

# **Relations between Endurance of Ruling Political Party and Economic Development**

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Within liberal political theories, it is acknowledged that liberties should be equally given to all individuals, which cover every aspect of human lives including economic, political, social and cultural rights. It is to say that the concept of developed-ness has not only been constrained with economic aspects but also extended with democratic level and freedoms as in the cases of the USA and the members of the European Union (EU). Many underdeveloped and developing countries are taking example of them and target good scores in respecting for human rights and being politically democratic system, together with economic development. To concrete, while seeking to catch up with GDP per capita of the developed countries, democratic quality of a given state should also be rising at the same time.

In the last century, the concept of democracy and especially quality of democracy has been vividly changing. In the political realm, core principles of democracy are elections to choose who or which political party would run the country, the rule of law and the division of powers (executive, legislative and Judiciary). These might have vital importance for democracy but not limited with. Duration of holding power, especially monarchs in European countries during the 19th century hold the power consistently and resulted with economically developed but with politically undemocratic (Olson, 1993). Durability of power can also be influential on the quality of democracy. Centuries long democracy experiences have currently reached the idea that human nature tends to corrupt when it gets power. As one of the liberal thinker of the 19th century, Lord Acton says “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” This argument was actually against the monarchies but has extended to the ruling a country for a long time. Given that elections are fundamental component of democracies since it is a legitimate way of changing presidents or prime ministers, duration of ruling or holding power has been generally limited with two subsequent terms. Despite coming to power through elections, persistence of power in a country (more than two terms of presidency or a political party in power) is connoted with slight tendency towards authoritarianism (Gurr, 1974; Gurr, Jagers, and Moore, 1990).

Russian Federation is mostly given as self-evident example as the same political party's candidates (Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev) has won presidential elections since early years of 2000s. It means that the United Russia which is ruling political party of Russia, the same line of political and social understanding has been prevailing since then. There might be narrow differentiation between president's policies but in cumulative perspective, not exactly identical but highly similar policies are followed. Another case similar to Russia is Turkey where Justice and Development Party, founded and led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has been ruling the country since the end of 2002. There have been different figures in the Prime Ministry or Presidential offices but still the Party's core policies have been in operation. The characters of these two political parties are symbolized and affiliated with certain leadership, Vladimir Putin in Russia and Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey.

Vital argument emanating from these two cases is that holding power for a long time (at least three times) infers to tendency towards authoritarianism

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which is affiliated with lack of political freedom, lack of free market economy, suppression of political and social oppositions, bureaucratic monopoly and etc. In their first two terms, Russia and Turkey were shining stars of world politics by the early years of 21st century due to the fact that economic and democratic reforms were dynamically changing appearance of these countries (White, 2000; Usul, 2010). They were hence considered as being in the way of fully developed countries in both economic and democratic aspects. As these political parties have consolidated themselves in domestic politics and endurance of their power exceeds at least a decade, harsh critics of authoritarianism increase. It is because of the process of

dominating domestic politics has been socially and politically conflictual for these two countries.

On the other hand, these countries' economic development level and involvement of international issues have gradually increased since the enduring political parties took the power. It might be because of having adequate time to complete projects and so pursuing long term economic reforms. By the end of 1990s, the United Russia led by Vladimir Putin (currently president of Russian Federation) won the elections and took over a politically and economically ruined country and then raised it up to the level which Soviet Russia once was. By the early years of 2000s, Justice and Development Party led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan (currently president of Turkey) won a landslide victory and also took over a country. It highly engaged with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to recover from the

2001 economic crisis of Turkey. From such an economically bottomed level, they boosted their economies despite having up and downs.

Russia and Turkey were developing in terms of democratic and economic levels. However, today there has been a common idea that they might be economically still in upwards trends and resisting against international economic manipulations and embargos but quality of democracy has been in dramatic downwards. It seems there is a complicated picture here, which leads us to our hypothesis. Whether or not endurance of political parties in power more than two terms is destined to decrease democratic level but to increase economic development of a country. The depicted Russia and Turkey cases underpin the argument but figures and data should be employed to substantiate the argument.

