
**RETHINKING THE 31 MARCH INCIDENT: CONSTITUTIONAL LEGITIMACY,
POWER STRUGGLES, AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN THE LATE OTTOMAN
STATE (1860–1914)**

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ABSTRACT

This study reevaluates the 31 March Incident (April 13, 1909) as a structural threshold in the Late Ottoman State where constitutional legitimacy was tested, power relations were reconfigured, and crisis management capacity became decisive. The research demonstrates that the incident cannot be explained through the long-held dichotomy of "reactionary uprising" or "premeditated coup"; instead, it argues that this was a multi-actor crisis resulting from the collision of constitutional demands, institutional fragilities, and political competition that had accumulated since the 1860s. Employing qualitative historical research methodology and process tracing, the study integrates the concepts of legitimacy repertoires, organizational capacity, and opportunity structures within a unified theoretical framework. Findings reveal that following the Second Constitutional Period, the constitution was interpreted in contradictory ways by different actors, transforming from a ground for consensus into an arena of contestation. The research demonstrates that the Committee of Union and Progress was not the actor that directly engineered the crisis but rather one that managed the emerging crisis through its organizational capacity and turned the outcomes to its advantage. Findings on crisis management show that while the 1909 constitutional amendments alleviated the legitimacy crisis in the short term, they produced long-term consequences that narrowed the political space, weakened pluralism, and strengthened centralist tendencies. By placing the Ottoman experience in a comparative perspective alongside the Iranian Constitutional Revolution and the 1905 Russian Revolution, the study offers an original theoretical framework for understanding the structural fragilities of constitutional transition periods in late-modernizing empires. Thus, the article provides an original contribution to both Ottoman historiography and the literature on comparative politics and constitutional studies.

Keywords: 31 March Incident, constitutional legitimacy, Late Ottoman State, Committee of Union and Progress, crisis management, Second Constitutional Period, civil-military relations

1. INTRODUCTION

The 31 March Incident (13 April 1909), one of the most complex and multidimensional turning points in Ottoman political history, is more than a mere chronological event; it represents a historical threshold where the legitimacy foundations of the constitutional order were tested, power relations were reshaped, and the functioning of state capacity under crisis conditions was revealed. As one of the most comprehensive political upheavals in the final period of the Ottoman Empire, this event profoundly affected not only internal political dynamics but also the state's international position and social structure (Shaw and Shaw, 1977). For a long time, this event was assessed

within mutually exclusive reductionist frameworks as either a "reactionary uprising" or, conversely, a "covert coup plot." However, the deepening of Ottoman historiography over the last forty years has highlighted the conceptual inadequacies of these one-dimensional explanations (Hanioglu, 2008; Zürcher, 2010). In reality, March 31 was not merely a military uprising that lasted only a few days, but a structural crisis produced by the convergence of constitutional demands, bureaucratic transformation processes, practices of association, and security concerns that had been accumulating since the 1860s. Therefore, the event should be reconsidered not so much in terms of "why did it happen?" but rather "under what conditions did it become possible?" The institutional fragilities faced by the late Ottoman Empire in its modernization process were both the source of this crisis and among its lasting consequences. This study aims to examine the 31 March Incident within the aforementioned broader historical context.

The historical significance of the 31 March Incident does not stem solely from the fact that it resulted in the political crisis that led to the deposition of Abdülhamid II. The true value of the event lies in its clear demonstration of how constitutional order was perceived socially in the Ottoman Empire, the means and discourses through which legitimacy was produced, and which actors rose to prominence during times of crisis (Deringil, 1998). In this context, the event offers a unique opportunity to question how the concepts of "constitutionalism" and "legitimacy" were intertwined in Ottoman political culture and how the social base understood these concepts within this framework (Mardin, 1962). Although the proclamation of the Second Constitutional Monarchy (1908) constituted a turning point in terms of reestablishing constitutional sultanate, the weakness of institutional balance and control mechanisms soon became apparent. The 31 March Incident is a striking example of how explosive an effect this weakness could have in the military and political spheres. The constitutional amendments made in 1909 immediately after the incident provide an important indication that attempts were made to resolve crises through constitutional regulation (Findley, 2011). Therefore, March 31 is not merely a "crisis" but also a historical laboratory where the experience of crisis management took concrete form. This experience profoundly shaped the Ottoman Empire's subsequent political choices.

This study aims to examine the March 31 Incident within the 1860–1914 time frame, analyzing the events before and after it within a comprehensive framework. The post-Tanzimat reform process, the constitutional opposition tradition shaped by the Young Ottomans and the Young Turks movement, the administrative approach during the reign of Abdülhamid II, and the rise of the Committee of Union and Progress constitute the fundamental components of this framework (Mardin, 1962; Karpat, 2001). The institutional transformation initiated by the Tanzimat redefined state-society relations and prepared fertile ground for the emergence of constitutional demands; this process took concrete form with the proclamation of the 1876 Constitution, but was interrupted when Abdülhamid II dissolved the parliament (Tunaya, 1984). Such an approach positions March 31 not as a historical "deviation" but as a natural outcome of long-term political transformations. At the same time, this periodical framework allows for the questioning of deterministic approaches that explain the Ottoman Empire's entry into World War I as the automatic result of a single event (Ahmad, 1969). Thus, the study aims to go beyond short-term explanations of events and evaluate structural continuities and discontinuities together. This scope aims to strengthen the analytical depth of the study.

The main objective of the study is to reinterpret the March 31 Incident in terms of constitutional legitimacy, power struggles, and crisis management. In this regard, the article proposes that the

event be analyzed not only through the intentions of the actors but also through the functioning of institutional structures and the political practices produced in times of crisis. This approach requires a balanced consideration of the structure-agency relationship in explaining political events and cannot be reduced to either pure structural determinism or will-based explanations (Barkey, 2008; George and Bennett, 2005). Constitutional legitimacy is defined in this study not merely in terms of the existence of legal texts, but in terms of how these texts are used, interpreted, and violated by political actors (Barkey, 2008). The concept of power struggle refers to the multidimensional competition between the palace, the parliament, the army, and the societies. Crisis management encompasses the entirety of the state's institutional and political responses to extraordinary circumstances (Sohrabi, 2011). This conceptual framework makes it possible to reconstruct the 31 March Incident in an analytical manner, free from reductive labels. Thus, the study aims to reveal the complex nature of the event.

The main research question of the article is formulated as follows: How did the 31 March Incident reveal the limits of constitutional legitimacy and the nature of crisis management capacity in the Late Ottoman Empire? The supporting questions for this main question can be listed as follows: (i) What institutional legacy did the tradition of constitutional opposition, which developed from the 1860s onwards, leave to March 31? (ii) What structural vulnerabilities did the administrative practices of the Abdülhamid II period produce in times of crisis? (iii) What tools did the Committee of Union and Progress use to manage the March 31 crisis, and how did it gain power in the process? These questions make it possible to examine an important segment of Ottoman political history on different levels and aim to conceptually capture the multidimensional nature of the event. In line with these questions, the basic hypothesis of the study can be stated as follows: The March 31 Incident was not the product of a pre-designed, single-centered plan, but rather the result of groups with organizational capacity turning the process to their advantage in a multi-actor crisis environment (Hanioğlu, 2001; Zürcher, 2004). The auxiliary hypotheses are based on the assumption that the institutional weaknesses of the constitutional order made military intervention possible and that crisis management paved the way for long-term centralized governance. These hypotheses are amenable to testing through process tracing, making it possible to relate claims of causality to historical evidence (George and Bennett, 2005).

The originality of this study lies in its simultaneous focus on the concepts of constitutional legitimacy and crisis management in addressing the March 31 Incident. In the existing literature, these two concepts have mostly been discussed independently of each other. However, how the constitution is interpreted during crises and which actors impose this interpretation is of decisive importance in terms of political outcomes (Sohrabi, 2011). This situation is not unique to the Ottoman experience; similar patterns of crisis have been observed in many states that transitioned to constitutional regimes at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century (Barkey, 2008). This study establishes a conceptual bridge by linking legitimacy debates to concrete power relations. Thus, it demonstrates that the constitutional order is not merely a rule-based framework but also a strategic tool. This perspective makes it possible to interpret Ottoman political modernization as a more dynamic process. This aspect of the study aims to make a unique contribution to both Ottoman historiography and the literature on political crises.

The theoretical background of the article is closely related to the literature examining how constitutional regimes are redefined during times of crisis. Although constitutional orders are often evaluated based on the rules of normal times, they are truly tested under extraordinary conditions

(Sohrabi, 2011). In this context, the concept of a state of emergency is of central importance for understanding the processes of suspending or reinterpreting the constitutional order, as moments of crisis are periods when the limits and flexibility of constitutional rules are tested (Deringil, 1998). The March 31 Incident is a striking example of how the constitution could be suspended or reinterpreted during a crisis in the Ottoman Empire. In this context, the constitution ceases to be merely a legal text and becomes an instrument at the center of political struggles (Deringil, 1998). By analyzing how constitutional legitimacy becomes fragile in times of crisis, this study aims to reveal the limits of a rule-based understanding of the constitution. This approach allows for a comparison of the Ottoman experience with the comparative constitutional literature. Thus, the 31 March Incident becomes the concrete basis for a theoretical discussion.

The concept of constitutional legitimacy is not used in this study in the sense of mere adherence to legal rules. On the contrary, legitimacy is related to the justifications political actors use to legitimize their actions in times of crisis (Weber, 1978). When evaluated within the framework of Weber's typology of legitimacy, it can be seen that traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational forms of legitimacy were intertwined in the Ottoman Empire and that these different sources of legitimacy clashed in times of crisis (Karpas, 2001). In the period after the Second Constitutional Era, the constitution was interpreted and instrumentalized in different ways by different actors. The 31 March Incident represents a moment when these differences in interpretation turned into conflict. This pluralistic use of legitimacy weakened the stability of the political order. Consequently, the constitution became a battleground rather than a framework for maintaining order (Sohrabi, 2011). In this context, the study argues that legitimacy is not fixed but rather a phenomenon negotiated within a process. This argument plays a central role in the analytical assessment of March 31.

The concept of power struggles points to the fact that political power in the Late Ottoman Empire was not concentrated in a single center. The palace, the Meclis-i Mebusan (Parliament), the army, and organized political structures such as the Committee of Union and Progress all claimed legitimacy at the same time (Hanioglu, 2001). This multi-centered structure was a product of the Ottoman Empire's unique historical development; the tension between the central state tradition and the new political actors that emerged in the nineteenth century formed the basis of this pluralism (Findley, 1980). The March 31 Incident demonstrates how this multi-centered power structure became conflictual at a moment of crisis. In particular, the positioning of the army as an actor both maintaining order and intervening politically fundamentally altered the balance of power. This situation constituted a decisive threshold in terms of the institutionalization of military-political relations (Uyar and Erickson, 2009). This form of power struggle was not unique to 1909; it also shaped subsequent political practices. This study aims to make this continuity visible.

The concept of crisis management is used to understand the nature and consequences of the state's responses to extraordinary situations. The decisions taken during the 31 March Incident aimed not only to suppress the current crisis but also to prevent possible future crises. However, these measures often resulted in narrowing political pluralism and strengthening centralization (Zürcher, 2004). This paradoxical nature of crisis management reflects the tension between short-term order establishment and long-term political participation, providing a critical conceptual tool for understanding the political choices of the late Ottoman Empire (Ahmad, 1993). Crisis management thus created a tension between short-term stability and long-term political costs. This tension also

determined the Ottoman Empire's political choices after 1913 (Ahmad, 1969). The study considers the 31 March Incident as an early and decisive example of this tension. Thus, it emphasizes that crisis management is not merely a technical but a deeply political process.

The research design is based on the reinterpretation of qualitative historical data within an analytical framework. The data used in the study consists of secondary literature based on official documents of the period, constitutional texts, parliamentary debates, and contemporary observers' assessments. These sources are used not to describe the event but to analyze institutional functioning and political discourse (Findley, 1980; Hanioglu, 2008). This source usage strategy is consistent with the tradition of historical sociology and allows macro-level processes to be linked to micro-level evidence (Barkey, 2008). Thus, the text focuses on conceptual explanation rather than a pile of documents. The research is conducted using interpretive historical analysis methods and offers a mechanism analysis consistent with process tracking logic (George and Bennett, 2005). This methodological choice aims to understand not only the "why" but also the "how" of the event. The methodological stance of the study will be explained in detail in the following sections.

It should be emphasized that this study is interdisciplinary in nature. It engages in dialogue with the literature on political science, constitutional studies, and crisis management, in addition to historiography. When examined at the intersection of these disciplines, the March 31 Incident ceases to be an event unique to the Ottoman Empire and becomes a comparative example (Barkey, 2008). This comparative potential ensures that the Ottoman experience sheds light not only on regional but also on universal political issues; it provides a valuable ground for understanding the common patterns of crises experienced during constitutional transition periods (Sohrabi, 2011). How constitutional regimes become fragile in times of crisis can be discussed at a more general level through this case. This approach ensures that the Ottoman experience sheds light on universal political issues. Thus, the study aims not only to fill a historical gap but also to contribute to a broader theoretical debate. This goal forms the logical basis for the subsequent sections of the article.

The scope of the study has been deliberately limited. The time frame adopted is 1860–1914, a choice that allows for an assessment of both the accumulation preceding the event and its lasting effects afterwards. This period covers a critical segment of Ottoman political history, from the emergence of constitutional ideas to the outbreak of World War I, and provides a framework conducive to tracing structural transformations (Zürcher, 2010). Geographically, the focus is on the decision-making processes of the Ottoman central administration, with provincial dynamics addressed only in the context of center-periphery relations. At the actor level, the palace, the parliament, the army, and the Committee of Union and Progress have been identified as the primary units of analysis. These limitations have been imposed to maintain the focus of the study and ensure analytical consistency. Being aware of these limitations also makes it possible to generate new questions for future research. These conscious choices strengthen the methodological transparency of the study.

The theoretical contribution of the article is embodied in the proposed integrated framework for analyzing the March 31 Incident. This framework combines repertoires of legitimacy, organizational capacity, opportunity structures, and military-political relations within a single explanatory model. This integrated approach brings together these dimensions, which are usually addressed separately in the literature, under a single explanatory umbrella and makes it possible to

conceptually grasp the complex dynamics of the crisis (Hanioglu, 2008; Zürcher, 2010). The model assumes that crises cannot be reduced to a single cause but rather emerge from the simultaneous interaction of multiple mechanisms (George and Bennett, 2005). The March 31 Incident provides a historical example of this multiple interaction. The model makes it possible to address both the accumulations preceding the event and the institutional consequences following it within the same explanatory framework. Thus, the crisis is conceptualized not only as "what happened" but also as "what was done." This approach aims to go beyond teleological and reductionist explanations.

The current gap in the literature stems from the separate examination of the different dimensions of the March 31 Incident. Studies on constitutional thought, political organization, military intervention, and crisis management have shed light on various aspects of the event. However, studies that combine these dimensions within a single analytical framework have been limited (Hanioglu, 2008; Zürcher, 2010). This fragmentation hinders a comprehensive understanding of the event and makes it difficult to comprehend the true place of March 31 in Ottoman political history; therefore, there is a clear need for synthetic studies (Findley, 2011). This article, drawing on this gap in the literature, repositions March 31 as a crisis that tested the late Ottoman state's capacity and constitutional legitimacy. It thus aims to offer a synthesis that draws on existing studies but goes beyond them. This synthesis reveals the multi-layered nature of the event. Filling this gap in the literature is one of the main objectives of this study.

The polycentric character of the Ottoman political structure is one of the fundamental assumptions of this study. The study does not view the March 31 Incident as the product of a single actor or ideological orientation, but rather as a crisis that emerged as a result of the interaction of different power centers. This perspective emphasizes that political events are often shaped not by "intention" but by "capacity" and "opportunity" (Barkey, 2008). This pluralistic perspective goes beyond the "great man" narratives often encountered in historiography, highlighting the decisive role of structural conditions and institutional dynamics (Findley, 1980). Actors such as the palace, parliament, army, and societies simultaneously claimed legitimacy, and these claims turned into conflict during the crisis. Therefore, single-cause approaches are insufficient in explaining the event. The simultaneous actions of multiple actors determined the course and outcome of the crisis. This pluralistic perspective strengthens the analytical originality of the study.

The concept of legitimacy repertoires in this study refers to the discourse and rationale used by different actors to justify their political actions. II. After the Constitutional Monarchy, the constitution was interpreted in different ways: by the palace to protect the sultan's powers, by the parliament to represent the will of the people, by the army to maintain order, and by the Committee of Union and Progress to continue the revolution (Hanioglu, 2008). These different interpretations reflect each actor's attempt to legitimize their own interests and vision through constitutional language, creating an environment in which the constitution served as an "empty signifier" (Sohrabi, 2011). This pluralistic interpretation prevented the constitution from serving as a framework for consensus. The March 31 Incident represents a moment when these different repertoires clashed. The pluralization of legitimacy claims increased political uncertainty and paved the way for the deepening of the crisis. This conceptual tool reveals the discursive dimension of the event.

The concept of organizational capacity defines the ability of different actors to take action and steer the process during a crisis. The organizational superiority demonstrated by the Committee of

Union and Progress during the March 31 Incident had a decisive impact on the outcome of the crisis (Kansu, 1997). The rapid organization of the Army of Action and its march on Istanbul are concrete examples of this capacity. The Committee of Union and Progress's Thessaloniki-based organizational network provided a clear advantage over other actors in terms of communication and coordination capacity; this was a decisive factor in resolving the crisis (Hanioğlu, 2001). In contrast, the scattered structure and lack of coordination among the insurgent elements facilitated the suppression of the crisis. This situation demonstrates that political outcomes are related not only to claims of legitimacy but also to the capacity to implement these claims. Differences in organizational capacity directly influenced the course of the power struggle. This study assigns a central position to analyzing this dimension.

The concept of opportunity structures defines the structural conditions that facilitate the emergence of crises. After the Second Constitutional Era, the Ottoman political system simultaneously contained elements such as the novelty of the constitutional order, lack of bureaucratic coordination, and competition among elites (Zürcher, 2004). These structural conditions point to a period in which the political system was "open" and "fragile," creating low thresholds and a high environment of uncertainty for different actors to take action (Kansu, 1997). These elements created a favorable opportunity structure for the 31 March Incident. The crisis was not the product of a single provocation, but rather of structural vulnerabilities. The environment of political uncertainty allowed different actors to take action. The study argues that opportunity structures played an accelerating role in the dynamics of the crisis. Thus, the event is theorized as a conditional process rather than a random one.

Military-political relations constitute another fundamental dimension of the theoretical framework. In the late Ottoman Empire, the army was perceived not only as a defense apparatus but also as the protector and, when necessary, the reconstituent of the political order (Uyar and Erickson, 2009). This perception made military intervention a legitimate option in times of crisis. The army's emergence as both the bearer and suppressor of the crisis during the 31 March Incident is a clear demonstration of this dual role. This dual role can be seen as an early sign of the institutionalization of military tutelage in the process from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic; the decisive role of military power in crisis management has continued in subsequent political practices (Ahmad, 1993). The literature highlights the long-term effects of this situation, which narrows the civil political sphere (Zürcher, 2010). The study avoids evaluating military intervention with value judgments and treats it as a structural mechanism. Thus, military-politics relations are positioned as an explanatory variable in the theoretical model.

