The Politics Classroom
Host: Professor Floros
Ep. 2023.11: Constitutions, Candidates, and Coups, Oh My!
In the Classroom: Petia Kostadinova & Semih Patan

[00:00:00] **Professor Floros:** Hi everyone. It's Professor Floros in The Politics Classroom, a podcast of UIC Radio. Today I'm going to bring you the rest of my conversation with UIC Political Science PhD candidate Semih Patan, about recent political developments in Turkey. However, I have two other orders of business first, so let's get started in The Politics Classroom.

Intro Music: Three Goddesses by Third Age

First, my summary of the situation in Tunisia in the last episode was woefully inadequate. Much more has been happening that I missed in my explanation, and I want to take a few minutes here to go into more detail. I'm going to try to book a guest who can go into even more detail in a future episode, so if you know anyone who might be appropriate, you can reach out to me on Twitter @DrFloros with a suggestion.

So briefly, I mentioned that in July 2021, the Tunisian president, Kais Saied, suspended parliament and dismissed the Prime Minister. In September of 2021, he issued Decree Number 117, which allowed him to rule by decree, giving him broad authority over all branches of government without parliamentary approval or other checks on authority.

In March 2022, Rashed Ghannouchi, the Speaker of the Parliament, leader of the largest political party in Tunisia, Ennahda, and one of the people I met when I went to Tunisia in 2017, he held a virtual parliament where most of the members who attended criticized the president. Saied responded by formally dissolving the already suspended parliament.

Having successfully replaced the judicial and election authorities with loyalists, on July 22, 2022, the president held a constitutional referendum to center power in the country in his hands. The referendum passed with only 30% turnout and accusations of fraud. This was followed in December 2022 and January 2023 with two rounds of voting for a new parliament. These elections were boycotted by the opposition, and each round drew only 11% turnout.

Throughout this period, opponents of the president have found themselves in increasing legal jeopardy. After convening the virtual parliament in March 2022, Ghannouchi was barred from leaving the country while he was being investigated for his potential role in the 2013 deaths of two left-wing politicians. In July ahead of the constitutional referendum, his assets were frozen in connection to money laundering and campaign finance violation charges.

In November ahead of the first round of parliamentary elections, he went to court on two separate cases. In early November there was a hearing related to the money laundering case. While that case is still active, no subsequent hearings have been scheduled. In late November, Ghannouchi was in court giving testimony on allegations that he encouraged Tunisian extremists to go to Syria and fight with ISIS. This is known as the "Shipment of Jihadists" case. Undeterred, Ghannouchi continued to speak out against President Saied. He was arrested in April 2023 after making a statement at a meeting of opposition leaders that suggested that excluding Islamists and leftist parties from government was a recipe for civil war. The charge was plotting against state security.

The next day the offices of Ennahda all over the country were searched and closed. At the end of April, a judge ordered that Ghannouchi, who is 81 years old, be held in detention until trial.

May 2023 brought the most serious legal consequences for Ghannouchi to date. He refused to leave detention for a hearing about yet another criminal charge. In February 2021, in a eulogy for a deceased party member, Ghannouchi praised the deceased for fighting against tyrants. A member of the police union filed a complaint that Ghannouchi was referring to the police when he mentioned "tyrants".

Ghannouchi was charged with incitement under an anti-terrorism law, but as I said, he refused to appear in court because of the perceived ridiculousness of the clearly political charge. On May 15, 2023 he was convicted on the incitement charge and sentenced to one year in prison.

Just fyi, another person I met on my trip, Noureddine Boutar, the director of the independent radio station, Mosaique FM, was also arrested this year. He was arrested on February 13, 2023 and released on May 25. I should probably stop meeting government officials when I go abroad.

The second piece of business before we get to my interview with Semih Patan is that I realized that in my first conversation with Semih, we were talking about forms of government, voting, and a bunch of other concepts that folks who aren't politics nerds might not know very much about. Therefore, I sat down with UIC Political Science professor, Petia Kostadinova, for a brief introduction to different political systems around the world.

Professor Petia Kostadinova, thank you for joining me in The Politics Classroom for a quick tutorial of different types of governments.

[00:05:51] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** Thank you very much for having me. It's a pleasure.

[00:05:54] **Professor Floros:** So, an Intro to Comparative Politics class would take most of a semester to cover what I hope to cover in less than 30 minutes. Um, so let's jump right in. Are you ready?

[00:06:03] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** Sure. As ready as I'll ever be.

[00:06:06] **Professor Floros:** Okay, great. So, for a country to be considered a democracy, what features must it have? Are elections enough?

[00:06:17] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** Short answer is no. So, elections by themselves are necessary, but not sufficient.

[00:06:24] **Professor Floros:** Okay

[00:06:24] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** So, during communism, uh, there were elections. Noncompetitive, but there were, so just having elections doesn't mean, doesn't mean much. So, elections are necessary, but not sufficient. What else is to be added to the procedural components of, of democracy?

Some sort of a competition between parties or candidates. Uh, some sort of a choice that citizens have. The, the competition aspect also relies on, on media to communicate these choices to citizens and citizens to be informed of the, the different positions and the different choices that they have. A third element would be accountability for those in office, ability to remove them from office through competitive elections the next cycle, their ability to accept the loss of office and loss of the elections,

and some sort of even legal ramifications if the holders of, the office holders do something that is, that is illegal, being able to behold accountable either through elections or through other legal means. So, that's on the side of the, the, the elites.

