UNDERSTANDING THE VOTING MOTIVATIONS OF THE JUSTICE AND
DEVELOPMENT PARTY VOTERS


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ESRA SÜZEN AKKAYA


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submitted by **ESRA SÜZEN AKKAYA** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **Master of Science in Sociology, the Graduate School of Social Sciences of Middle East Technical University** by,

Prof. Dr. Yaşar KONDAKÇI
Dean
Graduate School of Social Sciences

_____

Prof. Dr. Ayşe SAKTANBER
Head of Department
Department of Sociology

_____

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mustafa ŞEN
Supervisor
Department of Sociology

_____

**Examining Committee Members:**

Assist. Prof. Dr. Kurtuluş CENGİZ (Head of the Examining Committee)
Ankara University
Department of Sociology

_____

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mustafa ŞEN (Supervisor)
Middle East Technical University
Department of Sociology

_____

Assist. Prof. Dr. Aksu AKÇAOĞLU
Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University
Department of Sociology

_____

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

**Name, Last Name:** Esra SÜZEN AKKAYA

**Signature:**

**ABSTRACT**


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DEVELOPMENT PARTY VOTERS


SÜZEN AKKAYA, Esra

M.S., The Department of Sociology

Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mustafa ŞEN


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This study addresses how the Justice and Development Party voters perceive and make sense of their support towards the party. Despite its changing political stance, opinion polls show that an important mass of voters is still willing to vote for the party. Thus, the thesis problematizes why some voters continue to vote for the party. During the time that the party was in power, some voters had changes in their attitudes towards the party and acted differently. Therefore, the study aims to understand how the votes change over time, and the extent to which the voters have a sense of belonging. In this study, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with twenty-seven participants who voted for the party at least once in Istanbul. The research has revealed that since the establishment of the party, the voters have different motivations that affect their voting act. These are voting for the leader, national pride, ideological engagement and identity, voting out of conservative fears, anti-opposite standpoint and strategic voting. The study found that the affections expressed by the participants while explaining the reasons formed a pattern. It was explained by resorting to the affective sociology, with reference to the key concepts in the philosophy of Spinoza particularly.

# ÖZ


## ADALET VE KALKINMA PARTİSİ SEÇMENİNİN OY VERME MOTİVASYONLARINI ANLAMAK

SÜZEN AKKAYA, Esra

Yüksek Lisans, Sosyoloji Bölümü

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Bu çalışma, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi seçmenlerinin partiye verdikleri desteği nasıl algılayıp anlamlandırdıklarını incelemektedir. Kamuoyu yoklamaları, değişen siyasi duruşuna rağmen önemli bir seçmen kitlesinin halen partiye oy vermeye istekli olduğunu gösterdiği için çalışma, seçmenin neden hala partiye oy vermeye devam ettiğini sorunsallaştırır. Partinin iktidara geldiği günden bu yana kimi seçmenler partiye karşı farklı tutumlar benimsemiş ve farklı oy verme davranışları göstermiştir. Bundan hareketle çalışma, oyların zaman içinde nasıl değiştiğini ve seçmenlerin ne ölçüde aidiyet duygusuna sahip olduğunu anlamayı amaçlar. Bu doğrultuda İstanbul'da partiye en az bir kez oy vermiş olan yirmi yedi katılımcı ile yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Araştırma bulguları, Partinin kuruluşundan bu yana katılımcıların oy verme eylemlerini etkileyen farklı motivasyonların olduğunu göstermiştir. Katılımcıların oy verme nedenleri altı tema altında sunulmuştur. Bu temalar; lider için oy verme, milli gurur, ideolojik angajman ve kimlik, muhafazakâr korkular, muhalefet karşıtı duruş ve stratejik oy verme şeklindedir. Araştırma bulguları, katılımcıların nedenleri izah ederken ifade ettikleri duygulanışların bir örüntü oluşturduğunu göstermiştir. Bu durum Spinoza felsefesindeki anahtar kavramlardan hareketle duygular sosyolojisine başvurularak açıklanmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler**: Oy Verme Nedenleri, Oy Verme Motivasyonları, Bağlılık ve Aidiyet, Duygu ve Duygulanım

*To My Family*

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AK Party-AKP   Justice and Development Party – Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi

ANAP          Motherland Party – Anavatan Partisi

AP            Justice Party – Adalet Partisi

BBP           Great Union Party – Büyük Birlik Partisi

CHP           Republican People's Party – Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi

DEVA          Democracy and Progress Party – Demokrasi ve Atılım Partisi

DP            Democrat Party – Demokrat Parti

DYP           True Path Party – Doğru Yol Partisi

FP            Virtue Party – Fazilet Partisi

GP            Future Party – Gelecek Partisi

HDP           Peoples' Democratic Party – Halkların Demokratik Partisi

IBB           Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality – İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi

MG            National Vision – Milli Görüş

MHP           National Movement Party – Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi

RP            Welfare Party – Refah Partisi

SP            Felicity Party – Saadet Partisi

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# CHAPTER 1


# INTRODUCTION


## 1.1.    Introduction

In Turkish election history, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party, AK Party-AKP) has been the party that has remained in power the longest since the multi-party system. There has always been a large electorate that consistently voted for the AK Party, and in all elections, since 2002, the AK Party continued to receive remarkably high votes. Although there was an occasional decrease in vote rates, no decline that could cause the AK Party to lose its power was observed. However, the opinion polls have recently demonstrated an essential change in voting preferences.

Voting is a complicated phenomenon, and it is difficult to understand the reasons behind people's voting choices and behaviours. Likewise, it is quite troublesome for a voter to manage. Furthermore, foreseeing the voting behaviours of average citizens in the dynamic environment of a rapidly changing political agenda is also a challenging task. When taking all the above-mentioned factors into account, it is clear that voter behaviour is not easily predictable. This study neither intends to provide a foresight about the upcoming elections nor has such capability. Thus, the main aim of this study is to understand and analyse the main reasons for voting for the AK Party. Public polls show that a significant mass of voters is still willing to vote for the AK Party despite its changing political stance. Thus, I depart from a simple question: why do some voters still support the party?

The AK Party has gone through a great transformation during its power, but the votes continued to be consistent. Their initial goals and policymaking have changed. Their initial staff has been radically substituted. With the transition to the presidential system, the leadership system within the party became more dominant. Many

politicians who had taken essential positions in the party left the party, and some even founded their own parties. There were frequent changes in duties and positions. Unlike these internal movements, major contextual changes have taken place during the party's government. After 2018, for example, the country faced a severe economic crisis. Despite the discernible disadvantageous conditions, the party essentially continued to emerge from the elections with serious victories. At least until the 2019 elections, no major breaks were observed in the vote preferences of the voters. At this point, the question of how AK Party voters interpreted voting came to the fore. In that sense, the thesis aims to understand how the AK Party voters perceive and make sense of their support for the party and problematize how the votes change over time.

The AK Party voters have demonstrated various voting behaviours throughout time. They have either continued to vote or decided to stop voting for the AK Party. Likewise, from 2002 to 2019, the voters had several decision-making processes before the elections. For example, some were determined about what to do, while others were hesitant until the very last second in the voting booth. Why these voters continue to vote, remain hesitant or stop voting has always been a matter of curiosity. In this regard, the primary purpose of this thesis is to understand the rationale behind the consistent votes and changing minds. The main questions address the reasons why the AK Party electorate voted for the party, stopped voting or remained hesitant. The sub-questions are to uncover the extent of the support and loyalty for the party and the extent to which the governing AK Party's practices have affected the voters' decision-making processes. This may help us understand the changing voting behaviour of the AK Party voters and investigate the relations between society and state in Turkey via the electoral system.

I had 27 participants in the field research. In my semi-structured interviews, I asked them a group of questions to find out their overall political views, self-positioning in the political context, attitudes towards the current situation and subsequent election, daily religious practices, and ideological or religious identity definitions. I discussed the responses in light of the relevant literature. There is a resemblance in participants' attitudes towards the party preferences, political participation, self-positioning in an ideological engagement, party loyalty, self-placement and predisposition in the left-

right spectrum. I categorized the responses based on their similarities and explained their distinguishing elements. Furthermore, I attempted to explain the impact of similarities and differences on the voting behaviour of the participants.

The scope of the research in the context of the time was not what I had initially planned. Due to the physical conditions of COVID-19, I was able to have the interviews between 2019-2021. The timing did have some advantages because, over time, the voters' preferences started to be diversified. I believe the study data has been enriched due to the variety of changes in participants' preferences during the extended time of the data collection. The research was conducted between the last election and the forthcoming election. This period has a contextual difference in comparison to the pre-2019 period. The presidential system has affected the party organization, and the party's cadre has substantial changes over time. Besides, throughout the time, there occurred also a contextual difference, mainly because of the pandemic and the economic hardship across the country, all of which have influenced the voters' preferences and potential impacts on their choices. Especially in the last period of 2021 and the first period of 2022, the continuing economic crisis has adversely affected every citizen. I should note that I did not have an interview at the time when the economic difficulty had this dramatic increase. Therefore, the thesis cannot take into account the current important contextual difference. However, I believe that, while I did not address the potential implications of the economic crisis on voter decisions, the study findings maintain its importance in understanding the rationale behind the voting decision.

