



THE LIBERAL PARADIGM IN THE DEVELOPMENT-DEMOCRACY NEXUS: A COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE TURKISH EXPERIENCE FROM THE REPUBLIC TO THE PRESENT

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between development and democracy through the lens of liberalism, asking whether durable development can be achieved without liberal-democratic institutions. Adopting a historical-comparative approach, it traces Turkey's trajectory from the founding of the Republic to the present and contrasts this experience with the authoritarian growth trajectories of China and Russia, drawing on institutional economics, classical liberal theory, and empirical democratization research together with historical and index-based secondary data. The study argues that development is not reducible to economic growth but constitutes a multidimensional process encompassing education, culture, social welfare, and political participation, and that this process becomes durable primarily where individual freedom, property rights, constitutionalism, and the rule of law are institutionalized. The Turkish case, spanning early Republican statism, post-1980 liberalization, the 2002-2011 reform period, and the subsequent majoritarian turn, illustrates how decoupling economic liberalization from political liberalization produces fragile outcomes. The Chinese and Russian cases show that authoritarian growth can persist temporarily but faces sustainability constraints stemming from insecure property rights and weak institutional accountability. The study concludes that the durability of development depends less on economic liberalization per se than on the liberal-democratic consolidation of political and legal institutions.

Keywords: liberalism, development, liberal democracy, institutional economics, Turkey

JEL Codes: O43, P16, P51, N45

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between democracy and development, situated at the intersection of development economics and political science, has been among the most debated questions in the social sciences for over half a century. At the centre of this debate lie two competing propositions concerning the effect of political regime type on economic and social advancement. The first proposition holds that authoritarian regimes may facilitate rapid capital accumulation and developmental breakthroughs by lowering short-term political costs; the second holds that sustainable and inclusive development is possible only in liberal-democratic regimes in which individual freedoms, property security, and the rule of law are institutionalised.

This study takes the second proposition as its point of departure and re-reads the phenomenon of development through the core values of liberalism: the individual, liberty, property rights, constitutionalism, and the rule of law. The study's starting premise is that development cannot be reduced to economic growth rates alone; rather, it is a multilayered practice encompassing education, cultural development, social welfare, and political participation (Sen, 1999, p. 218). This multidimensional conception of development gains durability to the extent that it coincides with the institutional guarantees provided by liberal democracy; conversely, where economic growth occurs without accompanying political freedoms and legal guarantees, the resulting trajectory tends to be fragile and productive of inequality.

To test this general framework, the study analyses the historical experience of the Republic of Turkey from its founding to the present. The Turkish case is well suited to observing the different phases of the liberal development thesis, as it encompasses a transition from a statist development model to multi-party politics, a return to market economics after 1980, the European Union-oriented democratisation drive of the early 2000s, and the subsequent phase of majoritarian and institutional backsliding. In the second part of the study, this historical analysis is compared with the cases of China and Russia, where liberal democracy is comparatively weak yet high growth rates have been recorded, in order to discuss the sustainability limits of authoritarian development.

Following this introduction, the study presents its conceptual and theoretical framework in Section 1; examines the Turkish experience across four historical phases in Section 2; conducts a comparative discussion through the cases of China and Russia in Section 3; evaluates the findings within the context of the liberal development thesis in Section 4; and summarises the study's conclusions in the closing section.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section addresses, in turn, the three conceptual strands underlying the study: the classical theoretical foundations of liberalism, the institutional-normative components of liberal democracy, and the multidimensional nature of development. These three strands are then integrated with current debates in institutional economics and political economy -- foremost among them the extensive research programme of Douglass North and of Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson -- to construct a comprehensive theoretical framework for the democracy-development nexus.

Classical Foundations of Liberalism: The Individual, Liberty, and Property

The foundational text of liberalism in the history of political and economic thought is John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* (1690). Locke argues that individuals in the state of nature possess natural rights to life, liberty, and property; that political society is established through a consensual social contract to protect these rights; and that any authority violating these rights forfeits its legitimacy. Locke's theory of property -- the thesis that an individual may acquire property by mixing labour with natural resources -- is regarded as the cornerstone of classical liberalism, offering a framework that explains both the rationale for the state's existence and the criterion by which its performance should be evaluated (Locke, 1690/1988). Within this

framework, property rights are positioned not merely as an instrument of economic policy but as a constitutive element of the individual's autonomy vis-à-vis the state.

