The periphery in the center: Some political features of Turkish urbanization

"It seems that realities of social and economic structure, including the characteristics and patterns of urbanization, deeply affect political development. In countries where rapid, unbalanced and disorderly urbanization tends to concentrate population in major urban centers, unemployment, feelings of relative deprivation and the manipulation of formally and informally organized political groups exert a certain impact upon rural migrants to keep away from center parties. As a result, social, economic and political factors tend to nourish the growth of extremist or fundamentalist movements in society."

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Introduction

The center and the periphery have long been key concepts in Turkish politics and also in the analysis of the political dimensions of urbanization.[1] They have had both a spatial and a socio-cultural content. There is no doubt that both meanings of the concept were closely interrelated and their interaction intensified as the communication systems in the country progressed considerably during the post-war years. Major urban centers represented the center while the rural areas have been identified as the periphery in this context. Similarly, squatter settlements and their residents that constituted almost 35 percent of urban population were regarded as the periphery as opposed to the planned sections of the major cities which were considered as the center in the true sense of the concept.

Population growth, urbanization and industrial development contribute to the creation of broad opportunities for all the countries in the world, but at the same time, they create numerous socio-economic and physical problems that cannot be resolved easily and inexpensively. Although such problems that are either created by urbanization itself or aggravated by increasing rate of urbanization concern every nation, it is the developing countries that are affected most by these processes. Turkey is no exception to this observation. Nearly two thirds (65 percent in the 2000 Census) of her population live in urban centers. The absolute number of urban residents has increased from 7 to 44 million during the last four decades. The average rate of increase of rural, total and urban populations during the same period has been 1 percent, 2.5 percent and 6 percent, respectively. The number of cities, defined as urban settlements of 10,000 or more population, has also increased from 147 in 1960 to 320 in 1980 and to 475 in 2000[2] (fig. 1). More than two thirds of the urban population live in urban centers with more than 100,000 population. Not all the
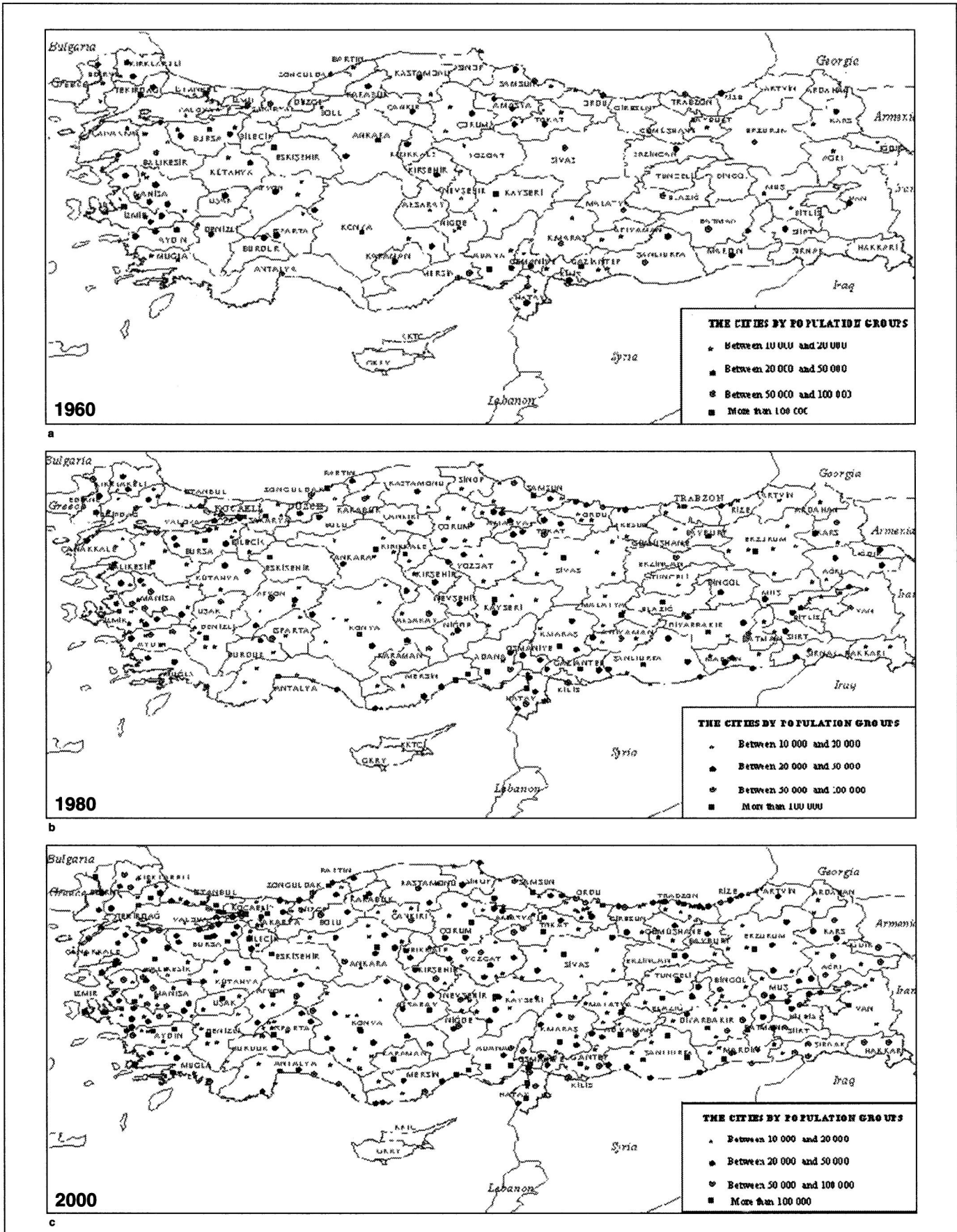
Fig. 1: Turkey – Distribution of urban centers in 1960 (a), 1980 (b) and 2000 (c).

