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PROTEST BY THE PEOPLE FOR THE GOVERNMENT: PRO-GOVERNMENT MOBILIZATION IN AKP'S TURKEY, 2013-2016

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A Ph.D. Dissertation

by
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POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
İHSAN DOĞRAMACI BİLKENT UNIVERSITY
ANKARA

September 2022

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science.

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ABSTRACT

PROTEST BY THE PEOPLE FOR THE GOVERNMENT: PRO-GOVERNMENT MOBILIZATION IN AKP'S TURKEY, 2013-2016

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This dissertation explores the protest dynamics of government supporters under the authoritarian *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AKP) government in Turkey. Analyzing contentious dynamics from January 1, 2013 until December 31, 2016, this thesis examines pro-government mobilization theoretically and empirically. Based on original event data on protests, repression, and pro-government contentious events I collected from two newspapers, *Cumhuriyet* and *Yeni Şafak*, with 9083 episodes, this research dissects contentious actions of government supporters and aims to explain why and how such mobilization practice occurred in Turkey. To provide a systematic answer, I offer three elements that generate a conducive environment for pro-government contention: threat, authoritarianism, and framing.

On this basis, first, I suggest threat as the main component that drives governments to adopt pro-government contention. In my case, I argue that the AKP appeals to pro-government contention when it feels politically threatened. Second, I show that the mobilizing power of the threat—and its capacity to generate pro-government contention—is dependent on the regime type. Therefore, I argue that political threats could generate pro-government contention as the AKP became gradually more authoritarian, and such contention was absent during its democratic phases. Finally, I

suggest that governments build frames of pro-government contention, and not government supporters. I argue that the AKP utilizes various framing tools to create a conducive environment for mobilizing pro-government audiences and such frames are reflected in the street by government supporters.

Keywords: pro-government contention, protest, threat, authoritarianism, mobilization

ÖZET

HÜKÜMET İÇİN HALKIN PROTESTOSU: AKP'NİN TÜRKİYE'SİNDE HÜKÜMET YANLISI MOBİLİZASYON, 2013-2016

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Bu tez, Türkiye'deki otoriter *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AKP) hükümeti yönetimi altında, hükümet destekçilerinin protesto dinamiklerini araştırmaktadır. 1 Ocak 2013-31 Aralık 2016 tarihleri arasındaki sokak siyaseti dinamiklerini analiz eden bu araştırma, ampirik ve teorik olarak hükümet yanlısı mobilizasyon süreçlerini incelemektedir. *Cumhuriyet* ve *Yeni Şafak* gazetelerinden topladığım, protesto, bastırma ve hükümet yanlısı eylemlerden oluşan toplamda 9083 orijinal olay verisine dayanan bu çalışma, hükümet yanlısı grupların sokak eylemlerine odaklanmakta ve böyle bir sürecin Türkiye'de neden ve nasıl ortaya çıktığını açıklamayı amaçlamaktadır. Sistematik bir cevap sunabilmek için, hükümet yanlısı eylemlerin ortaya çıkmasına elverişli bir ortam sağlayan üç faktör öneriyorum: tehdit, otoriterlik ve çerçeveleme.

Buna dayanarak, ilk aşamada, hükümetleri hükümet yanlısı eylemi kullanmaya teşvik eden temel unsur olarak "tehdit" kavramını öneriyorum. Analizime spesifik olarak ise, AKP'nin kendisini siyasi olarak tehdit altında hissettiği zaman hükümet yanlısı eylemi bir opsiyon olarak kullandığını iddia ediyorum. İkinci olarak, tehdidin mobilize etme gücünün ve hükümet yanlısı eyleme sebep olma kapasitesinin, rejim tipine bağlı olduğunu tartışıyorum. Bu nedenle, siyasi tehditlerin ancak AKP'nin

giderek daha çok otoriterleştiği evrede hükümet yanlısı eyleme sebep olduğunu ve bu eylemlerin AKP'nin demokratik dönemlerinde olmadığını gösteriyorum. Son olarak, hükümet yanlısı eylemler için bir çerçeve oluşturanın hükümetler olduğu fikrini öneriyorum. AKP'nin, hükümet yanlısı grupların eylemleri için elverişli bir ortamın oluşması amacıyla çeşitli çerçeveleme araçlarını kullandığını ve bu çerçevelerin gruplar tarafından sokakta işlendiğini iddia ediyorum.

Anahtar Kelimeler: hükümet yanlısı sokak eylemi, protesto, tehdit, otoriterlik, mobilizasyon

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

When citizens participated in spontaneous nationwide protests against the government, starting at the end of May 2013 in Turkey, the headlines of media organs announced that the protests were unprecedented in size and diversity, emphasizing their uniqueness within Turkish political history. Originally springing from environmental concerns to protect the urban green space and the police's disproportionally violent reaction to protesters, the Gezi protests suddenly became an anti-government mass performance on the streets, targeting the government's increasing autocratization and its reflections in daily life. Public squares became spheres in which millions of people, who had had no official power to change existing power relations, expressed their grievances against the government through protest mechanisms. Protesting suddenly became the most threatening tool to shake the legitimacy of the government, which had established its authority with consecutive and landslide electoral victories since its coming to power in 2002. 2013 was, therefore, the year marked by ordinary citizens' massive capacity to raise their claims with extra-institutional means, which was capable of posing a severe risk against the AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) government.

While anti-government protests dominated the Turkish political agenda during the summer of 2013, the government's reaction was equally striking. Apart from the police's violent, repressive measures against protesters, the then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan utilized an unconventional mobilization mechanism. During the initial days of the Gezi protests, he stated that the government was hardly able to keep at least 50% of the population at home, referring to their own AKP electorate (Cumhuriyet, 2013i). As a result, the government paved the way for a pro-government mobilization process, which showed itself in counter-demonstrations organized by pro-government citizens, assaults on Gezi participants, and collaboration with security forces. More importantly, for the first time during its rule, the government organized mass meetings for a reason other than elections. Millions of people participated in government-organized mass rallies under the name of "Respect for National Will Meetings" (Bilgiç, 2018), which aimed to counter the anti-government "spirit of Gezi" on the streets (Karakayali & Yaka, 2014). The

government realized the importance of managing not only elections but also streets for the continuity of its heavy-handed rule (Robertson, 2011: 3).

After the Gezi protests, the presence of the government and pro-government groups on the street became an increasingly visible phenomenon. Three years later, the atmosphere on the streets was completely different from the atmosphere during the Gezi protests in 2013. A military coup that aimed to overthrow President Erdoğan and the AKP government in July 2016 faced a pro-government mass resistance upon Erdoğan's invitation of citizens to the streets. Unexpectedly, the citizens' presence in the squares was not a one-time, desperate resistance against the military but instead it jumpstarted a resilient stance, which seriously contributed to the coup's failure. Causing many casualties, including the murder of more than 200 citizens, the junta did not manage to topple the government, but instead provided it with an opportune position. After this triumph, the squares became a sphere for mass gatherings organized and supported by the government for almost one month. Pro-government citizens attended these mass rallies, called "democracy watches," to safeguard democracy against likely coups that might threaten the government in power in the future. Under the conditions of a newly declared state of emergency in 2016, the streets were possessed no more by groups that protested the government but rather by groups that supported it.

This dissertation explores the mobilization process of government supporters starting from this period, which witnessed a significant transformation in protest politics. Analyzing contentious dynamics from January 2013 until December 2016, this thesis examines contentious pro-government mobilization under the authoritarian government of *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AKP) in Turkey. Based on original event data on protests, repression, and pro-government contention which I collected from two newspapers, *Cumhuriyet* and *Yeni Şafak*, with 9083 episodes, this research dissects contentious gatherings of government supporters and the government. In this context, this research aims to explain why and how such mobilization practice occurred in Turkey.

The object of analysis of this dissertation departs mainly from the general interest in the social movement research. While conventional wisdom in the scholarship typically focuses on mobilization practices of those who have no official ways to

express their demands, this dissertation explores mobilization dynamics of groups, who are already represented by the official government. The present research, therefore, problematizes an understudied topic in the literature with the purpose of offering an alternative account in the field. It attempts to investigate a different facet of mobilization processes which promises new approaches to the actors, targets, and event types in contentious politics.

1.1 A Brief Definition of Pro-Government Contention

I use the term "pro-government contention" and define it as any contentious action performed on the street, a) either showing support for the government or b) if there is no clear sign for labelling rally participants with being pro-government, then acting in parallel with the government's political frame.[1] Three characteristics come to the forefront for an action to be counted as pro-government contention: government, government supporters, and contentious action. By contentious action, I refer to Tilly and Tarrow's definition of contentious politics (2015: 7), which is "interactions in which actors make claims bearing on the other actors' interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs, in which governments are involved as targets, initiator of claims, or third parties."

It can be instructive to draw the borders of pro-government contention firmly, clarifying what it is not. First of all, pro-government contention is not equal to paramilitary activism sponsored by the states. While protesting an anti-government force, pro-government groups may incorporate paramilitary forces but are not limited to those forces in terms of number and context. Put differently, they can work with paramilitary forces but cannot be equated to them. Paramilitary activities are illegal, informal, armed, and generally unidentified security forces of repression employed by the state (Carey et al., 2012: 250). In contrast, pro-government contention is not necessarily a repression technique, but fundamentally a mobilization strategy, which is mostly legal, formal, non-armed, and visible. More importantly, pro-government rallies are presented as the manifestation of the popular, whereas paramilitary groups are far away from such a mission.

[1] A detailed definition of pro-government contention is given in Chapter 3 while discussing data and methodology.

Pro-government contention is also not a synonym for pre-election rallies. The purpose of a pre-election rally is gaining momentum, increasing voter turnout, conveying the party claims to the audience, and consequently winning the elections (Green & Gerber 2008). However, pro-government rallies' mission surpasses the electoral victory and instead reaches a wide range of strategic moves. Although incumbents criticize their rivals and manifest their claims for the subsequent period of office in election meetings, these rallies are not set up as contentious expressions as they are routine and banal organizations arranged to gain popular support to prevail in the elections. In contrast, pro-government contention has a contentious character and does not necessarily deal with attaining more votes for winning the elections. It has a protesting character engendered by discontent or jeopardy felt by incumbents and therefore has an objection in its expression.

I adopt a government-based perspective to illuminate pro-government contention, sharing the same assumption with Hellmeier and Weidmann (2020: 75) that governments are involved at least within the organization, logistics, and promotion of a high proportion of pro-government rallies. Hence, governments are put into the center of the analysis instead of government supporters.

1.2 What Scholarship Suggests

The scholarship shows that pro-government rally is not a phenomenon unique to Turkey but rather it is a mobilization technique adopted in various countries. One can observe pro-government rallies in closed authoritarian regimes such as China or Cuba, hegemonic authoritarian regimes such as Russia, or competitive authoritarian regimes such as Hungary. (Susánszky, Kopper & Tóth, 2016; Weidmann & Rød 2019). Moreover, pro-government rallies are typical in regimes with populist leaders, such as Venezuela, Poland, or even the United States, where leaders actively organize mass gatherings to oppose a danger they personally encounter.

Despite the previous lack of interest on this topic in the literature, the scholarship has recently provided fresh insights regarding pro-government mobilization. The research on cases of pro-government rallies (Aliyev, 2019; Horvath, 2011; Østbø, 2017; Robertson, 2011; Smyth, Sobolev & Soboleva, 2013), the various theoretical contributions of studying such rallies (Verhoeven & Duyvendak, 2017), or comparative approaches in this strand of research (Hellmeier & Weidmann, 2020;

Hellmeier, 2020) noted significant findings about the mobilization of government supporters. Most importantly, they show that pro-government rally is mainly an authoritarian and hybrid regime phenomenon (Hellmeier & Weidmann, 2020; Horvath, 2011; Østbø, 2017; Robertson, 2011). They argue that it is used in these regimes as a political repression vehicle as well as a strategy to demonstrate regime strength. Moreover, they showed that pro-government mobilization is an output of political threats against the government, such as mass mobilization, coup, or diffusion risks (Hellmeier & Weidmann, 2020; Østbø, 2017).

Considering this scholarship and aiming to contribute to this line of research, I suggest exploring two kinds of literature to explain the use of pro-government rallies as a governmental strategy. First, social movement literature provides valuable tools and concepts to understand the contentious mobilization of government supporters just as it explains conventional social movement strategies and actions. If the pro-government rally is regarded as a form of activity that includes demonstrations, clashes, or marches, it shares similarities with protest actions in the conventional sense, which targets governments. Governments, or officials within the regime, may imitate social movement strategies in organizing or promoting contentious mobilization of government supporters, which is called "governmental activism" (Verhoeven & Duyvendak, 2017).

In social movement literature, I focus on two concepts: threat and framing. The scholarship offers that "threat" can be a variable to explain the presence of pro-government rallies as a mobilization instrument (Hellmeier, 2020; Hellmeier & Weidmann, 2020; Østbø, 2017; Robertson, 2011). Moreover, acting as if they are social movement organizations, governments may actively establish contentious frames to mobilize their audience or create a conducive environment for the organization of such rallies (Snow, Rochford, Worden & Benford, 1986). One can observe a set of pro-government rallies organized by leaders, such as Viktor Orbán or Hugo Chavez, in a highly polarized political milieu, which helped them generate a cleavage in society and build exclusive blocs in the form of pro- and anti-government. For this reason, threat and framing, discussed in Chapter 2 thoroughly, may help researchers draw a meaningful and explanatory picture of pro-government rallies.

The second literature I use considers the pro-government rally as a strategy adopted mostly by autocrats or in regimes where authoritarianism is in the making. The scholarship shows that leaders or governments use pro-government rallies in regimes called fully authoritarian or hybrid authoritarian (Robertson, 2011; Weidmann & Rød, 2019). Although it is adopted as a political strategy in democracies as well, even in the cradle of democracy, namely the United States, the pro-government rally is an output of authoritarian tendencies, with abundant resources and political opportunities (Hellmeier & Weidmann, 2020). Therefore, it is plausible to expect autocrats to use the advantages deriving from the regime's authoritarian setting and transfer these opportunities to the organization and promotion of pro-government rallies. In this regard, a pro-government rally represents a form of action that surpasses the boundaries of democracy and is inherently in conflict with the idea of protest in democracies.

1.3 Why Study Pro-Government Contention? Why Turkey? Why 2013-2016?

What encouraged me to study the mobilization of government supporters in Turkey? Initially I was motivated by what I personally witnessed as a Turkish citizen. The Gezi protests in the summer of 2013 represented a formative event in my political socialization as it did on an entire generation. It was a rupture for many social science students in Turkey, making social movements an attractive field to be studied both sociologically and politically.

What was appealing as a research topic, however, was not only the mobilization process of anti-government protesters, but also that of government supporters. During such protests, the Turkish political scene witnessed unusual statements and strategies by government officials, implying the likely and concrete presence of pro-government groups on the street. As a result, many pro-government events occurred that targeted Gezi protesters, including demonstrations, marches, assaults on protesters, cooperation with police forces, and government-organized mass rallies. It was a moment that an unconventional face of contentious politics was providing fruitful materials and promising new lines of research in social movement scholarship.

The mobilization of government supporters during the Gezi protests was not the only case that was offering fresh lenses to explore protest mechanisms. Turkey saw a striking pro-government mobilization process after the failed coup in July 2016, which seemed like a new phenomenon that started attracting scholars' attention. Mobilizing pro-government citizens both on the coup night and in its aftermath, the Turkish government managed to create an alternative space for assembling government supporters, which must lead us, political scientists, to discuss the function of protest politics. Unexpectedly, the dominant actors in the squares and their motivations in 2013, when the Gezi protests shook the government seriously, were entirely different from those in 2016. And more importantly, the central figure of this sharp transformation was the government, which turned from being the main target into the foremost instigator only in three years. It was pretty striking to witness such a change in protest mechanisms, prompting further scholarly attention to understanding what produced this switch and how it was carried out at the governmental level.

By the early months of 2017, when I finally decided to study pro-government contention, the topic was also already on the headlines internationally. News reports about rallies organized by Vladimir Putin in Russia or Venezuela's Hugo Chávez were noteworthy in observing a new phenomenon on the streets. The scholarship had already started to produce more research on pro-government contention, emphasizing its unlikely nature compared to the conventional understanding of protesting (Robertson, 2011; Smyth, Sobolev & Soboleva, 2013; Susánszky, Kopper & Tóth, 2016). In this respect, the idea of this dissertation was born in such a political environment where pro-government contention was gradually becoming popular at the international level, and it had its reflections at the local level.

The overlap between the contentious actions of government supporters in Turkey and other countries was not solely temporal but also implied common properties at the regime level and in terms of mobilization strategies. As mentioned above, the scholarship shows that pro-government contention is a strategy used in authoritarian or hybrid authoritarian regimes, and Turkey was one of them. The scholarship had already considered Turkey a hybrid authoritarian regime, particularly after the Gezi protests in 2013 (Sözen, 2020). In addition, Turkey was also similar to other countries in terms of the ruling parties' mobilization strategies. Similar to Hugo

Chávez in Venezuela or Viktor Orbán in Hungary, Erdoğan was a populist leader and the AKP was a populist party (Aytaç & Elçi, 2019). Regarded in this way, Turkey can be a good case not only in terms of understanding pro-government contentious dynamics solely in Turkey but also of providing a reference point to make comparisons with other countries having similar characteristics.

Moreover, the concept of pro-government contention was interesting from the beginning because of the difficulty of categorizing it using a standard theoretical toolkit provided by social movement scholarship. While pro-government contention still relies on the masses, the organization behind such contention is not a typical social movement organization, with grievances deriving from relative deprivation, or from elite resource providers, as the scholarship suggests (Gurr, 1970; McCarthy & Zald, 1973; McCarthy & Zald, 1977). Instead, governments, pro-government organizations, and thus privileged access to official resources seem to be the fundamental actors behind such organizations. Also, these gatherings cannot simply be called counter-movements, as they are not mainly movements that respond to a change instituted by an initial movement (Mottl, 1980; Zald & Useem, 1987). Hence, pro-government contention entails an alternative approach and definition with distinct qualities, making me interested in examining this unusual form of protest mechanism.

And why 2013-2016? There are several answers to this question. First, the scholarship does not offer any analysis of pro-government contention before 2013, likely because it was not a salient phenomenon in the pre-Gezi period (Uysal, 2017). Apart from protest event research, the literature does not offer any research that scrutinizes a pro-government rally in Turkey before the Gezi protests. Commencing with the Gezi protests, however, scholars started to consider pro-government contention as an object of analysis (Bilgiç, 2018; Gümrükçü, 2021). Therefore, before deciding on the period to be explored, the Gezi protests stood out as a possible critical juncture for the adoption of pro-government contention by the AKP government. The fundamental reason for starting with 2013 to collect data stems from such occurrence of pro-government contentious politics as a response to the Gezi upheaval.

The reason for limiting this study to four years was twofold. On the one hand, I initiated this research in 2017, which allowed me to collect data until 2017. On the other hand, 2016 was a significant year to highlight a striking development concerning pro-government rallies. The democracy watches against the coup attempt in 2016 appealed to many scholars and encouraged them to develop new approaches to the mobilization of government supporters (Küçük & Türkmen, 2020; Teke-Lloyd, Türk & Dönmez, 2021; Uysal, 2021). After the coup attempt, journalists and scholars started to highlight the term "pro-government rally" differently from regular AKP meetings organized in previous electoral campaigns. In the post-coup period, pro-government contention was not solely a countering attempt of the government to stop a mass protest threat as in the Gezi protests but also represented the government's ambition to attribute a new meaning to protest politics. In other words, the Gezi protests and the anti-coup rallies were turning points for using pro-government contention as a mobilization technique, making this period an important one to explore. Consequently, 2013-2016 represents the observable inception and sporadic continuation of pro-government rallies in Turkey and their dominance in managing contentious politics.

Second, the period covered by this research is not critical only in terms of its inception and ending but critical also in terms of the events that threatened the government seriously, leading the government to adopt pro-government contention as a governmental strategy. The government continued to be challenged after the Gezi protests, as several staggering events threatened the government seriously. Only a few months after Gezi, in December 2013, the Gülenist movement, a religious clique within the state, accused several ministers and the entire AKP leadership of corruption and graft. The scandal stirred up contentious actions on both sides. On the one hand, anti-government groups protested the government with the leftover energy remaining from the Gezi protests. On the other hand, the government and pro-government groups continued to arrange rallies against the possibly disruptive effects of the scandal.

The AKP's electoral hegemony was also seriously threatened in this period. In contrast to landslide victories in all elections from 2002 to 2015, the AKP lost the chance of being the ruling party for the first time in the historical elections in June 2015. However, in the polls' aftermath, fatal terrorist attacks marked the period,

leading to another victory for the AKP in the early elections of November 2015. The period between the two elections witnessed striking mobilization processes, which cannot be detached from the government's contentious strategies, as I show in this dissertation. In other words, from the beginning of 2013 until the end of 2016, pro-government contention sporadically became a component of Turkish politics, making the period attractive to explore.

1.4 The Research Questions and The Argument

This thesis explores pro-government mobilization in Turkey and addresses the following questions: What does an autocratized government do when confronting severe threats to its rule? Why does an autocratized government need to mobilize its audience on the street, although the conventional wisdom suggests that authoritarian regimes do not require mobilization (Linz, 2000)? How and why did the AKP government use pro-government contention as a mobilization strategy? What factors pushed the AKP to pursue contentious strategies on the street? Asking these questions, this dissertation investigates the rationale behind the adoption of pro-government contention as a political strategy and the conditions of possibility for the occurrence of such a phenomenon in Turkey.[2]

On the one hand, focusing on "how" and "what" questions, I aim to present a narrative regarding the circumstances in which pro-government contention appears as a strategic alternative. On the other hand, by answering "why" questions, I provide an analytical framework to explore the elements of pro-government contention, promising further implications at the comparative level. Moreover, I offer a theoretical approach to pro-government mobilization which can be adopted through further studies to explain contentious activism of government supporters in different contexts.

My central argument relies on three components, which are capable of answering the questions presented above. To provide an answer based on the cause-effect relationship, first, I suggest threat as the main component that drives governments to adopt pro-government contention. Based on my data, the comparative data collected

[2] Although the scholarship approaches pro-government mobilization not only through the lens of "mobilization," but also of "repression", this dissertation explores only the mobilization process of government supporters instead of the repressive effects of pro-government contention.

by Mass Mobilization in Autocracies project (Weidmann & Rød, 2019), and considering the secondary literature (Hellmeier and Weidmann, 2020), I argue that pro-government contention emerges when a serious threat against the government is underway. Instead of political opportunity, which occurs as a result of a decrease in the target's power, I focus on threat, which I define as the cost that emerges if the government does not take action (Goldstone & Tilly, 2001: 180-183). I observe that pro-government contention is adopted as a response to an increasing cost. Therefore, my first argument is that threat is the fundamental source that motivates a government to adopt pro-government contention as a mobilization tool. In my case, I argue that the AKP appeals to pro-government contention when it feels politically threatened.

Second, I show that the mobilizing power of the threat—and its capacity to generate pro-government contention—is dependent on the regime type. Considering the literature on pro-government contention and the Mass Mobilization in Autocracies Database, I suggest that threat may produce pro-government contention mostly if the regime is authoritarian or hybrid authoritarian. In other words, I argue that threat becomes a real component as the regime has authoritarian opportunities, which are simultaneously devoid of democratic burdens, to respond to a threat. This helps me explain why pro-government contention is not generally an issue in democratic countries, despite a few exceptions (such as the USA or Poland). In contrast, it is frequently used in authoritarian or hybrid authoritarian regimes. Also, for my case, this allows me to explain why the pre-Gezi period, which was described still through the adjective "democratic" to label the AKP government (Sözen, 2020)**,** did not witness pro-government contention. In brief, I argue that threat and authoritarianism are closely related to generating a conducive environment for adopting pro-government contention. For the Turkish case, I argue that political threats could generate pro-government contention as the AKP became gradually more authoritarian, and such contention was absent during its democratic phases.

Third, I argue that governments build frames of pro-government contention, and not government supporters. This component is proposed to answer "how" questions, instead of "why." I suggest that pro-government contention is generally an elite-based mobilization process instead of a grassroots movement. Using the opportunities deriving from the authoritarian setting of the regime and responding to

a threat against their rule, I claim that elites in authoritarian regimes are involved in mobilizing government supporters either by organizing or promoting pro-government contention. I argue that a threat becomes a threat when perceived as a threat, and governments are the agents that define it as a threat in the case of pro-government contention. On this basis, framing pro-government contention is the discursive response of the government against a threat, providing an appropriate milieu for pro-government contention as a mobilization practice. In this way, the frame established by the government is present in the contentious actions of government supporters. In brief, I argue that the AKP utilizes various framing tools to create a conducive environment for mobilizing pro-government audiences and such frames are reflected in the street by government supporters.

Finally, I argue that the Gezi protests were a critical event for the AKP, leading it to pursue contentious strategies on the street to counter the political threats it encountered. I suggest that the Gezi threat was a unique opportunity for the government to establish a strictly polarized society on the street with increasing authoritarian resources. It furnished the AKP with the chance to control the mobilization of pro-government masses to boost its popularity with a mechanism other than elections. Furthermore, since several autocrats were toppled by mass protests in the Middle East and North Africa during the Arab Spring just before the Gezi protests erupted, I argue that the AKP searched for new ways of controlling the street and pro-government contention was one of them. Also, I suggest that the Gezi protests served as an experiment for the government to test the use of pro-government contention, which in turn became a contentious tactic for the government when it faced a political threat in subsequent years.

It should be noted that these components do not automatically lead to pro-government contention. Undoubtedly, pro-government contention is a strategic choice of governments and is not an inevitable mobilization strategy. Instead, what I argue, benefiting from the literature and my findings, is that a combination of the abovementioned determinants can create a conducive environment for adopting pro-government contention, helping me explain the use of pro-government contention in Turkey by the AKP government.

1.5 Contributions and Limitations of the Research

This dissertation contributes to the scholarship in several ways. Most importantly, it provides a comprehensive dataset regarding protests, repression, and pro-government contentious actions for the designated period in Turkey and expands on other datasets in the literature. The scholarship so far presents research based on datasets from 1971 to 2019. The dissertation of Gümrükçü (2014) exploring protests from 1971 until 1985, Atak's (2013) research analyzing protest-police relationship between 2000 and 2009, Uysal's (2017) comprehensive study covering protest events from 2000 until 2013, and Arslanalp and Erkmen's (2020a; 2020b) research on protest bans between 2007 and 2019 offer important protest event datasets. Regarding the period of the present datasets, only Arslanalp and Erkmen's studies overlap with my study, but their research only scrutinizes repressive measures in the form of protest bans. In addition, there are studies analyzing the Gezi protests specifically with a similar methodological approach, but they provide data only for the Gezi period (Atak & della Porta, 2016; Demirel-Pegg, 2020; Demirel-Pegg & Rasler, 2021). This dissertation introduces a dataset based on a new time frame in the literature about protests and repression.

Furthermore, this thesis presents data regarding pro-government contention in Turkey about which there is no systematic data in the scholarship. As a phenomenon that increasingly draws attention in the international literature, this dataset contributes to the scholarship in presenting data from a case study in which the pro-government rally is an important component. It can also contribute to comparative datasets in this context, such as the Mass Mobilization in Autocracies Database (Weidmann & Rød, 2019), which includes data concerning pro-government rallies but does not cover Turkey.

In addition to providing an original dataset, this dissertation presents a detailed picture and analysis of pro-government contention in Turkey during the AKP period without sticking to a single case. The scholarship on pro-government mobilization in Turkey approaches the mobilization of government supporters by selecting a case, which is either counter-Gezi rallies or anti-coup rallies (Bilgiç, 2018; Gümrükçü, 2021; Küçük & Türkmen, 2020; Teke-Lloyd et al., 2021; Uysal, 2021). Instead of focusing on one of them, I examine pro-government contentious actions for a four-

year period, which helps me trace the process during which new components are uncovered depending on the context and the type of threat. I show that pro-government contention is not limited to the counter-Gezi rallies in 2013, nor can it be restricted to anti-coup rallies in 2016. Still, it is a type of strategy conducted by the government either by organizing rallies or promoting them during the period covered by this research. Hence, this dissertation contributes to the literature by offering a meticulous study of pro-government contention by exploring a long period instead of a short-term case.

It should also be noted that the dataset established for this research will be open to scholars in the field. In contrast to the abovementioned protest datasets on Turkey, this dataset will be made available for further studies. Scholars studying protest and repression mechanisms in Turkey or those interested in pro-government contentious activism may benefit from this dataset in their prospective case and comparative studies. Considering the high numbers and categoric richness of the coded material, social movement scholars may find relevant data for their research.

At the argument level, this thesis contributes to the scholarship by showing the dependency of "threat" on authoritarianism in the organization of pro-government contention. The scholarship explores pro-government rallies in authoritarian regimes and takes authoritarianism for granted for the occurrence of pro-government demonstrations (Hellmeier, 2020; Hellmeier & Weidmann, 2020; Horvath, 2011; Østbø, 2017; Robertson, 2011; Smyth, Sobolev & Soboleva, 2013; Weidmann & Rød, 2019). I show how the regime type matters for the likelihood of the use of pro-government contention as a mobilization instrument even though threats are present in both periods. Proving that pro-government rallies were unheard of in the democratic period despite the presence of threats, I show both authoritarianism and threat are necessary for using pro-government contention as a widespread mobilization tool.

Another contribution of this dissertation is approaching pro-government mobilization by examining governments as frame builders. Despite the presence of research on pro-government mobilization, I am not aware any studies that explore it through the lens of the framing literature. This research attempts to explain how a government's

framing is also contentiously reflected on the street, supporting the claim that governments sometimes may act as if they are social movement organizations.

Considering threat, regime type, and framing options as the main components and determinants of pro-government contention, this dissertation offers theoretical guidance for further research in the same field. Focusing not only on forms of threats (Hellmeier and Weidmann 2020), but also on the effect of autocratization in pro-government contention, and framing strategies in generating an appropriate political milieu for contentious activism, I suggest a theoretical path for other scholars to test their arguments. I also present a wider spectrum of threats, which can generate sufficient justification for autocrats to mobilize their audience.

As a final contribution, this thesis presents an alternative definitional framework to understand pro-government contention with different aspects. Research on pro-government rallies or organizations generally seek explicit bonds with the government/state in order to label an event/organization as pro-government (Carey, Mitchell & Lowe, 2012; Hellmeier & Weidmann, 2020). However, such an approach is likely to overlook contextual elements and their functions to disclose inexplicit relationships between pro-government agencies/events and governments/states. Conducting a case study allows me to develop an approach that might focus more on detail and provide a more comprehensive picture of pro-government contention. On this basis, I offer a categorical definition of pro-government contention from which future researchers may benefit according to their interests and research agenda.

However, this research has several limitations. First, the dataset covers only four years and provides data only from Turkey. Since the data are limited to a relatively short period, it does not allow further researchers to make comprehensive comparisons. To improve the scope of the dataset, another coding project was initiated in 2019 to collect data from January 2017 until April 2019. Second, the data are based on newspaper data, which is vulnerable to bias problems (for detailed discussion, *see* Chapter 3), instead of police data as in the research of Uysal (2017). I was aware that police data would have enriched the research. Therefore, I applied to the Security General Directorate in 2017 for access. However, my request was denied, which forced me to study newspapers. To decrease bias as much as possible, I conducted the research with two newspapers rather than one. Another limitation is

that I collected the data alone, a constant risk in establishing a protest event dataset, which might lead to coder fatigue. This problem can be overcome to some extent through double-checking the data with new coders in the future.

Moreover, this dissertation does not explore pro-government contention as a repressive mechanism even though the scholarship suggests it as a practical repressive tool (Hellmeier & Weidmann, 2020; Robertson, 2011). This research approaches contentious actions of government supporters only as a mobilization instrument and leaves its repressive effects for further studies. For this reason, this research can be advanced by analyzing pro-government contention's repressive effects, which can be interpreted either as the fundamental motivation of the mobilization of government supporters or as a side effect.

1.6 Chapter Outline

Besides the introduction and the conclusion, this dissertation consists of four main chapters. The following chapter, Chapter 2, presents a theoretical discussion on pro-government contention, benefiting from social movement and authoritarianism literature. Three central concepts are suggested in this chapter: threat, authoritarianism, and framing. I discuss how the concept "threat" is functional in explaining the adoption of pro-government mass mobilization and how it becomes a motivation in authoritarian and hybrid authoritarian regimes instead of democracies. This chapter also highlights how governments act as frame builders in the organization and promotion of pro-government contention, referring to frame alignment processes (Snow et al., 1986).

Chapter 3 explains the data collection processes and methodology of the research. Here, I explain what protest event analysis is and how it is adapted to this research; the advantages and disadvantages of newspapers as data sources; the challenges and biases of collecting newspaper data in an authoritarian regime; the definitions of protest, repression, and pro-government contention; and the variables, codebook, and coding procedure. This chapter clarifies the systematic data collection process by using protest event analysis and the collected data's detailed description. Moreover, I provide a general portrait of pro-government contention in Turkey in this chapter, presenting descriptive data concerning pro-government contentious dynamics from

2013 until the end of 2016. This section offers a practical guide to the reader about what the dataset includes and how it can be utilized.

Chapter 4 traces the history of the AKP from the inception of its rule in 2002 to show that threat alone is insufficient for using pro-government mobilization, but the regime type also matters. Exploring political threats against the democratic AKP government, I present an analysis of the AKP's responses to overcome those threats without carrying out a contentious strategy on the street in its democratically driven period. I show how the AKP did not include pro-government contention in its repertoire from 2002 to 2013, even though it faced political threats similar to the Gezi protests. This chapter highlights why pro-government contention was not a frequently used strategy during the pre-2013 period, while the Gezi protests in 2013 led to a turning point in terms of the adoption of contentious strategies.

In Chapter 5, I share my findings from the dataset I collected and present detailed analyses of the government's framing strategies for pro-government contention. Since my argument relies on threats, I explore the dynamics of pro-government contention according to the threat types I categorize in Chapter 2 and examine the government's contentious responses case by case. I explore five threat cases respectively. First of all, I examine counter-Gezi rallies and contentious activism of government supporters (protest threat), followed by pro-AKP contentious gatherings against corruption allegations (scandal threat). Then, I focus on the anti-Kurdish mobilization dynamics and its contextual parallelism with the AKP government's political orientation after June 7, 2015, elections (terror threat). The following case scrutinizes the most striking pro-government mobilization practice in the history of Turkish politics, deriving from a mass resistance against a military coup that attempted to overthrow the AKP government (coup threat). And the last case specifically focuses on international developments, which might create risks for the AKP in domestic politics (diffusion threat).

Finally, I conclude the research in Chapter 6, providing a general review of the findings of this dissertation. I discuss how these findings can be tested and improved through further case and comparative research.

CHAPTER 2: A THEORETICAL APPROACH TO PRO-GOVERNMENT CONTENTION

The scholarship on social movements analyzes research material that has an antagonistic duality: on the one hand, there are states and their repressive sub-institutions such as police forces; on the other hand, there are various forms of clusters called social movement organizations (SMO) struggling to attain short-term or long-term gains and acting radically or in a reformist way depending on the context against their competitors, namely government institutions (Verhoeven & Duyvendak, 2017). Recently, however, a considerable amount of research has grown around the theme of pro-government rallies, which challenge this duality in mobilization studies (Aliyev, 2019; Aliyev, 2020; Cheskin & March, 2015; Hellmeier, 2020; Hellmeier & Weidmann, 2020; Horvath, 2011; Østbø, 2017; Robertson, 2009; Robertson, 2011; Smyth, Sobolev & Soboleva, 2013; Smyth, Soboleva, Shimek & Sobolev, 2015; Su, 2013; Susánszky, Kopper & Tóth, 2016; Van'ke, 2015; Verhoeven & Bröer, 2015; Verhoeven & Duyvendak, 2017; Weiss, 2013). Instead of contentious efforts of downtrodden portions of society mobilizing against the government and the regime, these studies concentrate on the mobilization of incumbent supporters.

Departing from the conventional wisdom, the research on pro-government mobilization produced three important findings. First, scholars showed that "threat" is a central component of pro-government mobilization instead of "political opportunity." Hellmeier and Weidmann (2020: 73) found that pro-government rallies are strategic options for autocrats to handle political threats. Hellmeier (2020: 3) supported this view and argued that threats considerably boost pro-government mobilization along with foreign pressure. As a result of various forms of threat, scholars have demonstrated that pro-government mobilization is used to pacify and discourage opponents (Østbø, 2017: 284), thwart the possibility of a revolutionary attempt (Horvath, 2011: 2), or stop coup efforts (Hellmeier & Weidmann, 2020: 73). In brief, without a threat against the government, pro-government contention is simply not a mobilization strategy in question for incumbent regimes.

Second, scholars found that pro-government mobilization is a strategy adopted by autocrats (Hellmeier & Weidmann, 2020; Horvath, 2011; Robertson, 2011). Successful fully authoritarian and hybrid authoritarian regimes are concerned not exclusively with elections but also with contention on the street in contrast to democracies (Robertson, 2011: 3). This makes pro-government contention an effective political tool for regime stability. Thus, these actions are a component of the political repertoire of autocrats to dishearten citizens, prevent them from participating in oppositional protests or showing the regime's strength (Østbø, 2017: 284). The Mass Mobilization in Autocracies Database proves that pro-government contention is a widely used instrument in authoritarian regimes, showing that it can be an output of rich authoritarian resources and powerful elites in such regimes (Weidmann & Rød, 2019).

Finally, researchers found that governments are not solely actors of repression when it comes to contention, but they can also be primary actors of contentious mobilization (Robertson, 2011; Smyth, Sobolev & Soboleva, 2013; Verhoeven & Duyvendak, 2017). The literature on protest and collective action traditionally tended to approach states and governments in terms of their repressive capabilities or treat them as third parties once a contention is put into action (Tilly, 1978). Social movement scholars predominantly engaged with mobilization phenomenon in a "movement-centric" manner (McAdam & Tarrow, 2010), understanding states and governments as repressive institutions. However, scholars dealing with pro-government mobilization argue that states are not merely repressive actors but also agents of mobilization, albeit sporadically. In this context, as Robertson (2011: 30) puts it, the options for governments feature not only "repression but also mobilization." This is what the concepts "governmental activism" (Verhoeven & Duyvendak, 2017) or "contentious governance" (Verhoeven & Bröer, 2015) demonstrate, stressing that governments should also be regarded as "initiator(s) of claims" (Verhoeven & Duyvendak, 2017: 567).

Furthermore, existing theoretical approaches ignore the role of framing processes in the organization and promotion of such mobilization. Despite the aforementioned studies' significant findings, to my knowledge, no scholarly research systematically explores the framing strategies of governments in mobilizing government supporters on the street. Although social movement literature offers a vast amount of research

on framing (Gamson & Meyer, 1996; Johnston & Noakes, 2005; Snow, Tan & Owens, 2013), I found no research that focuses on autocrats' framing options in mobilizing the electorate contentiously.

Taking the arguments of these studies as starting points, this dissertation suggests a theoretical framework to understand pro-government contention in Turkey in three steps. First, as my fundamental argument, I show how the literature and data prove that threats lead governments to carry out contentious mechanisms on the street. Second, as the scholarship suggests, I discuss the links between authoritarianism and pro-government contention to demonstrate that threats can generate pro-government mobilization mostly when the regime is authoritarian. Finally, I argue that governments act as frame-builders in pro-government contention, utilizing various frame alignment processes. I claim that governments generate a conducive environment for mobilizing government supporters by shifting from one framing strategy to another depending on the context.

2.1 Threats and Pro-Government Mass Support

Little attention has been given to the concept "threat" compared to the concept "political opportunity" by social movement scholars (Goldstone & Tilly, 2001). This is mainly because the social movement literature, to a great extent, dealt with the efforts of vulnerable groups to obtain new rights and therefore focused attention on opportunities that these groups seek. In part, threat remained as a variable that did not generally garner the scholars' attention because of the disadvantageous status of conventional protesters, who do not have privileges that can be threatened. However, when it comes to relatively powerful groups, threat deserves to be treated as an independent variable that can instigate a mobilization process. Van Dyke and Soule (2002: 499) note that "(t)hose enjoying the most powerful positions in society may have sufficient economic and organizational resources and political leverage to mobilize, but may only be inspired to do so when faced with a perceived threat to these resources." Accordingly, only in the last two decades have research directly undertaken to examine the role of threat in collective action (Almeida, 2003; Almeida, 2019; Andrews & Seguin, 2015; Boudreau, 2004; Cunningham, 2013; Cunningham, 2018; Einwohner & Maher, 2011; Maher, 2010; McVeigh, 2009; Van Dyke & Soule, 2002; Wright, 2007).

The scholarship offers two functions of threat that can be instructive in formulating the role of threat in pro-government mobilization. The first refers to the mobilization of masses to protect a right under threat. Despite the literature's general reluctance to handle threat as an analysis material, it is regarded as a more marshaling element for people to take action in comparison to opportunities. Tilly (1978: 134-135) argues that "a given amount of threat tends to generate more collective action than the 'same' amount of opportunity." Such difference stems from losing possession being sensed more dramatically than gaining new advantages (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Snow, Cress & Jones, 1998). Following McVeigh's (2009: 44) example, most people do not have an expensive car and do not attempt to have one. However, if one steals the expensive car of a car owner, he would instantly show a reaction and pursue the ways to recoup his vehicle. Revealingly, a central facet of mobilization is a threat against the privileges of those with an advantageous status within social relations.

And second, there is evidence that threat is crucial in determining repression mechanisms by the state. In contrast to grasping threat as an incentive for collective action, some research in social movement literature approach threat within the context of the state and repression. These works uncover how states respond to collective threats posed by various groups, revealing how they repress once they confront a social movement which threatens the status quo. Similar to the response of collective groups to threats against their interests, a threat against the state can jeopardize the political, economic, and social positions of those having the state power and thus might induce them to take precautions (Davenport, 1995). These precautions may vary from counterintelligence programs (Cunnigham, 2003; Cunnigham, 2004) to state-sponsored violence organizations (Brandwein, 2017) or from deadly weapons (Gartner & Regan, 1996) to political regulations and censorship (Davenport, 1995).

Studies on threat/mobilization and threat/repression revolve around the phenomenon of pro-government mobilization, but do not precisely touch upon it because they either problematize the effect of threat in mobilization against the government/state or question the impact of threat in repressive mechanisms of the state against mobilized groups. Therefore, approaching pro-government mobilization theoretically is a compelling task given that it creates a context in which government and

contentious action unfamiliarly interact with each other. As previously noted, states and governments do not always act as a third-party or referee with respect to contentious episodes. Still, they can sometimes be "fully engaged and actively involved actor(s)" in contentious politics to overcome threats they face (Alimi & Hirsch-Hoefler, 2012: 333). Pro-government mobilization is interesting in assembling both mobilization and government on the same ground. I propose to understand threat within such coexistence. Starting from and building on the works above and referring to research on pro-government mobilization and threats (Hellmeier & Weidmann 2020; Weidmann & Rød, 2019), I argue that pro-government mobilization can be regarded as a strategic option for governments when facing a threat to their survival.

At this point, it is necessary to clarify what threat means. Acknowledging and tailoring Tilly and Goldstone's (2001: 183) definition of threat, "the costs that a social group will incur from protest, or that it expects, to suffer if it does not take action", I define threat as the costs that a government suffers if it does not take action. In other words, pro-government mobilization occurs as the manifestation of a contentious response to a threatening situation with the calculation of governments that non-action will be more costly. What is critical here is that such response is not assessed within the context of repression of opponents, as the abovementioned literature suggests, but of mobilization of supporters.

In developing the theoretical framework regarding threat types, I formed a list of categories that can help analyze pro-government mobilization. The range of threat types against a government that can induce pro-government mobilization can be wide. Hellmeier and Weidmann (2020: 73) argue that pro-government rallies occur more likely once there is mass mobilization, coup danger, and approaching elections. However, these variables do not draw a comprehensive picture of the formation of pro-government contention, because they miss several other factors that might spawn pro-government mobilization. I argue that different threat types may engender different forms for pro-government contention and different outcomes accordingly. Establishing a more comprehensive framework also helps one disclose new micro-dimensions of pro-government contention, demonstrating how governments are pretty flexible in utilizing pro-government contention as a political strategy. Using Mass Mobilization in Autocracies Database (Weidmann & Rød, 2019), I found eight

threat cases countered by pro-government mobilization: (1) protest threat, (2) foreign threat, (3) economic threat, (4) coup threat, (5) terror threat, (6) election threat, (7) scandal threat, and (8) diffusion threat (*see* Table 1).[3] Five out of eight forms of threat are also evident in the data I have collected for pro-government contention in Turkey. I categorized these threats according to the perception of governments. Actors' intentions behind threats are not considered.

Threat Type	Definition	Example
Protest Threat	A threat generated by protest means	Pro-government mobilization against the Orange Revolution in Ukraine during 2004-2005
Foreign Threat	A threat generated by external actors	North Korean mass mobilization against the US threat in 2013
Economic Threat	A threat generated by economic convulsions	Pro-Mugabe mobilization against inflation rates in Zimbabwe during 2000s
Coup Threat	A threat generatedby a coup or coup attempt	Anti-coup demonstrations in Mauritania in 2008
Terror Threat	A threat generated by terror instruments	Protests supporting President Bouteflika against terrorism in 2007 in Algeria
Election Threat	A threat generated by approaching or past elections	Demonstrations to support Chavez in 2010 in Venezuela
Scandal Threat	A threat generated by a political scandal	Pro-government demonstrations against a graft scandal in 2010 in Kuwait
Diffusion Threat	A threat generated by the likelihood of diffusion of events	Anti-Sisi protests in 2013 in Turkey

Table 1: The categorization of threat types for the adoption of pro-government contention

First, several reports found that an anti-government social movement or protest series can seriously threaten incumbents (Tilly, 1978; Davenport, 1995; Goldstein, 1978; Rasler, 1996). Protests can undermine the government if they receive enough popular support, properly seize political opportunities and use mobilization resources effectively. If the regime is vulnerable to such intimidation, the level of threat and the measures taken against it swell as well. I define protest threat as a threat generated through protest instruments. Responding to the threat that buffets the

[3] To categorize threat forms, first I formed a separate file that shows only the events where pro-government groups mobilize. I used keywords such as "government supporters", "support", "pro-government", or "for the government" to detect such events. After having a list of pro-government contentious actions from several countries, I first read the short explanations given in the dataset to understand the cause of the actions, then explored the reasons of such actions in detail through web research. Eventually, I found eight threat forms against which government supporters mobilize in distinct conjunctures.

government, incumbents can choose to clear the scene through police forces and apply sanctions, soothe the angry audience with accommodation and channeling techniques (Earl, 2004), or can even ignore the protests (Bishara, 2015). Pro-government mobilization can be an additional option to show off the government's popular support and erode the legitimacy of the anti-government protests (Hellmeier & Weidmann, 2020; Horvath, 2011; Østbø, 2017; Robertson, 2011). Goading government supporters to counter an anti-government movement thus pits one "popular" against the other in the case of a protest threat, creating a space for protest against protest. Protest threat is one of the most common threat forms that prompt pro-government mobilization. The Orange Revolution in Ukraine during 2004-2005, the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003, the Belarusian protests in 2020, and the Hong-Kong protests during 2019-2020 are just a few examples of protest threat that induced pro-government rallies in diverse contexts. Protest threat, therefore, can be a harbinger of the formation of a countermovement – as an opposing movement effectuated against an initial movement. It may also lead to "more polarization in the streets" (Hellmeier, 2020: 23).

Second, prior studies scrutinize foreign threat, as well, as a source of pro-government mobilization (Weiss, 2013; Weiss, 2014). Foreign threat is the threat form created by external powers. Governments can forge a defensive frame against an external threat, asserting that national integrity and unity are in jeopardy, and exhort masses to take to the streets or let them organize nationalist protests. On the one hand, they acquire the room to manifest that the people back them as a response to the foreign threat. On the other hand, they suddenly reap the means to consolidate both their audience and governmental power. Furthermore, the foreign threat can be utilized to extend the existing frame, incorporating nationalist values for mobilization. In doing so, the government attains the chance to embrace a nationalist narrative to reach a wider audience, even if it does not espouse nationalism ideologically. One can observe this in the Chinese example, where incumbents permit nationalist protests against the U.S threat in 1999 (Weiss, 2013), and in the North Korean mass mobilization against the U.S threat in 2013. Under the guise of nationalism and patriotism, the rallies of government supporters when facing a foreign threat can also be read as contentious forms of rally-around-the-flag effect (Baker & O'Neal, 2001; Mueller, 1970; O'Neal & Bryan, 1995).

Economic threat is the third form, which refers to severe danger produced by economic convulsions. Financial instability can put governments into a weak position and increase the level of grievance, which spawns discontent among individuals with respect to the existing government. A sharp decline in economic wealth can push people to question the legitimacy and sustainability of the government in power, moving them to voice their disapproval (Bernburg, 2015; della Porta, 2012; Gemici, 2013). Concurrently, the fragile status of the government in the grip of an economic recession can engender the proper circumstances for a contentious expression to defend the incumbent authority against anti-government voices. Pro-Maduro demonstrations right after the financial crisis that reached traumatic levels in Venezuela in the last years of the 2010s or pro-Mugabe rallies against the unstoppable inflation rates in Zimbabwe during the 2000s are proper examples that fit the definition of economic threat and pro-government contention it generated. Incumbents can set a contentious frame in which the economic catastrophe is tied to an assault on national or regime interests and these interests are presented as if they are dependent on the government's survival. Given this constructed frame, pro-government mobilization can be a disclosure of a popular confirmation for such relationships between the government, economic crisis, and national interests, providing a popular base to overcome the threat at stake and maintain the legitimacy of the government.

Coup threat, the fourth form, is the threat based on a military coup or coup attempt. It is a lethal menace for the government's survival because it can overthrow incumbents in one night and quite radically (Zald & Berger, 1978). As a result, rallying the government supporters can become an option for the incumbents to subdue the coup (Esen & Gumuscu, 2017; Hellmeier & Weidmann, 2020). The anti-coup demonstrations in Mauritania in 2008, resistance against the coup in Burkina Faso in 2015, and support rallies for Morsi against a likely coup in 2013 in Egypt are genuine examples of coup threat and pro-government contention. Pro-government mobilization against a coup has two tasks: hampering the coup attempt by hauling away the coup plotters, thereby maintaining the politically dominant status, and demonstrating that the people's will is incarnated on the streets, proving the public approval for the incumbents. From this perspective, pro-government contention

against the coup threat involves the hazard of a bodily encounter, which might precipitate dire results, unlike the relatively risk-free environment of other threats.

Fifth, incumbents can also be put in jeopardy by means of terror. Accordingly, I define terror threat as the threat that results from terror instruments. Terror is a strategy that shakes the legitimacy of target, signaling that it is vulnerable when it cannot thwart fatal assaults by terrorist groups (Tilly, 2005: 22). The leverage of incumbents to rally pro-government masses can be assessed as a political tool to demonstrate the government's strength and to fight the terror peril. In this way, incumbents acquire the opportunity to, so to speak, constitute a purified public, which is situated against the terror, and to design a polarized discourse that helps keep its audience energetic against a dire situation. This also allows them to give a proper format to the political sphere, promoting "acceptable forms of political participation" (Robertson, 2009: 545). The protests supporting President Bouteflika in Algeria against terrorism in 2007, and the rallies organized by youth organizations of the United Russia Party in Russia against terror in 2010 and 2014 can be considered within the scope of the terror threat and pro-government contention deriving from such danger.

The sixth threat form is election threat, which refers to the threat fomented by approaching or past elections. Winning elections is a certain benchmark of the people's sovereignty or testimony for the triumphant party that the public champions. By the same token, being defeated signifies the lack of popularity for the incumbents. On this account, elections always include the likelihood of turning into a threat if the incumbents do not feel self-confident to win the upcoming elections. Pro-government mobilization can serve as a contentious spectacle, a "political theater" (Smyth, Sobolev & Soboleva, 2013: 24) to contrive an ambiance that the government is supported extensively and is powerful adequately to prevail in the elections or to show strength after the triumph (Hellmeier & Weidmann, 2020). Pro-Kremlin groups' rallies declaring their support for Putin in Russia for the approaching presidential elections in 2012, demonstrations where thousands attended to declare their support for Chavez in the upcoming elections in Venezuela in 2010, and the rallies that championed Lukashenko against the opposition leader Milinkevich in 2006 presidential elections in Belarus are valid examples for pro-government mobilization engendered by the election threat. A note of caution is due at this point

because all parties organize rallies as a part of their election campaigns. Evidently, rallying government supporters is more than standard party meetings, pointing out a contentious performance instead of inert and fixed public meetings.

