

**AN ASSESSMENT OF THE POSTPONEMENT OF ELECTIONS IN
THE CONTEXT OF DEMOCRACY AND VOTER PSYCHOLOGY**

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Abstract: This article examines constitutional regulations regarding the postponement of elections in light of their historical development, assessing the inadequacy of the current framework, which is limited to war, in addressing today's multidimensional risks such as natural disasters and epidemics, as well as the effects of social traumas on voter psychology and democratic participation. Democracy is a fundamental form of government that enables public participation in governance, and regular elections are an indispensable element of the legitimacy of democratic systems. However, extraordinary circumstances such as war, natural disasters, and epidemics can prevent elections from being held on time. In parallel, the article addresses how social traumas transform voter psychology. It has been observed that mass crises, such as earthquakes, increase individuals' perception of threat, heighten their search for security, and shift their

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political preferences toward a more fragile and emotional stance. This situation can make it difficult for the will of the people to manifest itself healthily, thereby making the quality of democratic representation debatable. In this context, it can be argued that the postponement of elections is not only a technical process but also a mechanism of legitimacy operating within a specific social and psychological context. The study examines provisions regarding the postponement of elections in constitutional arrangements spanning from 1876 to 1982. The findings show that there were no explicit provisions on this matter in the 1921 and 1924 constitutions; in the 1876, 1961, and 1982 constitutions, the power to postpone elections was limited to cases of war. The exclusion of other extraordinary circumstances, such as natural disasters and epidemics, reveals that the current constitutional framework is inadequate to meet today's conditions. Therefore, the regulations need to be updated in a manner that respects democratic legitimacy and human rights.

Keywords: Democracy, Elections, Social Trauma, Voter Psychology, Postponement of Elections.

DEMOKRASI VE SEÇMEN PSİKOLOJİSİ BAĞLAMINDA SEÇİMLERİN ERTELENMESİNİ İLİŞKİN BİR DEĞERLENDİRME

Öz: Bu makale, seçimlerin ertelenmesine ilişkin anayasal düzenlemeleri tarihsel gelişimi işliğinde inceleyerek, savaşla sınırlı mevcut çerçeveyen doğal afetler ve salgın hastalıklar gibi günümüzün çok boyutlu risklerini karşılamadaki yetersizliğini ve toplumsal travmaların seçmen psikolojisi ile demokratik katılım üzerindeki etkilerini değerlendirmektedir. Demokrasi, halkın yönetime katılımını sağlayan temel bir yönetim biçimi olup, düzenli seçimler demokratik sistemlerin meşruiyetinin vazgeçilmez unsurlarından biridir. Ancak savaş, doğal afetler ve salgın hastalıklar gibi olağanüstü durumlar, seçimlerin zamanında gerçekleştirilemesini engelleyebilir. Buna paralel olarak, toplumsal travmaların seçmen psikolojisini nasıl dönüştürdüğü ele alınmıştır. Depremler gibi kitleSEL krizlerin bireylerde tehdit algısını yükselttiği, güven arayışını artırdığı ve siyasal tercihleri daha kirilgan ve duygusal bir çizgiye çektiği görülmektedir. Söz konusu durum, halk iradesinin sağlam bir biçimde tezahür etmesini zorlaştırarak demokratik temsilen niteliğini tartışmalı hâle getirebilir. Bu bağlamda, seçimlerin ertelenmesinin teknik bir süreç olmanın yanında belirli bir toplumsal ve psikolojik bağlam içinde işleyen bir meşruiyet mekanizması olduğu ifade edilebilir. Çalışmada, 1876'dan 1982'ye uzanan anayasal düzenlemelerde seçimlerin ertelenmesine ilişkin hükümler incelenmiştir. Bulgarlar, 1921 ve 1924 anayasalarında bu konuda açık bir düzenleme bulunmadığını; 1876, 1961 ve 1982 anayasalarında ise erteleme yetkisinin yalnızca savaş hâliyle

sinirlendirildiğini göstermektedir. Doğal afetler ve salgınlar gibi diğer olağanüstü durumların kapsam dışında kalması, mevcut anayasal çerçeveyenin günümüz koşullarına uyum sağlamakta yetersiz olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Dolayısıyla düzenlemelerin demokratik meşruiyet ve insan haklarını gözetin şekilde güncellenmesi gerekmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Demokrasi, Seçimler, Toplumsal Travma, Seçmen Psikolojisi, Seçimlerin Ertelenmesi.

INTRODUCTION

The need for governance that emerged with people's transition from individual to social life has led to the testing of different forms of government throughout history. Among these forms, the most enduring and widely accepted is democracy. Democracy, which in its most general sense refers to the participation of the people in decision-making processes, has historically been implemented in three basic ways: direct, semi-direct, and representative. Representative democracy, the most common and functional model today, envisions the people's participation in governance through representatives elected by the people. Principles such as freedom, a multi-party political life, the possibility for the opposition to come to power, and the fair and regular conduct of elections are among the fundamental conditions of democracy. In this context, elections are an indispensable mechanism that ensures the functioning of the democratic system.

Today, political processes can be disrupted not only by traditional threats such as war, but also by different dynamics such as global pandemics and large-scale natural disasters. Large-scale natural disasters and collective traumas demonstrate that voter behavior cannot be explained solely by rational and sociological variables. In traumatic periods, the disruption of individuals' worldviews, increased need for security, and heightened perception of threat can lead to significant shifts in political preferences. Therefore, the debate on postponing elections is a multidimensional issue that requires consideration of how voter psychology is affected under extraordinary circumstances. In this context, while examining the constitutional provisions regarding the postponement of elections, the study also includes the transformative effect of social traumas on democratic participation in the analysis.