To do so, democratic level of these countries is going to be measured in accordance to the Freedom House scores since 2000s. Freedom House index does not only measure the democratic level through elections but also enlarges the democratic criteria ranging from the numbers of prisoned journalists and politicians to violations of freedom of speech. These are mostly used by those arguing that Russia is an authoritarian country (McFaul, 2004: 149) and Turkey is an authoritarian democracy (Esen and Gumuscu, 2016). On the other hand, there is no one simple economic index whose criteria contain persuasively adequate variables to measure economic level of a country. Thus, variety of indicators such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Gini Index for income inequality, Inflation, and life expectancy is considered to measure their level of economic development.

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In order to address the controversies on the relationship between endurance of political parties in power more than two terms and economic development, we utilize from the world bank's datasets for a variety of economic and social indicators which explicitly allows for the possibility that political stability and economic development are all reciprocally related. Initial point of the paper is that democratic level of these countries has been decreasing and economic development increasing within the same time period when the United Russia in Russia and the Justice and Development Party in Turkey have repeatedly been holding the power. In order to grasp these argument, Table 1 and 2 indicating freedom house scores of these countries and GDP per capita are as below;

Table 1: Freedom House Scores of Russian Federation and Turkey

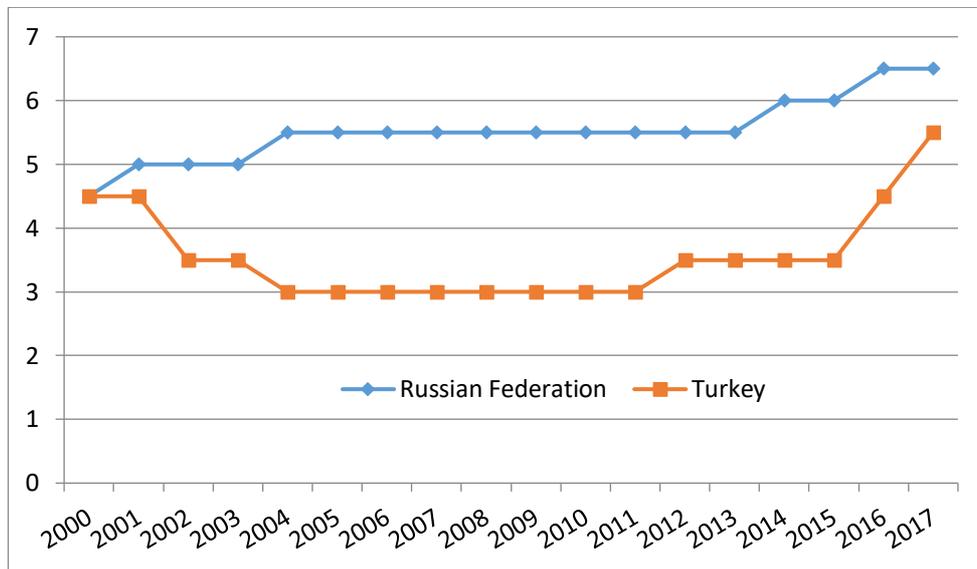
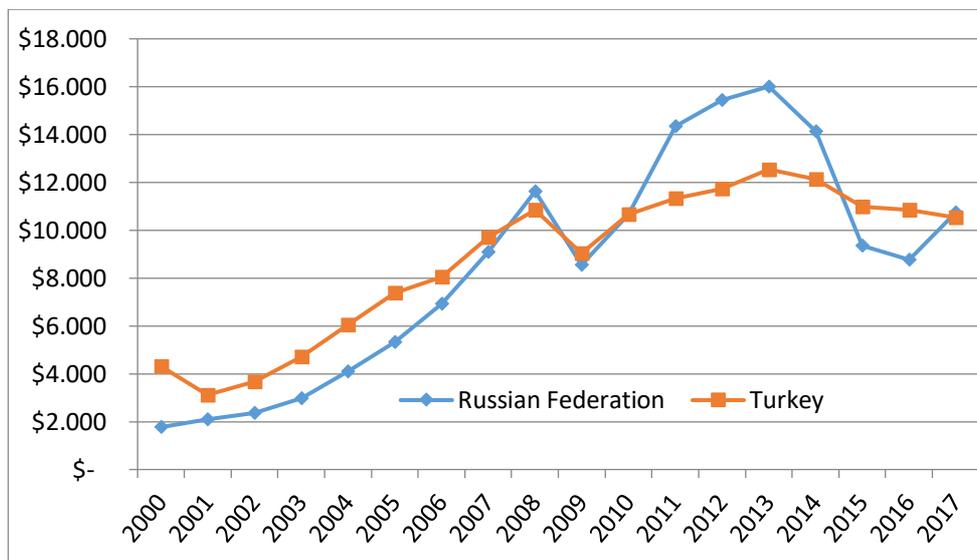