Seventh, the rule of governments can also be menaced through scandalous events. Scandal threat refers to the threat engendered by scandals against incumbents that might jeopardize their authority. Political scandals break out when illegal or deceitful actions of political figures already are (or threatened to be) disclosed (Bornstein, 1994). They are capable of ending political careers and temporarily interrupting government action (Quirk, 1998). Therefore, they may put politicians in unstable positions after their questionable concealed actions are exposed. When encountering a scandal that causes discomfort to the incumbents, governments and their supporters may take a set of precautions to handle the threat. Protests are one form of precaution. Amassing government supporters to collaborate for showing support for the government can be a contentious expression to deal with the precarious situation caused by the shocking scandal in question. Pro-government demonstrations arranged by government supporters in Kuwait once an alleged graft scandal erupted in 2010 and rallies to support the government after graft allegations were revealed in Turkey in 2013 are instances of mobilization against a scandal threat.

Lastly, diffusion threat is the threat posed by an event or situation that may subsequently prompt dangerous outcomes for the government. Even if there is no concrete or actual threat to a government, it can feel unsafe because of the danger of diffusion and therefore decide to nip potential hazards in the bud. From expectations regarding an outbreak stemming from the economic or political crisis (Kriesi, 2015) to the anticipation of diffusion of protests (della Porta & Tarrow, 2005) or coups (Li & Thompson, 1975), diffusion threat can take on various dimensions. Contention in another country can unsettle governments and push them to take safety measures against this “warning sign” (Hellmeier & Weidmann, 2020: 79), which is termed “diffusion proofing” (Koesel & Bunce, 2013). Incumbents can assess the mobilization of government supporters as a strategic component of diffusion proofing to preclude any possibility of spreading the threat to their own countries. The protests of pro-Putin youth groups against a potential candidate for the presidency in Russia during 2005 and anti-Sisi protests in Turkey just after the Gezi

protests hit the country dramatically in 2013 are appropriate instances of diffusion threat mobilization.

These threat types show important findings about pro-government contention and expose variation in the form of mobilization and its likely outcomes. First of all, protest threat proves that pro-government contention can take the form of a countermovement initiated against a social movement. The literature on countermovements suggests that governments act as third parties or support/hamper movements' activities in line with their strategies and interests. The bond between government and countermovement is not portrayed as a fully-fledged relationship, and the government is not treated as the chief organizer (Lo, 1982; Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996; Zald & Useem, 1987). However, pro-government contention organized against mass movements demonstrates that governments can be direct organizers of countermovements, or more generally, they can be the actors by which a countermovement forms its agenda. Second, foreign threat shows that pro-government contention can be a diplomatic tool in the international arena (Weiss, 2013). As an indicator of regime potency, pro-government contention can make the impression that the regime is backed by the people and shows no sign of weakness. Third, pro-government rallies can manifest a contentious expression of the rally-round-the-flag effect, particularly when there is a foreign or terror threat. Both domestically and internationally, pro-government contention warrants a nationalist narrative, which clusters around the leader and the regime.

Furthermore, pro-government contention can serve as an extra popular gathering in addition to party rallies in pre-election periods. What differentiates pro-government contention from regular pre-election meetings is its capacity for protesting and activism instead of the dull and monotonous atmosphere of election rallies. Along these lines, pro-government contention adds an activist layer to governments' political repertoire, which may present an extra option for them to prevail in the elections. Fifth, pro-government contention can be organized as a bodily power to thwart the possibility of being overthrown by coups. Pro-government protesters can be summoned to the street to resist a lethal threat such as a military coup. The government benefits from a physical force to preclude such a threat and generates a popular legitimacy against an illegitimate elite activity. Finally, the contentious mobilization of government supporters can also be used to nip the diffusion of threat

in the bud. It is not merely performed reactively but also functions like a preventive mobilization (Horvath, 2011). In this context, pro-government contention has the capacity of managing, controlling, and dominating the contentious sphere and of redefining the context and meaning of street politics by blocking the presence of opponents on the street.

As shown above, I proposed eight types of threat that might prompt governments to encourage their audiences to rally on the street. Regarding the literature on pro-government mobilization and concrete examples from various countries, I argued that government supporters could take action contentiously as governments encounter these eight types of threat. It should also be noted that these threats are not cleanly divided. No doubt, they may operate concurrently, transform themselves into other forms of threat, and sometimes they can overlap with each other. A coup threat may take the form of mass mobilization against the government, which generates a protest threat simultaneously for the incumbents to take alternative measures; or an election threat may evolve into a scandal threat after a certain type of corruption in elections made by the government is disclosed.

2.2 Authoritarian Regimes and Resource Opportunities

Although threat is the fundamental component that drives governments to adopt pro-government contention as a strategic alternative, it is insufficient to explain why some governments choose to use such mobilization mechanisms. The literature on pro-government rallies demonstrates that the regime type is a decisive feature in whether pro-government contention is embraced as an instrument in the strategic reserve of incumbents or not. We know that pro-government contention is rare in democratic regimes (Robertson, 2011: 33). Incumbents can be removed from office through elections, or mass movements can jeopardize the legitimacy of the existing government in democracies. Still, we barely observe pro-government contention under such circumstances.

While it is uncommon in democratic regimes, pro-government contention appears dominantly in authoritarian settings. As Mass Mobilization in Autocracies Database (Weidmann & Rød, 2019) shows, pro-government rallies occupy a significant room in autocrats' contentious repertoire. Unsurprisingly, all case studies on pro-government and pro-state mobilization scrutinize authoritarian countries in different

forms, such as Russia and China (Horvath, 2011; Østbø, 2017; Robertson, 2011; Weiss, 2013), or carry out comparative research about authoritarian regimes (Hellmeier & Weidmann, 2020). Even if the selected case is a democratic country, such as Hungary (Susánszky, Kopper & Tóth, 2016), this is likely because it recently switched to authoritarianism (Bozóki and Hegedűs 2018). We also know that hybrid authoritarian regimes in Latin America, such as Bolivia and Ecuador embrace pro-government mobs in their contentious repertoire (Levitsky & Loxton, 2013). Therefore, it is plausible to suggest that pro-government contention, to a great extent, is a phenomenon observed in authoritarian and hybrid authoritarian regimes.

Evidently, highly organized gatherings in which thousands of government supporters participate and all public resources and institutions are exploited are practical demonstrations in creating the image that the regime is robust and has massive popular support. One can witness the use of pro-government contention as a sign of strength in all forms of authoritarian regimes. The Mass Mobilization in Autocracies Database (Weidmann & Rød, 2019) shows various examples of masses gathering in the street to support leaders, such as Castro in Cuba, Putin in Russia, Gbabgo in Côte d'Ivoire, Chavez in Venezuela, Shevardnadze in Georgia, Aliyev in Azerbaijan, dos Santos in Angola at leader level, or EPRDF in Ethiopia at party level. The Database also demonstrates that these rallies are organized against anti-government forces shaking the authority of the ruling party/leader, such as the Ladies in White in Cuba, the Orange Revolution influences in Russia, or the CUD in Ethiopia.

While pro-government contention is a generally preferred mechanism in authoritarian and hybrid regimes, scholarship does not pay much attention to its analysis. A large number of studies in the literature approaches protest dynamics in authoritarian countries through the lens of those that demand a transformation of the regime (Almeida, 2003; Boudreau, 2004; Bunce & Wolchik, 2010; Chen, 2011; Johnston, 2012). Despite the weakness of political mobilization in authoritarian regimes (Linz, 2000: 269), these researchers illuminate how the silenced segments of society engage with contentious performances, preparing conditions that shape mass mobilization against an authoritarian rule and investigating the mobilization of underrepresented groups who demand access to institutional politics. Another set of studies in the scholarship deals with how authoritarian regimes downplay threats

against the regime through various measures (Boudreau, 2004; Bueno de Mesquita & Smith, 2011; Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007; Linz, 2000; O'Donnell, 1973).

Despite the scholarly interest in oppositional contention and devices that maintain survival in authoritarian settings, little research has been done concerning the combination of these two, namely, rally mechanisms orchestrated by the ruling elite. As discussed above, only recently did some studies question pro-government rallies as a political device utilized by incumbents in authoritarian and hybrid regimes, dealing with the functions that those rallies serve the ruling elite. These scholars investigate how and why autocrats use social movement tactics along with more conventional and institutional means, asserting that pro-government rallies can be employed as a tool to consolidate power, as a repression technique championed by autocrats, and as a political spectacle to showcase that the regime is strong and the opposition is weak (Geddes, Wright & Frantz, 2018; Hellmeier & Weidmann, 2020; Robertson, 2011).

But why do authoritarian regimes, and not democracies, present a helpful environment for mobilizing government supporters? Two reasons can be suggested to explain the aggregation of pro-government contention in authoritarian regimes. First, the authoritarian structure enables autocrats to control institutions and resources. The scholarship on authoritarianism highlights distinct properties of authoritarian regimes exploited by incumbents. Despite differences in form and degree, an authoritarian regime dispenses autocrats with the monopolization of resources and the absence of independent institutions that check political actors (Svolik, 2012). It establishes the concentration of power through the design of an uneven playing field, the violation of civil liberties, and unfair competition in elections (Levitsky & Way, 2010). In some cases, it furnishes privileges to one party by constructing a limited pluralism (Linz, 2000) and is willing to manage and control contentious action in parallel with incumbents' strategies (Robertson, 2011). Owing to the vast opportunities to abuse political power, autocrats have a substantial amount of "discretion over the organization of rallies and the mobilization of participants" (Hellmeier & Weidmann, 2020: 77).

Given that they have privileged access to institutions and resources, authoritarian leaders possess the ability to manage their audiences to a significant degree on the

street. Pro-government rally participants can be paid to participate in rallies (Rashiduzzaman, 1997: 257), incentivized through rewarding systems, or many resources can be mobilized for the organization of communication, logistics, and technological devices. Media tools can effectively be used in order to boost the contentious milieu in favor of the government. In a similar vein, security forces function as a unit serving autocrats, promoting pro-government citizens to participate in a contentious event at a low cost compared to an anti-government group. Viewed in this respect, authoritarian regimes have a larger scale of opportunities to mobilize their audiences on the street compared to democratic regimes, making them capable of organizing and promoting such rallies.

Second, mass protests can forge serious threats for authoritarian incumbents, which is why even strong autocrats "are nervous of public opposition" (Robertson, 2009: 530). In a world where mass protests topple governments and transform systems, modern autocrats became aware that winning elections or ensuring coordination among elites is insufficient to stay in power. Extending the argument, we can argue that any serious threat against the rule of an autocrat is adequate to make him nervous, as discussed above, therefore may encourage him to take precautions, among which proving popular strength through contentious mechanisms is an option.

On this basis, it is plausible to assume that pro-government rallies can be unconventional and contentious instruments employed by autocrats to mold the political sphere. Authoritarian leaders noticed that the political arena should be arranged so that political participation is performed within the borders of "appropriate" behavior, which prompts authoritarian leaders to take precautions concerning public opposition. Many studies analyze these precautions in terms of repression (Davenport, 2007; Earl, 2003), a costly behavior in many respects. But it is tempting to expect that incumbents in these regimes, as decision-makers that monopolize resources with varying degrees, can be more active in street politics. This might encourage them to search the ways to goad their audiences to act contentiously in favor of regime interests. Therefore, authoritarian regimes learned they could re-invent themselves as a "mobilisational authoritarian regime" (Horvath, 2011: 1).

If pro-government contention is an authoritarian regime phenomenon, then one should also consider the links between rallies and incumbents owing to autocrats' high involvement in institutions and control over resources. It is not plausible to expect pro-government rallies to be independent from the government. Geddes et al. (2018: 132) argue that it is seldom that pro-government rallies are spontaneous events. Hellmeier and Weidmann (2020: 77) support this view, stating that "(p)ro-government rallies rarely happen without at least the explicit consent or minimum logistic support from the government." Pro-incumbent contention is characteristically different from conventional protests in terms of being managed, "permitted, controlled, and integrated into the broader political strategies of elites" (Robertson, 2011: 4). It necessitates a network of people consisting of both incumbents and the community for the organization and logistics of demonstrations.

Resource mobilization theory may help us to explore the link between autocrats and pro-government contention. What makes a mobilization process feasible is increasing resources for "unorganized but aggrieved groups" (Jenkins & Perrow 1977: 250). "At the most fundamental level" McAdam (1985: 21) notes, "the generation of insurgency develops not from an aggregate rise in discontent but from a significant increase in the level of resources available to support collective protest activity." Resource mobilization theory, on this basis, analyzes resources to be mobilized, the connections and relationships among SMOs, support linkages from external sources, and the strategies of authorities to manage and restrain movements (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). The advocates of the theory assert that politically impotent masses are incapable of initiating a movement which is why they always need external powers to help them realize their claims (Jenkins & Perrow, 1977; Lipsky, 1968; Oberschall, 1973). The mobilizing capacity of grievances, ideas, and sentiments for the masses becomes anathema to resource mobilization adherents; instead, they offer to focus on "leadership, administrative structure, incentives for participation, and a means for acquiring resources and support" (McAdam & Scott, 2005: 6).

More importantly, these theorists approach social movement mobilization through a dualist perspective. They argue that there are masses, the fundamental objects of the mobilization, that challenge existing power relations on the one hand, and there are elites as subjects who can supply necessary resources for the mobilization of the

former, on the other. This is why McAdam (1985: 20) calls resource mobilization an "elite theory" since mobilization is dependent on the will and power of elites. From this vantage point, the likelihood of the political influence that the masses can exert through social mobilization is eliminated and given to elites' capabilities and resources. For Jenkins and Perrow (1977: 251), grievances are not time-dependent for the masses, and there is always adequate discontent, which is a constant for mobilization. What gives them the likelihood of mobilizing their grievances are resources, or more precisely, "interjection of external resources" (Ibid.). Agreeing with this, resource mobilization theorists epitomize terms such as "social movement industries" or "movement entrepreneurs" (Rucht, 2008: 185), indicating that movement mobilization is more like a power-play in economic terms among elites.

Resource mobilization theory may notably contribute to the dissection of pro-government mobilization phenomenon theoretically. I argue that there is no other pertinent political actor than an authoritarian government controlling necessary resources for mobilization. Regarding government not as a repressive actor as in mainstream social movement studies (Tilly, 1978) but as a primary and vital actor of activism (Verhoeven & Duyvendak, 2017), one can argue that pro-government groups can massively enjoy resources supplied by governmental agents and organizations in the mobilization processes. In this way, they can take advantage of government-backed power in the manifestation of their claims. Resource mobilization is helpful in illustrating pro-government contention in its tendency to draw a line between masses and elites, depicting elites as decision-makers of mobilization and appraising masses as practitioners of contentious action. It further suggests that "grievances and discontent may be defined, created, and manipulated by entrepreneurs and organizations" (McCarthy & Zald 1977: 1215). Similar to the resource mobilization claim, governments can also define, create and manipulate grievances. In evaluating pro-government contention, it is plausible to argue that government elites are guiding and substantial in steering and shaping the structure of pro-government mobilization (Robertson, 2011). I also say that the line between government and its audience is thicker than a typical social movement contention because of the massive capacity of authoritarian governments to hold resources and their roles as ultimate decision-makers in official politics.

The link between the government and a rally can be conducted through several organizations. One of the most influential organizations is the political party "in which elites pool resources and opportunities for advancement and share the spoils of office" (Robertson, 2009: 530). Political parties have a wide organizational structure, institutional capacity, and a set of divergent tools to influence their audiences that might facilitate and promote their contentious actions. Accordingly, some reports introduce concepts such as "party-driven movements" (Muldoon & Rye, 2020) or "party-led protests" (Lewis, 2020), according to which already established political parties utilize contentious tactics to mobilize their constituents. Pro-government contention can be assessed within the same framework, not through the lens of opposition parties, but in terms of the ruling party. In authoritarian settings, the primary function of the ruling party "is to distribute benefits to the nonelites on whom the dictatorship's survival depends" (Geddes et al., 2018: 131). But if the ruling party is powerful enough, it can "monopolize mass support by controlling the state's resources and using patronage networks" (Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010: 128). Seizing public resources, powerful ruling parties in authoritarian systems control "land titles, fertilizers, subsidized housing, scholarships, food, construction materials, and many other privileges," whereby the ruling party may contrive incentives for participation in pro-government rallies (Ibid). The mobilization of all party resources to make civilians participate in pro-government rallies and to dismantle the coup threat by the Colorado Party in Paraguay is a clear example of a political party's power to mobilize the masses (Geddes et al., 2018: 103).

Furthermore, governments may use government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs) (Hasmath, Hildebrandt & Hsu, 2019; Wu, 2003). GONGOs are created by a government "to channel the diverse demands of the society and (to) arrange them in ways to support its legitimacy" (Wu, 2003, 36). In this regard, GONGOs can be founded and managed for the organization of pro-government contention to generate popular support with the image that it is not officially a government organization. In a similar vein, incumbents can establish ersatz social movements, which use social movement strategies and behave like social movements, but serve the government's interests (Robertson, 2011, 27). Russian youth organization *Nashi* is an excellent example of ersatz social movement, explored by several studies (Atwal & Bacon, 2012; Krivonos, 2015). Governments

can also conduct relations with already established organizations and subject them to the regime in the form of a GONGO. The Red Cross Society of China, which has been under the influence of the Communist Party of China, or Memur-Sen, a union of public employees in Turkey, is a typical example of this, which has grown exponentially after the AKP came to power and has taken a vibrant role in many pro-government rallies.

In sum, sharing the same approach with Hellmeier and Weidmann (2020), I argue that pro-government contention is a political instrument in the hands of autocrats to reinforce the regime by demonstrating their popular support. Moreover, I suggest that authoritarian regimes present appropriate political environments for autocrats to use pro-government contention as a political technology. The over-abundance of resources and the permanent risk of being toppled by mass opposition in authoritarian regimes engender an appropriate political milieu to incentivize the use of pro-government contention as a political tool. The "elite" perspective of resource mobilization theory is helpful in understanding the government's prominent role in mobilization campaigns and the ties between pro-government audience and the government. Lastly, I argue that pro-government contention could be conducted through organizations such as political parties, government-related organizations such as GONGOs or ersatz social movements, or developing relations with established organizations to render them dependent on the regime.

Combining the first and second arguments, I argue that threats may lead to the emergence of pro-government contention if the regime is authoritarian or hybrid authoritarian because of the opportunities deriving from the regime. If threat, by itself, was sufficient to engender a mobilization process of government supporters, then one would observe pro-government contention frequently also in democracies. However, as discussed before, we know pro-government contention is mostly absent under democratic circumstances, leading one to conclude that regime type is a decisive element for pro-government mobilization when there is a serious threat against the government.

But how do opportunities provided by authoritarian regimes function in the organization and promotion of pro-government mobilization? In this dissertation, I suggest understanding authoritarian resources mainly as a framing strategy. I argue

that autocrats are capable of building frames in which and through which pro-government groups act contentiously on the street. Using resources the authoritarian regime provides, such as monopolized media, the abundance of pro-government organizations, or uneven access to public and state institutions, autocrats are capable of building up a contentious frame to mobilize their electorate. The following section focuses on how governments may act as frame builders for pro-government contention.

2.3 Governments as Frame Builders

Even though authoritarian governments have immense resource capacities, a dangerous threat that jeopardizes the government's survival does not automatically beget rally participation. No matter what a threat actually is, it becomes a threat once it is perceived and framed as a threat by the target. The meaning of these dangers is framed through several means. Most importantly, from a government-based perspective, I argue that governments are frame builders of these threats, not governments' audiences. In contrast to the mainstream tendency to view social movements as autonomous structures in framing their struggles (Robertson, 2011), I suggest that pro-government contention is dependent on framing strategies of incumbents, or at least rally participants act within the frame established by incumbents. In line with Hellmeier's (2020: 6) argument, I argue that governments should provide justifications for their audiences to participate in pro-government rallies. In this section, I discuss how incumbents design their frames for pro-incumbent mobilization and what framing strategies governments can use while constructing a discourse to mobilize the masses.

A growing body of literature on social movements focuses on the concept of frame during the 80s and 90s (Gamson, 1988; Johnston, 1995; Snow & Benford, 1988; Snow & Benford, 1992; Snow et al. 1986) with its critiques and assessments (Benford, 1997; Benford & Snow, 2000; Hart, 1997; Oliver& Johnston, 2000) to flourish a fresh insight based on Goffman's influential study *Frame Analysis* (1974). The concept "collective action frame" is used to show the interpretation framework of SMOs and individuals as to their social milieu, accredited with "bringing ideas back in" (Oliver & Johnston, 2000) or making meaning "pivotal" (Benford, 1997) in social movement studies. These scholars ushered movement adherents as actors

constructing a shared meaning of their struggles, targets, objectives, and environment instead of seeing them as static and passive agents of structural failures or ideologies (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow et al., 1986). This line of research criticizes other social movement theories because they neglect the interpretive processes of agents concerning grievances. Snow et al. (1986: 465) note that both classical theories and resource mobilization theory are incapable of paying necessary attention to the fact that grievances are subjected to "differential interpretation," whereby grievances are carved out peculiarly. This approach suggests that objects have no meanings, but only through the participation of actors in attaching a value to an object can they acquire a meaning (Benford, 1997).

Framing is an active and processual deed, which is why it includes several continuing and developing operations. I go back to the term of Snow et al. (1986: 464), "frame alignment", which refers to "the linkage of individual and SMO interpretative orientations, such that some set of individual interests, values, and beliefs and SMO activities, goals, and ideology are congruent and complementary." I suggest explaining pro-government mobilization frame through frame alignment processes because they pave the way for an elastic field of strategy for governments which I could observe in my case. Snow et al. (1986) argue that frame alignment process is divided into four forms: (1) frame bridging, (2) frame amplification, (3) frame extension, and (4) frame transformation. These four forms represent strategic moves of frame builders, pointing out discrete but intertwined processes: (1) Frame bridging refers to the mesh of two independent but ideologically close frames in order to activate "unmobilized sentiment pools or public opinion preference clusters" (Ibid., 467). The coupling of two separate frames serves to create an organizational structure in SMOs where shared grievances are disclosed and common objectives are pursued together. (2) Frame amplification is concerned with the so-called revitalization of a petrified emotion or idea, clarifying and invigorating the frame such that an unexpressed or forgotten value is re-voiced (Ibid., 469). Adopting frame amplification as a strategy, SMOs idealize and embellish various values to push the audience in a particular direction to reach a specified purpose.

(3) Frame extension refers to an SMO's attempt to enlarge the scope of the movement goals and to widen the boundaries to attract more adherents to the organization and struggle (Ibid., 472). SMOs strive to captivate the attention of

disinterested individuals and groups by extending the particularized borders of the movement agenda, furnishing a more diverse framework. This strategic move is utilized to hook people to get their endorsement, who are extraneous to the movement objectives, and to introduce them to the movement organization. Finally, (4) frame transformation is an SMOs' renewal, sometimes even reversal, of its frame to garner more members to the organization (Ibid., 473). Frame transformation entails a reframing process of old meanings, signs, and values, inserting dissimilar ones to reformulate a novel structure. From this perspective, frame transformation is a radical re-structuring of an SMO's or individual's frame, shifting the focus to an alternative set of meaning and content. The tolerable starts to be defined as intolerable or what was perceived as the order of things some time ago can now be seen as unjust.

I offer that these four types of frame alignment processes may help us understand pro-government mobilization dynamics from the framing perspective. I argue that pro-government mobilization is a corollary of the interplay of these framing strategies, circling different values as the locus of mobilization objectives. In other words, compatible with Snow et. al (1986) categorization, I claim that these strategies may herald a theoretical guideline to illuminate pro-government mobilization phenomenon and establish a practical framework. However, a re-adjustment of actors, targets, and processes is necessary because of the unusual nature of pro-government collective action compared to a standard social movement. One should note that pro-government mobilization cannot function as an SMO does. Needless to say, it has a different structure, organization, motivation, recruitment, number of resources, and objectives. The liaison between protesters and organizers sometimes tends to follow a much more roundabout route, which unravels new ways of strategies and organizing patterns.

As substitutes for frame builder SMOs, it is incumbents that fashion frames in pro-government contention. In managing pro-government rallies, governments may occasionally act like an SMO, called "mimicking of SMO behavior" (Verhoeven & Duyvendak, 2017: 565). By this likening, I refer to governments' capacity and ability to construct a mobilization frame for their audiences to attend rallies or promote them to take to the street. SMO is a formal organization that mobilizes its adherents in collective action to attain political benefits from authorities (Kriesi, 2008: 152). A

government, however, does not fit into this definition and contradicts it by definition. It can rally its supporters and produce a collective space for protest. Still, the political goal rests on the government's survival and thus includes a preservation reflex instead of an ambition to ameliorate current conditions. In other words, it is not explicitly activists but incumbents who decide whether a frame should be bridged, amplified, extended, or transformed in the case of pro-government mobilization.

On the other hand, similar to SMOs, governments also construct specific values to which government supporters attach themselves. The frame-building process in pro-government contention contrasts with what Gamson calls “injustice frames” to designate the typical character of all collective action frames (1992: 68). Instead of injustice frames, some recent studies have demonstrated that governments may rally masses such as through nationalist and civic duty discourses (Weiss, 2013; Hellmeier, 2020), patriotic and ethnic responsibilities (Smyth et al. 2015; Aliyev, 2019), or values like dignity (Van’ke, 2015). Depending on the context and based on the elasticity of the regime ideology, governments may shift from one value to another. Value frames are constructed, bridged, amplified, reminded, extended, and sometimes even transformed by governments through governmental discourse in accordance with their consolidation, repression, and survival strategies. Governments may single out frame amplification in order to revive buried feelings and ideas, or opt for frame extension to engulf new individuals with a broadened value-oriented frame.

To summarize, I suggest understanding pro-government mobilization through the lens of framing literature and offer to adapt Snow et al.’s (1986) theorization of frame alignment processes. I argue that governments might prefer adopting the four types of frame alignment discussed above to rally their audiences, akin to what SMOs do. Incumbents embrace various values and bridge, amplify, extend and transform them depending on the context.

2.4 A Summary of the Theoretical Model

Overall, my argument in this chapter can be summarized as follows. I argue that threat is the fundamental driver of pro-government contention in an authoritarian regime, where autocrats exploit authoritarian opportunities, and frame the contention

to promote or organize mobilization. On this basis, pro-government mobilization process can be explained best with a diagram below:

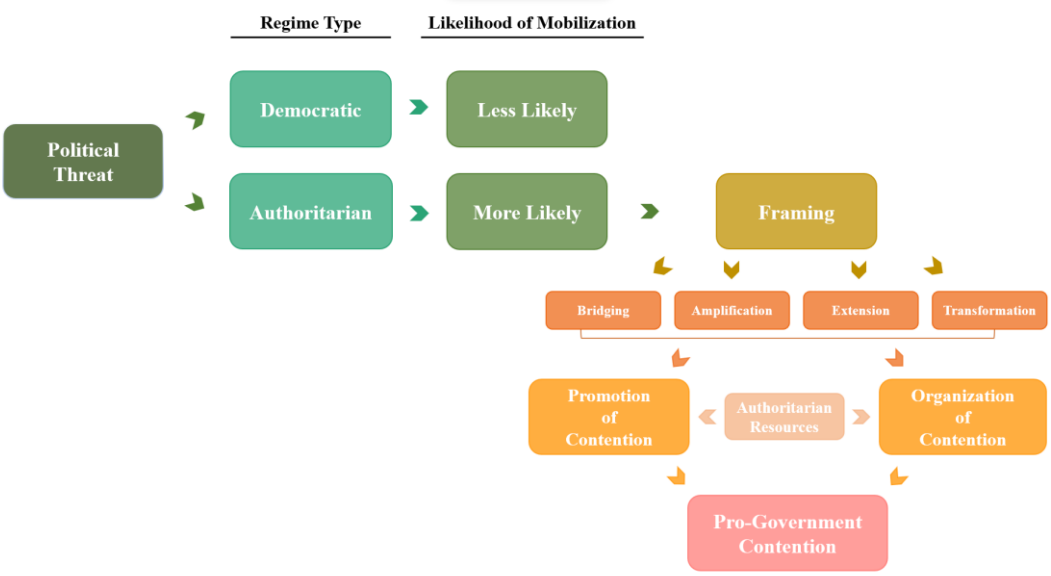

Figure 1. A theoretical diagram for pro-government contention

First, without a threat against the government, pro-government contention is not a strategic option for incumbents. I argue that pro-government mobilization is the output of political threats rather than political opportunities, suggesting that a government does not prefer mobilizing its audience unless its rule is at risk. Therefore, threat functions as the fundamental mobilizing factor in generating pro-government contention as a strategic response. Second, I point out the regime type as a determinant for using pro-government contention. I suggest that if the regime is authoritarian, then pro-government contention is more likely than democracies because authoritarian regimes can present the ruling elite with the necessary means to mobilize the masses. Conversely, if the regime is democratic, then the likelihood of pro-government contention is less due to the inadequate control over institutions and resources.

Third, I offer that when there is a threat against an autocrat's rule, this can be a threat if it is perceived as a threat. Therefore, I suggest that governments are frame-builders of pro-government contention, which is framed through frame alignment processes. This can be done in four ways: frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension, and frame transformation. Next, I show that the government's framing creates two paths for using pro-government contention: promotion or organization. Utilizing

frame alignment processes, the government either promotes pro-government contention or directly organizes it. Finally, I suggest that this is done through authoritarian resources due to the opportunities deriving from the authoritarian structure of the regime. Pro-government contention can be read as a mobilizational output of this chain of events.

Regarded in this way, the conditions of possibility for pro-government contention rely on the presence of political threats in a regime, which is capable of providing a certain control over institutions and resources, namely an authoritarian regime. This helps us answer why pro-government contention occurs as a mobilization strategy in the repertoires of autocrats. Therefore, it presents a theoretical answer to why questions of this dissertation. After conducive circumstances appear for the use of pro-government mobilization, I offer frame alignment processes, which are utilized by autocrats for the promotion and organization of pro-government contention, allowing the former to construct a narrative according to the political context. As a result, I suggest, pro-government contention appears as a strategic alternative for autocrats to mobilize their audiences to deal with the threat they confront.

2.5 What This Theoretical Model Cannot Explain

This research aims to shed light on pro-government contention phenomenon theoretically and empirically from a government-based perspective. For the theoretical part discussed in this chapter, this dissertation attempts to understand how government supporters take to the street, what circumstances trigger governments to goad citizens to act contentiously, and why governments feel the necessity of constructing a contentious frame to mobilize their audiences.

Yet, there are a few questions that this theoretical model does not propose an answer. First, the approach discussed in this chapter does not aim to consider the independent frames, motivations, and resources of pro-government protesters as variables. Instead, it takes them as constant. Some research conducted their studies on pro-government protesters' values through surveys (Smyth et al., 2013; Susánszky et al., 2016), emotions through street interviews (Van'ke, 2015), or practices through participant observation (Küçük & Türkmen, 2017). Accepting that pro-government protesters may have relatively diverse motivations, values, emotions, and ideas

regarding participation in a pro-government rally, the model presented here tries to understand pro-government mobilization from the government-based perspective.

For this reason, this model does not help explain the individual or group sentiments concerning participation in rallies. Instead, it is illuminative regarding the impact of governments' frames and resources to guide government supporters and the facilities that an authoritarian regime supplies. Therefore, this model is useful for adopting certain types of methods, such as protest event analysis, discourse analysis, and process tracing, but not practical for interviews, ethnographic research, and surveys, which are helpful in measuring the motivations of pro-government rally participants.

Second, this model does not aim to show the effects of pro-government contention on the autocratization of the government. It can be argued that pro-government rallies are functional in consolidating autocrats' rule (Küçük & Türkmen, 2020), which is also meaningful in the Turkish case, particularly during anti-coup rallies organized by the government in 2016. Regarding the role of authoritarianism in pro-government contention, however, this dissertation's purpose is to put forward the incentives that the authoritarian setting of the regime creates for the organization and promotion of pro-government contention. Hence, the theoretical model proposed in this chapter helps understand only the effects of authoritarianism on pro-government contention, not vice-versa.

This theoretical outlook is not a recipe for pro-government contention, nor does it claim that mobilization of government supporters is a mechanical result of the combination of the variables presented here. It is evident that pro-government mobilization is a subjective practice as much as it rests on objective regime conditions and threats. The components documented in this chapter can be helpful only to explain and understand the general tendencies and may picture a rough anatomy of pro-government contention. This chapter can thus be beneficial about what to expect concerning pro-government contention, the general rationale about its advent, and organization strategies. It does not promise an automatic input-output model to expound the advent of pro-government contention.

2.6 Why Is This Theoretical Model Useful to Explain the Turkish Case?

The theory suggested above is a useful one to explore pro-government contention in Turkey, because all three conditions/tools are relevant for the designated period of this dissertation. From 2013 to the end of 2016, several threats endangered the AKP during its rule; the regime shifted to an authoritarian one; and the AKP utilized a specific framing strategy to overcome the threats it confronted.

The period between 2013-2016 is rich in terms of threats against the AKP government. Benefiting from the categorization of threat cases discussed above, the AKP confronted five different threat cases in this era. As a protest threat, the Gezi protests, spreading after the violent response of the police to a peaceful environmental protest, menaced the AKP rule in the summer of 2013. While the effects of such a mass protest threat still continued on the Turkish political scene, a scandal outbroke in December 2013, accusing several government officials of graft and corruption. In the summer of 2015, after the first failure of the AKP in the ballot box, the termination of the ceasefire between the Turkish state and the Kurdish terrorist organization PKK stirred up a new security problem. Most importantly, as one of the deadliest nights of the history of Turkey, July 15, 2016 witnessed a military coup attempt, which was overcome by the government through mass resistance on the street. And finally, certain international events triggered a diffusion threat against which the AKP adopted contentious measures. Chapter 5 explores each threat case in detail.

In addition to the threats, Turkey is a country that observers are not shy in using the label of authoritarianism to describe the regime in this period, such as authoritarian neoliberalism (Aydin, 2021; Bilgiç, 2018; Kaygusuz, 2018; Tansel, 2018), competitive authoritarianism (Castaldo, 2018; Esen & Gumuscu, 2016; Özbudun, 2015), full authoritarianism (Çalışkan, 2018), electoral authoritarianism (White & Herzog, 2016), or new authoritarianism (Somer, 2016). As Sözen (2020) argues, the Gezi protests in 2013 were a turning point after which scholars started to label the regime in Turkey as authoritarian. Therefore, putting the period 2013-2016 at the center for analysis can be productive in observing the effects of authoritarianism on pro-government contention.

Furthermore, in the aftermath of the Gezi protests in 2013, the AKP's populist mobilization strategies became a popular topic in the scholarship (Aytaç & Elçi, 2019; Aytaç & Öniş, 2014; Baykan, 2018; Castaldo, 2018; Elçi, 2019; Özdemir, 2020; Selçuk, 2016; Türk, 2018; Yabanci, 2016). In parallel with this line of thought, scholars also started to focus on the effects of polarization in this period (McCoy & Somer, 2019; McCoy & Somer, 2021; Somer, 2019). If populism is defined as a "mode of political practice—as populist mobilization" based on polarizing strategies (Jansen, 2011: 75; Handlin, 2018: 80) and participation of "popular" power in contentious actions (Handlin, 2020: 217), the AKP's post-2013 period can be fruitful to explore frame alignment processes used in organizing and promoting pro-government contention.

I argue that these three elements, namely the presence of threats, authoritarianism and framing based on polarization, make the Turkish case a proper one to be explored using the theoretical model suggested in this chapter. In the next chapter, I examine the pre-2013 period, during which the regime in Turkey is not an authoritarian one, to show how the presence of threats and the regime type are dependent upon each other for the use of pro-government contention.

2.7 Summary

Pro-government contention has been presented theoretically in three steps in this chapter. First of all, since pro-government contention is not the mobilization of subordinate groups, who do not readily access necessary resources, threat is offered as the core element in mobilization campaigns instead of political opportunity. Benefiting from a comprehensive comparative dataset on pro-government rallies, I found and discussed eight threat cases. These cases have demonstrated several implications. It has been argued that pro-government contention may take the form of a countermovement, can be used as a diplomatic tool in the international domain, generates occasionally a rally-round-the-flag effect, brings an aggressive atmosphere in pre-election periods, promotes the likelihood of physical resistance and repression in some cases, and blocks the diffusion of a variety of threats.

Then, I have shown that pro-government contention is closely related to the regime type. Rather than democracies, pro-government contention is observed chiefly in authoritarian and hybrid authoritarian regimes, which furnish autocrats with rich

resources and unchecked institutions. The elite-based orientation of resource mobilization has been adapted to the case of the contentious mobilization of government supporters, and the cardinal role of incumbents not solely as repressive actors but also as mobilizers has been highlighted. The functions of political parties, GONGOs, ersatz social movements, and government-dependent institutions have been noted in pro-government mobilization.

Finally, framing literature has been offered to investigate the interpretation process of incumbents and their construction of the contentious narratives. Referring to the four techniques of frame alignment, governments' active involvement in building frames, which is fundamental for pro-government contention, has been inquired about. It has been shown that incumbents exploit various values such as patriotic or ethnic sentiments, nationalist narratives, or civic responsibilities.

CHAPTER 3: DATA, METHODOLOGY, AND DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

The present research is based on protest event analysis (PEA), a social movement method that provides rich empirical data to explain the dynamics of collective action. In this dissertation, I use PEA to elaborate on pro-government contention in Turkey between January 1, 2013, and December 31, 2016.

This chapter has seven sections. First, I will explain what PEA is, why it was preferred, and discuss its weaknesses and strengths. This will be followed by examining the advantages and disadvantages of newspapers as primary sources. Then, I will explain the rationale for preferring the newspapers used in this research. Fourth, I will share the definitions of protest in general and pro-government contention in particular. Fifth, variables, codebook, and coding procedures will be introduced. Sixth, I will briefly explain the use of frame analysis in this dissertation. Finally, I present a general portrait of pro-government contention, benefiting from the data I collected.

3.1 What is Protest Event Analysis and Why is it Useful?

Protest event analysis is a way of producing systematic quantitative data to analyze various forms of collective action. The purpose is fundamentally building up an "event catalog" (Tilly, 2002: 249), which "is a set of descriptions of multiple social interactions collected from a delimited set of sources according to relatively uniform procedures". It pursues to enumerate information regarding protest events, grouping different variables such as "number of participants, duration of unrest, the magnitude of violence and other characteristics" (Olzak, 1989a: 120). Instead of individual cases of protest events, PEA aims to form a statistical procedure that helps researchers quantify protest information for a wide period and a wide area of subjects. Using PEA as their methods, social movement scholars have researched a diverse set of topics such as police presence and action in protest events (Earl, Soule & McCarthy, 2003), ethnic and racial conflicts (Olzak, 1989b), farmers' collective protests (Jenkins & Perrow, 1977), various social protests in Italy (Tarrow, 1989), or civil rights movement in the United States (McAdam, 1985).

There are remarkable advantages of PEA in measuring diverse facets of contentious politics. Most importantly, it presents a systematic way of dealing with "unstructured matter", assisting researchers in turning it into "data". With the help of this methodological technique, researchers can collect data regarding protest events regularly and consistently. It allows scholars to develop orderly and consistent information regarding, for example, the themes and geographies of protests, the relationship between authorities and challengers, or escalation and de-escalation of values, ideologies, and mobilization (Koopmans & Rucht, 2002: 232).

Furthermore, PEA provides necessary methodological tools to handle big volumes of information (Hutter, 2014: 337). It is a functional method to generate large datasets that include thousands of data, enabling scholars to investigate the studied phenomenon meticulously. PEA encourages researchers also to cope with a wide range of questions due to the magnitude of the collected information. This allows PEA to be adaptable "to a wide variety of circumstances, depending on the researcher's purposes" (Beissinger, 2002: 460). Finally, researchers can present a solid analysis of speculated issues through event analysis in their studies. Because PEA requires a vast amount of energy to collect the data, the questions that researchers ask would be generally unasked before, and the answers given to them would stay within the borders of speculation in general. On this basis, "PEA provides a solid ground in an area that is still often marked by more or less informed speculation" (Koopmans & Rucht, 2002: 252).

Despite PEA's popularity and wide usage to study distinct forms of collective action in social movement research, pro-government contention has generally remained out of the boundaries of scholarly interest in using PEA, except for a few (Hellmeier, 2020; Hellmeier & Weidmann, 2020). However, there are several advantages of using event analysis to investigate pro-government contention dynamics as well. Most fundamentally, PEA allows researchers to collect quantitative data in order to picture the details of pro-government contention trends and features. Because researchers acquire a large dataset of protest events by using this method, they can show the effects of pro-government contention in a very detailed way and therefore can analyze protest politics thoroughly where the government is the leading actor. In addition, PEA helps highlight the relationship between governments and contentious politics both in terms of repression and mobilization in depth. On the one hand, it is

capable of showing repressive capacities of states and the role of pro-government contention as a strategic option in repression mechanisms. On the other hand, it discloses the mobilization dynamics of government supporters, which is quite different from typical social movement mobilization processes.

In this context, PEA manages to supply valuable methodological tools to explain the circumstances in which pro-government contention has appeared as a major contentious phenomenon in Turkey. It provides productive material to resolve the puzzle of why such a mobilization strategy was opted by the Turkish government specifically between 2013 and 2016. It helps present a picture of pro-government contention, showing how it has been shaped in line with authoritarian government practices, displaying the relationship between threats against the government and pro-government contention, and providing hints concerning resource opportunities. Moreover, this dissertation is the first study through which a dataset has been created to gauge pro-government contention. For this reason, the data presented in this dissertation can explain pro-government contention with all its aspects compared to datasets that include pro-government rallies only as a sub-segment.

3.2 Why Newspapers? Advantages and Limitations

PEA can use multiple sources to generate data such as police reports, archives, newspapers, and historical records (Olzak 1989a: 120). While researchers conduct their studies, they can benefit from all sources as long as they follow a systematic coding procedure. However, newspapers occupy a central position in protest event research (Hutter, 2014: 348) for various reasons. First, newspapers are relatively credible sources because they have to compete with each other permanently in order to be preferred by audiences. This creates a concern for accuracy when covering events because they have to maintain their reliability to a certain extent. Second, they present daily information regarding events, helping researchers obtain data regularly for systematic categorization, whereas archives or historical documents offer discontinuous and non-systematic information in general. Third, unlike difficult access, for example, to police reports, newspapers are easily accessible sources (Koopmans, 1999: 92-93). They are available information sources everyone can have access easily and do not mostly require any official permission.

Despite the advantages of newspapers and the fact that there is hardly any other viable option for long records of processes (Franzosi, 1987: 14), they also have their limitations. Fundamentally, scholars point out two types of biases concerning protest event analysis: selection bias and description bias.[4] Selection bias refers to the fact that newspapers act selectively in terms of reporting an event. Critics claim that newspapers are unable to provide representative data as they are structured through particular economic and ethical concerns (Earl, Martin, McCarthy & Soule, 2004: 68-69). For example, McCarthy, McPhail & Smith (1996: 480) argue that newsworthiness is a vital component of whether an event will be reported or not. Because reporters compete with each other to get their reports covered, they pursue notorious, consequential, extraordinary, and culturally resonant events.

Furthermore, some scholars suggest that the logistics and structural limitations can also affect news agencies in selecting events to be reported. Danzger (1975), for instance, problematizes the impact of wire services on information gathering about an event. Compared to events in big cities, cases in small cities can be unreachable and unavailable because of the insufficiency of organizational structure. Another source of selection bias, scholars argue, is the political economy of news production, such as the role of media bosses, which influences the way in which reports are produced and messages are conveyed to readers (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes & Sasson, 1992). Media gatekeepers have the power to manufacture the same event with different narratives by highlighting various dimensions that gives them the capability of constructing multiple realities for distinct readers. Finally, critics emphasize that if an event is concerned with social problems, it is more likely to get printed, which is called "media issue attention cycle" (McCarthy et al., 1996: 481). This is also a source of selection bias because such an attention cycle can exclude other events, and reporters can tend to integrate other issues into socially attractive and striking cases.

The second problem about using newspapers that scholars have often underlined is description bias. Description bias refers to the concern about the accuracy of reported issues and portrayal of issues (Earl et al., 2004: 72). Newspapers can distort events by neglecting some aspects of the story, manipulating them and distributing

[4] The literature also discusses "researcher bias" (Franzosi 1987), which refers to the errors made by coders during data coding, but this form of bias is not specific to PEA research.

misinformation, or framing and constructing meaning in the desired way. Depending on the political orientation of the newspaper and the economic relations of media bosses, protesters can be depicted in diametrically opposite ways. For instance, while a left-oriented newspaper is more likely to portray labor movements positively, it is less likely for a right-oriented newspaper to welcome them affirmatively. In addition, due to the dominant influence of gatekeepers in media, news coverage can sometimes favor authorities, sometimes challengers (Smith, McCarthy, McPhail & Augustyn, 2001: 1415-1416). Apart from political and economic orientations, the scarcity of witnesses to an event may misrepresent the actual story. Incidents can be verified through witnesses from whom reporters obtain information and produce reports. If there is no observer in the incident or the number is low, then "reporters rely on posterior information" (Weidmann, 2014: 6).

Undeniably, newspaper data do not represent what actually happened in an event. Newspapers cannot cover all protests happening worldwide, and they do not select protest events randomly to report (Maney & Oliver, 2001: 133). However, even if they generate biased information about specific issues because of the subjective involvement of reporters, editors, media bosses, and objective structural limitations, newspapers display bias systematically which assists scholars to trace trends and changes properly. As Koopmans (1999: 93) put it, bias "is not always a real problem as long as we are not interested in any 'absolute' truth and as long as the bias is systematic". Considering this, what is essential for researchers using protest event analysis in obtaining data from newspapers is not presenting the reality as it is but rather coding information such that the bias is systematically constructed. Furthermore, Earl et al. (2004: 77) argue that "newspaper data does not deviate markedly from accepted standards of quality". In fact, all sociological data are permeated through bias which is why it is not a serious problem if bias is present. Bias is almost a universal phenomenon, Berk (1983: 392) argues, and "(t)he question is whether the bias is small enough to be safely ignored."

3.3 Generating a Dataset on Protests and Pro-Government Contention in a Politically Polarized and Authoritarian Context

As this dissertation deals with contemporary protest politics, archives and historical documents were not feasible options. Only two kinds of sources could provide viable

research concerning pro-government contentious episodes: police records and newspapers. To obtain more intense data, I first demanded police reports on protest events from the General Directorate of Security in 2017. The demand was rejected, which led me to conduct the research using newspaper data. Many studies on Turkish protest politics utilized newspapers and media sources as their data sources (Atak & Bayram, 2017; Atak & della Porta, 2016; Demirel-Pegg, 2020; Gümrükçü, 2014; Uysal, 2017).

As indicated above, protest event analysts are doomed to produce biases when they study with newspapers. Assuming that my research on pro-government contention will also be exposed to selection and description biases, my purpose has been to reduce the levels of biases as much as possible by selecting appropriate newspapers and following a systematic coding procedure. In doing so, the existing biases will be constructed systematically, relatively small, and can be ignored.

The fundamental issue about the bias problem in this dissertation was the necessity of collecting data about all kinds of protests. To measure the importance and density of pro-government contention in protest politics, it was essential to gather information regarding all forms of contentious action. In this way, I could demonstrate the weight of pro-government contention in the total episodes of protests, their dominance or non-dominance on the street, and their repressive capabilities, if any. Collecting data about all forms of protest, including both pro-government and anti-government protests, created a newspaper selection problem because of the different coverage scopes of newspapers and the polarized political environment in the country.

For this reason, using only one newspaper could be highly problematic. Since Turkey has recently shifted to a competitive authoritarian regime (Esen & Gumuscu, 2016), printed media is not independent as it is in a democratic country, leading to a polarized media logic (Çarkoğlu, Baruh & Yıldırım, 2014; Panayırcı, İşeri & Şekercioğlu, 2016). Even though Çarkoğlu et al. (2014) suggest a threefold categorization of newspaper media as “conservative,” “mainstream,” and “opposition” newspapers based on their research on 2011 elections in Turkey, mainstream media has been gradually eliminated recently and become mostly “pro-government and partisan” (Ataman & Çoban, 2018: 1025). To a great extent, hence,

Turkish newspapers belong to pro-government circles, and a few of them are anti-government-oriented. In this context, using only one newspaper was considerably controversial and quite vulnerable to selection and description biases. I assumed that pro-government contention will be underrepresented when relying only on an anti-government newspaper. Similarly, I supposed that other forms of protests will be underrepresented if the research was conducted by a pro-government newspaper.

To solve this problem, I decided to use two newspapers, one pro-government and one anti-government. Scholars have already recognized the advantages of conducting research using more than one newspaper, allowing researchers "to capture more events and to assess differences in reporting on the same events that are covered by both newspapers" (Earl et al., 2004: 74). Therefore, I selected *Cumhuriyet* as the anti-government newspaper and *Yeni Şafak* as the pro-government one. *Cumhuriyet* is one of the oldest newspapers in Turkey, printed daily since its foundation. It adopts a pro-opposition attitude against the AKP from a social-democratic perspective and is one of the few printed newspapers that remains independent. Also, the scholarship shows that *Cumhuriyet* is one of the richest newspapers in covering protest events compared to other newspapers in Turkey. Before initiating the coding process, I also scanned one month in two other popular newspapers, *Milliyet* and *Hürriyet*, and noted considerable differences in protest coverage, lending support to choosing *Cumhuriyet.*

Yeni Şafak, on the other hand, is a daily printed, conservative-Islamist-oriented newspaper founded in 1994. It is owned by a group closely tied to the AKP. The newspaper has a pro-government stance, providing a reasonable justification to prefer *Yeni Şafak* in enriching the material about pro-government contention. Before starting to code, I also scanned two major newspapers from the pro-government media, Sabah and Star. I found that *Yeni Şafak* was the most generous one in reporting pro-government contention. Moreover, I believe this couple is also the best choice for reducing description bias to a certain degree instead of, for instance, the *Sözcü-Yeni-Akit* pair, which are much more ideologically oriented and provocative newspapers.

The expectations regarding selection bias if I had used one newspaper were proved right. Figure 2 demonstrates the differences between the two newspapers with

respect to pro-government contention and other forms of protest episodes. While *Yeni Şafak* covered more than 65% of total pro-government contention episodes by itself, *Cumhuriyet* reported less than 25% of them. The difference is more dramatic in including protest events other than pro-government contention. *Cumhuriyet* covered almost 90% of non-pro-government protests, whereas *Yeni Şafak* reported only 8% of these contentious actions by itself. The figures also display that newspapers did not mostly overlap with each other in selecting what to report. Regarding the total number of protest episodes, only 5% of the episodes were reported both by *Cumhuriyet* and *Yeni Şafak*. The rest of them were covered through only one of them. Collecting data from two ideologically opposite newspapers, I tried to hold selection bias to a reasonable level. Gathering data from two newspapers allowed me not to miss the protest events on both sides to a certain degree and to show protest trends more appropriately.

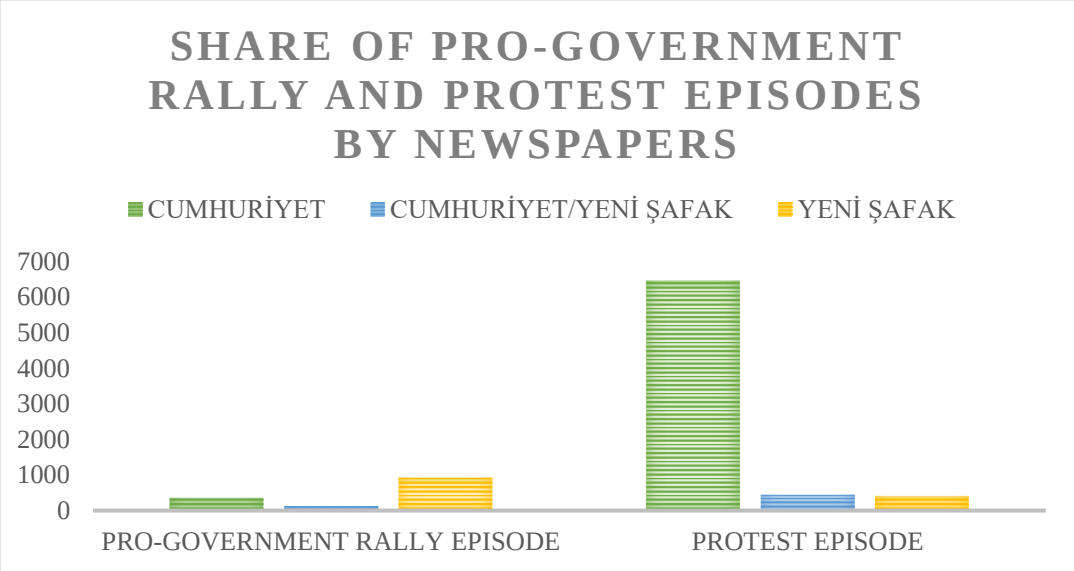

Figure 2. The newspapers' share of the pro-government contention and protest episodes in Turkey between January 1, 2013−December 31, 2016.

