

The Unintended Consequences of Nation-Making Institutions for Civil Society Development

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ABSTRACT

A dominant idea in the literature is that civil society development tends to decrease with statism and be higher in liberal democracies. Our study argues that statist institutions do not necessarily crowd out civic associations and may even foster civil society development. To develop and test our argument, we use the case of the People's Houses, one of the major social projects of early Republican Turkey modeled after its counterparts of the era. We find that the local existence of the People's Houses has a detectable effect on present-day associational mobilization. First, drawing on qualitative evidence, we explain how the People's Houses' organizational structure contributed to developing vibrant associational infrastructure and organizational skills. We then use an original dataset that draws on archival data on the People's Houses' locations as well as an original web-scraped dataset on the present-day civic associations located across 970 districts, showing a robust and positive relationship between the People's Houses and the number of present-day local associations.

Keywords: Civil society; nation-making; state politics; political development; education

Introduction

Most new countries that break away from a major empire or gain independence from a colonial power grapple with the challenge of creating new state-sponsored national attachments and loyalties under the banner of a shared identity. Usually, “it is the state that forms the nation, not vice versa” (Esherick *et al.*, 2006, p. 27). Indeed, history has witnessed a multitude of top-down and state-initiated campaigns to forge a nation from disparate groups through time and space. While most European countries took steps to homogenize their populations in the 19th century through the expansion of public education facilities, which forced the use of a common language and built infrastructure for more accessible travel and communication, countries such as the Soviet Union, Germany, and China each undertook incredible nation-building efforts in the early 20th century (Alesina and Reich, 2013; Tilly, 1975; Weber, 1976). Although the exact channels through which efforts of homogenizing and unifying were taken varied, the governing elites considered nation-building activities vital to ensuring internal stability and silencing independence movements of ethnoreligious minorities.¹

Turkey is no exception. With the Republic of Turkey’s proclamation in 1923, the new regime attempted to change from the multiethnic and Islamist Ottoman Empire’s ruins to a thoroughly modern and secular nation-state. Following most other regimes which sought to create loyal subjects through a comprehensive nation-building program, the new government prioritized primary and popular education to win the hearts and minds of the masses and to indoctrinate them into its ideology (Alesina and Reich, 2013; Gellner, 2008; Paglayan, 2017).

Established in 1932, an important institution that became the new regime’s headquarters of popular education, propaganda, and indoctrination was the People’s Houses (*Halkevleri*), which, through educational and entertainment channels, sought to improve the minds and morals of the masses and to create social and cultural unity (Karpat, 1963; Lamprou, 2015). Modeled after the *Dopolavoros* in Italy and *Narodnye Domas* in the Soviet Union, the People’s Houses were similar to institutions of indoctrination in other revolutionary and authoritarian regimes in the early 20th century (Bozdoğan, 2001). Soon after their inception, the People’s Houses became important centers of social and cultural life in Turkish towns. By 1948, a total of 469 People’s Houses were in operation. In 1951, with the ascendancy of the conservative Democrat Party (*Demokrat Parti*), whose power ended the single-party era, their property was confiscated, and the People’s Houses were closed.

¹On France, see Weber (1976); on Germany, see Mosse (1975); on Spain, see Quiroga (2007).

Despite the prominence of the People's Houses and other similar institutions in Turkey and other countries in the early 20th century, scholars have largely overlooked how they could continue to influence contemporary politics and development. Given the recent findings on the long-term consequences of historical institutions (Charnysh *et al.*, 2019; Dell, 2010; Michalopoulos and Papaioannou, 2013), it would be surprising if such a fundamental element of the propaganda and indoctrination toolbox had no long-term effect on current political or economic outcomes.

In this paper, we show that the local existence of the People's Houses — an institution that was abolished 70 years ago — had a persistent effect on contemporary civil society development. First, drawing on qualitative evidence, we illustrate that the modus operandi of the People's Houses contributed to strengthening networks between local residents and developing an intellectual infrastructure needed for creating and maintaining civil society institutions. We then empirically show the positive relationship between the People's Houses and the development of civil society organizations using an original dataset that draws on archival data on the People's Houses' locations, as well as an original dataset on present-day civic associations located across 970 districts in Turkey. We find that there is a robust and positive relationship between the existence of the People's Houses and the number of the present-day local associations, controlling for a comprehensive set of control variables, including literacy rate, public education infrastructure, population, economic development (as proxied by nightlights density), nationalist vote share, Islamist vote share, public service infrastructure, and distance from the capital.

A hard-case test where we look at the relationship between these state-introduced institutions of secular propaganda and the current distribution of Islamist associations further increases our confidence in our findings: we find a statistically significant and positive relationship between the People's Houses and current Islamist associations. We also demonstrate that it is unlikely that this relationship is driven by the confounding effect of any omitted political variables. While the People's Houses have a strong positive relationship with Islamist associations, they do not predict the Islamist vote share in the 1970s or the conservative vote share in the 2000s. These findings suggest that while the People's Houses equipped people with organizational skills necessary to develop civil society institutions, they had no persistent impact on the political outcomes they were designed to shape, such as support for political parties with secular ideology.