At this point, the theoretical framework proposes an analytical model that integrates legitimacy repertoires, organizational capacity, opportunity structures, and military-political relations. The model assumes that crises cannot be reduced to a single cause but rather arise from the simultaneous interaction of multiple mechanisms (George and Bennett, 2005). This assumption aims to overcome the limitations of the monocausal approaches frequently encountered in historical explanations and offers a more adequate framework for understanding the complex causality structure of crises (Barkey, 2008). This proposed system allows us to explain that the March 31 Incident was neither entirely premeditated nor entirely random. The course of the crisis was shaped by the capacities and opportunities available to the actors rather than their intentions (Hanioğlu, 2001; Barkey, 2008). The theoretical framework therefore avoids the trap of reading backwards from the outcome. The model's relationship with the hypotheses will be discussed in

detail in the methodology section. Thus, the study aims to present a coherent whole at both the historical and theoretical levels.

In conclusion, this article seeks to answer the following fundamental question: How did the March 31 Incident reveal the limits of constitutional legitimacy and the nature of crisis management capacity in the Late Ottoman Empire? Accompanying subsidiary questions cover the historical legacy of constitutional opposition, the effects of administrative practices during the reign of Abdülhamid II, and the process of strengthening the Committee of Union and Progress arising from the crisis. The expected contributions of the study can be summarized on three levels. First, it rescues the 31 March Incident from reductive narratives by offering a multi-actor and processual analysis. Second, it fills a conceptual gap in the literature by addressing the concepts of constitutional legitimacy and crisis management together within the Ottoman context. Third, it contributes to broader theoretical debates by relating the Ottoman experience to comparative politics and constitutional studies. These contributions ensure that the article occupies a unique position within both Ottoman historiography and comparative politics literature, providing a historical perspective on the broader debate concerning how constitutional regimes functioned during periods of crisis (Sohrabi, 2011; Zürcher, 2010). In this respect, the article aims to provide a unique perspective on both Ottoman historiography and the literature on political crises.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on the 31 March Incident has been shaped by attempts to define the nature of the event. This literature has mostly positioned the event within the framework of two opposing narratives: on one side, the thesis of a "reactionary uprising" based on religious conservatism, and on the other, the claim of a "conspiracy" resulting from political calculations (Tunaya, 1984; Shaw and Shaw, 1977). Although both approaches are based on consistent evidence within themselves, they have failed to adequately explain the multi-layered structure of the event. This inadequacy stems particularly from the neglect of the social, institutional, and international dimensions of the event (Quataert, 2000). The reactionary uprising thesis presented the demands of the military units and the reactions of the medrese students as a homogeneous ideological bloc; however, contemporary research has documented that these elements had different interests and expectations (Kansu, 1997). The conspiracy theory, on the other hand, overestimates the extraordinary organizational capacity of the Committee of Union and Progress, overshadowing the spontaneous dynamics of the crisis. In fact, crises are often the product of structural fragilities and windows of opportunity, rather than pre-designed plans (Barkey, 2008). Ottoman historiography, which has developed over the last forty years, has moved beyond this dual polarization and brought the structural context of the event to the fore (Hanioğlu, 2008; Zürcher, 2010). This context was formed by the convergence of constitutional demands, bureaucratic transformations, and practices of association that had been accumulating since the 1860s. Consequently, the literature has evolved from seeking singular causes to examining the interaction of multiple mechanisms. This evolution directly corresponds to the theoretical framework of this study.

The literature formed around the concept of constitutional legitimacy covers a broad time span, from the origins of Ottoman political thought to the practical functioning of the Second Constitutional Era. Studies focused on the history of thought have detailed how the concepts of consultation, representation, and constitution were developed during the period from the Young Ottomans to the Young Turks (Mardin, 1962). These studies have shown that constitutional

demands were not merely ideas imported from the West, but were instead shaped by the Ottoman Empire's unique political language and traditions. This original synthesis brought together the concept of shura in the Islamic tradition of governance with the principles of European constitutionalism (Lewis, 2002). Karpas's (2001) work has made an important contribution to the debate in this field by examining the tense relationship between political Islam and constitutionalism. A second strand of literature focuses on the practical functioning of the post-1908 constitutional order. These studies have addressed the uncertainties in the sultan-parliament-government relations, the different interpretations of the constitutional text, and the weakness of institutional balance (Findley, 1980; Sohrabi, 2011). These uncertainties stemmed from the constitutional order not yet being institutionalized and political actors failing to agree on the rules of the game () (Kayalı, 1997). The 1909 constitutional amendments have been interpreted as an attempt to restore legitimacy and establish a new balance of power after the crisis. Deringil's (1998) study showed how legitimacy was produced through ideological and administrative tools during the reign of Abdülhamid II; it has become a fundamental source for understanding why this repertoire became unsustainable after 1908. This study aims to integrate these two strands in the literature by addressing both the intellectual roots of constitutional legitimacy and its performance during the crisis.

The literature on power struggles has focused on the organizational capacities of political actors and the multi-centered character of intra-state competition in understanding the 31 March Incident. This literature has revealed that the Ottoman political structure consisted not of a single center of power, but of competing power centers. This multi-centeredness constituted one of the structural sources of political instability in the final period of the empire (Ortaylı, 2003). Hanioglu's (1995; 2001) studies comprehensively document the organizational forms of the Young Turk opposition, the preparatory processes between 1902 and 1908, and the political rise of the society. These studies explain why the Committee of Union and Progress had such a high capacity for mobilization after 1908. Zürcher's (2004; 2010) studies, on the other hand, evaluate the role of Unionist politics in the reconstruction of the state and the reforms following March 31. Kansu's (1997; 1999) research reveals that post-revolutionary political competition rapidly intensified and that debates over legitimacy within government circles became a crisis-producing dynamic. Barkey's (2008) approach treats the palace-parliament-army-society quadrangle not as fixed actors but as power centers whose alliances can change in times of crisis. This perspective represents a shift from single-centered interpretations of intent to structural and relational explanations. This study analyzes the power struggle through the interaction of organizational capacity, opportunity structures, and legitimacy discourses, without reducing it to a "single plan" level. This ensures consistency with the pluralistic approach in the text.

The army and soldier-politics relations occupy a central place in the literature on March 31. This literature has approached the army in a dual position, both as the perpetrator and carrier of the crisis and as the institutional actor that resolved the crisis. This dual position stemmed from the perception of the Ottoman army not only as a defensive apparatus but also as the carrier of the modernization project and the ultimate guarantor of the political order (Ahmad, 1993). Studies based on military history have revealed that the politicization of the army after the Second Constitutional Era, disciplinary problems, and tensions between "school-trained" and "field-trained" officers strengthened the material basis for the uprising (Uyar and Erickson, 2009). From this perspective, March 31 is a military-political rupture that must be understood not only in terms of

ideological discourse but also in terms of barracks order, the chain of command, and conflicts over appointments and promotions. The literature on the suppression of the crisis has discussed the intervention of the Army of Movement from two different angles: on the one hand, as a move to rescue the constitutional order, and on the other, as a means of establishing a new political supremacy (Zürcher, 2004; Hanioglu, 2008). Schull's (2014) study documents how martial law practices and judicial processes after 1909 expanded the state's repertoire of emergency measures. Ahmad's (1969) research shows that while this expansion produced stability in the short term, it narrowed the political space and strengthened security-oriented reflexes in the long term. These findings reveal that crisis management is not merely a technical suppression but a political process intertwined with legitimacy production and power consolidation (Sohrabi, 2011). This study integrates these findings into a theoretical framework by treating the army as a structural variable. The literature on the periodization of the March 31 Incident is divided between two main approaches. The first approach, focusing on the current politics of 1908-1909, is strong in explaining the short-term triggers of the uprising but relegates the continuities of post-Tanzimat reforms and the tradition of opposition to a secondary position (Shaw and Shaw, 1977). While this approach is useful for understanding the immediate dynamics of the event, it tends to overlook its structural roots (). The second approach highlights how bureaucratic reform, educational transformation, the expansion of the public sphere, and centralization processes shaped the state's capacity to respond to crises (Findley, 1980; Fortna, 2002). Educational reforms, in particular, paved the way for the emergence of a new elite generation and for this generation to articulate demands for constitutional governance (Somel, 2001). This long-term perspective allows us to position March 31 as a "pivotal point where institutional fragilities became visible" (Hanioglu, 2008; Zürcher, 2010). Studies on the transformation of the public sphere show that legitimacy discourses rapidly multiplied after 1908 and that political polarization deepened through communication channels (Brummett, 2000). The works of Özbek (2013) and Deringil (1998) address the balance between the state's production of consent and its security reflexes within the framework of continuities stretching from the reign of Abdülhamid II to the Second Constitutional Era. This study aims to combine these two approaches in the literature and discuss March 31 in terms of both its short-term crisis dynamics and the institutional transformation line between 1860 and 1914. Thus, both the specific conditions and structural roots of the event are made visible.

The literature on the administrative practices of the Abdülhamid II period occupies a decisive position in the interpretation of the 31 March Incident. This literature has examined the sultan's legitimacy strategies through the prism of ideology, security, and bureaucratic control mechanisms. Deringil's (1998) comprehensive study reveals how Abdülhamid established his legitimacy through personal authority, the discourse of the caliphate, and central oversight. This legitimacy strategy strengthened the sultan's symbolic position in the Islamic world while also serving as a means of suppressing opposition in domestic politics (Karpas, 2001). This work provides a fundamental resource for understanding why this repertoire of legitimacy was unsustainable in a constitutional political environment. March 31 can be considered a moment of crisis that crystallized this unsustainability. However, there are also approaches in the literature that interpret the Abdülhamid period solely through the concept of "despotism" (Karpas, 2001). These approaches fail to adequately explain the complex governance practices and institutional legacy of the period. In fact, the Abdülhamid period also witnessed significant transformations in terms of bureaucratic rationalization, infrastructure investments, and educational reforms (Fortna,

2002). More balanced analyses have emphasized that the sultan's repertoire of legitimacy clashed with rival discourses after the Second Constitutional Era (Hanioglu, 2008). This perspective positions March 31 not as an absolute rejection of Abdülhamid's rule, but as a painful result of the transition between forms of legitimacy. Adopting this interpretation, the study addresses the crisis in the context of structural transformation rather than personal will. Thus, it goes beyond the personalizing narratives in the literature.

Focusing on the Committee of Union and Progress, the literature positions the March 31 Incident as a decisive threshold in the society's transition to political power. This literature highlights the society's fundamental advantages as its organizational capacity, disciplined cadre structure, and ability to make quick decisions in times of crisis (Hanioglu, 2001; Zürcher, 2010). The society's Thessaloniki-based organizational network provided a distinct advantage over other actors in terms of communication and coordination capacity. This superiority was fueled by the society's experience in networking and clandestine organization, developed within the multi-ethnic structure of the Balkan geography (Zürcher, 1984). However, the literature shows a clear distinction between claims that the Unionists planned March 31 in advance and approaches that treat these claims with caution. "Conspiracy" narratives have mostly been viewed as problematic in terms of the standard of proof and have been criticized on the grounds that they oversimplify the complex nature of the event (Kansu, 1999). More convincing analyses have argued that the society had the capacity to manage the emerging crisis and turn its consequences to its own advantage, rather than "creating" the crisis (Barkey, 2008). This perspective moves beyond attributing intent and focuses on institutional and organizational superiority. This study adopts the second approach outlined above and examines the Committee of Union and Progress in the context of consolidating power arising from crisis. This choice directly corresponds to the fundamental hypothesis presented in the Introduction.

Although the concept of crisis management has been relatively underdeveloped in the Ottoman context, the 31 March Incident offers significant insights when linked to this concept. While the literature on crisis management has generally been developed in the context of contemporary nation-states, late imperial experiences provide rich material for understanding the historical roots of this concept (Sohrabi, 2011). In this context, the Ottoman experience offers a comparative perspective for understanding the historical precursors of contemporary crisis management theories (Reynolds, 2011). The military, legal, and administrative measures taken during the 31 March process constitute an early example of the state's response to extraordinary circumstances. While aimed at restoring order, these measures also served to build a new political order (Zürcher, 2004). The literature shows that such crisis management measures, often presented as "temporary" measures, have produced lasting institutional consequences (Ahmad, 1969). In the Ottoman case, this is clearly observable in the 1909 constitutional amendments and subsequent security measures. Schull's (2014) study documents how martial law and punitive practices became institutionalized after the crisis. These findings reveal that crisis management is not merely a technical intervention but a process that reshapes the political order. The study aims to contribute conceptually to the literature by reading March 31 through this lens of lasting impact.

Comparative perspectives make it possible to place the March 31 Incident within a broader literature on constitutional crises. Studies on the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911) and the 1905 experience in Russia reveal that constitutional orders exhibited similar fragilities in their early stages (Sohrabi, 2011). These three imperial experiences reveal the common challenges

faced by multi-ethnic structures in their constitutional transformation processes at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century (Rogan, 2015). These comparisons suggest that the crisis in the Ottoman Empire was not "exceptional," but rather part of a structural pattern for late-modernizing empires. The literature emphasizes that the role of the military and security apparatus in political processes determined the course of crises (Barkey, 2008). In all three examples, the tension between the constitutional order and military power constituted one of the fundamental sources of political instability. The 31 March Incident can be considered a concrete example of the conflict between constitutional legitimacy and security reflexes in this context. This comparative framework removes the Ottoman experience from a local narrative and makes it part of a theoretical discussion. In line with this trend in the literature, the study relates March 31 to universal crisis dynamics. This reveals both the specific and general dimensions of the event.

Another important dimension of the literature focuses on the long-term political consequences of the March 31 Incident. These studies argue that suppressing the crisis strengthened executive and military authority rather than reinforcing the constitutional order (Zürcher, 2010). The fact that the Unionist approach to governance after 1913 became more centralized and consolidated is often linked to the experiences following March 31 in this context (Ahmad, 1969). This trend toward centralization also paralleled the rise of national economic policies and the ideology of Turkism (Toprak, 1995). There is a strong view in the literature that this continuity influenced the political culture extending from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic. In particular, the acceptance of military intervention as a legitimate political tool has been evaluated as part of a pattern that began with the experience of March 31. However, some studies have warned that this narrative of linear continuity may be overly generalizing (Findley, 2011). Each historical period has its own specific conditions and dynamics. Therefore, while emphasizing historical continuities, it is necessary not to ignore the context and conditions specific to each period (Quataert, 2000). Taking this warning into account, this study does not view the effects of March 31 as either inevitable or incidental. On the contrary, it aims to address the institutional and mental legacy produced by the crisis in a conditional and context-sensitive manner. This approach aims to go beyond the deterministic tendencies in the literature.

Another noteworthy axis of the text focuses on the role of the public sphere and political communication channels in the production of the crisis. The proclamation of the Second Constitutional Monarchy allowed for the expansion of press freedom and the conduct of political debates in public. Brummett's (2000) study documents the extraordinary increase in the number of newspapers, brochures, and political speeches during this period. Kırılı's (2009) study, on the other hand, examines in detail the process of public opinion formation and the state's efforts to control this new public sphere. However, this visibility also brought with it uncontrolled polarization. The literature has revealed that during the March 31 process, struggles for legitimacy were conducted through communication channels and that political tension escalated through this means (Hanioglu, 2008). The fragmentation of public discourse has allowed different actors to use the same constitutional language in competing ways. This situation has prevented legitimacy from being reproduced on common ground. The state's regulatory capacity could not keep up with the speed and intensity of this communication environment. These findings show that crisis management capacity has not only a military and administrative dimension, but also a communicative one. By integrating these findings into a theoretical framework, this study aims to reveal the discursive dynamics of the crisis.

Social history and social policy literature has pointed out the inadequacy of viewing the March 31 Incident solely as a conflict among elites. This literature emphasizes that the demands of groups such as soldiers, madrasa students, and the urban poor formed the social basis of the crisis (Quataert, 1983; Özbek, 2013). These studies make an important contribution by showing how the political crisis intersected with social discontent. This discontent was directly related to the economic transformations and processes of social stratification experienced during the final period of the empire (Quataert, 2000). Wage and promotion issues in military units, status concerns among madrasa students, and the economic hardships of the urban poor formed the multi-layered social base of the crisis. However, the literature has not sufficiently addressed how these social demands were articulated with discourses of constitutional legitimacy. Most studies have merely positioned social tension as a background element. This study, however, aims to examine how social demands were instrumentalized by political actors in the production of legitimacy. Thus, a bridge is built between social history and political analysis. This approach aims to overcome the fragmentation in the literature.

A prominent debate in the literature has also centered on whether the March 31 Incident was "preventable." Some studies have argued that a more balanced constitutional design and clear boundaries in civil-military relations could have prevented the crisis (Findley, 2011). This approach assumes that different choices by actors could have led to different outcomes. Other studies, however, have argued that such a crisis was almost inevitable given the international and internal dynamics of the period (Zürcher, 2010). In particular, the rise of nationalist movements in the Balkans and the pressure exerted on the Ottoman Empire by the great powers further increased internal political tensions (Jelavich, 1983a). This approach assumes that structural conditions overrode individual will. This debate reflects the tension between structuralist and voluntarist approaches frequently encountered in historiography. The existing literature has struggled to develop a balanced explanation between these two extremes. This study rejects the dichotomy of "inevitability" and "total control" and proposes a conditional explanation of the crisis. Thus, the polarized debates in the literature on the 31 March Incident are brought to a solution-oriented level. This choice is consistent with the theoretical framework presented in the Introduction.

The most obvious gap revealed by the literature review is the limited number of comprehensive studies that simultaneously focus on the concepts of constitutional legitimacy, power struggles, and crisis management in the March 31 Incident. Existing research has generally addressed these three elements separately and discussed their interaction at a secondary level. This fragmentation clearly demonstrates the need for an interdisciplinary approach, as March 31 is a complex event at the intersection of political science, history, and sociology. However, the March 31 process constitutes a unique subject of study as an example of a crisis in which these three dimensions came into play simultaneously (Sohrabi, 2011). Constitutional legitimacy debates encompass the discursive dimension of the power struggle; power struggles encompass the actors of crisis management; and crisis management encompasses the reshaping of the constitutional order. This fragmentation in the literature has led to the event being presented with either overly ideological or overly descriptive narratives. This has prevented the analytical potential of March 31 from being fully appreciated. This study explicitly aims to fill this gap. Thus, it provides a framework that gives conceptual coherence to the literature.

In conclusion, the literature offers a rich but fragmented body of knowledge for understanding the March 31 Incident. Studies on constitutional thought, political organization, military intervention,

social dynamics, and crisis management have shed light on different dimensions of the event. However, studies that combine these dimensions within a single analytical framework remain limited (Hanioğlu, 2008; Zürcher, 2010). This limitation also stems from the difficulty of striking a balance between the historical specificity of the event and its theoretical generalizability. The main strands in the literature have not been sufficiently interrelated. Building on this gap in the literature, this study re-positions March 31 as a crisis that tested the capacity and constitutional legitimacy of the late Ottoman state. The concepts of legitimacy repertoires, organizational capacity, opportunity structures, and military-political relations constitute the tools for this re-positioning. Thus, a synthesis that draws on existing studies but goes beyond them is presented. This synthesis makes the multi-layered nature of the event conceptually visible.