Coding through two newspapers reduced description bias to a limited extent because only a small number of cases were covered by both newspapers, as shown above. Even when covering the same episodes, both tended to understated protests and pro-government contention opposing their ideological orientations. That is, they mostly preferred narrating events in line with their pro-government or pro-opposition attitude. In this context, I observed that while anti-government protests were depicted in detail in *Cumhuriyet*, *Yeni Şafak* reported those events by omitting factors such as

police intervention. I noticed this variation sharply in the coverage of the Gezi protests and anti-coup rallies. For instance, *Cumhuriyet* reported the Gezi protests thoroughly and described them by explicitly emphasizing the fervor in the squares but understated anti-coup rallies by not stating the magnitude of gatherings. Similarly, *Yeni Şafak* usually depicted Gezi protesters as vandals using violent means while portraying participants in anti-coup rallies as representatives of national will. This variation in descriptions indicates that both newspapers introduce bias to their coverage. However, cross-referencing the coverage and coding helped to minimize this specific bias to some extent. The bias was overcome as much as possible by coding episodes separately if the episode was described differently in two newspapers.

Using two newspapers in this study provided comprehensive coverage, yet it can be improved in different ways. For instance, a third newspaper reporting more from the southeastern region would present broader information concerning Kurdish mobilization and repression carried out against Kurdish groups. However, I suggest that generating the dataset with one pro-government and one pro-opposition newspaper serves the purposes of this research, which explores contentious dynamics on the street in a populist authoritarian context where the government is a key actor. Also, considering that the coding process took almost two years, including additional sources would be quite costly in terms of time. Another option to enrich the dataset can be automated data collection for other newspapers, which is a limitation of this research because of the absence of digitally scrapable versions of the newspapers in question. Nevertheless, *Cumhuriyet* and *Yeni Şafak* were capable of presenting diverse data, proven by the number of coded material and the geographical distribution of coded events (*see* Appendix B).

The immense variation between newspapers, particularly regarding selection of events, proves that studying by multiple newspapers is essential for scrutinizing pro-government contention. In contrast to research that found major obstacles in terms of bias in studies using multiple sources (Davenport & Litras, 2003; Oliver & Maney, 2000), I found that benefiting from multiple sources create a major positive effect in reducing bias in general (Nam, 2006: 286) and in measuring the context and influence of pro-government contention in particular. Moreover, this positive effect stems partly from the fact that ideologically opposite newspapers are functional in

reducing selection and description biases, providing rich data for both pro-government contention and other forms of protests. This helps researchers understand contentious mechanisms on the street more correctly.

Since pro-government contention is an authoritarian and hybrid regime phenomenon, as discussed in Chapter 2, future researchers will likely face the mainstream media problem. This may not be a problem for comparative datasets that use international newspapers for pro-government contention (Weidmann & Rød, 2019). Still, it can likely be a major problem for those who aim to conduct case studies in politically unstable contexts through national newspapers to collect rich data. Like Beissinger (2002: 476), who also draws attention to the necessity of using multiple sources, I argue that using multiple newspapers is necessary to understand pro-government contention in a country where society is polarized, and the state dominantly controls media tools. Therefore, I suggest overcoming this problem by coding more than one newspaper, which is no doubt more costly in terms of energy and time.

3.4 Definitions of Protest, Repression, and Pro-Government Contention

Because I aimed to form a comprehensive dataset, which covered protests, state repression, and pro-government contentious actions, I adopted broad definitions. I used Goodwin and Jasper's (2015: 3) definition of protest, which is "the act of challenging, resisting, or making demands upon authorities, powerholders, and/or cultural beliefs and practices by some individual or group." To attribute a collective character to protest, events organized by one person are not coded in this dataset. Therefore, all forms of non-violent and violent protests with at least two participants are included, such as demonstrations, marches, strikes, boycotts, sit-ins, gatherings, forums, petitions, assaults, bombing, or clashes.[5] As the definition of repression, I adopted Boykoff's (2007: 282-283), which is depicted "as a process whereby groups or individuals attempt to diminish dissident action, collective organization, and the mobilization of dissenting opinion by inhibiting collective action through either raising the costs or minimizing the benefits of such action." Hence, I coded all

[5] Protests organized abroad were excluded, even if they were related to Turkish politics. To delimit the scope of the study, indoor events were not included. The armed conflicts between the PKK and the state were not coded, because they have their own unique elements. Actions such as bombing or firing buildings are exceptions of the requirement of including at least two participants. I assumed that such actions are a result of a group organization, therefore they were coded in all instances irrespective of the number of participants.

violent and non-violent repressive measures against protests such as bans, arrests, curfews, clashes with protesters, or beating.

The most crucial challenge was to decide which events should be counted as pro-government. For example, some researchers have used the criteria of declaring support for the government to accept an event as a pro-government rally (Hellmeier & Weidmann, 2020). However, because the dataset is of a specific country and therefore requires more context-driven research, I did not solely include contentious actions where the government was officially involved or where participants declared that they were pro-government. I also considered other contextual variables. Hence, while counting an event as pro-government, I made a threefold categorization considering the context: (1) if the government organized a contentious action, such as Respect for National Will Meetings (*Milli İradeye Saygı Mitingleri*) in the summer of 2013 or the democracy watches following the coup attempt in 2016;[6] (2) if participants explicitly declared their support for the government or if they were pro-government organizations, such as gatherings to support the government against corruption allegations in December 2013−January 2014; and (3) if the contentious action was organized by groups whose relations with the government are not specified, but are acting in line with the government's frame, such as the rallies against the Kurdish political party HDP (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*) after June 2015 elections. Events thusly considered to be pro-government were coded in their respective categories. This allows researchers to consider specific categories of pro-government contention and dismiss others in line with their own definitions and purposes in prospective studies.

3.5 Variables, Codebook, and Coding Procedure

The fundamental purpose of forming this dataset is to provide comprehensive data regarding January 1, 2013-December 31, 2016, which includes an intricate series of protests, repressive measures, and pro-government contention such as the Gezi protests, increasing repression in its aftermath, and the anti-coup rallies. Therefore, I did not use a sampling process for the events to avoid missing any critical event that might be overlooked if sampling was used. I downloaded all issues of two

[6] Party meetings organized before elections were excluded because of their regularity for all political parties.

newspapers, *Cumhuriyet* and *Yeni Şafak*, between January 1, 2013 and December 31, 2016 from the Turkish Grand National Assembly's library. I coded every event that fits the definitions I presented above, resulting in high numbers of coded material. I coded all material by myself.

Although I systematically downloaded all issues of the two newspapers, some issues were missing. Figure 3 demonstrates the number of missing issues year by year for both newspapers:

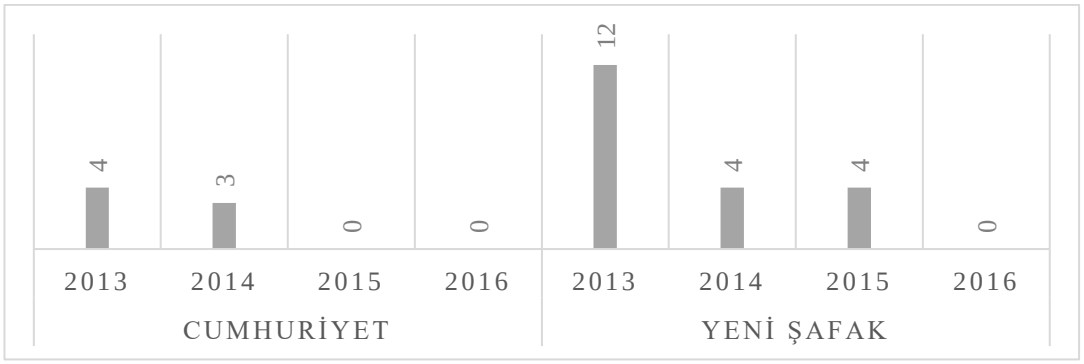

Figure 3. The number of missing issues in both newspapers by year

PEA is undoubtedly a "resource-intensive" research technique (Hutter, 2014: 341). I coded data by scanning each page of both newspapers in order not to miss any protest event. In total, 9,083 episodes and 12,910 events of protests, repressive actions, and pro-government contention were coded (*see* Figure 4). Episode number refers to the sum of all events in a protest, repressive action, or pro-government contention. Event number refers to each action within an episode (Tarrow, 2008: 229). For instance, events such as a demonstration, police intervention, and clashes between protesters and police may all be part of an episode.

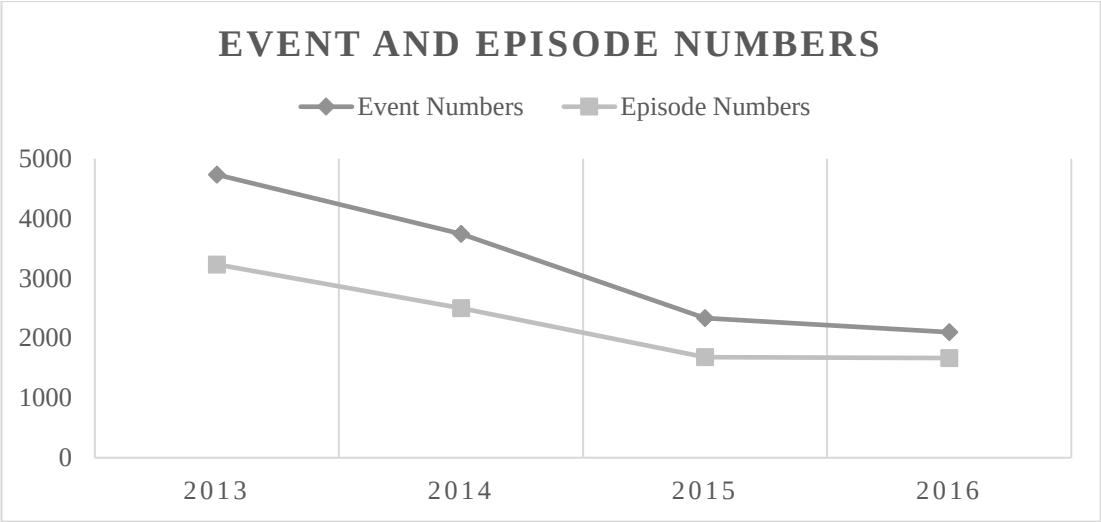

Figure 4. Total number of all events and episodes by year, January 1 2013−December 31 2016, Turkey.

While coding the data, I used and modified Demirel-Pegg's (2020) codebook,[7] an adaptation of Krain's (2000) scale of protest actions, repression, and accommodation to the Gezi protests. Since these codes were not designed for pro-government contention, I added and omitted codes in line with the context. The codebook has four sections: (1) actors and targets, (2) event list for repression, (3) event list for collective action, and (4) pro-government event list for collective action. Moreover, I adopted Demirel-Pegg's variables to generate the coding scheme and added new variables, determining twenty-six variables in total. The codebook, examples for each event code, and a detailed description of each variable of the coding file are shown in Appendix A. All coded data, the codebook, and the detailed coding instructions can be found in Harvard Dataverse.[8]

To provide systematicity, the following procedure was applied in coding each event. I scanned every page of the two newspapers respectively for each day to find events according to definitions. I manually searched words such as "protest", "demonstration", "marched", "chanted slogans", "gathered", "threw stones", "police intervention", "support rally" or anything that can be related to protests, protest repression, or pro-government contention. When I detected one, first, I entered the year of event, date, page number, name of newspaper, episode number, event's date

[7] To test the reliability of the research, I compared my and Demirel-Pegg's coding of the Gezi protests and obtained similar results.
[8] The DOI number of the dataset is as follows: https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/BKVX4G

and day of the week. Then, I read each line of the report and specified actors and targets of the event. I used codes in the codebook assigned to actors and targets, usually identified in a news report. If there was no information, I marked it as "not clear". If actors or targets were students, then I typed their ideologies, if there were any.[9] Next, I coded event type, which includes a wide range of codes in the codebook. Considering the form of action in an event report, I coded every action separately.[10] After that, I entered the numbers of deaths, injuries, and arrests, if any were noted. If the event was a pro-government contention, I numbered it according to the pro-government contention categories discussed above and also indicated whether it was about international issues. I numbered the presence for reports stating that police were present in an event, regardless of their intervention. Lastly, I entered the city where an event happened and provided a short description.

Each event was coded according to the short descriptions of the events in the codebook (*see* Appendix A).[11] For repressive actions, I formed general categorizations according to the methods used by security forces, such as restricting, seizing, or judicial actions, which are displayed in the codebook one by one. Each repressive action is coded under these categories. For instance, if police detained protesters in a demonstration, the code "onsite arrest/detentions" was used under the category of "seize", or if police beat protesters up, the code "beating up" was entered under the category of "use of force". Protests and pro-government contention were also divided into general categories under which events were listed according to the intensity of action. For example, if a group consisting of less than 200 protesters threw stones at security forces in a march, the code "violent small-scale demonstrations" was used under "medium intensity collective action".[12] Similarly, if

[9] Because many actors are already designated by their ideological orientations such as socialist organizations or nationalist groups in the codebook, I include "Ideology" variable only for students. Another reason for this is that many protests in universities are organized by groups with specific ideologies.

[10] To make the categorization of the data clearer, the codebook grouped codes according to action type. While repression codes start with 2, codes for collective action start with 5 and for pro-government rallies with 7. See Appendix A for the full list.

[11] One can object that some codes may be interchangeable, which might produce bias. While this is true, the bias is systematic throughout the dataset. Because I coded all the material and trained new coders personally for the subsequent years, events were coded in a consistent way.

[12] 200 participants were set as the limit for coding a demonstration's magnitude. If a report mentioned "hundreds of citizens" in a demonstration, which meant there were more than 200 participants, "large-scale" was coded, whereas "small-scale" was coded for less.

pro-government citizens distributed leaflets, I used the code "petitions or distribution of leaflets" under "low intensity pro-government collective action".[13]

The actors and targets were coded according to the codes designated for actors and targets in the codebook. Reporters' wording helped determine the code of an actor and target. One challenge was actors in the Gezi protests and pro-government contention because the actors' groups were occasionally not specified. In the Gezi protests, I coded protesters as "Gezi protesters" if specific information about protesters' group was not present. Similarly, I used the code "pro-government groups" regarding pro-government contention as an overarching code if actor's group was not stated in the report. If the government was involved in an event, the government was coded as well.

Violent and non-violent actions were separated in the codebook. Events were coded as violent if they included an action that gave physical harm to people or properties and as non-violent if they did not.[14] Regarding repressive actions, events such as teargassing, beating up, or clashing with protesters were coded as violent, whereas restricting assembly, blocking marches, or identifying protesters were coded as non-violent. For protests and pro-government contention, assaults or damaging property were coded as violent actions, while peaceful gatherings or sit-in protests were coded as non-violent. Actions such as bombings or burning houses were also included as violent protests.

The events' duration was coded according to the number of issues they appeared in. For instance, some strikes last for many days, but newspapers do not cover them daily. In such cases, I coded events only for the days they were covered, but also noted information about the actual duration of the strike in the description column. In addition, if an event's location was not specific, I entered "no information" to the location column. For example, if a report says that protests were organized nationwide, I noted this in the description column but coded it as one event and entered the location as "no information."

[13] The intensity of actions was categorized according to the Demirel-Pegg's codebook, which considers each event's adjusted weight according to Krain's scale of protest actions, repression, and accommodation. When I added a new event to the codebook, I considered similar actions to specify the intensity of collective action.
[14] If an action is violent, the code ends with 9.

Lastly, to prevent overinterpretation, only the information provided in the newspapers was considered, and personal knowledge about cases was not included. For example, even if I knew that thousands participated in a demonstration, I coded it as a small-scale demonstration if the newspapers provided no information about its magnitude. That said, knowledge about the context was used when necessary. For instance, while coding an event in the third group of pro-government contention, which entails interpretation to a certain extent, the context was analyzed and coding was done accordingly. About missing information, I coded all events that fit the definitions even if actors, targets, or location were not clearly stated. If the information provided in a report did not match a code in the codebook, the event was not coded.

3.6 Frame Analysis for Pro-Government Contention

PEA is the fundamental research method of this research. But in addition to PEA, I also collected data regarding the AKP officials' speeches, news reports, and columns to understand the framing of the AKP during the dataset period. Because one of my claims is that governments are frame-builders of pro-government contention, it is necessary to grasp how this framing operates and how it is related to contentious practices of government supporters.

From the social movement perspective, framing is basically the process in which individuals and groups make sense of their environment and reflect upon their grievances (Oliver & Johnston, 2000: 42). It is a type of behavior through which the world is interpreted, and actions are steered into a specific route. Assuming that governments can also be frame builders like an SMO and that there is a connection between governments and pro-government contention albeit in distinct ways, I argue that governments' frame-building processes should also be explored. Only in this way, I suggest, can one figure out how pro-government contention transpires as a form of action.

On this basis, I collected all speeches from the same newspapers, *Cumhuriyet* and *Yeni Şafak,* while coding the material. I considered two criteria in containing speeches. First, if an AKP official stated something related to protests, repression of protests, and pro-government contention, I stored it as a JPEG file. For instance, if a minister said that environmentalist protesters are components of a conspiracy against

the government, then I extracted the speech from the newspaper and stored it. The reason for storing such speeches is to understand how the AKP government approaches protests, repression, and pro-government contention and how the framing process operates accordingly.

Second, since my argument concerning the use of pro-government contention relies on the presence of threats against the government, I specifically extracted speeches when an event threatens the government seriously. Unlike the first one, I did this after completing the data coding process and decided to go back to sources. This decision is capable of understanding which events seriously threatened the AKP government and led to the adoption of pro-government contention as a political strategy.

In this dissertation, I explored the frames used by the government by focusing on the use of polarization and tried to explain how the government adopted various different frame alignment strategies under this overarching frame. While detecting a frame related to the threat cases analyzed in this thesis, I specifically concentrated on the officials' emphases on polarization in response to the threat in question. Adopting a qualitative approach, I attempted to dissect the speeches from the party and the President, which emerged as a discursive reaction to the political threats. The degrees of the polarization that was used in the speeches or of the frame alignment strategies were not measured. The speeches were used only for showing how the government utilizes polarization frame to create a conducive environment for the mobilization of pro-government audience.

3.7 Descriptive Analysis: A General Portrait of Pro-Government Contention in Turkey, 2013-2016

In this section, I present descriptive information concerning the dynamics of pro-government contention by using the collected data to show how the data are used. Figure 5 plots the time series of pro-government contention, highlighting the changes in the pro-government mobilization trends on the street from 2013 to the end of 2016. Most importantly, it shows that contentious pro-government action is a significant component of contentious politics in Turkey, proved by its persistent presence during the four-year term. Oscillating between low and high levels of

intensity at certain intervals during this period, the data indicate that contentious mobilization by the government sporadically reaches high numbers. While the phenomenon in question is almost not present during some specific periods, such as from January 2013 until May 2013 or from October 2015 until July 2016, it exists as a contentious form of gathering for a long period, occasionally reaching more than one hundred events in some months, which is a quite striking frequency level.

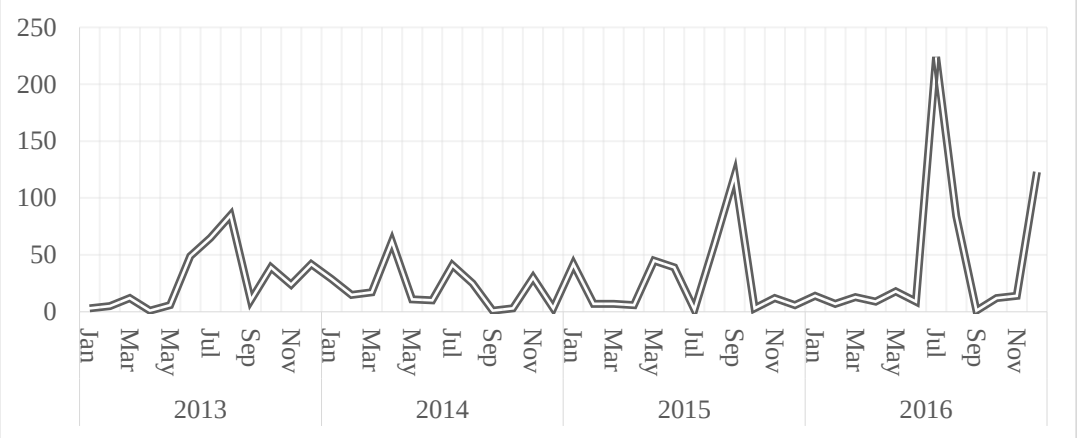

Figure 5. The monthly distribution of pro-government contentious events in Turkey from January 2013 to December 2016.

Despite the perseverance of pro-government contention as a contentious activity in this period, it should be noted that it is a sporadic phenomenon. Figure 5 displays many sharp triangles whose endpoints are zero events in many instances, implying that contentious mobilization of government supporters suddenly reaches high numbers and then instantly disappears on many occasions. It can be said that this proves that pro-government contention is an intermittent mobilization form in Turkey during this specific time period. The figure shows that mobilization of government supporters is a set of actions that swiftly comes to the forefront, reaching the top before leaving the contentious sphere. Instead of a long series of protest actions, one can observe a kind of reaction against a target for a short period. The mobilization of government supporters also does not generally tend to generate long series of protests lasting for months because it occurs as a response to an immediate threat against the government whose exigency loses its influence shortly after the first appearance of the threat.

For this reason, regarding such triangles in Figure 5, I suggest that pro-government contention can be understood as a rejoinder to threats against the Turkish

government, which are capable of producing sharp triangles in a short time. Within the frame set by the government that perceives threats, pro-government contention suddenly appears as a governmental reaction to a specific threat and then disappears to a significant extent. This confirms the argument discussed in Chapter 2, where several types of threats are suggested as likely drivers for the emergence of pro-government contention. Threats and the government's instant reactions may explain why the figure contains many sharp triangles instead of more splayed angles, which can be products of a more long-termed struggle to make a change within the status quo. By using contentious means, government supporters or agents acting within the AKP government's frame gather against the risk of a threatening situation targeting the government's political position and then recede from the street as the threat loses its destructive effect.

In addition to Figure 5, I also drew a second time-series graph that consists solely of rallies organized by the AKP government or pro-government organizations. The numbers in the figure do not feature, for instance, counter-demonstrators during the Gezi protests unless they declare their support for the government, nor does it include rallies in line with the international agenda of the incumbent regime unless they, for example, chant slogans in favor the AKP. In brief, the time series does not contain data concerning contention whose organizers are not specific, even if the contention is in parallel with the government's political frame.

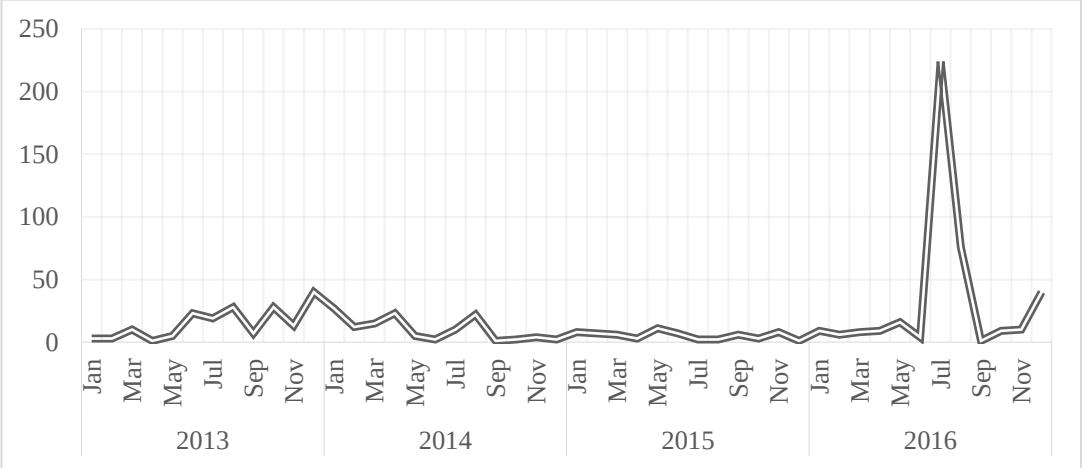

Figure 6. The monthly distribution of pro-government contentious events without groups having no official link with the government in Turkey from January 2013 to December 2016.

I extracted a separate graph from the data to indicate the difference between the two time series, showing how ignoring contextual variables results in missing critical developments in pro-government contention. This is also a critique of the literature on pro-government mobilization. While categorizing an event or group as pro-government, some scholars provide definitions in a pretty conservative way. For example, Carey et al. (2012: 250-251) define an event as pro-government if a direct link exists between the government and the action. They suggest that "sharing an enemy with the government or evidence that a group does not oppose the government or is simply tolerated by the government is insufficient for the group to be considered as pro-government" (251). Similarly, Hellmeier and Weidmann (2020: 15) suggest considering an event as pro-government if there is "an expressed political motivation to support the central, regional, or local government."

However, as discussed above, I argue that considering only those having ties with the government or the government itself is condemned to miss significant elements in the mobilization of the incumbent regime. For instance, if merely contentious actions that explicitly declare their support for the government are considered, then those attacking anti-government protesters during the Gezi protests should be excluded from the dataset, a fundamental problem in drawing the general portrait of pro-government contention. A similar approach would also miss a series of rallies against Egypt, for instance, after the then PM Erdoğan established an assertive foreign policy in the Middle East, setting a tight political narrative against the coup in Egypt specifically and coups against democracies in general. For this reason, I suggest looking closely at events and the political context, which can include highly interactive processes between the government and rally participants, who may not have explicit and official connections with the former. I argue that this approach would be capable of presenting a more comprehensive, more consistent, and more nuanced picture of contentious pro-government mobilization without overlooking some key elements. Hence, I use the data shown in Figure 5 instead of Figure 6 in the rest of the chapter.

Furthermore, the share of pro-government contention within all protests reveals more striking aspects of pro-government mobilization in Turkey. Figure 7 presents pro-government contention and other protests between January 2013 and December 2016, displaying the changes in event numbers throughout the four years. Most

importantly, the figure shows that pro-government contention sporadically dominates protest politics, especially from the mid-2015 to the end of 2016, during which "all other protests" decrease compared to 2013 and 2014 to a significant extent. One can observe huge frequency gaps between pro-government contention and other protests in 2013 and 2014. The considerable increase in "all other protests" numbers in June 2013 represents the Gezi protests, after which protests continue relatively at regular levels until 2015 although ups and downs are observed in this period. After 2015, however, pro-government contention numbers start to draw close to the number of other protests and even pass them in two different cases. Even though protest rates are higher than pro-government contention during some periods, such as between October 2015 and July 2016, they are quite low compared to the protest frequencies in 2013 and 2014.

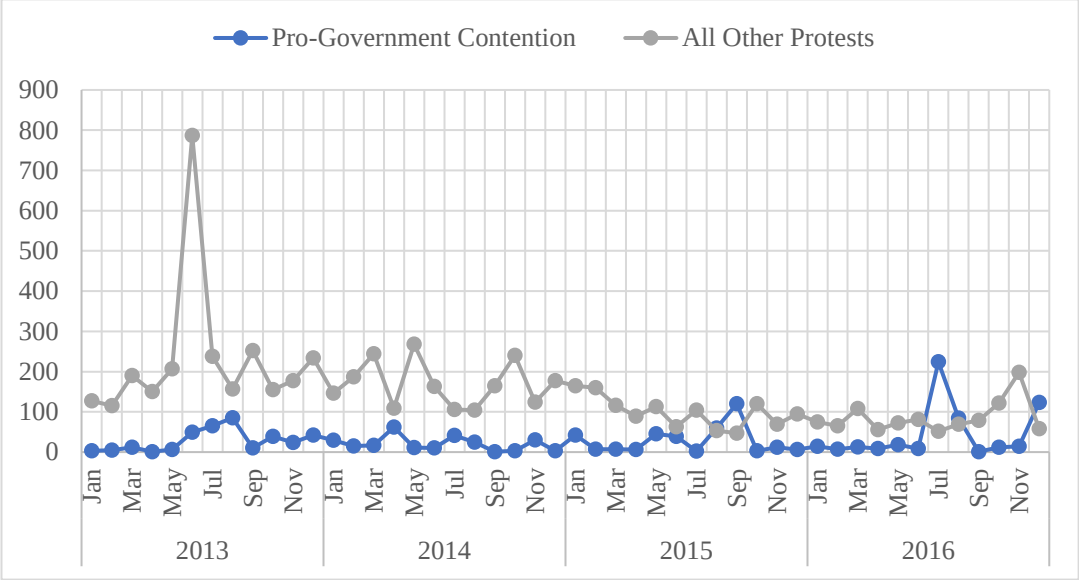

Figure 7. The monthly distribution of pro-government contentious events and all other protest events in Turkey from January 2013 to December 2016.

It should be noted that this is a dramatic change for a country where an anti-government upheaval prevailed in non-conventional politics in 2013. The significant decrease in using contentious means in the traditional sense and the increasing presence of pro-government contention on the street imply that protest politics is exposed to a definite transformation and engenders significant shifts in actors and targets. It can be claimed that the contentious sphere welcomes exceptional actors while crowding out the usual ones and, so to speak, turns upside down in these four years. Whereas the dominant actors are conventional ones in protest politics, such as

students, workers, environmentalists, feminists, anti-government citizens, union members, or ethnic groups during 2013 and 2014, it turns to the dominance of an unusual actor after 2015, that is the government. Similarly, while the protest target is primarily the government or the state during 2013 and 2014, the new targets stay out of the sphere of governmental or state affairs during 2015 and 2016.

This is also a dramatic switch regarding the meaning of protest in Turkey. While protesting has a sense of gathering, marching, and chanting slogans on the street against the government in the summer of 2013, contentious activism takes a new form in 2016, simply opposite the former's context. What is evident in Figure 7 is that protesting is no more an activity in the last two years that is peculiar to groups having no official channels to declare their demands. Instead, the context of protesting is exposed to a certain reversal, and it becomes an effective tool also for those who already have official ways of making political decisions. In other words, one witnesses a different and striking situation after 2015: a new context of protesting, which is utterly in conflict with what it already was.

While the government manages to form an alternative contentious identity, the actors that display this identity on the street vary in different contexts. According to the categorization I made above, three actors are taking a role in the organization of pro-government contentious actions: the AKP government; government supporters or pro-government organizations/GONGOs; and groups about which no official link to the government is present but acting in line with the government's agenda. Figure 8 displays the share of organizers in pro-government contention.

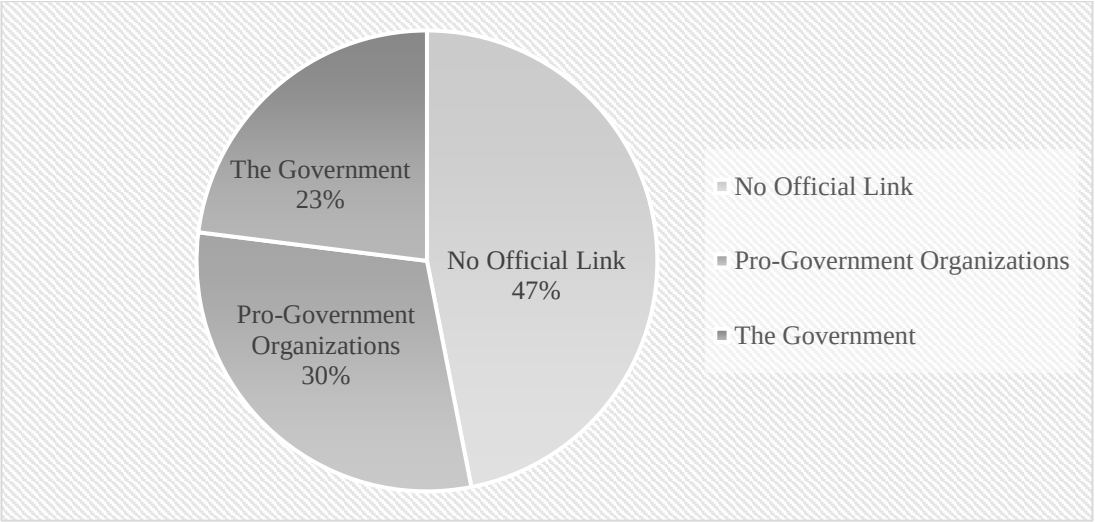

Figure 8. The distribution of organizers of pro-government contention in Turkey from January 2013 to December 2016.

Figure 8 shows that groups having no official link to the government have the most significant share with 47% of all pro-government contention events, followed by pro-government organizations with 30% and the AKP government with %23. First of all, to remind the reader, if newspapers do not provide information regarding the organizers of a protest and the protest event follows the official narrative of the government, I coded them under the category of "no official link". This explains why the percentage of the "no official link" category is relatively high compared to the other two because newspapers do not always provide complete information concerning the organizers of a protest event. In many cases, pro-government contentious actions are announced as "citizens marched to protest…" without any reference to an organization, while pro-government groups in a different city organize a similar contention.

Second, I found that if violent means are used in a pro-government contention, it is quite likely that the protest organizer is in the category of "no official link", followed by pro-government organizations and government supporters. Conversely, the government is not involved in fierce events compared to the other two. Figure 9 displays the violent cases in the contentious mobilization of government supporters according to actors. The difference implies that the AKP government does not want to see the street as an uncontrollable sphere, but as a space that should be managed. Similar to Weiss' (2003) argument that nationalist rallies may reach a fever pitch at a certain point and the government may lose the control despite its permission for such

a rally, using violent means can easily spin out of control and engender irrevocable consequences for the AKP government. Therefore, it is quite understandable that violent rallies and actions occur out of the governmental sphere, and actors adopting violent means are officially unrelated agents to the government most of the time.

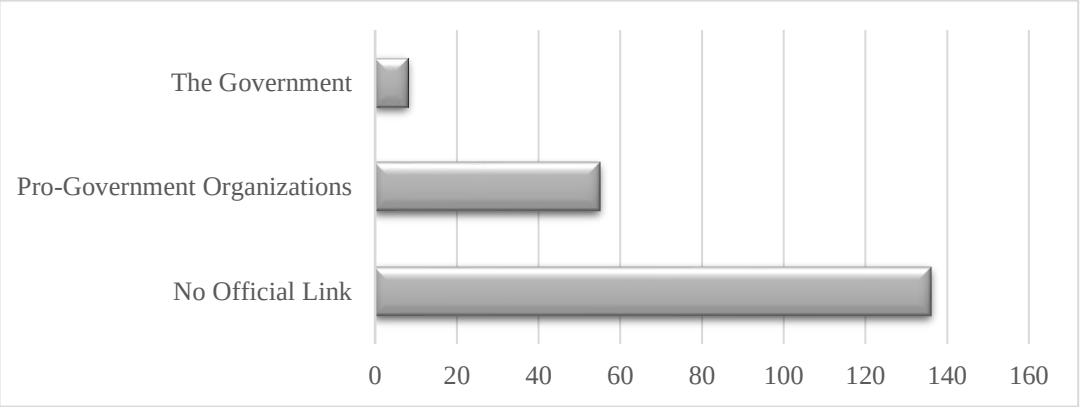

Figure 9. The number of violent cases in pro-government contention according to organizers in Turkey from January 2013 to December 2016.

A striking issue about using violent methods in pro-government contention is the repertoire of contenders. Figure 10 presents the violent means adopted in the contentious activism of pro-government citizens, displaying several ways of resorting to violence. This distribution is important to see that the violence at stake is not simply clashes in demonstrations with other groups or throwing materials such as stones and bottles at security forces. Rather, more than half of the violent actions are assaults, coded as actions that aim to attack a target without involving in a protest such as a demonstration or a march. In addition to assaults, one can also see that a significant portion of remaining violent events are burning, armed attack, damaging property, and lynch, which are seriously destructive deeds. In this context, violence used in pro-government contention has a paramilitary characteristic, often dependent on extreme violence (Carey et al., 2012).

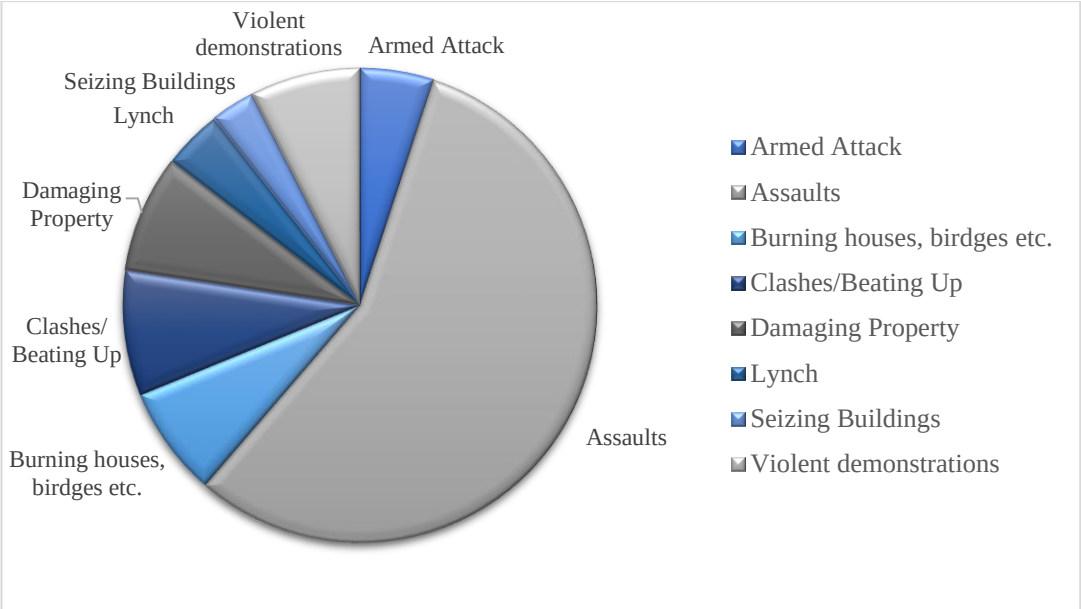

Figure 10. Types of violence in pro-government contention in Turkey from January 2013 to December 2016.

An important finding from the data is that police intervention is rare in pro-government contentious events. This is even more important if Figures 9 and 10 are kept in mind, proving that violence is an essential mechanism in pro-government contention in Turkey. Figure 11 displays the numbers of police intervention in contentious pro-government events according to organizers. It should be noted that the figure includes police interventions even in cases where police intervene in a pro-government contentious action. Still, the actual target of the police is vague. In some events, it is reported, for example, that pro-government citizens attack anti-government protesters. The police intervene in the protest, but it remains unclear whether the police also intervene in the actions of pro-government assaulters or not. To not underestimate the number of police intervention cases, I also include these events in which pro-government citizens and police are present regardless of the actual target of the security forces.

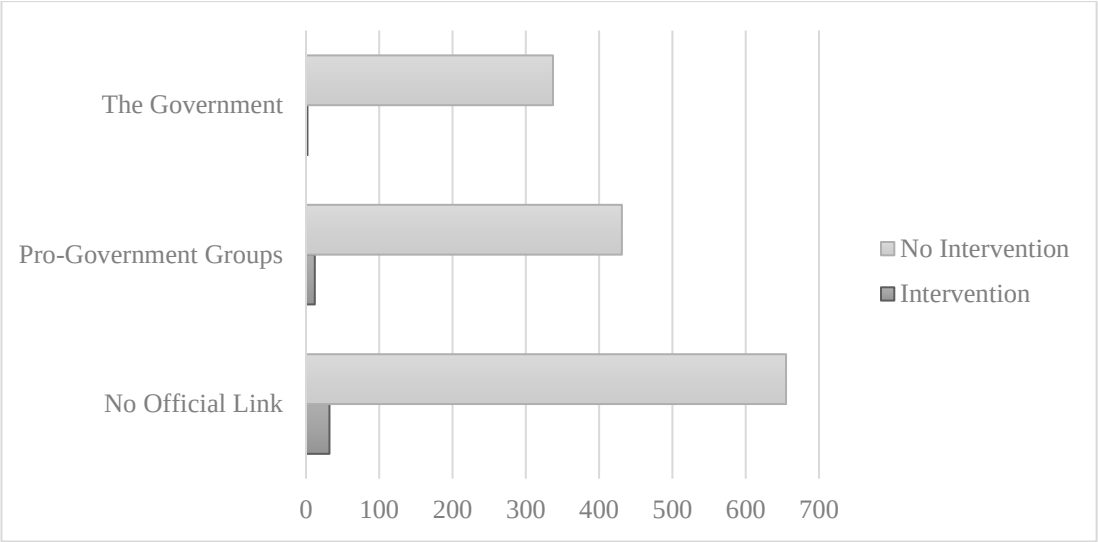

Figure 11. Police intervention in pro-government contention according to organizers in Turkey from January 2013 to December 2016.

The relative absence of police forces in pro-government contentious events also suggests that the autocratization of the AKP government shows itself directly on the street. The police-protest relationship is generally explored within the scope of repression studies in the scholarship (della Porta and Fillieule 2004; Earl and Soule 2010; Earl, Soule, and McCarthy 2003). This is likely because protest research on democratic regimes is dominant in social movement literature, but little attention is paid to the police-protester relationship in authoritarian regimes. In addition to the repressive capacity of security forces, police may also provide a secured space for some protesters in authoritarian regimes (Robertson, 2011: 78) or act reluctantly to intervene in specific protests (Ciorciari & Weiss, 2016: 566). Similarly, in the Turkish case, we observe not only that police forces carry out repressive strategies against peaceful protesters as in autocracies (Levitsky & Way, 2010: 54-55) but also that they allow the mobilization of certain actors by not intervening in their actions. In other words, autocratization brings two phenomena together. On the one hand, the government becomes capable of repressing its opponents through the exploitation of authoritarian resources and hampering the anti-government or anti-regime vibrancy on the street. On the other hand, it might choose strategically not to deploy security forces in the protests of specific groups who act in line with the government's political interests and thus increase their contentious visibility.

The actors of pro-government contention, their adoption of violent repertoires, and police intervention are critical dimensions to understanding pro-government contention dynamics correctly. That said, the target of pro-government contention is equally important as its actors. Figure 12 indicates the numbers of pro-government contention according to targets, which are not specific to a definite issue but show a considerable variety. As seen in the below graph, international issues draw the most attention from pro-government citizens among other topics, followed by anti-HDP/PKK and anti-coup mobilization. The high share of international issues can be explained by the fact that pro-government mobilization regarding global topics spread over time, as shown in Chapter 5 in detail, compared to more event-specific cases such anti-Gezi and anti-coup mobilization processes. While the Gezi protests lasted only one summer and anti-Gezi contention was limited basically to three months, international issues generated a mobilization opportunity almost every year in specific months. The relatively high shares of anti-HDP/PKK and anti-coup mobilization processes can be explained best by the immediacy and risk of these two threats, which are explored thoroughly in Chapter 5.

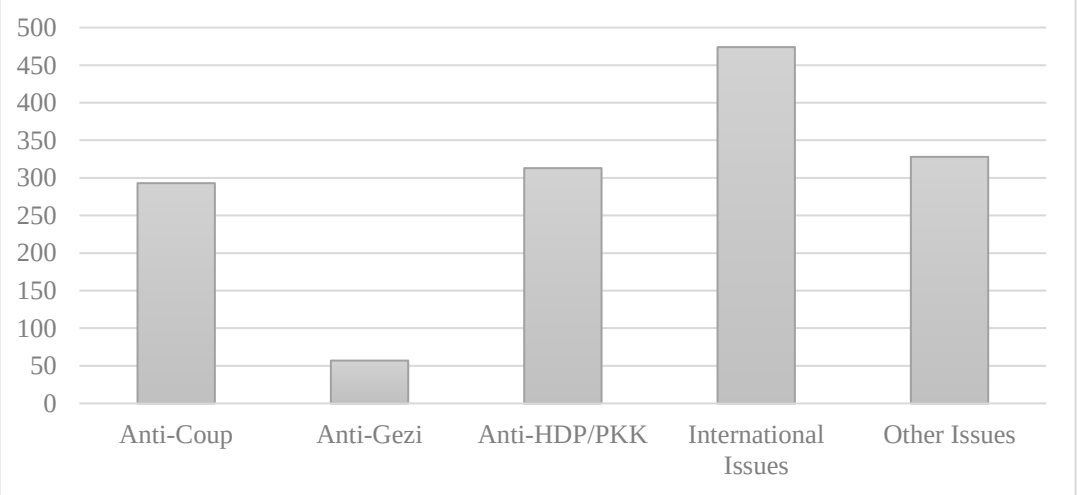

Figure 12. The distribution of pro-government contention cases according to targets from January 1, 2013, until December 31, 2016, in Turkey.

A striking result here is the number of anti-Gezi pro-government contention. Although I argue in Chapter 4 that the Gezi protests served as a critical event for the invention of pro-government contention as a mobilization strategy, Figure 12 shows that the number of pro-government contention against the Gezi protests is low in comparison to other cases. At first sight, this may look counter-intuitive considering

the claim made in Chapter 4. However, one should note that the Gezi protests are a case in which a confrontation between anti-government and pro-government citizens was a likely scene. Despite the Gezi protests' criticalness in the use of pro-government contention as a political strategy, the high use of pro-government contention against the protests might increase the likelihood of violence between the two camps and might lead to an uncontrollable situation for the government. It can be logical to think that the government asserted more control over its audience to reduce the cost and risk, decreasing the number of cases (*see* Weiss 2013). For this reason, in comparison to other cases, it seems plausible to see low numbers for pro-government contention against the Gezi protests.

This argument can be objected that the coup threat also created a condition that witnessed the direct confrontation of two groups, government supporters and coup plotters. While this is true, the coup threat was the most immediate threat against the AKP government, having the capacity to overthrow them only in a few hours. On the other hand, despite its shock effect, the government had an opportunity to control the Gezi protests through repressive measures and eliminate the protest risk for a long time. Also, one should note that the government became increasingly authoritarian within the three years between the two events, providing them with necessary resources and more organizational capacity to use pro-government contention more widely.

Finally, the dataset presents the geographical diversity of pro-government contention, displayed in Figure 13. The first important thing is that pro-government contention is a widespread phenomenon geographically. Expectedly, İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir, the three largest cities in Turkey, come first in terms of hosting pro-government contentious actions, but the actions are not limited to them. Rather, pro-government contention is organized everywhere despite differences in number. But more importantly, one can observe remarkable differences in protest and pro-government contention numbers in cities other than İstanbul, Ankara, and İzmir (*see* Appendix B for the geographical diversity of all protests and pro-government contention). For example, while cities populated mostly by Kurdish citizens such as Diyarbakır, Şırnak, or Hakkari witnessed high numbers of events, they are not attractive cities for pro-government contention, as shown in Figure 13. Protests are also everyday events in big cities such as Adana or Mersin, whereas they do not cover high numbers of

pro-government contentious actions. Instead of these cities, the graph shows that pro-government contentious actions are organized more in cities such as Konya, Kayseri, Erzurum, or Rize, where the AKP has always won landslide victories in the general and local elections since 2002. To emphasize the difference more explicitly, the protests and pro-government contentious actions organized in Diyarbakır are six times more than those organized in Konya. In contrast, pro-government contentious actions organized in Diyarbakır are 20% less than pro-government contention organized in Konya. In a similar vein, while Adana and Mersin witnessed three times more protest events than Kayseri, the number of pro-government contention in Kayseri is 50% more than in Adana or Mersin. This implies that pro-government contention is a phenomenon that requires organizational networks and resources, which are relatively less present in cities where the AKP does not have a dominant authority or is seriously challenged by other parties.

Figure 13. The geographical distribution of pro-government contention events from January 1, 2013 until December 31, 2016.

3.8 Summary

In this chapter, I explained the methodological ground of this dissertation that relies on protest event analysis. Just as being a productive tool to measure conventional social movement activities, PEA is a useful method also to gauge the components of pro-government mobilization processes owing to its ability to generate rich and

detailed datasets. Similar to all forms of methods used in sociological inquiries, however, PEA also has its own problems, which are commonly called selection and description biases. I underlined that it is more likely that these biases show themselves more problematically in an authoritarian setting where the media tools are generally under the control of incumbents. For this reason, I decided to use two newspapers representing ideologically opposite poles. In doing so, I attempted to reduce the level of biases and managed to succeed to a certain extent. I found that both newspapers, with varying degrees, report quite selectively and in line with their ideological perspectives. I also showed that there is a significant difference in terms of writing about pro-government rallies and other forms of protest. Expectedly, the former is reported in detail in *Yeni Şafak*, whereas the latter finds more space in *Cumhuriyet*.

Later, I explained how I collected data from two newspapers and shared the descriptive statistics regarding protest episodes and events. The number of events I coded is relatively high for four years compared to other research using PEA as their method. For this reason, I believe that the collected data are capable of presenting a comprehensive and elaborated picture of protest politics in Turkey and pro-government contention in particular. I also explained the difficulties I have encountered during the coding process and how I tried to solve them systematically. Finally, I provided an operational definition to code pro-government contention, which is not solely based on protests declaring that they are pro-government but also on the government's discourse, organizations involved in protest series, and police presence.

There are two major findings of this chapter. First, if the research is conducted in a hybrid-authoritarian country where the media system is seriously possessed by the government, it is not possible to reduce the levels of selection and description biases by using only one newspaper. Since mainstream media is eliminated and dependent on the government, media information is exposed to bias to a certain extent. To overcome this problem, I offer to use at least two newspapers from both sides, one pro-government and one anti-government, which is a practical way of decreasing the problem of event selection and description. Second, related to the first one, if the research is conducted to study pro-government contention as a case study, a pro-government newspaper can provide valuable materials for pro-government

contention. As I demonstrated, however, it will be insufficient to show the intensity of non-pro-government protests, resulting in an over-abundance of pro-government contention in the total number of protests. To balance over-reporting and under-reporting for both kinds of protests, namely pro-government and non-pro-government, researchers may opt to study with at least two newspapers representing opposite ideological orientations.

Lastly, I presented descriptive data from my dataset concerning pro-government contention, displaying distinct qualities of the mobilization of government supporters. I showed how the dataset can be used and what kind of data it contains. This section includes information regarding pro-government contention trends, organizers of such contention, geographical diversity, police intervention rates, and types of violence in the mobilization of government supporters, but is not limited to them.

CHAPTER 4: POLITICAL THREATS, STRATEGIES OF THE AKP, AND THE AUTHORITARIAN TURN

In Chapter 2, I presented a general theoretical explanation for pro-government contention. To answer the "why" questions of this dissertation, I argued that pro-government contention is a result of threats against the government in a context where the regime is autocratizing or already an authoritarian one. I further claimed, to answer "how" questions, that autocrats have the opportunity to build a frame for a likely contentious performance, therefore acting as frame builders for pro-government contention.

This chapter explores "why" questions by examining the first decade of the AKP's rule in Turkey. To observe the dynamics of pro-government contention, I analyze specific threatening events against the AKP government from 2002 to 2012, during which the regime was labeled as a democratic one, and I show that pro-government contention was not considered a strategic option in this process. Although threats are the main drivers for the emergence of pro-government contention as a mobilization tool, this chapter aims to show that threats against the government alone are insufficient for the organization and promotion of pro-government contention. I suggest that only after the regime enters into an authoritarian trajectory, which provides massive control over resources and institutions, do threats against the government become capable of engendering pro-government contention in the mobilization repertoire of the government.

Regarding this argument, I show that a conducive political surrounding emerged only during the autocratization process, starting with the Gezi protests in 2013, for the use of pro-government contention. I suggest that the Gezi upheaval was a political threat that occurred in an autocratizing regime and created an opportunity for the government to use pro-government contention as a mobilization instrument. To mobilize its supporters against the Gezi threat through the means provided by autocratization, I show that the AKP effectively used pro-government contention in the post-Gezi process.

In this context, I suggest that pro-government contention became a contentious tool for the AKP government to maintain its legitimacy through mobilization during and after the Gezi upheaval. It became a strategy in its repertoire as several political events following the Gezi protests threatened the regime severely until the coup attempt in 2016, after which pro-government contention reached its peak. Therefore, this chapter explains pro-government contention as an outflow of the political context, which assembled various elements after 2013. I show that it sprang from a protest threat amid mounting autocratization and through the combination of these two elements, I argue, was pro-government contention added to the strategic toolkit and used effectively by the AKP government.

To prove this argument, I explore the first decade of the AKP's rule, during which the AKP was not an authoritarian government but was still exposed to severe threats. I show that pro-government contention was not utilized as a strategic option in this period. There were notable examples of threats against the government, such as the Republic protests in 2007, the party closure case, or TEKEL workers' resistance against which pro-government contention might be a strategic weapon. However, this chapter shows pro-government contention was not a prevalent option for the AKP to deal with the threats it faced before 2013. I discuss below that the AKP was a party without abundant resources and robust control over state institutions deriving from autocratization. Therefore, coping mechanisms against threats did not include pro-government contention as an alternative.