This paper has substantial implications for our understanding and study of historical institutions, civil society development, and social capital. Civil society development is regarded as a critical determinant of democracy, good governance, and economic and social development (Berman, 1997; Diamond, 1994; Paxton, 2002; Putnam, 2000; Putnam *et al.*, 1994; White, 1994). While most work in the civil society literature focuses on its implications for democracy

and development, fewer studies explain variations in the strength of civil society (Howard and Howard, 2003; Lipset, 1959; Putnam *et al.*, 1994; Schofer and Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2001). A dominant idea among these studies is that civil society development tends to decrease with statism and be, in general, higher in liberal democracies. Our paper joins this body of scholarship by arguing that statism does not necessarily crowd out associationism, and its institutions, albeit unintentionally, may foster civil society development. Additionally, existing work in the literature focuses on the political consequences of civil society development (Berman, 1997; Paxton, 2002; Putnam *et al.*, 1994). However, they provide little explanation and systematic evidence for subnational variations in the level of associational involvement.² Our findings suggest that historical institutions that help equip people with social capital and organizational skills are significantly persistent in shaping the subnational variations in contemporary civic associations, even if they no longer exist.

Apart from contributing to research on the varying levels of social capital and civic associations, this analysis also shows that extensive nation-building efforts do not necessarily bode well for the prospects of indoctrination of a specific ideology. Our findings suggest that the People's Houses, institutions created to promote secular and Western agenda, lead to increased religious activism while not affecting the political attitudes. Given the prevalence of similar institutions in other contexts, such as Italy and the Soviet Union, our findings illuminate the possible persistent political (null) effects of popular indoctrination centers in settings beyond Turkey.

Historical Background

The Turkish Revolution

Following the Ottoman Empire's defeat in World War I (WWI), the Allied Powers' occupation and partition of the country prompted multiple local resistance organizations by the Muslim population in Anatolia. In May 1919, Mustafa Kemal, a former Ottoman military officer, started attempts to draw together the disparate local groups into a unified national movement. Ultimately, most Ottoman generals and their troops, who almost uniformly supported the resistance, smuggled guns and ammunition from the Ottoman army and joined the unified local forces in Anatolia. With the British occupation of Istanbul in March 1920, representatives elected by the local branches of the resistance movement were joined by some of the former members of the Ottoman parliament and formed the Great National Assembly in Ankara (Zürcher, 2017). Following numerous military victories, the Turkish resistance army expelled Greek, British, Italian, and French armies by late 1922. Members

²For a notable exception, see Cirone (2018), who argues urbanization caused increases in political mobilization through associations in the French Third Republic.

of the parliament in Ankara abolished the Ottoman Sultanate in November 1922 and negotiated a peace treaty with the Allies in July 1923. The Grand National Assembly officially proclaimed the Republic on October 29, 1923, which marked the beginning of the Republican People's Party's (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (CHP)) single-party rule until 1950. Mustafa Kemal became the Republic of Turkey's first president.

The announcement of the Republic was followed by a comprehensive series of top-down secularization and modernization reforms. In 1924, the parliament abolished the caliphate, the ministry of Sharia law, and religious seminaries. The religious shrines were closed down the following year. In 1926, Sharia courts were annulled and replaced by the Swiss civil code and the Italian penal code (Azak, 2010). The government removed the second article of the 1924 Constitution, which proclaimed Islam the state's official religion, and the Latin alphabet was substituted for the Arabic script in 1928. Eventually, these reforms planted the seeds of secular movements that would attempt to push religion out of public life in the Middle East in the 20th century.³

After 1923, Turkey was religiously more homogeneous than the pre-WWI Ottoman Empire, but the remaining Muslim population was ethnolinguistically and culturally more fractured, partly due to the Muslim Ottoman migrations from lost territories. In addition to Kurdish Muslims who lived under the Ottoman Empire's rule and made up almost 20% of the post-WWI population of the country, it was estimated that between 1856 and 1914, more than 7 million immigrants, including Greek, Serbian, Macedonian, and Bosnian Muslims, came to Anatolia (Akgündüz, 1998). In 1924, as a result of the population exchange between Greece and Turkey, 350,000 more Muslims migrated from Greece.⁴

During the War of Independence, the resistance movement emphasized religion as the tie that binds these ethnically and culturally disparate groups to create a 'rally around the flag' effect and encourage different factions of the Muslim community to participate in the resistance movement against the West. However, in the absence of an Islamist state with a ruling caliph, the first time since the caliphate was claimed by the Ottoman Sultan in 1539, it was increasingly challenging to depend on Islam to unify and stabilize these diverse populations (Azak, 2010).

Unsurprisingly, radical reforms also generated considerable resentment and backlash among religious conservatives. In 1925, for example, an armed

³Other examples of assertive secularism include Iran under the Pahlavis (1925–1978), Tunisia under Bourguiba and Ben-Ali (1957–2011), Egypt under Nasser (1952–70), and Baathist Iraq (1968–2003).

⁴According to the census of 1927, there was a sizeable group who did not speak Turkish. That year, 86.42% of the people spoke Turkish, and 13.58% spoke other languages, such as Kurdish, Arabic, Greek, Armenian, Bosnian, and Judeo-Spanish (İstatistik Umum Müdürlüğü, 1928).

revolt organized by a Kurdish Sheikh as a nationalist and reactionary Islamist movement aimed to restore the Sharia broke out in the Eastern provinces, followed by 13 other local flare-ups until 1930 (Çağaptay, 2006, p. 21).⁵ Similarly, in 1930, a group of dervishes initiated a riot by rallying an armed crowd against the policies of the secular government and calling for the restoration of the Sharia and the Caliphate, where the rioters ultimately beheaded the commanding officer of the responding squad (Zürcher, 2017).⁶ Consequently, the government took drastic and draconian measures to crush the antirevolutionary insurgency by implementing martial law and silencing the growing political opposition.⁷