And then on the citizen side, you have the rights of citizens for voting expression, freedom of association, freedom to run for office. A number of democracies add social rights to the rights of citizens. Scandinavian countries, for example, the right to education, healthcare, and things like that. But generally, the rights, the, the, the legal rights, the civil, civil rights are considered an important element of, of all democracies.

So, that's the procedural sort of side, and then substantively, democracy is about representation, some sort of a linkage between the voters and the elected officials. That can be done in any number of ways and can take any number of forms, but there needs to be some sort of a connection between, I as a voter, this is what I wish to see happen, this is what I wish the government to do. And then the government actually doing what I, I think I wished, and then me holding them accountable for that, if they don't do what I thought they should do. And again, that's the trickiest part of the, the substantive representation. You can have strong or even longer lasting procedural democracies where that element, substantive representation is, is lacking.

[00:08:53] **Professor Floros:** Mm-hmm.

[00:08:53] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** Uh, or, or it's weak, and that that can undermine the procedural aspects, uh, of a democratic system if consistently citizens change who is in power, but the policies don't change, uh, or the policy outputs. One example of that is, um, during the nineties in a lot of, uh, Eastern European post-communist countries had come, just come out of communism and they had frequent elections, frequent changes and governing parties, but for the most part, they all pursued neoliberal economic reforms.

And so citizens would vote for a different party with the hope that the reforms would slow down or be mitigated or changed, or there will be some social protections as a result of these reforms, but that wouldn't necessarily happen. And the, the changes in government parties didn't necessarily reflect changes in governing policies.

And that was the, the substantive representation was sort of lacking, lacking there. That, later on, that the contributed to the dissatisfaction with democracy in these countries, and, uh, outright democratic backsliding in a number of them. It's not the main reason, but certainly a, certainly one of it.

And then of course, you can have non democracies or weaker democracies where some groups of citizens get substantive representation. In Turkey most recently, we had certain electorates that are preferred by the ruling parties. So again, substantive representation by itself is not necessarily even the necessary aspect of democracy, but it's sort of adding layers to the procedural aspect of it.

[00:10:31] **Professor Floros:** Okay, so elections, competition, accountability, the people being linked to the people they elect and being able to hold them accountable, and the voters, I guess, writ large, their preferences actually reflected in the outputs that the government does.

[00:10:50] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** Right, right.

[00:10:51] **Professor Floros:** Okay, next question. So, democracies and also non democracies, but we're focused on democracies, come in many shapes and sizes. Can you briefly describe the features of both presidential and parliamentary systems?

[00:11:06] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** Okay. The main elements of, of, of differences that in a parliamentary system, the branches of, the legislative branch and the executive branch are connected. As a citizen in these countries, you don't vote directly for your executive, the head of government. You vote for legislature, the legislature then selects the Prime Minister and their cabinet, and that is the executive. The connection is that the executive can at any time resolve the legislature. There is no fixed terms of office, which is another element of, of, of difference.

The presidential systems, we know in the United States, you vote, you know exactly when the next elections are gonna be, in the parliamentary system you don't. There are certain constitutional terms you must hold your, within the next four or five years, but, when those are going to happen, you don't know.

So, the executive can then dissolve the legislature, can, uh, kick them back to, to the voting booth. This actually happened, happens very frequently, happened in Spain a week ago. It was a major, big, big issue when the prime minister in Spain decided to dissolve parliament and call for early elections. Happened in Montenegro in 2023. Uh, again, it happens quite frequently.

[00:12:28] **Professor Floros:** In Israel, didn't it happen like four or five times in two years?

[00:12:33] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** Yeah, it's one of these, uh, very, very frequent occurrences.

The other aspect of the, the connection is that the legislature can kick the executive out as well. They can replace the executive at anytime if they're not happy with the cabinet. The cabinet, the, the executive functions if they have support from the legislature, that often means 50% plus one votes in the legislature through a either single party, which is rare, that controls 50% of the legislature, or more often a coalition of parties that control the majority of the legislature. But that, that that dependency between the executive and the legislative branches is sort of the defining characteristics of a parliamentary system.

So, in the parliamentary system, then the head of government is selected by, by the legislature. In presidential systems, there's a clear separation of powers. There's clear division of the two branches. You vote for legislature, and then you vote for an executive, which is the, the head of, and then they're the head of state, is the head of government, the president. Then the two roles are, uh, linked there, often overlapping, but the, the selection of the legislature is independent from the selection of the executive at least in principle.

[00:13:56] **Professor Floros:** Okay. So can you just really quickly talk about the difference between a head of state and a head of government, and if the Prime Minister is the head of government in a parliamentary system, who is the head of state, and what does that person do?

[00:14:16] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** Yeah, so the head of state is typically a ceremonial role. Let me put it this way. If you have a, if a country is a monarchy, well, the monarch is the head of state, but you don't elect one. You have a separately elected head of government. Countries that are not monarchies, instead of a monarch, they have a president head of state, and that is the position that is to represent the entire country versus a particular group of political factions through the legislature.