Table 2: GDP Per Capita of Russian Federation and Turkey



To begin with, both countries were categorized as “partly free” (between 2.5 and 5) but their democratic status has tended to down to the category of “not free” (between 5 and 7). The only exception is that Turkey’s status had been qualified for almost a decade between early years of 2000s and the early years of 2010s. In general, it can be argued that their democracy levels are gradually worsening under the same political parties ruling the countries. As a counter argument, there might be no relations between

prolonging rule of a certain political party in a country and democratic quality. Yet, massive literature suggests opposite, which is the longer the term of a political party the more tendencies to autocracy (Brumberg, 2002; Inkeles, 1991: 131).

On the other hand, per capita GDP level in Russia and Turkey has dramatically increased since the current political parties took the power. In Russia, per capita GDP increased from approximately \$1700 in the year 2000 to \$16000 in the year 2013. At the same time period, GDP per capita has also increased in Turkey from approximately \$4000 to \$12000. Since 2013, there has been a downward trend but it is not limited with these two countries but a global scale due to the global commodity price realignments of 2014–2016 (World Economic Situation and Prospects, 2018). Overall, it can be concluded that subsequent ruling terms of a political party (more than two terms) suggests fluctuated but generally consistent economic development.

Considering only GDP would not be adequate to come to this conclusion. Gini Index, screening income inequality is commonly used for measuring economic condition of a country, suggests that Russia and Turkey have accomplished to keep the rates for a long time in spite of often fluctuations. These rates were 37.3 per cent in Russia and 41.3 per cent Turkey in 2002. In accordance to the most recent data, their percentages were 30.7 in 2015 in Russia and 41.9 in 2016 in Turkey (a Gini index of 0 represents perfect equality, while an index of 100 implies perfect inequality). Poverty rate, showing the percentage of population under poverty line, has also dramatically decreased within the same time period. In 2002, 24.6 per cent of population was living under poverty line in Russia and this ratio was 30.3 percent in Turkey. These ratios significantly decreased to 13.3 and 1.6, respectively in 2015. Another alternative indicator for measuring development is life expectancy (at birth) which has considerably risen from 65 to 71 in Russia between 2002 and 2016. Over the same time period, life expectancy has also increased from 71 to 75 in Turkey. Lastly, inflation rates would suggest a paramount level of development because both countries were economically bottomed, especially Turkey. In 2002, Russia's inflation rate was 15.78 and Turkey's was 44.96 but in 2017 Russia succeed to reduce it to 5.2 and Turkey did it to 10.8.

To conclude, this short piece of paper shows that, in cases of Russia and Turkey, a long term of ruling by one party is in favour of economic development but not of democratic development. This reality leads to our main question, for developing countries, whether or not democratic and economic development is possible at the same time. To have a robust answer to this question, history of developed countries should be examined but this would be subject of another paper.

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