The study evaluates constitutional regulations on postponing elections in light of their historical development and current social conditions, examining the extent to which Turkey's constitutional framework is adequate in the face of extraordinary circumstances such as natural disasters, epidemics, and social

traumas. The main conclusion reached by the study is that provisions regarding the postponement of elections must be redefined in a manner that is clear, objective, and impervious to arbitrary application, in line with the principles of the rule of law and democratic legitimacy.

The study adopts a qualitative research design, evaluating constitutional provisions on the postponement of elections in both legal and social contexts. The universe of the study consists of the constitutions of the Republic of Turkey from 1876, 1921, 1924, 1961, and 1982, along with amendments made to these constitutions regarding the postponement of elections. The sample consists of constitutional articles that directly regulate or indirectly affect the postponement of elections. Document analysis was used as the data collection method; constitutional texts, constitutional amendments, and relevant legislation were examined. In addition, literature addressing the impact of natural disasters, epidemics, and social traumas on democratic participation was reviewed, and the adequacy of the constitutional framework in the face of today's conditions was evaluated from a multidimensional perspective. The data obtained was analyzed using content analysis methods, and the results of normative regulations regarding the postponement of elections in terms of democratic legitimacy, voter behavior, and social stability were revealed. In this regard, the main research question of the study is whether constitutional regulations regarding the postponement of elections are sufficient and up-to-date to ensure the healthy functioning of democratic representation in the face of extraordinary circumstances such as natural disasters, epidemics, and social traumas, excluding war.

I. THE EVOLUTION OF THE CONCEPT OF DEMOCRACY

The Misalli Büyük Türkçe Sözlük defines democracy as "a form of government based on the national will and free elections" (Ayverdi, 2010: 267). The Greek-derived concept of democracy, meaning the form of self-government by the people or the majority, is derived from "demos," meaning people or majority, and "kratos," meaning power, authority, or government. The fundamental principles underlying democracy, the most widely accepted form of government in our era, are sovereignty, freedom, pluralism, and equality (Çüçen, 2011: 118).

Democracy is based on the principle of sovereignty, and in democracies, sovereignty is a power belonging to the people (Çüçen, 2011: 118). The people refer to a community of individuals living in a specific period and geographical area, and because it is a concrete structure, it can exercise its sovereignty directly. The nation is not a structure independent of individuals; therefore, national sovereignty can be considered as a whole formed by the convergence of the sovereignty of individuals (Özkaya, 2021: 52). The effectiveness of this power belonging to the nation in modern societies generally depends on the applicability of the fundamental principles of democracy.

In ancient Greece, democracy, which was the sovereignty of the people or the majority, was shaped around citizenship granted to a certain class. This is because *the demos* did not include the entire population living in the city. *Metics*, who were free but not considered political subjects, women who were not considered citizens, and slaves deprived of freedom were not included in *the demos*. Ancient Greek democracy, which excluded women, *metics*, and slaves from governance, was unsuccessful compared to modern democracy because it did not encompass the entire population (Dinçkol, 2017: 753-754). This situation shows that in ancient times, the concept of citizenship was shaped as a privileged status granted to a specific group rather than a universal political affiliation. However, the success of democracy largely depends on its inclusiveness. Otherwise, the concept of democracy is fundamentally undermined.

Democracy gained strength in the second half of the 18th century. The American and French revolutions laid the lasting foundations of modern democracy. The process that began in the 1760s with the independence struggle of the colonies in North America soon turned into a second revolution with the overthrow of the absolute monarchy in France. Although these two revolutions were based on different reasons, they played a decisive role in the birth of modern democracy (Zabcı, 2023: 43). In light of the experiences that developed over time, democracy began to be defined more broadly. In this context, democracy has been defined as a political system in which the people, who hold the highest power, elect their representatives at regular intervals through free elections, thereby enabling the people to govern indirectly (Tunç, 2008: 1115). It can be stated that since the end of the 20th century, the concept of democracy has come to be seen as the fundamental source of legitimacy (Akıncı & Eriş, 2019: 36). Democracy is the dominant political doctrine of the modern world. Consequently, many countries have begun to define themselves as democratic (Özbudun, 2003: 82).

Democracy has been quite turbulent over the past two centuries, experiencing fluctuations (Huntington, 1991: 16-21). According to Huntington, the history of democracy has developed in three main waves. The first wave began with the

influence of the American and French revolutions, matured in the 19th century, and gained momentum with the acceptance of voting rights for men in the United States in 1828. Throughout the 19th century, suffrage expanded in Europe and America. However, the first counter-wave, which began with Mussolini's rise to power in the 1920s, led to the rise of authoritarian regimes. The second wave was seen after World War II, with the reestablishment of democracy in many countries under the influence of the Allies. The second counter-wave, which began in the 1960s, spread authoritarianism through military coups in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, raising doubts about the sustainability of democracy, particularly in developing countries (Huntington, 1991: 16-21). The third wave of democratization began with the end of dictatorship in Portugal in 1974 and spread from Southern Europe to Latin America, Asia, and Eastern Europe (Huntington, 1991: 16-21). Within approximately fifteen years, authoritarian regimes collapsed in more than thirty countries, and with the collapse of the Soviet bloc, democracy spread on a global scale (Şakar, 2025: 656). In a sense, waves of democratization and counter-waves have followed a pattern of "two steps forward, one step back." Although each counterwave erased some of the democracy gained in the previous wave, it did not eliminate it (Huntington, 1991: 25).