These incidents alarmed the ruling elite about the new regime's unpopularity among the citizens and the secularizing reforms' failure to take root among the people. Thus, at the beginning of 1931, when the rebellions and the political opposition were firmly repressed, the government shifted its attention and resources to creating loyal supporters of the new regime. In other words, Turkey had been made, and it was time to create the Turks. The CHP emphasized the imperative to work on a new encompassing definition of "being Turkish" that was built on the unity of the spoken and written national language (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 139), as well as a shared history (Çağaptay, 2006, p. 45). To create a sense of unity and a common past between the ethnically heterogeneous Muslims living within the Turkish border, the Society for the Study of Turkish History, commissioned by Mustafa Kemal, worked extensively "to show that the earliest civilization had been developed by prehistoric Turks of Central Asia and thence carried to the four corners of the world" (Tachau, 1964, p. 200). Similarly, the Turkish Language Society developed a hypothesis that aimed to prove that the Turkish language was the source of the world's languages (Lewis, 1999; Tachau, 1964). The government also spent considerable effort to promote Turkish as the only spoken language, as well as the Turkification of the Kurdish, Greek, and Armenian toponyms (Aslan, 2007).

People's Houses

The CHP envisioned education as the primary instrument to spread these principles and, therefore, the nation-state project to the people.⁸ However, the party was also aware that formal education of school-aged children alone

⁵For a detailed account of the *Sheikh Said's Revolt*, see Van Bruinessen (1992, Chapter 5) and Türkmen (2021, Chapter 1).

⁶For more information on the *Menemen Incident*, see Azak (2010, Chapter 1).

⁷For more information on the multiparty politics experiment of 1930, the effects of the Great Depression on the formation of political discontent, and the Free Republican Party, see Emrence (2000).

⁸Childress (2002) presents a detailed account of the role of education in creating national identity by examining how the new Turkish national identity was presented in primary and secondary school textbooks.

appeared inadequate for a rapid and radical transformation of the hearts and minds of ordinary citizens. As Recep Peker, the Secretary-General of the CHP between 1931 and 1936, stated, the Party cadres believed “if you want to create a nation in this century, create a community on national values, you will have to create the basis of a popular education” (Lamprou, 2015, p. 27). Thus, in addition to significant investments in primary school infrastructure, changes in the curriculum to reflect new national ideals, and teacher training, the new regime founded the People’s Houses, a network of adult education and community centers where the state communicates and disseminates the constructed *Turkish* identity.⁹

In structuring this institution, the government benefited from the experiences of the one-party authoritarian regimes of the period, such as the *Dopolavoros* in Italy, the *Sokols* in Czechoslovakia, and *Narodnye Domas* in the Soviet Union (Aydın, 1996).¹⁰ On February 19, 1932, the CHP opened the People’s Houses in 14 provinces.¹¹ Forty-one new Houses opened in 1933, and followed by 25 others in 1934. By 1948, there were a total of 469 People’s Houses across the country. Figure 1 shows the geospatial distribution of the People’s Houses in 1945 across Turkey.

The CHP, through a set of bylaws published in 1932, set the modus operandi of the Houses by defining their duties, operational structure, and encouraged activities. The first article of the by laws defined the People’s Houses as a “place of gathering and work for those who feel the holy love of the homeland in their hearts and minds” (Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkası, 1932, p. 6). The rules stipulated that although anybody, independent of whether they are party members, could become a member of their local People’s House (Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkası, 1932, p. 6). However, the director of each People’s House would be appointed by the CHP to ensure maximum control and supervision of the institution. Houses, as a function of their number of members, could contain

⁹Some scholars see the Turkish Hearths, a political organization founded in the last decade of the Ottoman Empire, as a predecessor of People’s Houses (Özdemir and Aktaş, 2011; Zürcher, 2017). It was founded by Turkish intellectuals and politicians associated with Turkism and the Union and Progress Party in 1911 and remained open until around 1931 with over a hundred branches across the country, despite several years of closure during the war. According to some, Atatürk initially considered the Turkish Hearths the primary cultural and social organization to spread Republicanist ideas (Ustel, 1997). However, it was closed down in 1931, while all of its assets were transferred to CHP, presumably because the regime’s control over them was not tight enough (Zürcher, 2017). In this paper, we only focus on People’s Houses, not only because of the unavailability of systematic data on the Turkish Hearths but also because they were sponsored by a certain political movement and a faction of politicians rather than the state itself, not centered on popular education, and much more limited in scope. On the other hand, we account for the influence of nationalism in our model by adding a control variable for nationalist vote share.

¹⁰For more information on *Dopolavoro*, see De Grazia (2002); on *Sokol*, see Cornwall and Evans (2007); on *Narodnye Doma*, see Siegelbaum (1999, Chapter 11).

¹¹First houses were opened in Afyon, Ankara, Aydın, Bursa, Bolu, Çanakkale, Denizli, Diyarbakır, Eminönü (İstanbul), Eskişehir, İzmir, Konya, Malatya, and Samsun.