geographical regions urbanize at the same pace mainly due to economic, social, geographical and political factors. The degree of urbanization of the Western region of Marmara is nearly 80 percent while the same rate for the regions of the East and the Black Sea is less than 50 percent (fig. 1a, 1b, 1c).

Perhaps a more striking feature of Turkish urbanization patterns is that there are deep contrasts in the internal structures of major metropolitan centers as appeared between illegally built-up squatter settlements and regularly constructed residential areas. This is an expression of the uneven income distribution in society. The percentages of the urban population living in squatter settlements in major cities such as Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir are 65 percent, 70 percent and 60 percent, respectively. Under these conditions, squatter settlements in Turkish cities can no longer be regarded as "marginal" because it is the planned sections of many major cities that can justify such characterization. Employment opportunities in rapidly urbanizing cities have not increased at the same pace as out-migration from rural areas and the hopes of rural migrants to find expanding job opportunities in those centers are seldom met.[3] Uncontrolled urbanization tends to increase the unemployment and underemployment rates in metropolitan centers. A migratory movement, a kind of social and economic erosion, transferring poverty from villages to urban centers, can hardly be considered as a real contribution to economic and social development. World views, attitudes and behavior of migrants are considerably influenced by poverty conditions, which also tend to have far reaching implications for public order.

How do politics and urbanization affect each other?

First of all, politics play a certain role in controlling and shaping urbanization. There is no doubt that to find rational solutions to the economic, social and physical problems created by urbanization requires either to take up and to try to remedy all of these issues one by one or to formulate and implement general policies that might have a chance to change the settlement pattern in the country in the long run, through which each of the above-mentioned individual problems can also be solved spontaneously. Urbanization policy aims to influence the shape, pace and geographical distribution of migratory movements in order to foster national development.

Even in liberal economies such interventions in socio-economic life are regarded as necessary steps for saving the future of cities. Since urbanization in Turkey following the emergence of the first squatter settlements in metropolitan centers accelerated after the Second World War, it was not before the beginnings of the 1960s that serious public policies to deal with it were formulated. The attitudes of both politicians and bureaucrats were in favor of unauthorized building activities of the squatters during the decades following the Second World War. Perhaps it was difficult to opt for an alternative policy of discouragement in a democratic and parliamentary political regime respectful of individual freedoms. As a result, even the socio-economic models aiming at keeping the farmer in his village and improving his living and working conditions in place did not attract much attention.