Locke's emphasis on individual liberty and limited government was deepened in the twentieth century, in different ways, by Isaiah Berlin and Friedrich Hayek. Berlin's concept of negative liberty defines freedom as the absence of interference by others, treating the protection of the individual's sphere of self-determination against state power as a core element of liberal order (Berlin, 1958). Hayek, in *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960), systematically develops the link between individual freedom and the rule of law, defining the rule of law as the general, predictable, and equal application of rules to all, and arguing that this principle is the strongest safeguard against arbitrary state intervention (Hayek, 1960). For Hayek, economic freedom and political freedom cannot be separated from one another; because of the informational limits and the risk of power concentration inherent in central planning, a market economy governed by spontaneous order is also a precondition for political freedom.

This classical lineage forms the basis of the definition of liberalism adopted in this study: the individual is treated as the fundamental unit of political and economic analysis, while liberty, property rights, the rule of law, and the constitutional limitation of state power are treated as inseparable normative components of liberalism. In this study, liberalism is positioned not as a periodic economic policy preference but as a comprehensive normative order that frames both the means and the ends of development.

Institutional and Empirical Foundations of Liberal Democracy

The normative principles of liberalism become a regime type -- liberal democracy -- only when they are given concrete institutional form. Robert Dahl's concept of polyarchy makes a foundational contribution to the field by grounding this concretisation in empirically observable criteria. Dahl defines polyarchy as a regime characterised by inclusiveness and openness to public contestation, listing institutional guarantees such as freedom of association, freedom of expression, the right to vote, eligibility for public office, the right of political leaders to compete for votes and support, and access to alternative sources of information as the minimal conditions of democracy (Dahl, 1971, p. 8). In Dahl's framework there are two independent axes, participation and contestation; for a regime to qualify as a liberal democracy, both axes must be realised jointly and at a high level.

This two-axis framework distinguishes liberal democracy from a narrow (electoral) conception that reduces democracy to the electoral mechanism alone, recognising civil liberties, judicial independence, press freedom, and the accountability of power as constitutive components of democracy. The Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project translates this conceptual distinction into measurement practice by calculating the electoral democracy index and the liberal democracy index independently of one another, demonstrating that a country may hold regular elections while still scoring low on the liberal democracy index (V-Dem Institute, 2026). This distinction is decisive for understanding the Turkish experience discussed later in this study, as the Turkish case concretely illustrates the erosion of liberal guarantees despite the continuity of electoral mechanisms.

Development as a Multidimensional Concept

In the second half of the twentieth century, the concept of development was largely identified with growth in gross national product, and economic growth rates came to be treated as almost the sole indicator of development. This narrow definition began to be questioned from the 1980s and 1990s onward by critical approaches within development economics. The most influential and systematic of these critiques is Amartya Sen's capability approach. For Sen, development is the process of expanding the real freedoms that enable individuals to sustain the ways of life they value; within this framework, income and output levels have only

instrumental value, while the true objective is to expand the set of functionings -- the basic things a person is able to do and be (Sen, 1999, p. 218).

Sen's approach disaggregates development into interacting multiple components -- economic facilities, political freedoms, social opportunities, transparency guarantees, and protective security -- and argues that a deficiency in any one of these components adversely affects the others. The Human Development Index, developed by the United Nations Development Programme on the basis of Sen's theory, began measuring development not by per-capita income alone but jointly with education and life-expectancy indicators, thereby carrying the multidimensional nature of development into international measurement practice (UNDP, 1990). From this perspective, development is a holistic transformation process, irreducible to any single indicator, that encompasses the expansion of educational opportunities, the growth of cultural participation, the diffusion of social welfare, and the effective participation of individuals in political decision-making.

This multilayered nature of development is decisive for the central argument of the study. If development consisted of production and income growth alone, the effect of regime type on development could be treated as a secondary matter. Because development also encompasses education, culture, social inclusion, and political participation, however, the institutional-political framework that secures the growth of these components -- namely, the freedoms and legal guarantees provided by liberal democracy -- assumes a central position for the sustainability of development. Indeed, when Sen's approach is read alongside Dahl's framework of polyarchy, political participation and freedom of expression become not merely instruments of development but constitutive components of it.