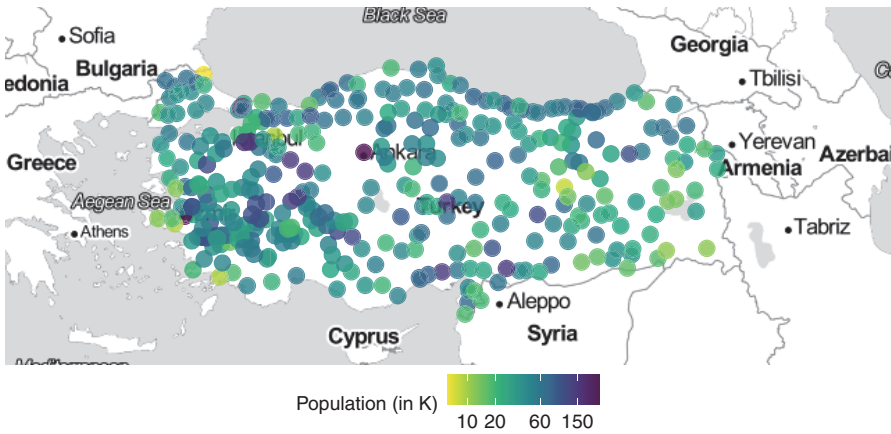


Figure 1: Locations of People's Houses by district population (1945).

up to nine branches.¹² A 1932 presidential decree signed by Mustafa Kemal “highly recommended and encouraged” school teachers and civil servants to be active participants of the Houses.¹³

The People's Houses became the center of social and cultural life in Turkey between 1932 and 1940. During this period, Houses throughout the country held 23,750 conferences, 12,350 seminars, and 9050 concerts. Furthermore, they screened 7850 films and organized 970 art exhibitions (Çavdar, 1983). By 1944, over 1.3 million readers were registered at the People's Houses' libraries (Erol, 2000). Houses also attached great importance to developing their own media organs, especially to publishing monthly magazines: in 1944, there were a total of 50 periodicals published and disseminated by various People's Houses (Taner, 1944). These publications sought to provide helpful information to the masses (on health or agriculture, for example), propagate the ideals of the Revolution, and provide advice on how to be an “ideal, modern, and national” citizen (Karpaz, 1974).¹⁴

¹²These branches were (1) language and literature; (2) fine arts; (3) theatre; (4) sports; (5) social assistance; (6) adult classes and courses; (7) library and publications; (8) village, and (9) exhibitions and museum.

¹³Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivi [BCA] CHP, 1932:30/55/15

¹⁴In the first volume of *Ülkü* (Ideal) magazine, published by the Ankara People's House between 1933 and 1950 and considered the main publication organ of the Houses, Recep Peker, Secretary-General of the CHP, explains the goals and aims of the journal: “*Ülkü* emerges to nourish the excitement of the new generation walking a path to an honorable and bright future by leaving the dark ages behind, to warm the revolutionary elements in the blood of the society. In addition, *Ülkü* is published to serve the national language, national history, national arts, and culture. *Ülkü* will work to serve all these purposes through writing.” *Ülkü*, February 1933.

However, the years that followed could not preserve the pace and excitement of the initial period due to World War II (WWII) and the growing opposition's gradual objections directed at the CHP's propaganda activities. The transition to multiparty politics in 1946 marked the beginning of a heated discussion between the CHP and the Democrat Party about the status and the future of the People's Houses. The Democrat Party heavily criticized the CHP for operating state-funded Houses as cultural and political propaganda institutions of the Party. This dispute over the status of the People's Houses, and possible alternatives to transform these institutions, continued until the accession of the Democrat Party to power in 1950. Once in power, the Democrat Party passed a bill that confiscated the property of the People's Houses. Consequently, the People's Houses were closed down in 1951.

Civil Society Development

Background

Civil society development is regarded as a critical determinant of democracy, good governance, and economic and social development (Berman, 1997; Diamond, 1994; Paxton, 2002; Putnam, 2000; Putnam *et al.*, 1994; White, 1994). While most work in civil society literature focuses on its implications for democracy and development, fewer studies explain variations in the strength of civil society. These studies provide a wide range of explanations for civil society strength, including economic development (Howell and Pearce, 2002; Lipset, 1959), structural factors (Huntington, 2000; Putnam *et al.*, 1994), and political institutions (Curtis *et al.*, 2001; Howard and Howard, 2003; Schofer and Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2001).

One major argument comes from the modernization theory, which lies on the premise that economic development leads to the growth of the middle class, whereby a more comprehensive portion of society gains education and skills necessary for civic engagement and a vibrant civil society (Howell and Pearce, 2002; Lipset, 1959). A second strand of literature, including the seminal work by Putnam *et al.* (1994), postulates the importance of structural factors such as cultural legacies, particularly the spread of social trust in society. Studies in this tradition also underline the role of religion (Huntington, 2000; Ruiter and De Graaf, 2006) as well as ethnic and religious heterogeneity, although their answer to the question of whether social heterogeneity negatively or positively affects civil society development is somewhat mixed. While some scholars propose that social heterogeneity reduces the likelihood of strong civil society (Costa and Kahn, 2003), others point out that citizens in diverse societies may show a stronger interest in associational life to control or gain their own identity group's benefits and rights — but only in developing democracies

where institutions are likely to change over time (Anderson and Paskeviciute, 2006).

Finally, studies that focus on political institutions primarily emphasize the importance of regime type. This line of research points out that countries with a communist or statist legacy tend to have weaker civil societies, either due to the state's direct control over associations (Schofer and Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2001) or via its destructive impact on trust toward civic engagement (Howard and Howard, 2003). Conversely, democratic experience is positively correlated with participation in associations (Curtis *et al.*, 2001). Our paper joins this body of scholarship by arguing that statism does not necessarily crowd out associationalism, and its institutions may foster civil society development — albeit unintentionally. To develop our argument, we use the case of the People's Houses, the major social project and a popular education institution of the post-Ottoman and early Republican Turkey.

