

# DISCOURSES OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE AND POPULATION POLICIES IN TURKEY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** *In the early years of the Republic the Turkish government followed Western family values and norms, and attempted to implement population policies and programmes as part of its agenda, as they were believed to represent development and progress. The overall character of these policies was weighted towards “development”. Imposing demographic change, first through pronatalist and then through antinatalist population policies, the Republic aimed to bring the country to the forefront of developed countries. In this study I analyse the modernisation campaigns that challenged old demographic practices, the historical evolution of such policies and their impact since the beginning of the Republic.*

**Keywords:** *pronatalist population policies, antinatalist population policies, modernisation, developmental idealism.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Since the late Ottoman period Turkey has experienced extensive industrialisation and urbanisation, and governmental programmes have been implemented

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to engineer social change. Being impelled by the ideas of modernisation and the need to transform the country, the newly founded Turkish republic engaged in several reform movements. As revealed in the following words of Mustafa Kemal, the founder of the republic, Westernisation was adopted as the predominant ideology of the Republic: “All of our efforts are directed toward the establishment of a modern, therefore Western, government. Has there been a nation which has desired to be civilised, but which has not turned towards the West?”(Kemal, 1923, p.68).

In order to portray Turkey as a progressive nation, the Kemalist regime implemented modernization programmes including secular educational institutions, a new political and an administrative system as well as communication and transportation networks. The government elites’ emulation of the lifestyle patterns commonly found in the North-western societies led to the swift adoption of an urban lifestyle, to secularisation, and to widespread education. The main drive behind this wide-scale adoption of western lifestyle was the evolutionist worldview that considered the local patterns as deficient and bound to converge towards Western standards (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005).

While there was strong support for Westernisation, many people were critical of it and advocated values and norms associated with Ottoman society. This tension led to a cultural clash and on-going debates that last up to the present day. Despite this, however, Westernisation still remains the *leitmotiv* and model of change characterising Turkish modernisation (Kavas and Thornton, 2013).

In order to Westernise, the country went through the most rapid and substantial economic and social change since the turn of the twentieth century (e.g., Ortaylı, 1994; Aytaç, 1998; Aykan and Wolf, 2000). At the same time, families in Turkey changed practices, for example those concerned with marriage, divorce and fertility, ultimately rendering Turkey a “rich demographic laboratory” (Toros, 1985, p.97). For example, although marriage remains almost universal, there has been a shift in the timing of marriage. Early marriage was quite pervasive in Turkey in the nineteenth century: the average age at first marriage was 20 to 22 for men and 14 to 18 for women (Duben, 1990). The average age at marriage for men and women was relatively stable at (respectively) 26 and 22 years during the 1970s, but in the last decade it increased to around 27 for men and 24 for women (Turkish Statistical Institute, Turkstat, 2013). Furthermore, the crude divorce rate increased from 0.15 in 1930 to 0.37 in 1961. And since then it has steadily increased, reaching 0.52 during the 1990s and 1.59 in 2009 (Turkstat, 2010); the current divorce rate stands at 1.65 (Turkstat, 2013). Fertility has also changed, declining from an average of 7 children per woman (TFR) in 1930-1935, to 4.6 in 1978, to 2.7 in 1995 and to 2.14 in 2008 (TDHS, Demographic Transition in Turkey, 2008; The world bank world development indicators, 1960–2013).

This study argues that Turkey's modernisation programmes, and their underlying developmental idealism as interpreted by Thornton (Thornton, 2001; 2005) have played a crucial role in demographic changes seen in the country (Kavas and Thornton, 2013). This study illustrates the role of developmental models in demographic practices, as well as discourses in Turkey. In particular, the study examines the influence of the developmental model on policies connected with fertility, which were carried out both in the early and the later phases of the Republic. Of particular concern, is examination of academic discourses regarding these demographic changes, since scholars' perspectives have important repercussions for the early and later population policies.

The article begins with a brief introduction to the theory of developmental idealism and the perspectives and attitudes of Turkish scholars *vis-à-vis* demographic changes and the family. I then discuss the ways in which the ideas of development relate to Turkey's experience of population policies since the foundation of the Turkish republic. Finally, I conclude the paper clarifying what role population policies and programmes have played in modernisation campaigns since the early Republican period.

## 2 THE THEORY OF DEVELOPMENTAL IDEALISM

Developmental idealism is a model of social change which draws on a developmental paradigm that has been prevalent in Western thinking from the Enlightenment period of the eighteenth century to the present. The paradigm suggests that social change is natural, imperative and directional and that all societies experience change and development (Burrow, 1981; Nisbet, 1969). With this paradigm in mind, Thornton argues that Western scholars have depicted societies as developing from traditional and backwards to modern and civilized, usually placing North-western European societies at the highest level and non-Western societies at various lower levels of the developmental hierarchy (Thornton 2001; 2005). This hierarchical thinking is no doubt associated with the colonialist paradigm, where Eurocentric perspectives reconfigured a new rhetoric of a 'civilisational slope' (Melegh, 2006, p.97; also see Melegh et al., 2013). In this civilisational slope the West was placed at zenith of the developmental ladder.

