



# EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND JUSTICE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FROM A SOCIO-ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE: THE CASE OF TURKEY\*

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## Introduction

■ When production and supply decrease, prices rise; As production increases, prices fall. The existence of a secret hand that raises and lowers prices in this way is accepted in economics. When the product was scarce, it was seen with surprise that the seller made more money. This is called “King’s Law” in economics (Demirer 2017). While this is the case in economics, there are many studies on the issue that real economic welfare cannot be achieved in societies where justice cannot be provided. In this study, quantitative and qualitative data analysis was made, and content analysis was applied to the secondary sources obtained to prove that there is a positive relationship between the society’s perception of democracy and economic development.

The main subject of the mentioned secondary sources is that economic development cannot be achieved in a society without justice. Therefore, it is claimed that the societies in which the phenomenon of justice is settled are democratic. In this study, it was emphasized that “democracy is a regime that ensures social welfare” by going one step further.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the relationship between economics, justice, and economic development in the context of democratic regimes. It aims to determine the existence and direction of this relationship by analyzing the related data sources. Additionally, the study aims to explore the impact of interruptions in democracy, such as the single-party period, military coups, and memorandum

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periods in Turkey, on economic indicators. It also aims to examine the relationship between freedom of thought, freedom of civil and political rights and the number of detained journalists.

The study holds original value by highlighting the essentiality of internalizing democracy and justice in every field for the economic welfare and happiness of societies. In the following sections of the study, it has been expressed within a historical process that societies that have truly internalized the concept of economics in the real sense are just, adopt the democratic regime and can provide social welfare. The study's original value lies in providing insights and potential solutions to address the socioeconomic challenges faced by these countries and contribute to the overall understanding of the importance of economics, justice, and democratic principles in achieving societal well-being.

## Methodology

The research aims to explore the relationship between democratic regimes, liberal values, the rule of law, political and civil rights and economic prosperity in Turkey. It employs a comparative analysis approach, utilizing historical data to examine the impact of different forms of political management on economic outcomes. The research method involves data collection of financial data during specific periods in Turkey, including times of democratic suspension, and during democratic regimes that prioritize liberal values, political and civil rights, and the rule of law. International democracy, global freedom and rule of law indexes are used to quantify these concepts.

The collected data is examined using analysis method of financial tables expressing macroeconomic indicators. This socioeconomic examination is conducted to find out how different political management forms influence macroeconomic outcomes and social welfare between democratic and less-democratic periods. This study concludes by conducting a comparative socioeconomic evaluation of its findings. Through this analysis, it emphasizes the importance of democratic governance and adherence to justice, liberal values for ensuring sustainable economic development and long-term social welfare. Several limitations of the research are acknowledged, such as data constraints, challenges in proving direct causality, and sociocultural contextual factors that may influence the results.

## Relationship Between Economics and Justice

After the Second World War, economics and political scientists stated that the secondary problem for economic development was democracy. The prevailing view at that time was that democracy was a result of economic growth (Doğan 2005). As a matter of fact, the first study on the relationship between democracy



and economic growth was carried out by Seymour Martin Lipset in 1959. According to Lipset; democracy can only become possible after a certain economic growth (Lipset 1959).

Ensuring justice in all fields is important for the future and socioeconomic welfare of societies. Recent developments have questioned the existence of justice and left many question marks in people's minds about what needs to be done. In Turkey, it is necessary to take the necessary steps to resolve the socioeconomic problems experienced during less-democratic periods and establish justice as dominant in all social strata. In this sense, the following statement of Heraclius comes to mind; "Justice is the bread of nations; nations are always hungry for justice" (Gibbon 2020).

Democratic management ensures easier delegation of authority to the economy and a more stable environment for investment. It accelerates the mobility of energy, raw materials, and other production factors in the country towards areas needed for economic growth and development. Democracy also increases the stock of human and non-human capital. At the same time, it reduces income inequality by offering a fairer income distribution and thus significantly supports economic growth and development (Sirim and Eraslan 2020; Topuz 2022). Thus, it can be said that if the fair lifestyle spreads from the top management to the public, unique capabilities emerge, and economic development is achieved.