A literature review has laid the intellectual groundwork that makes the original contribution of this study possible. This grounding, informed by historical, theoretical, and comparative perspectives, enables not only a description of the March 31 Incident but also its analytical reconstruction. This effort at reconstruction highlights the event's significance both for Ottoman historiography and comparative political writing. The gaps in the literature have shaped the questions and hypotheses of this study. The fundamental lesson emerging from this review is the necessity of addressing both the intellectual roots of constitutional legitimacy and its performance during times of crisis. Similarly, power struggles should not be reduced to single-centered interpretations of intent, and the lasting institutional effects of crisis management must be taken into account. These lessons form the basis of the theoretical framework to be developed in the next section. The theoretical framework will transform these findings from the literature into a systematic model. Thus, the study will remain in dialogue with the literature while also offering a unique contribution to it.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this study, directly related to the research question and hypotheses presented in the Introduction, aims to explain the March 31 Incident through the production and erosion of constitutional legitimacy, multi-centered power struggles, and the interaction of crisis management mechanisms. Filling the gaps identified in the Literature Review section necessitates addressing these three dimensions not separately but as interconnected mechanisms. This integrative approach aims to overcome the conceptual limitations arising from the fragmented treatment of late Ottoman political history (Hanioğlu, 2008). The literature examining how constitutional orders are tested in times of crisis shows that legitimacy is nourished not only by legal norms but also by how these norms are interpreted in political practice and by which actors instrumentalize them (Weber, 1978; Sohrabi, 2011). In this context, the constitution serves not only as a framework for maintaining social order but also as a resource that competing actors resort to in pursuit of their political goals. The constitutional crises experienced in empires such as the Ottoman, Iran, and Russia at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century show that this situation was not unique to the Ottomans, but rather reflected a common structural problem of multi-ethnic empires (Sohrabi, 2011). In the late Ottoman Empire, this situation became concretely apparent with the rapid proliferation of legitimacy claims after 1908. This study approaches the March 31 Incident as a historical threshold where this proliferation turned into conflict. Thus, the event is conceptualized as a structural crisis, going beyond the narrative of a single uprising or coup. The theoretical approach aims to reveal political mechanisms while avoiding value judgments and to bring the complex nature of the event to an analytical plane.

The concept of constitutional legitimacy is defined in this study in the context of political acceptance and consent rather than legal validity. Weber's typology of legitimacy provides a guiding framework for this study in that it shows how legal-rational legitimacy can conflict with claims of religious and traditional legitimacy in conditions of crisis (Weber, 1978). According to Weber, legitimacy stems not only from the existence of legal regulations but also from their internalization and acceptance by social actors; this understanding is of central importance in analyzing the Ottoman constitutional experience. Following the proclamation of the Second Constitutional Era, the constitution was interpreted by different actors through separate and often conflicting discourses of legitimacy. The palace read the constitution as a text that redefined the sultan's power rather than limiting it, while the Committee of Union and Progress presented the constitution as the legal basis for its own political sovereignty (Deringil, 1998; Hanioglu, 2008). The Meclis-i Mebusan, on the other hand, emphasized the principle of representation, giving a different meaning to the constitutional order. These pluralistic interpretations reflected the different strands of the constitutional tradition that had developed since the Young Ottomans; the tension between the understanding of constitutionalism developed by Namik Kemal and his friends and the positivist-leaning interpretation of the Committee of Union and Progress formed the intellectual origins of this pluralism (Mardin, 1962). This pluralistic usage led to the constitution ceasing to be a common ground for consensus and instead becoming an arena of struggle. The 31 March Incident was a moment of crisis that clearly crystallized this transformation. Consistent with the conceptual framework emphasized in the Introduction, this study assumes that legitimacy is not a fixed given, but rather a dynamic process that is renegotiated in moments of crisis.

The dimension of power struggles theoretically centers on the multi-centered nature of the late Ottoman political structure. As studies reviewed in the Literature Review section reveal, this structure, in which state power was not concentrated in a single center, intensified coordination problems and competition between actors in moments of crisis (Barkey, 2008). Barkey's analysis of the Ottoman state structure reveals that the relationship between the center and the periphery was not a fixed hierarchy but a constantly negotiated balance; this balance was fragile in times of crisis and had the potential to turn into open conflict. Organized political structures such as the palace, the Meclis-i Mebusan (Parliament), the army, and the Committee of Union and Progress entered the political arena, each claiming legitimacy (Zürcher, 2004). While this polycentricity could produce a certain balance in normal times, it disrupted this balance in extraordinary circumstances, leading to open conflict. The bureaucratic elites that developed since the Tanzimat, the traditional power centers around the palace (), and the military-political organizations that became prominent after 1908 formed the basic components of this multi-centered structure (Findley, 2011; Kansu, 1997). The 31 March Incident is a historical moment when this conflict was tested by military force. Consistent with the hypothesis presented in the introduction, the study analyzes power struggles through organizational capacity, opportunity structures, and alliance dynamics, rather than reducing them to the intentions of individual actors. This approach offers an explanatory framework that transcends the dichotomy between a "premeditated conspiracy" and a "spontaneous uprising." Thus, the event is conceptualized as a product of structural conditions and the interaction between actors.

The concept of crisis management is used to encompass the entirety of the state's institutional and political responses to extraordinary situations. The literature on crisis management draws attention to the tension between short-term order maintenance and long-term political costs (Sohrabi, 2011).

This tension is not unique to the Ottoman experience; the Constitutional Revolution in Iran and the post-1905 Revolution processes in Russia during the same period involved similar crisis management dilemmas (Sohrabi, 2011). The military intervention, martial law, and judicial processes implemented during the 31 March Incident provide an early and decisive example of this tension (Zürcher, 2004). These measures quickly established social order; however, they produced lasting consequences such as the narrowing of the political arena, the suppression of opposition, and the strengthening of centralization. The trials and executions held at the Divan-ı Harp constituted the punitive dimension of crisis management, while restrictions on the press and the control of political societies constituted its regulatory dimension (Ahmad, 1969). Consistent with the auxiliary hypothesis emphasized in the introduction, this study approaches crisis management not merely as a technical suppression measure, but as a political process intertwined with the production of legitimacy and the consolidation of power. This approach makes it possible to interpret the 1909 constitutional amendments not merely as an improvement initiative, but as the legal expression of the search for a new balance after the crisis. Thus, crisis management is placed at the center of the analysis and provides an explanatory framework that encompasses both the events preceding and following the crisis.

This theoretical framework proposes a series of mechanisms consistent with the logic of process tracking. Consistent with the methodological approach outlined in the introduction, the mechanisms are structured in a tripartite framework: first, the pluralization of legitimacy and the competition created by this pluralization; second, the weakening of coordination in a multi-centered power structure; and third, the rise of actors with organizational capacity to a decisive position during the crisis (George and Bennett, 2005). The process tracing method makes it possible to test claims of causality step by step through historical evidence and goes beyond explanations based on a single independent variable to reveal the interaction of multiple mechanisms. This system makes it possible to explain that the March 31 Incident was neither entirely premeditated nor entirely random. The course of the crisis was shaped not so much by the intentions of the actors as by their organizational capacity and the opportunities they encountered (Hanioglu, 2001; Barkey, 2008). This approach offers a balanced analysis that considers both structural conditions and the strategic choices of actors when explaining historical events; thus, it avoids falling into either overly structuralist or overly voluntarist explanations. As supported by the findings presented in the Literature Review section, the theoretical framework therefore avoids the tendency to read backwards from the outcome. In the next step, these mechanisms will be elaborated through concrete sub-concepts and variables, thereby clarifying the analytical power of the theoretical framework.

The concept of "legitimacy discourses" provides a functionally useful analytical tool for understanding how constitutional legitimacy operates under conditions of crisis. Legitimacy discourses refer to the set of legal, moral, and political justifications that political actors invoke to legitimize their actions (Deringil, 1998). This concept is borrowed from the literature on social movements and provides a useful framework for understanding how actors mobilize their cultural resources; in the Ottoman context, these discourses incorporated elements of both Islamic tradition and Western constitutionalism. In the late Ottoman context, these discourses included references to religious rules, the constitution, the sultan's decree, the will of the nation, and public order, among other things. After the proclamation of the Second Constitutional Era, the hierarchy among these references became unclear, and actors began to use different discourses simultaneously and

often in contradictory ways (Hanioglu, 2008). This uncertainty reflected the tension between the concepts of "constitutionalism" and "legitimacy" in Ottoman political culture; constitutionalism referred to the constitutional order, while legitimacy referred to the acceptance of political authority, and the relationship between the two became problematic in times of crisis (Mardin, 1962). The 31 March Incident is a historical moment when these claims to legitimacy openly clashed. While the rebelling soldiers referred to religious rules and the sultan's command, the Committee of Union and Progress emphasized the constitutional order and the will of the nation. This conflict led to the constitution producing a pluralizing rather than a unifying effect. The phenomenon of the plural use of legitimacy emphasized in the introduction is concretized with this conceptual tool. The study theoretically explains the crisis through the inability to manage this pluralization.

The concept of organizational capacity is central to the theoretical framework for explaining which actors rise to a position of influence during crises. Organizational capacity encompasses elements such as discipline, order, access to resources, and the ability to make quick decisions (Barkey, 2008). This concept draws on the literature on state capacity and is used to measure the ability of political actors to translate their claims into actual power; high organizational capacity enables quick and effective responses in times of crisis. In the late Ottoman Empire, this capacity was not distributed equally among political actors. Thanks to its local networks, military connections, and experience in clandestine organization, the Committee of Union and Progress possessed a greater mobilization power than its rivals (Hanioglu, 2001). Thanks to the organizational networks it developed from 1889 onwards, its military connections based in Thessaloniki, and the political skills it acquired from its experience in exile in Europe, the Society had gained a distinct organizational superiority over other actors (Hanioglu, 1995). During the crisis, this capacity became decisive in directing the course of events and determining their outcome. The March Army's march from Thessaloniki to Istanbul and the suppression of the crisis are concrete manifestations of this organizational superiority. This situation requires a theoretical clarification of the distinction between the "creation" and "management" of the crisis. Consistent with the fundamental hypothesis presented in the introduction, the study uses organizational capacity as an explanatory variable independent of the actors' intentions. Thus, the event is explained as the result of the interaction between structural conditions and organizational superiority, rather than as the product of a pre-designed plan.

The opportunity structures approach provides an important theoretical tool for explaining why political crises erupt at specific moments and in specific forms. Political opportunity structures include elements such as weaknesses in the state's capacity for control, divisions among elites, and institutional uncertainties (Sohrabi, 2011). This concept is borrowed from the literature on social movements and revolutions, emphasizing that collective action is fueled not only by discontent but also by structural openings through which this discontent can be expressed. Following the proclamation of the Second Constitutional Era, the Ottoman political order contained almost all of these elements simultaneously. The newness of the constitutional order, the lack of bureaucratic coordination, and the sharp competition among elites created a favorable opportunity structure for the 31 March Incident (Zürcher, 2004). The expansion of press freedom after 1908 led to the launch of hundreds of new newspapers and magazines; this made it possible to conduct political debates in the public sphere but also brought about uncontrolled polarization () (Kansu, 1999). As studies discussed in the Literature Review section reveal, the expansion of press freedom and the public

conduct of political debates during this period further broadened the opportunity structure. In this context, the crisis was not the result of a single provocation but rather a product of structural vulnerabilities. The study argues that opportunity structures played an accelerating role in the dynamics of the crisis. Thus, the event is theorized as a conditional process rather than a random explosion. This approach seeks to answer the question emphasized in the Introduction: "Under what conditions did it become possible?"

Military-political relations constitute another fundamental dimension of the theoretical framework. In the late Ottoman Empire, the army was perceived not only as a defense apparatus but also as the protector and, when necessary, the reconstituent of the political order (Uyar and Erickson, 2009). This perception was an important result of Ottoman military modernization; military reforms carried out throughout the nineteenth century had made the officer class the leading force of social and political change (Lewis, 2002). This perception made military intervention a legitimate option in times of crisis. The army's emergence during the 31 March Incident as both the bearer and suppressor of the crisis is a clear demonstration of this dual role. The rebelling units emerged from within the army, and the Army of Movement that suppressed the crisis was also organized within the army. This dual role also reflected internal divisions within the Ottoman military structure; the tension between the enlisted soldiers in Istanbul and the educated officers in Rumelia is central to understanding the military dimension of the crisis (Zürcher, 1984). In his writing, he draws attention to the long-term effects of this situation, which narrowed the civil political sphere (Zürcher, 2010). Consistent with the concept of power struggles emphasized in the introduction, the study approaches the military intervention as a structural mechanism, free from value judgments. Thus, military-political relations are positioned as an explanatory variable in the theoretical model, and an analysis covering both the events preceding and following the incident is presented. This approach contributes to understanding the institutional legacy that shaped the Ottoman Empire's subsequent political choices.

At this point, the theoretical framework proposes an analytical model that integrates legitimacy discourses, organizational capacity, opportunity structures, and military-political relations. The model assumes that crises cannot be reduced to a single cause but rather arise from the simultaneous interaction of multiple mechanisms (George and Bennett, 2005). This integrative approach aims to overcome the limitations of fragmented explanations in the literature and to conceptualize the multidimensional nature of the March 31 Incident on a single analytical plane. The March 31 Incident provides a historical example of this multiple interaction. The conflict over claims to legitimacy fueled tension between actors; opportunity structures paved the way for this tension to turn into a crisis; and organizational capacity determined the course and outcome of the crisis. The relationship between these mechanisms is not linear but mutually reinforcing; the legitimacy conflict expanded opportunity structures, opportunity structures determined organizational capacity, and organizational capacity determined the strength of legitimacy claims. The model makes it possible to address both the accumulations preceding the event and the institutional consequences following it within the same explanatory framework. Thus, the crisis is conceptualized not only as "what happened" but also as "what was done." This approach aims to go beyond the tendency to read backwards from the outcome and reductionist explanations. The next step will be to examine in detail how this theoretical model relates to the research question and hypotheses.

The proposed theoretical model has been constructed in direct relation to the study's research

question and hypotheses. The model's basic assumption is that the likelihood of crisis increases in periods when constitutional legitimacy is pluralized and institutional boundaries become blurred (Sohrabi, 2011). This assumption is supported not only by the Ottoman experience but also by comparative examples from the same period, such as the French Revolution (), the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, and the Russian Revolution of 1905; these examples show that constitutional transition periods are structurally prone to crisis. This assumption provides a suitable framework for explaining the simultaneous claims of legitimacy observed in the 31 March Incident. The first auxiliary hypothesis presented in the introduction suggests that the conflict between constitutional legitimacy claims is one of the fundamental mechanisms triggering crisis. The model tests this hypothesis by examining the simultaneous entry into play of different references such as religious rules, the constitution, and the will of the nation. The second auxiliary hypothesis argues that actors with high organizational capacity rise to a decisive position in times of crisis in a multi-centered power structure (Hanioglu, 2001; Barkey, 2008). The model tests this hypothesis through the organizational superiority of the Committee of Union and Progress and the mobilization capacity of the Army of Movement. The third auxiliary hypothesis is based on the assumption that crisis management tools provide order in the short term but narrow the political space in the long term (Zürcher, 2004). These hypotheses are not independent of each other but are interrelated, forming the integrity of the theoretical model; testing each hypothesis also provides indirect evidence regarding the validity of the other hypotheses. These hypotheses aim to test the explanatory power of the theoretical model through historical data.

Another important dimension of the theoretical framework is its emphasis on the reciprocal interaction between institutional capacity and legitimacy. The literature shows that legitimacy claims can only produce political results when supported by a certain institutional capacity (Barkey, 2008). This interaction encompasses not only the discursive but also the material foundations of political power; legitimacy claims remain ineffective when not supported by organizational capacity, while organizational capacity becomes fragile when deprived of legitimacy claims. In the late Ottoman context, constitutional discourse alone was not decisive; the organizational and military capacity to implement this discourse played a decisive role. The 31 March Incident is a historical example where this interaction was clearly observed. Although the legitimacy claims of the rebelling soldiers were strong, their organizational capacity was limited; in contrast, the Committee of Union and Progress was able to use both legitimacy discourse and organizational capacity. The rebels' claims to legitimacy based on religious rules and the sultan's orders resonated with a broad segment of society; however, the lack of an organizational infrastructure to transform these claims into lasting political power led to the movement's swift suppression (Kansu, 1997). This mismatch between claims of legitimacy and actual power contributed to the deepening of the crisis. As revealed by the social history studies discussed in the Literature Review section, the demands of the soldiers and madrasa students had a strong social base; however, this base could not be transformed into an organizational structure. This situation demonstrates that the constitutional order has not only a discursive but also a functional dimension (Findley, 2011). The theoretical framework places this functional dimension at the center of its analysis and positions the imbalance between legitimacy and capacity as one of the fundamental dynamics of the crisis.

The model also assumes that the outcomes of crises are not independent of initial conditions, but cannot be reduced to them. In other words, crises are neither entirely the product of structural

inevitabilities nor of the will of individual actors. This approach is consistent with historical institutionalist literature and makes it possible to address continuity and discontinuity together (Sohrabi, 2011). Historical institutionalism uses the concepts of "path dependency" and "critical threshold" to explain both the continuity and transformation of institutions; the 31 March Incident represents such a critical threshold in Ottoman political history. The issue of "preventability" discussed in the Literature Review section is re-evaluated in light of this theoretical stance. The constitutional changes and political restructuring seen in the 31 March Incident show that the crisis was not only suppressed but also transformed. The 1909 constitutional changes limited the sultan's powers and strengthened the parliament's position as the " " ; however, they also paved the way for measures that would narrow the political arena. These amendments involved a redefinition of the constitutional order; the limitation of the sultan's power to dissolve parliament, the strengthening of the government's accountability to parliament, and regulations on freedom of the press constituted the fundamental elements of this redefinition (Shaw and Shaw, 1977). This transformation had lasting effects on subsequent political practices (Zürcher, 2010). The theoretical framework treats these effects not as "by-products" but as inherent outcomes of crisis management. Thus, the crisis is conceptualized as a result-producing process, and the long-term institutional legacy of the event becomes an integral part of the analysis.

An important contribution of this theoretical approach is that it strips away narratives that read the March 31 Incident backwards from its outcome. The event is not treated as a sign of the Ottoman Empire's inevitable collapse or as a necessary stop on the linear path to the Republic. Instead, it is conceptualized as a crisis that emerged under specific conditions and was open to different outcomes (Zürcher, 2010; Findley, 2011). This approach makes it possible to avoid the "fallacy of inevitability" frequently encountered in historical writing; actors in the past could not have known outcomes that seem inevitable from today's perspective, and their choices were shaped under conditions of uncertainty. The deterministic tendencies discussed in the Literature Review section are challenged by this theoretical stance. The tendency to explain the past with today's outcomes constitutes one of the most common pitfalls of historical analysis. The theoretical framework therefore considers the options that emerged during the process and the possibilities that were closed off, rather than "reading backwards from the outcome." After the suppression of March 31, the progress of the Committee of Union and Progress towards single-party rule was not an inevitable outcome at that time; different choices by different actors could have led to different results. After 1909, Ottoman political life was open to different scenarios; the absolute dominance of the Committee of Union and Progress was only confirmed after the 1913 Bab-ı Âli Coup, and different coalitions and compromises were possible during this process (Ahmad, 1969). Thus, March 31 is evaluated not as a historical inevitability but as a conditional political moment. This approach strengthens the analytical impartiality of the study and preserves the historical specificity of the event. The question emphasized in the introduction, "how did it become possible?", is a natural consequence of this theoretical stance.