And so in, in countries, again, that, that don't have monarchies, they have a president through, uh, and that's the, the head, the head of state. They can be directly elected often is for a popular vote, but it doesn't have to be. Number of countries, uh, I'm primarily be giving examples from European countries as well I know the best, but a number of countries, uh, Italy, Germany, tend to have a, um, president head of state that is elected or selected by the legislature through various, various procedures. And then that position then again, serves a lot of ceremonial, or they, they don't have a day-to-day executive role in

running the country. They, for foreign, uh, dignitary, go to visit or foreign, uh, monarchy, that's the person who greets them at the tarmac, the person who represents the country.

[00:15:46] **Professor Floros:** All right, so head of state is largely ceremonial, head of government runs the government. In the United States, for example, right, the president is both the head of state and the head of government, but in many places there's a prime minister who runs the government and either a monarch or an elected or indirectly elected president who, who holds that, those ceremonial functions.

[00:16:13] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** Mm-hmm.

[00:16:14] **Professor Floros:** So can you talk about the pros and cons of each system?

[00:16:21] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** Yeah. So, oftentimes when I talk to American students about, about these systems, they, they see, especially, you know, European countries, I, I teach, "Oh, that sounds very unstable, very unpredictable. You don't know when the next elections are gonna be. You vote, and it, it can take months to form a new government if it's a coalition of government." So, parliamentary systems have this impression of being unstable and messy, and they can be.

There is much less predictability in, in, in, in that sense. What is a big advantage for, for the parliamentary systems is the ease with which the government can be replaced if they have lost the confidence of the legislature or, and then, or the confidence of the people. When you have a situation where the government no, is no longer representative substantively of the preferences of the majority of the legislature, but by extension the majority of the voters, then, then you can replace them. You don't have to wait until their term expires to remove them from office.

[00:17:21] **Professor Floros:** Mm-hmm.

[00:17:22] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** So that, that's, that's a government instability, but it's, it translates into longer regime stability. You, you're not questioning then the, the, is democracy the right regime for us if we stuck with these people for the next foreseeable future.

In a presidential system because you can't easily remove the executive, you need to wait until the next elections or you can try to impeach them, which is relatively rare, relatively difficult. Then the re, there's a higher risk of regime instability, of dissatisfaction with the current establishment can translate into a dissatisfaction with the regime overall.

[00:18:05] **Professor Floros:** And by regime you mean, like, "We're frustrated with how our government is not representing us, and so because we can't get rid of them, that frustration with our government might be a frustration with democracy."

[00:18:19] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** Correct.

[00:18:20] **Professor Floros:** And thinking, "Okay, it's okay if we become slightly less democratic if it means whatever it means." So, so when you talk about regime stability, it means democracy's lasting.

[00:18:33] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** Correct. Yeah, exactly. Yeah. That, that, uh, I mean, at least in theory, that is the, that is the association. I think you can see it in practice more recently, but when you can. Now, the, the, the substantive aspect, I talked earlier when you, you can still change the government and not lead to any policy change, that can still be frustrating, but at least you have the mechanism. And it can happen fairly frequently. I mean, not to, to get too bogged down this example, but in Bulgaria where I, I grew up, we've had five parliamentary elections in three years, and there hasn't

been a coalition agreement, there hasn't been an, uh, enough support within the legislature to actually form a majority to elect the government. One got elected today for the first time in 10 months, so very, very excited to see how long it's gonna last. So, and, and that kind of instability can also undermine support for democratic regimes because it is seen as, this is clearly not working.

[00:19:32] **Professor Floros:** Mm-hmm.

[00:19:33] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** What seems to be leading in this case is, oh, maybe the parliamentary system's not working. Maybe there was some, the current president sort of making insinuations for presidential system.

[00:19:43] **Professor Floros:** Mm.

[00:19:44] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** There wasn't a strong anti-democratic tendency yet, but it's certainly, uh, anti-system tendency.

[00:19:51] **Professor Floros:** Yeah. And I think that that's actually the argument that the sitting president of Tunisia made when he dismissed Parliament and took over basically, was that the system as they had, it wasn't working, and so they needed a new constitution for a more effective system.

[00:20:09] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** Right.

[00:20:10] **Professor Floros:** But he dismissed Parliament and his jailing all his opponents. But that's, that's another conversation. Okay.

So, Presidential may be like, you don't have elections every two seconds, but you can't throw the bums out until the next scheduled election, and so you're stuck with who you have, even if they no longer have the confidence of the country?

[00:20:36] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** Correct.

[00:20:37] **Professor Floros:** Okay. All right, so most political actors belong to political parties, so can you talk about the role of political parties in each of these two systems that we, that we've been talking about?

[00:20:50] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** Yeah, so they're on the, because modern democracies are representative democracy, parties are the units that represent the aggregate, the interest of, of voters, and, and can facilitate the linkage between voters and the legislature.

There isn't really, at least to my mind, a big difference in the role of parties in the, in the different systems, so much as it's linked to, I guess the, the, the more historical reasons for why certain countries have certain types of political systems. What I mean by this is that the parliamentary systems tend to be a remnant of the British Empire.

I mean, it'd be United States, no, it's not this exception here, but a number of, of around the world because they also belong to Commonwealth and their head of state is the British monarch. Those countries don't have their own president, but they also have, tend to have parliamentary systems and they have then also inherited the electoral systems of the British, of the, the United Kingdom.

The presidential systems tend to be, uh, uh, associated or remnants of the, the Spanish or Portuguese colonialism where, uh, independence happened as a way to overthrow the colonial power that tended to be a particular monarch, but then resulted in, in the presidential systems and their, their political parties then, then reflected those, those, those cleavages and the, the systems that, that they had.