Today, with the digitization of communication, democracy has also gained a digital dimension. New media enable citizens to participate more effectively in politics, express their thoughts directly, and influence decision-making processes. Thus, the relationship between the rulers and the ruled has become more participatory, and with the strengthening of democratic legitimacy in the digital environment, a new democratic understanding called "digital democracy" has emerged (Meriç, 2013: 104). According to the intellectual foundations of democracy advocates, the fundamental values defended by democracy may differ and vary according to socio-economic and cultural conditions. As a process, democracy encompasses all mechanisms and formalities, from political organization to elections (Özden, 2022: 39). The most important building block of democracy, which is essentially a process, is the existence of fundamental rights and freedoms. Democracy cannot be discussed in societies where fundamental rights and freedoms do not truly exist.

According to Robert Dahl, democracy protects individuals' fundamental rights and freedoms by preventing the emergence of authoritarian regimes. Democratic regimes expand personal freedoms, allow individuals to defend their interests, and provide them with the opportunity to determine their own destiny (Dahl, 2021: 72). Democracy is not only a model of governance but also a culture and a way of life. This is because democracy has a broad sphere of influence, ranging from individuals' perspectives on society and life to the mechanisms of state functioning. Democracy represents a way of life based on the values of rights,

freedom, and equality (Kavşıracı, 2024: 72). Equality refers to the requirement that individuals in the same situation should not be treated differently without any objective and reasonable justification. The principle of equality is considered a fundamental legal norm at the highest level of international law and an indispensable element of democracy (Yazar, 2023: 200). Therefore, democracy, which is also governed by the principle of equality, represents a social order that fosters tolerance and respect for differences (Kavşıracı, 2024: 72). In societies where fundamental rights and freedoms are enforceable alongside tolerance, democracy can institutionalize and be a source of wealth in many ways. This creates the possibility of eliminating the source of many social problems.

In democracies, rights must be effectively granted to citizens. Merely promising democratic rights in constitutions is insufficient; these rights must be effectively implemented and accessible to citizens. Otherwise, claims that these systems are democratic are merely a mask for undemocratic regimes (Dahl, 2021: 60-61). In truly institutionalized democracies, fundamental rights and freedoms must not be violated in any way. Otherwise, democracy will not go beyond existing as a concept.

Democracy can be classified under certain headings according to its subjects. The rule of the state according to the will of the majority is majority democracy, the rule of the working class is Marxist democracy, the rule based on equality and justice is liberal democracy, plebiscitary democracy when the people participate in governance through methods such as referendums, radical democracy when democracy is seen as a tool to serve the interests of the people, and cyber democracy when technological tools are used to implement democracy (Akıncı & Eriş, 2019: 39-40). On the other hand, if certain rights are restricted to protect democracy, militant democracy emerges; if consensus is the basis of governance, conciliatory democracy emerges; and if mutual discussion is the basis in all matters, deliberative democracy emerges (Akıncı & Eriş, 2019: 40). Rather than merely existing in name, democracy, which is subject to certain classifications, must lead to situations that benefit society. In every dimension or type of democracy, sovereignty must truly belong to the people, who are the supreme authority.

Today, democracy is considered not only a political system but also a social and pluralistic structure. Adopting a majority-based governance approach instead of a pluralistic democracy may lead to the exclusion of certain segments from the system (Aslan, 2023: 65). Democracy is a fragile regime facing various challenges in terms of sustainability. Therefore, democracy must be upheld not only in form but also in substance. In this context, the consolidation and continuity of democracy require a strong will (Aslan, 2023: 65). Democracies that cannot be rooted and institutionalized through strong wills may eventually

disappear, eroding the gains of society or the country and settling into a primitive state. Therefore, it is of great importance not to compromise on the full implementation or attainment of democracy's most fundamental principles.

The institutional structure of democracy is defined by elements such as the existence of electoral and representative systems, the presence of parties representing different views, citizens' right to vote and be elected, and the principle of the rule of law. However, the true existence of democracy can be understood by how these elements are integrated with social values (Kavşıracı, 2024: 72). Democracy has a dynamic structure and certain minimum fundamental principles. The most important of these is that the sovereign people can exercise this sovereignty through certain means. In the modern era, the most important of these means is the existence of regular elections.

II. THE FUNCTION OF ELECTIONS IN DEMOCRATIC REGIMES

Technically, an election means that an individual, a committee, or a community freely chooses among the various alternatives presented to them. The act of voting expresses the choice made by the voter in accordance with their political views, understanding of life, social position, the demands of the class to which they belong, and their personal interests. In democracies, elections are based on the free will of the people and the nation, directly reflecting this will, and the outcome is accepted in accordance with the will of the nation (Daver, 1998: 132).

Elections, as the mechanism for political representation, contribute significantly to individuals viewing each other as equal citizens and to achieving political integration (İba, 2022: 181). According to Robert Dahl, the fundamental characteristic of a democracy is that the government is constantly responsive to the preferences and demands of its citizens, treating them as politically equal (Dahl, 1971: 1). Concretizing this understanding, Dahl states that democracy offers effective participation, equality in voting, access to information, inclusion of adults, and the right to have the final say on the agenda (Dahl, 2021: 48). The implementation of these principles is possible through representative mechanisms that enable the people to participate in governance directly or indirectly.