From Modernisation Theory to Institutional Economics: The Theoretical Genealogy of the Democracy-Development Nexus

The pioneering work in the systematic theoretical debate on the relationship between democracy and development is Seymour Martin Lipset's 1959 study, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy." Lipset identified a strong correlation between the level of economic development -- per-capita income, industrialisation, urbanisation, and educational attainment -- and democratic stability, and systematised this finding under the label of "modernisation theory": as countries develop economically, the probability of democratisation was argued to increase through the growing complexity of social structure, the expansion of the middle class, and rising levels of education (Lipset, 1959, pp. 69-105). This theory is counted among the field's foundational texts, being one of the most-cited articles in the history of the *American Political Science Review*.

The direction of causality within modernisation theory -- whether economic development produces democracy or democracy produces economic development -- became the subject of intense empirical debate in the decades that followed. Douglass North's institutional economics constituted a decisive turning point in this debate. North defines institutions as humanly devised constraints that structure social interaction, consisting of both formal rules (constitutions, laws, property rights) and informal norms (custom, convention, codes of conduct) (North, 1991, p. 97). For North, institutional environments in which property rights are secured and contracts are predictably enforced lower transaction costs and thereby encourage investment and production decisions; the fundamental determinant of economic performance is therefore institutional quality rather than geography or culture. North's framework treats development primarily as a matter of institutional guarantees rather than directly as a matter of regime type; yet the question of which regime type most reliably produces these institutional guarantees came to occupy the centre of the subsequent literature.

The most comprehensive and influential answer to this question comes from the research programme developed by Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James Robinson, who were awarded the 2024 Nobel

Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences for their work on how institutions affect national prosperity. In their landmark study using settler mortality rates as an instrumental variable across former European colonies, Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson show that colonial powers tended to establish extractive institutions in regions where settlers could not survive permanently -- owing to high disease risk -- whereas in regions favourable to settlement they built institutions prioritising property rights and legal guarantees; these early institutional choices have persisted to a substantial degree to the present day and exert a decisive effect on levels of per-capita income (Acemoglu, Johnson, & Robinson, 2001, pp. 1369-1401). This study marked a turning point in the field by demonstrating that institutions are not merely a consequence but a fundamental cause of economic development.

Acemoglu and Robinson systematised these findings in *Why Nations Fail* (2012) around the distinction between inclusive and extractive institutions. Inclusive economic institutions encourage broad participation, secure property rights, ensure contract enforcement, and provide a competitive environment; such institutions reinforce, and are reinforced by, inclusive political institutions in which political power is distributed across broad segments of society. Extractive institutions, by contrast, concentrate power in the hands of a narrow elite and channel resources in that elite's favour; while such an arrangement may generate growth in the short run, it becomes unsustainable in the long run because it systematically suppresses the creative destruction and technological innovation that would threaten the incumbent elite's position (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). According to the authors, instances of growth sustained under extractive political institutions -- such as the Soviet Union's rapid mid-twentieth-century industrialisation -- eventually reach a point of stagnation, because extractive elites have a structural interest in suppressing innovative enterprise and creative destruction that would threaten their own power.

Acemoglu and Robinson's subsequent study, *The Narrow Corridor* (2019), deepens this framework along the axis of the state-society relationship. According to the authors, liberty is possible neither in the complete absence of state capacity -- a "caged" condition exposed to chaos and the tyranny of norms -- nor under a despotic Leviathan in which the state acquires unchecked power over society; liberty can exist only within a "narrow corridor" in which a strong state capacity is balanced by an equally strong societal-civic counterweight that constrains it (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019). This framework carries an important implication for development: the strengthening of state capacity -- through, for instance, public investment, infrastructure projects, or industrial policy -- does not by itself guarantee development; where this capacity is not balanced by mechanisms of societal accountability, the state itself may turn into a despotic actor that threatens development over the long run. This thesis offers a directly explanatory framework for the cases of China and Russia discussed later in the study.

The empirical study conducted by Acemoglu together with Suresh Naidu, Pascual Restrepo, and Robinson tests these theoretical propositions of the institutional-economics literature on a large dataset. Covering 184 countries over the period 1960-2010 and examining 122 instances of democratisation, this study shows that - - controlling for country fixed effects and the dynamic path of income -- democratisation raises per-capita GDP by approximately 20 percent in the long run, an effect that operates through channels such as improved provision of public goods, increased investment in education, and reduced social unrest (Acemoglu, Naidu, Restrepo, & Robinson, 2019, pp. 47-100). This finding is a decisive reference point for the theoretical framework of the present study, as it demonstrates that the effect of democracy on development is not merely a theoretical assumption but a relationship supported by systematic empirical evidence.