An amendment made to the Constitution of 1982 (Art. 23) provides that freedom of settlement can be restricted by an Act of Parliament with the aim of ensuring orderly urbanization. As in any other multi-party parliamentarian democracy it is almost impossible to restrict this freedom even to attain the above-mentioned goal. Starting from the First Five Year Development Plans, the State regarded urbanization as one of the requirements for development and encouraged a growth pole policy for a more balanced population distribution among major cities and regions. The major tools of such a policy were not repressive measures but essentially the policies of investment, tax, credit and personnel. The growth of medium-sized cities, not the giant metropolises, was going to be encouraged.

The policy of squatter settlements during the last 50 years aimed to regularize their physical layout and legal positions, to integrate them with the larger society and to meet their infrastructure needs by taking measures for the prevention of further squatting. These are the main characteristics of the policies of urbanization and squatting shaped by politicians.

But in practice, there was a false impression, as if migration from rural to urban areas was going to be encouraged. No real control was exercised over the distribution of population and economic activities within the framework of regional plans. This increased the regional inequalities and the cities faced enormous infrastructure problems. Despite the fact that all laws on squatting enacted between 1948 and 1966 banned illegal building, the number of squatter houses actually built increased from 240,000 in 1960 to 2.2 million in 2002. And the number of people living in these settlements increased from 1.2 million to 11 million. Therefore, it can be safely assumed that mainly political party interests induced decision makers to be tolerant toward squatting and this fact aggravated further the issue of unplanned urbanization. Short-range political interests have also made it difficult to protect fertile agricultural lands, forests, coastal areas and the natural values of touristic regions.[4] In other words, the supremacy of public interest over private interests in the process of urbanization was not ensured.

As to the impact of urbanization on politics, it is in order to remember some of the preliminary theoretical analyses. The first was formulated by political scientist Karl W. Deutsch. According to Deutsch, the concept of social mobilization comprising such factors as urbanization, exposure to mass media, inceasing literacy, the ratio of non-agricultural occupations and per capita national income is a precondition of political participation. As a result, political behavior is affected by social change or mobilization. This causes a differentiation in voting behavior in rural and urban areas. It is assumed that urban residents are more eager for participation in elections than villagers. This theory suggests that the higher the rate of urbanization, the higher the rate of participation in elections in urban centers. Of course, the direction of participation is as important as the density of participation. In other words, a more important question is to know for whom the urban residents will be voting. There are different views in this respect:

● Some scholars believe that the residents of squatter settlements, in other words those living in unauthorized settlements, will have more reason to vote for essentially conservative political parties encouraging them to migrate, simply because they are better off in the city as compared with village life and they have to be on good terms with existing decision makers in power in order to ensure that their shack house should not be demolished and continue to be a sort of guarantee of their social security in the future.

● A second view assumes that urbanization favors political parties with left-of-center ideologies, because rural migrants faced with numerous hardships in the cities are gradually alienated from the rest of society. Most of them become unemployed or underemployed, and the conditions of relative deprivation that they experience and the inadequacies in living conditions push them to the left of the spectrum. Thus, it is quite normal that these masses with unsatisfied needs support political parties that aim to change the status quo.

● According to the views of those in a third category of scholars, a shift to the left in the spectrum and becoming more radical occurs not immediately but from the second generation on. Because, as the new generations become more conscious

about their differences with prosperous segments of the city and their own relative deprivation, it becomes more difficult to prevent them from being radicalized. Certainly, the process of radicalization takes time. They form explosive political groups that may be manipulated by radical groups in society. Such radical elements can approach them easily for the exploitation of their anger to throw out even democratically formed governments as experienced in some Latin American countries. Findings of some surveys carried out in Turkish cities in the late 1970s and early 1980s provide ample evidence in this respect.[5]

Deterioration of the value systems under the influence of worldwide globalization as reflected in the expansion of the rent economy, development of the underground economy, decrease in respect for natural and environmental values, is no less important than the characteristics of urbanization as it affects political behavior.

Despite the fact that in theory it is generally accepted that urbanization fosters participation, the experience with elections throughout the multiparty regime in Turkey since 1946 indicates that this is not the case. In other words, rates of participation in parliamentary elections have been much higher in rural areas than in urban centers. On the other hand, voting data on past elections in squatter settlements, that can be viewed as the best indicators of urbanization, show that newly urbanized residents did not vote mostly for the left-of-center parties. It would be safer to underline that the trend does not seem straight in this respect during the last several decades. For example, in the 1973 and 1977 municipal elections, what the theory predicts was more or less confirmed in cities with relatively high urbanization rates where labor population was also high. In fact, candidates of the left parties won the mayoralties in those cities. But paradoxically, in the 1984 local elections, even in a city like Istanbul which is in the center of the most urbanized region of the country, conservative political parties were the major winners.[6] A few years later, the following municipal elections in Istanbul revealed that once again the center left Republican Party was the leading political party in both Istanbul metropolitan municipality and its lower-level district municipalities.