People's Houses and the Development of Associational Life

The instructive effect of the Houses on the subsequent formation of autonomous associations and civil society groups was instrumental in the context of Turkey because of the absence of a robust civil society tradition in the Ottoman Empire (Mardin, 1969). The Law of Associations — the first law that formally permitted associations in the Ottoman Empire — was enacted in 1908, very late compared to other European countries. Additionally, most associations clustered in a few big provinces with strong European influence. The limited number of women's associations, for example, were almost exclusively located in and operated from Istanbul, Izmir, and Thessaloniki (Önhan, 1990). Similarly, a few of the student associations active in the pre-Republican period were mostly located in Istanbul and Izmir, and had no branches in peripheral districts (Gündüz, 2010).

Due to the lack of civil society tradition, associational mobilization was also almost nonexistent during the first two decades of the Republic of Turkey (Mardin, 1969). The government used the law for the Maintenance of Public Order, which was in effect between 1925 and 1929, to dissolve the minimal number of existing civil society organizations, and ultimately, crackdown opposition to the Revolution. The pressure intensified during the 1930s. During this period, the Turkish Women's Association and the Mason Lodges — almost all of whom were located in the previous capital of Istanbul — were either abolished or decided themselves, probably following the CHP's orders, to dissolve (Aydin, 2004).¹⁵ The 1938 Law of Associations continued the

¹⁵Before the establishment of People's Houses, there was a minimal number of associations throughout the country. Minutes from a Senate of Turkey meeting on civil society in 1967 reveal that only 9 of the 237 associations listed on the document were founded before 1932 (Cumhuriyet Senatosu Tutanak Dergisi, Cilt:44, Toplantı:7).

substantial party control on civil society formation. There was an explicit ban against creating associations based on social class, religion, sectarianism, and regionalism. Forming associations was, in effect, impossible without formal authorization from the government.¹⁶ In fact, in 1938, Turkey had only 205 associations, most of which were auxiliary organizations of the nation-state project created under the auspices of the CHP rather than autonomous and independent civil society organizations (Bianchi, 1984).¹⁷ However, the number of associations rose rapidly following the gradual decrease of the CHP's autocratic control of civil society as well as the impact of People's Houses in localities with no prior experience of associational mobilization. With a transition to multiparty politics and the subsequent liberalizing amendments to the Law of Associations in 1946, the number of associations increased to 820, followed by another jump to over 17,000 during the 1960s. Currently, there are more than 120,000 active associations in 970 districts.¹⁸

What prompted the society's capacity to establish and manage such a large number of associations in just a few decades in a country with no tradition of a developed civil society and local associations? In this paper, we examine the People's Houses' influence on the current levels of local associational mobilization. Specifically, we argue that the People's Houses jumpstarted the development of civil society by providing intellectual know-how and physical infrastructure that persistently decreased barriers and transaction costs for forming groups and associations.

First, we posit that the structure and modus operandi of People's Houses brought democratic and organizational know-how that was fundamental in developing civil society organizations in the post-single-party era. In a context where the majority of the population had no social capital or experience in civil society organizations, the CHP's elites' top-down teachings of democratic norms and organizational skills, as outlined by the laws of the Houses, were fundamental in shaping the emergence and the successful administration of future political and social networks through formal arrangements. The executive board and sectional committee elections, held every two years, provided significant insights into how democratic norms work, especially in the absence of competitive national elections until 1946 (Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkası, 1932; Lamprou, 2015). In addition, scheduling meetings, rallying new members, planning conferences, and publishing monthly magazines, even if in conjunction with and under the supervision of the CHP, sparked a transformative growth

¹⁶For the full set of rules, see "*Cemiyetler Kanunu*" [Law of Associations], Resmi Gazete 14, no. 3512 (14 July 1938).

¹⁷These early associations include Philanthropy-Lovers Association, Children's Protection Society, or local sports clubs.

¹⁸For more information on current associations, see <https://www.siviltoplum.gov.tr/faal-ve-fesih-dernek-sayilari>.

in social capital and organizational skills of ordinary people who had never been involved with associational activity before.¹⁹

Second, the *modus operandi* of the Houses placed great emphasis on debate and discussion regarding the matters of the administration and activity program. The bylaws stipulated, for example, that the executive committee of each branch would establish its annual goals at its first meeting and meet every 15 days to review its activities (Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkası, 1932; Lamprou, 2015). Furthermore, in a letter sent to People's Houses across the country, Recep Peker, the Secretary-General of the CHP, encourages the House administrations to facilitate active communication. He writes, "It is one of the most fundamental responsibilities of Houses to prevent the silence, which is one of the bad outcomes of the old education system. We are here to speak and make people speak."²⁰ We argue that, in addition to providing experience and know-how to organize around ideas in the post-single-party rule, the People's Houses provided the means and tools to generate and communicate ideas that led to the creation of networks of civic engagement.

Finally, the Houses periodically brought together people from different segments of society, which helped facilitate the communication of shared interests and coordination of organizational resources. For example, *Ülkü* magazine indicates that in 1940 alone, the People's Houses delivered 4533 lectures to a total of 1,282,824 individuals.²¹ Libraries and reading rooms of the Houses also served as places of gathering for the local population. Periodic meetings of the local population with shared interests meant that the critical mass needed to form groups around shared goals could be brought together with lower transaction costs.

Taken together, the empirical implication of this discussion is that we expect that localities with a larger number of People's Houses have a higher number of present-day civil society institutions, namely social, cultural, religious, and political associations. We contend that there will be a significant and positive impact of the Houses on civil society development that has persisted over time, even in the absence of People's Houses since 1951, due to the snowball effect of associations. Once a high number of individuals in the local population gains the social capital necessary for a vibrant civil society, this effect dominates that locality's social and political life through the local transmission of information, know-how, and civic culture across individuals.