The empirical literature pioneered by Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi, by contrast, finds no direct and stable causal relationship between democracy and growth rates, while nonetheless establishing that regime type has a decisive effect on the quality and sustainability of growth (Przeworski & Limongi, 1993, pp. 51-69). In their comprehensive study of 135 countries over the period 1950-1990, Przeworski and colleagues show that democracies do not significantly outperform dictatorships in investment rates, yet because population growth is faster under dictatorships, per-capita income rises faster in democracies; they further show that once established, democracies display considerable durability in wealthy societies

(Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, & Limongi, 2000). When compared with the later and methodologically stronger findings of Acemoglu and colleagues, these results indicate that the empirical debate in the field has evolved over time toward more strongly supporting the positive effect of democracy on development.

Taken together, these four theoretical strands -- Lipset's modernisation theory, North's institutional economics, Acemoglu and Robinson's inclusive/extractive institutions and narrow-corridor frameworks, and the empirical regime-growth literature of Przeworski and of Acemoglu and colleagues -- provide a comprehensive theoretical foundation that supports the central proposition of this study: economic growth can occur under authoritarian conditions for a certain period, but its transformation into a multidimensional, inclusive, and sustainable process of development requires a liberal-democratic framework in which property rights, the rule of law, and political accountability are institutionalised. The following sections test this framework first against Turkey's historical experience and then against the cases of China and Russia.

THE TURKISH EXPERIENCE: A HISTORICAL-COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS FROM THE REPUBLIC TO THE PRESENT

The developmental practice of the Republic of Turkey, from its founding to the present, offers a rich case for testing the relationship between liberal democracy and development. This section examines the Turkish experience across four historical phases: the statist development model of the early Republican period; the transition to multi-party politics and the ensuing process of limited liberalisation; the neoliberal transformation after 1980; and the democratisation drive of the post-2002 period followed by the subsequent majoritarian turn.

The Early Republican Period and the Statist Development Model (1923-1945)

In the period following the founding of the Republic, Turkey aimed to transition from an unindustrialised agrarian economy to a modern nation-state. In the first phase of this transition (1923-1929) a comparatively liberal approach encouraging private capital accumulation was adopted, but following the 1929 global economic crisis the country shifted to a policy of *étatisme* (*devletçilik*), under which the state's weight in the economy increased markedly. During this period, industrialisation was carried out largely through state economic enterprises, and private property and enterprise were confined within a state-determined planning framework.

While the developmental performance of the *étatist* period yielded significant gains in the establishment of industrial infrastructure, the normative components of liberal democracy -- multi-party political competition, press freedom, an independent judiciary -- were largely suspended during this period. Under single-party rule, political participation remained highly limited, and economic decisions were taken by a narrow bureaucratic-political elite. In this respect, the early Republican period constitutes the first concrete illustration of the tension between the economic dimension of development and its political-participatory dimension: while progress was recorded in industrial infrastructure, the political and participatory components of development were left in the background.

The Transition to Multi-Party Politics and Limited Liberalisation (1945-1980)

The transition to multi-party political life in 1946 represents Turkey's first institutional step toward liberal democracy. The period of the Democrat Party, which came to power following the 1950 elections, is notable both for political pluralism and for a partial departure from *étatisme* in economic policy; priority was given to agricultural development, and a comparatively liberal foreign-trade regime based on external aid was adopted. This period, however, also stands out as one in which political pluralism was not underpinned by institutional guarantees; pressure on the opposition and restrictions on press freedom indicate that the

participatory dimension of liberal democracy was not balanced by its civil-liberties dimension. This tension is regarded as an important factor in the period's termination through the military intervention of 1960.

The 1961 Constitution is widely regarded as one of the most liberal texts in Turkish political history in terms of civil liberties, social rights, and mechanisms of constitutional review; nevertheless, in the period that followed, the state's weight in the economy increased once again within the framework of an import-substitution industrialisation strategy. Between 1950 and 1980, the Turkish economy followed a state-led industrialisation regime shaped predominantly by protectionist foreign-trade policies and state economic enterprises. Throughout this period, political pluralism persisted intermittently -- interrupted by the interventions of 1960, 1971, and 1980 -- and the continuity and stability component of liberal democracy could not, accordingly, be secured.