In the light of these conditions, it would be a safer assumption to accept that urbanization is only one of numerous factors affecting voting behavior and there may be many other independent variables that might affect the patterning of political structure and behavior. For example, political violence witnessed in such squatter settlements in Istanbul as Ümraniye, Gaziosmanpaşa, Kadıköy, during the 1970s and 1990s, has been definitely nourished by the unplanned and disorderly character of urbanization as well as other socio-cultural and economic features of society.

What have we learned from the recent past?

Contrary to the prevailing assumption of the theories, it seems that urbanization does not affect political behavior in the predicted direction. In other words, by increasing degree and rate of urbanization, electors are not inclined to vote heavily for the leftist parties. In this sense, the political and administrative influence of the periphery on major cities continues to increase. Such a trend gives the impression that the periphery plays an increasing role in the center. In the rest of this paper, we will be dealing with the analysis of the data on national and local elections during the 1980s and 1990s.

A comparison of the 1989 and 1994 local elections reveals that the most successful political party in these elections was the Welfare Party, a radical islamist fundamentalist party, which received its strength mainly from the squatter settlements surrounding central Istanbul. In table 1 a comparison can be found of the successes of the Welfare Party (RP) and the Social Democratic Republican Party (SHP) in the above-mentioned elections.

It is remarkable to observe that the majority of the right and right-of-center parties won the mayoralties in metropolitan centers and in the headquarters of the provinces and sub-provinces in 1994, while the left-of-center party (SHP) gained mainly mayoral elections in relatively smaller settlements. There is a striking shift in the votes cast for the SHP in 1989 to the RP in 1994.[7] A great many factors such as the distortion imposed upon the political structure by the 12 September 1980 military intervention, general economic and socio-cultural features of the nation, differences among the techniques of organisation, operation and information works of the political parties, the ways in which their candidates are chosen, inequalities in the distribution of the benefits created by disorderly urbanization and concrete difficulties faced by the residents of different types of settlement played a considerable role in changing the voting patterns. In addition to the above-mentioned factors, the fact that physical, social and cultural factors did not keep pace with rapid population concentration in cities created unsatisfactory living conditions in major metropolitan areas. Reflections of the negative consequences of unhealthy urbanization in cities even encouraged some observers to argue that "Turkey was going to be rightest in general" and the RP, an Islamist fundamentalist political party was going to be essentially "an urban-based political party."[8] In fact, the same political party won the elections not only in rapidly growing cities, such as Diyarbakır, Elazığ, Erzurum, Kayseri, Malatya, Sakarya, Trabzon, Konya, Sivas, Kahramanmaras, Sanlıurfa and Van, but in the largest metropolises like Istanbul and Ankara as well.

Table 1
Mayoral offices gained by the Welfare Party (RP) and the Social Democratic Republican Party (SHP) in the Municipal Elections of 1989 and 1994 (number of mayors)

Municipality	Welfare Party (RP)		Social Democratic Republican Party (SHP)	
	1989	Gains in 1994	1989	Losses in 1994
All municipalities	71	256	662	226
Metropolitan municipalities	1	5	6	4
Provincial municipalities	4	18	36	28
District municipalities	19	76	290	155
Rural municipalities	57	157	390	39

(Source: Erol Tuncer, 27 Mart 1994 Yerel Seçimleri, Sayısal ve Siyasal Deierlendirme (Local Elections of 27 March 1994. A Statistical and Political Assessment), (Ankara, Tesav, 1994), pp. 15-16).