Certainly, in parliamentary systems with proportional representation, the role of political parties tends to be more pronounced in the sense of voters can participate in candidate selection if they're members of the political party and participate through the structures of the political parties. In other systems, they have much, voters can have much more direct role in selecting, selecting candidates and send that then party organization, party control.

And that's another thing that my students often notice when we talk about these things, even in, in strong democracies. The parties themselves as internal organizations, they may be non-democratic or not as openly democratic. They're very, they could be very hierarchical organizations and very closed to input from outside of the organization. And then are they reflecting really the interest of the voters or are they reflecting the interest of those activists who are participating in the party?

[00:23:27] **Professor Floros:** So, you were talking about coalition governments in parliamentary systems, and so that implies that there are multiple parties that have to come together to form a coalition. So, are a large number of parties more associated with parliamentary versus presidential, or is it the kind of voting rule or the electoral rules of proportional representation versus first past the post, which we need to explain what each of those two things are

[00:23:56] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** Yeah.

[00:23:56] **Professor Floros:** As well.

[00:23:57] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** So, yes, the, certainly the number of parties and then the, the party systems tends to be a reflection of the electoral system rules, the political system, presidential, parliamentary, that serve a separate component, but it's the electoral system reflects, affects the party system. Again, going back to British Empire, the first past the post is, uh, is a system that is a plurality rule. First past the post literally means the first one to cross the line. Doesn't matter by how much you can win an election or a seat by as little as 20% of the vote or, or fewer.

What this system also means is the, the single member district system, you can only elect one representative per district. And, um, there is a, this so-called Duverger Law in political science, one of the very few lawlike relationships in social sciences where if you have first past the post system, you almost always have a two party system.

Where this, the rule breaks is unless you have a geographically concentrated minority. Canada, Scotland. So, in the United Kingdom you have an effective third party. They're not very prominent at the federal level, but they have replaced the Labor Party. In Scotland, it's the

[00:25:18] **Professor Floros:** The Scottish National Party

[00:25:19] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** The Scottish, Scottish National Party has emerged as a third party in the UK and they have, because the geographically concentrated constituency there. So, in those kind of systems, you, you can have, uh, a third party emerging if it's geographically concentrated. If it's not, then it's a two party system. Then, then you have a sort of variation. France has it, some, some number, a number of other countries where you still have a single member district, still elect one representative per district, but they need a majority of the vote.

[00:25:50] **Professor Floros:** Mm-hmm.

[00:25:50] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** And if they don't get a majority in the first round, there was a second round of elections, and by definition then that person has a majority of the vote, which tends to be a bit more representative. Plurality systems are very disproportionate. You can have, you can end up with a legislative majority that is reflective of a minority of the population, especially with gerrymandering and the way the district is structured.

And then you have a number of countries that have, probably even the majority of the countries have some version of a proportional representation where you have multi-member districts, you elect one, more than one person per district. The Netherlands is an extreme example. The entire country's one district, 150, uh, seats a list of, uh, 150 candidates. And that's where the, the, the party organization thing that I talked about earlier comes in like. And then strictly speaking, PR system, proportional representation, many of them are so-called closed list. The voters go to the booth and have a literaral list of names that the party has selected. The party has decided the order in which these are gonna appear. They may or may not be reflective of gender or ethnic or other makeups of the electorate, and then voters have no choice. They either support the party, if they support the party, they vote the entire list, even if they disapprove of individual candidates. In the first past the post system, those are much more candidate centered. There's two political party labels, but there is much more competition between candidates even within a, a single party for nomination.

But recently, there's been a tendency in parliamentary system, well, I should say PR systems to have a variation of an open list PR. Typically, that that includes some sort of a preference vote. Yes, the voters still get a list, they still support the party or not. But with that, then that list, they can rank order candidates or they can circle the preferred candidates. So, when the votes are tallied, the person who gets elected from that district, that is a reflection of the number of preferences that they received by the voters of that district. So it's still a, still gives voters some, some choice within the, the system, but those, those parties, the PR systems tend to result in multiple parties at the legislative level.

[00:28:13] **Professor Floros:** And, and so, so if we have a district, and you know that district because of its population is allocated 10 seats and there are five political parties contesting in that district. Each party will have a list of up to 10 people. Everybody goes to the polls, votes for the party that they wanna see in power, and then the number of seats each party actually gets is based on the proportion, thus the name proportional representation, PR, the proportion of the votes they actually get. So, if one party gets appro, I mean, and, and at the margins, it's not exact right, but one party gets 20% of the vote, the top two candidates on their list get seated, et cetera, et cetera, until all, all the seats are, are allocated.

And then each district will then send their folks. And so that's how you end up with people from different parties representing the same district, but more seats are allocated to the parties that have a larger proportion of the support in the country.

[00:29:24] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** Correct. Correct.

[00:29:26] **Professor Floros:** Okay. So I, um, I'm not getting this done under 30 minutes, but let's just ask if you have anything about electoral rules, political parties, separation of powers, anything that you think is relevant for an intro level explanation that we have not already covered.