Moreover, these Western scholars studied societies comparatively and cross-sectionally rather than focusing on a single society, an approach that Thornton conceptualises as *reading history sideways*. These Western scholars believed that they could use this method of historiography to explain different forms of families across countries and the nature of developmental trajectories across time (Thornton, 2005). For example, they observed that the family systems of North-western Europe were quite different from societies outside of

Europe, in the sense that families in non-Western societies were usually extended with strong family solidarity, parental authority and arranged marriages. By contrast, families in North-western European societies were nuclear, more individualistic, with less parental authority, more affection and usually non-arranged marriages. Scholars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries believed that “there had been a family transition that had changed European families from being like the traditional world outside of Northwest Europe to being like the modern families of Northwest Europe” (Thornton, Binstock and Ghimire, 2004, p.5). So using a developmental paradigm and a historical model known as reading history sideways, they concluded that non-Western societies would develop into an ideal, Western form, characterised as modern and progressive.

Developmental idealism provides beliefs and values which suggest that modern society characterised by urbanisation, industrialisation, a high level of education, technology and wealth, etc., is desirable and attainable. It also exerts an influence on family systems and patterns, suggesting that modern families should adopt individualism, freely chosen marriages, gender equality and planned and low fertility. As it stands, developmental idealism provides policy makers and lay people with new methods and means of attaining these ideals.

Thornton argues that many notions connected with developmental idealism are increasingly accepted by policy makers, government elites, non-governmental organisations as well as lay people around the World, and that they have become powerful forces for social change (Thornton, 2010). Many factors, including education, mass media, social movements, foreign aid, the United Nations, and government and non-government programmes have been influential in spreading developmental idealism and making it an international phenomenon (Thornton, 2012). Particularly important for our purposes here are the international family planning programmes. Family planning advocates have energetically emphasised the importance of development and fertility control (Barrett and Frank, 1999). Importantly, to the extent that many of the elements of developmental idealism have become known and accepted, they have become a crucial drive for institutional and behavioural change (Binstock et al., 2013). A burgeoning literature, including survey research and individual studies conducted in various places around the world, exhibits the level of acceptance of the ideas of developmental idealism. For instance, recent survey research in Argentina, China, Egypt, Iran, Malawi, Nepal, Turkey, and the United States indicates that many individuals associate development with self-choice marriages, inter-generational independence, gender equality and low fertility, (Abbasi-Shavazi et al., 2012; Binstock and Thornton, 2007; Thornton et al., 2008; Thornton et al., 2012a; 2012b; 2012c; Kavas and Thornton, 2013; Allendorf, 2013; Allendorf and Thornton, 2015).

Here, I argue that developmental idealism is a useful perspective for understanding the shifting public policies Turkey has experienced. I describe how the message of developmental idealism – that small families facilitate the development of a nation – became a prevalent discourse in Turkey and an important force for family planning programmes in Turkey.

A caveat needs to be noted regarding the present study. The main weakness of this study is insufficient empirical data. I discuss two shifts in population policies and their impact on fertility change in Turkey on the basis of secondary analysis of research conducted at the relevant periods and also on the basis of discourses including speeches and legal reforms. Despite this inability to document empirically all the elements in the argument, I believe that the argument stated throughout this paper shows that developmental thinking is an important factor that needs to be taken into account to understand and explain the motives behind population policies in Turkey. Nevertheless, more research with a wider variety of empirical and archival data is needed to improve our understanding of the historical context, and the demographic processes during which population policies were implemented. I now turn to discussion of developmental thinking among Turkish scholars and how these discourses can be confronted with demographic processes themselves.

### 3 DEVELOPMENTAL IDEALISM IN SCIENTIFIC DISCOURSES

In Turkish demographic discourse one perspective was particularly dominant: a strong belief in modernisation theories, which took an evolutionist and developmental tone with regard to social change (see Kongar, 1972; 1976; Kıray, 1964; Yasa, 1969; Şahinkaya, 1966; Berkes, 1942). In doing so, these scholars followed Western scholars of the Enlightenment period who, having a distinct mode of developmental thinking, constructed trajectories of development or change from what they saw as the least to the most developed societies. They did so by assuming that contemporary societies they considered more developed, at some time in the past, had the same social and cultural features as the contemporary societies they considered as less developed. Following the same pattern, they believed that in the future a society currently characterised as less developed would become similar to the present society considered to be developed (see Thornton, 2001; 2005). Quite in line with this thinking, many sociologists in Turkey evaluated the changes Turkish families were experiencing as evolutionary processes of inevitable and natural change. As Kandiyoti (1985, p.33) states “the early comparative studies on family patterns in developing countries tended to attribute the increasing predominance of the nuclear family to the transition from a rural society to a modernizing urban-industrial one”. These scholars believed that the historical Turkish family was the tradi-