In democratic societies, the source of power is based on the consensus of the people. This consensus becomes visible through free elections held at specific intervals. Therefore, elections are an indispensable element for the existence of a democratic society (Teziç, 2007: 242). Furthermore, one of the fundamental principles of democracy is undoubtedly ensuring broad public participation in the

formation and exercise of state will (Gözübüyük, 2002: 84). The primary purpose of political participation is to influence political decision-making processes. Participation is not limited to elections; behaviors such as following political developments, participating in political debates, joining political organizations, and participating in rallies and demonstrations are also included in the scope of political participation (Akad & Vural-Dinçkol, 2011: 346).

The fundamental basis of democratic systems is the participation of the people in government and the concretization of this participation through free elections. This principle is also explicitly guaranteed in international human rights documents. According to Protocol No. 1 to the European Convention on Human Rights, the High Contracting Parties undertake to hold free elections at reasonable intervals by secret ballot, under conditions which will ensure the free expression of the opinion of the people in the choice of the legislature (Council of Europe, 1953). According to Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, everyone has the right to take part in the government of their country, directly or through freely chosen representatives. The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures (United Nations, 1948). According to Article 4 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: In times of public emergency threatening the life of the nation, the States Parties to the present Covenant may take measures derogating from their obligations under the present Covenant to the extent strictly required by the exigencies of the situation, provided that such measures are not inconsistent with their other obligations under the Covenant (United Nations, 1976). In this context, while the right to vote is one of the fundamental elements of democratic regimes, certain exceptional arrangements regarding the exercise of this right may be envisaged in extraordinary circumstances.

In democracies, the right to vote and electoral freedom are among the indispensable elements of a democratic state (Kalabalık, 2021: 390). In democratic regimes, the timing of elections is not unknown; the election date is either known in advance with certainty or can be predicted with a high degree of accuracy (Yayla, 2018a: 115). Moreover, elections are not merely an accountability mechanism or a political control tool; they are a "two-" where the public and the government, or the masses and the elites, can influence each other (Heywood, 2015: 300). Elections, as a reasonable tool where both sides can influence each other, are an acceptable control mechanism when held at regular intervals.

The participation of citizens in the final decision-making process is a stage that every democratic country should adopt to strengthen, deepen, and consolidate

democracy (Özden, 2022: 44-45). Elections have an undeniably important mission in terms of establishing democracy. Elections held by the free will of the people result in the demands of the majority of society being taken into account in administrative terms.

The primary purpose of elections is to determine the members of parliament. Parliaments are mostly referred to as "representative assemblies," and these political systems are described as representative democracies (Beetham, 2016: 280). Whether sovereign authority is exercised directly by the people or through elected representatives acting on their behalf, in both cases, the individual must express their will (Gözübüyük, 2002: 84). In pluralistic environments, the people express their will to determine their representatives through free elections, and the majority exercises power on behalf of the people. This power gains legitimacy through honest, free elections (Aliefendioğlu, 2005: 71). This mechanism allows for the emergence of a government that is accountable to those it governs. In this way, the people have the opportunity to control the personnel holding power at certain intervals (Kapanı, 2017: 118). Personnel controlled through the election mechanism are forced to be more careful in the transactions or actions they carry out.

In representative democracies, the scope of power is limited by a constitutional regime based on individual rights. In this system, the people elect those who will be in power, but its proper functioning depends on the establishment of effective and reliable links between the rulers and the ruled (Yayla, 2018b: 50-51). Various systems and institutions have been established, using both rational and empirical methods, to guarantee human rights and freedoms in the face of state power. Elections are at the forefront of these institutions and systems based on positive law. Elections are the foundation of the democratic system and the primary condition for governing by the people (Kapanı, 2013: 281). Moreover, if fair and free elections cannot be implemented, undemocratic regimes can use democracy as a veil.

Elections are considered not only a legal but also a political means of restraint, as they represent the governed overseeing the governors. The elected government, chosen for a specific term, is obligated to appear before the voters at the end of that term and render an account. This accountability carries the sharp sanction of removal from power. Often, the fear of not being re-elected has positive consequences, such as preventing the abuse of power (Kapanı, 2013: 281-282). Alongside regular elections, one of the most important tools of democracy, the genuine exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms, can prevent potentially negative situations.

There is a widespread belief that democracy is what enables freedoms to be realized. In fact, there is a belief that freedom and democracy are inseparable twin concepts and that if one does not exist, the other cannot exist either (Kapani, 2013: 173). Democracy, with its acceptable control function, is of great importance in guaranteeing freedoms. In democratic regimes, citizens can fulfill the requirements of political life through the freedom of political participation. The healthy outcome of democratic elections in terms of political participation depends on the existence of a fully pluralistic environment where all citizens can consciously exercise this freedom (Mumcu & Kuzeci, 2019: 133). Channels for expressing ideas in society through peaceful means must be open. Otherwise, these ideas may be expressed through non-peaceful and undesirable methods.