[00:29:46] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** One thing I wanted to, to talk about relevant to political parties, and I think it gets not as highlighted as I think it should be, is that the notion of the origin of the different ideologies of, of political parties. And oftentimes, and this is really more true for the context of, of European context, but I think it's, some of this is relevant to any number of countries, but the, the type of political parties that exist in modern times tended to emerge as a result of either national

revolution for state formation, some sort of a challenge to the, the, the system, either a monarchical rule or colonial rule, uh, and then industrial revolutions that happen and, and in Western Europe. So there's a result of these processes that you have well defined at some point, still very relevant, cleavages. You have the worker owner cleavage, which is most often associated with the, uh, Industrial Revolution and the, uh, the left-right political spectrum that, that we, that we talk about. Uh, the other cleavage associated with the Industrial Revolution is the urban, rural, the tension between the city centers that needed work, workers and, and the land owners that needed farm labor, and the tensions that, that resulted in these type of political parties that emerged.

With the national revolution, starting with the French Revolutions, you had the tension between church and state and the type of religious parties that emerged there, and as well as the center-periphery with the who belongs to, to the state. What, what is the territory that the state controls? And I, I, I mentioned these because again, most, most people think about political parties left-right spectrum, but I think recently, certainly we've seen with identity politics and also with other tensions, we have seen a number of other cleavages becoming very prominent. I mean, certainly in the United States, seeing it in Europe as well. The urban-rural cleavage is the main one. You can map how the political, the support for political parties based on whether you live in the city or, or suburbs or, or not.

[00:31:44] **Professor Floros:** Yeah.

[00:31:44] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** And that that is a, that is the strongest cleavage. In a number of European countries, you will have seen the center-periphery, the Catalan independence, Scottish independence. Any number of parties are becoming more relevant because they're advocating on that type of cleavage and with, I think during the Cold War, all of these cleavages kind of were subdued or kind of, they were over overtaken by, by the the left-right worker cleavage. But then as that cleavage is weakening with the changing service economy, with, you know, who is the owner, who is a worker?

[00:32:21] **Professor Floros:** Mm-hmm.

[00:32:22] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** That's a little bit less clear now. These other cleavages began to resurface and I, they're still there. They're still quite relevant. And the reason I bring it up because it's important because those work on the cleavage can be, changeable, right? You can change your identity in terms of your, your occupation. You can also change your identity based on where you live, city or, or rural center-periphery is, is, it's kinda hard, rooted into a more, uh, more immutable kinda changes, type of, type of identities.

And then about linguistic, about, uh, religious issues and that, that becomes very hard for them citizens to even compromise to, to some extent, right?

[00:33:07] **Professor Floros:** Yeah.

[00:33:07] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** When you're talking about those kind of issues and parties that draw support on those issues versus strictly speaking policy left-right?

[00:33:16] **Professor Floros:** Yeah.

[00:33:16] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** Um, that, that can, can be changed.

[00:33:21] **Professor Floros:** Can you talk for two minutes about Islamic parties?

[00:33:24] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** So, with the caveat that I was totally not an expert on Islamic parties, I, I would see them more of as a church, state

[00:33:33] **Professor Floros:** Mm-hmm.

[00:33:34] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** Sort of a party, falling on that cleavage. That's the cleavage of what is the role of, of religion in personal life? Who gets to decide what type of education, what children get, who determines that?

And historically, the Catholic Church you want, if you wanted to learn to, to read, you were part of, of, of that establishment. Marriage, baptism, that came through, through the church and then the state replaced those functions in personal life. And still, in many democracies, that's, that's the way it is. Even if people choose, then have a religious aspect added to it.

So that, to me, the Islamic parties then fall into that kind of a cleavage. Who gets to determine issue morality and personal life? Is it the religious authorities? Or is it the state? And that is one of the older cleavages out there, and I wouldn't put them, they can crosscut with left-right, but it, it, it's a, it's an, to me it's an independent sort of cleavage. Yeah.

[00:34:38] **Professor Floros:** Right. And, and thank you so much for, for highlighting the Catholic church because yeah, in Germany there's a Christian Democratic party. Right?

[00:34:47] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** Right.

[00:34:48] **Professor Floros:** And so it's not, we talk about, we hear about Islamist parties, but there are certainly parties who, that are, are affiliated with any name a religion and there is somewhere in the world a political party that's geared in that direction.

[00:35:05] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** The religious parties are not unique to the Islamic world by, by no means.

[00:35:09] **Professor Floros:** Okay, great. Well, Professor Petia Kostadinova, thank you so much for talking about these systems with me. You teach Intro to Comparative Politics where I'm sure you cover a lot of these topics, and so I appreciate you helping me illuminate my listeners. Thanks a lot.

[00:35:25] **Professor Petia Kostadinova:** Thank you very much. It was a pleasure and I really enjoyed talking to, to you and to people about those issues.

[00:35:31] **Professor Floros:** Thank you.

Let's take a break. You're listening to Professor Floros in The Politics Classroom, a podcast of UIC Radio.

Music Interlude: Ticky Tacky by Rhythm Scott

Welcome back to The Politics Classroom, a podcast of UIC Radio. I'm Professor Floros, and now I'd like to bring you the rest of my conversation with UIC Political Science PhD candidate, Semih Patan.