tional family characterised by extended family forms, with couples having many children and generations living together under the same roof. They believed this kind of family would change as the country modernised over time. For example, as the country became increasingly developed and urbanised, it was expected that extended family would be replaced by the nuclear family (see Kongar, 1972; Kıray, 1964; Yasa, 1969; Şahinkaya, 1966; Berkes, 1942). In the following quotation, a prominent social scientist, Kongar, associated modernity and the nuclear family form, reporting findings from surveys he carried out in Izmir:

That the predominant family form of Izmir is the nuclear family can be accepted as clear sign of the modernisation of the city. Other cities, which are relatively traditional when compared to Izmir, tend to follow an extended family form. This particular fact indicates that the family in Turkey goes through an evolutionary line of progress from the traditionally extended family to *famille souche* and then to nuclear family. This structural change is similar to what Levy pointed to when he analysed Turkish family forms. (Kongar, 1972, p.65) (English translation is Author's own).

Elsewhere, Kongar (1976) also uses the phrase progressive nuclear family (*çağdaş çekirdek aile*) to describe the nuclear family. We see similar labeling expressed by another scholar, Şahinkaya (1966) who uses the phrase 'modern democratic family form' to depict the nuclear family. Kongar's study is a quintessential example of the use of a teleological and evolutionist standpoint in examining family structures and arrangements in a certain context. His survey findings clearly reinforce the popular discourse of the time that extended families are traditional families and that they are inevitably and indispensably subject to evolving into nuclear family form as the country becomes more industrialised and urbanised. In fact he reiterates the word 'evolution' while he is describing the process of change:

At the last stage of its evolution, we come to see nuclear families that consist of father, mother and children... it is the end product of industrialisation. It is clear that Turkish families are also following this universal pattern, ...in societies with high technology, with resources and properties unequally distributed, income and other exogenous factors causes families to change. The tendency for nuclearisation in Izmir's families, for this particular reason, is a significant matter (Kongar, 1972, p.135). (English translation is Author's own).

However, nationwide surveys and individual studies introduce a different perspective and raise the question of whether or not the traditional Ottoman

family, characterised time and again by extended family and high fertility, really did exist. A notable part of the literature suggests that the family thus characterised was not a norm as such (Ortaylı, 1994; Özbay, 1985; Kandiyoti, 1985; Timur, 1972; Duben, 1985). As many scholars came to acknowledge, the patriarchal extended family (with generations living together permanently) was not prevalent, even in rural Anatolia, let alone being a norm in the urban hinterland of the empire (Özbay, 1985; Timur, 1972; Duben, 1985). Findings of a 1968 survey conducted by Timur attests to this: while the nuclear family was predominant among agricultural workers at 79 percent, it was around 70 percent in the urban setting. Moreover, for Vergin (1984) unlike what was frequently stated, it was the nuclear family that was the chief form in Turkish society as a whole (Vergin, 1985; Duben and Behar, 2002). A final statement comes from a leading sociologist, Özbay (1985, p.58), who stated that the likelihood that the patriarchal extended family, consisting of three generations living together with the eldest male acting as the family head, is quite low even during the precapitalist era, when the patriarchal system was dominant.

Moreover, Duben and Behar (2002) note that fertility was low even in the early nineteenth century, with the total fertility rate standing at 3.9. Duben and Behar (2002) also draw attention to the somewhat surprising fact that families in Istanbul were practicing birth control as early as 1860s.

Although extended family forms with high fertility and inter-generational living might have been fairly common in the past, the over-generalisation and attribution of a static character to the family (rather than families) reveals the influence of modernisation theories on scholars' views of past family forms in Turkey (Vergin, 1984). In this way the perspectives of Turkish scholars were similar to Western scholars of the eighteenth century, who, as Thornton argues, constructed a developmental hierarchy and portrayed societies as moving through this hierarchy from traditional to modern. This conceptual schema influenced the ways scholars studied families in history. As noted, they studied societies comparatively and cross-sectionally at one point in time and assumed that "at some time in the past the most developed nations had been like their less developed contemporaries and that, assuming continued progress, at some point in the future the least developed nations would become like their more advanced neighbors" (Thornton, Binstock and Ghimire, 2004, p.5) As noted, in many ways Turkish scholars, in their aspiration to modernise the country, were depicting the Turkish family as being in transition. This was a transition from a traditional, past and 'imperfect' state to an advanced and modern family. This mode of thinking can be further illustrated by the following quotation from a Turkish demographer, who views the Turkish fertility transition as being at an incomplete stage and maintains that with the current state of fertility Turkey represents the state of European countries in the 1970s:

Turkey has the highest fertility rate among the EU countries. As it stands, Turkey reminds us of the 29 states' (25 members and 4 candidate states) situations in the 1970s in terms of fertility... if we remember the fact that the average total fertility rate among the EU member states is 1.5, it becomes necessary to come to terms with the fact that the issue of fertility will inevitably stall Turkey's progress toward integration with EU states (Özgür, 2004, p.10). (English translation is Author's own.)