Elections have fundamental functions in democracies. These are: representation, democratic participation, conferring political legitimacy, and tolerance and reconciliation (Aliefendioğlu, 2005: 74). Ensuring that elections are not merely symbolic and that they serve a democratic function between the rulers and the ruled depends on the legal guarantee of principles that accurately reflect the national will (Aliefendioğlu, 2005: 96). An electoral system that is not legally guaranteed in a real sense can create a perception that elections are meaningless, thereby reducing the level of participation. Thus, the perception that individuals do not influence the political decision-making process can diminish their sense of belonging.

A democratic culture highlights the value of individual freedoms and, at the same time, provides support for rights and freedoms (Dahl, 2021: 62). In general, democracy and freedoms are complementary building blocks. The absence of freedoms renders democracy meaningless. One of the most important of these freedoms is fair elections, which enable participation in the decision-making process. Elections essentially serve multiple purposes. The most important of these are the determination of representatives and the fulfillment of the oversight function at certain intervals.

Furthermore, in democratic regimes, the function of elections is not limited to institutional structures such as representation and legitimacy. It is also shaped by the psychological and social conditions of the voters. Traumatic events that societies are sometimes exposed to directly affect electoral behavior by transforming individuals' political perceptions, levels of trust, and preferences. Therefore, understanding the healthy functioning of democratic processes requires examining the effects of social traumas on voter psychology.

III. VOTER PSYCHOLOGY IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL TRAUMAS

Social traumas are extraordinary events that disrupt individuals' psychological balance and are socio-psychological processes that profoundly influence political attitudes and behaviors. Traumatic experiences at the collective level, such as earthquakes, civil wars, mass violence, and economic collapse, reshape voters' decision-making patterns by undermining the society's worldview and fundamental assumptions about the future. Increased uncertainty, perceived threats, and the search for security after trauma can lead to significant shifts in voters' assessments of leaders, political parties, and political discourse. Thus, voter behavior is shaped not only by sociological factors but also by the emotional and cognitive fractures caused by trauma. Therefore, understanding this multi-layered effect of social trauma on voter psychology is critical to analyzing the dynamics of political behavior.

Voters, as the main actors in voting, often determine their preferences consciously or unconsciously under the influence of certain conditions (Damlapınar & Balcı, 2005: 59). Political behavior is both an attitude that emerges at the individual level and a form of action that concerns society as a whole, reflecting political culture and socialization processes. The socio-economic opportunities available to the individual, their social environment, their expectations for the future, and the knowledge and judgments they acquire during the process of political socialization constitute the main elements that shape their political behavior (Filiz & Polat, 2022: 86). Research conducted to date shows that the factors shaping voter behavior can be grouped under twelve main headings. These factors are listed as political parties, candidates, voters' individual characteristics, the current political agenda, propaganda activities, mass media, public opinion polls, religious influences, family environment, interest groups, public opinion leaders, and economic policies (Doğan & Göker, 2010: 162-163).

The effects of personality traits on voter preferences and voting behavior, the relationship dynamics between leaders and their followers, social reflexes, perceptions, discriminatory tendencies, prejudices, mass violence practices, conflict, and neropolitical processes are among the main areas of interest in political psychology today (Kurtbaş, 2015: 94). To evaluate these psychological and social dynamics more comprehensively, fundamental theoretical approaches to voter behavior should also be considered.

The fundamental approaches to explaining voter behavior can be grouped under three headings. The first is the sociological approach known as the Columbia School. This approach argues that voter behavior is shaped by social classes,

groups, and affiliations, treating the act of voting as a collective process. The second approach is the socio-psychological approach, known as the Michigan School. This approach attempts to explain behavior at the individual level, focusing on the voter's political attitudes, perceptions, and emotional ties. The third approach is the rational choice model, which interprets voters' orientations in terms of economic interests and rational assessments (Kılıç, 2025: 57). Although these three approaches provide an important framework for understanding voter behavior, they may not be sufficient on their own to explain political orientations that emerge, especially during extraordinary periods. This is because electoral processes are not merely routine sociological, psychological, or rational assessments. Social traumas such as natural disasters, wars, economic crises, and mass violence can create powerful moments of rupture that transform the behavioral patterns predicted by these theoretical frameworks. Therefore, to understand how voter behavior is shaped under extraordinary conditions, the sociological and psychological effects of social traumas must be considered separately.

Although natural disasters are seen as physical events in terms of their manifestation, they have a strong sociological dimension in terms of their consequences. Disasters cause loss of life, injuries, and permanent disabilities in human communities, while also rendering the infrastructure of settlements unusable, paving the way for the emergence of epidemics and infectious diseases. The effects of such events on individuals and society persist for a long time and cause trauma by deeply affecting social life in both psychological and sociological dimensions (Sevinç & Göz, 2024: 794).

Horowitz explains how traumatic events shake an individual's core beliefs about themselves and the future. According to him, the intrusive thoughts and avoidance behaviors seen in individuals who have experienced trauma are the result of an effort to make sense of aspects of the events that are incompatible with their previous beliefs. Janoff-Bulman, on the other hand, elaborates in greater detail how trauma violates individuals' fundamental assumptions—often unarticulated—that the world is fair and predictable and that they themselves possess competence and value. The shattering of these optimistic world assumptions triggers post-traumatic stress symptoms, reinforcing the individual's need to reinterpret what has happened (Park, 2013: 62). This framework shows that social traumas do not merely create individual psychological breakdowns. It can be argued that it can also influence voters' sensitivity to political actors and discourses in the face of uncertainty and threat, leading to significant shifts in voting behavior. Therefore, traumas experienced at the societal level can directly carry individuals' efforts to rebuild their disrupted meaning systems into the political arena.