The January 24 Decisions and Neoliberal Transformation (1980-2002)

The stabilisation decisions of January 24, 1980, marked a turning point in Turkey's transition from a statist-protectionist structure to a market economy. These decisions initiated a shift toward an export-led growth strategy, introduced a more flexible exchange-rate regime, liberalised foreign trade, and sought to reduce the share of state economic enterprises in the economy. Because Turgut Özal was both the architect of the decisions and, in his subsequent tenure as prime minister, the political leader of this process, the 1980s are referred to in the literature as the “Özal era” (Öniş, 2004, pp. 113-134).

Ziya Öniş's analysis of this period shows that Turkey's liberalisation carried a “heterodox” character -- that is, economic liberalisation did not proceed in tandem with political and institutional liberalisation (Öniş, 1991, pp. 109-126). Indeed, the 1980 decisions were implemented in the aftermath of the 12 September 1980 military coup, during a period in which political freedoms were largely suspended; this indicates that the synchronisation between economic and political liberalisation was problematic in the Turkish experience from the outset. At the same time, the literature also discusses how economic liberalisation, in subsequent years, eroded the structure of bureaucratic tutelage by strengthening the power of elected politicians, thereby generating an indirect democratising effect.

Although the Turkish economy took significant steps toward external opening and financial liberalisation between 1980 and 2002, it continued to display serious weaknesses in the predictability of property rights, fiscal discipline, and institutional transparency. The crises of 1994 and 2001 clearly exposed the fragility of a liberalisation whose legal and institutional infrastructure had not been sufficiently strengthened. This experience offers an important finding consistent with the study's theoretical framework: economic liberalisation alone, unless supported by the rule of law and institutional oversight mechanisms, does not translate into a stable and sustainable development process.

The Post-2002 Period: From Reform to Majoritarian Drift

In the first phase of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government that came to power following the 2001 crisis (roughly 2002-2011), a comprehensive wave of constitutional and legal reform was undertaken within the framework of the European Union accession process. During this period, civil-military relations were restructured, judicial reforms were implemented, and constitutional amendments concerning fundamental rights and freedoms were introduced; in the literature, this process has been evaluated as a period in which Turkey converged toward liberal democracy (Özbudun & Gençkaya, 2009). During this same period, economic growth performance also gained relative stability, and foreign direct investment inflows increased.

From the 2010s onward, however, a process of majoritarian drift has been widely identified in the literature. Menderes Çınar and Çağkan Sayın describe this period through the concept of “parochial democratisation,” arguing that while the ruling power used democracy as a majoritarian source of legitimacy, it simultaneously

eroded the liberal components of democracy -- separation of powers, press freedom, and the protection of minority rights (Çınar & Sayın, 2014, pp. 365-385). Similarly, the analysis by William Hale and Ergun Özbudun shows that the AKP experience concretises the tense relationship among Islamism, democracy, and liberalism (Hale & Özbudun, 2009).

This institutional backsliding can be clearly traced in the data produced by the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project. According to V-Dem data, Turkey's Liberal Democracy Index score fell from its historical peak of approximately 0.51 in 2004 to levels near the lowest points of the post-1980-coup period, reaching 0.113 in 2023 and 0.117 in 2024 (TheGlobalEconomy.com, 2024). The V-Dem Institute's 2026 Democracy Report classifies Turkey among the "electoral autocracies," a category in which roughly two-thirds of the world's population now resides, grouping it alongside countries such as Egypt and Iran (V-Dem Institute, 2026). These data show that despite the continuation of regular elections in Turkey -- reflected in an electoral democracy index that remains markedly higher than the liberal democracy index -- the liberal components of democracy, namely judicial independence, press freedom, and the separation of powers, have eroded severely.

The destabilisation of growth rates, and the rise in inflation and exchange-rate volatility, from the second half of the 2010s onward present a picture consistent with the predictions of the institutional-economics literature: as the rule of law and institutional oversight mechanisms weaken, investor confidence and predictability decline, adversely affecting medium- and long-term developmental performance. In this respect, the Turkish experience demonstrates that the erosion of liberal democracy is not merely a political matter but a structural factor that directly affects the sustainability of development.