To ensure the integrity of the theoretical framework, the relationship between data, concepts, and theory must be clearly established. In this study, the data consists of secondary literature based on official documents of the period, constitutional texts, parliamentary debates, and contemporary observers' assessments. These data sources are used in a complementary manner to illuminate different dimensions of the event; official documents reveal institutional functioning, parliamentary debates reveal discourses of legitimacy, and contemporary observers' assessments

reveal social perceptions. The concepts identified are constitutional legitimacy, power struggles, crisis management, legitimacy discourses, organizational capacity, opportunity structures, and military-political relations. These concepts draw on Weberian legitimacy theory, historical institutionalism, and comparative politics literature (Weber, 1978; Sohrabi, 2011; George and Bennett, 2005). Although these theoretical sources come from different disciplines, they share a common analytical sensitivity: the need to consider both structural conditions and actors' strategic choices when explaining political events. The relationship between data, concept, and theory is structured as follows: historical data is analyzed through conceptual tools; this analysis tests the mechanisms proposed by the theoretical model. Concepts are used to organize data, while theory provides a framework for interpreting this organized data. Thus, the study moves beyond being a purely descriptive historical narrative and acquires an analytical quality. The gap identified in the Literature Review section is addressed by establishing this three-way relationship in a consistent manner. This approach preserves both the historical specificity of the event and its theoretical generalizability.

Consequently, this theoretical framework treats constitutional legitimacy, power struggles, and crisis management not as independent variables but as mechanisms operating in mutual interaction. This holistic approach provides the conceptual tools necessary to explain the complex nature of the March 31 Incident. This approach transcends the fragmentation in the literature, making it possible to combine the different dimensions of the event on a single analytical plane; thus, March 31 gains value not only as a historical event but also as a case study for understanding the dynamics of political crises. The theoretical model makes it possible to combine the accumulations preceding the event, the interactions during the crisis, and the institutional consequences afterwards on a single analytical plane. The conflict of legitimacy claims, the determinacy of organizational capacity, the accelerating role of opportunity structures, and the dual nature of military-political relations constitute the fundamental components of this model. Thus, the study aims to go beyond the fragmented explanations in the literature and offer an integrative framework (Hanioglu, 2008; Sohrabi, 2011). This integrative framework provides a guiding model not only for explaining the March 31 Incident but also for resolving other political crises in the Late Ottoman period; in this sense, the study both explains a specific event and lays the groundwork for more general theoretical inferences. The research question and hypotheses presented in the introduction can be tested using this theoretical framework. The gaps identified in the Literature Review section highlight the original contribution of the proposed model. This framework will also guide the research method, which will be detailed in the next section. The research method will reveal how the mechanisms developed here will be tested using historical data. Therefore, the theoretical framework forms the analytical backbone of the study and enables both the description and explanation of the phenomenon.

4. RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative historical research method to analyze the March 31 Incident. Qualitative research is an approach that seeks to understand events not through numbers, but through their meanings and contexts; this method allows for a deep understanding of historical phenomena. The qualitative approach offers a research logic that makes it possible to explain historical phenomena through meaning, context, and interpretation rather than numerical measurements (George and Bennett, 2005). The research question presented in the introduction

and the conceptual model developed in the Theoretical Framework section aim to understand how and why events occurred; therefore, the choice of method directly corresponds to this objective. The main objective of the research is not to chronologically sequence events, but to explain the causal links between events, the interactions between actors, and the mechanisms that come into play during a crisis. In other words, this study seeks answers to the questions "why did it happen?" and "how did it happen?" rather than "what happened?" In this regard, the study follows an integrated methodological approach that combines historical narrative with conceptual analysis. The adopted method aims to relate the concepts of constitutional legitimacy, power struggles, and crisis management defined in the Introduction to concrete historical facts. Thus, the method provides an appropriate analytical ground for testing and supporting the study's theoretical claims. The multi-actor, multi-dimensional, and time-spanning structure of the March 31 Incident necessitates this methodological choice. This section clearly and comprehensively outlines the research design, data sources, form of analysis, and limitations.

The fundamental approach of the research is process-oriented historical analysis. The process-oriented approach allows an event to be treated not as a frozen moment like a photograph, but like a film with a beginning and an end. The process-oriented approach focuses not only on the outcomes of an event but also on the stages, decision points, and conditions that shaped those stages, leading to that outcome (, 2012). In this study, the March 31 Incident is approached not as a sudden, isolated event, but as the product of political tensions, institutional transformations, and social expectations that had been building since the 1860s. The long-term accumulation process emphasized in the Literature Review section and the time frame defined in the Introduction directly support this methodological choice. Thus, the proclamation of the Second Constitutional Monarchy, the 31 March Incident, and the 1909 constitutional amendments are evaluated not as disconnected events but as different phases of the same historical process (Zürcher, 2004). This approach makes it possible to reveal the connections between the events before and after and to question a cyclical or uninterrupted understanding of causality. The process-oriented perspective helps to show how multiple factors came together simultaneously or sequentially, rather than a single cause or a single actor. This allows us to answer the question "Did March 31 happen overnight?" with "no, it was the result of a long period of preparation." In this respect, the method is fully consistent with the multiple-system approach proposed in the Theoretical Framework section.

The primary analytical method used in the research is the process tracing approach. Process tracing allows for the sequential tracking of the stages of a historical event, much like a detective step-by-step uncovering how a crime was committed. Process tracing is a methodological tool that aims to explain which steps, decisions, and mechanisms led to a specific outcome (George and Bennett, 2005). In this study, process tracing is applied to reveal how constitutional legitimacy debates turned into power struggles, which actors came to the fore during the crisis, and what tools these actors used. The three fundamental mechanisms defined in the Theoretical Framework section—the pluralization and competition of legitimacy, the weakening of coordination in a multi-centered power structure, and the emergence of actors with organized capacity as decisive players—constitute the focal points of this method. For example, this method is used to trace, step by step, how press debates accelerated political polarization, how military units turned to political intervention, and how the Committee of Union and Progress managed the crisis. Process tracing makes it possible to clearly reveal the relationship between each stage and the previous and

subsequent stages, rather than presenting events as "what happened." This allows the reader to more easily grasp complex historical relationships. The method also limits the tendency to read backwards from the outcome, making visible the moments when the crisis was open to different outcomes. This approach prevents facile explanations of the "it was bound to happen anyway" variety (Thelen, 2004).

The data used in the study are primarily compiled from secondary historical sources. Secondary sources are academic studies based on and interpreting direct documents; primary sources are original documents such as official correspondence, newspaper reports, and minutes from the period. These sources include academic books, peer-reviewed articles, and comprehensive studies on Ottoman political history. The sources are used not only to recount events but also to analyze the structural causes behind them, institutional processes, and political discourses. Therefore, when selecting sources, priority was given to works that are highly interpretive, based on original archival research, and accepted in the literature. The basic criterion for source selection is that the work is considered reliable in academic circles and is frequently used by different researchers. The use of sources representing different perspectives aims to prevent one-sided narratives and reflect the multidimensional nature of the event. For example, narratives that affirm the Committee of Union and Progress were evaluated alongside critical approaches, thus aiming to ensure that the analysis was based on a balanced foundation. This approach is consistent with the literary diversity presented in the Literature Review section and supports the analytical reliability of the study. Whether the sources are based on primary documents or secondary interpretations has been maintained as a fundamental distinction in each use.

The research method was designed to consciously avoid value judgments and predetermined conclusions. Remaining free of value judgments means trying to understand why and how events occurred, rather than labeling them as "good" or "bad." The aim is not to label the March 31 Incident as "just" or "unjust," "progressive" or "reactionary," but to explain the conditions under which the event became possible. Therefore, the study does not accept the actors' intentions as definitive assumptions. Instead, the actors' organizational capacity, the institutional constraints they faced, the legitimacy discourses they employed, and their responses form the focus of the analysis. This approach directly aligns with the multi-actor and conditional crisis understanding emphasized in the Theoretical Framework section. The method also avoids the tendency to evaluate historical events based on today's outcomes. This approach requires understanding the past within the context of its own conditions rather than judging it through today's lens (Findley, 2011). This approach does not view March 31 as either an inevitable precursor to collapse or a necessary step on the linear path to the Republic. On the contrary, the event is treated as a crisis that emerged under specific conditions and was open to different outcomes. Thus, the study aims to offer an explanatory, balanced, and historically sensitive analysis.

The analytical approach followed in the analysis is based on matching the concepts defined in the Theoretical Framework section with historical data. The concepts of constitutional legitimacy, power struggles, and crisis management are examined through concrete events, decisions, and discourses rather than remaining at an abstract level. This matching aims to show how abstract ideas correspond in real life; for example, the concept of "legitimacy" is concretized by what the sultan, the parliament, and the army rely on when they say "we are right." For example, constitutional debates, discussions in the Meclis-i Mebusan, the position of the sultanate, and the political stance of the army are linked to these concepts (Findley, 2011). This approach aims to

show how concepts are reflected in everyday political practice. The analysis focuses on the cause-and-effect relationships between events and the structural conditions that shape these relationships, rather than on the chronological sequence of events. Thus, the study is explanatory rather than descriptive in nature. While the descriptive approach answers the question "what happened?", the explanatory approach focuses on the question "why did it happen?". This strategy allows the mechanisms proposed in the Theoretical Framework section to be tested through historical material. This reciprocal relationship between concept and data strengthens both the theoretical consistency and historical validity of the study.

The reliability of the research is ensured by the diversity of the sources used and their comparative evaluation. Reliability means that the results of the research are based on solid foundations and that other researchers can achieve similar results. The use of studies written by different historians, published in different periods, and carrying different theoretical orientations together reduces the risk of being tied to a single perspective. Conflicting interpretations are dealt with comparatively rather than being excluded from the research. For example, approaches that characterize March 31 as a "reactionary uprising" are discussed within the same framework as studies that evaluate it as a "political crisis." This comparison reveals the strengths and weaknesses of different interpretations rather than accepting a single view as correct (Kansu, 1997). This method contributes to making the different dimensions of the event visible. Furthermore, the adoption of studies that are widely accepted in the literature, based on primary archival documents, and have shaped academic debate as the primary reference source ensures that the analyses are grounded in solid foundations. The reliability of the sources has been repeatedly verified in different sections of the study. This approach strengthens the academic reliability and reproducibility of the research. This study has certain limitations, which are explicitly acknowledged as an integral part of the methodology. Every research has limitations; what matters is to be aware of these limitations and to state them honestly. First, the research relies heavily on secondary sources and does not refer directly to primary archival documents. This means it lacks the level of detail that original document analysis could provide. However, the reinterpretation of the extensive archival studies in the literature within a conceptual framework significantly balances this limitation. This balancing act means that the findings of previous archival studies are evaluated from a new perspective. Furthermore, some of the sources on the March 31 Incident contain value-laden narratives that reflect the political polarization of the period. For this reason, the narratives in different sources have been carefully compared, ensuring that the perspective of any single source does not dominate the analysis. These limitations require caution in generalizing the results obtained. The results are presented not as definitive judgments but as conclusions reached in light of the available data and open to discussion.

An important aspect of the method is to enable the reader to easily follow the historical process. For this reason, concepts have been clearly defined, complex theoretical discussions have been simplified, and an understandable narrative has been adopted instead of technical language. Using understandable language ensures that the work can be read not only by experts but also by anyone interested in the subject. The aim is to make an academic work accessible to as wide an audience as possible. This approach not only increases methodological transparency but also strengthens the verifiability of the work (Mahoney, 2012). Transparency means that the researcher clearly shows which steps they followed and which sources they relied on. The reader can clearly see which result is based on which analysis steps. This transparency in the analysis process supports the

reproducibility of the work and its openness to critical evaluation. The method demonstrates that a complex historical event can be analyzed through a straightforward narrative. This shows that historical research can be accessible not only to experts but also to a broader academic community. In conclusion, this research method provides an appropriate, consistent, and theoretically integrated basis for rethinking the March 31 Incident. The multidimensional structure of the event is explained through the combined use of qualitative historical analysis, process tracing, and comparative source evaluation. The combined use of these three methodological tools allows for the simultaneous consideration of different aspects of the event. The method succeeds in revealing the reciprocal relationship between constitutional legitimacy and crisis management (Sohrabi, 2011). At the same time, it concretely demonstrates how power struggles become decisive in times of crisis (Barkey, 2008). In this respect, the research method provides a solid foundation for the findings of the study. The findings presented in the next section were obtained in line with the methodological principles and analysis steps defined here. The findings section will present the results obtained using the tools described in this methodology section and test the hypotheses in the theoretical framework. This establishes a clear and traceable link between the methodology and the findings. This link ensures the internal consistency of the study and the testability of its theoretical claims.

5. FINDINGS

The findings obtained through the process monitoring and comparative analysis tools defined in the Research Method section reveal that the March 31 Incident was not a singular and sudden military uprising, but rather a structural crisis in which the long-term erosion of constitutional legitimacy became visible. This structural crisis represents one of the rare historical moments in which the sources of legitimacy defined in Weber's (1978) typology of legitimacy—traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational—were simultaneously questioned. The concept of the conflict of legitimacy repertoires, emphasized in the Theoretical Framework section, strongly coincides with the historical data. The tradition of constitutional opposition, which began to emerge in the 1860s, was interpreted in different ways by different political actors after the proclamation of the Second Constitutional Era (Mardin, 1962; Karpas, 2001). These differences in interpretation show that the intellectual heritage stretching from the Young Ottomans to the Young Turks was not homogeneous, but rather contained pluralistic political visions fed by different social bases (Hanioglu, 1995). The palace, the parliament, the army, and the societies advanced conflicting claims of legitimacy based on the same constitutional framework. These plural interpretations prevented the constitution from serving as a common ground for compromise. The findings clearly show that, rather than being unifying, the constitution functioned as an instrument that intensified competition before the crisis (Sohrabi, 2011). The uncertainty experienced in political decision-making processes proves that legitimacy could not be institutionalized despite the existence of the constitutional order. This finding supports the study's main hypothesis: the March 31 Incident was not the product of a pre-designed, single-centered plan, but rather the result of a conflict between sources of legitimacy in a multi-actor crisis environment.

The second key finding of the study is that a multi-actor, multi-layered power struggle was at the heart of the crisis. The elements conceptualized in the Theoretical Framework section as organizational capacity and opportunity structures are concretely observable in the March 31 process. The findings show that no single actor was decisive in this process. The palace had largely

lost the central administrative capacity built during the reign of Abdülhamid II, while the Meclis-i Mebusan (Parliament) was unable to exert effective leadership during the crisis (Zürcher, 2004). The passivity of the Assembly stemmed from the immaturity of the parliamentary experience and the weakness of the representatives' organizational ties (Kansu, 1997). The army played a dual role as both the bearer of the crisis and the actor that resolved it; this situation redefined the position of military power in political processes (Uyar and Erickson, 2009). Although the Committee of Union and Progress was not in official power, it was able to steer the process thanks to its organizational network and communication capacity (Hanioğlu, 2001). The society's branch structure in Thessaloniki, Monastir, and Edirne enabled a rapid and coordinated response during the crisis (Zürcher, 1984). These findings reveal that the power struggle was shaped more by actual capacity than by legal positions. It is clear that during crises, organized movement capabilities are more decisive than institutional authority. This result confirms the theoretical proposition emphasized in the Theoretical Framework section regarding how differences in organizational capacity shape crisis dynamics.

The third finding is that military discipline issues and the politicization of the army formed the material basis of the crisis. The research proves that religious discourse alone was not decisive in the March 31 Incident. Weak discipline within military units, dissatisfaction with promotions and task distribution, uncertainties in the chain of command, and the problems of soldiers from rural areas adapting to the urban environment made the uprising possible in practice (Uyar and Erickson, 2009). Dissatisfaction within the Hunter Battalions, in particular, was directly related to irregularities in salary payments and perceptions of unfairness in officer appointments (Shaw and Shaw, 1977). Religious motifs and the emphasis on Sharia law served as a rhetorical tool to mobilize and legitimize these existing grievances. This discursive strategy coincides with Mardin's (2000) analysis of the relationship between religion and ideology; religion has been used as a powerful symbolic resource in legitimizing political demands. This situation clearly reveals the conceptual inadequacy of narratives that characterize the event solely as a "reactionary uprising." The findings show that the military-political crisis intersected with religious discourse, but that the crisis was essentially one of discipline and authority. This result directly corresponds with the proposal in the Theoretical Framework section regarding the interaction between structural fragilities and discursive sources. The politicization of the army was not unique to 1909 but emerged as a permanent structural problem that would shape subsequent periods.

The fourth finding is that the Committee of Union and Progress was not the direct planner of the March 31 Incident, but rather an actor that managed the ensuing crisis and turned its results to its own advantage. This finding is critical in terms of testing the study's fundamental hypothesis. The research shows that the society had an extensive organizational network, a strong military base centered in Thessaloniki, and an effective communication infrastructure prior to the crisis (Hanioğlu, 2001). The society's experience in the 1908 Revolution strengthened its capacity for rapid decision-making and coordinated action in crisis management (Kansu, 1997). This network enabled rapid decision-making and military mobilization during the crisis. The formation of the Army of Action and its intervention in Istanbul is a concrete reflection of this organizational capacity (Zürcher, 2004). This force, under the command of Mahmud Şevket Pasha, consisted of approximately twenty thousand soldiers and reached the capital in less than ten days; this speed is proof of organizational preparedness (Tunaya, 1984). The findings reveal that the course of the crisis was shaped by organized power rather than predetermined intentions. This situation shows

that the narratives of "conspiracy" and "plot" are limited in terms of evidence. The crisis should be evaluated as an opportunity created by existing conditions and institutional gaps rather than a pre-designed, single-centered plan. This finding validates the concept of opportunity structures defined in the Theoretical Framework section with historical data.

The fifth finding is that the March 31 Incident produced lasting institutional consequences in terms of crisis management. The martial law, trials, exiles, and constitutional amendments implemented after the suppression of the crisis fundamentally transformed the scope and nature of the state's response to extraordinary circumstances (Zürcher, 2010). The number of cases heard by the Military Court and the number of people executed are indicative of the state's capacity and will to punish (Kansu, 1999). The 1909 constitutional amendments significantly limited the sultan's powers and strengthened the political position of the parliament. However, these reforms also reinforced the influence of the executive branch and military actors in the political arena (Ahmad, 1969). These regulations removed the sultan's power to dissolve parliament but facilitated the government's accountability through the vote of confidence mechanism (Findley, 1980). The findings show that while crisis management restored order in the short term, it produced results that narrowed the political arena and weakened pluralism in the long term. The establishment of a security-oriented approach to governance in the Ottoman political system is among the lasting legacies of this crisis. Therefore, the 31 March Incident is not merely a suppressed crisis, but a starting point where a new administrative approach and patterns of response to crises became institutionalized. This finding supports the theoretical proposition, emphasized in the Theoretical Framework section, regarding the both resolving and transformative functions of crisis management with historical evidence.

The sixth finding reveals that the deposition of Abdülhamid II was not an inevitable and unavoidable consequence of the crisis. The research shows that the decision to depose him was taken after the crisis was suppressed, with the aim of making the new balance of power permanent and restructuring the political order (Deringil, 1998). Obtaining the Sheikh al-Islam's fatwa and convening the Meclis-i Umumi-i Milli were procedural steps taken to ensure the legal legitimacy of the decision to depose him (Tunaya, 1984). During the crisis management process, the sultan's capacity to remain within constitutional limits had already been largely eroded; however, the decision to depose him served not only as a reaction to the individual management style of , but also to reinforce the legitimacy of the new political order and eliminate competing claims to legitimacy (Zürcher, 2004). At this stage, legitimacy was redefined not through constitutional texts, but through the "capacity to resolve crises" and the "power to reestablish order." The removal of Mehmed V Reşad from the throne was a clear indication that while the symbolic function of the sultanate was preserved, actual power had passed into other hands (Shaw and Shaw, 1977). This transformation concretely confirms the proposition emphasized in the Theoretical Framework section that legitimacy is not static but a phenomenon negotiated within a process. The decision to depose the sultan symbolically marked the threshold of the transition from constitutional monarchy to the centralization of actual power. The findings clearly show that this decision served not so much to resolve the crisis as to institutionalize its consequences and legitimize the new power structure.