Chapter one attempted to overview the voting behaviour literature and the brief information about the AK Party. In chapter two, I aimed to describe the methodology of the research. In chapter three, I intended to demonstrate the findings that I came up with. In accordance with these findings, I tried to explain the primary voting motives of the AK Party voters and the reasons behind giving up voting. I organized the themes that I discovered while studying the interviews. Based on my study findings, I attempted to provide a novel approach to explain the voting behaviour of the AK Party electorate.

## 1.2. Justice and Development Party

Being the longest-term governing party since the beginning of the multi-party period, AK Party has a structure that maintains its internal relations and keeps different groups together from the beginning. Thus, certain phenomena are helping the AK Party to stay powerful and consolidated in the political arena. I will examine this in this chapter. This section first presents the background information of the incumbent AK Party. Secondly, I will describe the brief history of the party and the context preceding the first elections.

**Table 1 The Chronological Elections Results**

| Year | Election | First | % | Second | % | Third | % | Turnout Rate (%) |
|------|----------|-------|---|--------|---|-------|---|------------------|
| 2002 | General | AK Party | %34 | CHP | %19 | DYP | %9 | %79 |
| 2004 | Local | AK Party | %42 | CHP | %18 | MHP | %10 | %76 |
| 2007 | General | AK Party | %47 | CHP | %21 | MHP | %14 | %84 |
| 2009 | Local | AK Party | %38 | CHP | %23 | MHP | %16 | %85 |
| 2011 | General | AK Party | %50 | CHP | %26 | MHP | %13 | %83 |
| 2014 | Local | AK Party | %43 | CHP | %26 | MHP | %18 | %89 |
| 2014 | Presidential | AK Party | %52 | CHP | %38 | HDP | %10 | %74 |
| 2015 | General | AK Party | %41 | CHP | %25 | MHP | %16 | %84 |
| 2015 | Early General | AK Party | %50 | CHP | %25 | MHP | %12 | %85 |
| 2018 | General | AK Party | %43 | CHP | %23 | HDP | %12 | %86 |
| 2018 | Presidential | AK Party | %53 | CHP | %31 | HDP | %8 | %86 |
| 2019 | Local | AK Party | %44 | CHP | %30 | IYI | %7 | %85 |

In the aftermath of the 1995 general elections, the older generation leaders of the Milli Görüş (National Vision, MG) movement, under the name of the Refah Partisi (Welfare Party, RP), became the bigger partner of the coalition government. Following the intervention of the secularist military, the party was closed. After that, the movement's politicians formed the pro-Islamist Fazilet Partisi (Virtue Party, FP). After the closure of the FP by the Constitutional Court in 2001, the movement's younger generation politicians (Çarkoğlu, 2012) established the AK Party, which became the system's largest party in the 2002 general elections (Şen, 2010). The incumbent government was a coalition of the Demokratik Sol Parti (Democratic Left Party, DSP), Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Movement Party, MHP) and Anavatan Partisi (the Motherland Party, ANAP); however, in the 2002 general elections, the AK Party was able to come to power alone by receiving 34% of the votes; thus, the party became the

incumbent party (Çarkoğlu, 2012). According to Çarkoğlu, the critical election of 2002 was dominated by ideology in general and left-right ideology in particular, rather than economic performance evaluation. At this point, the ideological positioning of the AK Party should be mentioned.

### 1.2.1. Ideological Self-placement

Unlike the former politicians, the leaders of the AK Party have distanced their party from the movement's Islamist stance and have positioned it as a continuation of the ANAP of the 1980s and a renewal of the Demokrat Parti (Democrat Party, DP)'s conservative-liberal tradition of the 1950s (Şen, 2010). Although most cadres were former followers of the far-right Islamist party, the AK Party described itself as a conservative democrat (Şen, 2010) and attempted to identify itself with the center-right (Güler, 2007). Therefore, it is important to depict the general framework by making an explanation of center-right, which is frequently mentioned in this study. According to Çavuşoğlu (2009), center-right is historically one of the two most prominent actors in Turkish political history along with the Kemalist line, as the political representation of the beliefs, values and lifestyles of the majority of the society. He indicates that it is eventuated with the fusion of beliefs, value judgments and lifestyles of the society with liberal economic policies and modernization. Başkan's (2011) definition of center-right is taken as a reference in this study. According to this definition, center-right maintains conservative principles in social life, emphasizes a free-market economy mindset in economic terms, but regards state intervention as justified in some areas and operates with a social state mentality focused on certain essential requirements. The center-right is a political trend that promotes a new view of modernization based on the approval of society rather than top-down modernization.