¹⁹Eminönü People's House (Istanbul), for example, held 102 organizational meetings with 11,376 attendees and 10 section meetings with 864 attendees between 1938 and 1940 (Karpat, 1974). Given that Eminönü's population was 100,933 in 1935, the reach of the People's Houses is evident.

²⁰Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivi [BCA] CHP, 1937:3/15/46

²¹*Ülkü*, March 1941, p 69.

Data

Complementing the qualitative evidence that explains how the organizational structure of the People's Houses contributed to the development of vibrant associational infrastructure and organizational skills, such as associational membership, the election of managerial boards, and the management of the membership base, we empirically test this hypothesis using several original datasets based mainly on primary documents. Our unit of analysis is districts (*ilçe*), the lowest administrative unit in Turkey for which data on People's Houses are available. Districts are also a meaningful unit to analyze civil society development in the Turkish context since major civil society organizations, including those included in our analysis, usually choose to organize at the district level. We match our data on current indicators with historical indicators on People's Houses from 1945. For parent districts that split into multiple districts between 1945 and today, we assume that the House was in the city center of the parent district, whereby we identify the current district of its location. We present the details of these measures below and the summary statistics in Appendix Table A1.

To measure associational mobilization, we use the total numbers of associations per ten thousand persons in the district. The data on associations come from an original dataset based on Bozcaga (2020) and scraped from the official website of the relevant ministry. To measure Islamist associational mobilization, we focus on the local associations linked to one of the first major Islamist civil society organizations in Turkey, *İlim Yayma Cemiyeti* (IYC), founded in 1951.

Given that these associations are usually organized at the district level, we use a binary variable that shows whether the district has an IYC-affiliated association. We scraped the lists of IYC associations from the official website of the organization. Our data on People's Houses come from Bozcaga and Christia (2020), a novel dataset digitized based on an official publication from 1947 that lists all of the People's Houses across Turkey.²² Figure 2 provides histograms of the number of associations (per ten thousand persons) for districts that had at least one People's House and those without any Houses. This descriptive figure shows that the number of districts in the former group is lower than those in the latter. A more interesting finding is that the districts that had at least one People's House in the 1940s tend to have, on average, a higher number of associations today.

To control for the effect of state capacity at the subnational level, which may correlate with the strength of civil society (Migdal, 2020), we measure

²²National Education Statistics, 1944–1945. Genel Kitaphklar ve Müzeler ile Halkevleri, Odalar ve Okuma Odaları Kitaphkları, 1932–1942 [General Libraries and Museums & People's Houses, Rooms and Reading Rooms Libraries 1932–1942]. Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü, 1947.

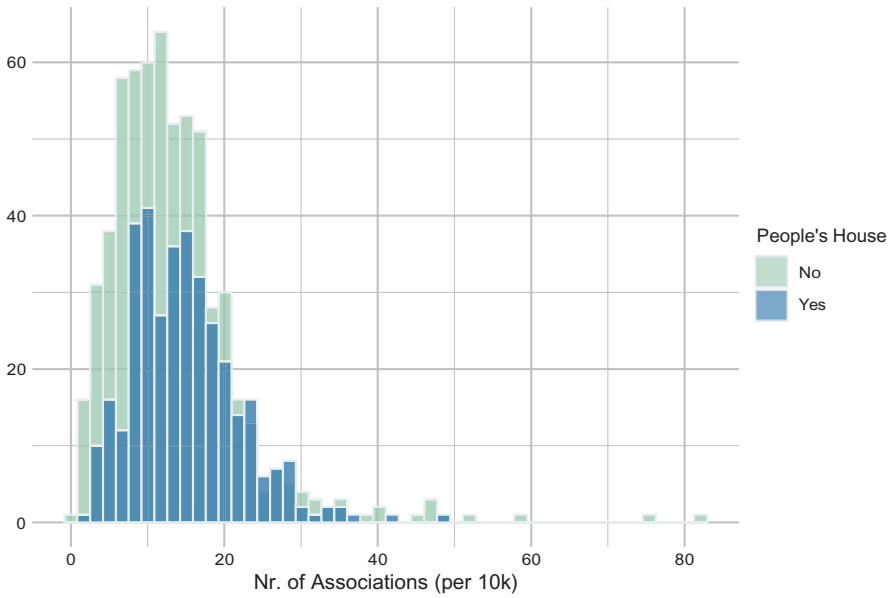


Figure 2: Present-day number of associations (per ten thousand persons) by district.

the supply of public service infrastructure. Our data comes from the official building census conducted in 2000 and captures the records of education and health buildings at the district level. The dataset also has information on the building owner, which enables us to identify the number of all education and health buildings owned by the state. In order to adjust the public service infrastructure by population, we scale the number of buildings used for public services by district population. The measure is defined as the number of public education and health buildings per ten thousand residents.

The modernization theory suggests that education and economic development are important determinants of civil society development (Howell and Pearce, 2002; Lipset, 1959). Therefore, in addition to the number of public education buildings, we also control for the number of all private schools (per ten thousand residents) and the literacy rate in the district. Due to the lack of district-level data for gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, we control for economic development by average nighttime luminosity, calculated based on NOAA’s nighttime satellite images.²³ To consider the potential impact of local elites on civil society, we also control for the total number of charitable

²³Specifically, this measure employs the average visible, stable lights, and cloud-free coverages from the DMSP-OLS Nighttime Lights Time Series.

endowments per ten thousand residents in the district, using official statistics of the relevant directorate.