Table 2
Election results in Turkey and in Istanbul, 1950-1995 (in percent)

Year	Turkey			Istanbul		
	Center Right	Center Left	Others	Center Right	Center Left	Others
1950	53.3	39.9	7.8	52.7	24.3	23.0
1954	56.6	34.8	8.6	61.9	26.3	11.8
1957	47.3	40.6	12.1	52.7	40.5	6.8
1961	34.8	36.7	28.5	41.8	38.2	20.0
1965	52.9	28.7	18.4	53.2	29.7	17.1
1969	46.5	27.4	25.1	47.8	33.8	18.4
1973	29.8	33.3	36.0	48.9	28.5	23.6
1977	36.9	41.4	21.7	58.2	28.4	13.4
1987	45.4	33.3	21.3	51.6	39.9	9.5
1991	51.0	31.6	17.4	46.3	36.5	17.2
1995	38.9	25.4	35.7	41.3	32.6	26.1

(Source: Mustafa Sönmez, *Istanbul'un Iki Yüzü (Two faces of Istanbul)* (Istanbul, Arkadaş, 1996), p. 107).

A feature of the political history of Istanbul, as the capital city of Turkey, indicates that throughout the second half of the 20th century, center-left and center-right political parties keep losing, while parties with extreme and rather radical world views are constantly gaining strength. However, when the trend in voting patterns in Istanbul is compared with that of Turkey in general, one can conclude that the same trend is much more sensible in Turkey than in Istanbul. In table 2, one can find the figures pertaining to both Turkey and Istanbul.

The most striking feature of table 2 is that the vote received by extremist parties increased from 9.5 percent in 1987 to 17.2 percent in 1991 and to 26.1 in 1995. This figure was still around 15 percent in the 1999 national elections.[9] There is a corresponding decrease throughout the election years in the votes of the center parties either on the right or on the left. Empirical research carried out in Istanbul and its immediate surroundings reveals that differentiation in the religious and ethnic backgrounds of the inhabitants played a considerable role in pushing the electors to the extreme. It was also argued that industrial centers seemed attractive to the migrant urban poor which strived for more security in the city.[10] The fear of the migrants concerning likely clashes between their traditional value system and the changes brought about by urbanization put a certain pressure upon the newly urbanized population to rely more on religiously oriented political parties.[11]

One should keep in mind that general economic and social conditions, uneven income distribution, development policies that neglected welfare aspects of development and finally disorderly and unplanned urbanization have all exerted a certain influence upon the voting behavior of the urban poor. The level of development of settlements has an undeniable impact upon voting behavior. In fact, when we classify the districts of Istanbul into various categories of socio-economic development, we clearly see how the shares of the votes received by different poitical parties vary from one district to another. For example, the districts of Istanbul can be grouped into three different categories in this respect:

● In the first group are the least developed or the poorest inhabitants. Such districts as Sultanbeyli (70.3 percent), Esenler (46.1 percent), Bağcılar (46.1), Ümraniye (45 percent), Gaziosmanpaşa (41.1 percent), Kasıthane (40.6 percent), Eminönü (40.2 percent), Pendik (39.1 percent), Beyoğlu (37.2 percent), Kartal (36.3 percent) are the poorest settlements. The vote of the Welfare Party received from the residents of these settlements is higher than both in other parts of Istanbul

and in the rest of Turkey. The majority of the population living in these districts are of rural origin and they constitute nearly one third (32.9 percent) of the city's total population.[12]
● The second category includes the most developed districts like Şişli , Kadıköy, Adalar, Beşiktaş and Bakırköy where the percentage of the votes received by the Welfare Party is the smallest. These figures for these districts are 20.6, 20.0, 15.1, 14.3 and 12.0 percent, respectively. The population of these districts is approximately 23 percent of the total population of the city.
● Finally, at the intermediate level, we find those districts that can be regarded as relatively developed, such as Tuzla, Güngören, Bayrampaşa, Eyüp, Fatih, Bahçelievler, Üsküdar, Beykoz, Büyük Çekmece, Zeytinburnu, Küçük Çekmece and Maltepe; 44.1 percent of the electors live in these districts. The total vote that the Welfare Party received in these quarters varies between 28 percent and 35.6 percent.

All this evidence suggests that the squatters' support for the Welfare Party is not necessarily indicative of an increase in support for radical Islam. Rather, it is the latest in a series of rational realignments on the part of urban squatters in an attempt to best serve their social, economic and service needs.[13] What is also true is that there is a noticeable shift in voting patterns from the center parties towards those that are far beyond the center, particularly in those cities where the great majority of the population are recent rural migrants and live in conditions of relative poverty. Therefore we can conclude that changes in voting behavior can not be taken up independently from the pace and patterns of urbanization. Several recent scholarly studies on the class structure of the Istanbul metropolitan area shed adequate light on the above mentioned differentiation in voting behavior.[14]

What can be expected in the near future?