Since I do not have systematic data regarding the pre-2013 period, I followed a useful way of testing this argument. Because I observed that pro-government contention was adopted as a response to political threats in the aftermath of the Gezi protests until 2017,[15] I scanned several threatening events against the government during the pre-2013 era in *Yeni Şafak.* I checked if there were organized or supported pro-government contentious activities concerning such threats.[16] I found that pro-

[15] This will be shown in Chapter 5 in detail.

[16] I scanned *Yeni Şafak* because it covers pro-government contentious actions more than *Cumhuriyet*. For the detailed methodological discussion concerning the coverage of newspapers, see Chapter 3. To observe the presence of pro-government contention before 2013, I decided to scan one-month periods after serious threats against the government to find pro-government contentious events, if there were any. This choice is based on the observation that pro-government contention culminates in the very after of anti-government threats between 2013 and 2016 as shown in Chapter 5. If the period intersects with pre-election campaign processes, then I excluded them. I scanned the Republic protests in 2007, the party closure case in 2008, the TEKEL protests in 2009 and 2010, the termination of the ceasefire

government contention was less likely in the form of government-organized rallies, and pro-government groups took to the street just in a few cases compared to the post-2013 period. In this period, the AKP neither organized big contentious rallies to counter a threat it confronted nor did it signal the street as a space that could be or should be used by the pro-government audience. Instead, the party chose to stay, or had to stay, within the boundaries of democratic tools and did not point out contentious mechanisms as an alternative. At most, the party used congresses and opening ceremonies to convey its political messages to its electorate and mobilized them accordingly. The discussion and findings concerning each threat are discussed below in detail.

In the light of these arguments and purposes, this chapter analyzes the political context of the AKP rule in the scope of political threats by dividing it into two periods. First, I explore the pre-Gezi era starting with the AKP's first electoral victory in 2002. Examining the developments from 2002 to the Gezi protests in 2013, I present a discussion regarding the threats the AKP faced and the strategies it adopted to overcome them. Because pro-government contention is an output of political threats against the incumbent rule (Hellmeier and Weidmann 2020), I present a framework of the pre-2013 period by specifically focusing on the threatening events against the AKP government. Then, I scrutinize the context of the post-Gezi period, during which pro-government contention became a visible and striking mobilization instrument of the AKP. In this section, I focus on the growing autocratization of the government that furnishes a conducive milieu enabling the emergence of contentious activism organized by the government and its supporters. While exploring two different periods by putting the Gezi protests to the center, I discuss why pro-government contention was not a preferred strategy before the Gezi upheaval and why contentious activism turned into a governmental technique after 2013.

between the PKK and the state in 2011, and the MİT crisis in 2012 respectively. Although this is limited data and does not present the whole picture about pro-government contention before 2013, it is still capable of portraying how the AKP reacts to threats within the context of contentious politics in this period.

4.1 The Pre-2013 AKP: The Democratic Period and Rising Threats

The AKP was founded in 2001 with the claim of representing "the moderate and modernist wing of the pro-Islamist movement", following a democratic route by respecting the Turkish secular state and its efforts to be a member of the European Union (Connelly, 2003: 87). It came to power in 2002 after a serious political crisis and a major financial downturn. Its single-party government established in 2002 was a milestone in Turkish political life. Even though the AKP's vote share started to diminish in the last five years, it came first in the ballot box in all the subsequent elections, including several general elections, local elections, and referenda, during its 20-year and still continuing rule, and obtained the opportunity to govern the country through popular vote.

In the last ten years, Turkey's regime has been considered an authoritarian one despite differences in labeling (Bilgiç, 2018; Esen & Gumuscu, 2016; Kaygusuz, 2018; Sözen, 2020; Tansel, 2018). However, in the first decade of its government, the AKP was a party that stood out with its democratic promises, and there was little scholarly objection to the democratic standpoint embraced by the government. Various democratic initiatives such as the consideration of cultural demands of minority groups were introduced under the AKP's leadership. Several steps were taken both domestically and internationally to protect the rights of minorities in accordance with the Europeanization process (Grigoriadis, 2008: 35-36). They were accompanied by the renewal of civil-military affairs, which targeted diminishing the military's role in politics, positive relations with the European Union, and a solid and cooperative foreign policy (Öniş, 2015: 23).

In line with this, many scholars positively approached the AKP's engagement with democracy in this period. The AKP's victory in the 2002 elections was interpreted as a possibility to build a democratic regime, leaving the state's authoritarian tendencies behind (İnsel, 2003: 293). Despite certain problems, the AKP's performance was seen as "hope-injecting" thanks to many signs of progress in diverse fields since the inception of its rule (Çınar, 2006: 470). The party was given the mission of initiating a liberalization process with a democratizing ideology against the dull and dysfunctional establishment (471). Although it was emphasized that the AKP had been at the crossroads after its first term, some analysts suggested that its democratic

commitment was more realistic than the opposition's fears that the regime would turn into an Islamist autocracy (Hale & Özbudun, 2010: 155). In a similar vein, some scholars argued that the AKP was a proper example of how a party including Islamic-oriented officials could embrace democracy and its necessities (Dagi, 2008: 30). There was a scholarly consensus regarding the AKP's democratic political orientation, its democratic enterprises, and the success of the policy-making within democratic boundaries in this period, and the AKP was expected to advance on this path (*see also* Aknur, 2012; Tepe, 2005; Yildirim, İnaç & Özler, 2007).

Data on the regime in Turkey also support this view. V-DEM's liberal democracy index shows that Turkey has a relatively liberal democratic regime, if not a perfect one, in the first term of the AKP's rule.[17] According to the data, civil liberties are constitutionally safeguarded to some extent; the rule of law, even if it is not a strong one, is respected; the judiciary is relatively independent; and some mechanisms provide checks and balances to restrict a likely abuse of executive power. Figure 1 shows that the AKP's first term is a sign of progress compared to the previous terms. While the score is around 0.4 from 1995 to 2002, it rises over 0.5 when the AKP came to power, proving that the AKP initiated some observable democratic advancements.

[17] V-DEM measures liberal democracy by considering the protection of minority and individual rights against the state and majoritarian understanding of democracy. According to the measurement, "(t)he liberal model takes a ~negative~ view of political power insofar as it judges the quality of democracy by the limits placed on government. This is achieved by constitutionally protected civil liberties, strong rule of law, an independent judiciary, and effective checks and balances that, together, limit the exercise of executive power. To make this a measure of liberal democracy, the index also takes the level of electoral democracy into account."
Scale: Interval, from low to high (0-1).

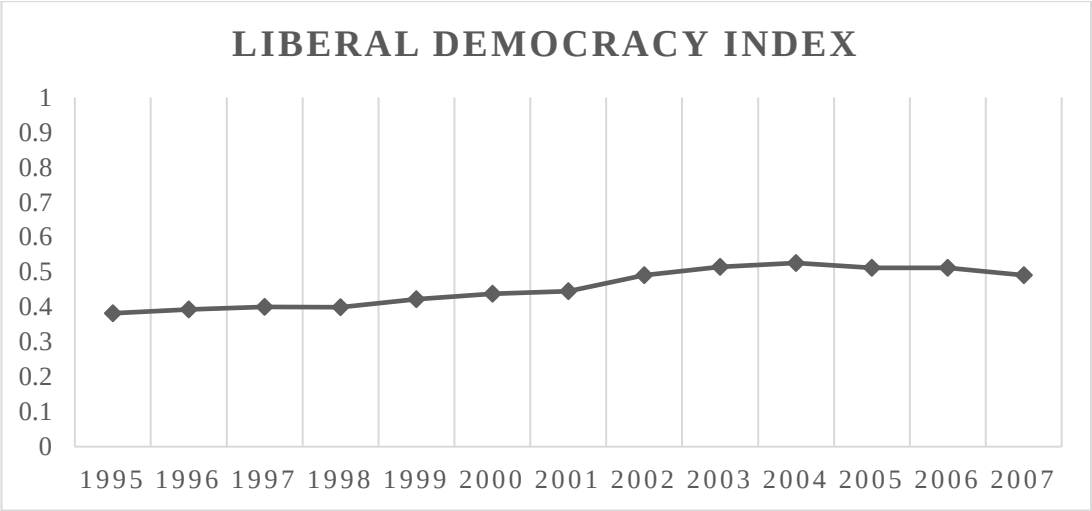

Figure 14. V-DEM's liberal democracy index for Turkey between 1995-2002. My elaboration of data from v.dem.net

Apart from the regime type, another important thing that should be noted is that there were critical actors that could restrict the AKP's power deriving from its single-party government. Designated generally as the "secularist establishment", these actors include the military, high-ranked bureaucrats and judiciary, the President, influential intellectuals, and the *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (CHP) as the leading representative of the official secularist ideology of the state (Çınar, 2006). The AKP, with its pro-Islamist roots, was a peripheral political power that stayed outside the sphere dominated by the secular elites (Grigoriadis, 2009: 1194). As one of the most influential actors in Turkish politics, the secularist military was given status over politics, acting as the guardian of the state and staging several coups against elected governments with the justification of re-establishing the regime's security. More importantly, the government formed by the predecessor of the AKP, *Refah Partisi* (RP), had been overthrown with a coup by the military only five years before the AKP came to power. The then-president Ahmet Necdet Sezer, the former President of the Constitutional Court, was a secularist bureaucrat who had the power of vetoing the amendments proposed by the AKP to a certain extent. There was an influential secularist civil society as the representation of the establishment's ideology in the public sphere (Özyürek, 2006), which was also supported by the mainstream media dominated by the secularist state ideology (Çınar, 2008). As the founding political party of the regime, the CHP was always a key actor that mirrored the state's secularist foundation in the official political sphere.

The power of the secularist actors in state institutions and their control over resources are beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it is essential to note that when it came to power, the AKP was far from having control over state institutions and public resources, which are significant elements, according to my claim, for the use of pro-government contention. Because I argue that political threats in an authoritarian regime are capable of engendering contentious mobilization of government supporters, it is crucial to know that the AKP was a party that stayed, or had to stay, within democratic boundaries in a regime dominated mainly by the secularist powerful elites in this period.

Below, I scrutinize political threats against the government and the AKP's strategies during this democratic period. In the first decade of its rule, the AKP faced several situations that endangered its authority. As of 2002, as a pro-Islamist party that acquired the opportunity to rule the country and establish a single-party government for the first time, the AKP was not alone in the power struggle. A robust secular establishment, which was dominant in several state institutions including the military and jurisdiction, could create existential threats to the AKP's political presence several times. The neoliberal policies carried out by the AKP engendered resilient resistance cases on the street. When the power struggles shifted within state institutions, where previous allies turned into new enemies, the AKP faced serious risks of losing power. I show how the AKP managed to overcome such threats and why pro-government contention was not a strategic option.

4.1.1 The First Term: The Presidential Vote and The Republic Protests

Although the AKP was pursuing a democratic agenda and regarded as a promising party with its democratic initiatives, it was perceived as a threat from the very beginning to the secularist opposition. They often claimed that the AKP had a secret Islamist agenda and hid behind a democratic mask to integrate religion into the public sphere (Gumuscu & Sert, 2010: 68). Various actors defending the secular establishment portrayed the AKP as a party with hidden purposes to autocratize the country under Islamism, which is why the party was often pictured as an existential threat to the regime. Furthermore, seculars feared that the AKP's moderate Islam might be pretty convincing for people whose culture had been greatly shaped by religious practices. As Somer (2007, 1277) argues, the secular opposition thought

that the recognition of a moderate Islamist party by large masses might slowly give rise to Islamisation of life, which was at odds with the principles of the secular establishment. In this respect, the unbridled aggrandizement of a pro-Islamist party and political support from large portions of society were disconcerting for seculars and created an ominous political environment that jeopardized the secular values and institutions.

The unsettled psychology of the opposition actors led to several events that increased the tension between the AKP and the secular segments. An acute crisis occurred in 2007 when the AKP was expected to elect the new President because of its majority in the parliament. While the AKP had such a parliamentary right, several powers in opposition, including the military, the secular main opposition party, CHP, and the Constitutional Court were completely unyielding against a president having Islamist roots. To impede the elections, three different strategies were adopted at three different levels: the party-level, military-level, and contentious-level. First, after failing to negotiate with the AKP about reaching a consensus for the presidential candidate, the opposition parties boycotted the elections in the parliament, went to the Constitutional Court, and asserted that the elections should be canceled, which was in turn accepted by the Court. It was a party-level attempt to put legal blocks on the likely presidency of an Islamist politician. Second, the Turkish military decided to take precautions regarding the so-called Islamist threat by implying a prospective military coup. It announced a memorandum on its website before the Court's decision, warning the AKP due to its Islamist policies and stating that it was ready to safeguard the values and principles of the Republic. (Çarkoğlu, 2009: 296-297).

Meanwhile, when it became quite likely that the next President would be a candidate from the AKP, a third strategy was adopted, which was a contentious one. Starting in mid-April 2007, mass rallies called "the Republic protests" were organized by secular civil society organizations to resist the presidential elections, calling people to draw attention to the growing Islamic threat. In fact, the Republic protests were the first series of demonstrations that achieved to attract a significant number of people to take to the street against the AKP since 2002. Millions of citizens, including retired senior military officials, participated in the rallies organized in several big cities. Many slogans were shouted, such as "protect the revolutions, tomorrow will be too late", "Turkey is secular and will remain secular", or

"government, resign", highlighting the perils created by the AKP government and the necessity of taking action to stop them. Participants often emphasized the threat of sharia stemming from the government of an Islamist party, declaring that they did not want religious sects in politics. They stated that all governments using religion as a political tool were condemned to be dissolved in the last instance (BBC, 20 May 2007; CNNTürk, 29 April 2007; Deutsche Welle, 14 April 2007). In a nutshell, the meetings were embraced, supported, and attended by secular segments, who saw a danger in the rising power of an Islamist party. It turned into a popular tour de force on the street protesting the AKP's past and prospective policies.

As a response to these three interfering actions taken by different opposition actors, the AKP took cautious steps. First, in responding to the opposition parties' boycott of the elections, the AKP increased its populist tone. Different opposition actors were located within the same box as counter powers against the people's democratic will. The army, the main opposition party, the CHP, civil society organizations that organized the Republic protests, the Constitutional Court, and the existing presidency were labeled as the elite, who were trying to block the people's attempt to rule the country. The people's sole representative was those who came first in the ballot box to disregard any challenge within a sphere other than the elections (Dinşahin, 2012).

Second, after the memorandum published by the military, the AKP confined itself to releasing a press statement. The party insistently emphasized that the army should have acted under the prime minister's jurisdiction and should not have intervened in political affairs for democracy to operate appropriately. It was underlined that Turkey was a state of law and the military's involvement in politics was utterly against the principles of democracy. The party also declared that the military's concerns about the secular foundation of the Republic were pointless because the AKP did not conflict with the fundamental values of the regime.[18]

Third, while developing a strategy against the rallies, the AKP elites declared that protest was a right and the demonstrations of seculars should be welcomed within the borders of democracy. The party was positive in accepting different political opinions, seeing this diversity as a sign of a healthy democracy. Ministers stated that the people gathered and used their right to protest without causing any incident and

[18] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lcv6SLdDn2k

underlined the point that the people listens to everyone and decides accordingly (Milliyet, 16 April 2007). But they also repeatedly claimed that the electoral majority was the only representation of the people's will; therefore, if a decision had to be taken, it should be done by the electorally prevailing parties. A majoritarian account of democracy was endorsed, deactivating any likely compromise and disregarding the oppositional presence in decision mechanisms. In other words, protest was not perceived as a way of political participation that could outclass the electoral majority. (Dinçşahin, 2012: 629-630)

Finally, in line with this populist rhetoric and mobilization strategy, the AKP called for early parliamentary elections against the Republic protests, the military's memorandum, and the opposition parties' boycott of the presidential elections. The snap elections were expected to provide proof to show that the people would lend massive support to the AKP and thus give popular legitimacy to the prospective presidential candidate of the party. The general elections in the summer of 2007 met these expectations and resulted in the crushing victory of the AKP once again. Although the AKP did not have sufficient seats to elect the President, one of the opposition parties, *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* (MHP), decided not to boycott the new presidential elections, run a candidate, and allowed Abdullah Gül, the former foreign minister of the AKP government, to be elected.

Among alternatives, pro-government contention was not included as a strategic option for the government. No doubt, some civil society organizations organized small protest events, marches, and gave press statements regarding the opposition threats to declare their support for the government (Yeni Şafak, 2007f, 10; Yeni Şafak, 2007b, 15; Yeni Şafak 2007g; Yeni Şafak, 2007e). In these protests, democracy and national will were insistently accentuated, and any coup attempt was cursed. It was emphasized that street protests should not determine the fate of the presidential elections, and the assembly was equated to the people's decision (Yeni Şafak, 2007a). In addition, a commemoration event for one of the previous presidents, Turgut Özal, was framed by the pro-government newspaper *Yeni Şafak* to compare with the Republic protests (Yeni Şafak, 2007d). Presented with the heading "A mawlid-like meeting" where thousands of people participated, the commemoration was depicted as a mass gathering in the aftermath of the first Republic protest.

However, no big rally was organized by the government or civil society organizations. Streets or squares, as likely spaces of contention, were not pointed out as possible means of responding to the threats against the government. For example, during the aforementioned commemoration event, people were warned about not turning the gathering into a demonstration and demanded to stay within the borders of religious practice (Ibid.). Also, unofficial actors announced the reluctance to organize such big events to counter the Republic protests. For instance, Türkiye Sivil Toplum Platformu,[19] a platform that includes many civil society organizations and unions close to the government, declared that they had no intention to organize a meeting against the Republic protests (Yeni Şafak, 2007c). Stating that only the democratic route and the nation's will should be paid attention to, they chose to express their concerns about a likely tension within society in the case of a counter-meeting and therefore eliminated such a possibility.

The aversion to using contentious means was also evident in the AKP officials' statements. Eyüp Fatsa, the then AKP's group deputy chairman, signaled such a gathering when the Republic protests started to rally secular citizens in the big cities. His statements were striking in this respect:

> To be honest, if the AKP organized such a meeting, it could gather a few millions of people on the street. We can gather ten times more people [than the Republic protests did]. Is it possible to reveal the nation's will in the form of a race in which parties compete by showing how many people they could gather? I would like to draw attention to this (Vatan, 2007).

The statement is interesting because a similar approach during the Gezi protests in 2013 resulted in pro-government rallies organized by the AKP in the form of counter-demonstrations and with several attacks of citizens on protesters, including beating participants or helping police forces. However, the AKP's strategic response to the Republic protests implied something different from pro-government contention, and the party acted somewhat unwilling to realize the claim in the

[19] Some of the members of this platform were as follows: Hak-İş, Memur-Sen, TESKOMB, Türk-İş, Adalet Gönüllüleri Derneği, Demokrat Hukukçular Derneği.

abovementioned statement. The AKP neither organized big anti-Republic protests, nor did AKP supporters or unidentified citizens assault secularist protesters while the Republic protests were continuing.

In this respect, and regarding the context of this dissertation, three things are important within the AKP's methods against threats posed by the opposition actors. First, even though democracy's context was generally bent in favor of simple majoritarianism and the opposition's political presence in decision-making was largely ignored, the adopted strategies still remained within the boundaries of limited democracy. Despite disapprobation regarding the Republic protests, they were welcomed and interpreted as a requirement of a democratic regime. Protesting was not perceived as a direct opposite of parliamentary or electoral politics but rather understood as a democratic right. In addition, welcoming the protests did not exclusively operate at a discursive level. The demonstrations, which lasted almost one month, did not confront police intervention or any repressive measure that might disrupt the gatherings. Instead of using harsh language and employing repressive state mechanisms, the government preferred acting relatively prudent and did not move beyond the borders of the necessities of a democratic regime.

And second, elections remained the primary motivation for mobilization in the aftermath of the secularist threats. While the AKP's populist mantras against secularist interferences no doubt fed polarization, they were steered into electoral politics to highlight the party's democratic commitment. This led to a call for early elections and all the mobilization campaigns against the secularist perils were organized within the scope of an electoral campaign. Like many populists such as Juan Perón in Argentina in the past or Viktor Orbán in Hungary today, the AKP arranged election meetings countrywide and rallied millions of its electorate in the squares as the driving force of its mobilization strategy. In other words, the counter-response of the AKP was given through what the AKP called the cradle of democracy: the ballot box. The crises in 2007 thus point out a populist government trying to act within the borders of democracy to overcome the jeopardies against the incumbency.

More importantly, it should be noted that the AKP's democratic strategies to deal with protest threat are not direct indicators of a "democratic commitment" embraced

by the AKP. It can be argued that the AKP's responses were forced to be in this way because of the opposition's influential position in state institutions. First of all, there was a constant threat of the military against elected governments in Turkish politics, proven in several coups against elected governments in Turkish history and also even while the protests were still continuing. This threat doubles when the elected government is a pro-Islamist one. Choosing to counter-mobilize pro-government audiences on the street against protesters might provide a conducive political situation could present the secularist military with a justification to intervene in the AKP government more directly.

Calling pro-government citizens to the street might lead to uncontrollable consequences while the government was unable to control state institutions and public resources as an authoritarian government might do. In the case of a confrontation between protesters and pro-government citizens, a realistic possibility under the rule of a government with limited resources and control over state institutions, the military could easily justify its decision to overthrow the government. For this reason, signaling the street as a contentious space for pro-government citizens might be entirely dangerous for a government incapable of bending power struggles in state institutions to its advantage as an authoritarian state does.

Second, the secular judiciary might attack the AKP, which was a party that might face a party closure case, like many pro-Islamist parties had experienced in the past, in the case of a violent situation between protesters and pro-government citizens. Suppose the AKP pointed out any possibility for counter-mobilization on the street, which might lead to fatal consequences. In that case, this might have been easily framed as a justification to launch an investigation to close the AKP by secular elites in the jurisdiction. Therefore, the AKP might feel insecure in such an unwanted situation owing to insufficient control over state institutions to prevent an existential threat to its presence as the government, giving support to the claim that encouraging pro-government contention might be pretty risky for the AKP.

The AKP's responses to these threats can be interesting in terms of the shift in using contentious mechanisms after 2013. While pro-government contention was not a governmental instrument in responding to the Republic protests or the military

memorandum in 2007, it became a widely used contentious tool against similar threats such as the Gezi protests in 2013 and the coup attempt in 2016, as will be shown in Chapter 5. Regarded in this way, such threatening events in 2007 provide a reference point to understand the changes in the government's approach to pro-government contentious politics after 2013.

The reasons why pro-government contention was not preferred as a mobilization strategy in 2007 are discussed later in this chapter. At this stage, however, more important is to note that the AKP stayed within the limits of democracy, or felt to act in this way, maintained its election-centered politics, and therefore rallied people only within the framework of electoral campaigns which is different than contentious pro-government action. The AKP's responses were mainly democratic practices despite their limits or veto actors forced the AKP to embrace more democratic means. The claim of the abovementioned AKP official was canalized into the elections and massive meetings were organized as a part of the electoral mobilization campaign. Rallying millions of people was rendered possible only within the frame of the AKP's electoral campaign, paving the way for a democratic practice that targeted triumph in the ballot box.

4.1.2 The Second Term: The Closure Case, TEKEL Protests, and Increasing Autocratization

As the continuation of the secularist threats, the AKP faced a party closure case less than one year after the second electoral triumph in the general elections. After obtaining a crushing result in the ballot box in 2007, the fear that the AKP had a secret agenda to Islamize society continued to influence the actions of the secularist opposition. The unending discussions about the headscarf issue were exacerbated because of a draft amendment in the Constitution about wearing headscarf in universities, inflaming the concerns regarding alleged anti-secular inclinations of the government. Meanwhile, a prosecutor submitted a case to the Constitutional Court, asserting that the AKP's policies and actions conflicted with secular values. The lawsuit demanded the ban of many AKP officials, including the PM Erdoğan and President Gül, and the party's closure. However, the verdict rejected the demand with a one-vote majority of the Court members yet gave the party a financial cut in state support. The Court recognized the legitimacy of the AKP on the one hand but also

admitted the uneasiness about the policies concerned with religious issues on the other (Gumuscu & Sert, 2010: 68).

As a response to the closure case, party officials contented themselves with giving cautious public statements and gave speeches about the closure attempt (Erdoğan, 2019). Erdoğan framed the case as an anti-democratic assault on national will and depicted the closure case as an intervention that by no means belonged to the political sphere. The future decision about the case was presented as a cornerstone regarding the democratic struggle in Turkey, either showing the failure or victory of democracy. The party repeatedly underscored the last electoral results, which were pointed out as proof that the people made a democratic choice and elected the AKP as the government. In this context, the closure case was tried to be eliminated through accents on democracy, and elections as its legitimate organ.

Apart from the emphasis on democracy against an undemocratic closure attempt, the AKP utilized other mechanisms as well in order to rule out the possibility of a likely closure. At the international level, it received considerable support from the European Union, benefiting from the European integration process, which substantially affected the decision of the Constitutional Court to reject the closure demand (Keyman, 2010: 323). At the local level, it had liberal and left-liberal intellectuals in its corner, as dominant figures in managing public discussions, who acted as intellectual coalition partners (Ersoy & Üstüner, 2016: 413). Such global and local support from the liberal world strengthened the AKP's hand, providing legitimacy for its stance against the closure case. Also, the mainstream media was targeted by the AKP, resulting in the sale of important mainstream and anti-government media channels and newspapers. In this period, many media organs such as *ATV, Sabah, Star,* or *Kanaltürk* were bought by businessmen close to the government, presenting a platform for the AKP to develop a media campaign against the closure case.

However, similar to the responses to the events in 2007, the government did not choose to carry out contentious means. Also, contentious mechanisms carried out by civil society organizations close to the government were limited. The AKP neither organized big rallies to curse the closure case nor sent any signal to its audience to use the street as a tool to display popular legitimacy. Admittedly, some protest

organizations by civil society organizations were reported in the aftermath of the submission of the closure case. For instance, Genç Siviller gathered in front of the AKP headquarters to call citizens to civil disobedience due to the closure case (Yeni Şafak, 2008c). In another protest event, they declared the Second Edict of Gülhane, claiming that coup forces endangered the regime and the torch of freedom should be fired (Yeni Şafak, 2008d). Groups also contentiously clustered around the official party building in a few cases. Pro-government citizens gathered in front of Erdoğan's house to meet Erdoğan and chanted slogans vibrantly for the party (Yeni Şafak, 2008b). It was also observed that Erdoğan spoke to the party's electorate in the public sphere on a few occasions before and after party congresses and in opening ceremonies (Yeni Şafak, 2008a; Yeni Şafak 2008e). Apart from these examples, no pro-government contentious organization was reported.

Another threat to the AKP government happened in response to the AKP's neoliberalization policies. Privatization was one of the long-standing policies of the AKP, as a government adopting a neoliberal economic approach, and protests against such policies were not unusual. The strikes and factory occupations of SEKA (the then public institution working in the paper industry) in 2004-2005 against the privatization of the company were striking examples. However, the most crowd-pulling event was the TEKEL (the General Directorate of Tobacco, Tobacco Products, Salt and Alcoholic Beverages) resistance starting at the end of 2009 and continuing for months. In the aftermath of the sales of TEKEL to British American Tobacco in 2008, as a part of the government's privatization policies, many factories were shut down and many workers' contracts were terminated by the company. What drove workers to initiate a resistance campaign, however, was the government's attempt to force fired workers to switch to a precarious status through a law amendment instead of transferring them into another public institution. The AKP's initiative not only reinforced the insecurity of working in the public sector but also ignored the workers' capability to fight against an unjust situation (Yalman & Topal, 2019: 452). Consequently, TEKEL workers commenced protesting the government, which turned into an occupation of public space in Ankara by tents that lasted almost three months.

No doubt, the response to the TEKEL protests represented a definite trace of the government's authoritarian practices against opposition voices and foreshadowed a

mounting autocratization process (Erkmen & Arslanalp, 2020). The government's response was harsh. Police violence was carried out such that it became a regular repressive activity throughout the protest campaign. As workers from various cities went to the capital city to protest the government, they encountered severe police intervention, which resulted in physical police brutality. Violence penetrated many protests in different cities, leading to arrests and injuries (BBC, 2010; Dünya Gazetesi, 2009; Sol Haber 2010). Furthermore, government officials depicted the resistance by putting it into distinct frameworks to criminalize protesters. From the PKK's involvement in the protests to the unions' provocation or to the opposition's conspiracy to sabotage the nation's will, the AKP officials charged protesters with being puppets of power groups that tried to undermine the government (Man, 2011). In contrast to the Republic protests, the government's reaction against the TEKEL protests was a milestone in highlighting the government's eagerness to display its repressive capacity in contentious actions both in the form of the police force and political discourse.

Despite certain increases in the repressive scale of the government against contentious practices, organizing counter-demonstrations or encouraging pro-government citizens to protest TEKEL workers on the street were not in question. I scanned the one-month period after TEKEL workers' first protest action but found no event featuring contentious mobilization of government supporters nor any protest organization arranged by the AKP government. I also did not note any statement by government officials that aimed to encourage citizens to take to the squares or any declaration that implied the street was a likely political space for government supporters.

While the echoes of such threats were continuing, the AKP started to be more forceful in its policies. Scholars suggest that the existential threats thrust the AKP to adopt more severe strategies against the opposition to block the possibility of prospective threats (Öniş, 2013: 114). The AKP's pluralist and democratic agenda in its first term, which had considerably enchanted the liberals and democrats, started to shift somewhat to a more assertive policy-making (Jenkins, 2008: 10-11). While the AKP's policies on social rights tended to focus more on religious liberties, prospective democratic steps to indiscrimination against other groups started to fail. Turkey witnessed a turnaround in the democratic initiatives regarding several

freedoms and rights, leading to distancing these issues from the center of attention. The period between 2007 and 2013 also witnessed the strong influence of the AKP on some state institutions, even causing their confiscation of them through critical political moves.

Nevertheless, the electoral popularity of the AKP continued in its second term. The champion of the local elections in 2009, the Constitutional referendum in 2010, and the general elections in 2011 was the AKP once again. The manifestation of extensive support for the government aggrandized the AKP's position to form the policy agenda around its political orientation. The consistent escalation in the vote share consolidated the leverage of the AKP more powerfully and showed that there was no realistic alternative that could replace the government.

The triumphs in all the elections since the AKP's first electoral victory led to academic discussions concerning the party's status within the system. Some scholars interpreted this victory as the emergence of a dominant party system (Esen & Ciddi, 2011; Çarkoğlu, 2011; Gumuscu, 2013) and perceived the 2011 elections as a turning point in this context (Aslan-Akman, 2012). They argued that the complacent victories of the AKP in the three general elections and its capacity to outdistance all the other competitors with large margins of votes were signs of the transformation of the system into a dominant party system. Moreover, they suggested that the opposition's incapability to offer a realistic alternative and the evanescent line between the state and the party were contributing to the claim that the AKP was dominating both the electoral arena and the governance, making it the sole power managing the state business.

Moreover, other than seculars, some scholars started to emphasize the authoritarian leanings of the party and Erdoğan more seriously after a decade since its first incumbency. Repeated sweeping results in the ballot box, specific policies of the AKP such as jailing journalists, deploying police forces in peaceful protests resulting in harsh response, polarizing populist rhetoric, and the party's switch to a dominant party system were started to be seen as critical junctures in the AKP's drift to authoritarian policies. (Aydın-Düzgit, 2012; Müftüler-Baç & Keyman, 2012). The results of the referendum in 2010 and the general elections in 2011 generated scholarly questions regarding whether the successive triumphs of the AKP would

lead to a deepened democracy or increased polarization and autocratization (Fabbe, 2011). Although no scholarly conceptualization exists regarding the authoritarian practices at the regime level, analysts began drawing attention to the risk of further autocratization and the AKP's retreat from democratic tenets.

V-DEM's liberal democracy index also displays this sluggish but important decrease in carrying out the principles of liberal democracy, particularly after 2007, which opens up a moderate field for authoritarian tendencies.

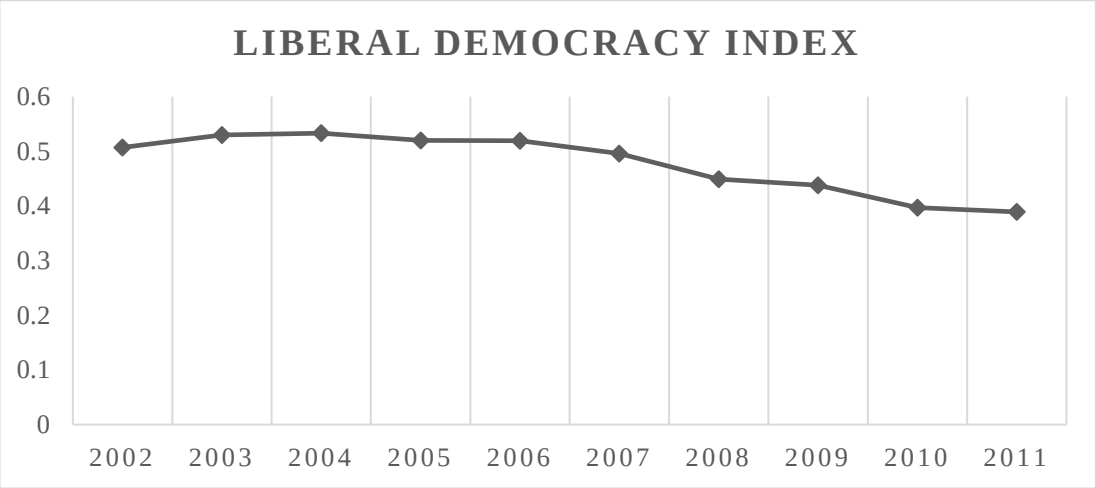

Figure 15. V-DEM's liberal democracy index for Turkey between 2002-2011. My elaboration of data from v.dem.net

This is important to show that the AKP started to distance itself from a democratic trajectory and take steps that implied an authoritarian path. In the next sections, it is seen that this relatively negligible decline in liberal democracy accelerates after 2013 and converges at almost zero value, promising shifts in the political strategies of the government.

4.1.3 The Third Term: The Kurdish Threat and The MİT Crisis

On the one hand, the electoral victories entrenched the idea that the AKP had been unrivaled in the ballot box. But on the other hand, the third term brought a series of new threats to the AKP rule through other means. The first one was the clashes between the Turkish state and the Kurdish terrorist organization PKK after the latter terminated the ceasefire in 2011 with the claim that the AKP did not adequately commit to the Peace Process. The Peace Process was a series of policies initiated by

the AKP towards the end of the 2000s to solve the Kurdish minority problem, including several ceasefires, continuing until 2015, albeit hesitantly.

After hopeful developments regarding the recognition of the cultural rights of Kurds, dialogues between the state officials and the PKK, and the disarmament moves of the PKK in the first years, a set of policies were carried out concurrently with pressure on the process. The then Kurdish political party DTP (*Denokratik Toplum Partisi*) was banned with the claim that the party was involved in terrorist activities, many Kurdish politicians and activists were arrested within operations, and the offers of Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned leader of the PKK, to solve the Kurdish problem were unanswered by the government. More importantly, after the general elections in 2011, it seemed that the AKP was unwilling to continue the process, leading to the termination of the ceasefire between the state and the PKK and to violent conflicts resulting in several deaths (Yeğen, 2015).

The pressures on Kurdish politicians and activists and the termination of the ceasefire also inflamed the momentum on the street. Before and after the elections, numerous protests were organized, mostly in Kurdish provinces, catalyzed due to the murder of 34 civilians in Uludere by the army's air forces in December 2011. Along with protests against the army's operations, KCK (*Kürdistan Topluluklar Birliği*) detentions and the disqualification of some Kurdish politicians from official representation were protested, and Newroz celebrations turned into mass Kurdish protests. Owing to the escalation of clashes between the PKK and the state, peaceful protests also hit a major wall and turned into violent ones, causing several deaths and injuries.

Despite such hot conflicts between the state and Kurds, however, both parties managed to maintain the Peace Process until the summer of 2015. The dialogue between the state officials and the PKK was, in part, maintained by mutually promising further democratic developments to solve the minority problem. The AKP did not involve in actions that might inflame the tension in order not to lead to an irrevocable process. It did not initiate a strategic campaign that could terminate relations with the Kurdish movement.

In contrast to the anti-PKK mobilization in 2015,[20] in which the AKP organizationally and discursively partook, the clashes between the two parties did not engender a mobilization process boosted by the government against the PKK. Some marches and demonstrations were organized by nationalist groups against the assaults of the PKK after the ceasefire ended (CNN, 2011; Comert & Jamjoom, 2011). However, I could not find a clue regarding the AKP's intention, if any, to use street mobilization as a strategic alternative. The AKP was not involved in such demonstrations. It did not prefer conducting a two-sided frame that might lead to a government-centered contentious mobilization. The street was not pointed out as a sphere that could be the manifestation of a mobilization policy. Instead, as stated above, the AKP chose to maintain the same strategic policy and did not approach the issue through the lens of contentious mobilization. In this context, pro-government contention was still out of the question within the AKP's repertoire. It was not an instrument that might provide popular legitimacy through a public spectacle, which might work to prove the power and stability of the existing government.

Another striking threat before the Gezi protests was the crisis about the MİT (*Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı*). In February 2012, the prosecution office in Istanbul called the MİT officials, including the undersecretary Hakan Fidan to testify because of the meetings of MİT with the PKK as a part of the Peace Process. However, then PM Erdoğan instructed Fidan not to respond to the call of the prosecutor, assuming that this was a political trap. Although the justification for calling the MİT officials to the prosecution office was not known then, it later became evident that the incident resulted from the power struggle between the AKP and a dominant group within the state called the Gülenist Movement. It is likely that the purpose of the prosecutor, a member of the Gülenist Movement, was to subdue the government. After years, the MİT crisis was labeled by the indictment as the first coup attempt of the Gülenist Movement to take down the AKP government, followed by December 17-25 graft allegations in 2013 and finally, the coup attempt in 2016.

What is significant about the MİT crisis in 2012 for this dissertation is that, similar to the critical and threatening events against the government outlined above, the crisis did not engender a pro-government mobilization process supported and organized by

[20] The detailed analysis of this mobilization process is done in Chapter 5.

the government. This is noteworthy because we know that, and I show in the next Chapter, December 17-25 graft allegations in 2013, which is different from the MİT crisis in terms of the level of threat but similar to it in style, generated a substantial reaction in the form of contentious mobilization both by pro-government groups and the government. While the corruption scandal leaked by the same group led to momentous contentious mobilization organized or encouraged by the government, the first one did not create such a contentious atmosphere. In the next section, I will provide a detailed analysis of why pro-government contention was not a strategy in the repertoire of the AKP government before 2013.

The non-mobilization of pro-government groups, the absence of a mass nationalist campaign against the Kurdish mobilization, or the reluctance of the AKP to mobilize its base against the MİT crisis are important indicators of how similar threats engendered different strategic responses in line with the context. Like the threats occurring in the AKP's first two terms, the first half of the third term also posed severe risks to the survival of the AKP government. However, contentious mobilization was not a considered option to respond to such risks.

Exploring the pre-2013 period, in which several events threatened the AKP government, is important to grasp the dynamics and context of the post-2013 process correctly and to understand the shift in the use of pro-government contentious mechanisms after this date. I show that the AKP did not encourage and organize pro-government contention as a striking political strategy to handle threats it encountered. Instead, it relatively stayed within the boundaries of democracy while simultaneously developing strategies such as police repression, establishing a pro-government media, or the attempts to eliminate secular rivals such as the military and judiciary to overcome those threats, which resulted in mounting autocratization and rising polarization.

In the next section, I present obstacles and reasons as to why pro-government contention was not adopted as a common strategy in this period in detail. Benefiting from the findings from the pre-2013 period, I propose possible reasons to explain the AKP's strategic or unavoidable choice concerning the contentious mobilization of government supporters.

4.2 Why Has Pro-Government Contention Not Been Used as A Regular Government Strategy Before the Gezi Protests?

The scholarship shows that pro-government contention was not a regularly organized phenomenon between 2002 and 2013 (Uysal, 2017). To reinforce this argument, I scanned *Yeni Şafak* issues during the critical events I discussed above and found no significant series of pro-government contention boosted by the government in the pre-2013 period, leaving the election campaign rallies aside. At this point, an important question can be asked: Why has the AKP government not preferred pro-government contention as a strategy of mobilization although protest threats such as the Republic protests, the TEKEL resistance, or the closure case might provide a conducive environment for such contentious counter-mobilization? Why did the AKP respond to the events that implied a coup in the pre-2013 period quite cautiously without considering pro-government contention as a governmental instrument while such a threat generated pro-government mobilization on the streets in 2013?

My answer to these questions was not tested empirically, but it is still possible to propose likely reasons by exploring the context of this period. The answer, therefore, is not straightforward and not based on a simple cause-effect relationship, which is why I outlined the political context of the AKP government since its first term. Yet I speculatively present reasons, which cannot be detached from one another, to answer this question. I suggest that they all illuminate a specific aspect of the relative absence of pro-government contention in the designated period. But a comprehensive picture can be provided if such arguments are tested empirically in further studies.

First, it could be that the AKP's democratic conservative ideology constrained the party's elbow room and impelled it to stay within the boundaries of democratic practices. Protest is one of the most direct expressions of democratic action, allowing opponents an alternative space to make claims outside official politics. However, when it comes to contention to advocate a party in charge of ruling the regime, the conventional meaning of protesting turns upside down. It implies a situation in which people seek justice for an already powerful actor, namely, the government. In contrast to the conventional meaning of protest, which is mainly a tool for those with no official channel to raise their voice (Goodwin & Jasper, 2015: 3), pro-government

contention leads to a paradox for a government claiming to be democratic. Also, assuming that governments partake in the organization or promotion of pro-government contention, using state and public resources for a protest activity was at odds with the party's then-democratic outlook.

Even more striking is that the AKP was a party that built its legitimacy with its claim to represent the people's will, which was rendered possible only through the ballot box (Özbudun, 2014). For the AKP, pre-election campaigns have always been the major arena for the mobilization of the masses, whose political attitudes were influenced by electoral mobilization strategies (Ginsberg & Weissberg, 1978). As seen in the AKP's response to the Republic protests, it was plausible for a democratic government to struggle against political threats within the framework of election campaigns, which allowed the government to organize big rallies to prevail in the elections. In this respect, election campaigns already fulfilled the role of mobilizing large masses while strengthening the party's democratic stance. In other words, pro-government contention was not a necessity, but rather the mobilization of the electorate could be chosen to be integrated into electoral processes rather than specific activities targeting political threats. Alternatively, as a party following the center-right tradition, for which street politics has not been mainly preferred as a way of political representation, it is pretty likely that pro-government contention did not conform with the democratic outlook of a center-right party.

At this point, one might question that the AKP's claim to be a democratic government continued while pro-government contention has been widely used in the post-Gezi process. Hence, it can very well be objected that the AKP's democratic stance can be a determinant in explaining the absence of pro-government contention in the pre-2013 era. While this is true, it should be noted that the AKP had a large scale of support both domestically and internationally in its first two terms, thanks to its democratic standpoint in policy making (Keyman 2010). The West and various fractions in Turkey, expecting a democratization process after long phases of the Kemalist tutelage, were binding agents for the AKP to boost its leverage and maintain its rule. Pro-government contention as a non-democratic practice might be highly tricky in this context and harm the democratic image of the government. The support from various circles gradually faded with mounting autocratization and weakened the persuasiveness of the AKP's claim to be a democratic government. As

a result, the bindingness of the domestic and international support was damaged, and the requirements of being a democratic government lessened over time. Therefore, pro-government contention could arise as an option in the government's repertoire during the autocratization process, contrary to the relatively indisputable government of the AKP dominated by democratic policy making.

Second, it could be suggested that pro-government contention was not considered as an option because of its likely high cost in a political environment where the AKP's power was notably limited by other political actors. During the first decade of its rule, the AKP was under the constant threat of powerful state actors such as the military and judiciary, as evident in the aforementioned e-memorandum published by the army or the closure case. In particular, in its first two terms, there was not an "excessive concentration of political power" around the AKP, resulting in an equilibrium of power generated by compelling opposition actors (Öniş, 2013). Despite certain political moves to gain ground, state institutions were far from being controlled by the AKP. Moreover, those institutions were functioning as legitimate organs that might challenge the AKP's rule and impede the party's future political actions. Counterbalancing political actors might lead to a lack of control in using pro-government contention, which might cause unmanageable consequences for the AKP’s survival.

Such a risk was evident in many threats mentioned above. For instance, suppose that government supporters were called to the streets or the squares were pointed out as possible places of contention against the Republic protests in 2007. In that case, we can expect that a likely confrontation of two groups —protesters and pro-government citizens— might provide sufficient justification for a secular military to take action, which could be more than a threat as in the e-memorandum. Similarly, organizing mass meetings against the closure case could be assessed as a sign of further autocratization and could easily affect the decision regarding the case and might lead to the party's closure. Put it differently, significant veto players might endanger the very presence of the AKP, and any attempt for pro-government contention could be used as a justification mechanism for the political moves of such players adversely for the government.

Third, pre-2013 was not a period that could provide rich resources and wide organizational networks for the AKP as an authoritarian regime might do. Expectedly, as regimes shift into more authoritarian forms, resource opportunities equally increase for incumbent parties in contrast to democracies (Greene 2007; Levitsky and Way 2010). The AKP, as a party established in 2001, did not have such a capacity and opportunity in the first decade of its rule. Although it could receive vast amounts of financial support from the state as a result of its triumphs in the ballot box, neither the party and its networks were the most dominant actors in economics, nor was the party sufficiently capable of exploiting state and public resources for its own purposes (Yilmaz & Bashirov, 2018: 1819-1820). It established its rule as a single-party government from the very beginning. Still, there was a gap between the government and the use of public resources and state institutions in parallel with the party's benefits.

Related to this, the scholarship suggests that dominant parties can politicize public sources to be successful and utilize them in line with their interests (Greene, 2010: 808). The AKP initiated its attempts to politicize these resources, particularly after its second term. Yet, the party was still doing politics as a democratic party, and autocratization was not seriously in question. There were pro-AKP NGOs and unions, but their numbers were relatively less compared to the autocratization era. Although the AKP had ties in particular with religious civil society organizations, these organizations were seen as the AKP's attempts to contribute "to the development of a moderate and democracy-friendly form of Islam in Turkey" (Sarkissian & Özler, 2009: 34). Switching gradually to an authoritarian regime, the AKP acquired or had already acquired such resources and opportunities, enriching its repertoire in mobilization and repression.

From this perspective, pro-government contention can be understood as an output of the propagation of the AKP government's resources and networks. It is no surprise that research found that pro-government rallies are phenomena observed popularly in authoritarian or hybrid regimes instead of democracies (Hellmeier & Weidmann, 2020; Robertson, 2011). It could be argued, therefore, that despite presence of severe threats, the pre-Gezi era was limited in providing opportunities for the AKP due to the non-availability of resources deriving from the authoritarian regime structure. Organizing big rallies to which numerous citizens are transported, or in which people

are sometimes paid or forced to participate, requires vast financial resources and massive networks between the party and its electorate. The pre-2013 era was relatively insufficient to supply such prerequisites in addition to the democratic constraints discussed above.

Finally, elections were safe mechanisms by which the AKP proved its democratic legitimacy in the pre-2013 period, which in turn made the AKP appeal to no other means than elections. Since 2002, the AKP not only prevailed in elections but also succeeded in the ballot box through landslide victories. While the AKP confronted political threats against its rule, it was aware of two things in this era. First, elections were no surprise, and the AKP would arise triumphantly because of the lack of any serious rival that might pose a risk. As a matter of fact, no party could offer an alternative to the AKP in the ballot box in the elections during its first two terms, which resulted in crushing results. Second, the AKP was aware that elections were the best means to boost its legitimacy in a democratic regime. Showing that the party was popularly endorsed and supported, the AKP knew that it could have the opportunity to rule out political threats without warranting any other means that might damage its democratic path. It should also be noted that the AKP increased its votes in each general election between 2002 and 2011, which helped reassure its robust rule.

However, it is likely that the Gezi protests and other critical events in its aftermath unsettled the self-confidence of the AKP in the electoral arena and pushed it to seek alternative ways of legitimizing its rule. The next general elections after the Gezi protests proved that the electoral popularity of the AKP was going downward. In the June 2015 elections, the AKP's votes decreased 9%, and the opposition parties acquired the opportunity to form a coalition government for the first time since 2002. It can be suggested that elections started to become a means that no longer could provide incontestable victories but turned into arenas where the opposition could find opportunities to challenge the AKP's rule. Pro-government contention could be assessed as an alternative way of showing legitimacy, referring to Robertson's (2011) argument that autocrats know that it is necessary to control not only elections but also streets. In this respect, the pre-2013 period did not require such an alternative way of mobilization because of the adequateness of crushing electoral results in a democratic regime for maintaining legitimacy. Given that the elections were no more

readily a reliable means to maintain the rule and "external shocks" that jeopardized the rule of the AKP (Bashirov & Lancaster, 2018: 1211), the party's means for mobilization were also radicalized. Pro-government contention could be seen as an output of this post-Gezi process.

In sum, I suggest that pro-government contention was not a feasible option for the AKP in the pre-2013 era. The AKP's democratic burden, the presence of influential veto players, the lack of authoritarian resources and networks for the organization of pro-government rallies and protests, and the AKP's crushing electoral victories did not create a need or force the AKP to limit itself to alternative paths of mobilizing the electorate. I suggest that pro-government contention is an effect of the changes in these dynamics, particularly after the Gezi protests in 2013. In the next section, I focus on the political environment starting with the Gezi protests that developed a favorable setting for using pro-government contention.

4.3 The Post-2013 AKP: Deepening Autocratization and Rising Polarization

The AKP's third and fourth terms represent a sharp turn in many respects. In contrast to its first two terms, democracy gradually became baggage for the AKP in the second decade of its rule, giving way to more authoritarian political practices. In this period, the government slowly gave up its democratic commitment in diverse fields, leading to an imperious attitude regarding its policy-making.

Expectedly, the democratic backsliding inflamed scholarly debates about the regime's status under the AKP government. Although some scholars define the changes in the regime type as illiberal democracy (Bechev, 2014) or delegative democracy (Taş, 2015) in the first half of the 2010s, many scholars compromise about the shift of the regime into an authoritarian one in the second half. In this regard, the scholarship is crowded with a vast array of fresh terms. To conceptualize the regime in question, scholars use the terms authoritarian neoliberalism (Aydin, 2021; Bilgiç, 2018; Kaygusuz, 2018; Tansel, 2018), new authoritarianism (Somer, 2016), competitive authoritarianism (Castaldo, 2018; Esen & Gumuscu, 2016; Özbudun, 2015), electoral authoritarianism (Konak & Dönmez, 2015; White & Herzog, 2016), and even full authoritarianism (Çalışkan, 2018). The studies

contribute to the literature in several respects, unraveling different trajectories of the autocratization process of the AKP during the 2010s.

Existing data also confirm that autocratization considerably increased in the second decade of the AKP's rule. Figure 16 presents V-DEM's liberal democracy index during the AKP government. It shows that the government managed well between 2002 and 2007 in democratic terms, having the highest score compared to subsequent years. After 2007, the democratic commitment slowly started to diminish until 2012. This is understandable given the developments in 2007 and the AKP's slight shift to authoritarian practices instead of democratic principles, as discussed above. Starting from 2013, however, the score sharply fell down. From 2013 to 2017, one can observe that the liberal democracy score consistently and strikingly decreased, almost reaching the minimum level. It implies that this period represents a renunciation of liberal democracy and a strong tendency to authoritarian elements at the regime level.