As the quotation indicates, Turkish scholars, by applying a developmental model to the family structure, were, in a way, following in the steps of Western scholars and reading history sideways. In the following sections I will illustrate this particular developmental and modernist view as appearing both in scientific discourses and also in the history of population policies since the foundation of Turkish republic.

It is common for population experts to use the demographic transition model as a benchmark for evaluating demographic changes in Turkey. Accordingly, Turkey is about to complete its fertility transition and "is moving toward an advanced stage of its fertility transition" (Yavuz, 2005; also see Özgür, 2004). Importantly, demographers consider it necessary for Turkey to follow the demographic transition model in order to join the ranks of developed countries, regardless of the fact that the demographic transition model, in reality, is a mere projection of an idealised state of population change in a country. To take an example from one demographic expert:

Turkey has gone a long way from being a closed village society in the early twentieth century with high fertility, and an agricultural mode of production, with the majority of the population illiterate; an introverted society. At the turn of the twentieth century, Turkey has managed to become a society which has completed its demographic transition. The majority of the population lives in urban areas, its family structure has been transformed, and it has diversified its cultural mosaic. Agricultural transformation has been accomplished and modernisation has been achieved (Atauz, 2003).

As seen quite clearly in the example above, there is a remarkable consensus among demographers and population experts that demographic transition is also a transition to a better world. This way of thinking clearly reveals the underlying ideological assumption that limiting population growth would help achieve socio-economic development (see Thornton et al., 2012; Thornton, 2005).



#### 4 DEVELOPMENTAL ELEMENTS IN POLICY MAKING

Before we move to the discussion of history of population policies since the foundation of Turkish republic, it is important to talk about the overall developmental framework shaping the actual policy making both in the pronatalist and antinatalist phases analysed below. An important characteristic of family planning programmes since the foundation of the republic was that they were all implementations of formal state policy focusing on development. Family planning reform was one axis of the process of creating the Turkish Republic (See Akşit, 2010). The state had a strong interest in determining the number of children born to a family. During the early phase of the republic, the pronatalist state encouraged population growth to counterbalance population losses resulting from successive wars that lasted for several decades. The policy here was circumstantial, sporadic and pragmatic. By 1960 the republic had achieved a significant increase in population growth, yet it continued to shape the population policies for several decades to come, this time reversing the population policy that had been stable for several decades. As we will see below, as of the 1960s, antinatalism was the formal policy and the issue of family planning was a central theme of general state policies. No doubt, imposing demographic change through first pronatalist and then antinatalist population policies, the republic aimed to bring the country to the rank of the countries they considered advanced at the time. What we can call demographic disciplining geared towards social modernisation was in place that would continue even to date. This social modernisation no doubt aimed to improve Turkey's 'ranking' in a globally competitive world. Turkey, in this respect, was embodying 'the globally framed link between demography and national positioning' (see Melegh, 2012, p.482).

It is important to note that the implementation of demographic disciplining was not a straightforward process. Many resisted family planning programmes for nationalist reasons, arguing that contraception was a Western innovation and that fertility control was inconsistent with Islamic principles. Widespread opposition continued for several decades and even to the current day, with the current president labelling family planning advocates as betrayers of the country. (Radikal, 2014. Agenda. *Radical*, 22 Dec. p9.)

Another important dimension of family planning programmes, and ensuing fertility decline in Turkey, corresponds to a perceived association between fertility control and development. A strong belief in a causal relationship between smaller family size and a higher standard of living was particularly prevalent among policy makers. It was on this basis that economists in the state planning organisation recommended the government to change its pronatalist population policies in the early 1960s (Fişek, 1965).

It was against this background that when the State Planning department was founded in 1960, one of the first attempts made was to form a new population

policy geared towards reducing what was often termed uncontrolled population growth. In fact, reducing the population growth rate became part and parcel of the five-year development plans drafted every five years by state planning departments (Metiner, 1965).

