassroots affiliates, the BJP can recruit voters among the poor through the distribution of private goods but based also on personal relationships (Thachil 2014).

Despite the BJP’s robust organisation, before the 2014 elections, Modi formed direct links with the voters through technological mechanisms, such as speeches via hologram. It has been this personalistic centralisation of power that has carried the BJP to government and that has marked Modi’s rule since 2014 (Manor 2015, 737–739; Jaffrelot and Tillin 2017). However, Modi’s 2014 success was in part also due to his ability to appeal to “vote mobilisers” to reach local communities with no easy access to information. In as big and diverse a country as India, vote mobilisers donate money, campaign door-to-door or put up posters advertising the party, although most of them are not members and expect material benefits for their service (Chhibber and Ostermann 2014). Thus, the BJP has relied on a mixture of strategies, including Modi’s personalistic style, organisational links with the RSS, strong party organisation and local activism, setting the BJP apart from the typical cases of neo-liberal populism.

### **Thailand**

The TRT came to power following the 1997–1998 economic crisis, which had led to an IMF agreement and a strict application of neo-liberal principles of fiscal cuts, retrenchment of the state and privatisations. In an economic environment that had already damaged big business in Thailand, the IMF programme benefited foreign investors, giving them opportunities in the privatisation schemes (Hewison 2005). Faced with competition from foreign capital,

domestic businesspeople turned to a strategy of capturing state power. Thaksin – a wealthy business tycoon himself – founded the TRT in 1998 with this “principal mission,” “to rescue Thai business people from the 1997 financial crisis and to restore economic growth” (Pasuk and Baker 2008, 64). The TRT advocated a mildly nationalist form of capitalism that would restrict some foreign shareholding in some enterprises. It continued with privatisations, favoured employers over labour, facilitated free trade and reduced state involvement in the economy (Pasuk and Baker 2005, 65–68). Although Thaksin did not strictly adhere to IMF prescriptions, he was likened to Peru’s Fujimori and the neo-liberal populists of Latin America because of his party’s economic policies and links with domestic capital (Moffitt 2015, 307; Pasuk and Baker 2008, 73–77). However, unlike them (and as explained above), he balanced his big business bias with universal welfare schemes to the poor in rural areas and to the informal sector and workers in urban settings in a more inclusionary fashion. Again similar to the AKP, coming to power after an economic crisis, the party could also promise sustained economic growth rates, reaching to 7% in the peak year of 2003 (a major surge from -8% in 1998) that would appeal to a cross-class alliance (World Bank 2019).

Like Erdoğan and Modi, Thaksin himself was at the centre of the populist appeal. He appeared as a successful businessman and assured small and mid-sized businesspeople similar kinds of upward mobility. He blended his personalistic control over the party and the government with high membership levels to the TRT and social mobilisation strategies. While critics like McCargo and Ukrist (2005, 86–89) are sceptical of some claims made about TRT membership, the TRT had a registered membership of around 8.5 million in 2003, six times more than its closest competitor, the Democrat Party. The levels of membership were important in order to receive associated state funding, but also, similar to the AKP, to provide a possible grassroots force that could be mobilised when faced with an elite attack. The value of such mobilisation was made clear by the march of the Assembly of the Poor on Bangkok in 1997 and their subsequent months-long protests that provided the ideal ground for the populist discourse based on the grievances of the rural poor to spring up, although, at first Thaksin “paid little attention to this discourse” (Hellmann 2017, 167). However, after 2001 and more so before the 2005 elections, Thaksin embraced the discourse as well as the mobilisational strategy.

The value of mobilisation of the poor became especially clear for Thaksin and the TRT following the 2006 coup (Hewison 2017, 435–437). A grassroots movement started with the Caravan of the Poor marching on Bangkok to defend Thaksin. His followers later established the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) and wore red shirts to symbolise their opposition to anti-Thaksin groups (Markou 2016). With every change of government and at any critical political moment, the red shirts were actively mobilised, oftentimes clashing with security forces and with anti-Thaksin groups. The activities of the UDD reached new heights in 2009 and 2010, when they stormed the 2009 ASEAN Summit in Pattaya and seized several locations in Bangkok in both years. In the end the UDD was not successful in preventing the 2014 coup, but this turn towards civil society mobilisation and organisation after 2006 is a feature that sets the Thai case apart from the neo-liberal populist experience in Latin America and is similar to the AKP’s mobilisation strategy.