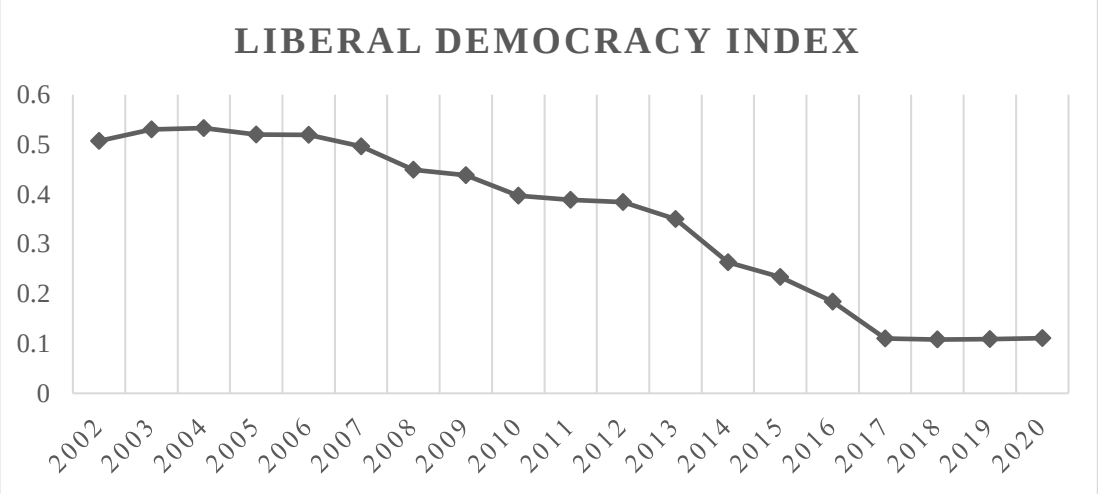

Figure 16. V-DEM's liberal democracy index for Turkey between 2002-2020. My elaboration of data from v.dem.net

As evident in Esen and Gumuscu's (2016) study, many steps were taken by the AKP that led to the establishment of a hybrid authoritarian regime in the second decade of its rule. Regarding democratic elections, the electoral competition was bent heavily in favor of the AKP. Opposition activists were regularly targeted during election campaigns, media organs were restricted for the opposition parties to a significant extent, and systematic efforts were made to put mobilization rallies of the opposition parties into trouble. The AKP started to increase its involvement within state

institutions, exploited resources unevenly, and increased its influence on the media sector and judiciary (Özbudun, 2015). State employees were mobilized in the party's rallies, and security forces were deployed as if they were in charge of safeguarding the AKP's interests rather than the state's welfare. Several established media companies were bought or influenced by circles close to the AKP that left limited space for opposition (Yesil, 2014). Public and private funds were utilized extensively in electoral mobilization campaigns, and many civil society organizations were founded and supported in line with the AKP's political goals. In addition, freedom of expression was seriously restricted. Journalists, artists, and ordinary citizens were exposed to severe pressure, including being sued, fined, or imprisoned.

Apart from the AKP's oppression of opposition in diverse fields, the autocratization phase of the government brought changes concerning the ruling mechanisms as well. As Somer (2016, 483) puts it, the authoritarian turn transformed political mandate into a "more particularistic, personalized, and mass-based" authority, leading to a more repressive political environment than ever in Republican history. Instead of enriching mass prosperity without discrimination, the authoritarian shift created a new state-society relationship, which started to produce benefits for a particular party, the AKP, and its constituents. The state institutions, which are supposed to be impersonal, became personalized, serving the interests of specific political personalities. This empowered the regime's authoritarian structure "by bolstering the status of the 'providers' as patrons and that of the beneficiaries as clients" (490). The relationship between patrons and clients also fostered the mass constituency of the regime, whereby constituents became politically more active and self-confident agents. Being organizationally and financially capable of mobilizing millions of people in rallies, the AKP found the opportunity to solidify the political identity of its electorate, making them dynamic actors in the reproduction of the authoritarian setting.

A sense of more agency in politics has been afforded to the AKP's constituencies due to the opinion that benefits can only be maintained through the dynamic capability of the pro-government audience to keep the AKP in power (483). This resulted in a mutual dependency between the government and its mass base. On the one hand, the pro-government electorate developed the feeling that they depended on the AKP for the continuity of the redistribution of resources, which was provided by the mounting

authoritarian opportunities and advancing clientelism. Government supporters realized that the stability of the distribution of resources was possible only through the sustainability of the current regime with present actors; otherwise, the cost of government change was very high (Esen & Gumuscu, 2020; Yıldırım, 2020). For this reason, observers suggest a positive correlation between the mobilization of the AKP's supporters and clientelistic linkages between the party and the electorate (Laebens & Öztürk 2021, 3). On the other hand, the AKP relied on its voters to maintain its rule by means of elections against a set of pitfalls jeopardizing the AKP government, which resulted in tracing more channels of mobilization for its electorate and, therefore, more active participation of citizens in politics.

In addition to switching to a hybrid authoritarian regime, this era also witnessed mounting polarization. It is evident, according to scholars, that the AKP's populism increased significantly during the 2010s. It is no surprise that scholarly research on populism in Turkey suddenly grew after the third successive electoral victory of the AKP (Aytaç & Elçi, 2019; Aytaç & Öniş, 2014; Baykan, 2018; Castaldo, 2018; Çınar, 2018; Elçi, 2019; Özdemir, 2020; Selçuk, 2016; Türk, 2018; Yabanci, 2016). Several important events contributed to making populist tools more effective in this period. Türk (2018) argues that the AKP's populist progression is based on unsettling events such as the Gezi protests and graft allegations in 2013 and the coup attempt in 2016. Çınar (2018, 177) similarly argues that the AKP inaugurated a populist strategy to maximize its votes after the 2011 elections, which also intersects with the AKP's democratic retreat.

No doubt, polarization was a significant result of such populist politics. A growing body of literature concentrates on polarization politics in Turkey in the last decade (Arbatli & Rosenberg, 2021; McCoy & Somer, 2019; Özler & Obach, 2018; Somer, 2019). Under the leadership of the AKP in its third term, Turkey was a "highly polarized and fragmented society along secular, religious, and ethnic lines, with a strong leader and weak opposition", which was arguably more than ever during the rule of the AKP government (Keyman, 2014: 21). Indeed, similar to populism, polarization has always been a component of Turkish politics (Somer 2019: 46). Regarding the AKP's rule, as discussed above, certain key events already revealed polarized cleavages within society before the autocratization phase.

However, the level of polarization surged in the post-2013 process such that polarization became "pernicious", which penetrated the core of Turkish politics. Scholars suggest that there was momentous polarization during the authoritarian streak of the AKP, which polarized society more "between those who perceive themselves as benefiting from autocratization versus those who feel harmed" (McCoy & Somer, 2021: 8). Contrary to previous experiences concerning polarized camps in Turkish political history, polarization acquired a new form, which was "increasingly self-propagating, personalized, and based on negative partisanship and fear" (Somer, 2019: 54). The political framework was reduced to an "either, or" decision, relying on a choice between stability or terror, order or chaos, democracy or vandalism.

The democratic breakdown and the authoritarian turn also nurtured and deepened polarization. As Laebens and Öztürk (2021) put forward, autocratization contributes to a highly polarized political surrounding, forging partisanship and promoting the mindset that rights and freedoms are based on one's preferences about supporting a political party with the power to rule. They show that the government's capacity to control state institutions established a political environment in which government supporters equated the AKP rule with their well-being and thus became more polarized. At the same time, opposition groups developed a more partisan political approach during the transition era to a hybrid regime. As autocratization permeated the governmental practices and their reflections were mirrored in society accordingly, viewing issues through polarized lenses was embedded in political standpoints of both pro-government and anti-government camps.

The data prove that polarization has existed since 2002 but became a rooted social phenomenon in the second decade of the AKP's rule. As shown in Figure 17 by V-DEM data, society's dichotomy significantly increased from 2011 to 2015. After the third successive electoral victory of the AKP in the general elections in 2011, the AKP realized that they could receive the majority of votes without appealing to liberal values (Bakıner, 2017: 39). Because of the gradually increasing authoritarian tone in policies, a large portion of society started to distance themselves from the party's political position, generating the circumstances for a strict polarization for both sides. The Gezi protests strikingly contributed to the acceleration of this process. When the mass demonstrations spread nationwide in 2013, polarization

concurrently blew up and deepened significantly (Akkoyunlu, 2017: 53). The figure also displays that the polarization curve converges at almost 0 value starting from 2015, meaning that the Turkish society was divided strictly into two camps on nearly every political issue. As Başer and Öztürk (2017, 9) put it, polarization entered a new phase in 2015: a confrontation between "those 'with' the AKP and those 'against' it".

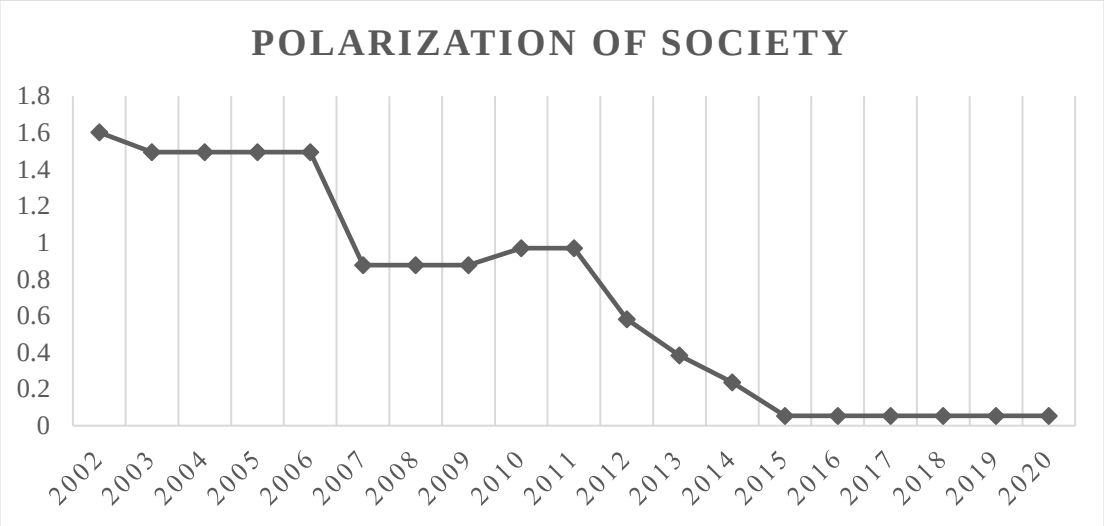

Figure 17. V-DEM's polarization of society index for Turkey between 2002-2020. My elaboration of data from vdem.net

Moreover, the polarized political environment was incited more in this period due to the repressive and violent police responses, particularly during and after the Gezi protests and Erdoğan's polarized political discourse labeling protesters as vandals, terrorists, or illegal actors (Gençoğlu Onbaşi, 2016: 278). Elçi (2019) explicitly shows that the populist rhetoric used by Erdoğan, which seriously contributes to the polarization in society, reached its highest point in 2015, and the period of 2013-2017 represents relatively high frequencies in Erdoğan's populist rhetoric. Such increased use of populist rhetoric by Erdoğan implies that polarization within society was also boosted by political discourse, deepening the existing cleavages more.

Within an environment surrounded by mounting autocratization and deepening polarization, the AKP formulated new mobilization techniques, which were arguably different from the pre-2013 era in many terms. In contrast to the use of democratic mechanisms to overcome threats that endangered the incumbent rule in the pre-2013 period, I suggest that the AKP adopted new tools benefiting from both autocratization and polarization. Regarding mobilization instruments, the AKP

skillfully harnessed the mobilization power of polarization, and advanced discursive strategies that bolstered the dualist framework of politics. Political and economic resources were also massively exploited in mobilizing the electorate employing political opportunities deriving from the authoritarian structure of the regime.

I argue that pro-government contention stands at the center of these mobilization tools. I suggest that such political transformations contributed contextually to the emergence of pro-government contention as a governmental strategy to respond to political threats in the post-2013 period. On the one hand, autocratization provided sufficient means and necessary control over institutions to use pro-government contention as a political strategy. On the other hand, polarization generated a conducive political environment for mobilizing government supporters to respond to political threats.

One could object that autocratization and polarization can simultaneously be both the component and the result of pro-government contention. While this can be true, this dissertation avoids such an argument and does not seek such a mutual relationship between autocratization, polarization, and pro-government contention. Instead, I offer autocratization to explain why pro-government contention becomes a means for mobilization in the presence of a threat and how polarization helps the AKP carry out contentious tools. The effect of pro-government contention on autocratization and polarization is out of the scope of this research.

In the next section, I maintain that the Gezi protests, as a critical event, was the founding moment for adopting pro-government contention as a counter-measure within an autocratized and polarized milieu, penetrating the strategic repertoire of the government to be used against subsequent political threats. To put it differently, I suggest that the Gezi protests were not solely a political opportunity for anti-government citizens to mobilize on the street but also a political opportunity for the government to design a new counter-mobilization process. In this context, I suggest that the 2013, and the Gezi protests, are a dividing line for the AKP to develop new mechanisms regarding contentious politics, which did not exist in the repressive and mobilizational toolkit before 2013.

4.4 Why were the Gezi Protests a Turning Point for Using Pro-Government Contention?

While pro-government contention was not a preferred strategy to handle political threats before 2013, as shown and discussed above, it turned into a widely used mobilization technique during and after the Gezi protests, as will be shown in Chapter 5. Then, what reasons pushed the AKP to develop pro-government contention as a mobilization tool by 2013? What changes in the context and the AKP's mindset engendered a new mobilization technique?

As a critical event (Staggenborg, 1993), I argue, the Gezi protests were a watershed for the government to develop pro-government contention as a counter-strategy. I propose that the intensive use of pro-government contention after 2013 relies on the invention of such a strategy in response to the Gezi threat. This enabled the government to devise a novel counter-mobilization technique as it confronted a political threat. I also argue that mounting autocratization contributed to the Gezi protests' role of acting as a critical event for the invention of pro-government contention and its subsequent use. To discuss the reasons in detail, I suggest the reasons below for how the Gezi protests led to the use of pro-government contention and why the mobilization of government supporters became a regular governmental strategy afterward.

First, the Gezi protests transpired in an environment where spontaneous mass gatherings succeeded in overthrowing autocrats in the Middle East and North Africa. As the resistance spilled over to almost all cities in Turkey in June 2013, mass protest was the most vibrant and potent instrument in the nearby geography to topple down dictators (s*ee* Durac, 2015; Salamey, 2015). Despite specific differences, the Gezi protests were likened to the Arab Spring and seen as a new burst of rage deriving from the diffusion of such protests to Turkey (Göle, 2013). Indubitably, protests tearing down leaders and regimes in neighboring countries formed a serious threat against the AKP when the Gezi protests suddenly turned into an uprising in almost every city.

I suggest that the fear that the protests could be a new link in the Arab Spring drove the AKP to look for new ways of mobilizing its audience. While the Gezi protests

were continuing, the AKP's constant references to the Egyptian coup, where the military ousted a democratically elected leader, were clear proof of this fear. For the AKP, the Egyptian coup showed that it might also occur in Turkey if the government had given "an initially weak or lenient response to the Gezi Park protests." (Öniş, 2015: 36). The mobilization of government supporters can be seen as a component of the AKP's response to the Gezi protests, an additional strategy to deal with the threat in question. As an effect of the Gezi protests, I offer that the AKP felt insecure within the contentious sphere and tried to eliminate the peril of a new wave springing from the Arab Spring in Turkey. As a result, pro-government contention might be added to the government's repertoire as a precaution against the risk of diffusion and function as a means of mobilization and legitimacy.

Second, mounting autocratization allowed the AKP to control state institutions and helped it eliminate compelling veto players that might endanger its survival. While such veto actors seriously limited the AKP in its first two terms, the last decade witnessed a shift in power plays in the state institutions, allowing the AKP to assert more control over them. From this perspective, it can be suggested that the balance of power shifted to a more government-centric position, providing a more unfettered elbowroom for the AKP in its strategic repertoire. On this basis, pro-government contention could be an option as the AKP had sufficient authority over institutions, helping it manage the street without losing control. After successful coup-proofing strategies, constitutional amendments, landslide electoral victories, and seizure of critical institutions in the state, it is plausible to suggest that the AKP was pretty confident in encouraging its electorate on the street or organizing mass meetings to counter the threats.

In line with the mounting autocratization, authoritarian resources were also increasingly available for the AKP to promote a polarized environment whereby pro-government contention became a possible strategy. As the Gezi protests spread, having abundant resources organizationally and financially was a substantial difference compared to the first two terms of the AKP. Most importantly, state institutions were controlled or influenced by the government to a significant degree, allowing the AKP to maneuver easily. The mainstream media, through which the party could convey its message to everyone while repressing the opposition's voice, was largely dominated by the AKP, helping it portray the contentious atmosphere in

the media in line with its political stance and encouraging counter-action of government supporters. Financial resources were broadly available thanks to a long-standing single-party government, assisting the AKP in organizing mass rallies requiring a big budget.

Possessing such opportunities, it also became gradually indispensable to throw off the democratic baggage on which the entire legitimacy was founded in the first two terms. Under the circumstances where the AKP was quite rich in terms of political opportunities, I suggest that the AKP was capable of establishing an alternative contentious sphere for pro-government contention by using the resources deriving from its autocratization. In particular, by using its economic capacity and media domination within the autocratization phase, the AKP could manage to organize big rallies against various threats and establish a frame with which groups contentiously acted in line.

Third, the AKP no doubt sought news paths of showing its legitimacy, which should be something other than elections because of the elections' proven incapability to repel a likely mass protest threat at that time. Two years after the most crushing electoral victory by taking 50% of all votes, the AKP fell into a situation where almost the other half of society contravened certain authoritarian policies by occupying public spaces for weeks. It was undoubtedly implying that tremendous popular support at the ballot box was not adequate to hamper the opposition's demands for political participation, engendering a serious threat against the legitimacy of the government. Pro-government contention can be understood as an additional strategy to boost the AKP's popular legitimacy, for which the electoral dominance was incapable of foiling the political hazard that the opposition might produce. As a contentious mechanism against the Gezi protests, pro-government contention could energize the electorate, endow participants with an identity of being an organization member, and make them zealous about subsequent electoral victories.

Fourth, as a response to the Gezi protests, pro-government contention functioned as a control mechanism employed by the AKP and presented the AKP with the opportunity to situate its audience into a specific frame. The emergence of the Gezi resistance was utterly spontaneous and did not require any organization for its advent

and continuity. Instead of an administrable protest series by civil society organizations as in the Republic protests or the relatively small-scaled TEKEL resistance, Gezi was totally uncontrollable, full of spontaneous groups and individuals, and probably the biggest anti-government mass uprising in the history of Turkey. Because of its unruly character, the protests also tended to resort to violence despite their peacefulness, engendering a solemn occasion that should be taken into consideration by the AKP seriously. I suggest that the unpredictable nature of the Gezi protests and their erratic results propelled the government to take additional measures to close the ranks among the pro-government electorate. Because of the diffusion risk of the protests that might lead to the inclusion of more citizens like a snowball, organizing counter-demonstrations and promoting counter-protests might help the AKP to control its audience and locate them within a framework formed by the government. As a result, pro-government contention might emerge as an alternative for mobilizing the people under the umbrella of a controlled narrative.

The urgency of controlling the audience entailed a fresh contentious frame. Although the Gezi protests mainly were analyzed within the scope of frames built by protesters to determine the limits of the struggle, it was a framing opportunity also for the government to supervise and regulate the actions of its electorate. The upheaval furnished an appropriate environment for the government to build such a frame and maneuver in the contentious arena with a wide array of options. Because the protests clustered around the government within a severely polarized framework, as discussed above, the AKP and Erdoğan easily found the opportunity of acting like an SMO, like a frame builder. It was uncomplicated because the contentious demand at stake was unequivocal. On this basis, the protests created a polarization moment for the government to bridge, amplify, extend, or transform its frame without sticking to a definite ideological burden. Adopting a thin ideology as a populist government, incumbents managed to administer its electorate within a simple frame: protesting "for" the government instead of "against" it.

In addition to these reasons, I argue that pro-government contention became a strategy often carried out in the aftermath of the Gezi protests. It became a regular strategy for the government to handle several political threats after pro-government contention was started to be organized or encouraged against the Gezi threat. It could be suggested that the Gezi protests functioned as an experiment to test the

practicality of pro-government contention, which penetrated the government's calculus as it confronted a serious political threat to its rule. Although it is open to discussion whether the Gezi movement was a success for the opposition or not, it is for sure that the AKP withstood the uprising, managed to repress the protest wave, and succeeded in the ballot box in 2014 and 2015. Pro-government contention was a component in overcoming the likely devastating effects of the protests and fueling the vitality of the AKP's electorate by being attendant in a contentious activity.

Considering the discussion above, it can be suggested that pro-government contention was a product of a political context in which several elements intersect. Against a mass protest threatening its rule, it emerged as an option for the government, which was capable of promoting and organizing contentious actions thanks to the opportunities provided by autocratization and polarization. Unlike the pre-2013 period, during which striking series of protests also posed a challenge to the AKP government, the Gezi protests led to a political environment in which politics was reduced to two blocs. Acting as a frame-builder, the government cemented this bipolar political milieu within the contentious sphere by which pro-government contention appeared as an alternative for mobilization and repression in the strategic repertoire.

4.5 Summary

In line with the theoretical arguments discussed in chapter, I suggest that three fundamental elements coalesced and generated a conducive environment for the use of pro-government contention as a mobilization mechanism in Turkey: mounting autocratization, highly polarized political environment gathering around the government, and the Gezi protests as a critical event. I further argue that pro-government contention has been used effectively by the government, starting with the Gezi protests until the coup attempt in 2016 and turned into a regular instrument that proved the popular power of the government several times. The next chapter discusses how such mobilization has been created and promoted in detail in this period.

However, to make such an argument, it was necessary to show that pro-government contention was not a phenomenon that could be widely observed in the pre-2013 era. Only by showing that the government did not involve in contentious practices either

by organization or promotion of such actions was it possible to claim that pro-government contention is a periodical phenomenon. For this reason, I present the political framework of the AKP government from its inception to trace the process in which pro-government contention became an evident instrument after a certain point. Analyzing the threatening events that might lead to adopting pro-government contention as a governmental strategy, I show that contentious mobilization of government supporters is almost inexistent in this period. To support this argument, I scanned *Yeni Şafak'*s issues by considering the inception dates of threatening events against the government. I found no significant series of contentious performances of government supporters.

While exploring the political context of the AKP government, I provide an account for the rationale of pro-government contention's emergence as a governmental technique. I suggest reasons why pro-government contention has not become a governmental strategy for mobilization in the pre-2013 term: the AKP's democratic boundaries, presence of veto players, unavailability of authoritarian resources, limits of polarization, and adequateness of electoral victories. I argue that the political context in this period and the AKP's constructed political identity from the beginning created certain obstacles to adopting pro-government contention.

I also presented likely justifications concerning the question of why the Gezi protests were a turning point for the appearance of contentious mobilization of government supporters: the effect of the Arab Spring, mounting autocratization, sharpened polarized milieu, establishing a control mechanism for the pro-government audience, and elections' incapability to prevent mass protests. I claim that the Gezi protests were a watershed that engendered a political opportunity for the government to build its own contentious mass, which has become a new actor on the street against certain threats from that moment on. In contrast to the relatively democratic and less polarized political environment, where no mass protest posed a severe risk to the AKP government, I suggest that the post-Gezi era brought unique circumstances together and led to a favorable political surrounding for the AKP to act contentiously.

CHAPTER 5: PRO-GOVERNMENT CONTENTION IN TURKEY, 2013-2016

In this chapter, I explore the process starting with the Gezi protests in 2013 until the coup attempt and its aftermath in 2016. I examine in what ways the government adopted pro-government contention through either rallies or encouragement of pro-government contentious activism. In the previous chapter, I elaborated on why the pre-2013 period was not conducive to such a strategy and why the Gezi protests served as a critical event. This chapter scrutinizes the shift in the AKP's contentious strategy on the street, specifically on why and how the AKP responded to different political threats by adopting contentious means.

This thesis argues that pro-government contention results from political threats against an authoritarian government. I suggest that while using contentious means on the street, autocrats act as frame builders by utilizing various frame alignment processes to overcome a threat they confront. Relying on this argument, I explore the AKP's responses against political threats to answer the question of why pro-government contention becomes a strategy in the repertoire of the AKP and how it is carried out.

To do this, I follow a three-step analysis. Because my argument relies on the presence of political threats for the adoption of pro-government contention, first, I use the categorization based on threat types, as discussed in Chapter 2, and divide the chapter into five sections that explore five threat cases: the Gezi protests (protest threat), the corruption allegations (scandal threat), the post-June 7 process (terror threat), the coup attempt (coup threat), and finally the foreign policy in the Middle East (diffusion threat). In each section, I discuss what the case is and how it generated a threat to the existing government.

Second, I explain how the AKP government frames the threat in question for each threat type and how such framing shows itself in the contentious arena. Claiming that the government is the frame builder of pro-government contention, I focus on how the AKP exercises framing strategies to construct a context regarding contentious activism and shapes it accordingly when necessary. Suggesting that the AKP

constructed a polarization frame, I show how the AKP maneuvers between different frame alignment strategies and how those frames penetrated the contentious performances of government supporters.

Third, I show how the regime's authoritarian capacity is exploited by the government and how it serves the promotion and organization of pro-government contention. For each threat case, I demonstrate the opportunities deriving from the authoritarian structure of the regime, helping the AKP to use pro-government contention as a mobilization strategy. While doing that, I discuss each threat type by benefiting from the data I collected, showing why threats are the main drivers of pro-government contention when the AKP can use authoritarian resources and opportunities. In this section, I answer how authoritarianism and threats act as mobilizers of pro-government contention and why they are the fundamental mechanisms of pro-government contention.

Regarding the AKP's capacity to build a contentious frame for pro-government contention, I suggest that this is achieved through a frame based on a simple polarized logic, which divides society into two camps: those supporting the government and those being against it. I argue that each political threat is framed through an overarching polarization frame, which is extended, amplified, bridged, or transformed according to the political context. I argue that the AKP government encourages an appropriate political environment for the organization of pro-government contention by establishing a frame and switching among different alternatives. I show that after framing the threat in question, the AKP resorts to authoritarian opportunities to promote and organize pro-government contention.

It should be noted that the causal link I suggest, leading to the use of pro-government contention, is limited to the presence of threats and the regime's authoritarian properties. I do not discuss the government's framing strategies to draw a causal link between frames and pro-government contention. Instead, I suggest that the AKP's framing techniques against political threats generate a conducive political environment where pro-government contention becomes a feasible strategic option for the government. I show how the AKP's framing strategies echo on the street in demonstration areas through slogans, banners, and the organization of the contention. In this context, I discuss framing strategies of the government to answer a "how"

question instead of “why.” To answer “why” questions, I explore the effect of threats and authoritarian resources/institutions which the AKP government exploits to overcome these threats.

In the rest of the chapter, I explore each threat case separately through sub-sections that describe the case, analyze framing processes, the opportunities of authoritarianism, and the causal effects of political threats against the AKP government. In doing so, I provide answers to this dissertation's “how” and “why” questions as presented in the Introduction chapter.

5.1 Protest Threat: The Gezi Protests

In the summer of 2013, the AKP confronted arguably the largest mass protests in Turkish history, whose effects lasted for years in politics. Springing from an environmental and local protest to protect the Gezi Park against the government’s reconstruction project in the area, protests were attended by millions of people and turned into nationwide demonstrations against the government. In contrast to the Republic protests in 2007 or the TEKEL resistance in 2009-2010, Gezi protesters were not exclusively composed of a specific segment of society. Instead, they include various chunks such as seculars, nationalists, Kurds, students, workers, or even some Islamists. With a wide array of identities, it fundamentally had two objections. On the one hand, it was a disapproval of the government’s neoliberal policies based on privatization and commercialization. On the other hand, more importantly, the demonstrations responded to the AKP’s democratic retreat and its heightened authoritarian intervention in public life.

The sudden spread of protests was a shock for the AKP. To abolish the threat in question and prospective risks, the AKP has taken several measures. Most importantly, police repression was widely carried out. As the protests turned into nationwide anti-government mobilization, security forces adopted a zero-tolerance approach, resulting in more than ten deaths and thousands of injured (Atak & della Porta, 2016; Özen, 2015). Police barricades, the deployment of riot police in public spaces, and unproportioned water cannons became a daily measure to repel any protest threat in big cities. During this period, the police department considerably increased its purchase of water cannons and tear gas, implying that the security understanding of the regime renounced the means of dialogue and preferred severe

suppression instead (Atak & della Porta, 618). Furthermore, the targeted arrest was efficiently used to impede further anti-government mobilization. Many activists were arrested within a series of operations conducted by the police, resulting in the demobilization of protest campaigns (Demirel-Pegg, 2020).

Alongside such measures, the government responded with another option: pro-government mobilization. Scholars studying the Gezi protests generally explored the mobilization process through the lenses of protesters (Anisin, 2016; Damar, 2016; David & Toktamis, 2015; Gençoğlu Onbaşi, 2016; Göksel & Tekdemir, 2018; Özen, 2015; Ugur-Cinar & Gunduz-Arabaci, 2020). However, the manifestation of such grievances engendered another mobilization process, driving the government to extend the boundaries of its strategic repertoire.

In response to the protest threat, I argue that the government applied this strategy in two ways. First, it created a contentious frame after the protests became nationwide, seriously endangering the AKP. Building a polarization frame, the government provided an appropriate political environment for the pro-government audience's likely intention to take to the street against the Gezi protesters. And second, benefiting from authoritarian resources, the AKP organized and promoted pro-government contention where citizens and groups participated and became a popular component of a counter-narrative formed against the Gezi protests.

In the following section, I discuss the AKP's attempts, as the frame-builder of pro-government contention, during the Gezi protests based on strict polarization within society in the form of anti-government and pro-government masses. I show that the AKP uses two frame alignment processes: frame extension and frame amplification.

5.1.1 Framing the Protest Threat

The scholarship offers limited research concerning the AKP's framing strategies during the Gezi protests (de Medeiros, 2019; Nefes, 2017; Özen, 2020, Türk, 2014). I suggest an overarching theme whereby the AKP found the opportunity to extend and amplify its frame. Exploring the dynamics of pro-government contention during and after the Gezi protests, I argue that the AKP created a polarization frame against the protests. I suggest that the AKP found the opportunity to extend its democratic frame, which acquires legitimacy from the ballot box, to include contentious tools,

promoting citizens to take to the street or organizing them. In this way, the government, like an SMO, "extend(s) the boundaries of its primary framework to encompass interests or points of view that are incidental to its primary objectives but of considerable salience to potential adherents (Snow et al., 1986: 472). Moreover, I suggest that the AKP amplifies values that might prompt its electorate to take a counter-action against Gezi protesters. Highlighting conspiracy against the nation, conservative sensitivities, and national will narrative, the AKP amplified values that might reinforce the polarization frame.

In this context, I show that a polarization frame cemented by frame alignment strategies helped the government, as the frame builder of pro-government contention, create a conducive environment for mobilizing pro-government citizens against the Gezi protesters. I suggest that the AKP utilized four mechanisms to establish a polarized atmosphere in protest politics, encouraging both the government and pro-government citizens to adopt contentious means: comparisons of two masses on the street, threatening protesters with the pro-government audience, conspiracy theories, and finally emphasizing moral inferiority of protesters.

To form an appropriate political milieu for the use of pro-government contention against the protest threat, the AKP constructed a strict polarization frame from the beginning of the protests. The government's first critical reaction was to compare Gezi protesters with the AKP's electorate. On the first day when the nationwide protests were organized, the then Prime Minister Erdoğan gave a statement that created a simple duality based on the comparison of two popular crowds:

> If the thing is to have a meeting or social movement, if they can summon 20, I will summon 200 thousand. If they summon 100 thousand, I will summon 1 million people with my party. We don't have such a concern. But they shouldn't bring matters to this degree (Cumhuriyet, 2013g).

Erdoğan's reaction implies two things in general. First, the statement is based on a sharply polarized logic, defining protesters as "they" and the prospective pro-government rally participants as "we." Erdoğan immediately responded to the protests by conducting two camps in either an anti- or pro- position. This "either … or" portrayal of society draws the boundaries of contentious social identities with

thick lines, pushing citizens to participate in one of the existing camps. Similarly, the remarks of Yalçın Akdoğan, the then advisor of Erdoğan, claiming that the protests produced a unified bloc against the government, reflect the same approach, pointing out the confrontation of two blocs upon the spread of protests (Cumhuriyet, 2013m). In this way, an anti-government contentious claim engenders a counter-claim, implying a possible pro-government action. Erdoğan builds the polarization frame on this comparison, which does not leave any space other than keeping one against the other.

Second, the comparison between "us" and "them" relies on numbers and magnitude. Erdoğan points out two different masses with a comparison in which government supporters represent the overwhelming majority against anti-government protesters. While "the people" they can gather on the street is millions of people, anti-government protesters are pictured relatively as a small group that cannot reach the numbers of the pro-government audience. The slogan used in pro-government gatherings against the Gezi protests, "stay a few or we'll carry on," is a good example of this attitude (Cumhuriyet, 2013h). Against protesters, this indubitably provides a symbolic power for the pro-government audience, which an autocratized government already backs. And related to the first point, the other important thing is that the numeral supremacy is fused with a particular identity of "us" against "them," boosting the government's polarization frame. What Erdoğan emphasizes is not simply the dominance based on the number of prospective rally participants but also a "substance" in the form of "us," providing an identity composed against anti-government protesters (Müller, 2016: 77-78).

In this way, the government generates not only a political identity or numerical supremacy but also implies a likely contentious identity, which can be manifested on the street with the organization of mass rallies by the AKP government. Erdoğan's statement does not signify a virtual crowd. Instead, it points out the potential physical presence of pro-government citizens on the street as if it is in a social movement form. This statement denotes not only a frame relying on the polarization of "us vs. them" and the comparison of numbers but also promises the tangible correspondence of that duality and quantity in a contentious way in the squares. Extending the political frame to include the mobilization of citizens on the street as a governmental strategy, Erdoğan asserts a prospective counter-movement in the form of a pro-

government rally, which represents the simultaneous presence of two masses physically.

In addition to the implications, Erdoğan's words are also interesting because they are almost the same as the AKP's group deputy chairman Eyüp Fatsa's reaction against the Republic protests in 2007, as discussed in Chapter 4. To remind the reader, the AKP had reacted quite similarly against the mass protests in 2007, signifying a likely big rally organized by the party to counter the Republic protests. Although the party had signalized such a gathering, neither a rally had been arranged, nor citizens had taken action to concretize such a signal.

However, the Gezi protests proceeded in an entirely different direction. The statement about a prospective rally did not remain an isolated signal, but the frame was extended by the party's new announcements regarding a likely mobilization. More polarizing statements accompanied the clue about gathering millions of people in the squares in the following days. On June 3, Erdoğan stated that the party's grassroots incessantly asked them whether they would keep silent against protesters (Cumhuriyet, 2013e). While emphasizing the energy in the grassroots, he also cast a role to the party that tries to control such energy, so it does not burst out. He added that the party stayed calm to cool down the angry masses, although being constantly pushed to take action to counter the protests.

This threatening discourse was maintained even more strikingly in the following days. Erdoğan made one of his most famous speeches about the Gezi protests, dividing society into two strict camps proportionally. On June 3, he said, "we are hardly keeping at least 50 percent of the population at home. And we are telling them to be patient and don't be fooled" (Cumhuriyet, 2013i). Similar to the first and second statements above, the government denotes a definite duality of pro- and anti-government citizens in the contentious arena. Notably, Erdoğan constructs polarization so that one-half of the population protests the government. The other half stays at home as ready to take to the street, being smoothed down by the government not to lead a physical confrontation. In this context, despite the variety of actors and demands, the Gezi protests were anchored in an exact polarization of society in the AKP's contentious frame, promising an actor in the squares that might counter the anti-government mass.

Such discourse established by the government is necessary to understanding how protest politics is imprisoned within a polarized environment. It consists of two camps, anti-government protesters and pro-government audience, ready to take to the street, waiting for a signal from the government to act. This is important to grasp the contentious function of the polarization frame. Erdoğan's statement implies the prospective presence of government supporters on the street, showing that the polarization frame does not function solely as an imaginary composition but also signals the physical activity of pro-government citizens.

Furthermore, the AKP did not only adopt threatening protesters as a governmental strategy in response to the mass protest threat to solidify polarization. It also used blaming by amplifying two unfailing components of Turkish politics to dilute the protests' damaging effect: conspiracy theories and conservative sensitivity (Bora, 1996). One hundred seventy-one statements by incumbents were noted between 2013 and 2016 during my scanning of newspapers, accusing anti-government groups of being terrorists, coup plotters, or a part of an international conspiracy against the nation.

As of June 1, government officials frequently appealed to blaming internal and external actors for the emergence and spread of the Gezi protests. Triggering the concern about "the alleged plots of global powers and their local collaborators" against Turkey, the government amplified its contentious frame, which interlaced protesters' demands with external and internal lobbies' interests (Nefes, 2017: 612). Erdoğan interpreted the protests as a step having both internal and external connections (Cumhuriyet, 2013i). On the same day, the AKP's vice chairman Hüseyin Çelik pointed out secret actors who like hazy airs to disclose the grudge they bear. The most cited actor was the interest lobby, whose actors were not specified but generally portrayed as a group of people having a secret agenda to benefit from overblown interest rates. On this basis, the AKP built up a narrative that the Gezi protests were a planned and conscious venture of some lobbies to obtain economic benefits in a chaotic political environment.

Referring to conspiracy theories, the AKP did not only develop an isolated, paranoid style of doing politics but also managed to convey the perception regarding protests and protesters to their audience and persuade them. Research shows that AKP

supporters were inclined to believe conspiracy theories produced by the government during and after the Gezi protests. As Nefes (2017: 619) argues, this in turn "functioned to consolidate the AKP's supporter base against the protests, (and) to alienate the people sympathizing with the protests." More importantly, the AKP's conspiratorial framing reinforced the political fragmentation as two blocs, government supporters and government opponents. Forming a counter-protest narrative, the AKP simplified "the political process into a for-or-against position," thus contributing to society's strict polarization. (de Medeiros, 2019: 8).

The government's function of being a frame-builder in pro-government contention was evident in the squares. Its claim that the nation is facing a conspiracy echoed in the streets several times. Many instances show that groups supporting the government used the same conspiratorial language in their protest actions. A group organized a demonstration to protest Gezi protesters and chanted "we discerned the game played against Turkey" (Yeni Şafak, 2013k), while another crowd chanted "we will not let you topple him" in a gathering by referring to a conspiracy against Erdoğan (Cumhuriyet, 2013h). In an opening ceremony, government supporters shouted, "We won't take to the squares, we won't be fooled by this conspiracy" (Cumhuriyet, 2013p).

In the same vein, banners were hung in pro-government demonstration areas, pointing out an international conspiracy against the AKP: "The conspiracy is big," "the world is watching the realities now," "It's not Gezi Park, it's Interest Lobby Park" are a few banners that refer to a conspiracy, which is allegedly boosted both by internal and external actors (Cumhuriyet, 2013b; Yeni Şafak, 2013o). International media organs such as the BBC and CNN were booed with slogans claiming that such organizations were used to interfere in the internal affairs of Turkey (Yeni Şafak, 2013c). The government organized huge meetings called "Let's Spoil the Big Game, Let's Make History" (Yeni Şafak, 2013i), proving that contentious performances of government supporters are framed through persistent references to a serious conspiracy against the government and the nation.

Concurrently, the AKP officials pictured the protesters as people vandalizing public property and depicted the protests as an assault on conservative values. In the first days of the protests, Erdoğan labeled protesters as looters and approached protests as

efforts to overthrow the government in the street because of the opposition's failures in the ballot box (Cumhuriyet, 2013e). On June 9, Erdoğan directly associated protesters with terror and anarchy:

> We don't do what a few looters did. They wreak havoc. This is already the definition of a looter. They are such lowlifes that they swear at the prime minister of this country (…) Will we leave these squares to the terrorists and anarchists? They are fighting for what? (Cumhuriyet, 2013a).

Identifying protesters with terrorism and anarchism does not only aim to discredit protesters but also provides a tool for the government to gain a moral advantage by comparing two polarized masses (Mudde & Rovira-Kaltwasser, 2017: 14). On the one hand, the AKP ascribes a notorious character to protesters, bringing them into disrepute and attributing a morally inferior image. On the other hand, the morally inferior protester image is compared to its counter-image, which is composed of the people, the AKP's own audience.

The AKP constructs this moral polarization on several occasions. For instance, on June 18, Erdoğan points out the true people in the squares, where the AKP will organize big rallies against the Gezi protests:

> We will continue to show the view and photograph of true Turkey and the people's genuine sentiment to both traitors inside and collaborators outside. If traitors inside and collaborators outside want to see the true photograph of Turkey and to understand the people's genuine sentiment, they are welcome to look at Kayseri, Samsun, and Erzurum this week (Cumhuriyet, 2013o).

The faithful people is portrayed as a mass standing against traitors and collaborators: "As a nation, we have such a style of resistance that it suppresses all resistance, spoils all games and overturns all traps. We rise with prayer and resist with silence and patience" (Cumhuriyet, 2013b). Erdoğan's words in another rally against the Gezi protests repeat the same morally polarizing logic, depicting the AKP's

audience, as the people, as a force of "good" that might overpower the protesters in the streets.

This moral polarization also manifests in officials' statements regarding protesters' assaults on conservative values. Erdoğan amplified the frame against the protests by using two sacred values for conservative segments: headscarf and mosque. "They assaulted girls and sisters wearing headscarves. They walked into the Dolmabahçe Mosque with beers and shoes," he said, repeated several times in speeches by several AKP officials during the Gezi protests (Cumhuriyet, 2013a). The moral superiority of the people was insistently underlined on other occasions by contrasting the image of vandal protesters with the conservative and democratic electorate:

> On the streets, avenues, it is inexplicable. Several scenes that did not overlap with the people's decency and customs happened in and outside the tents. We did not and shall not respond to any of these with the same method because we did not start off by destroying, vandalizing, or with lies and slanders. We resist by prayers, our great efforts, law, and democracy in the ballot box (Yeni Şafak, 2013e).

The AKP's morally constructed anti-protester frame and its role as the frame-builder of pro-government contention are evident in the contentious actions of government supporters. Slogans chanted, and banners hung in demonstration areas mirror the government's morally superior language against Gezi protesters in the streets. "Bang bang bang it out, let the looters hear it out" (Yeni Şafak, 2013o), "the last word is said not by looters but by our nation" (Yeni Şafsk 2013e), "we challenged the whole world, a few looters cannot destroy us" (Yeni Şafak, 2013c) are examples from the gatherings organized against the Gezi protests. Government supporters fulfill the role of reiterating what government officials say concerning the moral polarization between anti-government protesters and the government's electorate, ascribing a contentious tone to the anti-Gezi frame. This proves that the polarization frame set by the AKP was not solely a discursive phenomenon utilized in speeches but also a performative action that is manifested in the social sphere by pro-government citizens.

I suggest that this polarization frame provided an appropriate milieu for pro-government citizens and for the government to start to use the streets as a political sphere. The government created incentives that promoted pro-government contentious actions by extending and amplifying the frame through the aforementioned means, as evident in pro-government gatherings. In the next section, I discuss the authoritarian opportunities used during the protests and share the data regarding pro-government contention against the Gezi protests.

5.1.2 Authoritarian Opportunities and the Protest Threat: Event Data

In addition to the polarization frame, the government's dominance on state resources deriving from increasing autocratization was evident in pro-government contentious actions. The data show that pro-government groups cooperated with security forces to intervene in the protests or organized their rallies under police protection. While protesters were exposed to harsh police response in many cases, citizens attacking Gezi protesters remained untouched or cooperated with security forces. Several coded events prove this claim. The assault of the AKP Youth Branch members on protesters (Cumhuriyet, 2013k), unidentified citizens' attacks on Gezi participants (Cumhuriyet, 2013d), the assaults of citizens having sticks or choppers on demonstrators (Cumhuriyet, 2013l; Cumhuriyet, 2013s) are examples, which did not encounter an impediment by the police. More importantly, it is reported that the police protected such actors or cooperated with them. Some pro-government protesters used water cannon vehicles as shields while attacking protesters. Some stayed behind security forces to beat protesters as an additional civilian power (Cumhuriyet, 2013q).

This is also in line with discussions about transforming the state into a police state under the AKP government with mounting autocratization (Kars Kaynar, 2018). The non-intervention of the police in the rallies and assaults on the Gezi protests ensured pro-government groups that their contentious actions would not have faced repressive measures. It functioned as a guarantee for future rallies organized by these groups, who witnessed that taking to the street was a safe option. This is important to understand how the cost of acting on the street was diametrically different for anti-government protesters from pro-government citizens, helping the latter manifest their claims in a secure environment. In contrast, the cost of protesting is pretty high for

the former. Increasing autocratization, which allows the regime holders to control the police department in line with their interests, can be grasped as a determinant that facilitates the organization of pro-government contention.

This shows that security measures can be used as a mobilization instrument in authoritarian regimes in contrast to democracies, where the security system is under the scrutiny of democratic institutions instead of authoritarian control mechanisms. The state's coercive capacity, comparably higher in authoritarian regimes than in democracies (Levitsky & Way, 2010: 56-61), was not used solely for the repression of protesters but as a security assurance for pro-government groups to express their contentious support.

The authoritarian opportunities exploited by the AKP are even more evident in the government-organized mass rallies. In addition to mass gatherings to welcome Erdoğan, where public resources were allegedly used, the AKP organized five big rallies to which millions of citizens attended, called Respect for National Will Meetings in Ankara, İstanbul, Kayseri, Samsun, and Erzurum. It is claimed that these rallies were arranged using broad public and state resources in parallel with the gradual autocratization of the government. *Cumhuriyet* asserted that participants were transported to the squares by opportunities provided by municipalities, public and private employees were allegedly forced or paid to attend the meetings, and SMS messages were sent to citizens to persuade them to participate in the rally (Cumhuriyet, 2013r; Cumhuriyet, 2013c). It was stated that mosques were used as places where free transportation was provided. The meetings were advertised on several TV channels, newspapers, and billboards to increase participation. *Cumhuriyet* also reported that the security of the participants was ensured while they were marching to the rally areas, and a high number of police officers were deployed to the demonstration area to take security measures (Cumhuriyet, 2013r; Cumhuriyet, 2013c).

Moreover, these meetings conveyed the polarization frame to the audience in the squares through the exploitation of state and public resources. Erdoğan gave public speeches, banners were hung, and slogans were chanted in demonstration areas, contributing to the deepening of the cleavage in society. Erdoğan repeated his discourse, labeling protesters as looters while depicting the rally participants as the

manifestation of national will, emphasized conspiracies against the nation, and reiterated Gezi protesters' immoral behaviors against the nation's conservative values. The mass rallies functioned as gatherings whereby the AKP created a contentious political atmosphere, the output of wide financial and organizational networks.

Media tools were also effectively used by the AKP to create the image that Respect for National Will Meetings are qualitatively more "national" and quantitatively bigger than the Gezi protests. From the beginning of the protests, pro-government media, including mainstream newspapers and TV channels which started to shift to the pro-government media sphere, was unwilling to report/broadcast the protests or tended to trivialize them (Özen, 2015). However, it had the opposite attitude when presenting pro-government rallies, helping the government picture them as the only representation of the popular will. As a well-known pro-government newspaper, *Yeni Şafak*'s portrayal of the Respect for National Will meetings is exemplary in this respect. The photographs from the meeting areas were given with the title "The View of Turkey" or "This is Turkey," and captions such as "the national will did not fit into the squares" were frequently used (Yeni Şafak, 2013d; Yeni Şafak, 2013f). While the crowds in the Gezi protests were portrayed as small groups, the Respect for National Will Meetings were presented as gatherings to which millions of patriotic citizens attended. Support demonstrations for the Turkish government from different countries were widely covered, announcing that thousands of Turkish citizens living abroad were with Erdoğan (Yeni Şafak, 2013s).

Supporting this dissertation's threat-based argument, the below figure shows how protest threat produced such contention. Figure 18 shows how the Gezi protests led to the emergence of pro-government contention as a political practice on the street.

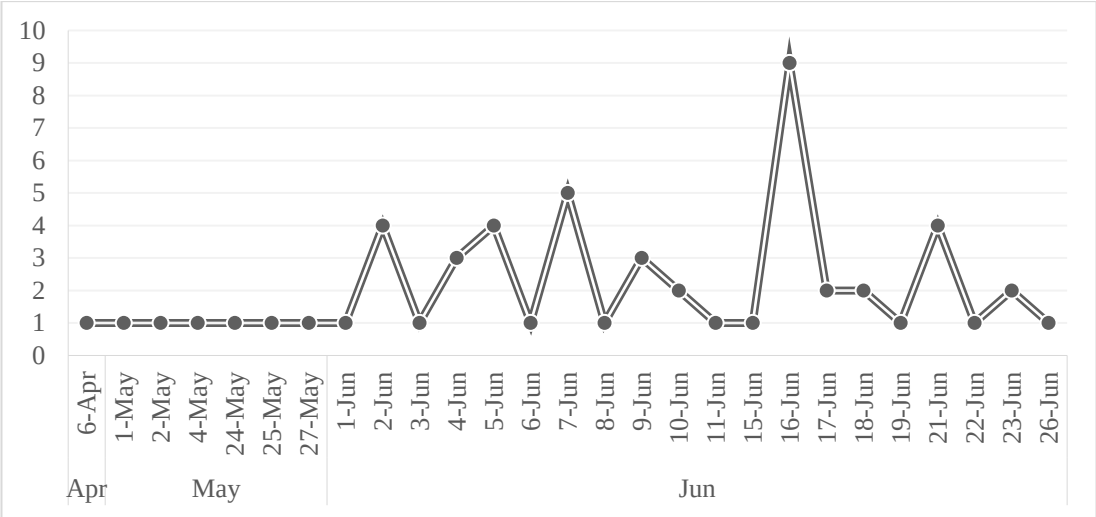

Figure 18. The daily number of all pro-government contention events from April 1, 2013, until June 30, 2013.

The figure suggests two things. First, there is not only a correlation between the nationwide Gezi protests and the use of pro-government contention but also a causal relationship if the absence of such contentious practices before the emergence of the Gezi protests is considered. Although there is no burst of pro-government contention during May, the figure shows a sharp increase as the Gezi protests spread. Regarding also the polarization frame constituted by the government in response to the protests, it can be suggested that the Gezi protests engendered another mobilization process, which has the purpose of preserving the existing government in power.

Second, the figure suggests that pro-government contention arises as counter-mobilization against a striking protest threat (Lo, 1982; Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996; Zald & Useem, 1987). As discussed in Chapter 2, protest threat may lead to the formation of a counter-force if conditions ripen for such mobilization. Given that pro-government contention numbers suddenly increase after June 1, Figure 1 proves this proposition. Instead of initiating a new claim to influence or change powerholders' policies, pro-government contention transpires in response to those initiating a claim against existing power relations.

Furthermore, contentious actions of government supporters against the Gezi protests do not arise in one form but have a repertoire, albeit limited. Figure 19 shows the distribution of pro-government contentious actions according to their event type, excluding officially organized rallies by the government.

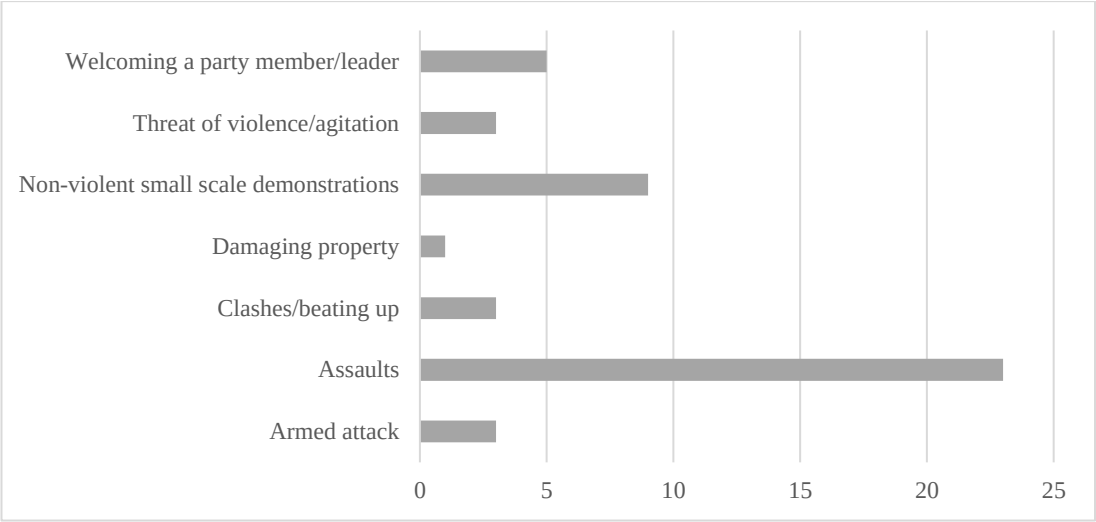

Figure 19. The distribution of pro-government contentious actions during the Gezi protests according to event type, excluding rallies officially organized by the government, May 28, 2013 – August 31, 2013.

It can be suggested that Erdoğan's polarization frame stirred up the feelings of some pro-government groups to take to the street, particularly by adopting violent means. After Erdoğan's first reaction against the Gezi protests, several gatherings, including many violent actions, were organized by pro-government groups and citizens. During June and July, groups directly declared their support for the government, unidentified groups assaulted Gezi protesters in different cities and chanted slogans to support the AKP. Given that government supporters cooperated with the police and the latter secured the former in demonstration areas, Figure 19 provides evidence regarding the use of police as an authoritarian means for violent pro-government actions.