IS DEVELOPMENT POSSIBLE WITHOUT LIBERAL DEMOCRACY? THE CASES OF CHINA AND RUSSIA

The central proposition of this study is that the durability of development is contingent on liberal-democratic institutions. To test this proposition, the cases of China and Russia -- countries in which liberal democracy does not function yet high growth rates have been recorded -- offer an important comparative ground. This section discusses the nature and sustainability problems of growth in these two countries.

China: Authoritarian Growth and the Problem of Sustainability

With the high and comparatively stable growth rates recorded since the reform period after 1978, China is the most frequently discussed example demonstrating that rapid economic growth is possible even under authoritarian regimes. The "adaptive authoritarianism" model, which combines the Chinese Communist Party's central planning capacity with market mechanisms, has provided a short-term advantage in rapidly implementing large infrastructure investments and in insulating economic decisions from political contestation. Yet the institutional foundations of this model, when evaluated through Acemoglu and Robinson's framework, continue to display extractive characteristics in the political sphere; economic opening proceeds together with the concentration of political power within the Chinese Communist Party.

Suisheng Zhao's analysis shows that the sustainability of the China model rests on the assumption that economic growth can suppress societal demands under all circumstances, and that this assumption is increasingly losing its validity. The rapidly rising costs of internal security and social control, and the fact that demands for social justice and rights can no longer be met by economic growth alone, are treated as a structural tension threatening the model's long-term stability; the author argues that a sustainable model can be achieved only when state power is balanced by democratic and legal institutions grounded in liberal values (Zhao, 2011). Similarly, the insecurity of property rights vis-à-vis political power, and the weakening perception of personal security among entrepreneurs, are cited as findings pointing to the erosion of China's informal property guarantees.

In addition to this picture, the gradual slowdown of China's growth rate since the 2010s reinforces assessments that the economy's capacity to compete at the technological frontier is adversely affected by the tension between authoritarian control and the openness and innovativeness required by a globalised economy. This is consistent with the thesis, predicted by the institutional-economics literature, that extractive political institutions, beyond a certain point, curtail processes of creative destruction and innovation, thereby impairing the quality of growth.

Viewed through Acemoglu and Robinson's narrow-corridor framework, the Chinese model represents a configuration in which state capacity is not balanced by societal counterweights: the party-state possesses extensive regulatory and directive capacity in the economic sphere, yet lacks the mechanisms -- an independent judiciary, organised civil society, a free press -- that would hold this capacity accountable (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019). While this structural gap increases the speed of implementation in the short run, it becomes, in the long run, a source of fragility that undermines investor and entrepreneurial confidence by heightening the risk of arbitrary intervention.

Russia: Resource Abundance, Institutional Fragility, and the Weakness of the Rule of Law

The case of Russia illustrates the unsustainability of authoritarian development still more sharply. In the transition to a market economy following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia developed an institutional structure that displayed serious weaknesses in securing the rule of law and property rights. The Russian economy's growing over-dependence on energy and natural-resource exports feeds a vicious cycle discussed in the literature under the concept of the "resource curse": resource revenues offer an opportunity to postpone institutional reform, thereby providing a basis for political power to become detached from mechanisms of accountability.

The empirical study by Olga Vasilyeva and Alexander Libman, based on Russia's regional data, shows that the adverse effect of resource wealth on economic performance becomes more pronounced in authoritarian regions where intense elite competition occurs outside a framework governed by the rule of law; according to this finding, political competition proceeding without a legal framework can produce outcomes more costly for economic growth than even consolidated authoritarian structures (Vasilyeva & Libman, 2020). This finding, showing that neither political stability alone nor political competition alone is decisive but rather that these factors operate within a legal framework, is consistent with the study's theoretical framework.

The unpredictability of Russia's legal system, widespread corruption, the cumbersomeness of public institutions, and the vulnerability of property rights vis-à-vis political power encourage capital flight abroad, thereby disrupting the domestic savings-investment balance and raising the cost of credit. The fact that growth based on natural-resource revenues delays institutional reforms that would encourage economic diversification and the development of innovative sectors causes development in Russia to be both narrowly based and excessively sensitive to external conditions -- namely, global energy prices. This picture demonstrates that resource wealth cannot translate into durable development unless supported by the rule of law and institutional transparency.