Economics deals with microeconomics, the relationship between individuals and resources. At the macroeconomic level, it examines the linkage between governments and material factors. However, it is important to recognize that states are abstract constructs and policies are determined by humans serving as representatives. Therefore, fundamentally understanding economic systems requires analyzing the nexus between humans and materials. The nature of interactions people establishes with resources, as well as motivations guiding resource allocation, form the basis on which other economic linkages are built. Where public administration prioritizes short-term gains over prudent stewardship of collective wealth, it often results in inefficient and inequitable outcomes (Demirer 2017).

Shortly, the role of humans in mediating resource linkages at all levels of the economy is crucial. Understanding human-material interactions is key to analyzing and improving socioeconomic outcomes.

## Democracy and Economy

Administrators ask citizens to save more. In this way, they think the wheels of the economy will work better. Those who try to convince the society and administrators with such narratives are economists who can only think of economic growth as a target. All they know is the "exchange rate-interest rate seesaw" (Küpçü 2018). However, while administrators direct the public to save and be prudent, they must first comply with these rules themselves.



Orhan Turan, who noted that democracy is only possible with institutionalized structures, said “a country’s institutions derive their power from democracy.” According to Turan, policymaking based on rules increases predictability in the economy and ensures trust. Therefore, strong institutions and laws lie at the foundation of a robust economy. Any step that strengthens our institutions, especially the rule of law, and democracy will also strengthen our economy and contribute to financial stability. (Türkonfed 2019).

Germany and Turkey, both countries have a population of about 82 million. On the other hand, the amount of land per capita in Turkey is twice that of Germany. In other words, Turkey can have twice the population of Germany. Or it can produce twice as much national income as Germany. But today, Germany’s national income is many times higher than Turkey’s middle-income level. This is because Germany is about twice as far ahead in democracy and rule of law indices (Gün: 2019).

Turkey ranks 103<sup>rd</sup> among 167 countries in 2022 in the Democracy Index. Turkey was in the last place in the Western Europe region, where 21 countries were evaluated. In the evaluation made by the UK-based research and analysis company Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), Norway took the first place, while Afghanistan took the last place. In the evaluation of the EIU, the countries are divided into four categories as full democracy, flawed democracy, hybrid regime and authoritarian regime. In the evaluation made in the Turkey section of the report, it is stated that “Turkey is the only hybrid regime in the region (Unit 2017). It has recorded a great decrease in the total score in the last ten years. This is a rough reflection of the increasingly autocratic management approach of the top management” (euronews.com).

There is a linear relationship between democracy and economic development. Therefore, for strong democracy and high economic development, it is necessary to clarify the separation of powers between the legislature, executive and judiciary in state administration, and provide minimum conditions on sensitive issues such as basic human rights. Current political administrations should revise themselves in a positive way by developing pluralistic democracy, economic government functioning, wide-ranging political participation, and civil liberties (Ulusoy 2019).

Definitions of economic development in the literature incorporate human development and democratic elements separately. In this sense, countries lacking democracy and experiencing issues regarding human rights and civil liberties cannot be described as “developed.” Growth may still occur under dictatorships lacking democratic foundations. However, the concentration of resources under dictatorship or minority control distorts income distribution.

Institutions grounded in democratic principles encompass transparent governance, competitive multi-party systems, free and fair elections, rule of law, an independent press, and economic, social and legal orders guaranteeing property rights. Nations possessing these characteristics concurrently demonstrate high levels of development (Korkmaz 2019).



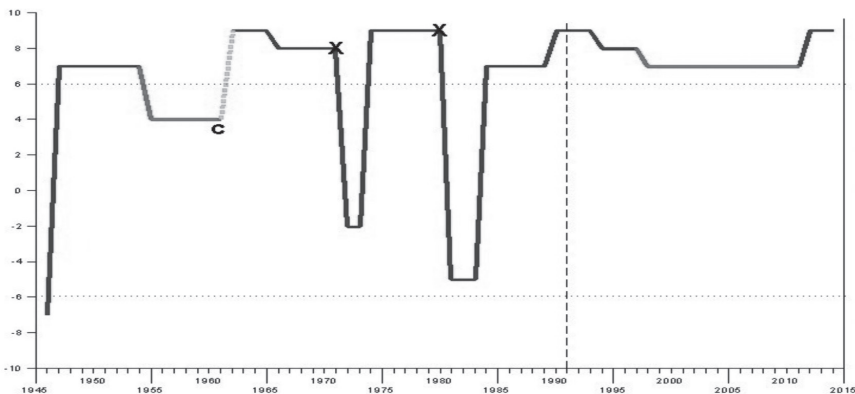
In democracies, public expenditures and savings of governments are controlled by the parliament. Control channels are clogged in autocratic governments. To survive, dictators divide state resources with groups that are close to them and support them. For example, 1979 Iran Shah regime provided more opportunities for the army. However, after the revolution, state facilities and resources were divided by mullahs. As a result, long-term growth and economic development cannot be achieved without democracy (Korkmaz 2019).