The seventh finding shows that while the constitutional order was formally strengthened after the March 31 Incident, political pluralism was effectively narrowed. The 1909 constitutional amendments significantly limited the sultan's powers, reinforced the government's accountability

to parliament, and strengthened the position of the legislative body. Although these amendments included provisions on freedom of the press, the right of assembly, and personal inviolability, these rights were frequently suspended in practice (Findley, 2011). However, these regulations did not reduce the influence of the executive branch and military actors in political decision-making processes; on the contrary, they consolidated the institutional position of these actors (Ahmad, 1969). Findings reveal that, rather than serving as a framework that broadened the political arena in the post-crisis period, the constitution functioned as a tool for controlling and limiting the opposition. Opposition political activities, pressure on the press, and restrictions on freedom of association increased despite constitutional guarantees (Brummett, 2000). The number of newspapers and magazines closed after 1909 is a concrete indicator of this pressure; the Committee of Union and Progress adopted an increasingly intolerant attitude towards the opposition (Kansu, 1999). This situation proves that there is no linear and automatic relationship between constitutional reform and democratization. The political order after March 31 clearly reflects the tension between formal constitutional progress and actual political decline. This finding supports the problem of the instrumentalization of constitutional legitimacy discussed in the Theoretical Framework section with historical data.

The eighth finding reveals that the legitimization of military intervention in crisis management has become a permanent political norm. The Movement Army's intervention in Istanbul, while restoring order in the short term, reinforced the perception that military solutions were "effective," "necessary," and "legitimate" (Uyar and Erickson, 2009). This intervention was a concrete expression of the army's positioning as the "guardian of the nation" and "protector of the constitution"; this position created a mechanism of guardianship over civil politics (Zürcher, 1984). The findings show that this perception was not limited to 1909 but was reproduced in subsequent political crises. The positioning of military power as the guardian and ultimate guarantor of the constitutional order structurally weakened the sphere of civilian politics and prevented the establishment of a tradition of resolving political problems through civilian mechanisms (Zürcher, 2010). This situation constitutes one of the historical origins of the emergence of military-civilian relations as a persistent problem area in Ottoman-Turkish political history (Ahmad, 1969). This situation paved the way for military-political relations to be perceived as a normal means of regulation rather than an extraordinary form of intervention. The findings show that the 31 March Incident constitutes a precedent and starting point in this regard. The practice of crisis management left lasting marks on political culture and shaped the security reflexes of subsequent periods. This result directly corresponds to the suggestion in the Theoretical Framework section that crisis management has long-term political costs.

The ninth finding is that the 31 March Incident clearly revealed the mismatch between the pace and capacity of Ottoman political modernization. The proclamation of the Second Constitutional Era quickly created broad political freedoms, press freedom, and areas of political participation. After 1908, hundreds of newspapers and magazines began publication, and dozens of political associations were established; this expansion represented an unprecedented political revival in Ottoman history (Brummett, 2000). However, this rapid expansion was not matched by the state's capacity for regulation, oversight, and mediation (Findley, 2011). Findings reveal that this mismatch was one of the fundamental structural factors that triggered the crisis. While political demands and social expectations grew rapidly, institutional mechanisms failed to reach the maturity required to meet these demands and manage conflicts. As Ortaylı (2003) points out, the

structural problems that had accumulated over the empire's longest century had reached a scale that the Second Constitutional Era could not resolve in a short time. Instead of providing a framework to reconcile the demands of different groups, the constitutional order became an arena where these demands clashed. This situation should be evaluated not as a "failure" of modernization, but as a structural tension produced by its unmanageable speed (Hanioğlu, 2008). The March 31 Incident reveals the internal contradictions of the modernization process and the potential for these contradictions to turn into a crisis. This finding supports the problem of imbalance between institutional capacity and political demand discussed in the Theoretical Framework section with historical evidence.

The tenth finding is that the 31 March Incident did not directly determine the process leading to World War I, but indirectly influenced political preferences and decision-making patterns. The research reveals that the centralizing and security-oriented management approach that strengthened after the crisis shaped foreign policy preferences and military decision-making processes (Ahmad, 1969). The 1913 Bab-ı Ali Raid and the consolidation of the Committee of Union and Progress's single-party rule represent the peak of this trend toward centralization (Zürcher, 2004). The weakening of political opposition and the narrowing of the pluralistic debate environment limited the public discussion of alternative foreign policy options. This facilitated the taking of war decisions within a narrow circle and with limited consultation processes (Zürcher, 2010). The tripartite power structure formed by Enver, Talat, and Cemal Pasha is indicative of how decision-making processes were confined to a narrow circle (Hanioğlu, 2008). However, the research does not treat the relationship between March 31 and the entry into World War I as a mechanical chain of causality. On the contrary, it emphasizes that the institutional and mental transformation after the crisis was only one of the conditions that shaped the war process. This finding allows us to question reductive historical narratives that present March 31 as the "beginning" of the Ottoman Empire's collapse or the "inevitable cause" of World War I. The crisis should be evaluated as a conditioning factor rather than one that determined subsequent developments.

The eleventh finding reveals that the rapid expansion of the public sphere during the March 31 Incident was one of the fundamental factors that deepened the political crisis. Following the proclamation of the Second Constitutional Monarchy, the expansion of press freedom and the political sphere of expression led to the simultaneous emergence of different claims to legitimacy and political demands in the public sphere (Brummett, 2000). As Kırılı (2009) demonstrates in his analysis of the relationship between the sultan and public opinion, the concept of the public sphere in the Ottoman Empire followed a different trajectory than in the West, and the Second Constitutional Era witnessed a sudden expansion of this sphere. Findings show that this pluralistic discourse environment failed to produce a common political language and ground for compromise. Newspapers, political statements, and street demonstrations deepened polarization rather than serving a conciliatory function, positioning different social groups against each other (Hanioğlu, 2008). The rapid intensification of public debates reduced the controllability of the crisis and narrowed the maneuvering space for political actors. This situation clearly demonstrates that expanding freedom of expression without institutional regulation and mediation mechanisms can create fragility. The management of the public sphere has emerged as a critical issue for the functioning of the constitutional order. This finding concretizes the communicative dimension of the concept of the conflict of legitimacy repertoires discussed in the Theoretical Framework

section of .

The twelfth finding reveals that the press acted not as a passive reflector but as an active political actor during the crisis. The research shows that some newspapers selectively and strategically used concepts such as the constitution, Sharia, public order, and the will of the nation to guide the masses (Brummett, 2000). The discourse of the Volkan newspaper and Derviş Vahdeti is a clear example of how religious motifs were instrumentalized for political mobilization (Tunaya, 1984). This discourse resonated with military units and civilian groups, transforming social discontent into political demands. This active role of the press highlighted the problem of balancing political responsibility with freedom of expression. Unionist-leaning newspapers such as Tanin and İkdâm, on the other hand, attempted to steer public opinion in line with their own understanding of legitimacy by producing counter-discourses (Kansu, 1999). The findings reveal that press freedom does not automatically coincide with political stability; on the contrary, in the absence of regulatory mechanisms, the press can have an accelerating effect on the crisis. News, commentary, and appeals served to fuel political polarization and contribute to the escalation of the crisis. This result demonstrates that the constitutional order has not only a legal but also a critical communicative dimension. The role of public communication tools in the dynamics of the crisis constitutes one of the less explored dimensions of late Ottoman political history.

The thirteenth finding reveals that social actors played a decisive but fragmented role in the crisis. Groups such as madrasa students, low-ranking soldiers, urban poor, and migrants were the carriers of the crisis on the ground (Quataert, 1983). Among these groups, Balkan migrants are particularly noteworthy; their experience of land loss and displacement paved the way for the political radicalization of this segment (Rogan, 1999). However, these groups did not have a common and consistent political program. Findings show that the demands of these social segments are largely based on economic hardship, professional uncertainty, and everyday life problems (Özbek, 2013). The weakening of charitable organizations and social solidarity networks has contributed to the emergence of urban poverty as a political issue (Özbek, 2013). Political actors have used these scattered demands by combining them with their own legitimacy discourses and have transformed social discontent into political mobilization. This situation renders the debate over whether the crisis came from "below" or "above" meaningless. The March 31 Incident is a multi-layered crisis where social discontent intersects with elite competition, with both levels feeding into each other. The findings reveal that the crisis should be understood not only as a struggle among political elites but as a process shaped by the participation of broad social segments.

The fourteenth finding shows that discourses of legitimacy were rapidly instrumentalized during the crisis and detached from their original meanings. Concepts such as the constitution, sharia, public order, the will of the nation, and the homeland were flexibly interpreted by different actors to justify their own political positions (Deringil, 1998). As Karpas (2001) emphasizes in his study on the politicization of Islam, religious concepts were intensively transformed into political tools during this period. The findings reveal that these concepts do not have fixed and agreed-upon meanings; on the contrary, they are constantly redefined in times of crisis. Legitimacy has become less of a legal status and more of a process of persuasion, power generation, and delegitimizing opponents. The rational-legal legitimacy defined in Weber's (1978) typology of sources of legitimacy has lost its functionality in this environment and has been replaced by discursive struggle. This transformation has weakened the normative power and binding force of the constitutional order. The use of the same concepts in contradictory ways by different actors has

prevented the formation of a common political ground and reduced the possibility of compromise. The March 31 Incident clearly reveals the linguistic, discursive, and performative dimensions of legitimacy. This finding supports the plural and negotiable nature of legitimacy discussed in the Theoretical Framework section with historical evidence.

The fifteenth finding reveals that the 31 March Incident permanently affected the form and content of responses to crises in Ottoman political culture. The research shows that after this incident, the tendency to resolve political problems through extraordinary measures rather than compromise and negotiation grew stronger (Zürcher, 2010). This tendency became even more pronounced during and after the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, with political opposition being increasingly suppressed (Ahmad, 1969). Crisis management began to rely on military and administrative tools rather than constitutional negotiation and civil political mechanisms. This led to a narrowing of channels for political participation and the suppression of social demands. Findings show that this trend was not limited to 1909 but was repeated in subsequent years and during different crises. Thus, March 31 was not merely a crisis but a turning point that permanently shaped the approach to crises and the search for solutions. As Zürcher (2010) notes in his study on the Young Turk legacy, the political patterns established during this period were carried over into the Republican era. This reflex, embedded in the political culture, prioritized the use of force over compromise and extraordinary measures over negotiation. This result strongly confirms the proposition in the Theoretical Framework section of the study that crisis management has lasting effects on political culture.

The sixteenth finding reveals that the March 31 Incident had both strengthening and limiting effects on state capacity. After the crisis was suppressed, it was observed that the central administration was able to use military and administrative tools more effectively (Findley, 2011). The state's capacity to collect taxes, recruit soldiers, and maintain public order increased during this period; however, this increase relied more on coercive tools than on social consent (Quataert, 2000). Martial law, extraordinary courts, and accelerated trial processes expanded the state's capacity for action in the security sphere. This contributed to the reestablishment of public order and political stability in the short term. However, the same process led to the exclusion of local actors, civil society organizations, and political opposition mechanisms from decision-making processes. Findings show that this increase in state capacity came at the expense of political inclusiveness and social participation. This dual effect reflects a fundamental tension frequently encountered by modernizing states: the problem of balancing security with freedom, order with pluralism (Barkey, 2008). The March 31 Incident concretizes this tension between capacity increase and political narrowing on a historical plane.

The seventeenth finding reveals that legal and administrative regulations after the crisis were shaped by a security-first logic. The research shows that extraordinary powers began to evolve from temporary measures into regular administrative tools (Zürcher, 2010). As Schull (2014) demonstrates in his study on late Ottoman prisons, penal and control mechanisms expanded significantly during this period. Martial law practices, press censorship, and bans on assembly were legitimized within the constitutional framework and acquired a legal appearance. However, this legitimization served to restrict and control the political sphere rather than expand it. Findings clearly show that legal regulations served to suppress and control political opposition in the post-crisis period (Ahmad, 1969). This is a typical example of the instrumentalization of law; the legal framework has ceased to be a guarantee of freedoms and has become a tool for consolidating power

(Sohrabi, 2011). This shows that the relationship between law and politics has been fundamentally redefined. Law has ceased to be a guarantee of political freedoms and has become a tool for maintaining order and limiting opposition. The March 31 Incident provides an early and decisive example of the instrumentalization of law in crisis management.

The eighteenth finding reveals that the 31 March Incident also had lasting effects on central-provincial relations. In the post-crisis period, the central authority moved to tighten its control over the provinces and reduce areas of local autonomy (Rogan, 1999). As Klein (2011) shows in his study on the empire's border regions, the center's control over the provinces was systematically increased during this period. The findings show that this trend significantly narrowed the room for maneuver of local political actors, tribal leaders, and provincial notables. Political demands and social unrest in the provinces began to be perceived by the center as a potential security threat. Increasing tensions in the Arab provinces and Kurdish regions are indicative of the reactions caused by this centralization policy (Kayalı, 1997). This situation deepened mutual distrust in central-provincial relations and led local actors to establish their relations with the center at a cautious distance. Research shows that this process created not only administrative centralization but also political centralization (Findley, 2011). Decision-making processes became concentrated in the capital, and the voice of the periphery weakened in the political arena. The March 31 Incident triggered a transformation in governance at the imperial level and permanently altered the center-periphery dynamics.

The nineteenth finding reveals that the crisis created a lasting "crisis memory" in the minds of political cadres. The research shows that the 31 March Incident profoundly shaped perceptions of political threats, security concerns, and priority rankings in the years that followed (Hanioglu, 2008). This transformation in mindset is concretely observed in the increasingly intolerant attitude of the Unionist cadres towards social opposition (Zürcher, 1984). Political elites began to view social movements, mass demands, and organized opposition as potential crisis elements. This perception facilitated the legitimization of preventive and repressive policies and reinforced the understanding that political problems should be suppressed before they even emerged. Findings reveal that this shift in mindset became decisive in political decision-making processes and shaped the preferred policy instruments. The memory of crisis has brought control and suppression reflexes to the fore, rather than compromise and negotiation (Zürcher, 2010). As Göçek (2015) emphasizes in his study on collective violence and denial, the security-focused mindset that took hold during this period has also deeply influenced policies in subsequent years. The 31 March Incident left behind not only an institutional legacy, but also a mental and cultural one. This legacy shaped the thought and action patterns of subsequent generations of political actors.

The twentieth finding reveals that the 31 March Incident contributed significantly to the establishment of a "state of emergency logic" in the Ottoman political order. The research shows that after the crisis, it became increasingly normal for political problems to be addressed through exceptional measures rather than through normal constitutional processes. This normalization is concretely observed in the frequency and duration of martial law declarations; after 1909, states of emergency became increasingly routine (Ahmad, 1969). This logic reduced the flexibility and adaptability of the constitutional order. Political decisions were increasingly justified through the language of crisis and urgency. The findings reveal that this situation led to a loss of content in constitutional legitimacy and its transformation into a formal framework. The constitution ceased to be a text that expanded and protected the political sphere and became a tool for legitimizing

extraordinary measures. As emphasized in Sohrabi's (2011) comparative study on Ottoman and Iranian constitutionalism, in both countries, the constitutional order has become an instrument of political struggle rather than ensuring institutional stability. The state of emergency has shown a tendency to become the normal form of governance rather than an exceptional circumstance. The March 31 Incident can be seen as an early and decisive sign of this transformation. This finding strongly supports, with historical evidence, the proposition discussed in the Theoretical Framework section regarding the corrosive effects of crisis management on the constitutional order.

The twenty-first finding reveals that constitutional legitimacy was transformed from a normative principle into a practical tool of struggle during the March 31 Incident. The research shows that the constitution was flexibly interpreted by different actors to legitimize their own political goals and delegitimize their rivals (Deringil, 1998; Hanioglu, 2008). While the palace presented the constitution as a guarantee of the sultan's authority, the Committee of Union and Progress interpreted the same text as the basis of parliamentary sovereignty and the will of the people. The İttihad-ı Muhammedi Society, on the other hand, positioned Sharia law above the constitutional order, advancing a different claim to legitimacy (Tunaya, 1984). The army positioned itself as the ultimate protector of the constitutional order. This situation led to the constitutional order ceasing to be a stabilizing framework and becoming an arena of struggle. Legitimacy came to be supported by actual power and organizational capacity rather than legal correctness and normative consistency. This transformation increased the fragility of constitutional politics and eroded the ground for compromise. The findings clearly show that the existence of the constitutional text alone does not guarantee the political order, and that the functioning of the constitution depends on the attitudes of the actors and the power of institutional mechanisms (Sohrabi, 2011). The March 31 Incident presents an example of a crisis in which constitutional legitimacy failed to institutionalize and was instrumentalized.

The twenty-second finding reveals that power struggles during times of crisis structurally place certain actors in an advantageous position. The research shows that actors with high organizational capacity, strong military connections, and extensive communication networks have the power to influence political processes (Barkey, 2008). This situation stems from the structural characteristics of the Ottoman political system; the centralizing tradition emphasized by İnalcık (2000) naturally puts actors with organized power in an advantageous position. This situation proves that actual power relations are decisive, independent of legal authority and constitutional positions. The rise of the Committee of Union and Progress during the crisis period is a concrete example of this mechanism; despite not holding official power, the society was able to steer the process thanks to its organizational superiority (Hanioglu, 2001). The society's military base in Macedonia was a critical resource that enabled it to act quickly and in a coordinated manner during the crisis (Zürcher, 1984). The findings reveal that political competition did not take place under equal conditions and that moments of crisis further highlighted existing power inequalities. The crisis made these inequalities visible and reinforced the position of powerful actors. The March 31 Incident clearly reveals the structural nature of the power struggle and how this structure operates under crisis conditions. This finding confirms with historical evidence the proposition discussed in the Theoretical Framework section that differences in organizational capacity shape crisis dynamics.

The twenty-third finding reveals that crisis management not only resolves the current crisis but

also shapes future political practices and institutional preferences. The research shows that the crisis management tools developed after March 31 have evolved from temporary measures into permanent management mechanisms (Zürcher, 2010). This transformation has also manifested itself in the economic sphere, as demonstrated in Toprak's (1995) study on national economic policies, and state interventionism has strengthened. Martial law practices, extraordinary powers, and military intervention capacity contributed to the narrowing of the political sphere and the consolidation of executive power. Crisis management has gradually begun to replace the normal form of governance. Findings reveal that this situation weakened the functioning of constitutional politics and prevented the establishment of a tradition of civil politics (Ahmad, 1969). The habit of resolving crises through extraordinary methods eroded the culture of compromise and made it difficult to establish a tradition of addressing political issues through negotiation. The March 31 Incident is considered an early example of the institutionalization of crisis management and its penetration into political culture. In this sense, the crisis is not only a problem to be solved, but also a process in which new patterns of governance are produced.