Another important observation is that mass rallies organized by the government may have the effect of curtailing the number of violent assaults on protesters and dampening protest threat. This might also support the claim that the government act as the frame builder and fundamental actor of pro-government contention. Figure 20 shows the number of violent actions of government supporters during June.

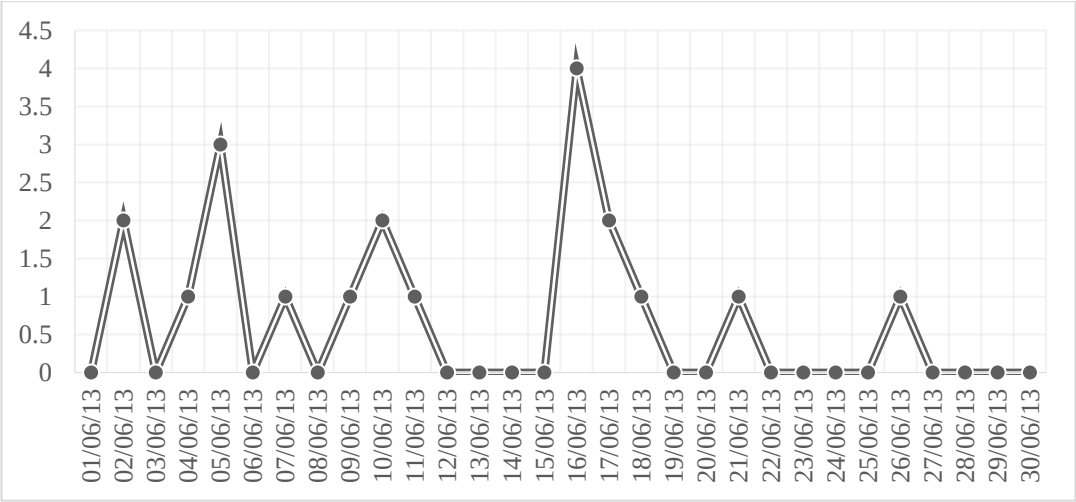

Figure 20. The daily number of pro-government violent events from June 1, 2013, until June 30, 2013.

According to the graph, pro-government violence is a visible phenomenon from June 1 until June 18, after which it almost disappears. This shift may be explained through two likely causes. First, it can be argued that because the number of protests is high in the first days of the Gezi protests, the number of violence is also proportionally high. Figure 19 demonstrates the number of non-violent small and large-scale demonstrations and marches, excluding pro-government rallies in June 2013. If Figures 20 and 21 are analyzed together, it is plausible to suggest that pro-government violence is relatively in parallel with the number of protests, which sharply declines after June 16.

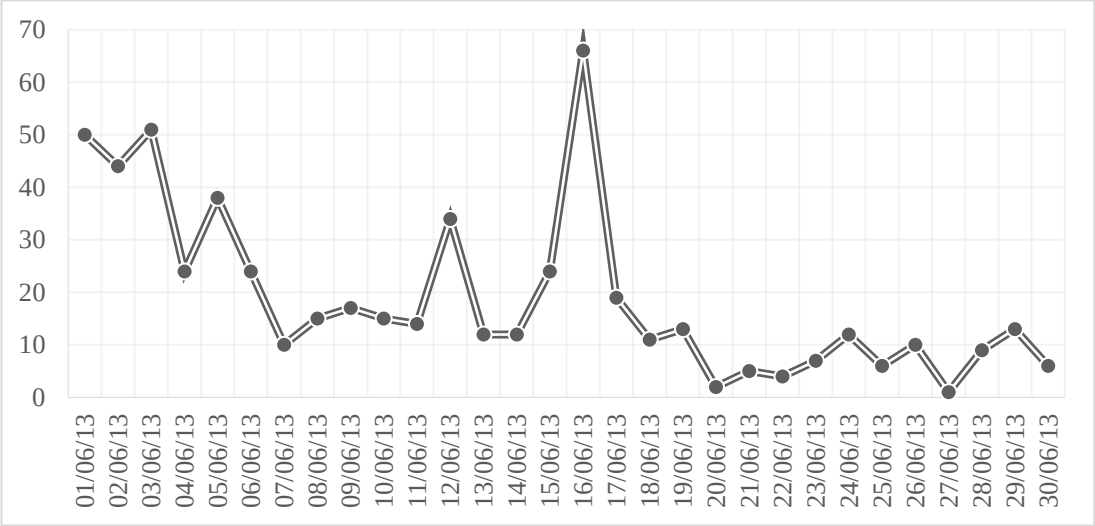

Figure 21. The daily number of protests from June 1, 3013 to June 30, 2013.

Another explanation can be the organization of the government's mass rallies, among which the date of the first rally is June 15, and the last one is June 23. It can be suggested that the organization of these rallies where the government specifies the repertoire, program, and location might provide control over the pro-government audience and lead to a decrease in the number of the use of violence as a contentious means. Put it differently, rallies organized by the government might exclude violent means from government supporters' repertoire because adopting violent strategies can easily become uncontrollable in an authoritarian regime. In this context, government-organized mass rallies may ensure a so-called discipline between the government and the electorate. Therefore, they may draw certain boundaries regarding violence so as not to lose authority over pro-government groups.

The mobilization process of government supporters against the protest threat is vital to understanding the fundamental arguments of this dissertation. The government created a polarization frame whereby a contentious dichotomy within society was successfully constructed as anti- and pro-government blocs. I showed that creating a polarization frame generated a conducive environment for promoting and organizing pro-government contention, evident in pro-government spheres. Grasping the role of the polarization frame in the contentious actions of pro-government groups and the government is essential because I show in the below sections that the polarization frame is used as the fundamental discursive formation to respond following threats against the government.

The protest threat also proved for the first time that the government's autocratization is evident at the contentious level. The government managed to claim streets as a pro-government space by exploiting a set of public and state resources for the organization and encouraging pro-government contention. And finally, the contentious mobilization against the Gezi protests showed that threat was the fundamental concept that prompted the government to set a contentious frame and use authoritarian resources and networks to mobilize its audience.

5.2 Scandal Threat: The December 17-25 Graft and Corruption Allegations

A few months after the Gezi protests, the government faced another shocking event. A religious clique in the state called the Gülen Movement publicized several tapes that revealed government officials' alleged corruption and graft attempts and their networks. Starting on December 17, 2013, a series of operations was launched by Gülenist prosecutors with accusations of bribery, smuggling, forgery, and malpractice, targeting people having critical positions in the government. As a result of the operations, significant figures, including the sons of the then Minister of Interior, Minister of Economy, Minister of Environment and Urbanization; influential businessmen and bureaucrats were taken into custody, and some were arrested. Moreover, Erdoğan was also personally targeted with secretly taped conversations, leading to a traumatic conflict within the state between the government and the Gülenist clique.

In fact, as an important strategic ally of the AKP since 2002, the Gülen movement contributed significantly to the AKP's electoral victories and helped them curb the influence of the establishment ideology. The Gülenist clique initiated historical operations against the army and several other political actors to curtail such actors' control in decision mechanisms (Martin, 2020, also *see* Chapter 4). However, this strategic alliance gradually cooled off. Despite both sides' publicly expressing the conflict, the MİT crisis in 2012 and the disagreement between the government and the Gülen movement regarding the latter's role in education increased the tension (*see* Taş, 2018). This palpable tension burst out when operations starting on December 17 damaged the AKP irreversibly, triggering a direct clash between the two powers. From this date, the Gülen movement became one of the major and explicit targets of the government.

In such a context, the scandal pushed the AKP to initiate a purge against the Gülenist clique, particularly targeting the cadres in the police department and the judicial institutions where Gülenists were dominant. The government seized the media groups owned by the Gülen movement in the subsequent years. The clique was identified with the term "parallel state," a label to declare the movement as an illegal structure that penetrated the state institutions. Using various official channels, the

AKP gradually increased its pressure on the clique, reporting the movement in the list of "illegal organizations under legal masks" in 2014 (Taş, 2018: 401).

In addition to such legal and institutional measures, the AKP maintained its polarization frame by repeatedly using frame amplification mechanisms. I argue that the risky situation promoted the AKP to keep the frame used against the Gezi protests and amplified specific values to cement the polarized atmosphere. As a result, I suggest that the polarization frame generated an appropriate milieu that helped the organization of pro-government contention and pushed the government to organize mass rallies, just as the Respect for National Will meetings.

5.2.1 Framing the Scandal Threat

In response to the corruption and graft allegations, the AKP maintained an already constructed frame, which succeeded in the Gezi protests to mobilize its electorate. In the previous section, I showed that the AKP created a polarization frame that divided society into two blocs, promoting pro-government contentious actions on the street and pushing the government to organize mass rallies against the Gezi protests. In this way, the AKP extended its democratic frame by including contentious mechanisms as a mobilization strategy to overcome the protest threat. The reaction against the December 17-25 allegations maintained the same frame, providing an alternative mobilization opportunity for the government.

That said, the government added a new frame alignment strategy to its repertoire to solidify its polarization frame against the scandal: frame bridging. To deal with the scandal threat, the AKP fused two successive events, the Gezi protests and the graft allegations, into the same narrative despite the presence of two different actors behind them and different background stories. In this way, the AKP bridged two independent but ideologically congruent frames: anti-protest and anti-Gülenist frames. Using media organs and mass rallies, the AKP, like an SMO, reached a wider pool of individuals and forced them to decide between two camps regardless of the methods used by opposition actors or their identities: either anti- or pro-government. Also, while doing this, it maintained to amplify a value that has already resonated in the pro-government audience: the fear of a global and domestic conspiracy against the nation.

The AKP chose to construct a conspiracy framework once again in responding to the scandal. The first reaction by Erdoğan against the operation was full of references to secret actors trying to design a plot. Adopting a populist approach, he told his audience that the plot was targeting not only the government but also the people:

> We will not bow down to any threat. God willing, we will not step back as long as you have our backs. We will never leave God and our fight for God. They can resort to any kind of ugly ways they want. They can make any kind of dirty alliance; in Turkey, the word belongs to the people now. Those receiving support from dark subjects and gangs cannot draw the path for this country and this nation. Those with the help of capital and media and some dark spheres inside and outside Turkey cannot play with Turkey's path. Turkey is not a country you can operate on. The people will not allow it, the ruling government of AKP will not allow it (Cumhuriyet, 2013f).

Like the discursive frame set during the Gezi protests, the AKP amplified the fear of conspiracy by referring to the same dichotomy built on an adversarial relationship between two camps. The people were depicted as a mass against which a group of people with local and global alliances to overthrow the government. More importantly, the people were given the duty of not permitting such a conspiracy against the government, which is also a force behind the people not to allow the realization of those groups' allegedly clandestine plans.

The people's duty of protecting the government and fighting against the conspiracy was built on a sharp polarization. The cleavage was deepened by us/nation vs. them/plotters, and the latter's content is filled mainly with ambiguous subjects such as dark spheres, gangs, capital, and their collaborators. The principal consultant of Erdoğan puts forward this polarization, which revolves utterly around the government:

> A losers' club is trying all kinds of manipulation, taunting and provocative tone with no moral concern. Even in the Olympics, they could stand against Turkey "just so that AKP

> doesn't win." There is a pathological approach to collapsing the country so that AKP doesn't win (Yeni Şafak, 2013h).

Seen through the lens of the AKP officials, the conspiracy does not solely include secret agents, as evident in the term "losers' club," but also refers to a broad spectrum of groups having anti-government tendencies and trying to block the AKP's success. The polarization frame successfully continues to picture a sharp division in society, not merely targeting many people with a backroom agenda but also blaming a vast bloc of people who threatens the government.

But more importantly, this conspiracy was used to reinforce the polarization frame by directly linking the conspiracy in corruption allegations with the conspiracy in the Gezi protests. The government bridges the frame it built during the corruption allegations with the frame that had already been established during the Gezi protests. Pointing out a single bloc under the banner of a conspiracy against the government and the nation, the AKP associated the intentions behind the Gezi protests with the Gülenist movement's operations. In this framework, one party consisted of the government and the nation, referring to the AKP's electorate, and the other party featured Gezi protesters and the Gülenist movement, who were in a complicated and covert relationship with dark powers:

> We don't doubt our wudu; we don't doubt our salaah either. This is an international game; it's a conspiracy with an outside root. Gangs are formed inside the state; they have been used as tongs and pieceworkers in this conspiracy. Local collaborators and pawns undertaking piecework of global powers have been used as tools in this conspiracy. We are spoiling this game. Just like we spoiled the game in Gezi, we will also spoil it here. Know this (Yeni Şafak, 2013b).

The conspiratorial coupling of the Gezi protests and graft allegations was underlined many times. In another speech, Erdoğan presented the same equation by emphasizing the vandalizing character of the Gezi protests and their diffusion into the corruption operations: "They yelled Gezi and went berserk. Now they are yelling corruption and so on, and they are going to berserk again" (Yeni Şafak, 2013r). Similarly, the then Minister of the European Union reminded that the Gezi protests were nothing but a

coup attempt. The situation was not different for the operations of the Gülen movement: “Just like the coup attempt under the name of the Gezi protests hit the wall of national will, current attempts, if God allows, will hit the wall likewise” (Yeni Şafak, 2013b).

The frame set by the AKP was evident on the street once again. The AKP’s fundamental role as the frame-builder of pro-government contention showed itself on different occasions but in similar ways. Several banners were hung, and slogans were chanted in the squares, such as “we do not feed Erdoğan to the wolves,” “preacher lobby, get out of my country,” and “we do not let them hang Erdoğan” (Yeni Şafak, 2013j; Yeni Şafak, 2014b). Protesters and organizers referred to a global conspiracy against Turkey, which attempted to overthrow the Turkish government (Yeni Şafak, 2013g).

The bridged frame, as discussed above, was also reflected several times. The Gezi protests were accentuated in speeches and statements. The corruption allegations were pointed out as a conspiratorial extension of the Gezi protests (Yeni Şafak, 2013m; Yeni Şafak, 2013l). Well-attended marches and gatherings were organized under the “March for Brotherhood against Global Conspiracy,” and global powers were cursed (Yeni Şafak, 2014a; Yeni Şafak, 2014c). The squares became spheres where the Gezi protesters and Gülenist operations were equated and blamed for toppling the AKP government.

The AKP’s framing strategies show how a threat, which does not have a fundamental connection with a protest threat, is presented within a contentious framework, which might be capable of keeping the contentious energy of the pro-government audience in the squares. In other words, by bridging two independent frames regarding two separate events, the AKP achieved to attribute a contentious character to their electorate. Moreover, the government amplified the conspiracy frame once again as a common ground for both the Gezi protests and the corruption allegations. As a result, pro-government contention became a visible strategic tool of the government and government supporters one more time.

5.2.2 Authoritarian Opportunities and the Scandal Threat: Event Data

As in the protest threat, the regime's authoritarian features and their effects on the organization and promotion of pro-government contention showed themselves in response to the scandal threat. As a contentious response to the corruption allegations, the government chose to organize mass rallies once again. Seven big rallies were noted in the cities Ordu, Samsun, Giresun, Ankara, Sakarya, Manisa, and İzmir.

These rallies served two purposes, similar to the Respect for National Will Meetings. First, squares became the spaces for the government to convey the polarization frame directly to the audience and furnish them with a contentious pro-government character. In such meetings, the AKP acted as a frame-builder in which government supporters might find guidance regarding who they were and what they had to do. Like an SMO's duty, the government set the borders of contention, specified its context and members, and designated the targets against which the struggle should be given. That said, this kept participants energetic as if they were members of a social movement organization, working to mobilize unmobilized sentiments by inviting citizens to be an active component of a contentious rally.

And second, the AKP gathered a controlled mass in designated spaces and declared that millions of people were in the squares to show their support for the AKP by using all media channels. Also, state and public resources were utilized in these rallies to prove the magnitude of the popular support. Like the Respect for National Will Meetings, *Cumhuriyet* claimed that participants were provided great convenience to attend these meetings by free transportation. In addition, those attempting to protest the government were detained, and extra security measures were taken by the police to provide participants' security (Cumhuriyet, 2013d).

Another important observation is that the contentious gatherings of government supporters against the scandal threat differed from the counter-Gezi actions in terms of organizers. Pro-government rallies against the scandal threat were primarily organized by GONGOs, which is a clear sign of the opportunities deriving from the autocratization. I coded many pro-government organizations such as Beyaz Hareket, Bizim Çocuklar Platformu, Ak Gençlik, Türkiye Gençlik STK'ları Platformu, Birlik Vakfı, Hukukçular Platformu, Sivil Dayanışma Platformu, Sivil Toplum Platformu,

Kardeşlik ve İyilik Platformu and many others, which took part in the organization of support rallies. This period also witnessed the foundation of major GONGOs such as Milli İrade Platformu and Milli İradeye Saygı Platformu, which comprise many small-scale civil society organizations close to the government.

As this dissertation claims, pro-government rallies are outputs of threats against the government insofar as the government perceives them as threats, and a conducive environment for the organization and promotion of such rallies is present. The government's use of frame alignment processes to establish and sustain a polarization frame shows that the corruption allegations were perceived as a threat by the government, pushing the latter to search for effective ways of mobilizing the electorate. Figure 22 displays that pro-government contention is one of those strategies. It shows that the number of pro-government rallies suddenly increases after the day the operation was initiated, December 17, compared to the first half of the month. In parallel with the contentious reaction of the government during the Gezi protests, the corruption allegations and operations goad them to take to the street one more time.

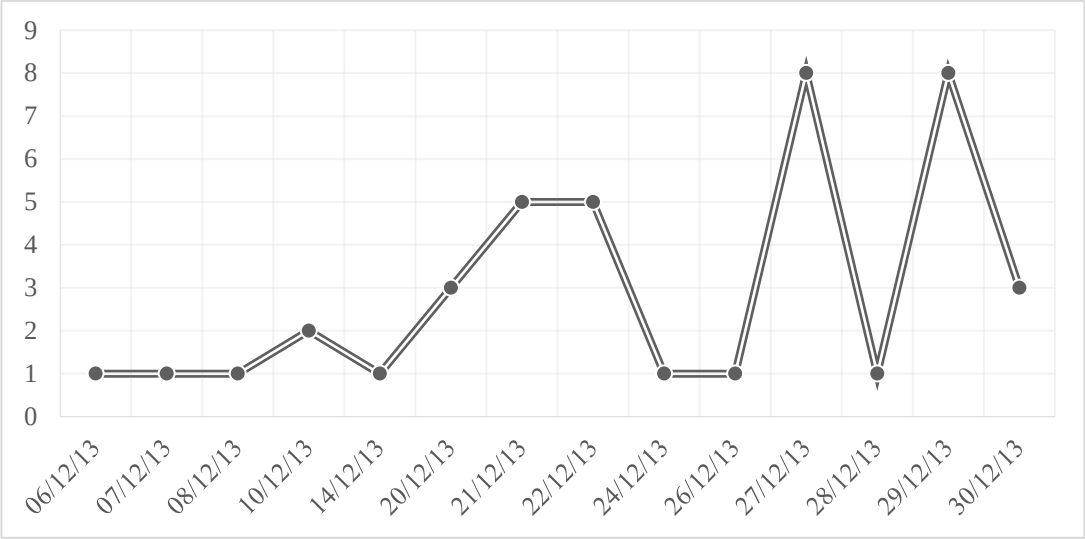

Figure 22. Daily number of all pro-government contention events from December 1, 2013, until December 31, 2013.

First of all, as proved during the Gezi protests, this affirms the proposition that threatening events may drive governments with authoritarian resources to show that they are popularly supported not only in the ballot box but also in the streets. Pro-government contention can be used as an authoritarian mobilization strategy in

addition to other mechanisms that parties in power adopt when they have to overcome a threat against their rule. Second, the figure proves that although the political scandal in question has nothing to do with a protest threat, the government promotes and organizes pro-government contention. This implies that encouraging contentious mechanisms does not necessarily require a confrontation with a protest threat but can be promoted without considering the latter's nature. In other words, it can be suggested that pro-government contention is not solely a counter-mobilization practice in responding to protests, but also a strategy against threats that do not espouse protest means.

Another data that allow one to compare protest and scandal threats is the repertoire of pro-government citizens. In contrast to the relatively rich and violent repertoire used against the Gezi protests, of which assaults are the most popular component, the repertoire wielded by pro-government groups during corruption operations is scarce and more peaceful. Figure 23 displays that the most preferred rally form is "non-violent small-scale demonstration," followed by "welcoming a party member/leader." While more than seventy percent of all actions consisted of violent means during the Gezi protests, less than ten percent of all actions featured violent options.

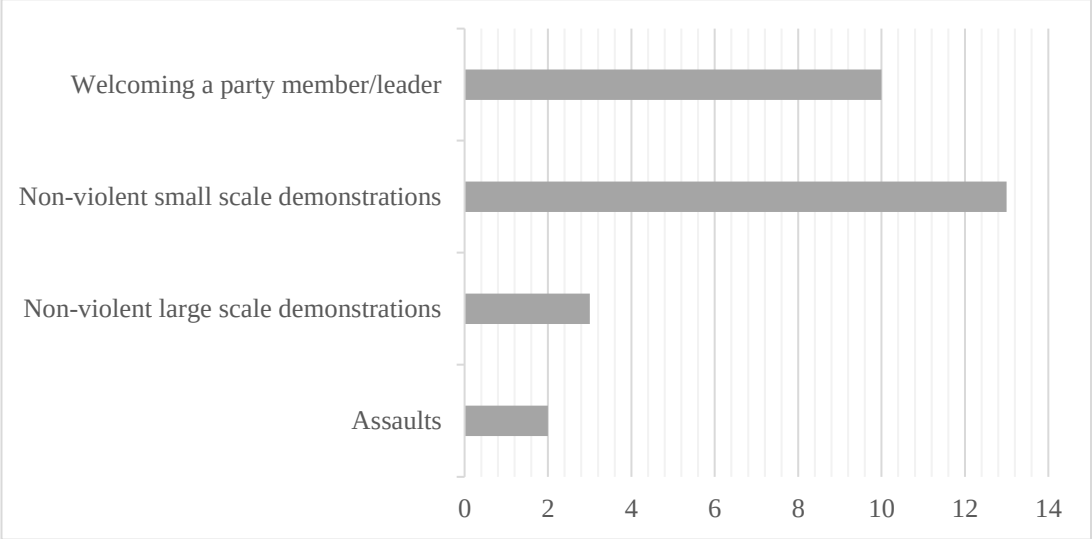

Figure 23. The distribution of pro-government contentious actions during the corruption scandal according to event type, excluding rallies officially organized by the government, December 17, 2013 – December 31, 2013.

The hesitation regarding violent means points out an essential difference regarding threat types. If there is no mobilized mass on the street, the confrontation between two groups may be less likely. If mass protests threaten the government, then pro-government groups could find the opportunity to face a direct target on the street, producing appropriate conditions for such violent confrontation.[21] Therefore, for violent repression to be a part of mobilization practice, the presence of two groups on the street might lead to strife, which does not seem a valid case for the scandal threat.

Therefore, the scandal threat differs from the protest threat in two ways. First, violence is almost absent in government supporters' repertoire of action compared to pro-government contentious actions during the Gezi protests. And second, many GONGOs are included in the organization of pro-government rallies, whereas the Gezi protests do not witness such richness of these organizations. That said, as in the Gezi protests, the government organized several rallies in response to the corruption allegations, building up a sphere in which the pro-government audience was given a contentious identity, and the political narrative was directly conveyed to them. Furthermore, the AKP maintained the overarching polarization frame by bridging two independent frames into one and explicitly amplified the fear of conspiracy against the nation.

However, both frame alignment processes and the organization of pro-government rallies were significantly changed after the June 7, 2015 elections. With a different polarization frame and the involvement of new actors, pro-government contention gained a novel character, which also left traces to understanding the mass mobilization practice in the aftermath of the coup night in July 2016. The following section analyses the terror threat, which occurred in 2015 and penetrated the very logic of the government's contentious repertoire.

5.3Terror Threat: The Post-June 7 Election Process

On June 7, 2015, the AKP, for the first time, failed to receive sufficient seats in the parliament to form a single-party government, promising the possibility of a new coalition government for the opposition. Although the AKP came first by receiving forty percent of all votes, three opposition parties, the social democrat CHP, the

[21] This argument will be more fully discussed in the section about terror threat, which consists the most violent events among other threats.

nationalist MHP, and the pro-Kurdish HDP passed the electoral threshold, granting them the opportunity to end the AKP rule. In particular, the HDP's electoral success over the threshold, which happened for the first time for a Kurdish party in the electoral history of Turkey, was a big surprise, and it was the most critical element in the AKP's failure to obtain sufficient seats. Yet, despite the chance of terminating the single-party rule with a coalition government that might exclude the AKP, the opposition parties could not succeed in reaching a consensus. The efforts to replace the government with a new one remained inconclusive, leading to a snap election on November 1, 2015.

This section is concerned with the inter-period between these two elections during which significant transformations occurred both in the electorate's grievances and the AKP's policymaking. I show that the five-month period between the two elections generated a new path of pro-government contentious mobilization with refreshed framing strategies.

To understand the context correctly, one needs to remember the peace process initiated by the government, as discussed in Chapter 4, to solve the Kurdish problem. In fact, the process was being carried out quite fruitful in the first half of the 2010s to reach a consensus between the two parties of the conflict, the state, and the Kurdish movement. On both sides, important steps were taken. On one side, the government announced a democratization package that ensured many new developments regarding Kurdish rights in 2013. On the other side, the same year witnessed compromising statements by Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned leader of the Kurdish terrorist organization PKK, who declared that the process of the PKK's armed struggle ended. As a crucial step in the process, a meeting was set between government officials and HDP members in February 2015, foretelling the end of the armed struggle. Accordingly, Abdullah Öcalan shared a message that called for people to organize a congress to stop the PKK's armed struggle against the Turkish state (Celep, 2018).

Despite such efforts to compromise, the process has entered into a phase that made a likely compromise stumble before the June elections. The government enacted a law known as the Domestic Security Law, which promised to extend the police's realm of authority, and the law was criticized severely by the HDP. President Erdoğan, who

had been elected in 2014 without breaking his ties with the AKP, started to attack the meeting organized in February and declared that there was no Kurdish problem in Turkey. Many assaults were attempted against HDP members by unidentified people, and the HDP held the AKP responsible for such attacks. In addition, a conflict between the Turkish army and the PKK caused several casualties in Ağrı and damaged the ongoing process of the solution to the Kurdish problem.

Despite such conflicts and declarations of both the President and the HDP regarding problems in the process, there was relative political stability, which was hindering terror to be the most serious problem in Turkey. Instead, the problems stemming from the economic decline such as unemployment or inflation were pointed out by citizens as the most essential issues that should have been overcome. This led the AKP to lose the opportunity to form a single-party government in the June elections (Kalaycıoğlu, 2018: 26).

In the post-election period, the developments between the government and the PKK created an alarming political environment. Starting from the second half of July, the tension between the army and the PKK suddenly escalated after a terrorist attack, organized by an Islamist terrorist organization, ISIS, deployed in northern Syria, against a group supporting the Kurdish movement in Suruç, Şanlıurfa. The attack caused the death of thirty-four citizens. This attack also initiated discussions regarding the irreversible end of the peace process. Two days later, the situation worsened when a group declaring that they were an armed unit of the PKK killed two police officers in retaliation.

From July until November, violence and terror became the determinants of the political atmosphere, including the terrorist attacks of ISIS. After the retaliation, the Turkish state attacked the PKK's camps, and the PKK responded likewise, resulting in a high number of casualties. In such a climate of fear, ISIS became a constant threat to citizens because of its deployment in northern Syria. The concerns about likely terrorist attacks did not remain unanswered, and the bloodiest terrorist attack in recent Turkish history shook the country. In October 2015, an HDP meeting in Ankara was attacked by a suicide bomber, causing the death of more than one hundred people.

Meanwhile, the AKP's political stance also shifted to a more nationalist one. The AKP attempted to delegitimize the HDP because of its ties with the PKK and conducted its political campaign on this confrontation. Targeting the HDP during its electoral campaign, "the AKP sought to strengthen its nationalist credentials and win back the support that it had lost" (Sayarı, 2016: 276). Abandoning the peace process fortified the AKP's engagement with nationalist values, contributing to their electoral success in November.

Furthermore, terrorist attacks suddenly changed and highly influenced citizens' perceptions concerning the most severe problem in Turkey. When people were asked about the most critical issue in Turkey just before the November elections, the answers were completely different from those given before the June elections. While before the June elections, only ten percent of the respondents had pointed out terror and national security, more than fifty percent of the respondents gave the same answer just before the November elections (Kalaycıoğlu, 2018: 26). Due to the consequences of the terror threat, the biggest concern of more than half of citizens shifted to terror and national security, proving that the political weather was completely different in the pre-November period compared to pre-June.

This difference also affected the results in the ballot box. As the results were announced, there was a significant shift in the vote share. The AKP increased their votes by nine percent, from forty to forty-nine, which was almost the same as the results of the 2011 elections. The electoral outcome was a huge success for the AKP, providing the opportunity to form a single-party government once again. The voters' choice significantly shifted from opposition parties to the AKP in a political milieu subsumed by instability created by the absence of a government in charge and the risks of existing and prospective terror problems.

This five-month period not only brought a change in voters' grievances and preferences but also led to an essential drift in the government's framing and the organization of pro-government contention. I show how the AKP's frame was transformed into a nationalist one after the June 7 elections and under what circumstances a striking social mobilization occurred on the streets against the Kurdish movement. I also show how the AKP partook in the contentious

mobilization process against terror by organizing mass rallies, and discuss their effects on pro-government contention.

5.3.1 Framing the Terror Threat

The defeat in the ballot box in the June 2015 elections and the termination of the peace process came with a striking shift in the AKP's political discourse. For the first time since 2002, the Kurdish movement and terrorism became the main target of the AKP and Erdoğan, granting them the opportunity to establish an utterly new frame whereby the likelihood of a new source of mobilization appeared. I show that the AKP maintained the polarization frame by transforming it into a nationalist narrative in the post-June elections period and this new frame reflected itself on the street. Instead of the dichotomy of pro-government vs. anti-government masses, the new discourse relied on the security of the state and established itself on the duality between the state/nation and terrorism. In this way, the government planted new values in its frame to garner support and secure existing supporters, resulting in a sharp increase in votes in the November elections.

Moreover, it created an impact similar to the rally-round-the-flag effect, which is conceptualized initially as an effect that boosts a president's popularity when an international crisis or a related event occurs (Mueller, 1970). I argue that the end of the peace process and the sudden increase in the number of conflicts between the PKK and the state, together with terrorist attacks of ISIS, generated a rally-round-the-flag effect, pushing the government to embrace a more nationalist perspective in policy-making and resulted in pro-government contentious actions circling around nationalist concerns on the street.

After the peace process was over, national security became the subject of almost all statements of government officials and Erdoğan until the November 1 elections. More specifically, the Kurdish movement under the banner of the HDP and the PKK became the anchor point around which two groups were located: those upheld by terrorists on the one hand and the state/the people on the other. In one of his speeches, Erdoğan conducted this duality very clearly:

> They are backed by terrorist organizations. We are backed by God, the people. We walk with our people and will continue

> to walk with you. Thank God, we are powerful. Don't worry. Those supporting terrorists and those administering terrorists will be defeated sooner or later (Yeni Şafak, 2015i).

Similar to the discourse used against corruption allegations, Erdoğan exploited the same narrative in which there were two sides: the people backed by the government and terrorists that threatened national security. Differently from corruption allegations, the situation now threatened not only the elites in the government and the state but also the people themselves because of the ever-present likelihood of a terrorist attack.

This polarization frame was fortified by the government's and Erdoğan's insistent emphases on a war against terrorist organizations. Erdoğan signaled that the fight against terrorism would continue no matter what:

> Both our government and our security forces, that is our state, will take all necessary steps. This is determination because we cannot allow a different state structure where our state is present. This could be called "parallel state", this state, or that state. It doesn't matter. Our state, with its government, all security forces and institutions, will take this step against these structures that threaten our national security no matter where they come from. Tonight has been a very important starting point for this. It will continue with this determination in the following days (Yeni Şafak, 2015f).

The constant concern regarding security and nationalist accents promised a transformation within the political frame set by the AKP and Erdoğan. Erdoğan's speeches resembled a typical nationalist leader:

> We will not refrain from any sacrifice to stop the flag from falling to the ground. Whoever claims this flag, they are local, national, they are Turkey. Whoever tries to haul down, destroy or burn this flag, they are a ruthless, loveless

> mankurt[22] with no connection to this nation. Whoever is against the nation today, they were also in Malazgirt and Çanakkale, against Kılıçarslan and Selahaddin Eyyübi[23] yesterday. History changed, but the purpose never did. The purpose is to keep this geography away from us and to spoil our brotherhood. Thank God, they didn't succeed. Every time they thought they destroyed us, we virtually were reborn from our ashes and we succeeded to plant the sacred flag trusted to us again to the summit. Everyone who benefits from this country today is aware of the game being played (Yeni Şafak, 2015j).

As a pro-Islamist leader, Erdoğan's narrative on the Turkish flag was far from the usual. In fact, only two and a half years ago, he had announced that they trampled on every kind of nationalism.[24] However, nationalism was included in the AKP's framing repertoire in the context of the post-June elections period to mobilize sentiments that were ready to be mobilized as the elections on November 1 were approaching. It was no surprise that Erdoğan demanded 550 local and national deputies to be elected in the polls and wanted citizens to keep the HDP below the election threshold (Yeni Şafak, 2015j).

As a part of the transformation in framing strategies, the agents were also renewed. Together with the influence of Erdoğan's presidency, the central actor became the state rather than the government. Erdoğan often accentuated the state's role in effectuating the terror threat: "This is the fight of the state to fulfill its duty only and only against those targeting our nation's peace, the safety of life and property, and we will maintain our fight with determination 'till the end" (Yeni Şafak, 2015h). More importantly, the state became an actor in a decision that citizens must take in the upcoming elections and was equalized to the re-election of the AKP government. The upcoming elections were confined to an "either… or" decision between the state and terrorist organizations (Yeni Şafak, 2015e). Unequivocally, Erdoğan stated that if one party could reach 400 deputies in the last election, terrorism would not be an

[22] Mankurt is an unconscious slave mentioned in several Turkic legends. It is typically a miserable person who has no identity.
[23] Important Muslim and Turkish leaders during the 11th and 12th centuries.
[24] https://twitter.com/rterdogan/status/305296130470731776

issue (Yeni Şafak, 2015c). Polarization was established such that citizens had to vote for the state's survival and this was rendered possible only through a single-party government. In this way, the November elections were pictured as a turning point for the security of citizens for whom the only reliable option was rendered as the state and the government.

Furthermore, Erdoğan shared the responsibility of fighting against terrorism with the people and called them to pull out all the stops. He stated that if terrorists could wander around freely in the cities and towns, then citizens were not doing their fair share (Yeni Şafak, 2015e). In another speech, he demanded from citizens to root out terrorists, even those who are in hiding, an apparent reference to the official Kurdish Party HDP:

> Our people should clean out the members of this terrorist organization. If need be, they have to report these terrorists to security forces. Everyone should know that the separatist terrorist organization's attempts to deceive the people are on edge. Nobody now believes such lies. We know who is who very well. They have one concern: "How do we stir up trouble, how do we divide the country?" First of all, "we are not separatist or something"; these are all lies. They are literally separatist. They are hiding themselves, and unfortunately, they are trying to set the sons of this country at loggerheads with each other. (Yeni Şafak, 2015a)

In fact, such sharing of responsibility with citizens was not something new but an already utilized discursive strategy by Erdoğan. While the case of Ali İsmail Korkmaz, who had been killed by shopkeepers during the Gezi protests, was tried, the shopkeepers were given the duty of being a security force on the streets:

> In our civilization, in the spirit of our nation and civilization, shopkeepers and artists are soldiers and fighters when necessary. When necessary, they are martyrs, veterans, and heroes defending their country at the front. When necessary, they are the police establishing order. When necessary, they are the judges and referees that ensure justice. Also, when

> necessary, they are compassionate brothers. You cannot underestimate them by calling them just a cab driver. They are the brother and the guardian of the neighborhood. You cannot underestimate them by calling them just a grocer, a butcher, or a tailor. They are virtually the soul of that neighborhood. They are the conscience of our street, our district. I am stating this very clearly; when you take away the shopkeepers, Turkish history will have nothing left in it (Cumhuriyet, 2014).

Designating them as soldiers, fighters, police, or judges, Erdoğan endows citizens with responsibility in daily life to ensure security and justice. More importantly, citizens were given this duty without any control mechanism, but they were given the capability to decide what was just and what/whom should be fought against. What one can observe in Erdoğan's statements in the post-June elections period is the continuation of the same authorization given to citizens, equipping them with the right to punish the guilty, that is, terrorist organizations and their supporters.

In sum, by transforming the existing frame into one that relies on national security with nationalist undertones, the AKP succeeded in refreshing the polarization frame within a new scope. Such a transformation produced fruitful results in the ballot box, helped the AKP prevail in the elections once again and formed a single-party government. Yet, the electoral triumph was not the sole result of this shift in the constructed frame. Along with the transformation in framing, popular mobilization dynamics, actors, and targets were also transformed.

5.3.2 Authoritarian Opportunities and the Terror Threat: Event Data

In transforming the frame into a nationalist one and promoting citizens to adopt contentious means, authoritarian opportunities were widely used. As a strong component, the pro-government media played a significant role in this process. Almost every day from mid-July to November, the war against terrorism became the main topic in the headlines of *Yeni Şafak*. Some columnists supported the fight against terrorism and pointed out the government's path as the only way out (Aktay, 2015: 11). Some used threatening language and implied the likelihood of popular

mobilization against those supporting terrorism. The most interesting one was İbrahim Karagül's (2015b: 15) column on July 29 in *Yeni Şafak*:

> The patriotic kids of this country will continue to tell the truths, fight for their country, and set their hearts on it at the risk of their lives. This fight will primarily be given against hypocrites, political frauds, the real powers behind the terror, domestic occupation, and oligarchs. It should not be forgotten that this country is neither Iraq, nor Syria, nor Egypt. When the deep reaction mobilizes, the owners of the headquarters that administer terror are made wear skirts, made dance in Taksim, and displayed to the whole country.

In the same column, he emphasized the likelihood of the people's reaction against the "invasion" initiated by the Kurdish movement and encouraged people to resist that invasion. The invasion was presented as a threat to the motherland; thus, it was underlined explicitly that the resistance should have been built up on protecting Turkey. The November elections were presented as an opportunity to defend the motherland and were referred to as the last war of independence (Karagül, 2015a: 15).

Moreover, many pro-government civil society organizations published memos about the PKK and terrorism in *Yeni Şafak*. In these memos, nationalism and patriotism became the central theme, the Turkish flag and the red color were widely used, and the AKP was referred to as the only way out in many instances (Yeni Şafak, 2015l; Yeni Şafak, 2015k). Celebrities were interviewed regarding terrorism and the necessity of ending terrorist organizations. Intellectuals, artists, journalists, sportsmen, and religious scholars called people to unite against terror, underlining values related to nation, flag, brotherhood, unity, and solidarity.

The authoritarian transfer of resources to rallies is also evident, just as in the mass rallies coordinated by the government during the Gezi protests and corruption allegations. Serious security precautions were taken to ensure the security of citizens, reducing the cost of participating in a contentious action to low levels. Turkish flags were distributed to participants to show the national unity powerfully in the squares, giving them an identity that belongs to the brotherhood before the speech of the

"commander." Like the previous cases, free transportation was provided for participants, facilitating and promoting their participation as much as possible (Cumhuriyet, 2015a). Pro-government media organs widely covered such meetings, instilling the idea that the nation was united against terror and terrorist organizations.

After it was clear that the peace process was over, a series of rallies were organized against the members of the Kurdish movement, sometimes including Kurdish citizens. Figure 24 shows the cumulative number of events against the Kurdish movement, including the targets as the HDP, the PKK, and Kurdish citizens.

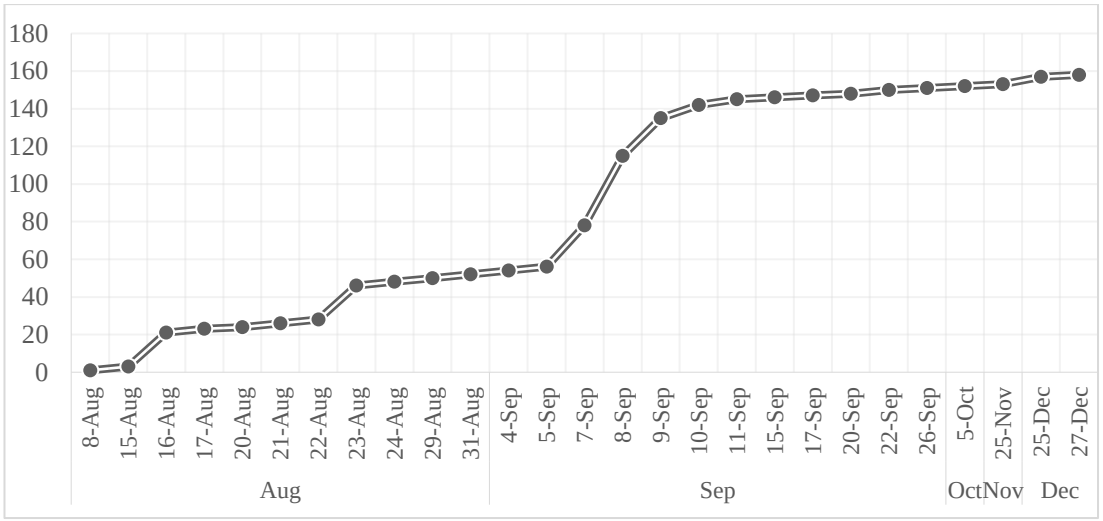

Figure 24. The cumulative numbers of anti-Kurdish movement rally events from August 1, 2015, until December 31, 2015.

Two deductions can be made from the graph. First, many events occur after the mutual conflicts between the state and the PKK started. Almost 150 rallies, including violent assaults, were organized against the Kurdish movement from mid-August until mid-September, which is quantitatively striking. Second, the rallies come to a halt after mid-September. The figure shows less than twenty anti-Kurdish movement rallies in total in three and a half months, from September 15 to December 31, whereas it is more than 140 from August 1 to September 15. This is a remarkable change about which possible reasons are discussed below.

Another striking observation from the data is the progress of the anti-Kurdish movement mobilization from 2013 to 2016 (*see* Figure 25). While there are small series of protests at certain intervals, particularly in 2014, there is a sharp bump in numbers in the post-June period and then a sudden decrease, which intersects with

the electoral victory of the AKP. This means that the mobilization against the Kurdish movement was highly influenced by the transformed frame and policy-making in the summer of 2015, resulting in a significant mobilization process between the two elections.

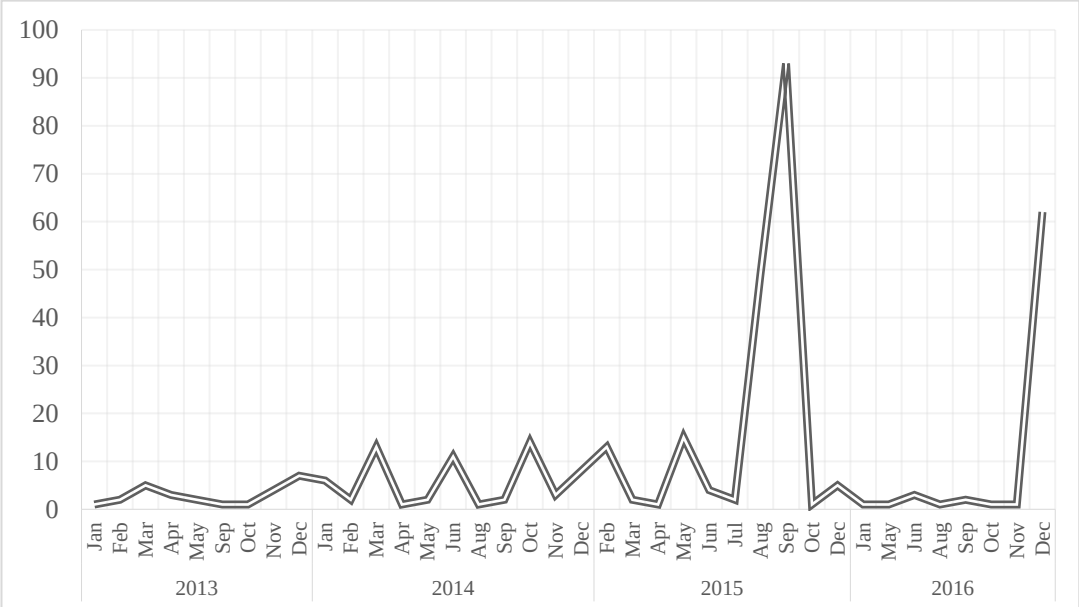

Figure 25. The progress of anti-Kurdish movement protests and rallies from January 1, 2013, until December 31, 2016.

The harmony between the sudden increase in anti-Kurdish movement mobilization numbers and the government's national security frame becomes even more meaningful when the police intervention numbers in nationalist protests and rallies are considered (*see* Figure 26). This also boosts the proposition that authoritarian resources function to facilitate some actions in parallel with the government's discourse. The most important observation that can be made is that police intervention rates seriously dropped after the spring of 2015 although the number of protests and rallies reaches the ultimate point in that summer. It can be argued that security forces also acted in line with the government's and Erdoğan's constructed national security frame and behaved reluctantly in intervening in protests and rallies that have a nationalist aspect. This shows that the police's relative absence in such protests and rallies is also compatible with the growing autocratization of the regime.

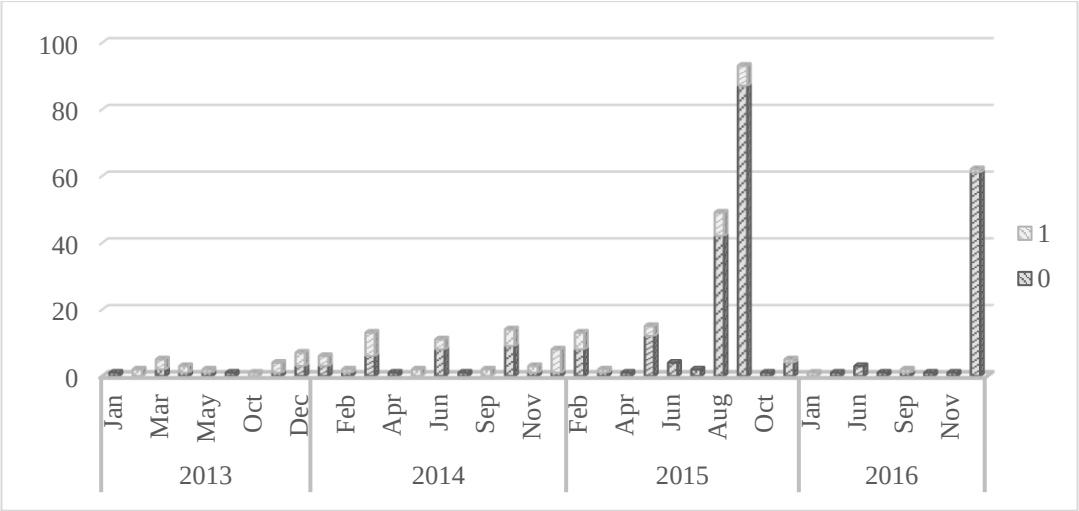

Figure 26. Police intervention in all nationalist protests and rallies from January 1, 2013, until December 31, 2016 (No intervention: 0, Intervention: 1).

The comparison between the police intervention rates in nationalist protests/rallies and Kurdish protests displays the absence of police in nationalist protests after the dissolution of the peace process in a more precise way (*see* Figure 27). While Figure 26 shows that police was hesitant to intervene in rallies against the Kurdish movement after July 2015, Kurdish protests attracted comparably too many police intervention in this period, as seen in Figure 27. Because police forces were present in many nationalist protests/rallies in the pre-July 2015 period, the comparison between Kurdish protests and nationalist protests/rallies shows that the police were deployed in the squares in parallel with the government's constructed national security frame.

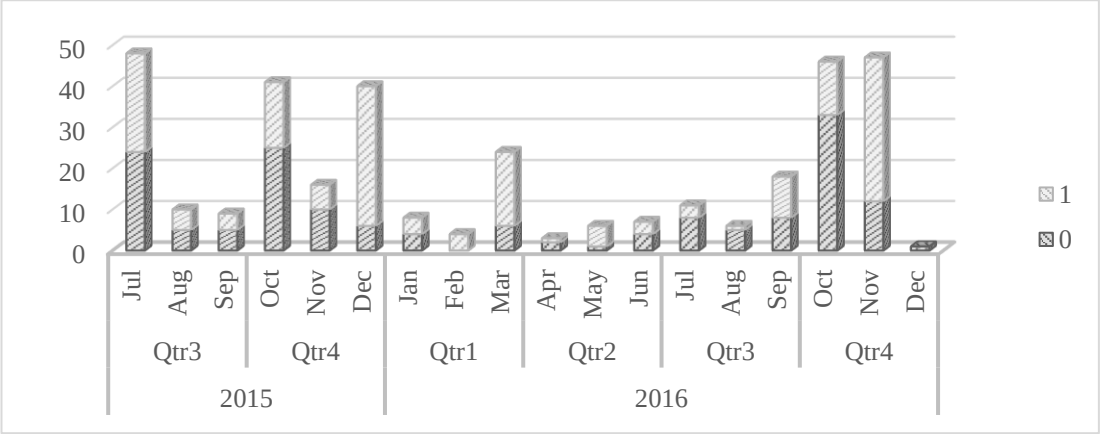

Figure 27. Police intervention numbers in all the Kurdish movement's protests from July 2015 until December 2016 (No intervention: 0, Intervention: 1).

One might object that the police's absence in such protests and rallies may be related to the non-use of violence. It is plausible to expect that if rally participants do not use violent means, then the police may be more tolerant to not stop them. Similarly, if rally participants use a violent repertoire or act as if they would cause trouble, police forces may feel obliged to intervene (Kritzer, 1977: 632). However, the case was far from that. Figure 28 displays the repertoire of rally participants in September 2015, showing that violence is the backbone of such a mobilization process.

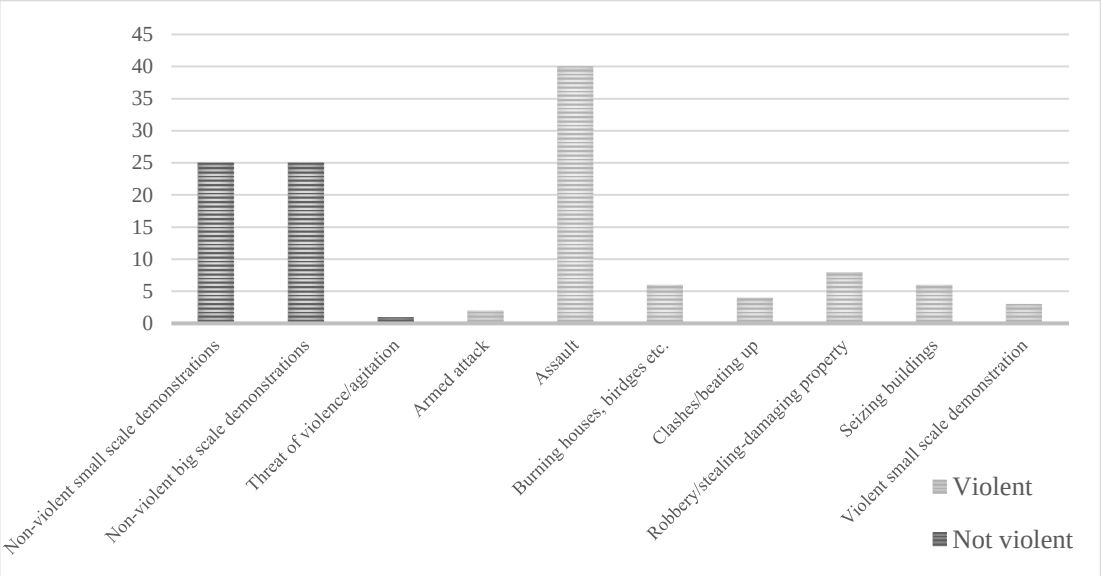

Figure 28. The repertoire of nationalist rally participants against the Kurdish movement in September 2015.

As shown in Figure 26, only around six-seven percent of all rallies are intervened by the police, whereas more than fifty percent use violent means such as assaults or clashes, even burning settlements or armed attacks, as seen in Figure 28. Although participants in nationalist rallies adopted a violent repertoire during September 2015, the police were rarely there to stop them.