Based on the assumption that political rights and freedoms are closely related to the democratization levels of countries, democracy indices of relevant countries are calculated every year. The democracy index is an index evaluated using 60 indicators clustered under five main components. The main components are listed below.

- Transparent functioning of the government,
- Electoral process and pluralism,
- Political culture,
- Political participation
- Personal rights and freedoms

The index takes a value between 0–10, and as the value increases, it is stated that the country has a more democratic structure (The Economist Intelligence Unit 2017: 54). *Figure 1* shows Turkey's trend based on democracy index from 1946 to 2013. When *Figure 1* is examined carefully, it is clearly seen that the tendency towards democracy in Turkey has decreased sharply during the military coup and memorandum periods.

*Figure 1. Democracy Tendency in Turkey 1946-2013 (Source: Polity Project Index 2013)*



Upon examining *Table 1* below to further scrutinize Turkey's democratic tendency, it is evident that when the multi-party period commenced in 1946, the democracy index doubled while the rate of economic growth increased dramatically from a contraction of 154% to an expansion of 31.9%.



Further analysis of the 1950 data after the Democrat Party’s election and time in government provides additional insights. Growth remained strong at 12.8% annually. Inflation, which was initially 6.8%, started to come down, falling to about 1%. So democratic advances appeared to coincide with stabilization of the economy.

*Table 1. Financial indicators in Turkey between 1945–1952*

| Years | Political Democracy Index | Economic Growth Rate % | Inflation Rate % |
|-------|---------------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| 1945  | -7                        | -15,4                  | 54,1             |
| 1949  | +7                        | 31,9                   | 104,4            |
| 1950  | +7                        | 9,4                    | 10,2             |
| 1951  | +8                        | 12,8                   | 6,2              |
| 1952  | +7                        | 11,9                   | 1                |

Source: Polity Project Index 2013

*Table 2* shows the significant negative impacts on Turkey’s economy, human development, and democracy during periods when the country experienced military coups. For instance, in 1980 after a coup took place on September 12th, the democracy index fell sharply from 9 to below -5. This represented a shift from a relatively democratic system to a highly undemocratic one. At the same time, civil liberties decreased from the free level to only partially free. The economy also suffered – growth declined from 8% to -2.8%, and inflation skyrocketed from 10.1% to over 107%. These changes illustrate the damage caused when coups overthrow democratic governance. The removal of pluralism and stable policymaking has clear knock-on effects for economic performance.

*Table 2. Financial Indicators in Turkey Between 1975–1981*

| 1980 Coup Period | Political Rights | Civil Rights   | Political Democracy Index | Human Development Index | Economic Growth Rate % | Inflation Rate % |
|------------------|------------------|----------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| 1975             | 2                | 3<br>Free      | 9                         |                         | 8                      | 10,1             |
| 1980             | 5                | Partially Free | -5                        | 0,474                   | -2,8                   | 107,2            |
| 1981             | 4                | Partially Free | -5                        | 0,569                   | 4,8                    | 36,8             |

Source: Polity Project Index 2013, Freedom House Index 2023

Memorandums, like military coups, restrict free thought and democratic rights. It is evident that such practices negatively impact the economy during periods when they occur.



As seen in *Table 3*, during the 1970 Military Memorandum period in Turkey, there were significant decreases in both the democracy index value and growth rate, along with a significant increase in the inflation rate.