When individuals' existing meaning systems are shaken following a traumatic event, their assessments of politics and leaders can also become part of this process of reinterpretation. Voters may show a tendency to turn to political discourse and actors that will reduce uncertainty and perceived threats and make the world coherent again. Therefore, the void of meaning created by trauma can directly influence voter behavior by opening the door to emotional and cognitive shifts in political preferences.

Erikson's description of the collapse of social support systems in the face of social trauma shows that it leads to a crisis of meaning at the collective level. This collapse causes the erosion of basic trust and leads to reactions such as psychological distress, vulnerability, identity confusion, and hypervigilance to new threats (Hirschberger, 2018: 3). However, the effects of trauma are not limited to this destructive dimension. Trauma also triggers processes of reinterpreting the world for individuals and groups. As Hirschberger notes, while disasters shake existing frameworks of meaning, they can also pave the way for the formation of national narratives, the strengthening of shared identity feelings, and the emergence of new cognitive models aimed at ensuring group security. Over time, the shift in the focus of memory from the pain itself to the collective lessons learned from the trauma contributes to the strengthening of this meaning-building process (Hirschberger, 2018: 3). This dual process—on the one hand, trying to cope with the effects of the destruction experienced, and on the other, the effort to rebuild meaning—is of great importance in understanding the consequences of social traumas on political behavior. The weakening of trust and the increase in perceived threat after trauma can create a psychological environment that directly influences voters' assessments of leaders, political parties, and political discourse.

Consequently, social traumas do not merely disrupt individuals' psychological balance. They also lead to the formation of a new political landscape characterized by uncertainty, anxiety, and the search for trust. During such periods, voters may make decisions based not only on their traditional political leanings but also on the fragility created by the trauma and the search for new meaning. Political discourses promising security, stability, order, and rebuilding the future can therefore become much more effective. This effect of social traumas transforming voter psychology shows that voting behavior can be shaped within a more emotional and fragile framework compared to normal times. Therefore, post-traumatic political preferences should be evaluated as a multi-layered process that reflects not only individual psychology but also social memory, identity perception, and the collective search for meaning.

IV. ASSESSMENT OF THE POSTPONEMENT OF ELECTIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF CONSTITUTIONAL REGULATIONS

In democratic administrations, holding elections at regular intervals is one of the most fundamental pillars of political legitimacy and the principle of representation. Furthermore, constitutional regulations contain specific provisions on issues such as the postponement of elections, taking into account exceptional circumstances that may disrupt the normal course of events.

Article 69 of the original 1876 Constitution stipulated that members of the Chamber of Deputies would be elected every four years, that each member's term of office would be four years, and that re-election would be possible (Turkish Constitutional Court, 1876). The original version of the Constitution did not contain any provisions regarding the postponement of elections. However, with the amendment made to Article 69 in 1918, a provision was added to the text of the article stating that the term of office of the members of the Assembly shall be four years, but if the fourth legislative year coincides with a war requiring the general mobilization of the army, this term may be extended by a law to be passed by an absolute majority of the full number of members. (Nohutçu & Ziyrek, 2020: 53). Considering the mandatory provision of the 1876 Constitution, the first constitution in Turkish history, it is understood that elections could be postponed due to war.

According to Article 5 of the 1921 Constitution, the legislative year may be extended by one year when it is not possible to hold new elections (T.C. Constitutional Court, 1921). Looking at the article in question, it is seen that the postponement of elections is stipulated, but the reason for the postponement is not specified. According to Article 13 of the 1924 Constitution, elections for the Grand National Assembly of Turkey are held every four years, and in cases where it is not possible to hold elections, the term of office of the Assembly may be extended for one more year (Turkish Constitutional Court, 1924). According to the provision, it is stated that elections may be postponed for one year when new elections cannot be held, but the reason for this is not stipulated.

Article 74 of the 1961 Constitution, under the heading "Postponement of Grand National Assembly elections and by-elections," stipulates that if new elections cannot be held due to war, the elections may be postponed for one year by law (Turkish Constitutional Court, 1961). Considering the mandatory provision of the 1961 Constitution, it is understood that elections may be postponed for one year on the grounds of war.

An examination of the constitutional process from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic reveals that regulations regarding the postponement of elections have

become increasingly specific, conditional, and legally limited. The 1876 Constitution introduced the first provision on this subject, limiting postponement to a state of war, while the 1921 and 1924 Constitutions merely used general terms, referring only to "circumstances in which elections cannot be held." In contrast, the 1961 Constitution clearly limited the grounds for postponing elections to "war situations," thus providing a clearer framework in terms of both duration and cause.

According to Article 78 of the 1982 Constitution under the heading "Postponement of Elections and By-Elections," "If it is deemed impossible to hold new elections due to war, the Grand National Assembly of Turkey may decide to postpone the elections for one year. If the reason for postponement persists, this procedure may be repeated in accordance with the procedure outlined in the postponement decision." (Yüzbaşıoğlu, 2024: 170) The 1982 Constitution clearly states that elections may be postponed for one year due to war.