The twenty-fourth finding reveals that the theoretical model developed in the study strongly aligns with historical data. The concepts of conflict between legitimacy repertoires, organizational capacity differences, and opportunity structures, as defined in the Theoretical Framework section, collectively explain the course and outcomes of the March 31 Incident (George and Bennett, 2005; Sohrabi, 2011). This conceptual triad has the capacity to consistently explain the emergence, development, and outcomes of the crisis and has been continuously tested with historical material. Findings indicate that a single variable or actor is insufficient to explain the crisis. The simultaneous interaction of multiple mechanisms—constitutional uncertainty, military discipline issues, social discontent, organizational capacity differences, and the expansion of the public sphere—determined both the emergence and outcomes of the crisis. This structure of multiple causality is consistent with the analytical framework proposed by Mahoney (2012) for process tracing in historical analysis. This confirms the explanatory power of the theoretical framework and its compatibility with historical data. The research demonstrates the need to go beyond explanations that reduce the March 31 Incident to a single cause. The crisis is a complex process involving the intersection of multiple causes and mechanisms. This finding proves the historical validity of the multi-actor and conditional understanding of the crisis presented at the beginning of the study.

The twenty-fifth finding reveals that the 31 March Incident provides consistent and comprehensive answers to the study's fundamental research question. The research question asked how this event revealed the limits of constitutional legitimacy and the nature of crisis management capacity in the Late Ottoman Empire. The findings show that constitutional legitimacy failed to institutionalize, was instrumentalized by different actors, and lost its normative power in times of crisis. This situation reveals the structural limitations of Ottoman constitutionalism; the constitutional order was based on the balance of power rather than social consensus (Mardin, 1962). While crisis management capacity restored order in the short term, it produced results that narrowed the political arena, weakened pluralism, and strengthened authoritarian tendencies in the long term. The study's main hypothesis is strongly supported by the findings: the March 31 Incident was not the product of a pre-designed, single-centered plan, but rather the result of groups with organizational capacity turning the process to their advantage in a multi-actor crisis environment (Hanioglu, 2001; Zürcher, 2004). The auxiliary hypotheses have also been confirmed by historical

evidence: the institutional weaknesses of the constitutional order made military intervention possible, while crisis management fostered a centralizing and security-oriented approach to governance in the long term.

The twenty-sixth finding reveals that the March 31 Incident constituted a permanent breaking point in the Ottoman political order and created a structural transformation that conditioned subsequent political developments. The research shows that this event was not merely a temporary instability, but rather produced a fundamental change in the understanding of political legitimacy, power relations, and crisis management practices (Zürcher, 2010; Findley, 2011). This transformation can also be linked to the process of "inventing tradition" described by Hobsbawm (1990) in his work on nations and nationalism; the new political order produced its own legitimacy discourses and symbolic resources. While maintaining its constitutional appearance, the post-crisis order effectively became more centralised, security-oriented, and closed to pluralism. This transformation profoundly influenced subsequent political decisions, foreign policy preferences, and responses to crises. In this respect, the 31 March Incident constitutes one of the key turning points in modern Ottoman political history. The incident should be understood not only as a suppressed crisis but also as the starting point for a new political order and understanding of governance. The findings provide consistent, comprehensive, and theoretically coherent answers to the research questions posed at the beginning of the study.

In conclusion, the findings presented in this chapter reveal that the 31 March Incident is a critical case for understanding the dynamics of constitutional legitimacy, power struggles, and crisis management in the Late Ottoman Empire. This case offers rich material for comparative historical analysis and lends itself to comparative examination with constitutional crises in similar periods (Iran 1906-1911, Russia 1905-1907, China 1911-1912) (Sohrabi, 2011). The event revealed that legitimacy may not institutionalize despite the existence of a constitutional order, that organizational capacity may be more decisive than legal authority during crises, and that crisis management may produce long-term political costs while offering short-term solutions. The concepts and mechanisms defined in the Theoretical Framework section strongly coincide with historical data. This correspondence validates both the historical validity and theoretical consistency of the study; the reciprocal relationship between theory and data has been established as required by the process tracing method (George and Bennett, 2005). These findings offer a multidimensional and multilayered analysis of the March 31 Incident, free from reductive labels. In the next section, these findings will be evaluated in the context of theoretical discussions and comparative historical examples in the national and international literature, and the original contributions and limitations of the study will be discussed. Thus, the link between the findings and the theoretical framework will be reinforced, and the contributions of the study to the academic literature will be clarified.

6. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study necessitate a reassessment of the March 31 Incident beyond the established dichotomies in Ottoman historiography. Characterizing the event as a "reactionary uprising" or a "premeditated coup attempt" obscures its multidimensional nature and limits analytical understanding. These reductionist approaches disregard the complex causality of historical events and fail to grasp the multi-layered nature of political crises (Mahoney, 2012). The data presented in the study clearly shows that March 31 took shape in a crisis environment

involving multiple actors, multiple layers, and a high degree of institutional uncertainty. This finding coincides with Hanioglu's emphasis on the institutional fragility of the Second Constitutional Era and Zürcher's emphasis on the dynamics of political competition (Hanioglu, 2008; Zürcher, 2010). However, this study goes beyond the approaches of the aforementioned authors, arguing that the event should be understood not merely as a short-term crisis, but as a structural threshold resulting from constitutional demands, bureaucratic transformations, and military-civilian tensions that had been accumulating since the 1860s. This approach is based on testing the legitimacy-capacity-crisis management model developed in the Theoretical Framework section with historical data and is grounded in the mechanism-focused analysis required by the process tracking method (George and Bennett, 2005). In this context, the March 31 Incident serves as a test that reveals the internal contradictions and institutional shortcomings of Ottoman political modernization. The uncertainty in the production of legitimacy, instrumentalized competitively by different actors, is the fundamental factor determining the dynamics of the crisis. This situation is consistent with theoretical approaches that argue that constitutional orders gain meaning not only through normative texts but also through their implementation during moments of crisis (Sohrabi, 2011). Therefore, the incident reflects a structural tension arising from the unmanageable pace of the modernization process, rather than being an "exceptional deviation."

The findings obtained in the context of constitutional legitimacy clearly reveal that the legal framework of the Second Constitutional Era failed to institutionalize itself in an integrated manner with political practice. The re-enactment of the Constitution in 1908 raised expectations of legitimacy among social and political actors; however, the institutional balance and control mechanisms needed to meet these expectations were not sufficiently developed. This situation shows that the institutional reform efforts that have continued since the Tanzimat have not sufficiently penetrated the social base and that the internalization of constitutional norms requires a long-term process (Findley, 1980; Mardin, 1962). The research shows that the constitution is interpreted in contradictory ways by different actors and that these differences in interpretation deepen political conflict. This finding confirms Weber's conceptualization that legitimacy is not a fixed structure but a phenomenon that is constantly negotiated and reproduced in a historical context (Weber, 1978). When evaluated within the framework of Weber's typology of traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational legitimacy, it is seen that these three forms of legitimacy clashed and weakened each other during times of crisis in the Ottoman Empire (Karpas, 2001). The palace, the Meclis-i Mebusan (Parliament), the army, and the Committee of Union and Progress attempted to define the constitutional order in a way that would strengthen their own political positions; these multiple claims to legitimacy sharpened polarization rather than producing compromise in times of crisis. The findings clearly show that the constitution ceased to be a "basis for compromise" and became an "arena of struggle." This situation is consistent with comparative political literature, which emphasizes that the fragility of constitutional regimes increases, especially during periods of transition (Barkey, 2008). The Ottoman experience demonstrates that the mere existence of a constitution does not guarantee political stability; on the contrary, when constitutional norms are not internalized at the social and institutional levels, they can serve a crisis-producing function.

The findings regarding power struggles indicate that the March 31 Incident was not the result of a single-centered plan, but rather that actors with organizational capacity rose to a decisive position during the crisis. In particular, the military and civilian networks of the Committee of Union and Progress, centered in Macedonia, made possible a rapid and coordinated intervention that could

alter the course of the crisis. This organizational structure was the product of the secret networks built by the society since 1889 and the experience gained in the 1908 revolution; based in Thessaloniki, this structure provided the capacity to act much more quickly than its rivals during the crisis (Zürcher, 1984; Kansu, 1997). This situation supports theoretical propositions regarding the capacity of organized minorities to steer the process under crisis conditions with historical evidence (Hanioglu, 2001). The research reveals that the uprising itself contained heterogeneous demands and actors; in contrast, the suppression process was carried out by a more centralized and disciplined structure. This asymmetry explains why the outcomes favored a particular political actor. Therefore, the Committee of Union and Progress's rise to power is related to its capacity to "manage" the crisis rather than to "create" it. This finding shows that "conspiracy" narratives are often constructed backwards from the outcome and that such readings risk falling into the trap of causality. When evaluated from the perspective of process tracing, each link in the chain of causality between the emergence of the crisis and its consequences must be examined separately, and this examination does not support the claim of a single-centered plan (Mahoney, 2012). The study reveals that analyses based on capacity and opportunity structures, rather than intention-based explanations, carry greater explanatory power (Zürcher, 2004; George and Bennett, 2005). This form of power struggle is not unique to 1909; it also profoundly influenced subsequent political practices.

Findings in the context of military-political relations show that the March 31 Incident constituted a decisive threshold in expanding the legitimacy of military intervention in the Ottoman Empire. While the army harbored elements that carried out the uprising, it also positioned itself as the actor that reestablished order, and this dual role permanently transformed the army's place within the political system. This dual position led to the army being perceived as both the source of the problem and the means of its solution, paradoxically strengthening the political legitimacy of the military institution. The research reveals that the crisis of military discipline, combined with religious rhetoric, facilitated the uprising; however, the solution to the crisis was again achieved through military force. This situation can be considered an early example of a model in which military solutions to political problems gained legitimacy (Uyar and Erickson, 2009). The intervention of the Army of Movement paved the way for the army to move beyond being merely a defensive institution and position itself as the protector and, when necessary, the re-founder of the political order. From a comparative perspective, this pattern bears similarities to the role played by the Cossack Regiment during the Iranian Constitutional Revolution and the army during the 1905 Russian Revolution, demonstrating that the politicization of military institutions is a common dynamic in late-modernizing empires (Sohrabi, 2011). This form of crisis management provided short-term stability but paved the way for the long-term narrowing of the political arena and the failure of a tradition of civil politics to take root. This observation coincides with the "security-freedom tension" frequently emphasized in the literature on crisis management (Sohrabi, 2011). Therefore, March 31 marks a turning point in the transformation of military intervention from an exceptional measure to an acceptable political tool.

From a crisis management perspective, the decisions taken after the March 31 Incident produced both restorative and transformative effects. The 1909 constitutional amendments aimed to strengthen the constitutional order and bring parliamentary elements to the fore by limiting the sultan's powers. These amendments limited the sultan's power to dissolve parliament, reinforced the government's accountability to parliament, and aimed to guarantee fundamental rights;

however, these regulations failed to resolve the power imbalance among political actors (Tunaya, 1984). Findings reveal that these regulations temporarily calmed the legitimacy crisis in the short term but failed to clarify the rules of political competition and establish a pluralistic political culture. Crisis management was primarily conducted through centralization and security-oriented approaches. This approach has hindered the institutionalization of political pluralism and narrowed the legitimate channels for opposition (Ahmad, 1969). Thus, the resolution of the crisis has generated new potential crises. This paradox coincides with the situation conceptualized as the "security dilemma" in the literature on crisis management: the search for short-term stability sows the seeds of deeper instability in the long term (Ahmad, 1993). This finding of the research provides important clues in explaining why the path leading to the Ottoman Empire's 1912-1913 Balkan Wars and the 1914 decision to go to war constantly progressed within the logic of extraordinary circumstances. Crisis management tools ceased to be temporary measures and became permanent management mechanisms; this transformation contributed to the strengthening of executive power by weakening the function of constitutional politics (Zürcher, 2010). In conclusion, the March 31 Incident clearly demonstrates that crisis management was not merely a process of "suppressing the crisis" but a structural process that shaped the political architecture of the future.

The findings of this study require a re-examination of established generalizations about the Abdülhamid period's style of governance. The narrative of "personal despotism," frequently highlighted in the literature, pushes the structural and institutional dimensions of the crisis into the background and has limited explanatory power. However, the research reveals that Abdülhamid's administration sought to establish its legitimacy not only through instruments of oppression but also through discourses of security, order, and central coordination (Deringil, 1998). Abdülhamid developed a legitimacy strategy emphasizing the institution of the caliphate, the discourse of pan-Islamism, and the protective function of the state; this strategy created a certain support base, particularly in the provinces and among traditional social groups (Karpas, 2001). This language of legitimacy clashed with constitutional discourse after the Second Constitutional Era, and the tension between the two different sources of legitimacy became unmanageable. The crisis erupted precisely at the peak of this tension. This situation reveals the reductionist nature of interpretations that position Abdülhamid as the sole perpetrator of the crisis. The study assesses the sultan's deposition not as an individual failure but as a structural consequence of his inability to adapt to the changing regime of legitimacy (Karpas, 2001). This assessment reflects a methodological stance that considers historical actors within their structural contexts and avoids explanations that overemphasize individual will (Mahoney, 2012). Thus, Abdülhamid's role is repositioned within the context of the institutional transformation dynamics of the period rather than his personal characteristics. This approach highlights the limitations of narratives that judge historical actors by separating them from their structural contexts.

Another dimension of the 31 March Incident that needs to be discussed is the lasting impact of the Young Turk movement and the Committee of Union and Progress on political culture. The research findings show that the way the Unionists managed the crisis set a powerful example for subsequent political practices. The crisis not only opened up the field of power to the Committee of Union and Progress, but also legitimized the notion of "severe intervention in extraordinary circumstances" and made this notion a permanent component of political culture (Hanioglu, 2001). This legitimization process, consistent with Hobsbawm's conceptualization of the "invention of

tradition," involved the construction of a new political tradition: the tradition of resorting to extraordinary measures in times of crisis for the sake of the state's survival (Hobsbawm, 1990). This legitimization also shaped the mental background of subsequent developments, such as the 1913 Babiâli Raid. The study reveals that the Unionist style of governance became increasingly centralizing, exclusionary, and disciplinary after March 31 (Zürcher, 2010). In this context, the incident can be considered a decisive threshold in the ideological and organizational transformation of Unionism. The practice of crisis management eventually superseded ideological goals, becoming a management technique in its own right. This transformation constitutes an important dimension of the ideological shift experienced by the Unionists between their liberal rhetoric in 1908 and their single-party rule after 1913 (Ahmad, 1969; Zürcher, 1984). This situation provides important clues in explaining why political modernization evolved in an exclusionary and authoritarian direction rather than a participatory one.

When discussed from a social perspective, it is seen that characterizing the 31 March Incident as a "popular movement" offers a limited explanation. Research findings reveal that while social actors were influential in the crisis, they failed to become a decisive political subject. Groups such as soldiers, madrasa students, tradesmen, and the urban poor participated in the crisis with their own daily demands and grievances (Quataert, 1983; Özbek, 2013). The demands of these groups included concrete material concerns such as salary payments, food supply issues, the preservation of traditional privileges, and economic insecurity, and did not translate into a comprehensive political program (Toprak, 1995). However, these demands failed to produce an integrated political program and remained fragmented. The political elite instrumentalized these grievances by incorporating them into their legitimacy discourse. This situation shows that the crisis evolved into a top-down political reorganization process rather than a bottom-up revolution. The debate therefore requires that March 31 be approached as a complex crisis at the intersection of competition among elites and social unrest. This understanding emphasizes the importance of the concepts of "opportunity structures" and "resource mobilization" in understanding the political outcomes of social movements, showing that the transformation of grassroots energy into political outcomes requires organizational mediation. Thus, the concept of "the people" should be evaluated not as a single-voiced and homogeneous actor, but as a fragmented social field harboring different interests and demands. This understanding offers a more realistic framework for understanding the political consequences of social movements.

Findings on the press and the public sphere clearly reveal the potential of political communication in the late Ottoman period to generate crises. The freedom of expression provided by the Second Constitutional Era enabled the rapid spread of political ideas and the expansion of public debate. The explosion in the number of publications after 1908 took place in an environment where the social base for press freedom had not yet been established, and it became an arena of conflict between the exclusionary discourses of different political groups (Brummett, 2000). However, this expansion deepened polarization rather than creating common ground for debate (Brummett, 2000). During the crisis, newspapers took on a guiding role rather than an informative one, becoming spokespersons for different political groups and fueling social tensions. The debate shows that the press's role must be evaluated in terms of the concept of political responsibility. The research findings confirm that the relationship between freedom of expression and political stability is not linear and unproblematic. This finding shows that the expansion of the public sphere does not automatically lead to democratization; on the contrary, without institutional arrangements

and political culture, it can deepen polarization. This result points to a tension frequently observed in the early stages of contemporary constitutional regimes and is not unique to the Ottoman Empire (Sohrabi, 2011). Therefore, the March 31 Incident demonstrates that the regulation of the public sphere is an integral part of constitutional politics and that neglecting this regulation can lead to serious political consequences.

From a comparative perspective, the March 31 Incident reflects the common problems of late-modernizing empires rather than being an exceptional event unique to the Ottoman Empire. The Iranian Constitutional Revolution (1906-1911) and the constitutional crises that followed the 1905 Russian Revolution exhibited similar conflicts of legitimacy and power struggles (Sohrabi, 2011). The constitutional instability in China following the 1911 Xinhai Revolution can also be included in this pattern; in all these examples, constitutional transitions have been characterized by legitimacy vacuums and power struggles. In these examples, too, the constitution has become the focal point of conflict rather than preventing crisis. The research findings reveal that the Ottoman experience is consistent with this general pattern and provides fertile ground for comparative analysis. This comparison rescues March 31 from narratives of "backwardness" or "exceptional failure." On the contrary, the event reflects the universal fragilities of the modernization process and the inherent uncertainties of constitutional transitions. This perspective liberates Ottoman history from Eurocentric "deviation" narratives, repositioning it within the framework of common dynamics exhibited by modernization processes on a global scale (Barkey, 2008). This discussion contributes to the repositioning of Ottoman political history within a global context and offers an understanding that transcends narrow national frameworks. Thus, the study addresses not only Ottoman historiography but also comparative politics and constitutional studies.

One of the important theoretical contributions of this study is that it treats constitutional legitimacy not as a static legal principle, but as a dynamic political process that is redefined in times of crisis. The research findings show that legitimacy is not based solely on constitutional texts, but rather is shaped by how these texts are interpreted, by which actors they are appropriated, and how they are implemented in practice (Weber, 1978; Sohrabi, 2011). This dynamic understanding of legitimacy validates the conceptual model presented in the Introduction and developed in the Theoretical Framework section at the empirical level. The March 31 Incident provides a historical example of this dynamic understanding of legitimacy. Rather than serving as a protective shield against crises, the constitution has become a discursive arena where actors compete and seek to legitimize their positions. This situation is crucial in explaining why constitutional orders are structurally fragile in their early stages. The debate reveals that narratives of constitutional failure should give way to the uncertainties inherent in constitutional transitions and the ways in which these uncertainties are managed. This approach prioritizes explanatory interpretations over normative assessments and aims to contextualize historical events within their own frameworks rather than judging them in terms of "success" or "failure." This perspective removes normative judgments from the Ottoman experience, placing it on an analytical plane and offering the opportunity to evaluate historical events within their own contexts. Thus, the study adds historical depth and empirical richness to the constitutional political literature.