## Conclusion

This article started with a simple observation: there is no consensus in the literature on the type of populism and regional variation that the AKP confirms to. After identifying the root cause of this discord in the literature, the article asked how the AKP *should* be categorised based on *all* its main attributes. The main finding of this article is that when its discourses, economic policies and organisational dynamics are considered together, populism in Turkey constitutes a specific ideological and strategic blend that contains elements from previous typologies. Although it does not resemble populists from Europe and Latin America, it has interesting similarities with the BJP in India and the TRT in Thailand.

There are three implications of this finding for the broader literature on populism. First, by showing how one “theory-infirming” case does not belong to the most dominant types of populism identified by the general literature, this article supports calls for a more comprehensive approach to populism, combining ideology and strategy with historically shaped socio-cultural dynamics. This type of socio-cultural reading of populism, as explicitly advocated by Ostiguy (2017) and in similar ways applied to case study work by Hadiz (2014, 2016), would go beyond analyses of class dynamics and religious divisions while including and combining them. It would stress how populist alliances that cross-cut economic interests can be formed among various social groups, based on civilisational discourses, economic policies and organisational instruments that are unique to countries, specific periods and geographical settings.

Second, this article highlights the need to expand the literature to other geographical areas. As others have also noticed, the literature on populism has an apparent “Atlantic bias” (Moffitt 2015, 293–295) and is still very much dominated by cases from Western Europe and Latin America (Hadiz and Chrysosgelos 2017, 399–400; Rovira Kaltwasser et al. 2017, 12–13). While typologies based on these continents may work for these regions and others with similar historical patterns, Turkey, India and Thailand are countries that had different experiences of nation-building and civilisational projects in the twentieth century. Further research can dig deeper into these experiences and investigate how they manifest themselves in contemporary populism from a more causal and explanatory framework.

Third, this article draws attention to the need to develop a new typology of populism by using comprehensive definitions of the phenomenon. This article while critical of existent typologies did not try to replace them. Such an effort would have required analysing as many global instances of populism as possible and including cases selected from different religious, geographical and developmental settings. A proper comparative analysis of the cases, then, would necessitate greater resources for a larger project producing findings that could go beyond this article. The goal of this article was modest but its findings direct research to more ambitious aims which could be taken up by others.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the four anonymous reviewers, Toygar Sinan Baykan, Michael Freeden, Kevin Hewison, Pierre Ostiguy, Laura Southgate, Adis Merdzanovic, Davide Vampa and Kurt Weyland for their comments on the earlier drafts of this article. All remaining errors are my own.

## Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Funding

This work has been supported by the Turkish Science Academy's BAGEP Award given to promising scientists.

## ORCID

Yaprak Gürsoy  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8909-6819>

## References

- Akcaay, Ü. 2018. "Neoliberal Populism in Turkey and Its Crisis." Berlin: Institute for International Political Economy Working Paper No. 100/2018.
- Akturk, S. 2009. "Persistence of the Islamic *Millet* as an Ottoman Legacy: Mono-Religious and Anti-Ethnic Definition of Turkish Nationhood." *Middle Eastern Studies* 45 (6): 893–909.
- Albertazzi, D., and D. McDonnell. 2015. *Populists in Power*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Arat-Koç, S. 2018. "Culturalizing Politics, Hyper-Politicizing 'Culture': 'White' vs. 'Black Turks' and the Making of Authoritarian Populism in Turkey." *Dialectical Anthropology* 42 (4): 391–408.
- Atasoy, Y. 2009. *Islam's Marriage with Neo-liberalism: State Transformation in Turkey*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Aytaç, S., and Z. Öniş. 2014. "Varieties of Populism in a Changing Global Context: The Divergent Paths of Erdoğan and Kirchnerismo." *Comparative Politics* 47 (1): 41–59.
- Bahçe, S., and A. Köse. 2017. "Social Classes and the Neo-Liberal Poverty Regime in Turkey, 2002–2011." *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 47 (4): 575–595.
- Baker, C. 2005. "Pluto-Populism: Thaksin and Popular Politics." In *Thailand Beyond the Crisis*, edited by P. Warr, 107–137. London: RoutledgeCurzon.
- Barr, R. 2009. "Populists, Outsiders and Anti-Establishment Politics." *Party Politics* 15 (1): 29–48.
- Baykan, T. 2018. *The Justice and Development Party in Turkey: Populism, Personalism, Organisation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bozkurt, U. 2013. "Neoliberalism with a Human Face: Making Sense of the Justice and Development Party's Neoliberal Populism in Turkey." *Science & Society* 77 (3): 372–396.
- Buğra, A., and O. Savaşkan. 2014. *New Capitalism in Turkey: The Relationship between Politics, Religion and Business*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Castaldo, A. 2018. "Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism in Turkey." *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 18 (4): 467–487.
- Chacko, P. 2018. "The Right Turn in India: Authoritarianism, Populism and Neo-liberalisation." *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 48 (4): 541–565.
- Chhibber, P., and S. Ostermann. 2014. "The BJP's Fragile Mandate: Modi and Vote Mobilizers in the 2014 General Elections." *Studies in Indian Politics* 2 (2): 137–151.
- Çınar, M. 2018. "Turkey's 'Western' or 'Muslim' Identity and the AKP's Civilizational Discourse." *Turkish Studies* 19 (2): 176–197.
- Croissant, A. 2007. "Unrest in South Thailand: Contours, Causes, and Consequences since 2001." *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 27 (1): 21–43.
- Daniyal, S. 2015. "On Granting Citizenship to Bangladeshi Hindus, Modi Has Been High on Rhetoric But Low on Action." *Scroll.in*, August 6. Accessed May 23, 2019. <http://scroll.in/article/732274/on-granting-citizenship-to-bangladeshi-hindus-modi-has-been-high-on-rhetoric-but-low-on-action>.
- Daragahi, B. 2018. "Erdoğan Is Failing Economics 101." *Foreign Policy*, May 25.