Given that studies that point out an Islamist advantage in expanding civil society networks (Clark, 2004; Wiktorowicz, 2004), the religiosity of the district may also be a potential confounder. Similarly, support for political Islam may also be a possible confounding variable if the People's Houses led to an increase or decrease in support for political Islam, particularly when we examine the relationship between the locations of People's Houses and Islamist associations. Therefore, we also control for some other key social and political variables. To account for the religiosity of the district in the model, we control for the total number of buildings used for religious purposes (per ten thousand residents). We also construct a social conservativeness measure, which is equal to the ratio of female illiteracy to male illiteracy, drawing on the fact that population conservativeness is largely correlated with female education (Meyersson, 2017).

To control the district residents' support for political Islam, we use the vote share of the first Islamist party in Turkey, the National Salvation Party (*Milli Selamet Partisi* (MSP)), which ran for the first time in an election in 1972. We also control for the conservative ruling party Justice and Development Party's (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AKP)) vote share in the 2002 elections, the first election in which the Party participated after its foundation in 2001. The third political control we use is the vote share of the conservative-nationalist Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* (MHP)). Districts located in the province center — which are, at the same time, relatively more urban — may host a higher number of civil society organizations due to their central location and easy access to transportation. Therefore, we also constructed a binary variable that indicates the districts in the provincial centers. Finally, we also control for district population (log). We rely on official statistics for vote share, literacy rate, and population measures.

Results

To ascertain whether the current distribution of associations across the country is associated with the locations of People's Houses, an institution that was abolished 70 years ago, we leverage the spatial variation in the presence of the People's Houses across Turkey's 970 districts and estimate the following ordinary least squares model:

$$Y_{ip} = \alpha + \beta P_{ip} + \theta X_{ip} + \gamma_p + \epsilon_{ip}$$

where Y_{ip} is the outcome in district i , P_{ip} indicates the number of People's Houses in district i , X_{ip} is a set of district-level control variables, γ_p is the province fixed effect, and ϵ_{ip} is the error term.

Table 1

| | (1) Total per 10K | (2) Total per 10K | (3) IYC | (4) IYC |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| People’s Houses (number) | 1.448*** (0.426) | 1.646*** (0.479) | 0.070*** (0.026) | 0.066*** (0.023) |
| Controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Province FE | No | Yes | No | Yes |
| Observations | 969 | 969 | 969 | 969 |
| R^2 | 0.246 | 0.538 | 0.365 | 0.442 |
| Adjusted R^2 | 0.235 | 0.488 | 0.356 | 0.382 |
| Residual Std. Error | 7.044 (df = 954) | 5.761 (df = 874) | 0.304 (df = 954) | 0.298 (df = 874) |

Note: Standard errors clustered by province. * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

Table 1 reports the main results, that is, the effect of the number of People’s Houses on the number of present-day local associations (per ten thousand residents), under two different specifications. Model 2 includes province fixed effects as well as the full set of controls, including the number of public education and health buildings (per ten thousand residents), number of private schools (per ten thousand residents), literacy rate, average nightlights density (as a proxy for economic development), population (log), nationalist vote share, Islamist vote shares in 1972 and 2002, number of religious buildings (per ten thousand residents), female/male literacy ratio, and a provincial center dummy. The standard errors are reported in parentheses and account for both heteroskedasticity and intraprovince clustering. The full table is presented in Appendix Table A2.

We find that there is a robust and positive relationship between the People’s Houses and the number of present-day local associations (per ten thousand residents), controlling for province fixed effects as well as the complete set of control variables. Model 2 reveals that a one-unit increase in the number of People’s Houses predicts a 1.65 unit (per ten thousand residents) increase in the number of associations. To put this number in perspective, this corresponds to a 0.2 standard deviation increase or a 12 percent rise compared to the sample mean. These findings suggest that, as expected, districts with a higher number of People’s Houses show higher associational involvement, despite the fact that 65 years have passed since the abolishment of these institutions.

As a hard-case test, we also examine this relationship for a subset of associations for which the positive relationship with the People’s Houses is least likely to hold. As the secular regime’s popular education and indoctrination headquarters, the People’s Houses may have contributed to the secularization

of the community, potentially distancing them from political Islam. Therefore, a positive and statistically significant association between the People’s Houses and Islamist associations would lend further credence to our findings. Models 3–4 in Table 1 evaluate the current distribution of Islamist associations by the number of People’s Houses in 1947, using a linear probability model with clustered standard errors. In all models, the coefficient for People’s Houses is positive and statistically significant. Model 4 in Table 1 shows that a one-unit increase in the number of People’s Houses predicts a 6.6 percentage point increase in the probability that an IYC-association is present in the district. To put this number into perspective, the average likelihood of a district having an IYC-association is 0.17, signifying a 39% increase compared to the mean value.