At that time, the violence used in nationalist rallies, their relationship with the government and the state, and the non-intervention of police forces in such rallies were also stressed by scholars. For example, while the assaults on the Kurdish movement suddenly increased in September 2015, Murat Belge, a liberal-left academic and columnist, noted that now the government, and therefore conservatives and religionists, tend to use violence more than other groups. He maintained that although the base of every group includes aggressors, these aggressors do nothing if

they do not receive a signal from the top. Moreover, he stated that while Erdoğan encouraged his audience by saying that they were hardly keeping fifty percent of the population at home during the Gezi protests, he continued to support them similarly in September 2015 (Cumhuriyet, 2015c).

In a similar vein, Tanıl Bora, another academic, argued that people adopting lynch as a means are spared by governments in Turkey. His words are pretty striking that help explain the likely networks among political weather, the government, and violent contentious actions:

> Lynch is a governmental technique, a method of forming a public opinion in this country. When the state and governments desire to suppress segments they designate as an enemy, an atmosphere of domestic war is created. Within this atmosphere of agitation, the groups having so-called "national sensitivities" take to the street, attack, and went berserk. Then, authorities and media, formally, call for common sense, but these waves of lynching are welcomed as if they are a natural disaster in the last instance. In the eyes of the government, the enemies are so horrible, and the flattering national sentiments are so blessed that people that lynch are spared. No severe punishment is given, and lynch is not seen as a shame (Cumhuriyet, 2015b).

This simultaneous relationship and non-relationship pictured by Bora between the government/the state and rallies is evident in the distribution of organizers (*see* Figure 29).

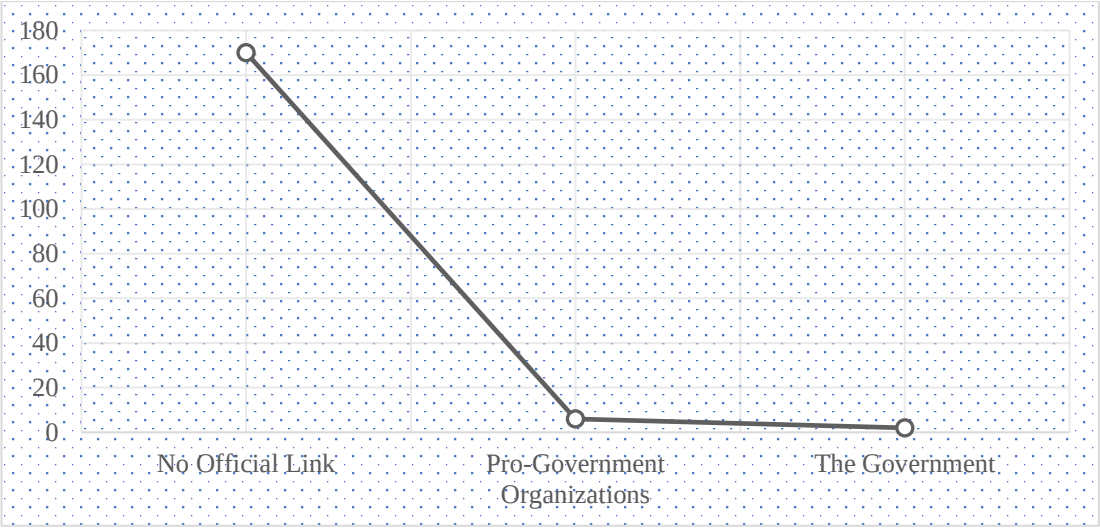

Figure 29. The organizers of nationalist rally events against the Kurdish movement from July 22, 2015, until November 1, 2015.

The graph shows thatmore than ninety-five percent of all rallies were organized by people about which no official link with the government is present. It shows fundamentally two things. First, it implies that the political atmosphere boosted by Erdoğan, the government, and the pro-government media affects random citizens to take to the street. This helped them manifest their grievances regarding national security within the anti-Kurdish movement mobilization.

But more importantly, the government and pro-government organizations are parts of only a few events, implying that the government and their relative networks are not involved in such high use of violent means on the street. The absence of the government in such rallies concurrently presents the opportunity for the government to amplify its freshly transformed national security frame contentiously. In this context, on the one hand, the government benefits from the repression of Kurdish groups resulting from the violent assaults of nationalist citizens. But on the other hand, they obtain the opportunity to mobilize citizens with nationalist concerns by taking no responsibility for the violence during the actions and, therefore, stay out of the boundaries of any illegitimate action.

Despite the low numbers of the government's and pro-government organizations' presence in the street, their influence in such mobilization practices is important. Similar to the Respect for National Will Meetings against the Gezi protests and several rallies against corruption allegations, two mass rallies were organized by pro-

government civil society organizations, including government officials and Erdoğan himself. The first mass rally was organized in Ankara on September 17, including pro-government organizations, the AKP deputies, and mayors. The second was another mass rally organized in İstanbul on September 20, including Erdoğan and Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu as speakers of the meeting.

Hundreds of thousands of citizens attended these rallies, marched, and chanted slogans to curse the PKK and terrorism in a secured sphere ensured by police forces. Referring to Erdoğan, rally participants chanted, “here is the army, here is the commander” (Yeni Şafak, 2015j). Most of the slogans directly targeted the HDP and the PKK. Participants chanted, “Down with the HDP!” “We do not want the PKK in the assembly!”

Another striking thing about these rallies is their timing and influence on citizens' mobilization. While the pre-rally period includes plenty of rally events against the Kurdish movement, the post-rally period witnesses almost no rally event protesting the Kurdish movement (*see* Figure 30).

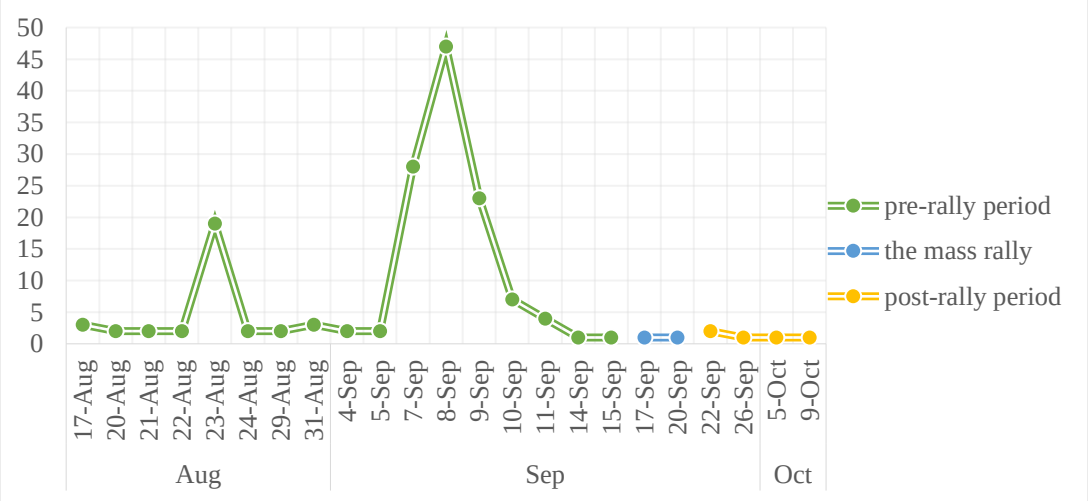

Figure 30. The number of events against the Kurdish movement during the pre- and post-periods of the mass rallies organized by pro-government organizations on September 17, 2015, and September 20, 2015; from August 17, 2015, until October 17, 2015.

This may imply that the government’s mass rallies may have the function of stopping rampant violence and adapting them into a more balanced, peaceful, and controllable context. Because violent means may reduce the legitimacy of an action (Zlobina & Vasquez, 2018), the government may use official rallies to solidify the legitimacy of

the frame and the present contentious activism. As seen in Figure 30, the government's mass rallies also curtailed violent assaults, which were the dominant component of citizens' repertoire in opposing the Kurdish movement only a few days before these rallies.

In brief, the AKP's transformed polarization frame, which is based on grievances regarding national security, produced a form of pro-government contention, which operated within the nationalist framework by groups having no official ties with the government in general. I showed that the government actively took a role in the production and control of anti-Kurdish movement sentiments by constructing a national security frame and promoting large-scale mass rallies. Thus the AKP managed to magnify the contentious character of their newly transformed political frame.

5.4 Coup Threat: The Coup Attempt

The previous cases demonstrated how the government developed its framing strategies in response to different threats and how citizens took to the street in such a political atmosphere. None was as sensational and large-scale as the resistance campaign against the coup attempt organized by the Gülenist clique in the military on July 15, 2016. After military tanks unexpectedly started to roll down the streets to overthrow the government, Erdoğan's first reaction was to summon citizens to the squares to resist the coup. Upon Erdoğan's call, which was broadcasted on a TV channel and reached everyone quickly, thousands of people took to the street. In İstanbul and Ankara in particular, citizens and soldiers came face to face with each other on different occasions, leading to fatal consequences.

The putsch attempt failed and caused hundreds of casualties because of the use of lethal weapons by the military. Although it was not the first failed attempt of military officials in Turkish history, ordinary citizens took an active role for the first time in suppressing a coup by their bodily presence in the streets. In this context, the July 15, 2016 coup attempt was a milestone in the history of coups in Turkey and triggered scholarly discussions regarding a pro-government contentious force on the streets as the fundamental subject of analysis.

To understand the dynamics of pro-government contention in this dissertation, July 15 has a distinctive position compared to previous mobilization processes. Among many striking events, Erdoğan's contentious strategy and consequences were remarkable on that night. Before the coup attempt, pro-government contention was either used as a virtually threatening mechanism, such as the statement "we are hardly keeping fifty percent of the population at home" in response to the Gezi protests, or carried out in the form of controlled mass rallies to prove the popular support. In this way, the government could supervise the dynamics of pro-government contention, which functioned as a sort of backup force for the regime.

However, the coup night unraveled a different facet of pro-government contention, which was much more vulnerable to cataclysmic results. Erdoğan personally invited citizens to the street, and the government had no apparent control over what was happening. His appeal to citizens was not an ordered and structured mobilization technique, leading to an immediate confrontation with armed units of the state. It implies that pro-government contention against a coup threat features the risk of fatal consequences because of the unpredictability of coups and their inevitable dependency on using violent means if necessary.

However, the coup's implications for pro-government contention were not limited to the dire encounter of the military with citizens. More important than citizens' victory in the street was the post-coup attempt process. Despite the failed attempt, the resistance was not restricted to the coup night. The government transferred the costly performances of citizens into a series of demonstrations called "democracy watches" that lasted almost one month. These watches helped the regime rely on a mass constituency in two ways (Somer, 2016: 498). On the one hand, these nationwide gatherings, organized by the government from the evening until the night every day, became places for a popular line of defense against the possibility of another coup endeavor. People participated in these watches as a security valve and became the fundamental subject to repeat their already attained success against coup plotters if necessary.

On the other hand, the squares became a sphere of intensive mobilization, whose frame was set entirely by the government. Attributing a mythical character to the resistance, the government provided democracy watches with the task of

perpetuating this heroic pro-government spirit on the street. On this basis, democracy watches were more than the triumph of the mobilizational capacity of the people, but also places in which citizens' pride was flattered, leading to a euphoria among them (Taş, 2018: 11).

This critical contentious performance under the government's leadership was promising also a refreshed meaning of the street. The presence of pro-government groups in the squares during the summer of 2016 manifested an inversion of the meaning of protest. It was not only the coup plotters that were defeated but also those using the street as a place to demand a change against the government. The putsch attempt pushed "genuine dissent and activism" to the sideline and transformed the scope of protest politics (de Medeiros, 2018: 83). The coup was a moment whereby the government could create a pro-government image for contentious politics, which was inherently incompatible with the conventional meaning of protest.

This reversal of the meaning of protest also came with the reversal of the democratic aspect of protesting, turning it into an authoritarian form. The cost of claiming a right on the street was canceled out on the coup night, ensuring a secured space and rich resource opportunities backed by the government during the democracy watches. Having no conflicting interest with the government, watch participants became an everyday popular representation of this autocratizing regime. They, thus, became the central element of the regime's mobilization strategies. Hence, one of the most democratic actions that ordinary citizens utilize, namely protest, was firmly adapted to a new form shaped by authoritarian regime dynamics.

In this section, I specifically focus on the coup night, and the democracy watches following it. First, I explore how the government maintained the polarization frame against the failed coup. I show how a holy interaction between Erdoğan and the pro-government audience was generated through discursive mechanisms and how pro-government contention became the very means of constructing this sacred engagement between the government/Erdoğan and government supporters by the amplification of religious and nationalist motives more than ever. I argue that building on the national security frame set in the post-June elections period, the regime boosted the mobilization of people in an autocratic regime.

5.4.1 Framing the Coup Threat

While conflicts were continuing between coup plotters and non-plotter security forces at night, citizens received an SMS sent by the President Erdoğan:

> The precious children of the Turkish nation. As during the 70s, this is an attempt against the nation by a small number of people, who hijacked the armored vehicles and weapons of the state in İstanbul and Ankara. The honorable Turkish nation, claim your democracy and peace. I summon you to take to the street and claim your nation against these small number of people who think they can intimidate the Turkish nation. Claim your state and nation (Cumhuriyet, 2016b).

Like the rhetoric used in previous cases, Erdoğan set the narrative on a simple antagonism. On one side, there are plotters, namely the elite, who consist only of a few people, trying to undermine democracy. On the other side, the people/nation, depicted as the guardians of democracy, are quantitatively superior to the plotters. Of course, this quantitative difference is also crowned by qualitative features. The nation is depicted as honorable and precious, whereas the elite is a group of people that try to oppress the nation.

Despite the similarity in framing, however, the coup threat differs from the previous ones in its occurrence and consequences, concurrently shaping the context of the government's framing. I argue that the most critical divergence concerning the dynamics of pro-government contention was the intensity of a physical confrontation, which presented the government with the opportunity to construct an utterly different political narrative. Although all previous threat cases established a duality between government supporters and the designated target, only a few events engendered the circumstances for a physical confrontation. The coup night was one of them. The frame against the coup threat departs from the previous framing strategies, addressing an utterly different form of action, which inevitably led to physical violence.

One may object that violence was a component also of pro-government mobilization against the terror threat and protest threat, which resulted in assaults against the

Kurdish movement and Gezi protesters. While this is true, what was different regarding the coup threat was the target of violence and the government's and Erdoğan's direct engagement with such a violent result in their framing. Although the terror threat and protest threat engendered violent repertoires, it was not the direct output of Erdoğan and the government's framing. As a matter of fact, despite threatening statements against Gezi protesters or the criminalization of the Kurdish groups, Erdoğan did not summon pro-government citizens to the street, demanding resistance against protesters or Kurdish groups.

When it comes to the coup threat, however, calling people to the street involved the risk of a deadly encounter. Seen in this way, the framing of the government, from the outset, relied on a likely violent situation, which puts forward a different dimension concerning pro-government contention in Turkey. Also, in none of the previous cases, government supporters were exposed to violence, but violence was a means adopted by pro-government citizens. Coup threat created a different trajectory, leading to lethal consequences not only for the target of government supporters but also for pro-government citizens.

I argue that the fatal consequences of the coup night, causing the death of more than 300 citizens/soldiers and thousands of injuries, reoriented the government's framing strategies. Relying on the nationalist frame built against the terror threat in 2015, Erdoğan and the AKP acquired the opportunity to amplify the combination of religious and nationalist sentiments and bridge these two different frames. I suggest that the resistance against the coup engendered numerous casualties, providing the AKP and Erdoğan with the opportunity to build a frame based on its so-called miraculousness. Throughout anti-coup contentious activism, including the coup night, a nationalist-religious frame and performance became the backbone of pro-government contention, relying on a narrative of the holy people and the holy leader. And similar to the terror threat, the incumbent regime created a homogenizing discourse based on "one-state, one-nation, one-homeland and one-flag" to drown the traumatic effects of the event and stabilize the political situation (Adisonmez & Onursal, 2020: 304).

The framing of this nationalist-religious narrative was embodied in two subjects: the people as the warriors fighting for the nation's unity and Erdoğan as the commander

of the people. The creation of these two subjects was not an isolated process. Instead, they interactively built each other. After the coup night, Erdoğan placed religious faith against the military's weapons used against the people:

> Unfortunately, with the instruction taken from masterminds, the movement of seizing our state by those who cannot stand our country's unity and integrity turned into an armed action on July 15. As that was the case, citizens from all quarters of the country responded to our call, took to the street, and stood against them by saying, "if they have tanks and cannons, we have our faith (Yeni Şafak, 2016b).

As can be remembered from the cases of Gezi and corruption allegations, the conspiracy was once again referred to as the people's ultimate enemy. Moreover, the nation was no longer depicted solely as a mass representing national will, as in previous cases. Instead, it was attributed to a religious dignity, which was proved in the squares while contending against coup plotters. Such dignity was also fused with a religious martyrdom, acquired by pro-government citizens when they withstood the coup and died for the nation's survival. Erdoğan often accentuated the religious context in his speeches in the post-coup period: "They (the people) really stood against the tanks with their faith and shouted out that they run into martyrdom"[25] (Yeni Şafak, 2016a). In a similar vein, while telling the story of a woman, he underscored her courage to refuse the plotters' plans. He stated that "she sipped the elixir of martyrdom and walked there," pointing out the confrontation between plotters and citizens (Ibid). The religious motives penetrated almost all speeches of Erdoğan made in the aftermath of the coup attempt. The people were portrayed as a mass above everything but God, the only thing before which they bowed (Yeni Şafak, 2016f).

Furthermore, this narrative was solidified through the active participation of religious institutions during mobilization. A new religious and nationalist connection was found between citizens and the state through the involvement of mosques. By using

[25] Erdoğan uses the word "şehadet", which has more religious connotation than "şehitlik", which is used more in a nationalist context.

salas,[26] which were chanted over loudspeakers during and after the coup attempt, the government created a hybrid form of nationalist and religious values. Starting from the coup night, imams called citizens to the squares for almost one month, founding a spiritual ground for the participation of citizens in the mobilization process. Pro-government contention was equipped with a religious context from the beginning but was not limited to it. Invoking previous practices in Turkish history, such as during the Turkish War of Independence between 1919-1923 or the Turkish Invasion of Cyprus in 1974, salas also functioned as a call for a nationalist resistance and war. Helping to win a triumph over the enemies of the nation, salas served as a catalyzer that prompted nationalist and religious sentiments of pro-government citizens, encouraging them to be the leading actor in a war-like situation.

This nationalist and religious contentious narrative did not solely stay within the boundaries of Erdoğan's framing but was also embraced by the people in the squares. One of the interviews conducted by Küçük and Türkmen (2020: 256) reveals that citizens felt that they found their identity in such a combination while participating in democracy watches:

> "The common ground is to be Sunni. On the bridge on the first night and the following nights that Sunni Islam and nationalism were intertwined. The repetitive reciting of salas and takbeers from the first day on has been the most straightforward expression of this intertwining. (. . .) From the other side it signified a majority and it felt like "we are the public majority.""

The nationalist-religious ethos of the anti-coup resistance only presented participants with a contentious identity but also encouraged them to be the subject of this victory. Another participant underlined the warrior-like courage she felt when takbeers[27] were chanted on the squares, although she was aware that she could be killed: "It was as if we were in a dream; the takbeer moved us. I was raised hearing takbeers. I saw people's eyes; there was no fear (. . .) Everybody was brave and tried to go forward, despite being shot at" (Ibid). Seen from the lens of participants, the AKP's Islamic-

[26] Sala basically means prayer. It is the prayer said by imams in mosques to call Muslims for namaz on Fridays and during religious holidays. It is also said before funeral prayers.
[27] Takbeer is a word chanted by Muslims, meaning that the God is almighty.

oriented frame promoted citizens to take action and be part of a community circling religious solidarity in the squares. The Islamic frame was so robust that even some sheikhs from other countries said they wished to die in Turkey while fighting against the coup (Yeni Şafak, 2016g). Pro-government contention was fostered by amplifying religious values, providing a sense of belonging and courage necessary to take to the street in a case that engendered bloody consequences.

On one side, this allegedly magical mission and character were given to the pro-government audience by Erdoğan in the constructed narrative. It was well-embraced by citizens, moving their courage to take action. But on the other side, the glorified nation required a holy and national leader to guide them in orientating this magical triumph on the street. Erdoğan fulfilled this role and became the central figure of this constructed nationalist-religious myth. Being the chief commander of the nation, Erdoğan espoused an exalted position like a prophet, endowing him with the place between God and the nation. Unsurprisingly, he likened his memories of the coup night to one that the prophet Mohamed experienced during his escape from non-Muslims (BirGün, 2017). The poem, "a decision that came from the heavens", which had been read by Erdoğan in a propaganda video during his presidential campaign in 2014, was re-amplified powerfully. The day after the coup happened, billboards were full of this phrase, which accompanied democracy watches, equipping them with the presence of a holy leader.[28]

Erdoğan's approach to the nation and the nation's triumph in the streets was also similar to a national leader who won a war against the enemy. While calling those resisting the coup "faithful crazy Turks," of whom he said he was proud (Yeni Şafak, 2016d), he declared the people as a nation having a consciousness of holy war, which was proved in the squares against the coup attempt (Yeni Şafak, 2016e). In a way, Erdoğan was as if he was a "destructive charismatic leader" who used an "absolutist polarizing rhetoric, drawing his followers together against the outside enemy" (Post, 1986: 675).

The national leader with a holy mission was not the only established frame, but also this image was attributed to Erdoğan by pro-government citizens, who identified themselves with the leader (Küçük & Türkmen, 2020: 260). After the coup attempt,

[28] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bb_JC-jAIz0

Erdoğan had a value in the eyes of pro-government citizens in the squares such that he was worth dying for:

> I am an AKP voter. If Erdoğan did not prostrate before God from the beginning, I would not stand behind him. We stand behind him because we trust him. He is a fearless man, I stand behind him with pride. And today, if he says "do that for me", I would go without asking what I will do. I would think that he does the right thing. There has been no person that served this country like him until today, people earned their bread (thanks to him). Nobody like him will come one more time. If he says "die", we would die (Yörür, 2016).

Another watch participant compares the anti-coup resistance with the Gezi protests, between which the most crucial difference is the presence of a leader like Erdoğan:

> People claimed their votes. The leader is so important. Why did the Gezi protests remain inconclusive? Legitimate demands turned into illegitimate demands. There was no leader. Here, Erdoğan put forth his leadership (Ibid).

The complementary relationship between government supporters and Erdoğan concerning this nationalist and religious resistance frame also declared their dominance on the street. It asserted how a protest should have been done. This was particularly realized through comparisons with the Gezi protests, which functioned as the constitutive other for democracy watches (Küçük & Türkmen, 2020). Only four days after the coup attempt, Erdoğan reawakened the disagreement that galvanized the Gezi protests and stated that they would build a mosque and museum in the Gezi Park. Without considering what others say, he said, they would restructure the area as planned (Cumhuriyet, 2016a).

Similarly, the then-mayor of İstanbul from the AKP, Kadir Topbaş, repeated the same plan and stated that the construction would start after the democracy watches ended (Cumhuriyet, 2016c). Later, the anti-coup resistance became a tool for Erdoğan to threaten likely protests. After an opponent journalist's comments about prospective protests against the government, Erdoğan's words were interesting:

> He calls people to the street, blow me down. What are you trying to do? Is this Paris?[29] Everyone already learned their lesson during the Gezi protests and on July 15. If some people intend similar actions, they will pay the price for what they do (T24, 2018).

Erdoğan's and the government's reminders of the Gezi protests and the contrast set between the Gezi protests and the anti-coup resistance were also rhetorically embraced by watch participants. For instance, *Milli Türk Talebe Birliği* (MTTB) members made a call on the Internet to set tents in the Gezi Park while democracy watches were continuing (Cumhuriyet, 2016a). *Yeni Şafak* framed the democracy watches with the headline "The Lesson of Resistance for Gezi Protesters." The gatherings in the democracy watches were portrayed as peaceful and honorable, whereas the Gezi protests were depicted as violent and inflammatory (Yeni Şafak, 2016c).

For some pro-government citizens, the Gezi protests functioned as a catalyzer to participate in the anti-coup resistance. For others, there was a crystal-clear difference between the two events:

> Everybody witnessed. No one says anything if you take to the street, express yourself, and go back home like a human being without vandalism. Those that took to the street before should hold this up as an example. Let alone vandalizing, everyone dropped their litter in the trash cans. Nobody clashed with the police. Everyone should protest in the places they are allowed to. Can a protest be done on the fly because "I want to do it here"? You cannot demand a right like this (BBC, 2016).

The watches were presented as pro-government citizens' protest right on the street, which had historically been a sphere for anti-state, anti-government, and mainly leftist groups. Moreover, these watches can be seen as a reaction, which was buttressed "by the consolidated powers derived from the preceding response to Gezi"

[29] Erdoğan refers to the Gilets Jaunes protests in France at that time.

(de Medeiros, 2018: 98). The placards and slogans used in the demonstration areas, such as "stable youth, not wanderers"[30] or "Tayyip is everywhere, Erdoğan is everywhere"[31] prove the desire not only to imitate the repertoire used in the Gezi protests but also for the inversion of this anti-government mass protest series that seriously damaged the AKP's authority (Küçük & Türkmen, 2020: 257).

In sum, the coup threat's effects on the framing process differ from the previous cases owing to the deadly encounter between the military and the people, leading the incumbents to set a nationalist and religious frame with undertones regarding the holiness of the event and actors. Viewed from this perspective, the regime obtained space to maneuver in its polarization frame, bridging nationalism and religiosity within a series of contentious performances and forming a pro-government bloc in the squares. This also helped the incumbency generate a narrative where the Gezi protests' political effect was inverted with pro-government rallies, and the meaning of the street was steered into a government-supported context.

5.4.2 Authoritarian Opportunities and the Coup Threat: Event Data

One of the indicators of the effects of autocratization is the dominant involvement of the government as the chief organizer of anti-coup rallies. If the distribution of actors behind pro-government contention from January 2013 until December 2016 is remembered (*see* Figure 4 in Chapter 3), the government's presence on the street in the aftermath of the putsch attempt is even more striking. Figure 31 shows the actors of pro-government contention in the post-failed coup period, during which contentious events organized by groups having no official link with the government are very scarce. The government is directly involved in more than fifty percent of pro-government-contention in terms of organization or logistics. Pro-government organizations also actively partake as actors of contention in a high share of events.

[30] The original version is "Gezici değil, kalıcı gençlik", a play on words referring to the Gezi protests.
[31] One of the most chanted slogans during the Gezi protests was "Taksim is everywhere, resistance is everywhere". Taksim is a central place in İstanbul where the Gezi Park is located and where many protests were organized in the history of Turkey.

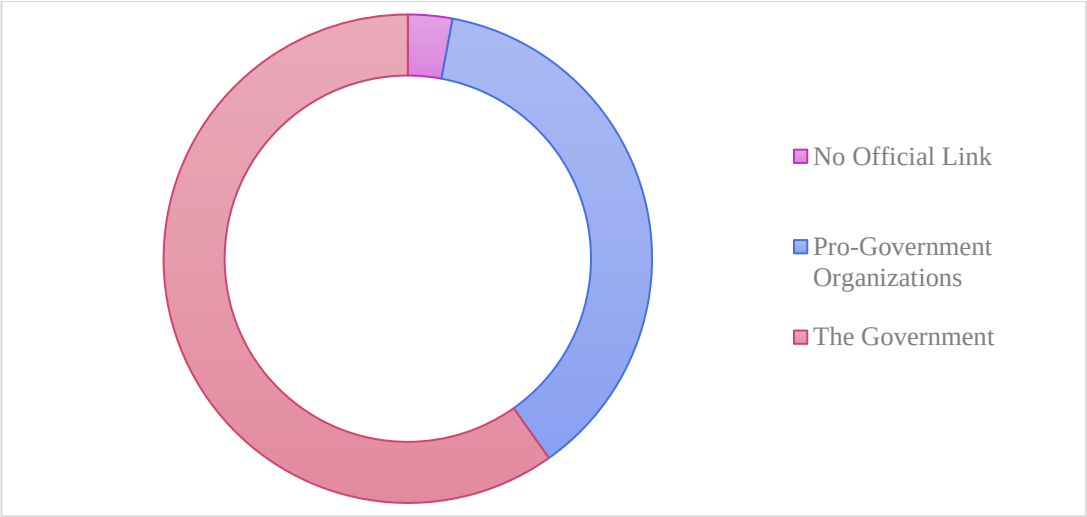

Figure 31. Organizers of pro-government contentious events from July 15, 2016, until August 31, 2016.

It was discussed that the government organized or partook in mass rallies against the Gezi protests, corruption allegations, and the dissolution of the peace process. Despite the rallies' magnitude, they were isolated events organized in specific cities. The pro-government contentious events scheduled in the post-failed coup period, however, were nationwide rallies prepared simultaneously in several cities in Turkey. The data show that the democracy watches were organized in almost all cities with high participation rates, proving that the government succeeded in controlling a vast population of government supporters with a wide geographical diversity. These rallies were spectacular in terms of their enormity, organizational and logistic order, and the number of participants, helping us substantiate the claim that the autocratization of the regime provides a practical encouragement to the government to organize such rallies.

The secondary literature also confirms this argument. As the scholarship argues, the communicational and organizational capacity of the government heightened quite efficiently during the autocratization process, which enabled the AKP to conduct ordered and spectacular mass rallies (Somer, 2016: 498). This capacity was most efficiently shown off during the coup night and in the democracy watches following the failed coup. The AKP managed to consolidate the party faithful efficiently during the coup night, equipped with almost monopolized media tools, religious networks through Diyanet, and public and private resources (Esen & Gumuscu, 2017: 64-66). The democracy watches were an indicator of an ordered organization in which all the

details were evaluated and considered (Küçük & Türkmen 2020). The authoritarian resources were fairly decisive in consolidating pro-government masses during the democracy watches, which were "orchestrated, scheduled, and managed by the party apparatus" (Konya, 2020: 19).

The organization of demonstration areas and how watches were managed give clues regarding how state and public resources were effectively exploited. As Küçük and Türkmen (2020: 256) observe, "(a)ll over the squares there were stage and sound systems in front of a giant screen, and the masses on the street were acting in perfect harmony with the directions coming from the stage." The crowds were highly coordinated and controlled, showing a certain dissimilarity from spontaneous protest events. Furthermore, the coup attempt allowed the government to declare a state of emergency, during which democracy watches were organized. This helped the government create a harsh repressive environment for opponents, facilitating the mobilization of government supporters in the squares and providing a secured political space for the pro-government audience.

The media was also productively used to mobilize government supporters, helping the AKP boost its nationalist and religious narrative in the squares. After the coup attempt, the government-controlled media published almost only "materials selectively leaked by the government and re-circulated statements by party leaders" (Taş 2018, 7). TV programs did not allow public discussions, including critics from the opposition, leading to a narrative of the putsch attempt dominated by the government (Akin, 2017). Several GONGOs and organizations close to the government published letters and statements regarding the resistance against the coup attempt and used the Turkish flag as the main symbol. They summoned citizens to participate in democracy watches and stand with the state and the government (*see* Yeni Şafak issues after July 15 2016).

Similar to the responses to other threats analyzed above, the coup threat promoted the adoption of pro-government contention as a governmental strategy. Figure 32 demonstrates the causal relationship between the coup threat and the use of pro-government contention. While there was almost no pro-government contention during one and half months before July 15, it suddenly became a daily routine until

the end of August. Resembling the causal relationship in other threat cases, the coup threat had a formative effect on using pro-government contention as a response.

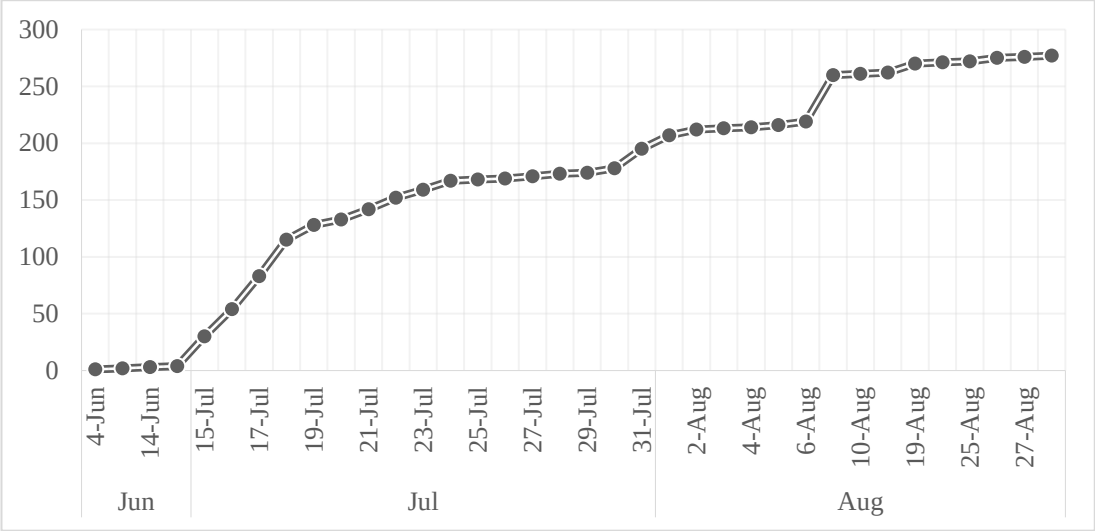

Figure 32. The cumulative number of pro-government contention after the coup attempt (from June 1, 2016, until August 31, 2016).

What makes the coup threat unique is the immediacy and quantity of response. For instance, while the Gezi protests created a counter-mobilization process in the form of pro-government contention, it was not an instant rejoinder but a response spreading over time. In a similar vein, the outbreak of corruption allegations or the dissolution of the peace process did not give rise to a significant number of pro-government contentious actions on the day the scandal or dissolution was revealed. This shows that the coup threat was capable of engendering a swift reaction, which, it seems, has to be given against the danger in question because of the immediacy of the threat. In other words, because coups can overthrow a government expeditiously, which was not an obvious and inevitable situation for the government in the previous three cases, it is plausible to expect that the response was generated at the same level.

Also, the rallies of government supporters are quantitatively higher than in previous threat cases, showing that the immediacy of reaction is coupled with a dominance in the number of pro-government rallies. The high volume of pro-government contention is closely related to the urgency of the jeopardous situation initiated by a coup. Because the threat should be eliminated instantly -otherwise, it may allow plotters to topple down the government in a few hours- it can be anticipated that the

magnitude of the government's response should be big in line with the urgency of the threat.

The immediacy of the coup threat and government supporters' quick response also bring violent results until the threat's likely destructive impacts are eliminated. On the day the military tanks rolled down the streets, more than 100 soldiers and 200 citizens died due to the military's excessive use of deadly weapons and conflicts in the military and with police forces. In the following three days of the coup, rally participants used violent means against different targets, and some clashes occurred between pro-government citizens and various groups. However, after the fourth day, violence almost stopped (*see* Figure 33).

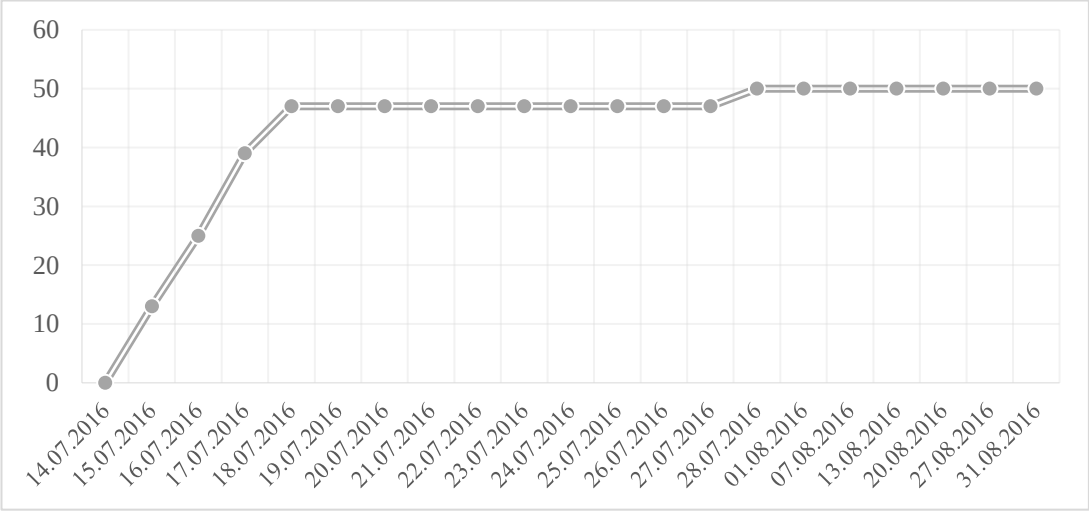

Figure 33. The cumulative number of violent events in pro-government contentious events in the aftermath of the coup attempt, from July 14, 2016, until August 31, 2016.

Two explanations can be presented to understand this shift in violent events. First, as the threat's immediacy faded, the number of violent events decreased. As the confrontation of citizens and soldiers on the street was inevitable after the call of Erdoğan, violence suddenly became a component of pro-government contention, leading to an instant escalation of violence, as shown in Figure 33. And after the political situation was relatively brought under control, violence lost its contentious presence on the street. In other words, when the instability engendered by a sudden coup was eliminated and the situation became more stable, violence became an unnecessary tool.

In addition to this explanation, it can also be argued that the government's presence on the street might curtail the presence of violence. The government's decision to control the street automatically brought a more stable way of contention, which excluded violence as an option because of the likelihood that violence could quickly get out of control. For this reason, the government's involvement within the organization of pro-government contention might have an effect that diminished violent cases.

That said, the mobilization against the coup threat declared a new owner of the street, who was not a conventional actor but rather pro-government citizens. Figure 3 in Chapter 3 clearly shows this reversal, which starts, in fact, in the last quarter of 2015 and reaches the climax after the coup plotters' efforts to overthrow the AKP government. Figure 34 below also displays this dramatic shift by focusing on two different periods, proving that the owners of the street became pro-government citizens only three years after the Gezi protests.

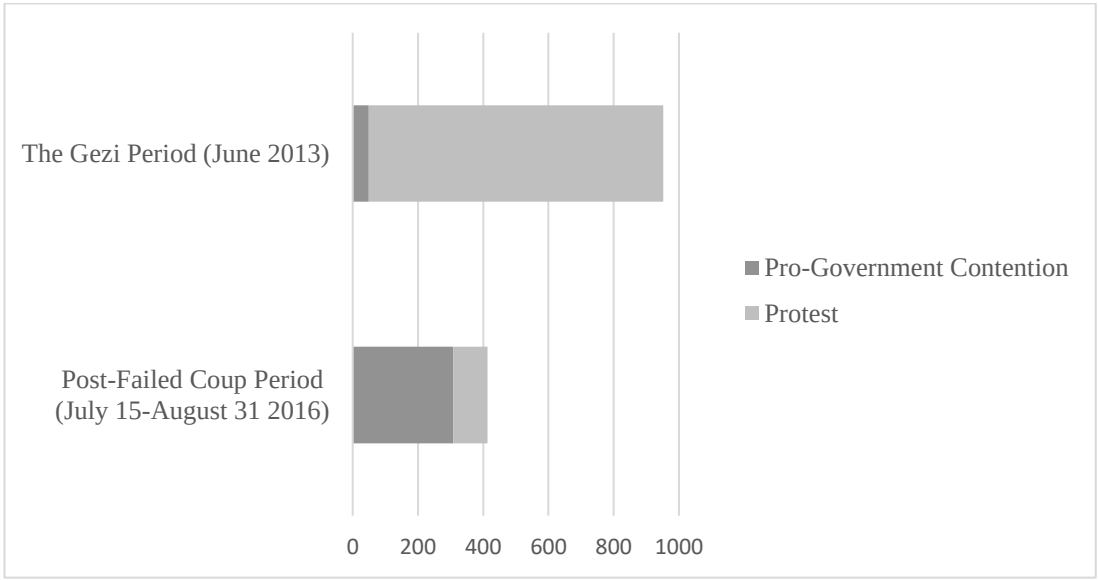

Figure 34. The comparison of protest and pro-government contention numbers (June 2013 and July15-August 31).

It is for sure that the replacement of conventional actors of protest with pro-government citizens is not a sudden shift but an output of a relatively long process of autocratization during which several elements played vital roles. First, the government initiated severe repressive policies against the right to protest after the Gezi protests. Police forces started to carry out a zero-tolerance approach in the

aftermath of the Gezi upheaval, raising the cost of participating in a protest event for citizens having grievances (Atak & della Porta, 2016). Concurrently, protest bans became a widely-used governmental strategy compared to the pre-2013 period, decreasing the likelihood of adopting extra-institutional means such as marching or gathering (Arslanalp & Erkmen, 2020b). Legislative regulations aimed to curtail the intention of using contentious means to challenge the AKP government within the autocratization process, creating an environment of fear for likely protesters. In addition to such institutional and legislative attempts to control and suppress prospective protest events, the government also used a polarization frame by which anti-government protesters were easily criminalized and depicted as enemies of the national will.

Pro-government contention against the coup threat is important to understand how the government maintained the polarization frame in a new context. This mobilization process illuminatively shows how resources deriving from mounting autocratization helped the AKP organize government-controlled rallies and how the coup threat was decisive in stirring up a pro-government mobilization process. What makes the anti-coup mobilization different from the previous ones is the magnitude and duration of rallies, for which the government managed to mobilize comprehensive state and public resources. Highly coordinated rallies during almost one month show that the government had sufficient organizational and logistic capacity, which was reinforced through an extensive reservoir of resources and dominance of state institutions.

5.5 Diffusion Threat: International Events

While protest threat, scandal threat, terror threat, and coup threat occurred in specific and short periods, diffusion threat spread over a long time. From January 2013 until December 2016, the risk of diffusion about international events constantly became an issue on the street. I argue that the diffusion risk pushed the AKP to promote rallies against specific countries in these four years. In this section, I show that the government encouraged rallies against Egypt, Syria, and Israel according to its foreign policy between 2013 and 2016. In doing so, the AKP could demonstrate that its foreign policy in the Middle East was popularly endorsed, and the electorate was mobilized.

This section explores the AKP's mobilization strategy against the abovementioned three countries. The high shares for these countries are predictable for two reasons. First, the "Middle Easternization" of foreign policy has made Turkey, and the AKP, an important actor in the region (Oğuzlu, 2008). Shifting from a pro-Western stance to a hegemonic role in the Middle East, the AKP embraced an influential position in the region and formed a more confident profile in its foreign policy, called a "new foreign policy vision" (Öniş & Yılmaz, 2009: 9). "Fueled by appeals to both nationalist and religious sentiments among the electorate," the AKP acted as an example of Islamic democracy for Arab countries (Balta, 2018: 15). In particular, the Arab Spring, which started in late 2010, opened a "policy window" for the AKP to enhance its activities and created several opportunities to act as the leader of the region with a pro-Islamist vision (Cop & Zihnioğlu, 2015: 7-8).

Second, the shift in the foreign policy, a more active profile in the region, and structural tensions brought deteriorating relations with Israel, Syria, and Egypt. A significant decay in ties with Israel was fueled by the negative turn in Israeli-Palestinian relations, Turkish support for Palestine, Turkey's increasing involvement in the Middle East, and Israel's support for Kurdish rule in northern Iraq (Oğuzlu, 2010: 280-281). Moreover, Israeli-Turkish relations have been tense since 2009, starting from the Davos conference when Erdoğan left the meeting after a dispute with the then President of Israel (Cop & Zihnioğlu, 2015: 122-123).

Regarding the Syrian policy, the instability caused by the civil war in Syria engendered serious security problems across the Turkish-Syrian border. It led to the "demonization of the Assad regime for its violation of human rights, democratic norms, and religious principles" (Demirtas-Bagdonas, 2014: 144). This, in turn, pushed the AKP to develop an anti-Assad campaign and sponsor anti-Assad groups against the regime and the Kurdish threat in northern Syria (Kösebalaban, 2020).

Meanwhile, in 2013, the military coup in Egypt against the then-President Mohamed Morsi, an important ally of the AKP, tarnished Turkey's impact in the region and damaged the AKP's alliance with influential networks. The coup signified a severe blow to Turkey's attempts to be a role model in the Middle East and empowered other actors that might jeopardize Turkey's assertive foreign policy (Balta, 2018: 16).

Considering the AKP's foreign policy in the region, I argue that mobilization against these three countries was encouraged by the AKP. To show this, I suggest that the incumbent regime endorses two strategies similar to other threat forms discussed above: (1) It framed the diffusion threat to generate a conducive environment, and (2) used authoritarian resources, which were evident in the absence of police forces and the presence of pro-government groups in the rallies.

5.5.1 Framing the Diffusion Threat

Because the diffusion threat spreads from 2013 until the end of 2016 and the target of pro-government contention changes according to the events happening in the foreign policy, I focus on the government's framing strategy against a specific country. I choose Egypt because the largest share of pro-government contentious actions is of the events in Egypt, and such actions continued sporadically for four years. I suggest that the AKP followed the same polarization logic. The amplification of the conspiracy narrative and the extension of the frame by including a coup in another country as a threat resulted in rallies against Egypt in Turkey.

A coup in Egypt in July 2013, led by General Sisi, overthrew President Morsi, an essential international partner of the AKP in its foreign policy. Yet, for the Turkish government, the collapse of Morsi's government was more than a regional catastrophe but had dire implications for the domestic policies. The presentation of the coup was an inevitable continuation of the narrative based on an alleged plot constructed during the Gezi protests. The then prime minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's words, similarly, show that the AKP could be forced to be face to face with a similar coup in Turkey:

> The Arab Spring starting in 2011 was awakening the entire region. They were scared. They were scared of democracy. Then they tried to stop Turkey. But our nation was tall in the saddle (…) Now they say "the AKP represents autocratization." In fact, they try to establish their own authoritarian regime by accusing the AKP of such. They search for a Sisi in Turkey. Sisi! (Yeni Şafak, 2015g)

Davutoğlu's words are almost identical to the conspiracy frame developed during the Gezi protests and the corruption allegations. The language relying on an unidentifiable "they," who work to topple down the AKP, and the emphasis on a prospective coup against the government stand out as familiar framing strategies based on an overarching polarization frame. In a similar vein, Erdoğan maintained the same dichotomy and the fear of conspiracy in his reaction against the sentence of death given to Morsi.

> If Morsi is executed —and I hope he will not be, they won't be able to— a brother of mine will obtain the status of martyrdom who lost his life in his struggle against a terrorist organization. If I also end up in a similar situation, I believe that my God, I hope, will grant the same status to us. (Yeni Şafak, 2015b)

Erdoğan's statement is interesting because he does not refrain from seeing himself as identical to Morsi and stresses that a similar situation is a real possibility in Turkey. It shows that although the AKP developed diverse coup-proofing strategies since the second term of its rule, it still felt insecure regarding the likelihood of a coup in Turkey. By pointing out a real coup in another country as a prospective threat against its government, the AKP extends its polarization frame into a new context, giving it a refreshed meaning.

This framing also worked well as a response to the Gezi protests. The coup in Egypt was carried out very after the Gezi protests, presenting the AKP with the opportunity to extend its anti-Gezi frame to a more general anti-coup frame. Similar to other regime changes during the Arab Spring, the Egyptian coup resulted from the mass protests against the Morsi government. Therefore, the AKP elites doubted that the Gezi protests could also lead to a coup in Turkey (Cagaptay, 2013). Erdoğan's words in the same summer that the Gezi protests happened are striking in this respect:

> "The game played in Egypt today will be played in another Islamic country tomorrow. The violence in Egypt today may be staged in another country tomorrow. Perhaps, they will desire to darken Turkey, because they don't want a powerful Turkey in the region" (Yeni Şafak, 2013q).

The coup enabled the AKP to distract the attention from the Gezi protests and was put at the center of discussions. It helped the AKP, in a way, to provide credibility for its assertions regarding the so-called intention behind the Gezi protests, bridging two unrelated events and pointing protesters out as coup plotters: "The entire conversation has been a metaphor for Turkey and its coup-ridden past, used to insinuate that the Gezi protesters – who in fact want more democracy – are plotting to eradicate it" (Berlinski, 2013). The coup was, therefore, more than a topic in Turkish foreign policy. As Berlinski states, "it's above all about domestic politics" (Ibid), showing that the ruling elite feared the likelihood of the diffusion of an international event into the local politics, together with the so-called destructive effects of the Gezi protests.

In addition to the ruling party elites, pro-government columnists also pointed out similarities between Turkey and Egypt in terms of mass protests or a coup threat. They warned the pro-government audience in this respect (Alğan, 2015; Kaplan, 2013; Yayla, 2015). GONGOs published statements that referred to the Gezi protests and corruption allegations and drew attention to the parallel situations in Turkey and Egypt:

> With the coup that was carried out in Egypt by the pawns of global powers, the massacre of İhvan members, and ungenuine death sentences, the Middle East is wanted to be reshaped (…) We know that the next step will be Turkey and the last powerful actor in the region will be tried to be destroyed. In particular, we see that the purpose of the Gezi protests and December 17/25 operations is this, and we take up our positions from the side we see right (Yeni Şafak, 2015g).

This shows that the government and circles close to the government were willing to link previous threats with an international one, which was framed within the scope of a prospective coup in Turkey. This is crucial to understand how the AKP extended its frame without withdrawing from the one used in the Gezi protests and corruption allegations. In other words, the AKP maintained the polarization frame in a new context surrounded by the fear of diffusion.

The AKP's polarization frame was evident in the contentious arena. Building on this frame, hundreds of rallies were organized that supported the Morsi government and cursed the coup plotters in Egypt. During these rallies, participants chanted slogans to warn fellow Turkish citizens of the possibility of an anti-government mass protest and a potential coup against the AKP government. For example, Morsi supporters chanted, "stand tall, don't bow down, Muslims are with you," indicating their willingness to resist a coup (Yeni Şafak, 2013n). "The lie behind the West's promises of democracy was revealed in Gezi and Gaza. Now it is revealed in Egypt", a statement from a speech in a pro-Morsi protest, implies how the allegedly international plot against the Turkish government in Gezi is perceived as a fragment of the coup in Egypt (Yeni Şafak, 2013a). In another instance, protesters chanted, "countries are different but Sisis are always the same," which can be read as a reference to Turkey's past and prospective coup plotters.

With a more direct remark on a past coup, a speaker during one of the rallies stated that the Egyptian coup plotters followed the footsteps of the military generals in Turkey when they issued a memorandum against the democratically elected Islamist prime minister Necmettin Erbakan on February 28, 1997. (Yeni Şafak, 2013p). Participants of these rallies also imitated slogans used by Gezi protesters, a clear signal that pro-Morsi rallies had a counter-character against the mass anti-government protests in Turkey. Frequently used ones included "everywhere is Egypt, resistance everywhere" (Yeni Şafak, 2013a), "we will win by resisting," and "resist Morsi" (Yeni Şafak, 2013n), which are adapted versions of the slogans chanted during the Gezi protests against Erdoğan.

The presentation of the coup in Egypt by government officials, GONGOs, and pro-government writers validates the framing strategy of the AKP once again. The government adopts the same polarization technique, which relies on a simple antagonism between the AKP and powers that aim to overthrow the former. While maintaining this frame, the government uses two alignment strategies: frame amplification and frame extension. Amplifying the conspiracy discourse and extending the frame to the diffusion of a coup in another country, the AKP succeeded in setting the same framework by including a new event, which was perceived as a threat that might affect domestic politics in Turkey.

5.5.2 Authoritarian Opportunities and the Diffusion Threat: Event Data

To show the effect of threats in engendering pro-government mobilization, Figure 35 displays the timeline of rallies in Turkey targeting other countries from 2013 to 2016. I coded more than 500 events, which did not culminate around a specific date but were distributed across the first three years. There are sudden ups and downs in the figure that represent popular mobilization under certain circumstances. The graph shows that mobilization is high in some months, implying that rallies are responses to specific international events, which are discussed below in more detail.

