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DEMOCRACY IN TURKEY, 1950-1959: RECORDS OF THE U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT CLASSIFIED FILES



This collection of State Department documents provides access to unique primary source materials on the political, economic and social development of Turkey during a period of democratization in the 1950s.

Date Range: 1950-1959

Content: 54,489 images

Source Library: U.S. National Archives

Detailed Description:

The official image of Turkish society promoted by the ruling elite since the 1920s is one of relative homogeneity. This image has been enshrined in successive constitutions of the republic in which it is stated that "the Turkish state, with its territory and nation, is an indivisible entity." In reality, however, Turkish society is a mosaic of diverse and at times contending ethnic and linguistic groups.

The result of Atatürk's secularist reforms was the creation of two cultures: a secularized and westernized elite culture and a mass culture based on traditional religious values. Prior to 1950, the elite's attitude toward traditional culture tended to be contemptuous in general and specifically hostile toward religious expression. Since 1950, however, the elite generally has become more tolerant of religion, or at least of orthodox Sunni Islam, and various political parties have attempted to conciliate religious interests, albeit within the framework of Atatürk's institutional secularism.

In the liberalized postwar atmosphere, party politics became a source of instability and democracy in Turkey. During the 1950s, tensions between the main parties increased as the

Democrat Party government of Prime Minister Adnan Menderes became more authoritarian, and the economy suffered inflation and heavy debt.

The Republic of Turkey has matured into a regional power. It pursues economic development within the global free market system. Its tradition of statecraft, inherited from the old empire, has helped it surmount internal political crises and develop a successful foreign policy that has ensured the support of like-minded foreign powers in defense of Turkish national independence and the general world order. Turkey's leaders have promoted cooperation with the West and other advanced industrial countries. In particular, they point to Turkey's unique distinction as a secular Muslim country that governs itself by a freely-elected parliament.

Political Affairs

Following the end of World War II, the Turkish government relaxed many wartime controls and agreed to a further democratization of the political process. In January 1946, the Democrat Party (DP), headed by Bayar and Menderes, was registered; it subsequently became the main focus of opposition to the Republican Peoples' Party (CHP). The general elections in July 1946 gave the DP sixty-two seats out of 465 in the assembly, demonstrating the appeal of the new party. Although the DP represented the interests of private business and industry, it also received strong support in rural areas.

In the May 1950 general election, about 88 percent of an electorate totaling about 8.5 million went to the polls, returning a huge DP majority. In the assembly, 408 seats went to the DP and only sixty-nine to the CHP, whose unbroken dominance since the founding of the republic was thus ended. Bayar was elected president by the new assembly, replacing İnönü, and named Menderes prime minister. As expected, the Menderes government's economic policy reduced reliance on state direction while encouraging private enterprise and foreign investment in industrial development.

In the May 1954 election, the DP increased its parliamentary majority. Taking its election victory as a mandate to make sweeping changes, including reform of the civil service and state-run enterprises, the Menderes government obtained the passage of a legislative package by means that the opposition characterized as "undemocratic and authoritarian." The CHP concentrated its attacks on a government-sponsored law that limited freedom of the press. Tension increased when the press law was tightened further and restrictions were imposed on public assembly several months before the scheduled October 1957 election. The government argued that the legislation was necessary to prevent "irresponsible journalists" from inciting disorder. The inability of the two main political parties to cooperate in the assembly brought the parliamentary process to a standstill as months passed. When a tour of central Anatolia by CHP leader İnönü in early 1960 became the occasion for outbreaks of violence along his route, the Menderes government reacted by suspending all political activity and imposing martial law. On April 28, 1960, students in Istanbul who were demonstrating against government policies in defiance of martial law were fired on by police; several were killed. The following week, cadets from the military academy staged a protest march in solidarity with the student movement, thereby bringing an element of the armed forces into confrontation with civilian authorities.

Economy and Finance

Beginning in the 1950s, the socioeconomic changes resulting from various government policies provided numerous and varied opportunities for the accumulation of private capital in finance, commerce, trade, and industry. The emergence of a wealthy business class inevitably led to the development of class-specific political interests and ambitions. Because of this new business elite's experience in entrepreneurial activities rather than the bureaucracy, its members' views differed sharply from those of the established ruling elite, which generally supported state intervention in the economy. Increasing competition between the two elites over appropriate state policies was one of the reasons for the polarization that characterized Turkey's national politics.

After 1950, a professional elite also gradually emerged, including architects, engineers, lawyers, managers, physicians, and university professors, who were not necessarily unified in their political views. Nevertheless, as a group they tended to resent what they perceived as the patronizing, even authoritarian, political attitudes of the ruling elite. This group's frustration with the political system, emerging at the same time as dissatisfaction within the business elite, highlighted the need for genuine political reform.

U.S. State Department Central Classified Files

The U.S. State Department Central Classified Files are the definitive source of American diplomatic reporting on political, military, social, and economic developments throughout the world in the twentieth century.

This publication of U.S. State Department Central Classified Files relating to internal affairs contains a wide range of materials collected and reported from the American Embassy in Ankara and U.S. consular offices, including:

- special reports on political and military affairs
- studies and statistics on socioeconomic matters
- interviews and minutes of meetings with foreign government officials
- court proceedings and other legal documents
- full texts of important letters, instructions, and cables sent and received by U.S. diplomatic personnel
- voluminous reports and translations from foreign journals and newspapers
- countless translations of high-level foreign government documents, including speeches, memoranda, official reports, and transcripts of political meetings and assemblies

This collection consists of thousands of pages arranged topically and chronologically on crucial subjects, such as:

- political parties and elections

- unrest and revolution
- human rights
- government
- administration
- fiscal and monetary issues
- labor
- housing
- police and crime
- public health
- national defense
- foreign policymaking
- wars and alliances
- education
- religion
- culture
- trade
- industry
- foreign relations
- natural resources

Research topics include:

- Postwar result of Atatürk's secularist reforms
- Turkish state as an indivisible entity
- Industrial and economic development
- Cultural differences between the modernist and the traditionalist
- Competitive political parties
- Military intervention and government control

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exhaustive detail by reproducing thousands of pages on political, governmental, and military affairs, as well as economic and social issues. It is this kind of documentation-official, in-depth, and on crucial topics-that makes the Records of the Department of State essential for research.

Publisher's Note: This collection comprises, in their entirety, the Primary Source Media microfilm collections entitled *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs, Turkey, 1950-1954*; and *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs, Turkey, 1955-1959*.