- Darunee Paisanpanichkul. 2001. "Burmese Migrant Workers in Thailand: Policy and Protection." *Legal Issues of Burma Journal* 10. Accessed December 28, 2018. <http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs/LIOB10-darunee.htm>.
- de la Torre, C. 2017. "Populism in Latin America." In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, edited by C. Rovira Kaltwasser, P. Taggart, P. Ochoa Espejo, and P. Ostiguy, 195–213. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Demiralp, S. 2012. "White Turks, Black Turks? Faultlines beyond Islamism versus Secularism." *Third World Quarterly* 33 (3): 511–524.
- Dinçşahin, Ş. 2012. "A Symptomatic Analysis of the Justice and Development Party's Populism in Turkey, 2007–2010." *Government and Opposition* 47 (4): 618–640.
- Eder, M. 2014. "Deepening Neoliberalization and the Changing Welfare Regime in Turkey: Mutations of a Populist, 'Sub-Optimal' Democracy." In *Turkey's Democratization Process*, edited by C. Rodriguez, A. Avalos, H. Yilmaz, A. I. Planet, 195–220. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Erçetin, T., and E. Erdoğan 2018. "How Turkey's Repetitive Elections Affected the Populist Tone in the Discourses of the Justice and Development Party Leaders." *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 44 (4): 382–398.
- Esen, B., and S. Gumuscu 2016. "Rising Competitive Authoritarianism in Turkey." *Third World Quarterly* 37 (9): 1581–1606.
- Filc, D. 2015. "Latin American Inclusive and European Exclusionary Populism: Colonialism as an Explanation." *Journal of Political Ideologies* 20 (3): 263–283.
- Gidron, N., and B. Bonikowski. 2013. "Varieties of Populism: Literature Review and Research Agenda." Cambridge: Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, Working Paper Series 13-0004.
- Göle, N. 2017. "Turkey Is Undergoing a Radical Shift, From Pluralism to Islamic Populism." *Huffington Post*, July 21. Accessed May 23, 2019. [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/turkey-coup-erdogan\\_b\\_596fcfcfe4b062ea5f8efa0f](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/turkey-coup-erdogan_b_596fcfcfe4b062ea5f8efa0f).
- Gürakar, E. 2016. *Politics of Favoritism in Public Procurement in Turkey: Reconfigurations of Dependency Networks in the AKP Era*. New York: Palgrave.
- Hadiz, V. 2014. "A New Islamic Populism and the Contradictions of Development." *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 44 (1): 125–143.
- Hadiz, V. 2016. *Islamic Populism in Indonesia and the Middle East*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hadiz, V. 2018. "Imagine All the People? Mobilising Islamic Populism for Right-Wing Politics in Indonesia." *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 48 (4): 566–583.
- Hadiz, V., and A. Chrysogelos. 2017. "Populism in World Politics: A Comparative Cross-Regional Perspective." *International Political Science Review* 38 (4): 399–411.
- Harriss, J. 2015. "Hindu Nationalism in Action: The Bharatiya Janata Party and Indian Politics." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 38 (4): 712–718.
- Hellmann, O. 2017. "Populism in East Asia." In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, edited by C. Rovira Kaltwasser, P. Taggart, P. Ochoa Espejo, and P. Ostiguy, 161–178. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hewison, K. 2005. "Neo-liberalism and Domestic Capital: The Political Outcomes of the Economic Crisis in Thailand." *The Journal of Development Studies* 41 (2): 310–330.
- Hewison, K. 2017. "Reluctant Populists: Learning Populism in Thailand." *International Political Science Review* 38 (4): 426–440.
- Jaffrelot, C. 2015. "The Class Element in the 2014 Indian Election and the BJP's Success with Special Reference to the Hindi Belt." *Studies in Indian Politics* 3 (1): 19–38.
- Jaffrelot, C., and L. Tillin. 2017. "Populism in India." In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, edited by C. Rovira Kaltwasser, P. Taggart, P. Ochoa Espejo, and P. Ostiguy, 179–194. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Karaman, O. 2013. "Urban Neoliberalism with Islamic Characteristics." *Urban Studies* 50 (16): 3412–3427.
- Kirdiş, E., and A. Drhimeur. 2016. "The Rise of Populism? Comparing Incumbent Pro-Islamic Parties in Turkey and Morocco." *Turkish Studies* 17 (4): 599–617.