Policy sciences teach us that structural problems of an economic and social character facing a nation can not be remedied in the short run through legal and partial interventions. It is obvious that such problems have been created as a result of a long process of accumulation of a great many economic, social and political factors and therefore their solutions may take a relatively long time.

Uneven income distribution is one of these factors. Although squatting appears to be a consequence of rapid

urbanization, the latter is more like one of the accelerating factors than the main reason responsible for the squatting process. The basic source of the squatting problem should be sought in unbalanced income distribution and in the inadequacy of the related development policies. It is an obvious fact that disorderly and unhealthy urbanization is more an outcome of working and living conditions prevailing in the rural sector than the attractiveness of the employment opportunities offered by the urban centers. Both official and unofficial estimates indicate that these poverty conditions will persist in the near future and the present rate of population growth will not be stabilized before 2025.

Both developmental features and demographic trends in the country can be controlled effectively through planning. Yet, urbanization and squatting process seem to be entirely out of public control at present. In some of the squatter settlements in Istanbul, the criminal sector known as the "land and squatting mafia" has even succeeded in replacing the authority of the public institutions to guide urban development and settlement in metropolitan areas.[15] Almost all of the political party leaders, by their encouraging statements and attitudes, have contributed, in their turn, to the persistence of the issue, in both national and local elections, in order to get the votes of the those who represent the periphery in the center.

Migration from rural to urban centers, from eastern to western regions continues and it adds to increasing regional inequalities. Unless the Southeastern Anatolian Development Project achieves its goals, the size of the periphery in major metropolitan areas may not have a chance to be minimized in the foreseeable future. Therefore, efforts to expand the scope of the regional development projects to cover the whole territory of the nation may provide some hope, because the distribution of population and economic activities between regions, metropolitan areas, cities, small towns, villages are aspects of the same phenomena and they cannot be separated from each other.

Rural migrants continue to live in cities as villagers without being adequately urbanized. They maintain their rural value systems and behavioral patterns for a long time in the city. The identity crisis they face pushes them often to radical mass actions, movements and political parties.[16] Those who look at the future with feelings of confidence are few. In the 1994 local elections, according to the public opinion polls, nearly 41 percent of the voters thought that none of the political parties participating in the elections was powerful enough to solve their economic, social and political problems; 36.6 percent of the voters believed that there was such a party and this was the Welfare Party (the religiously oriented radical party).[17]

The weak identity impression of local and central authorities plays a significant role in political instability. Increasing cleavages between center-left and center-right parties since the early 1980s, with no real difference of political ideology in their programs, pushed the hopeless rural migrants to the extremist political party that bases its relative strength on religious beliefs. Worldwide revival of Islamic fundamentalism in some regions of the world especially during the 1980s and 1990s has also influenced extremist elements largely manipulated from outside in this country. Inflitration occurred more easily in the outskirts of Istanbul and other large cities as the conditions of the periphery in the center were considerably suitable to such endeavors.

There is no doubt that the increase of the vote potential of an extreme rightest party from the youth, women and workers living in squatter settlements or from other parts of the cities can be regarded as normal in a democratic system with legally recognized political parties. However, as witnessed during social political movements occurring in such settlements of Istanbul as Gaziosmanpaşa, Ümraniye and Kadıköy, they easily become uncontrollable in joining the illegal militants protesting against the constitutional order of the state. Therefore, the limits of the freedom of the parties that seem to be sympathetic towards extremist movements are the constitutional principles that guarantee law and order in society.

Concluding remarks

It seems that realities of social and economic structure, including the characteristics and patterns of urbanization, deeply affect political development. In countries where rapid, unbalanced and disorderly urbanization tends to concentrate population in major urban centers, unemployment, feelings of relative deprivation and the manipulation of formally and informally organized political groups exert a certain impact upon rural migrants to keep away from center parties. As a result, social, economic and political factors tend to nourish the growth of extremist or fundamentalist movements in society. In order to stabilize political structure, those who have migrated from rural areas into urban centers, in other words the periphery in the center, must be integrated with the whole of society by concerted economic and social action with appropriate instruments.

Notes

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