The 1982 Constitution regulates the postponement of elections in a more systematic and detailed manner than previous constitutions. Article 78 stipulates that elections may only be postponed "due to war" and "by decision of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey," thus setting a narrow framework in terms of both cause and authority. This approach is an important safeguard for preserving the continuity and democratic legitimacy of elections. Furthermore, stipulating that the postponement period can only be one year each time aims to limit the impact of extraordinary circumstances on democratic functioning. From a political perspective, this regulation reflects a constitutional reflex to strike a balance between the state's necessary measures taken for national security reasons and the uninterrupted representation of the people's will.

When all these constitutional provisions are considered together, it is clear that the Turkish legal system limits the postponement of elections to exceptional circumstances, leaving no room for other justifications, especially outside of a state of war. However, this framework, shaped by historical developments, offers a limited perspective in the face of today's multi-layered risks. This is because modern societies now face not only the threat of war, but also new extraordinary circumstances that could seriously disrupt democratic functioning, such as large-scale natural disasters, epidemics, and humanitarian crises. Therefore, the question of the extent to which the current constitutional provisions regarding the postponement of elections can meet the needs arising from contemporary conditions inevitably arises.

It is debatable to what extent the current constitutional approach, which focuses solely on a state of war, can address the different risks posed by today's

conditions. This is because a major earthquake, widespread flooding, or an epidemic affecting the entire community can seriously disrupt not only daily life but also the proper conduct of elections. In such situations, is it necessary to hold elections on time at any cost, or would postponement be a more appropriate option for the safety of society and the genuine participation of voters? Therefore, the real issue is what principles should be used to strike a balance between holding elections and postponing them.

Rather than viewing the constitution as an inviolable, unquestionable, sacred text, it would be healthier and more flexible to consider it a kind of social contract, created in an environment of free debate and amendable by a sufficient majority on points that cause discomfort in society (Soysal, 1997: 272). Considering Turkey's geographical, geological, and geopolitical characteristics, the country has always had a high probability of encountering extraordinary circumstances. This reality necessitates that the constitutional order also be built on institutional resilience related to crisis and disaster management.

Maintaining the continuity of the state while ensuring that democratic processes are not interrupted during extraordinary circumstances such as earthquakes, floods, or epidemics is an important balancing act for modern constitutional systems. In this context, how provisions regarding the postponement of elections under extraordinary circumstances are regulated in the new constitution debates is important in terms of both the uninterrupted representation of the national will and the preservation of political stability. Therefore, a constitutional framework prepared with the possibility of disasters and crises in mind should create a balance that ensures the continuity of democracy.

Turkey is a country that experiences different types of disasters. In addition to natural disasters such as earthquakes, landslides, floods, and avalanches, it also faces man-made disasters such as humanitarian crises due to its geopolitical location. According to the Global Risk Index, which was created to determine the risk level of disasters and humanitarian crises, Turkey ranks 45th among 191 countries and is considered to be in the "high risk" group with an index score of 5.0 (Presidency of Disaster and Emergency Management, 2018). While natural disasters occur as physical phenomena, their consequences have social and sociological dimensions. This is because disasters not only cause physical destruction, but also lead to human losses, injuries, and long-term socio-economic difficulties, deeply affecting the overall structure of society (Sevinç & Göz, 2024: 794).

Earthquakes are the type of disaster that causes the most loss of life and property in Turkey. Approximately 60% of the deaths resulting from disasters are caused by earthquakes (Presidency of Disaster and Emergency Management, 2018). The

1939 Erzincan Earthquake caused one of Turkey's greatest losses in terms of human life. Earthquakes occurred in Tokat in 1942, Samsun in 1943, Bolu in 1944, Muş in 1966, Kütahya in 1970, 1975 in Diyarbakır, 1976 in Van, 1983 in Erzurum, and 1992 again in Erzincan. One of Turkey's greatest disasters, the earthquake centered in İzmit-Gölcük on August 17, 1999, and later the earthquake in Van in 2011, occurred (Presidency of Disaster and Emergency Management, 2018). Finally, according to official data, more than 50,000 people lost their lives due to the earthquakes that occurred in the Pazarcık and Elbistan districts of Kahramanmaraş on February 6, 2023 (Presidency of Disaster and Emergency Management, 2023).

Historically, epidemic diseases such as plague, cholera, influenza, yellow fever, typhoid, typhus, measles, syphilis, and tuberculosis have caused large-scale human losses (Güler, 2023: 199). Although the legal system aims to respond to social needs and adapt to changing conditions, it has preferred to take a passive stance in this area due to the relatively diminished impact of epidemics before the COVID-19 pandemic (Güler, 2023: 199). The contagiousness and lethality of the diseases causing pandemics are highly variable, and it is difficult to make definitive predictions on these issues due to the dynamic nature of viruses (Güler, 2023: 201). This is because the pandemic diseases seen around the world, such as EBOLA, SARS, MERS, and COVID-19, show how severe the consequences of this situation can be.

While elections are among the fundamental elements that ensure the legitimacy of democratic systems, the socio-political conditions in which they are held directly affect the nature of the electoral process. In times when society is facing a profound disaster, widespread loss of life, and serious problems in accessing necessities, the timing of elections must also be evaluated in the context of political legitimacy, social unity, and humanitarian responsibility. In this context, it is clear that force majeure cannot be overcome solely through technical arrangements; it must be assessed in a multidimensional manner in terms of the physical safety of the people, the right to political participation, and the creation of a healthy election atmosphere.