The five-year development plans conveyed explicit messages that control of population growth was crucial for social and economic well-being. In this sense, the state's population policy was drawing on a developmental paradigm that one can find examples of in UN reports or, if we want to go back in history, Thomas Malthus's policy recommendations. Reducing total fertility rates as well as the general population growth rate was presented as necessary for both economic and social transformation. For example, the eighth five-year plan stated that population dynamics are strongly associated with economic activities, distribution of natural sources and technological development. In the seventh five-year plan population decline was found to be insufficient, as a result retarding sustainable economic development by increasing the demand for infrastructure, housing and education (Hoşgör and Tansel, 2010). In a similar fashion, a Turkish demographer's use of a developmental tone in the following statement evinces the tendency among professionals to form an association between development and demographic change. The way population control and agricultural and industrial development is juxtaposed is particularly telling:

*“Surely a great problem of mankind in our time is to raise the standard of living in the developing countries, partly in order to achieve and maintain peace. Population control is one of most effective means of attaining this goal, along with the increase of agricultural and industrial production.”* (Fişek 1965, p.298).

Turkey's bid to join the European Union coupled with a commitment to United Nations policy recommendations and action programmes also influenced Turkey's population policies. The recommendations and agreements reached at United Nations' conferences and, in particular, the population and development objectives and actions, reinforces the perceived association between population and development. The 1994 International conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo, is a quintessential example in that it explicitly states that issues of development and population cannot be considered in isolation:

*“The 1994 Conference was explicitly given a broader mandate on development issues than previous population conferences, reflecting the growing awareness that population, poverty, patterns of production and consumption and the environment are so closely interconnected.”* (ICPD, 1994).

## 5 POPULATION POLICIES IN TURKEY: PRONATALIST POPULATION POLICIES TILL THE 1960S

The newly founded Turkish republic aimed to “revitalise” the nation. In addition to abject poverty, natural catastrophes and hopelessness in the aftermath of successive wars, one major problem, no doubt, was population decline. Successive wars, including the Balkan wars (1912–1913), the First World War (1914–1918) and War of Independence (1919–1922), led to high mortality and morbidity not only as a result of the conflicts themselves, but because of widespread epidemics in the population. Bleak circumstances reduced the male population and exacerbated poverty especially in the rural hinterland (Taeuber, 1958; Akın and Aykut, 2011). It was reported that in 1927, three years after the foundation of the republic, the population of Turkey was 13.6 million. The sharp reduction in the male population and the ensuing labour shortage impeded both agricultural and industrial endeavours, hindering the newly founded republic’s ability to make the great economic leap that it was energetically seeking (Metiner, 1965; Silier, 1981; Özbay, 1985; Akın and Aykut, 2011). It was against this background that a heated debate about increasing the population of the new republic came to the fore. Mustafa Kemal voiced his concern several times in his public speeches. The following words from his speech evince his concern:

It is our aim to protect our nation’s state of health and to make our nation even healthier, to decrease the mortality rate, to make population increase possible and to combat epidemics. By doing all these things, we aim to render our citizens strong and healthy and capable of work. (Speech in the Assembly, March 1922). (English translation is Author’s own).

While Atatürk’s speeches were, no doubt, setting the stage for pronatalist population policies that would continue for more than 40 years, it is important to state that this “climate of pronatalism” was not solely peculiar to Turkey. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, population growth was promoted as an asset for the nation states – large nation states were considered to be strong nation states (Barret and Frank, 1999). Moreover, as previously noted, just like Turkey many other war-torn nations were in favour of boosting fertility to counterbalance the human loss resulting from wars. Hence, in an era when most nations including France, Germany and East European states were taking pride in having a large population, the Turkish Republic, following in the footsteps of especially east European countries was also joining in the movement to boost the birth rate.

It is important to note that this political attitude, in many ways, was somewhat different from the North-western developmental model which was not necessarily marked by pronatalism at the time. In fact it is possible to read this sentiment as a twisted reaction to the ideology of North-western developmental model. To be more specific, the pronatalist model Turkish republic energetically implemented was more in line with East European nationalism which promoted the idea of building larger nations through stimulating birth rate (see Barret and Frank, 1999). In any event, promoting population growth was part of the reform plans to develop the country. As Melegh (2012, p.482.) states, throughout history population management was largely carried out so as to advance the nation through demographic revival:

“In other words, demographic policy was framed and organised by various considerations of how the nation could be ‘revitalised’, made ‘healthy’ and ‘normal’ or could be advanced with regard to greater powers and/or ‘civilised’ nations.”

Toward this end, in an effort to catch up with Western nations, the Republic prepared to implement additional measures including bringing people back from the Turkish diaspora, as indicated in the following piece by Mustafa Kemal:

“The population of the nation is at present at a very regrettable level. I believe the population of the whole of Anatolia does not exceed eight million people. Now our aim is to compensate for this population loss. As you all know, to compensate for population loss many medical and social measures are required, but we will implement whatever measures are required. If necessary, we will invite foreign experts to help guide us to achieve this. Yet in addition to that, we need to bring people with whom we have common race, language and culture from other countries and provide them with a healthy and prosperous life. It is only when we take these measures that we will manage to have a large nation. This nation is twice that of Europe; in Germany there are just 70 million people... this nation is so big that with the increasing population, it will thrive soon” (1923, quoted in: İnan, 1982). (English translation is Author’s own).