Okay, so we talked about, uh, how these democratic reforms, either to get into the EU or not, depending if, if we're cynical, weaken the ability of the military to intervene to course correct if it felt the

government was straying beyond its constitutional limits. And you described in 2007 a military attempt to prevent someone from becoming president because his wife wore a headscarf, that the AKP stood up to that. But in 2016, there was a coup attempt that was ultimately unsuccessful, but it was a faction of the military attempted to take control of the government. Erdogan was on vacation at the time when this coup attempt was initiated. How, how close did Erdogan come to being overthrown in a coup? How, how close was this to success?

[00:37:12] **Semih Patan:** I guess it was pretty close. But in terms of, if you compare to the standards of Turkish military's, uh, code of conduct, when it comes to staging a coup, uh, this was a poorly executed one, uh, for various reasons, but they did come close. They did intend to take over. They did intend to at least capture Erdogan, if not kill him. Uh, but I think he, you know, evacuated his summer house way ahead of time.

[00:37:46] **Professor Floros:** Mm.

[00:37:46] **Semih Patan:** And was already on a plane, uh, and safe. But I think an F-16, uh, fighter jet did want to engage. Uh, but did not do so. But you know, the evidence is not really out there for us. We don't really know exactly the, you know, the minor details of how things played out.

I was in Turkey at the time. It was really, really hard to believe what was happening. It started as a joke on Twitter, like a rumor. "Oh, there is some military activity, what is going on? A coup?" And turns out, yes. And the thing, you know, was that it happened like it was taking place at such an odd hour that you wouldn't expect. You know, the rumor started around 9:00 PM uh, where everybody is awake. And you don't really try to overthrow someone unconstitutionally through use of force when everybody is awake. It's just not really the way to go. Uh, but turns out their plans were foiled in the beginning, so they had to kind of start early and as soon as possible before the rest of the military kind of collect itself and respond.

But, uh, yes, uh, they failed. And it was a faction within the military, uh, which is also representing a certain, uh, Islamist ideology. So, the leader of which is currently residing in Pennsylvania, United States, Fethullah Gulen, whose supporters, uh, were basically behind, uh, this atrocity. Fighter jets bombed the Turkish parliament, which is a very dramatic and sad, uh, thing to just watch over tv. They killed their own people. They killed civilians who were heroically, resisting, uh, this military coup attempt. I may not agree with their politics, but of course, resisting a military coup against the civilian government is something heroic in my book. So, uh, whatever the intentions were for the, uh, you know, aftermath of the military coup that was being planned, it just, uh, did not play out as they wanted.

And of course, this fight between, uh, the government and the supporters of Fethullah Gulen goes back in history and it is, uh, to me, AKP and Erdogan himself to blame. Because he cozied up with these, uh, with this clandestine groups, and they had a falling out and they went so far ahead, uh, to commit this treasonous act, uh, against their own country.

Uh, but yes, it failed and Erdogan averted being overthrown, and of course welcomed by and embraced by his own supporters, and that boosted his popularity for a while. But it also allowed him to become much, much more authoritarian under the guise of cleaning the state from the sympathizers or the members of this Gulenist terrorist organization.

So, he used this very conveniently to also target his opposition, anyone he deemed, uh, politically dangerous. It was a convenient excuse to just like, you know, get rid of him by accusing them of being this Gulenist terrorist organization sympathizer or being associated with it. They use this very vague legal, it's not even legal term, it's not official, it's not officially recognized term, and it doesn't mean

anything. Being associated, it's not even associated, but like, it's a very weird word. And by just that, they can get rid of anyone from the government, from state, or just take over political offices.

[00:41:52] **Professor Floros:** This affected tens of thousands of

[00:41:54] **Semih Patan:** absolutely.

[00:41:55] **Professor Floros:** Turkish people, right?

[00:41:57] **Semih Patan:** Yes. And their families. A lot of those people were sympathizers, supporters of Gulenists to a certain degree, but there are many people who are just targeted for no real legitimate reason. They were, or either a family member of the person who was associated with them, or they were, again, a government critic or some politically dangerous, uh, people. So, it was a catchall term for anyone Erdogan did not really like. A very powerful delegitimizing tool.

[00:42:34] **Professor Floros:** And what, what are those people doing today?

[00:42:36] **Semih Patan:** If you are just associated somehow with the shaky evidence? Uh, what they do is they make sure you're not employed by the government.

[00:42:46] **Professor Floros:** Okay.

[00:42:46] **Semih Patan:** Or employed by any other as well. And government support, like social security is cut off. You are basically a person with nothing, so you're just like ostracized.

[00:43:00] **Professor Floros:** And they, so they either somehow exist in the informal economy, or they

[00:43:05] **Semih Patan:** usually

[00:43:05] **Professor Floros:** leave?

[00:43:05] **Semih Patan:** Or, they try to leave, but they also, most of them have suspended passports.

[00:43:11] **Professor Floros:** Oh, my gosh!

[00:43:12] **Semih Patan:** Um, so the government will suggest that it's, they're not targeting anyone who's not really associated with, you know, this organization, but many human rights, uh, reports and certain members of parliament, uh, have been investigating, uh, these allegations and they, you know, argue that this is not really the case.

There are thousands of people that are falsely accused, and even if the government does not take any action, just the accusation itself is enough for others to distance themselves from you, right? That in and of itself is also a tactic. Just make the accusation if you're not happy with this specific person and let things run its course in its natural way, I guess.

Uh, and people just distance themselves from these, you know, citizens who are somehow accused, even though those who are cleared through investigations sometimes end up not getting their rightful employment back.