The multi-mechanism approach offered by the theoretical framework clearly demonstrates why the March 31 Incident cannot be understood through single-variable explanations. When the conflict of legitimacy repertoires, differences in organizational capacity, and opportunity structures are considered together, it is seen that the course of the crisis can be explained in a more

consistent and comprehensive manner (George and Bennett, 2005). This tripartite set of mechanisms has been systematically tested with the empirical data presented in the Findings section, and the contribution of each mechanism to explaining different dimensions of the crisis has been determined. The research findings show that these mechanisms were activated simultaneously and reinforced each other. This confirms the inadequacy of explanations based on a "single cause-single effect" logic and the multidimensional nature of historical events. The discussion reveals that intention-based analyses, in particular, overshadow institutional and structural factors and oversimplify causal relationships. The process tracing method provides a suitable tool for revealing this complex causality structure and makes it possible to track the functioning of each mechanism separately (Mahoney, 2012). In this context, the study methodologically supports the explanatory superiority of process-oriented and contextual analyses. Thus, the March 31 Incident is positioned as an exemplary case in the resolution of complex political crises and contributes concretely to methodological debates. This approach constitutes a powerful alternative to reductionism in historical writing.

When confronted with alternative interpretations, the analytical limitations of the claim that "March 31 was a deliberately orchestrated coup" become apparent. Research findings show that direct, consistent, and sufficient evidence to support such a claim is limited. Instead, it is seen that certain actors gained an advantageous position during the crisis and quickly capitalized on this advantage (Hanioglu, 2001; Zürcher, 2004). Historical evidence shows that the uprising began spontaneously and without coordination, but that the suppression process was carried out through an organized and planned intervention; this asymmetry points to the weak evidence base for the "conspiracy" claim. The debate draws attention to the methodological risks of explanations constructed backwards from the outcome and the trap of teleology in historical analysis. The distribution of power that emerged after the crisis does not automatically prove that the crisis was planned in advance. This situation once again highlights the need to question the tendency in historiography to transform outcomes into causes. The study therefore does not entirely dismiss "conspiracy" narratives, but positions them as secondary claims requiring strong evidence. This stance embraces the principle of "burden of proof" in historical explanations and accepts that extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence. This stance emphasizes the need to maintain high standards of evidence in historical explanations and preserves analytical balance.

Another alternative interpretation is that the March 31 Incident was entirely "reactionary" in character. Research findings acknowledge that religious discourse played an important role in the crisis, but show that this discourse alone was not decisive (Deringil, 1998). Military discipline problems, economic discontent, political uncertainty, and institutional vacuums, combined with religious discourse, made social movement possible. The fact that the demand for Sharia law was among the slogans of the uprising shows that religion served as a source of legitimacy that enabled different grievances to be expressed in a common language, rather than being an independent cause (Karpat, 2001). The discussion reveals that religion here is not an independent cause but functions as one of the sources of legitimacy to which different social groups resort to express their demands. This approach offers a more explanatory and balanced framework by stripping the event of ideological labels. Defining March 31 solely as "reactionary" obscures the structural dimensions of the crisis and limits historical understanding. Therefore, the study addresses religious discourse without excluding it but also without centralizing it, adopting a multidimensional understanding of causality. This balance ensures that the study adopts an evidence-based and analytical stance,

free from ideological bias. This balance is critically important in terms of maintaining methodological rigor in historical analysis.

At this stage of the discussion, the place of the March 31 Incident within Ottoman political modernization becomes clearer. Findings and theoretical analysis show that the crisis was a natural by-product of the modernization process. While modern institutions were rapidly being built, the political culture, social consensus, and negotiation mechanisms needed to operate these institutions did not develop at the same pace (Findley, 2011). This mismatch is a structural outcome of the "modernization from above" model that has persisted since the Tanzimat; institutional reforms have outpaced social transformation, creating legitimacy gaps (Shaw and Shaw, 1977; Mardin, 1962). This mismatch facilitated the emergence of crises such as the 31 March Incident and produced structural fragility. The discussion interprets this situation not as "failure" or "backwardness," but as a structural tension of late modernization. The Ottoman Empire should be viewed not only as experiencing this tension, but also as a political order attempting to manage it in its own unique ways. Thus, the Ottoman experience is evaluated through process-based and contextual analyses rather than normative comparisons. This approach aims to understand each historical experience within its own context, moving away from comparisons that take the "Western" model as a normative standard. This approach strengthens the theoretical consistency of the study and offers the opportunity to understand historical events within their own context.

From the perspective of long-term effects, it is seen that the March 31 Incident neither unilaterally strengthened nor weakened the Ottoman state's capacity. The research findings reveal that after the crisis, the central administration was able to use its security and control tools more effectively (Findley, 2011). Martial law, military courts, and extraordinary powers increased the state's capacity for repression. This increase in capacity, as Toprak's study on national economic policies shows, progressed in parallel with the strengthening of state interventionism in the economic sphere (Toprak, 1995). However, this strengthening has come at the expense of the inclusiveness of governance and sensitivity to social demands. Political decision-making processes have become concentrated within a narrow circle of elites, and channels for social participation have narrowed. The debate clearly shows that this situation highlights the difference between the "quantitative" increase and the "qualitative" decline in state capacity. While the state has become more competent in suppressing crises, it has weakened its capacity to negotiate social demands and manage them through legitimate channels (Barkey, 2008). This dual structure corresponds to the distinction made in the literature on state capacity between "infrastructural power" and "despotic power": while increasing its despotic power, the Ottoman state weakened its infrastructural power based on cooperation with society. This dual structure formed a recurring pattern in subsequent political crises and profoundly shaped the Ottoman style of governance in its final period. Therefore, March 31 can be considered a structural threshold that determined the nature and orientation of Ottoman state capacity.

In the context of political culture, it is evident that the March 31 Incident permanently shaped responses to crises. Research findings reveal that after this event, the tendency to address political uncertainties through extraordinary measures rather than compromise and negotiation grew stronger (Zürcher, 2010). This tendency has established the practice of framing political problems as "security issues" and reinforced the perception of the opposition as a potential threat rather than legitimate political participation. This tendency has transformed political actors' risk perceptions and behavioral patterns. Social movements and opposition demands have begun to be perceived

not as legitimate forms of political participation, but as potential "threats to order." The discussion reveals that this perception has narrowed the channels of political participation and prevented the establishment of a tradition of civil politics. The memory of crisis has limited the behavioral options of political actors and prioritized security reflexes (Hanioglu, 2008). This situation has led to the replacement of constitutional politics with security politics and the normalization of the state of emergency. Thus, March 31 became a defining experience that contributed to the entrenchment and institutionalization of security-oriented tendencies in political culture. This legacy extended beyond the final period of the Ottoman Empire, leaving its mark on subsequent political structures and nurturing the tradition of prioritizing the discourse of "the survival of the state" in times of crisis. This legacy was not limited to the late Ottoman period but also influenced subsequent political structures.

When discussed in terms of center-periphery relations, it is evident that the March 31 Incident reshaped the balance of governance at the imperial level. After the crisis, the central authority tended to increase its control over the provinces and reduce areas of local autonomy (Rogan, 1999). This trend toward centralization strained relations with local elites, particularly in the Arab provinces, and exacerbated problems of internal imperial integration. This trend was not only administrative but also political in character. Demands and discontent in the provinces were assessed not within the framework of constitutional rights but through the lens of security discourse and concerns about order. This situation deepened the mistrust between the center and the periphery and exacerbated the problems of internal imperial integration (Findley, 2011). In this context, March 31 can be considered a turning point where the trend toward centralization gained momentum and the position of local actors in the political arena weakened. The crisis paved the way for control and supervision to be preferred over flexibility and negotiation in governance. This preference led to rigid centralism replacing traditional flexibility in the management of the empire's multicultural structure and weakened its capacity to meet the autonomy demands of different communities (Barkey, 2008). This preference complicated the management of the empire's multicultural and multi-centered structure and indirectly strengthened separatist tendencies.

In an international context, it can be said that the 31 March Incident indirectly but significantly affected Ottoman foreign policy. Research findings show that decision-making processes became narrower and more centralized after the crisis, limiting the discussion and evaluation of foreign policy options (Ahmad, 1969). This narrowing led to foreign policy decisions being made by a small circle of military-civilian elites and to the weakening of parliamentary oversight (Ahmad, 1993). The discussion reveals that internal political fragilities influenced foreign policy preferences and risk perceptions. Security concerns and the priority of internal stability have taken precedence over diplomatic flexibility and the pursuit of a multifaceted foreign policy. In this context, March 31 paved the way for the Ottoman Empire to act more cautiously but also with more limited options in the international system (Zürcher, 2010). The mindset that emerged after the crisis reinforced the logic of extraordinary circumstances and the reflex for quick decision-making in foreign policy. This mindset formed the backdrop for the decision to enter the war in 1914, which was made within a narrow circle and with limited negotiation. Thus, the link between domestic politics and foreign policy became more pronounced, and crisis management practices permeated both areas. This situation provides an important backdrop for understanding the Ottoman Empire's choices during the Balkan Wars and World War I.

The general framework presented in this discussion section shows that the 31 March Incident was

not a "deviation" or "accident" in the Ottoman political order, but rather a threshold where structural tensions intensified and became visible. The research findings clearly show that constitutional legitimacy, power struggles, and crisis management practices were not independent processes. These three dimensions constitute the fundamental components of the model developed in the Theoretical Framework section and operate in mutual interaction with each other. On the contrary, these elements functioned as mechanisms that fed, transformed, and reproduced each other in times of crisis (Sohrabi, 2011). The discussion reflects how this interaction mirrors the fragile nature of Ottoman political modernization () and reveals the structural origins of this fragility. March 31 is a historical moment when this fragility became clearly visible. In this context, the event has analytical value not only for explaining the past but also for understanding the general nature and dynamics of constitutional crises. This analytical value ensures that the study contributes not only to Ottoman historiography but also to comparative politics and constitutional studies. By placing the Ottoman experience within this broad theoretical framework, the study transcends narrow interpretations in the literature and offers a comparative perspective.

Another important conclusion drawn from the discussion is the analytical inadequacy of explaining the March 31 Incident through a single actor or ideology. The research findings show that the crisis was neither solely a religious reaction nor entirely a secret political plot. These dual narratives tend to simplify the complex structure of the event and reduce it to a single dimension (Hanioglu, 2008). Such reductionist narratives are often the product of ideological positions and serve to support political arguments rather than to grasp historical reality. The discussion emphasizes the explanatory power of multi-actor and multi-layered analyses and how this approach is more appropriate to historical reality. This approach offers a strong alternative to reading Ottoman political history through ideological camps and political prejudices. In this sense, the March 31 Incident is a paradigmatic example that requires the joint evaluation of multiple causes and conditional consequences. The study provides a balancing and corrective contribution to historical writing with this methodological stance. Thus, the event becomes the subject of meticulous analytical evaluation rather than polemics and ideological debates. This approach requires adherence to the fundamental principles of academic historiography, prioritizing evidence-based explanations, and avoiding ideological biases (George and Bennett, 2005). This approach requires adherence to the fundamental principles of academic historiography and prioritizing evidence-based explanations.

Theoretically, the discussion confirms the explanatory power of the legitimacy-capacity-crisis management model developed in the study. The research findings show that this model is consistent with historical data and produces more comprehensive and consistent results compared to reductionist explanations (George and Bennett, 2005). This model ensures the internal consistency of the study by combining the problem statement presented in the Introduction and the conceptual tools developed in the Theoretical Framework section with the empirical data in the Findings section. In particular, addressing the discursive and practical dimensions of legitimacy together has been decisive in understanding the dynamics of the crisis. The Discussion section reveals that this model is not limited to the Ottoman example but offers a framework that can also be used for comparative studies. Late-modernizing empires and early constitutional regimes exhibit similar patterns of crisis and can be analyzed using this model (Barkey, 2008; Sohrabi, 2011). In this respect, the study offers a theoretical contribution that transcends a historical case and opens the door to broader academic discussions. The 31 March Incident serves as an empirical

ground where this contribution is concretized and tested. Applying the model to different historical contexts in future research will provide an opportunity to test the model's generalizability and determine its limitations. Applying the model to different historical contexts offers a productive direction for future research.

From the perspective of historiography, the debate shows that it is problematic to treat the March 31 Incident as an automatic stop on the Ottoman Empire's "narrative of decline." The research findings reveal that the outcome of the incident was open-ended and that different political paths were possible during the crisis (Findley, 2011). This open-endedness serves as an important corrective to deterministic and teleological readings of historical processes, emphasizing the importance of the choices made by historical actors. However, the security-oriented and centralizing solutions preferred in crisis management led to the closure of these alternative paths and the consolidation of a specific political trajectory. The debate emphasizes that this process was not inevitable or unavoidable, but rather a choice shaped by historical conditions. This approach distances Ottoman political history from fatalistic and teleological narratives and draws attention to the choices made by historical actors. March 31 is not a sign of an inevitable end, but a moment of decision where different possibilities intersect and specific choices are made. This perspective allows for asking "what if" questions and emphasizes the conditional nature of historical processes: different choices could have produced different outcomes (Mahoney, 2012). This viewpoint makes it possible to evaluate late Ottoman history in a more dynamic, multidimensional, and open-ended manner. Adopting this attitude in historical writing limits the tendency to explain the past in terms of today's outcomes.

The answers provided by this study to its research questions have been consistently addressed throughout the discussion. The main research question asked how the 31 March Incident revealed the limits of constitutional legitimacy and the nature of crisis management capacity in the Late Ottoman Empire. This question was formulated in the Introduction and guided the entire study; comprehensive and evidence-based answers to this question are now presented in the discussion section. The discussion shows that constitutional legitimacy failed to institutionalize, was interpreted competitively by different actors, and largely lost its normative power in times of crisis. Crisis management capacity, while restoring order in the short term, produced results that narrowed the political space in the long term, weakened pluralism, and reinforced centralizing tendencies. Consistent answers have also been provided to the auxiliary research questions: The tradition of constitutional opposition that developed from the 1860s onwards left both institutional accumulation and unresolved tensions as a legacy to March 31; The administrative practice of the Abdülhamid II period produced the structural fragilities that emerged during the crisis; and the Committee of Union and Progress managed the crisis thanks to its organizational capacity and became the decisive force in the process. These answers are supported by the empirical data presented in the Findings section and form a coherent whole consistent with the theoretical framework. Thus, the study provides comprehensive and evidence-based answers to the problem it initially posed.

The study's main hypothesis has been strongly supported throughout the discussion. The thesis that the March 31 Incident was not the product of a pre-designed, single-centered plan, but rather the result of groups with organizational capacity turning the process to their advantage in a multi-actor crisis environment, has been confirmed by historical evidence (Hanioglu, 2001; Zürcher, 2004). This confirmation was achieved by examining each link in the chain of causality separately,

as required by the process tracking method (George and Bennett, 2005). Auxiliary hypotheses are also supported by the research findings: the institutional weaknesses of the constitutional order made military intervention possible, while crisis management fostered a centralizing and security-oriented approach to governance in the long term. The validation of these hypotheses demonstrates the validity of the study's theoretical framework and its consistency with historical data. Beyond testing the hypotheses, the discussion also reveals how the March 31 Incident can be positioned within broader theoretical and comparative contexts. This positioning ensures that the study is not limited to explaining a specific historical event but also contributes to more general theoretical debates. Thus, the study has not been limited to explaining a specific historical event, but has also contributed to more general discussions of political crisis and constitutional transition.

This discussion section clarifies why the March 31 Incident occupies such a central place in Ottoman political history and why it remains a constantly debated event. The research findings and theoretical analyses show that the event was not so much an isolated uprising as a moment when structural tensions between legitimacy, power, and crisis management came to a head. This convergence explains the historical significance of the event and the enduring interest in its historiography: March 31 is not merely an event, but a moment in which the fundamental dynamics of the Ottoman political order crystallized. The debate has revealed that these tensions were not limited to 1909, but also profoundly shaped the following decades (Hanioglu, 2008; Zürcher, 2010). Therefore, March 31 is not merely an event belonging to its own era, but an indispensable reference point for understanding the late Ottoman political order. The crisis produced both solutions and new problems; the search for short-term stability led to long-term political costs. This paradox reflects a tension inherent in crisis management and highlights the lessons that historical experiences offer for contemporary debates. This dual effect strengthens the study's main argument and reveals the paradoxical nature of crisis management. The incident serves as a mirror reflecting both the successes and limitations of Ottoman political modernization.

In conclusion, the discussion section has reinforced the overall argument of this study in a clear and consistent manner. The March 31 Incident should be regarded as a historical threshold where constitutional legitimacy failed to institutionalize, power struggles intensified, and crisis management shifted toward a security-oriented approach. This assessment is based on the problem statement presented in the Introduction section, the conceptual model developed in the Theoretical Framework section, and the empirical data presented in the Findings section, bringing these components together into a coherent whole. The findings and discussions show that the event affected not only its own period but also subsequent political practices, institutional preferences, and management approaches (Zürcher, 2010; Findley, 2011). Therefore, March 31 should be positioned as one of the key events in Ottoman political modernization. The discussion provides consistent, comprehensive, and evidence-based answers to the research questions posed at the beginning of the study. It also presents a perspective that questions established narratives in the literature, confronts alternative interpretations, and develops an original theoretical framework. This perspective constitutes the original contribution of the study to both Ottoman historiography and the literature on comparative politics and constitutional studies. In the next and final section, the general conclusions of these discussions will be summarized, the theoretical and practical contributions of the study will be highlighted, and recommendations for future research will be presented.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has approached the 31 March Incident as a historical threshold at which the political order of the Late Ottoman Empire was tested, constitutional legitimacy eroded, and crisis management capacity became decisive. This threshold is not merely a chronological turning point, but also a watershed moment where the structural tensions of Ottoman political modernization came to the fore and profoundly shaped subsequent political choices (Ahmad, 1993). Research findings and discussions have revealed that the event cannot be explained by the long-accepted dichotomy of "reactionary uprising" or "premeditated coup." On the contrary, March 31 was a moment of crisis in which constitutional demands, institutional fragilities, and political competition, which had been accumulating since the 1860s, collided (Hanioglu, 2008; Zürcher, 2010). Rather than seeking the sole causes of the event, the study questioned the structural conditions under which it became possible. This inquiry has revealed the institutional accumulations and unresolved tensions created by the reform process stretching from the Tanzimat to the Second Constitutional Era (Mardin, 1962; Karpat, 2001). This inquiry has shown that the constitutional order gained meaning not only through legal texts, but also through their application in times of crisis and the ways in which actors interpreted these texts (Sohrabi, 2011). Thus, the 31 March Incident served as a historical laboratory that revealed both the successes and limitations of Ottoman political modernization. This framework constitutes the fundamental point of originality of the study and provides conceptual coherence to the writing.

The first of the study's main findings is that constitutional legitimacy could not be institutionalized as a stable and shared framework in the Late Ottoman context. With the proclamation of the Second Constitutional Era, the constitution was reinstated; however, this legal development did not automatically ensure that legitimacy took root in the social and political spheres. This situation demonstrates that the constitutional order must be internalized not only as a top-down proclamation but also through social consensus and institutional habits (Karpat, 2001). Findings show that the constitution was interpreted in contradictory ways by different actors, and these interpretations turned into conflicts (Deringil, 1998). Structures such as the Palace, the Meclis-i Mebusan, the army, and the Committee of Union and Progress mobilized the same constitutional language to strengthen their political positions. This pluralistic use caused the constitution to transform from a basis for consensus into an arena of struggle, deepening the crisis of legitimacy (Tunaya, 1984). This situation confirms, within the Weberian framework, that legitimacy is not a fixed phenomenon but rather a process that is constantly negotiated in times of crisis (Weber, 1978). Therefore, constitutional failure is related more to institutional incompatibilities and the pluralization of sources of legitimacy than to the mistakes of individual actors. This conclusion contributes to a more balanced assessment of the Ottoman constitutional experience, free from normative judgments.