Towards this end, preparations, particularly on the legal front, launched the movement. The law titled Umumi Hıfzısıhha (public hygiene) was among the leading laws that promoted population growth, which had already become a formal policy of the Turkish government as early as 1930s (Fişek and Shorter, 1968). Within the framework of this law, the sale and use of contraceptives was

prohibited except for medical reasons or emergency. For example, an oral tablet was allowed for gynecological disorders (Özbay and Shorter, 1970). Needless to say, educating or raising consciousness about family planning was also strictly forbidden. The law provided financial incentives for families to have at least six children. Lower income taxes for parents with many children and a childcare allowance for state officers were examples of the financial stimulus provided.

It is important to note that promotion of population increase was successful. Relatively better economic conditions, a gradual extension of health protection, as well as a reduction in mortality, played a significant role in helping achieve the much desired population growth of the new nation (Metiner, 1965). As seen in the table below, when the republic reached the 1950s, the national population had already more than doubled with rapid population growth rate being 21.7‰ in 1950 alone. The total fertility rate increased from 5.5 to 7 children per woman and stood at around 7 during 1930s. Moreover, life expectancy at birth increased from 35 years to 45 years (Eryurt and Koç, 2012).

Table 1  
*Population growth rate every five years between the years 1935–1965 (‰)*

Years	Population	Population growth rate, ‰
1935	16,158,018	21.1
1940	17,820,950	17.0
1945	18,790,174	10.6
1950	20,947,188	21.7
1955	24,064,763	27.8
1960	27,754,820	28.5
1965	31,391,421	24.6

*Source:* Turkstat-Statistical indicators 1923–2013.

In the absence of historical data, it is not possible to disentangle the impact of pronatalist campaigns and incentives on the ascent in fertility during the early phase of the Republic. However, it is safe to say that with the vigorous population campaigns it is quite likely that it had at least some effects on people's motivation to have more children. Moreover, according to demographers some of the factors involved in the process of population increase were a notable decline in mortality rate, ever-increasing fertility, and a positive migration balance though at a very low rate (Cerit, 1983; Peker, 1983; Metiner, 1965; Gürtan, 1966). Although the population increased continuously from the time that it was first enumerated (1927), a slowdown was observed in 1935–1940, which can be attributed to physical and social conditions during the Second

World War. In any event, what one can say is that a steady population growth is evident, emanating in particular from high fertility and decreasing mortality.

An important determinant of high fertility since the early phase of the Republic was, no doubt, early marriage. In 1935 alone, the average age at first marriage for the urban women was 20.8 (Turkstat, 2006). With early marriage and contraceptive use forbidden, perhaps even unheard of for the rural women, and with government campaigns and incentives to have children energetically implemented, it is no wonder that an upward trend in fertility occurred.

## 6 ANTINATALIST POPULATION POLICIES SINCE THE 1960's

The pronatalist policies were implemented for four decades. After decades of extensive campaigning to drive people to have more children, the pronatalist government changed its population policy entirely in the 1950s for a number of reasons.

Many factors were involved in this change, the chief one among them was a shift in the government's population policy in favour of family planning, beginning as early as the 1960s. Turkey's experience was no different from that of many developing countries around the world, including Egypt, India, South Korea, Albania and Mongolia, where political elites expressed concern that the rapid rate of population growth had been holding back their prospects for socio-economic development (See United Nations Population Division Report, 2002). These governments supported policies and programmes that had an effect on fertility. Especially since the early 1950s with the advancement of the family planning industry, they increasingly supported services providing modern, contraceptive methods (*ibid.*). This neo-Malthusian approach was not uncontested, and several countries and blocks of countries opposed these policies, leading to well-known debates of which the best known was at the Population Conference of the UN at Bucharest in 1974.

Turkey was among the countries that considered its population growth rate too high. There were already reactions and heated debates among policy makers, civil initiatives and universities working against 'population overflow' and the unintended consequences of this growth from as early as 1958 (Peker, 1983). The adverse effects of population growth, such as unplanned urbanisation, an increasing unemployment rate in urban areas and health care problems, (particularly as concerns maternal health and infant mortality, which was as high as 165 per thousand,) were among the hotly debated issues. Moreover, one particular highlighted issue was the rapid increase in illegal abortions, which had become pervasive and was even employed as a form of birth control. In rural areas, in particular, half of all maternal mortality was a result of induced abortions, which was taken as the sole means of terminating an unwanted preg-

nancy (Akın and Aykut, 2011). As one would expect, it soon became common for many obstetricians to perform induced abortions as a side-job, even though the act was criminalised by the penal code (*ibid.*).