[00:44:19] **Professor Floros:** Okay. Well, one of the other actions that may have come as a function of the coup is that there was a constitutional referendum in 2017, and so you had said that Turkey was a parliamentary democracy, right? Meaning the Prime Minister was the head of the government and parliament, set the rules, et cetera, et cetera. And the president was more of, like, a figurehead, had much more limited role in day-to-day governing. But in 2017 there was a referendum on a constitu, constitutional changes that would change Turkey from a parliamentary democracy into a presidential system with an executive president.

So, can you talk about how extensive a change, and because the referendum passed, did mean for Turkey and what the arguments were of those who opposed this constitutional change of why this was not a great idea.

[00:45:24] **Semih Patan:** Right. I mean, it wasn't a great idea to, you know, even if there wasn't any cynical reason to make this, uh, change, then just like, why make it, right? Turkey has a long history of parliaments, parliamentary democracy. It just doesn't really fit the needs and institutional and historical codes of this, uh, nation. So it was, it would've been a very unnecessary thing to do, even if Erdogan aimed at a democratic presidential system. It just did not make any sense to begin with.

But of course, he wanted to have executive power embodied in himself without having to rely on the Parliament for gaining that power. Right? And we can see why actually to a certain extent. AKP won only like 35.5% of the votes in this recent elections. That is not enough to win the majority of the seats given there are so many other parties in the Parliament that deny that majority. So, by not having to rely on a parliamentary majority and his, and his own party's popularity,

[00:46:36] **Professor Floros:** Mm-hmm.

[00:46:36] **Semih Patan:** Erdogan just wanted to rely on his own popularity. And he remains popular so that he could just, like, get the executive powers, however unpopular the political party itself is. So that was the, I think, main motivation, kind of like detach this power from his party and just wanting to get it through his own personal charisma. So, that was the reason.

And how extensive it goes. A lot of people, if, I guess Americans would think, of course when they think about presidential system and compare it to their own system, and it's nothing like that. So, imagine Donald Trump being the head of his party also being able to field his own candidates for the Senate and for the Congress, deciding who gets to be the members of Congress. And this is, of course, not the case in the US because there is a clear separation of powers, which is the whole gist of the whole idea of a presidential system, strict separation of powers. In Turkey they are connected. Erdogan is the chairman of AKP. Erdogan is the one who gets to decide the party fields as members of Parliament, uh, as a candidate. Uh, so he controls the parliament and he controls the executive through this because the, this parliament, like party discipline in Turkey is very, very high, and the political party law in Turkey allowed for very authoritarian way of governing inter-party business.

[00:48:29] **Professor Floros:** But so if, if AKP only has 35% of the seats, approximately, and therefore not a majority, so he, he may control the actual people who hold AKP's seats, but if they don't have a majority, how does he still control Parliament?

[00:48:49] **Semih Patan:** That was, that's the thing that he did not clearly, uh, think about it as much.

[00:48:55] **Professor Floros:** Okay.

[00:48:55] **Semih Patan:** But the thing is, so far it worked right? In 2018 elections, first of all, AKP had a much higher vote share and much, uh, higher, uh, seat allocation. But you know, this system was advocated as something that would prevent coalition government in Turkey. And Turkish uh, political history is just marred with all these, uh, infighting between political parties. This coalition era in 1990s, Turkish voters basically have a very negative perception of politics in 1990s due to all these failing coalition governments. So Erdogan was marketing this whole system change as, "Oh, this will bring stability, political stability. There will be no need for a, uh, coalition." But it actually brought alliance politics because if I, you know, he did not specify in the constitutional referendum that the person, with most votes would be selected the, uh, president, but 50% plus one. And Erdogan never gained 50% votes in his life in this parliamentary demo, uh, democracy. The, the highest, uh, vote his party received was 47%. So, it would always fall short. So, he would always have to rely on some sort of an alliance. And we know actually through rumors and party insiders that he's very unhappy with this part of this new system that, like, he shouldn't have accepted 50% plus one, just like suggested that whoever got the fir, uh, most votes in the first round wins the presidency. Uh, but of course that is not the case.

So now Erdogan has to rely on alliances and this nationalist party is, is major political partner now and they have 10% of the votes in the parliament and that it gives them enough seats for forming a single party government.

[00:51:00] **Professor Floros:** Okay.

[00:51:00] **Semih Patan:** They used to, uh, like if this was a parliamentary democracy, then through this coalition they would've been able to form this single party government, but now of course it's a presidential system, so the forming a government does not require a parliamentary approval, but for passing any laws,

[00:51:21] **Professor Floros:** Yeah.

[00:51:22] **Semih Patan:** Now they need their alliance partners' votes as well. So far they have performed well, they avoided major crises. This is why, how he basically controls. What happened was nationalist party did not get any representation in the government portfolio, but they have an increasing role in Turkish bureaucracy. So the, particularly the Turkish security bureaucracy, and domestic security politics. This nationalist party is basically the veto player and has a much like, you know, high influence. And this, of course, most makes itself apparent in government's policies towards the Kurds and Kurdish politics in general, and the Kurdish party. Stripping off Kurdish mayors from their offices, from their powers and assigning trustees basically is, uh, outcome of this newly formed alliance between, uh, the Nationalist party and AKP.