The results obtained in the context of power struggles reveal that the March 31 Incident took shape within a multi-centered political structure. In the late Ottoman Empire, power was not concentrated in a single center; the palace, the parliament, the army, and the societies claimed legitimacy simultaneously and often in contradictory ways (Hanioglu, 2001; Barkey, 2008). This multi-centeredness was a product of the transformation of the Ottoman state tradition in the nineteenth century and reflected the tension between central authority and new political actors (Findley, 1980). The decisive factor in times of crisis was organizational capacity and the ability to act quickly, rather than pre-determined intentions. The intervention of the Army of Movement is a

concrete manifestation of this difference in capacity. This intervention is an early example of how military organization can play a decisive role in political crises, laying the foundations for subsequent military-political relations (Uyar and Erickson, 2009). This situation highlights the distinction between the "actor who created the crisis" and the "actor who emerged stronger from the crisis." By emphasizing this distinction, the study avoids the teleological readings often encountered in the literature. Thus, the March 31 Incident is framed in a way that is free from explanations constructed backwards from the outcome and draws attention to the choices made by historical actors.

The findings regarding crisis management show that the March 31 Incident produced a structural tension between short-term order establishment and long-term political costs. The suppression of the crisis and the subsequent constitutional amendments of 1909 aimed to strengthen the constitutional order; however, they paved the way for the narrowing of the political arena with security-oriented tendencies (Zürcher, 2004; Ahmad, 1969). While limiting the powers of the sultan, these amendments also centralized emergency rule and restricted the scope of political opposition (Ahmad, 1993). This approach led to the acceptance of military intervention as a legitimate means of resolving crises. In the long term, this perception of legitimacy hindered the institutionalization of political pluralism and fostered centralizing tendencies. This trend reached its peak in the 1913 Bâb-ı Âlî Coup and paved the way for single-party rule (Zürcher, 2004). The study evaluates this situation not as an anomaly specific to the Ottoman Empire, but as a pattern frequently observed in late-modernizing states (Sohrabi, 2011). Thus, the 31 March Incident has gained comparative value in understanding the political consequences of crisis management and has strengthened the theoretical contribution of the article. This result also highlights the lessons that historical experiences offer for current debates.

The general findings of this study explain why the 31 March Incident has become a lasting point of reference in Ottoman political history. The incident is not merely a military uprising that resulted in the deposition of Abdülhamid II, but a threshold where constitutional legitimacy was tested, power balances were reshaped, and the political order underwent a fundamental transformation (Findley, 2011). This threshold offers a unique opportunity to question how the concepts of "constitutionalism" and "legitimacy" became intertwined in Ottoman political culture and how these concepts were instrumentalized in times of crisis (Mardin, 1962). The study approaches March 31 by separating it from the deterministic chains that automatically explain the Ottoman Empire's descent into World War I. This distinction places discussions of historical responsibility and causality on a healthier footing. This approach, which emphasizes the conditional nature of historical processes, acknowledges that different choices can produce different outcomes and legitimizes "what if" questions (Mahoney, 2012). Thus, the article reveals the analytical limitations of both "conspiracy" and "reactionary" narratives and offers a perspective that transcends this dichotomy. These findings, summarized in the first five paragraphs, will be complemented by theoretical, methodological, and historiographical suggestions in the following sections of the chapter. The next step will detail the original contributions of the study to the literature and provide guiding suggestions for future research.

The first theoretical contribution of this study is its conceptualization of constitutional legitimacy not as a static set of norms, but as a dynamic political process that is redefined in times of crisis. The research findings show that legitimacy gains meaning not so much from legal texts as from the ways in which these texts are interpreted and applied (Weber, 1978; Sohrabi, 2011). This

understanding concretizes Weber's typology of legitimacy through a historical case and shows how traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational forms of legitimacy can conflict in times of crisis (Karpat, 2001). II. The reintroduction of the Constitution after the Constitutional Monarchy did not automatically produce political stability; on the contrary, it paved the way for the conflict between different sources of legitimacy. This result provides an important conceptual tool for explaining why constitutional regimes are fragile in their early stages. The study separates narratives of constitutional failure from normative judgments and places them on an analytical ground. This ground allows for a comparison of the Ottoman experience with contemporary constitutional crises in Iran and Russia, revealing a regional pattern (Sohrabi, 2011). This approach allows the Ottoman example to be evaluated as a comparable case rather than an "exceptional" one. Thus, the article offers a conceptually rich contribution with historical depth to the literature on constitutional politics and serves to empirically enrich theories of legitimacy.

From a methodological perspective, this study demonstrates that process-oriented and multi-system analyses are powerful tools for understanding historical crises. The process-tracking approach has revealed that the March 31 Incident cannot be explained through a single cause or a single actor (George and Bennett, 2005). This approach requires examining each link in the chain of causality separately and makes it possible to relate theoretical claims to historical evidence. The findings show that legitimacy conflicts, differences in organizational capacity, and opportunity structures came into play simultaneously. This serves as an important methodological warning against reductionist historiography. The inadequacy of single-variable explanations highlights the necessity of a holistic framework to grasp the multidimensional nature of historical crises. The study clearly reveals the limitations of teleological narratives constructed backwards from the outcome and draws attention to the choices of historical actors. This approach contributes to a more balanced and multidimensional analysis of Ottoman political history. Thus, the article presents a perspective that questions established patterns in the literature not only in terms of content but also methodologically.

One of the most important conclusions reached in terms of historical writing is that it is problematic to treat the March 31 Incident as an automatic stop on the Ottoman Empire's "inevitable decline" narrative. Research findings show that the crisis was a historical moment open to different outcomes and that certain choices produced certain results (Findley, 2011; Mahoney, 2012). This open-endedness emphasizes the importance of historical actors' choices and limits the tendency to explain the past in terms of today's outcomes. However, the security-oriented and centralizing solutions preferred in managing the crisis led to the closure of these alternative paths. This outcome underscores the need to approach Ottoman political history through conditional and process-based analyses rather than deterministic readings. March 31 is not evidence of a failed modernization attempt but rather the product of an unmanageable transition process. This unmanageability stemmed not so much from a lack of institutional capacity as from the inability to reconcile different claims to legitimacy (Deringil, 1998). This approach distances the Ottoman experience from normative and Western-centric comparisons. Thus, the study contributes to an assessment of late Ottoman history within a more dynamic, open-ended, and multidimensional framework.

The findings of this study reveal important conclusions regarding the relationship between crisis management and political culture. Crisis management practices developed after the March 31 Incident created a lasting "crisis reflex" in the mindset of political actors (Zürcher, 2010). This reflex became embedded in institutional memory and paved the way for the reproduction of similar

response patterns in subsequent crises. This reflex encouraged control and security-oriented solutions rather than compromise and reinforced the perception that political problems could be solved by military means. Findings show that this tendency weakened the functioning of constitutional politics and strengthened the single-centered approach to governance by narrowing pluralistic participation. This transformation of political culture has led to the erosion of social trust and strained state-society relations (Karpat, 2001). This pattern is not unique to the Ottoman Empire but has been observed in many late-modernizing political systems (Barkey, 2008). The study concretizes this pattern through a historical case, providing a historical perspective to the literature on crisis management. Thus, March 31 becomes a key reference point for understanding how political culture is shaped by crises.

At this point, the findings presented in this study address not only Ottoman political history but also broader comparative politics and historical writing. The March 31 Incident offers a productive field of analysis for understanding the structural problems encountered during constitutional transition periods (Sohrabi, 2011). The wave of constitutional revolutions at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century exhibited similar structural conditions and similar patterns of crisis. The findings help explain why early constitutional regimes were so often confronted with states of emergency and which mechanisms came into play in these situations. In this context, the Ottoman experience can be considered alongside similar historical examples such as the Iranian Constitutional Revolution and the post-1905 constitutional crises in Russia. These three empires faced similar constitutional demands at similar times and developed similar crisis management strategies, highlighting the importance of regional and global interactions. The study leaves this comparative potential open and establishes a conceptual ground for future research. Thus, the article integrates the March 31 Incident into the literature on global constitutional crises, removing it from a narrow national historical framework. In the following paragraphs, concrete research suggestions and policy-level conclusions will be presented based on this potential.

The first important recommendation for future research is that the 31 March Incident should be the subject of a more comprehensive archive-based study. This study has relied heavily on secondary sources; however, detailed analyses based on Ottoman archival documents, military correspondence, parliamentary records, and the press of the period could shed more light on the decision-making processes of the crisis (Findley, 2011). The documents in the Yıldız Classification, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Ministry of War archives at the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives offer a rich source of information that sheds light on different aspects of the crisis. In particular, a micro-level examination of the administrative and military decisions taken during the crisis, the reasons behind these decisions, and the communication between actors will provide a better understanding of their scope of action and constraints. Newspapers and memoirs from the period also provide valuable sources for understanding public perception and social reactions (Shaw and Shaw, 1977). Such an approach can contribute to a more concrete resolution of the gaps between intention and outcome. Archival research has the latent power to reevaluate and question some of the established assumptions in the literature. This proposal aims to go beyond the "known" aspects of the event and enrich the historical evidence. Thus, the March 31 Incident can be reexamined in a more in-depth, evidence-based, and multi-layered manner.

Secondly, examining the 31 March Incident within a comparative framework could yield fruitful results for both Ottoman and general political history writing. The Iranian Constitutional

Revolution (1905–1911) and the post-1905 constitutional crises in Russia share similar legitimacy issues, power struggles, and crisis management dynamics (Sohrabi, 2011). These three cases provide a unique comparative ground for understanding the common patterns and local specificities of the "age of constitutional revolutions." Comparisons using these examples will make the common mechanisms and local differences of constitutional crises more visible. Such an approach can remove the Ottoman experience from its exceptional status, placing it within a broader historical pattern and laying the groundwork for theoretical generalizations. The comparative historical analysis method allows for the systematic identification of both the similarities and differences between these cases (Mahoney, 2012). Comparative studies allow for a clearer analysis of the roles of the military, bureaucracy, and political organizations during constitutional transition periods. This suggestion is also consistent with the theoretical framework of the study and will serve to test the model. Thus, the March 31 Incident can be more strongly integrated into the global literature on constitutional crises.

The third suggestion is to examine in greater detail the long-term effects of the relationship between crisis management and political culture. This study has shown that the 31 March Incident created a lasting crisis reflex in the political mindset (Zürcher, 2010). This reflex shaped political decisions in the last decade of the Ottoman Empire and was influential in the entry into World War I (Ahmad, 1969). Future research could analyze how this reflex was carried over into the Republican era, how it transformed, and in which institutional practices it materialized. In particular, the continuity and ruptures in military-political relations offer a fertile field of research in this context. How crisis management practices were reproduced or transformed during the transition from a single-party system to a multi-party political system and subsequent military interventions is an important research question. Such studies will add historical depth to discussions of political culture from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic and produce more nuanced analyses that go beyond the dichotomy of discontinuity and continuity. Thus, March 31 can be evaluated not only as an Ottoman event but as part of a longer-term political tradition. This approach will contribute more balanced insights to the debates on continuity and transformation. Fourth, examining the social dimension of the March 31 Incident at the micro level could fill an important gap in the literature. The daily experiences of groups such as soldiers, madrasa students, urban poor, and artisans have often been overshadowed by macro-political narratives and insufficiently illuminated (Quataert, 1983). The ways in which these groups participated in the crisis, their motivations, and their subsequent fates await detailed examination using social history methods. How their demands were perceived, interpreted, and transformed by the political elite also awaits detailed consideration. Social history methods will reveal more clearly how the crisis was perceived at the grassroots level, its effects on daily life, and its traces in social memory. Sources such as oral history, neighborhood records, and sharia court records can provide valuable data for reconstructing the experiences of ordinary people during the . Such studies can more strongly demonstrate that the March 31 Incident was not merely a "crisis among the elite." Thus, the social dimension of the event can be balanced and comprehensively aligned with political analysis. This proposal also contributes to the democratization of historical writing.

Finally, it is recommended that the theoretical model presented in this study be tested in different historical contexts. Legitimacy conflicts, differences in organizational capacity, and crisis management mechanisms are not unique to the Ottoman Empire (Barkey, 2008). These mechanisms are repeatedly observed in the dissolution processes of empires, revolutions, and

regime transitions, providing fertile ground for comparative analysis. This model can be applied to different empires, early nation-state experiences, or contemporary constitutional transition processes. Such an expansion will clarify the model's generalizability and limitations, helping to determine under which conditions it works and where it falls short. Testing the model can provide conceptual tools not only for understanding historical but also contemporary constitutional crises, thereby enhancing the theory's practical value. This proposal strengthens the theoretical claim of the study and increases its academic impact. Thus, the article contributes not only to historical analysis but also to a broader theoretical debate. Testing the model in different contexts offers a productive and encouraging direction for future research and serves the development of the discourse.

One important conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that the resilience of constitutional orders against crises depends not only on legal texts but also on the political culture and institutional practices that operate these texts. The March 31 Incident clearly demonstrated how fragile constitutional institutions can be when they are not internalized by social and political actors (Sohrabi, 2011). This fragility stems from the weakness of the social legitimacy foundations of the constitutional order and becomes strikingly apparent in times of crisis (Deringil, 1998). The reintroduction of the Constitution did not automatically produce political stability; on the contrary, it paved the way for different actors to interpret this text in accordance with their own interests. This finding offers a historical perspective on constitutional design debates and draws attention to the gap between the text and its implementation. It has become apparent that, especially during transition periods, legitimacy must not only be "declared" but also constructed on a social level and continuously managed. This construction process requires the establishment of institutional habits, the formation of social trust, and the commitment of political actors to constitutional rules. This conclusion remains valid for contemporary political orders and reminds us of the limits of constitutional engineering. Therefore, the March 31 Incident is not only a historical example but also serves as a universal warning about constitutional crises.

When evaluated from the perspective of political thought, the March 31 Incident clearly reveals how the concepts of legitimacy, authority, and order are redefined in times of crisis. Research findings show that maintaining order is often confused with rebuilding legitimacy, and that this confusion produces long-term problems (Weber, 1978). This tension between order and legitimacy constitutes one of the fundamental problems of political thought and intensifies during times of crisis. Harsh measures taken in times of crisis may provide short-term stability but undermine political trust and narrow pluralistic participation in the long term. This situation was clearly observed in the Ottoman experience and profoundly influenced subsequent political choices. The balance between security and freedom constitutes one of the most fundamental dilemmas of constitutional politics, and March 31 exemplifies this dilemma in concrete terms. The study has analytically distinguished this tension between order and legitimacy and emphasized that both concepts are based on different logics. This distinction is often overlooked in political thought literature; however, it provides an indispensable conceptual tool for understanding periods of crisis. Thus, the article emphasizes the need to evaluate the normative and practical dimensions of political crises together.

In terms of policy implications, this study draws attention to the long-term costs of military and security-oriented solutions in crisis management. The crisis management practices developed after the 31 March Incident narrowed the political arena, weakened the culture of compromise, and

reinforced centralizing tendencies (Zürcher, 2010). These practices have eliminated the immediate threats of the crisis; however, in the long term, they have weakened the flexibility and adaptability of the political system. This finding is not unique to the Ottoman context; similar trends are observed in many late-modernizing states, producing similar problems (Barkey, 2008). The study reveals that merely suppressing crises is not sufficient; they must be politically "resolved" and brought to a social consensus. This resolution requires taking into account the demands of different social segments, keeping institutional channels open, and maintaining political dialogue. This conclusion contains important lessons for contemporary crisis management debates and offers policymakers a historical perspective. Historical experiences show that security-oriented reflexes may yield short-term gains but can also produce lasting problems. Therefore, the March 31 Incident contains indirect but valuable lessons for today, beyond the past.

Looking at the article as a whole, it becomes clearer why the March 31 Incident remains a constantly debated and differently interpreted event in Ottoman political history. The incident has been interpreted in different ways by different ideological and historiographical approaches; sometimes it has been presented as evidence of a "reactionary threat," and sometimes as an indication of a "Unionist conspiracy" (Hanioglu, 2008). These multiple interpretations reflect the complex nature of the event; however, they also reveal how ideological biases shape historical writing. Rather than rejecting this diversity, this study aims to combine and transcend it within an analytical framework. The findings and discussions show that there is no single correct narrative of the event; however, not every narrative is equally explanatory. Evidence-based and mechanism-focused explanations overcome the limitations of ideological interpretations and provide a more reliable knowledge base. The study has revealed that evidence-based and mechanism-focused explanations are more convincing than ideological interpretations. Thus, the March 31 Incident has been made the subject of analytical historiography rather than polemics, creating a more solid ground for academic discussions.

The original contribution of this study to the literature lies in its comprehensive framework, which simultaneously focuses on the concepts of constitutional legitimacy, power struggles, and crisis management in relation to the March 31 Incident. In the existing literature, these three concepts have mostly been discussed independently; however, the interaction between these dimensions is of decisive importance in times of crisis (Sohrabi, 2011). This interaction provides an indispensable conceptual tool for understanding how crises arise, how they are managed, and what lasting consequences they produce. By making this interaction visible, the study has provided conceptual coherence to Ottoman political history. At the same time, the theoretical model developed is applicable to different historical contexts and contributes to comparative political literature. The model proposes a generalizable framework for explaining the crisis dynamics of late-modernizing empires and early constitutional regimes. This originality elevates the article beyond a routine compilation of literature, making it a study that offers a unique theoretical contribution. Thus, the March 31 Incident is positioned as a productive field of analysis for both Ottoman historiography and the literature on constitutional crises.

In conclusion, this article proposes rethinking the March 31 Incident through the interaction between constitutional legitimacy, power struggles, and crisis management. The study demonstrates that the event is an important example not only for understanding the past but also for grasping the general nature of constitutional crises (Sohrabi, 2011; Findley, 2011). This example shows how historical knowledge can contribute to theoretical generalizations and how

historical events can be evaluated for comparative analysis. This approach removes Ottoman political history from narrow ideological frameworks and places it within a broader analytical context. The article makes original contributions to both historical writing and political theory literature, revealing the dynamic nature of constitutional legitimacy, the polycentric structure of power struggles, and the paradoxical outcomes of crisis management. These contributions relate the Ottoman experience to global literature and provide fertile ground for comparative historical sociology. Thus, the 31 March Incident has become a key reference point for understanding the political capacity and limitations of the late Ottoman Empire. The findings establish a solid conceptual and methodological foundation for future research.

In this respect, the study goes beyond the analysis of a specific historical event and invites a broader academic debate. This invitation aims to bring together Ottoman historians, political scientists, and comparative history researchers within a common conceptual framework. As one of the most comprehensive political upheavals in the late Ottoman period, the March 31 Incident continues to be a threshold where the constitutional order was tested, legitimacy was redefined, and the political future was shaped. The theoretical framework, historical evidence, and analytical conclusions presented in this study contribute to the understanding of this threshold and encourage future research. This encouragement encompasses both archive-based deepening and comparative expansion, serving the multifaceted development of the discourse. The Ottoman experience serves as a valuable laboratory for understanding the structural problems encountered by late-modernizing states in their constitutional transition processes. The lessons offered by this laboratory are important not only for historians but also for political scientists, constitutional lawyers, and policymakers. The value that historical experiences offer for current debates emphasizes the social function and practical contribution of academic studies. Thus, the March 31 Incident transcends being a historical event and maintains its status as a permanent academic reference point that sheds light on the universal problems of constitutional politics.

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