The conclusions we draw from these empirical findings would be stronger if we can show that this positive relationship between the People’s Houses and Islamist associations is not likely to be driven by the confounding effect of any major omitted political variables. For instance, if People’s Houses were located in relatively more Islamist districts or caused any Islamization or secularization in district population, the positive relationship between the People’s Houses and Islamist associations could also be explained by the support for political Islam. Models 1–2 in

Table 2 evaluate the relationship between the People’s Houses and the Islamist vote share in 1972, the first time in which an Islamist party ran for the elections. Models 3–4 report the results from the model where we estimate the relationship between the People’s Houses and the vote share of Turkey’s present-day conservative ruling party in 2002, the first election in which the Party participated after its founding in 2001. Models 2 and 4 include province fixed effects as well as the full set of controls. Conditional on control variables,

Table 2

| | (1) MSP 1972 | (2) MSP 1972 | (3) AKP 2002 | (4) AKP 2002 |
|-------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| People’s Houses | -0.557 | -0.616 | -1.442 | -0.308 |
| (number) | (0.553) | (0.398) | (1.107) | (0.546) |
| Controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Province FE | No | Yes | No | Yes |
| Observations | 969 | 969 | 969 | 969 |
| R ² | 0.101 | 0.539 | 0.090 | 0.681 |
| Adjusted R ² | 0.090 | 0.491 | 0.078 | 0.647 |
| Residual Std. | 8.943 | 6.691 | 15.266 | 9.444 |
| Error | (df = 956) | (df = 876) | (df = 956) | (df = 876) |

Note: Standard errors clustered by province. * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

we do not find a statistically significant relationship between the People's Houses and the Islamist vote share in 1972 or the conservative vote share in 2002. Furthermore, the direction of coefficients is negative, which demonstrates that the People's Houses are unlikely to have been sited in relatively more Islamist places. These additional findings raise our confidence in our argument that the People's Houses shaped the current distribution of associations in a positive manner.

Because our control variables control the variations in the 'posttreatment' period, some of them could be estimating a common effect or collider of our IV (People's Houses) and DV (current-day associations). Take, for example, our conservative measure, female/male literacy ratio. If both People's Houses and current associations affect the gender gap between school enrollment rates, female/male literacy would be a collider and might bias the estimates. To deal with this, we implement the sequential-g estimator (Acharya *et al.*, 2016), which, in a nutshell, estimates the controlled direct effect (CDE) of People's Houses on the number of present-day local associations (per capita). It does so by first estimating the effect of female/male literacy ratio on the outcome, controlling for everything else, and then transforming the outcome variable by subtracting this effect of female/male literacy. This creates counterfactual estimates of the outcome as if all districts had the same female/male literacy ratio today. The effect of People's Houses on these counterfactual values gives us the CDE. As we have a set of 12 control variables that indicate current values regarding each district's different characteristics (i.e., all control variables except for the provincial center dummy), we run 12 different models, in each of which a different 'posttreatment' control variable is assumed to be a collider. Our models includes the full set of controls as well as province fixed effects as in Table 1, Column 2. We use nonparametric bootstrap standard errors clustered by province to calculate the confidence interval for the CDE. We report the confidence intervals in Appendix Table A4. Although the size of the estimate becomes slightly lower, our estimate is statistically significant and robust across all models.

Could have been the case that the state targeted People's Houses to districts that would have developed strong civil society institutions anyways? If so, our results might be an outcome of this spurious positive correlation. As we mention above, pre-Republican Turkey did not have a robust civil society tradition, and the few existing organizations such as women's associations were concentrated in three major provinces of pre-Republican Turkey: Istanbul, Izmir, and Thessaloniki (the last of whom was annexed by Greece in 1912). If our results are the outcome of a spurious correlation between a strong civil society potential and People's Houses, they should then to a great extent be driven by these provinces where the civil society organizations of the time were located, i.e., Istanbul and Izmir. To empirically test this question, we interact our People's Houses variable with a binary variable indicating

districts in Istanbul and Izmir provinces. If our results are the outcome of a spurious correlation between a strong civil society legacy and People's Houses, they should, to a great extent, be driven by these provinces where the civil society movements of the time were concentrated, that is, Istanbul and Izmir. To empirically test this question, we interact our People's Houses variable with a binary variable indicating districts in Istanbul and Izmir provinces. If this alternative explanation is likely, the coefficient on People's Houses should turn statistically insignificant or diminish in size for the districts in the baseline group. The results (Appendix Table A5) demonstrate that the effect of People's Houses on the present-day number of civil society organizations remains significant at a 0.01 confidence level. Furthermore, in the model with province fixed effects, the effect size rises from 1.646 to 1.848. Given these findings, the influence of People's Houses on present-day civil society associations appears to have been stronger in districts without a preexisting civil society legacy, making it unlikely that People's Houses were placed in areas that would have developed strong civil society institutions anyways.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper shows that the local existence of the People's Houses has a positive and persistent effect on present-day associational mobilization. We find that this result is robust to a battery of control variables. Our results show that local social capital gained through the local People's Houses persisted over time to impact present-day local civil society mobilization. This effect is not driven by the secular influence of the People's Houses; we also find a positive relationship between the number of People's Houses and the existence of Islamist and conservative associations.

While we theoretically argue and empirically demonstrate that the People's Houses had a significant and positive impact on the development of civil society, we do not discover any meaningful relationship between these institutions and other political outcomes they were designed to shape, such as vote share for Islamist parties. In fact, our results show that the number of local People's Houses does not significantly associate with the vote-share of Islamist and conservative parties in 1972 or 2002. These findings suggest that the CHP's goal of spreading the main principles of the Revolution, such as secularism and Westernization, and the nation-state project were not very successful and persistent in the long run. Although this finding may seem surprising, it is in line with the historical work on the People's Houses' political and social effects. Most historians of the early Republican era criticize the People's Houses on the ground that their Kemalist cultural and social agenda only reached the urban and educated segment of the society, such as teachers, civil servants, and students. While the transformation of organizational know-how within the

educated and urban population through these institutions was fundamental in shaping the structure of civil society within urban centers, “the majority of the population, that is, the subsistence farmers of Anatolia, continued to remain estranged from the Kemalist cultural agenda, unincorporated to the state and party institutions” (Esen, 2014).

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