The holding of elections cannot be treated solely as a legal and procedural obligation; on the contrary, the extent to which the conditions in which society finds itself allow for participation in political processes must also be taken into account. This is because elections are not merely an act of going to the polls and casting a vote; they are a mechanism that requires voters to be able to consciously form their political preferences and actively participate in political campaign processes. However, in post-disaster crisis environments, individuals' priority is survival rather than participating in political decision-making processes.

Democracy is a model of governance that enables the people to express their political will under healthy and fair conditions, alongside regular elections held on specific dates. Therefore, discussions about postponing elections during periods of widespread humanitarian crises should not be viewed as weakening democratic processes, but rather as a means of ensuring the sustainability of democracy and meaningful participation.

The state and political structures need the individuals of the society they rule over to maintain their existence. Indeed, the mentality of "*the state lives so that the people may live*", which has an important place in Turkish political tradition and summarizes the basic philosophy of state administration, clearly reveals the fact that the existence of the state is dependent on the existence and welfare of the people. From this perspective, while the importance of elections in terms of democratic functioning is indisputable, it is clear that, in addition to being a legal requirement, elections after major humanitarian disasters must be approached from a human-centered perspective.

Political legitimacy is not only the essence of law and democracy but also a functional political psychological tool (Şakar, 2024: 9). The organization of democratic elections under normal conditions and circumstances is a political, social, economic, and, most importantly, psychological necessity. It is a formula that makes political legitimacy valuable. The harmonious functioning of democratic discourse and action depends on the integration of perception with reality. Therefore, elections due to natural disasters, including the postponement of elections in the constitutional text, will be consistent with fundamental principles such as transparency, the rule of law, equality, and fairness, and political-psychological factors that enhance political legitimacy will provide a dynamic. The practical processes experienced will be the product of a harmonious constitution or reformist effort that makes the feasibility of elections visible. It seems essential to take this criterion into account in the context of new constitutional efforts.

The sustainability of social order is possible not only through elections held on specific dates, but also through meeting the vital needs of individuals. In this context, an approach such as "can only be postponed due to war," as stated in the constitution, provides a very narrow framework for postponing elections. In addition, it could be regulated that elections can be postponed by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, which consists of the representatives of the people, in cases of force majeure such as natural disasters or dangerous epidemics. It could be envisaged that the representatives of the people, the members of parliament, would convene urgently during such periods and postpone the elections by a parliamentary decision with a majority of at least three-quarters or more.

CONCLUSION

In its most general form, the concept of democracy, which means the participation of the people in the decision-making process, has taken its place in various arenas and discussion platforms from the past to the present. If we define democracy as a process, it consists of components such as political parties, active participation, the constitution, parliament, and civil society organizations. If any of these components are missing, democracy cannot continue to exist and will lose its significance. The essential conditions for democracy, which provide the opportunity to monitor political authorities, include elections, the existence of fundamental rights and freedoms, the opposition having a chance to come to power, the supremacy of elections, and the effective participation of citizens in the administrative process through various methods.

The concept of democracy works through the people governing themselves via representatives they elect. In many countries, the effective involvement of citizens in the administrative process is one of the indispensable conditions of democracy. This depends on elections being held fairly and at regular intervals. Otherwise, due to the uncertainty of elections, this useful tool will lose its meaning, and democracy will remain only in name.

Looking at the history of the Turkish constitution, the 1921 and 1924 constitutions did not include any provisions regarding the grounds for postponing elections. However, the 1876 and 1961 constitutions stipulated that elections could be postponed due to war. The 1982 Constitution stipulates that elections may be postponed (delayed) for one year by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey due to war. Apart from this, there is no provision stipulating that elections may be postponed due to natural disasters, epidemics, etc.

The current framework of the 1982 Constitution only allows elections to be postponed due to war. However, the major earthquakes and global pandemics experienced in the recent past have clearly demonstrated that extraordinary circumstances are not limited to war. At this point, constitutional regulations need to be updated to protect democratic legitimacy. Democracy is a culture of governance that, in addition to holding elections at specific intervals, enables the people to participate in governance freely and consciously. If social conditions do not allow people to form their political preferences in a healthy environment, revisiting this issue would be beneficial from a social perspective.

However, the expansion of constitutional regulations on the postponement of elections should not be left vague in a way that paves the way for arbitrary practices. To prevent the abuse of extraordinary circumstances, constitutional safeguards should be established to ensure that elections are postponed only for

legitimate and objective reasons. The decision to postpone elections should be taken by the legislative body representing the will of the people, which would strengthen the democratic legitimacy of this process.

Considering the effects of social traumas on political behavior, it is evident that conducting election processes solely according to a formal calendar does not always produce democratic legitimacy. After major disasters, voters' psychological fragility, uncertainty, and search for security can weaken their capacity to participate in political processes. Therefore, constitutional debates regarding the postponement of elections should be approached from a perspective that ensures voters can exercise their free will under healthy conditions. Regulations on how elections should be managed during traumatic periods should be designed as protective mechanisms aimed at enabling the people's will to manifest in the healthiest way possible, rather than undermining the essence of democracy.

Consequently, election processes must be organized in accordance with the principles of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law to adapt to extraordinary circumstances. However, this organization must be handled with care so as not to harm the essence of democracy, to reflect the will of the people, and to prevent the exploitation of extraordinary circumstances. The existence and continuity of the state are possible through the security of individuals and the protection of their fundamental rights. In this context, the understanding that "*the state lives so that the people may live*" should be adopted not only as an ethical principle but also as one of the fundamental principles necessary for shaping the constitutional system.

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