Comparative Assessment

The cases of China and Russia show that high growth rates are possible for a certain period even under authoritarian conditions, yet raise significant questions concerning the sustainability of such growth. The structural feature common to both countries is that economic opening continues to remain independent of mechanisms of political accountability, that property rights are not adequately secured against political power, and that the rule of law has not become stably institutionalised. This finding is consistent with that of Przeworski and Limongi (1993, pp. 51-69), showing that growth under authoritarian regimes, even where it raises investment rates, has a limited capacity to translate into widespread welfare and durable institutions.

This comparison supports the study's central thesis in two respects. First, authoritarian development models, while capable of producing impressive growth figures in the short and medium run, appear to face structural limits in the long run with respect to creative destruction, innovation, and the production of inclusive welfare. Second, the institutional fragilities observed in both countries -- insecure property rights, legal unpredictability, and the disengagement of political power from oversight -- stand out as common denominators threatening the sustainability of development. These findings indicate that liberal democracy constitutes not merely a normative but also a functional requirement for development.

DISCUSSION: THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE TURKISH EXPERIENCE TO THE LIBERAL DEVELOPMENT THESIS

When the Turkish experience is evaluated together with the cases of China and Russia, three important inferences emerge regarding the democracy-development nexus. First, Turkey's post-1980 experience shows that pursuing economic liberalisation independently of political liberalisation produces fragile outcomes (Öniş, 1991, pp. 109-126). Economic liberalisation on its own, unless accompanied by legal and institutional guarantees, has not translated into a stable process of development; this became concrete in the crises of 1994 and 2001.

Second, the constitutional reform process of 2002-2011 supports the positive relationship between liberal-democratic institutionalisation and developmental performance; institutional reforms and relative macroeconomic stability proceeded together during this period (Özbudun & Genckaya, 2009). Third, the majoritarian drift of the following period and the decline in the liberal democracy index (V-Dem Institute, 2026) constitute an example that supports the study's theoretical framework, in that the weakening of institutional oversight mechanisms coincided with macroeconomic instability.

Read together, these three phases yield the following core finding regarding the Turkish experience of the democracy-development nexus: while the economic-growth dimension of development can advance to a degree independently of political liberalisation, its integration into a durable whole together with other dimensions -- education, social welfare, and political participation -- becomes possible only during periods in which liberal-democratic institutions function in a stable manner. This finding is consistent with the empirical finding of Acemoglu, Naidu, Restrepo, and Robinson (2019, pp. 47-100), based on 184 countries, that democratisation raises per-capita income by approximately 20 percent in the long run; the performance gap between Turkey's relative institutional improvement in 2002-2011 and its subsequent decline can be read as a country-level manifestation of this general tendency. When compared with the institutional fragilities observed in the cases of China and Russia, these findings lend further support to the thesis that liberal democracy is not a complementary but a constitutive element of development.

INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION

This study, examining the relationship between development and democracy through the lens of liberalism, has shown that development cannot be reduced to economic growth alone but constitutes a multidimensional process encompassing education, culture, social welfare, and political participation. Within this framework, the study concludes that societies in which liberal democracy is institutionalised -- through its normative components of individual freedom, property rights, constitutionalism, and the rule of law -- are better able to place the gains of development on a more durable and inclusive foundation.

The experience of the Republic of Turkey, from its founding to the present, offers rich historical material supporting this thesis. The trajectory extending from statist early-Republican rule to multi-party politics, from post-1980 liberalisation to the constitutional reform process of the 2000s and the subsequent majoritarian drift, demonstrates how decisive the balance between the economic and the political-participatory dimensions of development can be. In particular, the coincidence of the decline observed in

liberal democracy indices from the 2010s onward with macroeconomic instability indicates that this relationship is empirically, and not merely theoretically, observable.

The comparative discussion conducted through the cases of China and Russia has shown that short- and medium-term growth is possible even where liberal democracy does not function, but that such growth confronts sustainability problems arising from insecure property rights, legal unpredictability, and the absence of institutional oversight. This finding indicates that the short-term appearance of success offered by authoritarian development models does not provide a sufficient basis for a long-term and inclusive development strategy.

In conclusion, the findings of this study indicate that the design of development policy should treat as a central priority not only economic instruments but also the strengthening of liberal-democratic institutions -- an independent judiciary, press freedom, separation of powers, and secure property rights. In Turkey's case specifically, the ability of development to acquire a durable and inclusive character appears to depend, to a substantial degree, on the renewed strengthening of liberal-democratic institutionalisation. Future studies that test this relationship across a broader country sample and with quantitative methods would make a valuable contribution to the field.

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