*Table 3. Financial Indicators Between 1970–1971*

| Years | Democracy Index Value | Growth Rate (%) | Inflation Rate (%) |
|-------|-----------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| 1970  | +8                    | 5.8             | 6.7                |
| 1971  | -2                    | 2.2             | 15.9               |

Source: Polity Project Index 2013

One of the basic elements of economic and social developments is the “rule of law”. The rule of law comes to the fore in the protection of economic and political freedoms and the elimination of inequality of opportunity, enabling citizens to live in society with a more secure feeling. One indicator that can be used to determine the rule of law is the Rule of Law Index developed by The World Justice Project (Hayek: 1973; Posner: 2010; Bingham: 2011). The Rule of Law Index is clustered under eight main components as listed below (Şanlısoy 2019):

- Restriction of government power
- Prevention of corruption
- Transparency in management
- Fundamental rights
- Public order and security
- Administrative sanctions
- Fair law
- Criminal justice (removal of privilege)

Turkey, which ranked 117th among 139 countries according to the rule of law index in 2021, ranked 116th among 140 countries in the 2022 index. The top 10 are Denmark, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Netherlands, Germany, New Zealand, Luxembourg, Estonia and Ireland. In the same report, when looking at country classifications by income group, Turkey ranked 40th among 42 countries in the upper middle-income group. It is clearly seen that the rule of law index is directly related to the economy, just like the democracy index. Because the higher the rule of law index value, the more positive the economic indicators.

When this situation of Turkey regarding the rule of law is evaluated together with other indicators; It can be stated that it is difficult to eliminate inequalities of opportunity, corruption and to approach the desired potential in economic growth (Şanlısoy 2019).

## The Relationship Between Civil and Political Rights, and Economy

There are different views regarding the relationship between freedom and economic development. According to some economists, freedom leads to economic growth. Because in an environment where people can freely express their thoughts and implement their ideas, they develop more innovative ideas. Others argue that the increase in wealth brought by economic development can push governments to allow more freedom. Another view is that both freedom and economic growth are mutually reinforcing factors. The rise in living standards in a country increases people's freedom of expression. At the same time, in an environment where people can freely discuss and implement their own ideas, they can be more innovative in economic activities (Dawson 2003; 480). In conclusion, due to the mutually reinforcing nature of the relationship between freedom and prosperity, both elements need to be developed (Gwartney–Lawson–Holcombe 1999).

Government and state institutions should be evaluated like non-profit official institutions. Because their administrative activities have an impact on public welfare and development. In the study, evaluations were made by considering macroeconomic indicators in democratic periods in Turkey. Key indicators such as inflation, growth, and gross domestic product (GDP) were examined.

Overall, qualitative and quantitative analysis of Turkey's path from early development through modernization provides insights into how its balancing of state authority versus individual choice interconnects with long-term economic outcomes.

*Table 4. Evaluation of Turkish Economy Between 1972–1980 in Terms of Civil and Political Freedom*

|             | PR       | CR       | STATUS    | EGR         | IR           | GDP US\$       | CR (Change Rate) |
|-------------|----------|----------|-----------|-------------|--------------|----------------|------------------|
| 1972        | 3        | 4        | PF        | 7,4         | 15,42        | 549,39         | 0,23             |
| 1973        | 2        | 4        | PF        | 3,3         | 13,94        | 676,45         | 0,23             |
| 1974        | 2        | 3        | PF        | 5,6         | 23,90        | 916,02         | 0,35             |
| 1975        | 2        | 3        | F         | 7,2         | 21,23        | 1125,01        | 0,22             |
| 1976        | 2        | 3        | F         | 10,5        | 17,46        | 1266,13        | 0,12             |
| 1977        | 2        | 3        | F         | 3,4         | 25,99        | 1417,78        | 0,12             |
| 1978        | 2        | 3        | F         | 1,5         | 61,90        | 1540,39        | 0,07             |
| 1979        | 2        | 3        | F         | -0,6        | 63,54        | 2069,87        | 0,20             |
| <b>1980</b> | <b>5</b> | <b>5</b> | <b>PF</b> | <b>-0,8</b> | <b>94,26</b> | <b>1560,23</b> | <b>-0,18</b>     |

\*PR (Political Rights), CR (Civil Rights), F (Free), PF (Partly Free), NF (Not Free), EGR (Economic Growth Rate) IR (Inflation Rate)  
Source: Freedomhouse Index 2023, Dogrulukpayı 2013, World Bank 2023





When examining *Table 4*, particularly in 1979 when the status of freedoms was “Free,” the inflation rate was 63.54% and GDP was 1560.23 USD. However, in 1980 during the military coup, the status of freedoms became “Partially Free,” the inflation rate increased to 94.26%, while GDP remained the same at 1560.23 USD. These data indicate that during coup periods, civil and political rights were suspended and the economy performed poorly. On the other hand, an evaluation of the data from 1975 to 1979 within the same table shows that when the status of freedoms was “Free,” the inflation rate averaged moderately and GDP demonstrated an upward trend. Thus, it can be said that when civil and political rights are restricted within a society, the economy is negatively impacted.