- Kumar, R. 2014. "India's Watershed Vote: What It Means for the Economy." *Journal of Democracy* 25 (4): 46–55.
- Kumbaracıbaşı, A. 2009. *Turkish Politics and the Rise of the AKP: Dilemmas of Institutionalization and Leadership Strategy*. London: Routledge.
- Levitsky, S., and J. Loxton. 2013. "Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism in the Andes." *Democratization* 20 (1): 107–136.
- Manor, J. 2015. "A Precarious Enterprise? Multiple Antagonisms during Year One of the Modi Government." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 38 (4): 736–754.
- Markou, G. 2016. "Anti-Populist Coups: Thaksin, Dictatorship and Thailand's New Constitution." *Open Democracy*, September 14. Accessed May 23, 2019. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/gri-goris-markou/anti-populist-coups-thaksin-dictatorship-and-thailand-s-new-constitution>.
- Martin, N. 2018. "The A.K. Party and the Kurds since 2014: A Discourse of Terror." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 45 (4): 543–558.
- McCargo, D. 2005. "Network Monarchy and Legitimacy Crises in Thailand." *The Pacific Review* 18 (4): 499–519.
- McCargo, D., and Ukrist Pathmanand. 2005. *The Thaksinization of Thailand*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.
- McDonnell, D., and L. Cabrera. 2018. "The Right-wing Populism of India's Bharatiya Janata Party (and Why Comparativists Should Care)." *Democratization* 26 (3): 484–501.
- Moffitt, B. 2015. "Contemporary Populism and 'The People' in the Asia-Pacific Region: Thaksin Shinawatra and Pauline Hanson." In *Promise and Perils of Populism: Global Perspectives*, edited by C. de la Torre, 293–316. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.
- Montesano, M. 2002. "Thailand in 2001: Learning to Live with Thaksin?" *Asian Survey* 42 (1): 90–99.
- Mudde, C. 2004. "The Populist Zeitgeist." *Government and Opposition* 39 (4): 542–563.
- Mudde, C., and C. Rovira Kaltwasser. 2013. "Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America." *Government and Opposition* 48 (2): 147–174.
- Müller, J.-W. 2016. *What is Populism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Net Migration Rate. 2017. "World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision, United Nations Population Division" *UN Data*, July 12. Accessed May 23, 2019. <http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=PopDiv&f=variableID%3A85>.
- OECD. 2019. "Gross Domestic Product (GDP): GDP, Volume – Annual Growth Rates in Percentage." *OECD.Stat*, Accessed September 2, 2019. <https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?queryid=60703>
- Ohm, B. 2015. "Organizing Popular Discourse with and against the Media: Notes on the Making of Narendra Modi and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as Leaders-without-Alternative." *Television & New Media* 16 (4): 370–377.
- Ostiguy, P. 2017. "Populism: A Socio-Cultural Approach." In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, edited by C. Rovira Kaltwasser, P. Taggart, P. Ochoa Espejo, and P. Ostiguy, 73–97. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Özdemir, Y. 2015. "Turkey's Justice and Development Party: An Utmost Case of Neoliberal Populism." Paper, ECPR's General Conference, Université de Montréal, Canada, 26–29 August. Accessed May 23, 2019. <https://ecpr.eu/Filestore/PaperProposal/1afd5880-af7d-4232-a8ca-97da30743db6.pdf>.
- Ozkan, B. 2014. "Turkey, Davutoglu and the Idea of Pan-Islamism." *Survival* 56 (4): 119–140.
- Özpek, B., and N. Yaşar. 2018. "Populism and Foreign Policy in Turkey under the AKP Rule." *Turkish Studies* 19 (2): 198–216.
- Palabiyik, M. 2018. "Politicization of Recent Turkish History: (Ab)use of History as a Political Discourse in Turkey." *Turkish Studies* 19 (2): 240–263.
- Palshikar, S. 2015. "The BJP and Hindu Nationalism: Centrist Politics and Majoritarian Impulses." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 38 (4): 719–735.
- Pasuk Phongpaichit and C. Baker. 2005. "'Business Populism' in Thailand." *Journal of Democracy* 16 (2): 58–72.
- Pasuk Phongpaichit and C. Baker. 2008. "Thaksin's Populism." *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 38 (1): 62–83.