*“All these factors have an extremely significant soaring effect on the ability of Turkey to modernize, as outlined in the three five-year-plans – from 1962 to 1977.”* (Metiner, 1965, p.135.)

It was against this background that the family planning programme of Turkey gained ground. In many ways the process to initiate fertility control programmes was realised with the help of international agencies. In 1963 the Turkish government solicited assistance from the Population Council, to conduct a nationwide survey to investigate people’s attitudes to a nationwide family planning programme. This demand gave way to Turkey’s first ever survey on knowledge, attitudes and the practices of family planning (KAP Survey) conducted by staff from the Turkish Ministry of Health and an international research team from the Population Council. The findings of the survey revealed a high level of interest and positive reactions towards birth control practices and to the family planning programme in general. Moreover, the survey showed that people who participated in the study had very limited knowledge of contraceptive methods, with 43 percent of couples stating that they have no idea about how to avoid having a child. Importantly, perhaps, preparations to initiate a solid programme gained momentum in the aftermath of the publication of the findings. Over the course of the next year, a number of Turkish staff were sent to the United States to be trained in family planning, and experts from the Population Council assisted the Turkish team in implementing the programme.

A legal framework soon accompanied the preparations. In 1965 a new law was drafted by the government and was passed in the parliament repealing previous laws, which forbade the sale, use and distribution of contraception. The law stated that “individuals can have as many children as they want and the individuals will be free to use birth control practices to control their family size.” (*Population Planning Act 1965*. (no.557) Istanbul: Official Gazette of The Republic Turkey, 10 April.)

Following this legal support, a Family Planning Division was established within the Ministry of Health. Information about birth control and services for the provision of birth control devices were established. For example, maternal health centres were primarily responsible for educating people in every region of the country about birth control measures. Intra-uterine devices were provided free of charge. In 1967 abortion was decriminalised and the use of abortion was justified for a range of medical reasons. Further legislation on abortion came in 1983, when the criteria for a lawful abortion were expanded and tied to some preconditions such as obligation to have it undertaken at a public hospital, with the husband’s consent (for married women) and determining the legal limit for termination as the first ten weeks of pregnancy.

It is important to note that religion was also instrumental in supporting birth control. The fact that Islam does not prohibit limiting the size of couples' families, and that it even provides an "ideological underpinning for child limitation for Muslim Turkey throughout history" (Duben and Behar, 2002, p.4.), was a relief for policy makers because convincing people to act against religion would have been difficult in the path towards disciplining the demographic behaviour of the populace.

## 7 FERTILITY CHANGE IN TURKEY SINCE THE 60's

The spread of developmental thinking and an intense state campaign to spread use and knowledge of family planning practices since 1965 soon came to fruition. In 1978 women who were using a modern contraceptive represented 34 per cent of the population, which would soon rise to 51 per cent of women in 1983 (Ortaylı, 1989). Contraceptive use is now widespread, with 92 percent of ever-married women having used a contraceptive method some point during their reproductive years and 74 percent of currently married women using contraception (TDHS, 2013).

A notable decrease in fertility was observed which clearly corresponded to the increase in contraceptive use. In fact, Özbay and Shorter (1970) note that the transition from high to low fertility might have started in Turkey as early as the 1960s, just before the official policy change. In 1965 alone, the total fertility rate was 5.8, and this had decreased from 6.7 in 1950. A general change in population composition emanating both from internal migration and the massive emigration of young Turkish men to Western Europe are often cited as important ideational drivers behind the descent in fertility. Turkey experienced two migration patterns from the 1950s which had a significant impact on the demographic characteristics of the country. Turkish labour emigration to Europe, particularly to West Germany, could lead to late marriages and spousal separation which resulted in fertility decline (Özbay and Yücel, 2001). The fact that the workers stayed without their families and family reunion policies came only after they had spent years abroad might have had an effect on the fertility size of these families. However, it is important to note that the majority of these Turkish workers brought their families with them, settled down and did not return to their own countries (Kirisci, 2003). As such, it would not be wrong to say that emigration to Europe had a limited effect in changing fertility patterns in Turkey.