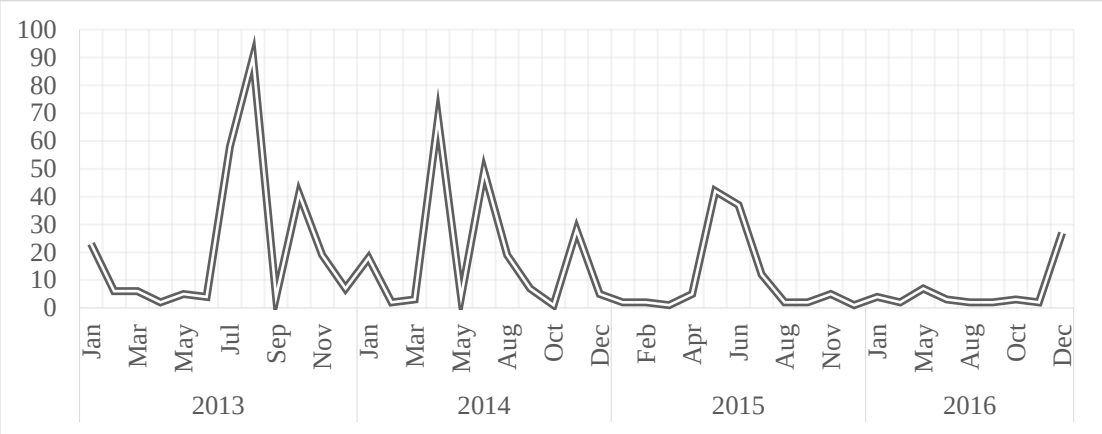

Figure 35. Monthly distribution of rallies about international events, from January 1, 2013, to December 31, 2016, Turkey.

Although the number of rallies against international events is relatively high, the diversity among rally targets is not as large. Rallies about international issues cluster around three countries, making up more than seventy five percent of all rallies against international events. Figure 36 presents the share of rallies by country, where rallies related to Egypt compose almost half, followed by Israel and Syria. The "Others" category includes rallies against the U.S., Russia, China, Germany, France, and others. [32]

[32] If a rally has more than one target, then it was added to the category of both countries. For example, if rally participants gather against both Israel and Egypt, then I added it to both the categories of Israel and Egypt.

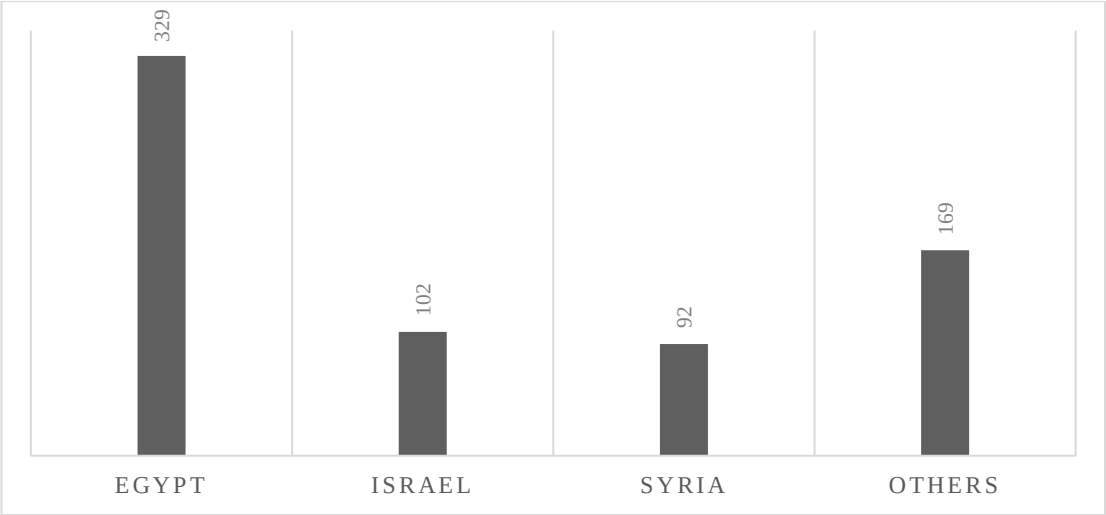

Figure 36. Number and share of anti-foreign rallies by country, from January 1, 2013, to December 31, 2016, Turkey.

In addition to the government-controlled media's broad coverage of the coup in Egypt and protests against it in Turkey while the Gezi protests were continuing (Berlinski, 2013), the AKP used some other authoritarian strategies to spread such rallies. To encourage rallies against these countries, the government adopted two policies. The first one was the police presence in the rally area. While police repression was widespread and the right to protest was strictly restricted in this period (Atak & della Porta, 2016; Arslanalp & Erkmen, 2020b; Özen, 2020), the data show that these governmental strategies were absent in rallies against Egypt, Syria, or Israel (*see* Figure 37). Strikingly, there were almost no police efforts to stop the rallies against the Middle Eastern countries, suggesting a modified police strategy concerning certain groups. I coded only four episodes, out of 489, where police employed repressive means, while no police intervention was mentioned for the others. Considering the increasingly repressive measures used by police in this period, particularly because of the Gezi protests, it can be argued that security forces were reluctant to disperse these rallies.

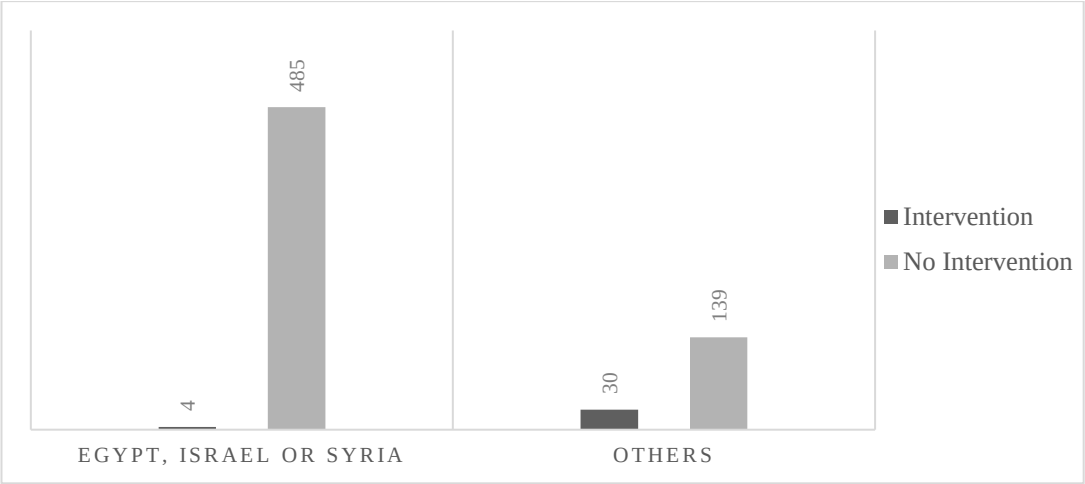

Figure 37. Police intervention in rallies against Egypt, Israel, or Syria, and other countries, January 1 2013-December 31, 2016, Turkey.

Moreover, the data show that if the police intervened, it would most likely be in a rally related to other countries. As shown in Figure 37, only less than one percent of the rallies against Egypt, Israel, or Syria were exposed to police intervention. In contrast, more than fifteen percent of the rallies against other countries such as the United States, Russia, or Germany were intervened by police. Furthermore, despite a vast majority of rallies being concerned with the issues in Egypt, Syria, and Israel − more than seventy percent of all rallies − the police efforts to disperse gatherings overwhelmingly occurred in rallies against other countries. While more than eighty-five percent of police intervention happened in rallies against other countries, only around ten percent of such intervention was present in rallies against Egypt, Syria, or Israel.

Given the regime is an autocratizing one, it is no surprise that the rallies displaying popular support for the government's foreign policy did not confront police forces, which were highly dependent on the government. The finding suggests that the police ensured a relatively safe space for participants in rallies against the Middle Eastern countries in question. Therefore, the cost for activists in these rallies was low because of the police's permissive attitude, which encouraged them to participate without the fear of being repressed.

The second strategy adopted by the government is the presence of pro-government organizations in the rallies against Egypt, Israel, and Syria.[33] Although many pro-government organizations seem independent, scholars show they are often "subsumed by the discourse, priorities, and policies of the government and develop an interest in shaping official politics" (Aras & Akpinar, 2015: 230). Moreover, many have direct links with the government. For instance, *Memur-Sen*, a public servant trade union, and *HAK-İŞ*, a worker trade union, were organizations that participated in or organized several of the rallies in question. Although they are independent, scholars suggest that the AKP has co-opted these unions based on clientelistic relationships (Gürcan & Mete, 2017: 110). As another example, *Uluslararası Rabia Platformu*, an organization that actively took part in organizing several rallies against Egypt, openly declared its support for the government, calling on people to vote for the AKP. The coordinator of *Uluslararası Rabia Platformu* was also the news director of *Anadolu Ajansı*, a pro-government news agency, another sign that the organization had close links with the government.

Figure 38 shows the share of rallies according to group type. While pro-government groups took part in 150 different rallies against Egypt, Syria, or Israel, only 14 rallies against other countries included such groups. It should also be noted that 13 out of 14 rallies incorporating pro-government groups against other countries included Egypt, Syria, or Israel as a target of the rallies. Referring to the data, it can be suggested that pro-government organizations were important components of mobilization against these countries, implying that these groups were considerably involved in the rallies' organization and participation processes.

[33] To code an organization as "pro-government", I checked the boards of organizations, explored their events, and scanned their literature. The organizations were coded as "pro-government" if there were people connected to the AKP or if the organization openly supported the AKP's policies.

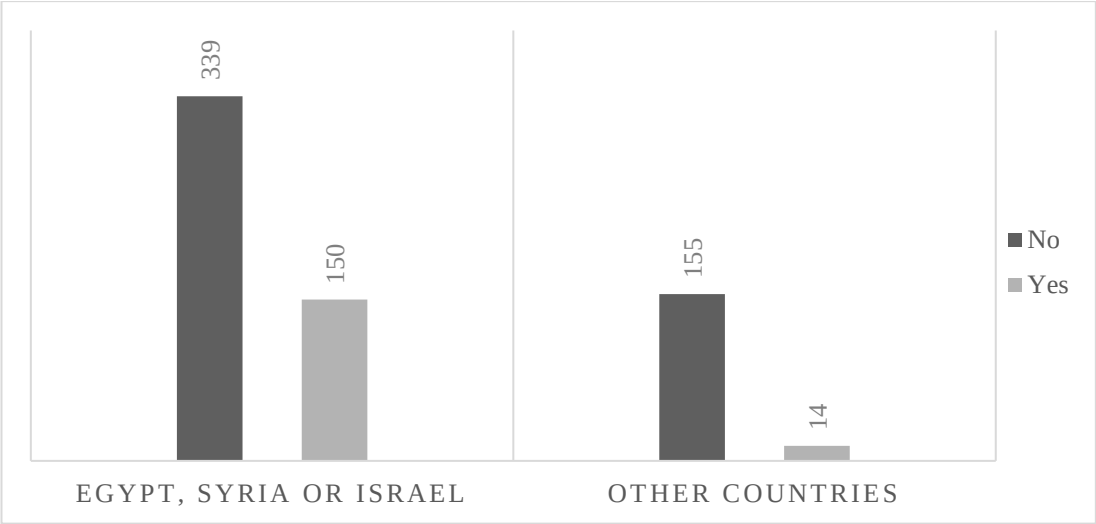

Figure 38. Pro-government groups participating in rallies against Egypt, Syria, or Israel, and other countries, January 1, 2013−December 31, 2016, Turkey.

Furthermore, almost all the rest of the rallies against Egypt, Israel, or Syria were organized by religious groups or citizens that might act in line with the government. No official link was found between these organizations and the government. However, it is well-established that Islamic civil society groups have flourished under AKP rule (Zihnioğlu, 2018). Contrary to past efforts to eliminate these organizations from the public sphere, they "no longer clash with the system, but rather [are] in harmony with it" (40). In this respect, scholars find that the AKP successfully co-opted civil society organizations to enhance its power (Doyle, 2018). Although it is wrong to assume that religious civil society organizations organized rallies to work toward consolidating the AKP's power directly, it is still plausible to suggest that these rallies aligned with the government's foreign policy, helping the AKP to build popular legitimacy.

I suggest that the presence of pro-government groups in rallies served three functions for the government. First, they increased the level of mobilization quantitatively, thus boosting the grassroots mobilization against a foreign policy threat springing from the Middle Eastern countries. For populists, vast gatherings of crowds with numerous citizens may function as proof of political legitimacy. High numbers of pro-government rallies help create the image that the rallies have a "popular" character, which contributes to the approval of a populist authoritarian government's policies. In this respect, the AKP found the chance to demonstrate the popularity of its

policies and signified its mass support through the participation of pro-government groups.

Second, these groups shaped the mobilization qualitatively, attributing to it a government-parallel character. Through pro-government organizations in rallies, the government could control the crowd to a certain extent and influenced the participants' repertoire, such as through slogans and rally types. In doing so, the popular power of the government was also consolidated and homogenized to a certain extent. Participants acquired a collective identity, transforming themselves within a contentious political practice in which pro-government organizations were also present and moving closer to the AKP's political outlook.

Third, pro-government groups provided legitimacy for the rallies, signaling to the police that these rallies did not threaten the regime's so-called security. This also helps explain why these rallies did not face police intervention and were free from repression. Moreover, these groups helped bolster the perception that such rallies were contentious representations of the official foreign policy and, therefore, "acceptable" forms of contentious action. This created an "amicable" relationship between rally participants and the police, which helped participants avoid the increasingly repressive tools used in the autocratization process of the government.

In addition to maintaining the polarization frame in a new context, by allowing and promoting some rallies through the absence of police and the presence of pro-government organizations, the AKP used the opportunities of authoritarianism to invigorate its foreign policy. Despite its official absence in most rallies, I show that the government encouraged rallies against threatening events within the context of its foreign policy. In doing so, the AKP established a parallel framework between its foreign policy and contentious expressions, strengthened its legitimacy, and exploited its authoritarian resources to a certain extent by linkages with pro-government organizations.

5.6 Summary

After the Gezi protests, a contentious character was afforded to pro-government citizens through the AKP's signals regarding the likelihood of taking to the street as a counter-force and through coordinated mass pro-government rallies. In this chapter,

I showed that the post-Gezi process represents the merge of rising autocratization, a polarization-oriented political frame, and a governmental opportunity created by various threats for adopting pro-government contention as a political instrument.

This chapter showed why and how the AKP encouraged and organized pro-government contention as a mobilization strategy between 2013 and 2016. To answer the "how" question, I suggested that the government acted as the frame builder of pro-government contention with a polarization frame. In line with the context of the threat, the AKP succeeded in using various frame alignment strategies by sticking to the overarching polarization frame. In this way, the Turkish government encouraged a conducive environment for contentious actions of government supporters, who developed a repertoire based on the government's strategic frame on the street.

To answer the "why" question, I showed that pro-government contention was a strategic response of the AKP government when a threat was present and authoritarian resources were available. I suggested threat as the primary driver of pro-government contention, functioning as a mobilizing force to generate pro-government contention. Moreover, in contrast to the AKP's democratic period, as discussed in Chapter 4, this chapter proved that the AKP was capable of exploiting authoritarian institutions and means in the organization and promotion of pro-government contention during its autocratization period.

This chapter was divided into five sub-sections analyzing five threat cases: protest threat, scandal threat, terror threat, coup threat, and diffusion threat. Each sub-section scrutinized a threat type through which five different cases were explored in detail. The same logic was followed in each sub-section: First, I briefly explained the case, providing information regarding the context and why it occurred. Second, I showed how the AKP framed each threat and how it moved from one frame alignment strategy to another by considering the political circumstances of the case. And third, by benefiting from the collected data, I showed the effects of authoritarian resources and threats in the emergence of pro-government contention as a mobilization strategy. I showed how threat types liken each other in some respects and differ from others.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This thesis explores the dynamics of pro-government mobilization in a country where a) the government confronted several instances of threat, and b) the regime shifted to authoritarianism. Conducting a case study on Turkey from 2013 until 2017 and using PEA based on newspaper data as the primary methodology, this dissertation asks the following questions: What does an autocratized government do when confronting severe threats to its rule? Why does an autocratized government need to mobilize its audience on the street, although the conventional wisdom suggests that authoritarian regimes do not require mobilization? How and why did the AKP government use pro-government contention as a mobilization strategy? What elements pushed the AKP to pursue contentious strategies on the street?

To investigate pro-government contention in Turkey, Chapter 2 presents a theoretical discussion on pro-government mobilization under three subjects: threats, authoritarianism, and frame building. Instead of political opportunity, which is a concept that social movement scholars have generally used to explain mobilization of those who have no official way to demand a right, I argue that threat is a more fruitful concept to interpret pro-government contention, which is a contentious expression of those who are already represented by the government. The reason for focusing on threat instead of political opportunity was based on comparative data the scholarship provides, showing that pro-government mobilization is a technique adopted when autocrats feel insecure by a threat to their rule. Using the data provided by Mass Mobilization in Autocracies Database (Weidmann & Rød, 2019), I present a categorization of threat types against which autocrats and pro-government citizens strategically use the street as a space for mobilization.

Then, I searched for a likely relationship, if any, between the regime type and mobilization of government supporters. The literature shows and my reseach also confirms that pro-government contention is not a strategy that can be observed in democracies. Instead, it is a contentious instrument practiced by autocrats. By exploiting resources and institutions in their own interests, autocrats control necessary means of mobilizing their audiences through the organization and promotion of such contentious activism. As a party labeled both as democratic and

authoritarian, the AKP was a proper example to test the argument that pro-government contention is a phenomenon in autocracies.

To answer "how" questions, Chapter 2 also presents a theoretical discussion on framing in pro-government contention. Referring to frame alignment processes offered by Snow et al. (1986), I suggest how governments may act as frame builders in a contentious action just as an SMO does in social movement activism. Bridging, amplifying, extending, and transforming the frames they generate, governments may move among framing strategies and create an appropriate political milieu for their electorate to mobilize. In this respect, adopting a government-based perspective, I present a theoretical approach to pro-government contention in terms of governments' capability of constructing a contentious frame.

To test these arguments, I coded comprehensive data through PEA, a method for collecting data regarding protests, repression, and pro-government contention. In Chapter 3, I discuss the data collection process thoroughly. As my primary data sources, I decided to use newspapers, typical types of sources used by social movement scholars. Although benefiting from newspapers is a common way of collecting protest data, it might create a problem in my case. Since I explore pro-government contentious dynamics in an authoritarian regime, where media is controlled dominantly by the incumbent regime, newspapers might present biased data in addition to the bias that already exists in democratic regimes. For this reason, I decided to use two newspapers, one pro-government, *Yeni Şafak*, and one pro-opposition, *Cumhuriyet*, to reduce selection and description biases as much as possible. My strategy worked well, and I collected data in plenty about all types of protests and repression, mostly from *Cumhuriyet,* and pro-government contention, mostly from *Yeni Şafak*. Chapter 3 proves that case studies about the mobilization of government supporters in an authoritarian regime might require at least two newspapers to reduce bias levels.

After a detailed discussion of data sources, I presented the definitions of protest, repression, and pro-government contention. At this point, one of the fundamental challenges was defining pro-government contention. The scholarship is limited in providing such definitions; all of them confine themselves to actions that openly declare their support for the government. I did not choose to follow this line of

definition because the mobilization of government supporters could be more than what is openly and explicitly declared. In contrast to conventional protests, pro-government contention can be much more complicated and veiled under different disguises due to the involvement of autocrats in contentious activism.

I made a threefold categorization to include also the contextual influence on pro-government contention. In the first category, I coded rallies organized directly by the government; in the second one, I coded contentious actions undertaken by pro-government groups or citizens that openly declare their support for the government; and in the last group, I coded actions, which are in line with the government's discourse even though organizers or participants have no official link with the government. This helped me differentiate the effects and consequences of one group from the other and presented a guideline for future researchers who might plan to examine pro-government mobilization in future studies. Next, I discussed variables I used in the coding file, the codebook, and the coding procedure in detail.

In the last part of Chapter 3, I presented a general outlook on the data at hand by showing a portrait of pro-government contention in Turkey between 2013 and 2016. In this section, I provided numerical and descriptive information regarding the trends of pro-government contention, its engagement with violence, its organizers, the geographical distribution, and the distribution of mobilization against threat types. It was an eye-opener in displaying how the data can also be used for further studies, which can investigate protest and repression dynamics as well.

To show how the regime type determines the use of pro-government contention when a threat against the government is present, the AKP's rule in the first decade, categorized as a relative democracy by scholarship, was explored in Chapter 4. I suggest that threat is capable of leading to the adoption of pro-government contention as a mobilization strategy when the regime is an authoritarian one. In that case, pro-government contention should have been absent or a quite limited phenomenon in the AKP's democratic period. To test this, I scanned one-month periods of threats against the AKP in this period because my data showed that pro-government contention was a product of threats against the government between 2013 and 2016. On this basis, I investigated several threats, such as the Republic

protests in 2007, the party closure case in 2008, and the Kurdish protests in 2011. I attempted to detect contentious activism of government supporters, if there was any.

My findings concerning the pre-2013 period confirmed my argument to the effect that the AKP encountered threats that had detrimental effects on its rule, but pro-government contention was not its preferred mobilization strategy. This finding was necessary to prove how the regime type is decisive in organizing and promoting pro-government rallies and how threats are alone inadequate for triggering pro-government contention. In other words, Chapter 3 contributes to substantiating the argument of how the mobilizing capacity of threats is dependent on autocratization.

Comparing the Republic protests in 2007 and the Gezi protests in 2013 in terms of pro-government mobilization was also quite illuminative. Despite differences in actors and organizers, both were mass protests and put the AKP authority in serious jeopardy. It is worth mentioning that the AKP employed similar discursive mechanisms to a certain extent in both cases, implying a likely counter-mobilization of government supporters against protesters. However, while the Gezi protests induced a counter-mobilization process in practice, the contentious response to the Republic protests remained at a discursive level and no counter-mobilization ensued. Similarly, while the party closure case against the AKP led to no mobilization, the corruption scandal of 2013 galvanized pro-government groups and the government to take a contentious action in response. The differences in contentious outcomes were essential to show how the regime shift and its consequences may be crucial for adopting pro-government contention as a governmental technique.

In addition to the role of autocratization, I speculatively argued that the Gezi protests functioned as a critical event for developing pro-government contention as a mobilization strategy. This part of the dissertation was not a part that was empirically tested but still I tried to explain why pro-government contention was first used extensively in response to the Gezi protests. I suggest that several factors overlapped to create a conducive environment for likely contentious government activism, and the AKP used this opportunity. It can be argued that the Gezi represented a mass protest threat which occurred during the intensifying autocratization phase of the AKP and immediately after the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring caused the downfall of several Middle Eastern autocrats through mass protests, and the Gezi protests

provided a conducive environment for the mobilization of government supporters. First, the abundance of resources deriving from exploiting state institutions and, second, an instant mass protest threat can be said to have implanted the idea in government circles and the AKP elites that staying in power as an authoritarian regime may not be possible only through elections. They came to the conclusion that they also needed to control the streets. Moreover, by forming a clear-cut polarized political environment, which relies on an anti-government and pro-government antagonism, the Gezi protests might have helped the AKP to establish a contentious dualist narrative through which being pro-government becomes a solid identity.

My data suggest that the Gezi protests prompted a counter-mobilization process, which was also present in the AKP's responses to the threats that emerged in the aftermath of Gezi. Chapter 5 offers that threats are fundamental drivers of pro-government contention in an autocratizing regime. My findings imply that the use of pro-government contention is more likely if a threat to a government's rule is present when the regime is an authoritarian one. In this context, the data indicates the fundamental argument of this dissertation that threats are dependent on autocratization and autocratization is dependent on threats in increasing the likelihood of pro-government contention.

I found five threats against which the AKP developed pro-government contentious politics: protest threat, scandal threat, terror threat, coup threat, and diffusion threat. Chapter 5 presents detailed analyses of each threat separately, exploring similarities and differences in the AKP's strategy of employing pro-government contention. While some motivations and consequences each threat type produces are context-driven and therefore unique to the case, there can also be generalizable deductions, which should be tested for future research. For instance, the data show that protest threat and coup threat lead to violence when pro-government groups take to the street because of the simultaneous presence of two ideologically opposite groups on the streets. In particular, the data indicate that coup threat engendered deadly results stemming from the use of lethal weapons by the military, which is always a realistic possibility due to the access of the military to such weapons. Similarly, because an anti-government group is already on the street in a protest threat in a highly dynamic way, the confrontation between pro-government groups and anti-government groups may foment tension, which in turn may lead to violence. Future research can test

such threats in different countries and may compare rates of violence in comparison to other threat forms.

I argue that the terror threat is not necessarily case-specific. This also needs to be compared in other cases. The data show that the terror threat in Turkey causes a nationalist narrative and thus a nationalist mobilization process, similar to the rally-round-the-flag effect discussed in the literature. Because terror threat is framed as a national security problem, pro-government contention against a terror problem may evolve into a nationalist context and may provide an elastic ideological space for the government. This may also be illuminative regarding the boundaries of the concept of the rally-round-the-flag effect, which can directly or indirectly encompass pro-government contention and the government's active involvement in the process in an authoritarian country. Future research may approach pro-government contention within the scope of terror threat by focusing on its capacity to produce a rally-round-the-flag effect and its likely engagement with nationalist narratives even if the government does not embrace a nationalist ideology.

Moreover, although pro-government contention is a conditional output of threats and authoritarian resources/institutions, it has to be framed in a certain way to define a threat as a threat and use authoritarian opportunities for such contention. This shows us how a conducive environment is prepared for pro-government contention. On this basis, I discuss the narratives of the AKP government regarding threats it encountered and I emphasize the role of the AKP as the frame builder of pro-government contention. Chapter 5 illustrated how the AKP framed threats by using the opportunities it derived from the authoritarian structure of the regime. Namely its control over media outlets and its ability to organize and finance big rallies consolidated the AKP's role as the frame-builder. I showed how the AKP utilized different frame alignment processes in response to the context and the nature of threat and particularly exploited polarization mechanisms.

6.1What Can We Expect After 2017?

Even though no data are yet available for the post-2017 period, what can we expect for this period regarding pro-government contentious dynamics in Turkey? What could be said concerning the AKP's use of pro-government contention as a political strategy while it is gradually autocratizing more? Considering the policies and

statements of the AKP and Erdoğan, a number of suggestions can be made to speculate about prospective contentious actions of government supporters in this period.

The first one is the use of pro-government mobilization against the coup threat in 2016 as a preventive repression strategy. Erdoğan's threatening rhetoric in reference to pro-government mobilization against the coup attempt can be illuminative in this respect. For instance, when a mass protest wave spread in France in 2018 and drew the attention of the international media, Erdoğan took a swift reaction to the protests and chose to threaten prospective protesters of a potential mass protest wave in Turkey. Even though there was no visible attempt of opposition groups to take to the street during that period, Erdoğan referred to the July 15 coup attempt and warned the main opposition party leader. He stated: "Mr. Kemal, you cannot get people to take to the street (...) You should know this nation would not allow you to the public squares, just as it did not allow FETÖ and its loyalists on July 15" (Hürriyet, 2018). In a more recent speech, he repeated the same threat when the opposition considered taking to the streets against rising economic grievances: "They say, shamelessly, they will take to the street, to the public squares. Didn't you see July 15? You will be brought down a notch by this nation just as the coup plotters were, regardless of wherever you escape to" (Deutsche Welle, 2022).

Erdoğan's words show that autocrats can also use pro-government mobilization as a symbolic repressive tool against threats, which are not present but exist as a potential possibility. To put it differently, pro-government contention can be a virtual mechanism to repress opponents' alleged actions by reminding the effect of a past pro-government mobilization process to subdue a definite threat. These examples prove that the anti-coup mobilization is used as a symbolic power to block the possibility of a mass protest against the government, or as a threatening mechanism to deter challengers from taking contentious action on the street. Therefore, it can be expected that the symbolic use of pro-government mobilization as a repressive power can be a major tool in the hands of the AKP against any threat that might jeopardize its political existence in the post-2017 period. The successful outcome in defeating the coup plotters on the street in 2016 can be a functional instrument to mobilize the electorate and repress the opponents, when necessary.

More important than the use of anti-coup mobilization as a virtual repressive tool is the possibility of the use of pro-government contention as an actual tool in the next round of elections. It seems that the year 2023 will witness presidential and parliamentary elections. Public opinion polls show that the AKP's and Erdoğan's success in the ballot box is under threat. On the contrary, the opposition parties are optimistic regarding the elections more than ever before (Kahvecioglu & Patan, 2022).

The high chance of opposition parties in the elections and the authoritarian resources available to the ruling party open up two hypothetical scenarios. The first scenario is that the AKP wins the elections and the opposition parties and groups organize mass protests to delegitimize the AKP's electoral success. In that scenario, I foresee two motivations for mass protests: a) that there had been electoral fraud, or b) that elections do not work under an authoritarian regime. Hence, mass protests can be a last resort for the opposition to shake the legitimacy of the elections and assert popular legitimacy.

The AKP may consider different options to handle the threat in question in such a scenario. The police's repressive capabilities can be an instrument to repress the protesters, just as it was used in the past against the Gezi protests. Several legislative and judicial steps can be taken to delegitimize the demands of opposition groups. Emergency strategies can be put into action once again. Comprehensive media campaigns can be carried out to create the image that protesting the government is an illegal activity and does not rely on any kind of legitimacy. Or the government may simply ignore the protests because of its triumph in the ballot box, which is presented as the only source of legitimacy.

In addition to such strategies, pro-government contention can be used by the AKP as a show of force on the street to repress mass protests. The mobilization of government supporters can be presented as the indicator of mass-based democracy and as the representation of the "national will" against the opposition's mass protests, providing the former the opportunity to reclaim its democratic commitment to relying on the ballot box. This scenario can be worrisome in terms of the likelihood of physical clashes between two groups and the uncontrollable violent outcomes of such confrontations. Therefore, pro-government contention may lead to one of the

most alarming cases in the history of protest actions in Turkey. It is possible that the government and opposition can lose control on the street quickly due to the unruly character of mass protests.

The second scenario is that the opposition parties win the elections, and the AKP or its voters do not recognize the legitimacy of the results. In this scenario, the opposition obtains the opportunity to rule the country after twenty years and overthrow the authoritarian government of the AKP via the ballot box. The opposition's victory thus puts an end to the AKP's dominance over institutions and resources and leads to a new path in Turkish politics. The AKP faces a total failure in the ballot box for the first time in its history, engendering a destructive election threat to its longstanding rule.

This may push the AKP to pursue various strategies in order to generate an atmosphere which can be used to delegitimize the electoral results. Similar to the 2019 local elections (Esen and Gumuscu, 2019), the election results can be contested with the claim that counting votes had been nonprocedural, in which case they might demand a recount or that the elections should be repeated. By using the monopolized media and its control over the justice bureaucracy, the AKP may construct a narrative that condemns the results and cast doubt on the legitimacy of the elections.

However, the AKP may consider another option to put a spin on its electoral defeat. Mobilizing all the institutions and resources, the government may goad government supporters to take contentious action once again, just as in the democracy watches in 2016. This would be a controlled, planned type of pro-government action on the streets. The virtual threat of the mobilized pro-government masses, expressed in previous speeches of Erdoğan, may be actualized in various forms to damage the legitimacy of the elections. The people on the street can be presented as the representation of the national will and the elections can be presented as a tool that steals this will through the opposition's fraud in the ballot box. In this way, the AKP may choose to redefine the boundaries of democracy and prefer attributing a new character to it by promoting its electorate to take to the streets in a controlled way.

The worst hypothetical scenario would be a call by Erdoğan and the AKP to the street immediately after the announcement of the opposition as the winner, similar to what Trump did after losing the elections in the United States. Not recognizing the

validity of the results, pro-government masses may act as an uncontrollable force, which may lead to devastating consequences for Turkish democracy. Such a call may cause violent results owing to the unpredictable outcomes deriving from the actions of undisciplined masses. If the confrontation between the army and citizens on the streets in 2016 is kept in mind, which led to acts of violence by pro-government citizens during the coup night, a similar situation may arise. This would probably be the worst case not only because of its likely fatal consequences but also because of its irreparable effects on the democratic processes and reliability on electoral mechanisms.

Overall, these are just hypothetical scenarios, which are nothing more than speculations based on past experiences of pro-government contention analyzed in this dissertation. However, these scenarios are not inevitable. The AKP might win or lose the elections and yet may choose not to initiate pro-government contention.

6.2 Suggestions for Future Research

There are several questions that this dissertation did not ask and did not answer. In terms of its methodology, this thesis studied pro-government mobilization with a quantitative method called PEA by relying on newspaper data. It supplied useful information to approach pro-government contention through the lens of contentious events. It provided a narrative based on these events and their relationship with the government.

Despite its advantages, however, this type of reserach also has its own shortcomings. Most importantly, this methodology disregards and does not allow us to understand the intentions of pro-government citizens in the squares. To present a comprehensive picture of pro-government mobilization, we need to know more than an analysis of government actions and protest events. Qualitative techniques such as interviews, surveys, or ethnographic research may contribute to understanding pro-government mobilization from a different perspective. They may help us grasp the motivations of government supporters, which may be quite different from those of the government.

As another aspect of methodological shortcomings, this study does not present quantitative analysis, despite collecting quantitative data, and leaves it for further studies. Because this research dataset is open to everyone, it may encourage scholars

to conduct a quantitative analysis of pro-government contention in Turkey in their future research. This would help measure other variables that can have an effect on the mobilization of government supporters and assist us in comprehending the phenomenon of pro-government contention more plainly. In addition, as the dataset includes data regarding all forms of protests and repressive measures during the designated period, researchers may also conduct studies to explore the dynamics of protest and repression in Turkey.

Apart from methodological drawbacks, this research can be developed in several ways. One of the understudied subjects in the scholarship is framing pro-government contention, which is a component of this research but not its central focus. I believe that approaching governments as contentious actors and their capacity to frame pro-government contention to build a favorable political milieu can be a fruitful field for future research. Many different variables can be researched with the proposition of "governments as frame builders." Ideological differences, the regime's level of autocratization, or GONGO-government relations in framing pro-government contention can be explored in various contexts. As contentious agents, specific actors within governments and their involvement in frame alignment processes can also be a fertile field for future studies.

In the scope of framing pro-government contention, this dissertation, despite its limitations, contributes to our understanding also in terms of the framing effect of existing polarization on pro-government mobilization and points out the engagement of polarization and pro-government contention as a topic to be studied in future research. In addition to the influence of polarization on pro-government mobilization, populism can also be a productive research field. Since we have observed pro-government contention recently in countries where populist governments rule, scholars can give populist orientation and its influence on contentious activism special attention. Comparative analysis can be conducted by analyzing populist governments in diverse contexts, which may help social scientists to observe contentious mechanisms under populist governments and populism's direct influence on contentious mobilization.

This research can also be advanced by exploring a different dependent variable. This thesis examines the mobilization of government supporters in Turkey but does not

examine such mobilization's effects on repression. The literature suggests that pro-government contention is not solely a political tool for mobilization but also for repressing opponents (Hellmeier & Weidmann, 2020; Robertson, 2011). In line with this argument, the AKP period provides a case that can be explored within the context of mobilization's repressive effects.

It seems that this can be done at least in two ways. First, the AKP's mobilization policies can be examined as a form of reactive repression. The AKP's contentious responses to threats are not merely a means of mobilizing its supporters and consolidating its electorate but also of repressing such threats and opponents. For instance, the counter-mobilization of government supporters against the Gezi protests can be analyzed as a form of reactive repression, which can be observed in the violent actions of pro-AKP groups against protesters. AKP officials' counter-Gezi rhetoric leading to pro-government contentious activism can be explored with a similar perspective. In the same vein, the AKP's mobilization of its audience against the coup attempt, both on the coup night and during the democracy watches, can be read through the lens of reactive repression. Such reading would enrich the context of contentious mobilization and its potential function of repressing opponents.

It is also worth mentioning that the mobilization of government supporters can be explored from the perspective of preventive repression. This can mostly be observed during the post-coup process in Turkey, as discussed earlier. In this regard, we must note especially the absence of mass anti-AKP protests since Gezi in 2013. The symbolic use of pro-government mobilization as a preventive repression mechanism can be a topic worth to be considered and it can be suggested that pro-government contention can be an additional political tool in the repressive repertoire of the government.

Another important contribution can be deepening the analysis of the regime type's effect on pro-government contention and analyzing contentious examples in democracies despite the limited number of cases. We know that the former president of the United States Donald Trump was successful in mobilizing rogue elements in his electorate after the loss in the last presidential elections (Smith, 2021). Similarly, pro-government mobs take to the street on some occasions to support the Polish

government in Poland, showing that pro-government contention is also a visible phenomenon in democracies (Szary & Florkiewicz, 2015).

Related to the use of pro-government contention in democracies, future researchers may explore two things. First, pro-government contention can be viewed through the lens of its likely effects on autocratization. Scholars may approach pro-government mobilization in democracies, where leaders may have authoritarian tendencies or where the regime is moving on an authoritarian trajectory. If the analysis is conducted in this way, then we would have the opportunity to know not only the effect of authoritarian resources on pro-government contention, but also the latter's effect on the former. This may give us a more nuanced understanding of such contention and seek the possibilities of a mutual relationship between these two. Second, this may also allow us to conduct links between autocratization, mobilization, and populist leaders. Populist governments in democratic countries may mobilize their supporters for a variety of purposes and this may very well be related to the autocratization of the regime. Regarded in this way, we can explore the effects of populism on autocratization within the scope of contentious mobilization, providing a more detailed picture on populism, authoritarianism, and mobilization studies.

Furthermore, future researchers may approach pro-government contention to build a conceptual framework and extend the boundaries of the term "protest". Even though this thesis does not define pro-government contention as a form of protest, it can very well be argued that pro-government contention is another form of protest, which does not aim to mobilize citizens based on grievances, but a form of protest to protect privileges deriving from the government they support. In the secondary literature, there are examples of research that explore protests in the scope of privilege protection in right-wing/conservative movements (Dietrich, 2014; McVeigh, 2009). However, no study approaches pro-government mobilization in such terms. Since we can expect that government supporters may benefit from the government in an authoritarian regime both in political and economic terms, pro-government contention can be viewed as a form of protest to protect existing privileges against threats to such prerogatives. On this basis, future studies may consider establishing a theoretical framework on the nexus of protest, privileges, and pro-government

contention. They may extend the scope of right-wing and conservative movements in this regard.

In the light of all these, the following questions can be addressed in future research: What motivations do government supporters have in joining pro-government rallies? How do they differ from or overlap with governments' intentions? How does the economic performance of a government affect the organization of pro-government contentious mechanisms? What role do GONGOs play in organizing and promoting pro-government contention? How can we methodologically prove the causal relationship between governments and pro-government contention? Why do we observe pro-government rallies recently in countries ruled by populist governments? In what ways is pro-government mobilization used as a repressive instrument by governments? Why do some governments include pro-government mobilization in their repression repertoire in addition to police repression while others do not? Why do we observe pro-government contention also in democracies despite their limitedness? What kind of a relationship could we observe between populism, autocratization, and pro-government mobilization? How can pro-government mobilization be conceptualized in terms of privilege protection, and in what ways is it similar to right-wing and conservative movements? These questions can be asked in prospective case or comparative studies and may significantly contribute to our understanding of pro-government mobilization and contentious mechanisms in such mobilization processes.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

CODES FOR ACTORS AND TARGETS

STATE	**66100**		
President	661001	Commander of the Turkish Armed Forces	661005
Prime Minister	661002	YÖK	661009
Deputy Prime Ministers	661003	Mustafa Kemal Atatürk	661010
Government	661004	National Assembly	661011

SOCIAL ACTORS	**66110**		
Media/Journalists	661101	Artists	661124
Students	661102	University Rectors	661125
Workers	661103	Gezi Protesters	661126
Peasants	661104	Non-labeled Anti-Government Protesters	661127
Farmers	661105	Saturday Mothers	661129
Engineers/Architects	661107	Animal Lovers	661130
Civil Servants	661110	Lawyers/Legists	661132
Football Groups	661111	Pro-government groups	661133
Environmentalists	661112	Socialist organizations	661134
Nationalist Groups	661113	Kemalist/Ulusalcı	661135
Religious Groups	661114	Academics	661137

Civilians/bystanders	661115	Health Sector	661138
Refugees	661116	Committee of Wise Men	661139
Martyrs/Lates Families	661117	Human rights organizations	661140
Prisoner Relatives	661118	LGBT organizations	661141
Feminist/Woman Organizations	661119	Mosque imams	661142
Commercial bosses	661122	Other	66910

POLITICAL PARTIES	**66120**		
AKP	661201	MHP	661203
CHP	661202	BDP/HDP	661204
Other	66920		

RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC POPULATION	**66130**		
Christians	661301	Alevis	661305
Jews	661302	Kurds	661306
Muslims	661303	Armenians	661307
Sunnis	661304	Other	66930

TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS	**66140**		
PKK	661401	Gülen Movement	661406

KCK	661402	Hezbollah	661407
PYD	661403	Al-Nusra	661408
ISIS	661404	DHKP-C	661409
Hamas	661405	Other	66940

STATE ENFORCEMENT	**66150**		
Police	661501	Security Directorates	661505
Thugs/Paramilitary Groups	661502	Gendarmerie	661506
Army	661503	Other	66950

EXTERNAL ACTORS	**66160**		
United States	661601	Israel	661608
European Union	661602	Russia	661609
United Nations	661603	Syria	661610
NATO	661604	International Human Rights Group	661611
United Kingdom	661605	Syrians	661612
France	661606	Egypt	661614
Germany	661607	Other	66960

MUNICIPALITIES	**66180**		
Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality	661801	Izmir Metropolitan Municipality	661803

Ankara Metropolitan Municipality	661802	Other	66980

CONCEPTS

Manhood	9100

EVENT LIST FOR REPRESSION

Category	Code	Examples
RESTRICT	**210**	**State actions that limit protesters' resources**
Restricting access to resources, necessities, jobs	2111	Banning doctors' intervention in emergencies in protests
Restricting assembly	2112	Closing a square for anti-government protests
Restricting freedom of speech and distribution of information	2113	Banning some banners in a demonstration
Restricting emigration, mobility	2114	Banning some protesters from going abroad
Prohibitive fines, taxes, fees, regulation	2115	Fining protesters because they participated in a protest
SEIZE	**220**	**State actions to detain and arrest protesters**
Searching/seizing assets	2211	Searching protesters' accommodation to arrest them
Onsite arrests/detentions	2212	Arresting protesters in a demonstration site

Nonviolent onsite arrest of opposition leaders	2418	Arresting a social movement leader with non-violent means in a demonstration site
Arrests after the event	2213	Arresting protesters after the protest is done
Arrests of opposition leaders after the event	2214	Arresting a social movement leader with non-violent means after the protest is done
Violent arrest of opposition leaders	24199	Arresting a social movement leader with violent means
WARN	**230**	**State actions that warn or threat protesters**
Public threat of violence/punishment	2311	The police firing their gun into the air to break up the crowd
Show of force	2312	Showing strength with security vehicles
Exemplary punishment/deterrent	2313	Punishing protesters to deter others from participating in prospective protests
Show trials/political trials	2314	Judging a protester or leader in a political trial
Expulsion/purge from party or ruling elite	2316	Expelling a member from the party due to a protest event
Halt negotiations	2318	Halting existing negotiations with a social movement organization
Identifying/recording protesters	2320	Recording protesters with a camera

JUDICIAL	240	State's judicial actions against protesters
Curfew	2411	Declaring curfew after a series of protests
Martial law declared	2412	Declaring martial law, which might restrict protest participation
"Special" extra-legal courts set-up	2413	Judging protesters in extra-legal courts
Suspension of parts of constitution or the regular workings of government/issuing ordinance	2414	Punishing protesters through legal mechanisms by benefiting from emergency conditions
Outlawing organizations, groups, industries	2415	Outlawing a social movement organization after a series of protests
Suspending or censoring news media/speech	2416	Censoring a channel's broadcast which supports protests against the government
Ousting groups from government	2417	Expelling groups related to a protest series from the government
Exiles/expulsions	2420	Sending a teacher into exile because they participated in a protest
Trials in absentia	2421	Judging a protester while they are absent in the trial
Prosecution on protesters	2425	Initiating an investigation against a protester
Founding a new organization	2426	Founding a new legal organization to repress protesters

NON-JUDICIAL	**250**	**State's non-judicial actions against protesters**
Non-violent putdown of demonstrations/strikes	2511	Stopping the march of protesters with a barricade
Violent putdown of demonstrations/striles and teargassing	25119	Stopping the march of protesters through violent means including teargas, plastic bullets, water cannons etc.
Calling in additional police posts/secret police/special forces	2514	Calling extra water cannon vehicles to intervene in protests

USE OF FORCE	**260**	**State's or thugs' use of force against protesters**
Beating up	26119	Beating protesters up in a demonstration
Clashes with group	26129	Clashing with protesters in a gathering without guns
Use of torture	26139	Torturing protesters in a police station
Disappearance	26189	Causing the disappearance of a protester
Damaging property	26199	Breaking the windows of a protester's shop
Bombing	26209	Using bombs against protesters
Burning houses, bridges etc.	26219	Burning the house of a protester
Firing at protesters/armed attack	26269	Firing at protesters with guns
Rolling tanks in the streets	26265	Using tanks against protesters
Running over protesters	26266	Running over protesters in a gathering

PROTEST EVENT LIST FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION

Category	Code	Examples
LOW INTENSITY COLLECTIVE ACTION	**530**	**Protesters' collective actions that have a low level of contention**
Petitions and/or distributing information	5313	Organizing a petition campaign on the street against environmental laws
Forming an organization	5314	Forming a new organization deriving from protests
Forums in parks	5315	Organizing forums where protesters exchange opinions
Standing man protests	5316	Standing man protests during the Gezi protests
Banging pots	5317	Banging pots on the street to protest the government
Street Panels	5322	Organizing panels on the street to protest racist assaults
Funeral Rites	5323	Funeral rites where slogans are chanted to protest terrorist attacks
Party meetings	5324	Meetings organized by opposition parties (excluding rallies organized during the election campaign period)
Concerts/Festivals	5325	A concert where people chant slogans to protest the government
Convoy	5326	Organizing a convoy where horns are honked to protest a bomb attack

Boosting protest campaign	5327	Providing scholarship to students to persuade them to participate in collective action

MEDIUM INTENSITY COLLECTIVE ACTION	**540**	**Protesters' collective actions that have a medium level of contention**
Non-violent strike	5411	A non-violent strike organized by a trade union
Violent strike	54119	A violent strike organized by workers
Non-violent general strike	5412	A non-violent nationwide strike organized by doctors
Violent general strike	54129	A violent nationwide strike organized by lawyers
Non-violent small-scale demonstrations (less than 200 participants)	5413	A small group of people gathering, marching, chanting slogans etc. without using violent means
Violent Small-scale demonstrations (less than 200 participants)	54139	A small group of people throwing stones at the police in a march
Non-violent Large-scale demonstrations (more than 200 participants)	5414	A large group of people gathering, marching, chanting slogans etc. without using violent means
Violent Large-scale demonstrations (more than 200 participants)	54149	A large group of people attacking the police with flag poles in a demonstration
Non-violent sit-ins	5415	A peaceful sit-in protest organized by feminists
Violent sit-ins	54159	A sit-in protest where protesters throw bottles at the security forces

Boycotts	5417	Deciding to organize a boycott by gathering on the street
Halt negotiations	5418	Halting negotiations with the government about a series of ongoing environmental protests
Founding a political wing/party	5420	Founding a political party after the Gezi protests
Threat of violence/agitation	5422	Drawing crosses on the door of an Alevi's house
Tenting	5425	Setting tents to occupy a public space in a protest
Hunger strike	5427	Organizing a hunger strike in a square
Making rehearsals for future protests	5430	A group's preparations in a campsite for prospective protests

HIGH INTENSITY COLLECTIVE ACTION	**550**	**Protesters' collective actions that have a high level of contention**
Assaults	55109	Assaulting police outside a demonstration site
Robbery/ damaging property	55119	Breaking the windows of a municipal bus
Clashes/beating-up	55129	A fight between ideologically opposite groups
Seizing buildings	55169	Occupying a building to protest commercial bosses
Armed attack	55199	Attacking a police station with guns
Bombing	55209	Bombing the garden of a police station

Burning houses, bridges etc.	55229	Burning shops in a demonstration
Attempting to kill civilians	55259	Pushing a person off the bridge
SPLIT	**560**	**Splits among protester groups**
Disagreements between factions	5611	A group previously participating in protests, declaring that they will not support ongoing demonstrations
Forming an organization as a result of splits	5612	Forming a new organization after disagreements among groups
Expelling members	5614	Expelling a member from a feminist organization

PRO-GOVERNMENT EVENT LIST FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION

Category	Code	Examples
LOW INTENSITY COLLECTIVE ACTION	**730**	**Pro-government groups' collective actions that have a low level of contention**
Petitions or distributing information	7312	A petition organized on the street by a pro-government group against corruption allegations
Founding an organization	7313	The foundation of Rabia Platform, which organizes many protest events
Welcoming a party member/leader-opening ceremony	7316	Welcoming the President in the airport with torches and slogans
Funeral rite	7323	A funeral rite where groups chant slogans supporting the government

Convoy	7326	A convoy where people chant slogans supporting the government
MEDIUM INTENSITY COLLECTIVE ACTION	**740**	**Pro-government groups' collective actions that have a medium level of contention**
Non-violent small-scale demonstrations (less than 200 participants)	7413	A small group of pro-government citizens gather peacefully to support the government's policies
Violent small-scale demonstrations (less than 200 participants)	74139	A small group of pro-government citizens throw stones at another group in a demonstration
Non-violent large-scale demonstrations (more than 200 participants)	7414	A large group of pro-government citizens gather peacefully to support the government's policies
Violent large-scale demonstrations (more than 200 participants)	74149	A large group of pro-government citizens throw bottles at another group in a march
Non-violent sit-ins	7415	A pro-government group organizing a peaceful sit-in
Violent sit-ins	74159	A pro-government group attacking other protesters in a pro-government sit-in protest
Ruling party meetings/demonstrations	7416	A meeting organized by the government (excluding rallies during election campaign period)
Threat of violence/agitation	7422	Calling people to arms to protect the President
Democracy watches	7423	Gatherings organized after the failed coup attempt

Tenting	7425	Setting tents on the street to support the President
HIGH INTENSITY COLLECTIVE ACTION	**750**	**Pro-government groups' collective actions that have a high level of contention**
Assaults	75109	Assaults to the Gezi protesters
Robbery/stealing-damaging property	75119	Breaking the tables of a shop owned by a protester
Clashes/beating up	75129	A fight between protesters and government supporters
Seizing buildings	75169	Occupying a building to support a policy of the government
Armed attack	75199	Attacking protesters protesting the government with guns
Bombing	75209	Bombing the house of an anti-government protester
Burning houses, bridges etc.	75229	Burning the shops of an anti-government group
Running over the protesters	75249	Running over the protesters with a car in a protest
Lynch/killing	75259	Attempts to lynch a group of people

Description of the dataset's variables	
Variable	Description
Year	Year of event
PDF Date	Date of event published in newspaper
Newspaper Page	Page number of newspaper report
Newspaper	Newspaper name; if same event is reported similarly in both newspapers, "Cumhuriyet/Yeni Şafak" was entered; if additional information exists in one of them, events were entered separately with the same episode number
Episode Number	Number of episode
Date	Date of event
Day	Day of event
Actor 1	Code of organizer or participant no. 1 in an event according to report. e.g. if organizer or participant of an event is artists, then the code is 661124. If there is no clear information about actor, "not clear" was entered
Actor 2	Code of organizer or participant no. 2 in an event according to report; if there is none, then space is left blank
Actor 3	Code of organizer or participant no. 3 in an event according to report; if there is none, then space is left blank
Actor 4	Code of organizer or participant no. 4 in an event according to report; if there is none, then space is left blank. If there are more than four organizers or participants, the rest is not included
IdeologyA	Ideology of student groups as actors; other actors are already coded according to ideologies if there is any such as socialist organizations (661134) or nationalist groups (661113)

Target 1	Code of protest target no. 1 in an event according to report, e.g if target is government, then the code is 661004. If there is no clear information about actor, "not clear" was entered
Target 2	Code of protest target no. 2 in an event according to report; if there is none, the space is left blank
Target 3	Code of protest target no. 3 in an event according to report; if there is none, the space is left blank
Target 4	Code of protest target no. 4 in an event according to report; if there is none, then the space is left blank. If there are more than four targets, the rest is not included
IdeologyT	Ideology of student groups as targets; other actors are already coded according to ideologies if there is any
Event Type	Code of event according to its type, e.g if event is a non-violent sit-in, then the code is 5415
# dead	Number of dead in an event as reported
# injured	Number of injured in an event as reported
# arrests	Number of arrests in an event as reported
Pg Mob Type	Pro-government mobilization type Organized by government: 1 Organized by pro-government organizations or explicit support declared for government: 2 No official link, but acting in line with government: 3
Foreign Policy	Pro-government rallies about international affairs (1=yes, blank=no)
Police Presence	Police presence in an episode, irrespective of their intervention (1=yes, 0=no, irrelevant to episode=x)
Location	City in which event happened
Description	Descriptive information about event

APPENDIX B

Geographical diversity of events excluding the largest three cities by population (Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir) from January 1, 2013 to December 31, 2016.