- Roberts, K. 1995. "Neoliberalism and the Transformation of Populism in Latin America: The Peruvian Case." *World Politics* 48 (1): 82–116.
- Roberts, K. 2006. "Populism, Political Conflict, and Grass-Roots Organization in Latin America." *Comparative Politics* 38 (2): 127–148.
- Rovira Kaltwasser, C. 2012. "The Ambivalence of Populism: Threat and Corrective for Democracy." *Democratization* 19 (2): 184–208.
- Rovira Kaltwasser, C., P. Taggart, P. Ochoa Espejo, and P. Ostiguy. 2017. "Populism: An Overview of the Concept and the State of the Art." In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, edited by C. Rovira Kaltwasser, P. Taggart, P. Ochoa Espejo, and P. Ostiguy, 1–24. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Roy, S. 2018. "Temple and Dam, Fez and Hat: The Secular Roots of Religious Politics in India and Turkey." In *New Perspectives on India and Turkey: Connections and Debates*, edited by S. Jassal and H. Turan, 91–112. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Ruparelia, S. 2015. "Minimum Government, Maximum Governance: The Restructuring of Power in Modi's India." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 38 (4): 755–775.
- Selçuk, O. 2016. "Strong Presidents and Weak Institutions: Populism in Turkey, Venezuela and Ecuador." *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16 (4): 571–589.
- Sen, R. 2016. "Narendra Modi's Makeover and the Politics of Symbolism." *Journal of Asian Public Policy* 9 (2): 98–111.
- Stanley, B. 2017. "Populism in Central and Eastern Europe." In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, edited by C. Rovira Kaltwasser, P. Taggart, P. Ochoa Espejo, and P. Ostiguy, 140–160. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Taggart, P. 2000. *Populism*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Taggart, P. 2017. "Populism in Western Europe." In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, edited by C. Rovira Kaltwasser, P. Taggart, P. Ochoa Espejo, and P. Ostiguy, 248–263. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Taş, H. 2018. "A History of Turkey's AKP-Gülen Conflict." *Mediterranean Politics* 23 (3): 395–402.
- Thachil, T. 2014. *Elite Parties, Poor Voters: How Social Services Win Votes in India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tuğal, C. 2009. *Passive Revolution: Absorbing the Islamic Challenge to Capitalism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Weyland, K. 1999. "Neoliberal Populism in Latin America and Eastern Europe." *Comparative Politics* 31 (4): 379–401.
- Weyland, K. 2001. "Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics." *Comparative Politics* 34 (1): 1–22.
- White, J. 2014. *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- World Bank. 2019. GDP Growth (Annual %), Thailand 1961–2017. Accessed May 30, 2019. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=TH>.
- Yabanci, B. 2016. "Populism as the Problem Child of Democracy: The AKP's Enduring Appeal and the Use of Meso-Level Actors." *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16 (4): 591–617.
- Yabanci, B., and Taleski D. 2018. "Co-opting Religion: How Ruling Populists in Turkey and Macedonia Sacralise the Majority." *Religion, State & Society* 46 (3): 283–304.
- Yıldırım, D. 2009. "AKP ve Neo-liberal Popülizm" [AKP and Neo-Liberal Populism] In *AKP Kitabı: Bir Dönüşümün Bilançosu* [AKP: The Balance-Sheet of a Transformation], edited by İ. Uzgel and B. Duru, 66–107. Ankara: Phoenix.
- Zarakol, A. 2013. "Revisiting Second Image Reversed: Lessons from Turkey and Thailand." *International Studies Quarterly* 57 (1): 150–162.