*Table 5. Evaluation of Turkish Economy Between 2015–2020 in Terms of Civil and Political Freedom*

|             | PR       | CR       | STATUS    | EGR        | IR           | GDP US\$      | CR (Change Rate) |
|-------------|----------|----------|-----------|------------|--------------|---------------|------------------|
| 2015        | 3        | 4        | PF        | 6,1        | 8,81         | 10851,9       | -0,09            |
| 2016        | 3        | 4        | PF        | 3,2        | 8,53         | 10734,3       | -0,01            |
| 2017        | 4        | 5        | NF        | 7,5        | 11,97        | 10464         | -0,02            |
| <b>2018</b> | <b>5</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>NF</b> | <b>2,8</b> | <b>20,30</b> | <b>9400,8</b> | <b>-0,08</b>     |
| <b>2019</b> | <b>5</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>NF</b> | <b>0,9</b> | <b>11,84</b> | <b>9103</b>   | <b>-0,06</b>     |
| <b>2020</b> | <b>5</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>NF</b> | <b>1,9</b> | <b>14,60</b> | <b>8561,1</b> | <b>-0,07</b>     |

\*PR (Political Rights), CR (Civil Rights), F (Free), PF (Partly Free), NF (Not Free), EGR (Economic Growth Rate) IR (Inflation Rate)

(Source: Freedomhouse 2023, Dogrulukpayi 2013, World Bank 2023)

In *Table 5*, Turkey’s recent economic performance has been evaluated in terms of macroeconomic indicators and civil and political rights. As known, there was a military coup attempt in Turkey in 2016. As in any coup period, freedoms were suspended in all aspects, and the economy faced difficulties. This situation is precisely reflected in *Table 4*. In 2015, the Economic Growth Rate (EGR) was 6.1%, and the GDP amount was 10,851.9 USD. However, in 2016, the EGR dropped to 6.1%, and the GDP amount declined to 10,734.3 USD. In short, when restrictions are imposed on the fundamental elements of democracy, such as freedoms, the Turkish economy experiences setbacks and difficulties. This phenomenon is not unique to Turkey alone. When societies that embrace democratic conditions are evaluated sociologically and economically, they face similar socio-economic outcomes.

The data in *Table 6* suggests that the number of arrested journalists can serve as an indicator of political and civil freedom restrictions, reflecting limitations on press freedom and potentially broader curtailment of civil liberties. However, it is important to consider other factors when assessing the state of freedom and democracy in a country.



Table 6. Total Number of Journalists Arrested by Countries Between 199–2020

| Country      | Total Number of Arrested Journalists |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|
| China        | 952                                  |
| Turkey       | 794                                  |
| Eritrea      | 439                                  |
| Iran         | 327                                  |
| Myanmar      | 244                                  |
| Ethiopia     | 205                                  |
| Vietnam      | 202                                  |
| Cuba         | 199                                  |
| Egypt        | 172                                  |
| Syria        | 161                                  |
| Kuwait       | 114                                  |
| Uzbekistan   | 95                                   |
| Azerbaijan   | 95                                   |
| Saudi Arabia | 88                                   |

Source: Dogrulukpayi 2020

## The Case of Justice and Economics in Democratic Countries

Democratic regimes expand the scope of civil and political freedoms provided to individuals. They also enable effective participation of individuals in the governance of the state and foster the development of social life through the provision of civil and political rights (Dahl 1971; Diamond 1999). Additionally, democracies, besides being a system that values human development, contribute significantly to economic growth and development by promoting the rule of law and safeguarding property rights with effective policies (Acemoglu–Johnson–Robinson 2001; North 1990; Sirim–Eraslan 2020).