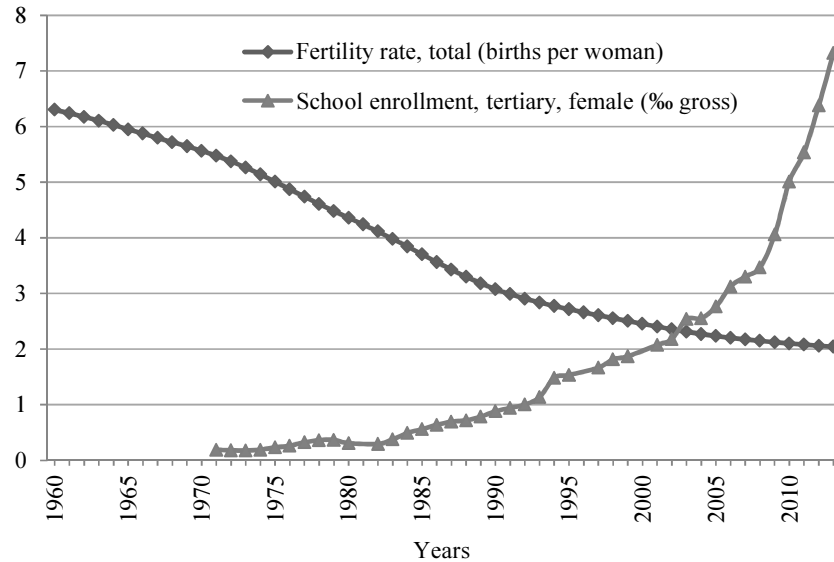
On the other hand, Turkish internal migration around the same period changed the fertility trajectory of the country to a great extent (Eryurt and Koç, 2012). First of all, the internal rural-to-urban migration led to a decrease in child mortality as a result of improved antenatal care and city hospital deliver-



ies. In addition, better health services and conditions made it easier for women to have access to contraceptive knowledge and services (Özbay and Yücel, 2001). Needless to say, urbanisation, in many ways, improved women's status in terms of both access to education and employment – and this might have been translated into more female autonomy in fertility decision making as shown by figures.

These important structural factors, no doubt, resulted in changes to fertility. Additionally, demographers commonly stress attitudinal change as the major drive behind the fertility decline. As the findings of the KAP Survey conducted in 1963 show, a majority of couples endorsed family planning and showed interest in learning about a method to practice family planning (Fişek and Shorter, 1968). This indicated that people were already receptive to the idea of limiting family size or setting up a smaller family earlier than the government's antenatalist policy (Özbay and Shorter 1970; Fişek and Shorter 1968).

Due to lack of survey data, it is difficult to disentangle the impact of all of these developments on the steady fertility decline which saw the total fertility rate drop from 7.1 children per woman in 1930, to 4.3 in 1978, to 3.1 during the late 1980s, and finally to 2.07 in 2013 (Kavas and Thornton 2013; The world bank world developmental indicators data, 1960-2013). However, it is clear that the education of women and relatedly the increasing access to contraceptives, implemented within the framework of the antinatalist policies, facilitated family planning and was the major driver of fertility decline (See *Figure 1* below). This is in line with experiences elsewhere in the world (Ergöçmen and Bozbe-yoğlu, 2005). Moreover, attitudinal factors still persist: according to the recent Turkish Demographic and Health Survey (2013), the desire for a large family has declined considerably. Among women who have two living children, 59 per cent want no more children. An important characteristic of Turkish fertility change is geographical variability. In eastern Turkey, where Kurdish populations predominate, the TFR is on average 3.3 births per woman, while in western Turkey the average fertility rate is as low as 1.7 births per woman.



Source: Author's calculation using the World Bank, World Development Indicators data.

Figure 1  
*Total Fertility Rate between 1960–2013 and Women's years  
of education between 1970 and 2013*

## 8 CONCLUSION

Concern with population growth has occupied the political agenda of Turkish governments for several decades now. Many countries have adopted policies to modify population growth and to improve family well-being. Since the 1960s, the Turkish government has joined other states in supporting family planning as part of its development plans.

Believing that Western family values and norms represent development and progress, the Turkish government attempted to implement population policies and programmes. The main characteristic of these policies was that they were all conducted with a developmental mindset. Importantly, population policies implemented since the early Republican period have acted as a channel whereby developmental ideas have penetrated far into society. With extensive population campaigns and discourses people have been exposed to notions prevalent in Western countries. In many ways, Turkish people have learnt that large population means national welfare and later the state-led fertility control

programme thought them that overpopulation impedes development of the country. With these and other related approaches developmental idealism prevailed the common discourse and have had a potential impact on people's fertility behaviours for several decades.

During the period when antinatalist policies were implemented, the Turkish political elite and intellectuals believed in a causal relationship between lowering fertility and achieving a higher standard of living. With a modernist stance, they believed that fertility decline was an end product of socio-economic transformation (See Thornton 2005, p.76.). Following the fertility decline experienced by European states, they thought that Turkey was antiquated and that family practices would change in Turkey along European lines as the country advanced. Following this line of thinking, Turkish elites and scholars illustrated a mode of historical analysis that Thornton (2005) identifies as Reading History Sideways.

All in all, since it was ratified by parliament in 1965, the government has made concerted and repeated efforts to lower fertility around the country. Even though the present ruling government supports a high population growth rate for Turkey and the current president advocates that couples should have at least three children, family planning remains at the core of public policy.

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