[00:52:25] **Professor Floros:** Okay, so just to make sure I understand. So, Erdogan in the second round got enough votes; he's reaffirmed as president. His party, though, only has about a third of the seats in Parliament, but when they collaborate with this nationalist party, they have enough to get legislation through. If this were a coalition government in a parliamentary system, members of that nationalist party would be, like, the defense minister or the whatever.

That isn't the case because it's a presidential system and the president gets to pick his cabinet or whatever, but this nationalist party has more sway in the different institutions of the country, specifically around security.

[00:53:12] **Semih Patan:** It's a much long-term strategy, uh, for them. So, they get to assign, you know, the district governors or governors, the chief of police, you know, these kind of appointments are basically done through their own, they either get their own people assigned to these, uh, positions, or they get to approve who is being assigned.

[00:53:34] **Professor Floros:** Okay.

Transition sound effect: Ball Shot at Shield

Okay, lightning round. Two questions. One, if Erdogan had actually lost, would he have given up power?

[00:53:49] **Semih Patan:** Yes. Yes, he would. He would've tried. That also depends on what are the margins. If it's a clear, with, or if it wasn't like, you know, 50.1, right? So, if the position of, uh, the opposition party and Erdogan swapped

[00:54:05] **Professor Floros:** 52 to 48 the other way

[00:54:08] **Semih Patan:** Erdogan would have, uh, I think given up power because he does not really have enough, I think, still both outside and institutional support that could dare to deny the opposition and the people's success and, uh, these democratic results. What, you know, differentiates Erdogan from other strong men is Erdogan's whole legitimacy actually comes from his, uh, popular support. This is what the electoral results also show, that Erdogan, despite all his false and terrible economy, people still support him. People still love him and do not necessarily think all the problems within the country is Erdogan's fault. Right?

[00:54:59] **Professor Floros:** Okay.

[00:54:59] **Semih Patan:** Somebody else's, maybe the parties, clearly the parties; they lost lots of votes, but not Erdogan. So, Erdogan is very popular and I don't think he would've survived without popular support.

[00:55:13] **Professor Floros:** Okay. Question two, which I meant to ask earlier, was the constitutional referendum rigged by the electoral court, which allowed unstamped ballots to be counted? I don't know what, what any of that means, except that there were one and a half million unstamped ballots that were accepted, maybe, and the referendum was only won by 1.4 million votes.

[00:55:47] **Semih Patan:** Yeah, this is hard to say because unstamped votes, in itself may not really mean much. There are ballots that are sent to each ballot councils, and you open those up and they are pre-stamped by the high, uh, electoral office. And if this was a genuine mistake without those stamps being there, it doesn't really mean much.

It's just like, does that mean that, you know, there was some ballot stuffing without us knowing, and Turkish electoral system makes that really difficult if you are present as an opposition because everyone gets to see the voting process and the counting is done right there. And every member of the, you know, ballot council, including the opposition, gets a signed version of the last tally.

So, if you have access to those as an opposition, and if you were present, there is no way for that vote to be stolen. The problem comes in when the opposition does not have a presence

[00:56:53] **Professor Floros:** Mm.

[00:56:54] **Semih Patan:** During those ballot counts because there are certain districts, areas where even though people sign up on behalf of the opposition, uh, to be at the ballots, but they turn out AKP supporters.

[00:57:05] **Professor Floros:** Mm-hmm.

[00:57:06] **Semih Patan:** But in Turkey, that's never been to a degree that it would alter the results. Constitutional referendum is a little bit tricky. Maybe so, maybe not. We don't really know, but I, I have to say no.

[00:57:20] **Professor Floros:** Okay, so even though the constitutional change doesn't make a lot of sense, it was legitimately approved through the referendum.

[00:57:29] **Semih Patan:** There were more irreg, irregularities for sure than usual, but I am not a hundred percent that it ultimately affected the result itself.

[00:57:38] **Professor Floros:** Okay. And just FYI, that whole, like, you sign up for the opposition, but you're really AKP? That happens in Chicago, right? There have to be, there have to be Democratic and Republican judges.

[00:57:52] **Semih Patan:** Yes.

[00:57:52] **Professor Floros:** And the Republican judges in most places are just random people who sign up who aren't Republicans.

[00:58:01] **Semih Patan:** Right.

[00:58:01] **Professor Floros:** But they need Republican judges, so that's not just a, a Turkey thing. (laugher)

[00:58:09] **Semih Patan:** Yeah. So, they need to be really organized and they still aren't. The opposition I mean.

[00:58:16] **Professor Floros:** Okay. Well, I could ask 5,000 more questions, but um, we both probably have other things to do. But I really wanna thank you. Thank you, Semih Patan, for spending your time and helping us understand, uh, more about Turkey, its politics, and the most recent election. So, thank you.

[00:58:33] **Semih Patan:** Thank you for having me and giving this opportunity.

[00:58:36] **Professor Floros:** Okay. Semih Patan is a PhD candidate in the Political Science Department at UIC.

Thanks for sticking with me in The Politics Classroom, a podcast of UIC Radio. I'm Professor Kate Floros. I'm on Twitter @DrFloros, so please contact me if you have any thoughts about the show or ideas for topics or guests for future episodes. If you want more information on the topics covered in today's episode, please check out the bookshelf section of the podcast website, thepoliticsclassroom.org. I'm hoping to release new episodes every two weeks, so until next time, class dismissed.

Music outro: Three Goddesses by Third Age