In democratic regimes, the rule of law is the fundamental principle. The concept of the rule of law encompasses several legal principles, two of which may be the most important. The first one is “Everyone is equal before the law.” This principle means that no one, no social class or group, is granted privileges or exemptions from the law. The second one is “All actions and decisions of the administration are subject to judicial review.” This principle emphasizes that those with the authority to govern the country cannot be exempt from judicial scrutiny regarding their decisions and actions. When these two important principles and other principles are



combined, the concept of a constitutional state emerges. Without a constitutional state, democracy cannot exist. (Kaytaz–Eğilmez–İnanç–Şen Taşbaşı–Görkey 2022).

In the most basic sense, a developed country is defined as a country with a high gross national product or a high per capita product. However, which indicators should be used for the definition of developed country is still a matter of debate in economics. As a matter of fact, criteria such as industrialization, education, health, democracy, national income, trade structure, income distribution can be indicators for the level of development of countries (Dreher–Nunnenkamp–Thiele 2008). However, the “Human Development Index (HDI)”, which contains many of these criteria, has become a more preferred index in explaining the level of development. Countries that do not comply with this index are also called developing countries (Stiglitz–Sen–Fitoussi 2010; United Nations Development Programme 1990; Cevizli 2013: 37). This evaluation refers to the existence of a complementary relationship between democratization and economic growth. In fact, democratization and economic growth are like interdependent wheels. The smooth functioning of one is not possible without the other. Therefore, in order for the democratic structure to be firmly established, there is a need for economic and social policies that promote growth. Similarly, in terms of achieving economic growth, it is necessary to follow a democratic political process in the selection, implementation, and success of strategic policies (Ghali 2003: 12).

## Conclusion

Numerous studies have been conducted on the long-term economic development within democratic regimes. Such research endeavors contribute significantly to the establishment of democratic governance and the formulation of socio-institutional frameworks that foster economic growth in nations. (Persson 2005: 22). In this sense in the study, comprehensive and comparative analyses with macroeconomic indicators have been conducted, focusing on distinct periods in Turkey’s historical trajectory, including the single-party era, military coups, and memorandum periods. These periods significantly undermined democratic institutions in Turkey, leading to severe socio-economic repercussions.

These coup and memorandum periods in Turkey have had long-lasting effects on the collective memory of society. They have left deep scars and negatively impacted the economy by eroding the investment climate, reducing prospects, declining political and civil rights and undermining the perception of the rule of law. These interventions have also disrupted the stability and predictability necessary for a conducive business environment, which in turn impedes economic progress. In contrast, when democratic governments that promoted liberal values and fair institutions were in power, Turkey experienced stronger macroeconomic conditions. The number of imprisoned journalists is also related to constraints on political and economic freedoms.



Overall, the research concludes that Turkey can achieve long-term socio-economic prosperity and welfare only by internalizing democratic frameworks in a manner consistent with principles of rule of law, accountability, and protection of political, economic and civil liberties. In this regard some potential solution suggestions could be:

- Strengthening democratic institutions and policies that safeguard civil liberties, freedom of expression, and rule of law to promote political stability.
- Providing support and protection for journalists, activists, and organizations that uphold democratic values of open debate and dissent.
- Encouraging civic participation and an active civil society to strengthen democracy from the ground up.
- Promoting transparency and accountability in both public and private spheres through open governance initiatives and anti-corruption efforts.
- Continuing the European Union accession process to align Turkey’s economy and laws more closely with international democratic norms and institutions.
- Establishing an independent judiciary and protecting judicial independence to maintain checks and balances.

In short, for the economic well-being and happiness of societies, it is necessary to internalize economic life and therefore justice in every field. Recent developments in Turkey have called into question the facts of economy and justice, and many scenarios have been considered about what should be done. First of all, starting from state administrators, maximum effort should be made to ensure that an economical lifestyle is adopted and that the concepts of the rule of law are established in the relevant societies. In this way, fair income distribution will be ensured in society and economic prosperity and happiness will be ensured.

The relationship between economics and justice is so important that an analysis of the top five countries in the democracy and rule of law indices shows that they pay utmost attention to economics and at the same time operate fair judicial processes. The following conclusion can be drawn from the whole study: „*Being content with less leads to economic lifestyle, economic lifestyle leads to justice, justice leads to democracy and democracy leads to economic prosperity.*”

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