The core mindset of the center-right parties is basically conservatism. Conservatism is derived from the Latin word "conservare", which means "to preserve as it is" (Gordon, 1999). It arose in response to the philosophy of enlightenment and aimed at protecting tradition in response to the revolutionary transformation projects of Enlightenment thought (Güngörmez, 2004; Özipek, 2010).

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Religion, state, authority, community, tradition and history are the primary pillars in the creation of the definition of conservatism (Köker, 2004). Instead of being completely opposed to change, it embraces change in connection to the past (Çiğdem, 1977) or tradition. Conservatives believed that contemporary liberal democracies could not be value-free; they would fail if they attempted to do so. In this perspective, the fundamental values of society should be protected (Bora, 1998). According to Akgün, conservative thinking, unlike its alternatives such as socialism or liberalism, emerges as a defensive ideology with no clear preconceptions and assumptions. It has a reactive attitude; thus, it considers what it opposes rather than what it is. It prioritizes history, experience, collective consciousness and traditions. Not only that, but it does not promote a total rejection of change and welcomes transformative change. It also glorifies institutions such as religion and family, which serve as bridges between the individual and the state and serve as repositories of societal values and traditions (Akgün, 2006).

The rise of conservative ideas in Turkey coincides with Turkish modernization (Akkaş, 2001). The secularization and Westernization tendencies emerged as a result of modernization processes that began in the Ottoman Empire's last period and gained serious momentum with the proclamation of the Republic. Within these political tendencies, the center-right parties are the ones who provide conservatives with a political representation, not excluding tradition. To correspond with the non-extremist attitude of the center-right parties, since its establishment, the AK Party has positioned itself on the political spectrum as a conservative democrat.

### 1.2.2. A Brief History

Gunes-Ayata and Ayata's study claimed that the instability of politics in the period when the AK Party was founded had a negative effect on the voters, and the search for alternatives increased among the voters (2001). According to Güneş-Ayata et al. (2001), Turkey's fragmented political party structure, which reflected profound cleavages in political culture, was a primary cause of instability in politics and administration. They exemplified the public opinion polls conducted in early 1999 before the elections. The findings were about the unwilling attitude and tendency to alienation from turnout, despite the large number and wide range of political parties.

The findings also indicated that dissatisfaction with the current state of party politics and blaming party leaders for everything that goes wrong in the country was a prominent issue in everyday conversation. There was also a tendency to believe that there was no political party that truly merits the majority of the voters' support. Voter alienation is consistent with survey findings indicating a comparable loss in the credibility and esteem of parliament as an institution. According to them, the discontent regarding current parties elevates the hopes of politicians who want to appeal to reluctant voters by forming a new party, which creates fragmentation in the political party system (Güneş-Ayata et al., 2001).

In this political instability, the most significant event that profoundly affected the acceleration of the founding period of the party and gave meaning to its power was the decisions made by the extraordinary National Security Council meeting on February 28, 1997. The process, when the Kemalist paranoia (Demir, 2018) has influence in all fields, was also a major source of reservations among the center-right and right-wing parties, which were later defined as conservative delusions (Bora, 2017). Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the mayor of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality at the time, was condemned to jail and barred from politics. The RP was closed in 1998 by the Constitutional Court for "acts opposed to the principle of the *laik* Republic." In the 1990s, National Vision Movement experienced a significant increase till the time. The center-right parties' apathy to the February 28 events generated a rupture with the conservative segment and encouraged the conservative segment to seek alternatives (Başkan, 2011).

Throughout Turkish political history, one of the most critical processes that required strong struggles during the establishment of political parties is to accept their existence by the state (Janoski et al., 2010). As a matter of fact, the party, which was created with a rather "criminal" staff at a time when the influence of February 28 was felt at a high level, tried to be accepted in the state by describing itself as a conservative democrat to ensure this acceptance. The AK Party adopted the terms "justice" and "development" in order to appeal to the conservative side, for whom the terms are vital, and to avoid entirely abandoning the National Vision from which it arose. In the political and sociological context, where the Kemalist paranoia has influenced,

Erdoğan's rhetoric, "We took off the National Vision shirt", indicates that the party is not a continuation of National Vision. For the same reason, during the establishment period, the AK Party made transfers from the staff of the MHP and the ANAP and Doğru Yol Partisi (True Path Party, DYP) cadres to ensure the representation of every element of the right-wing (Akgün, 2006).

In terms of Turkey's political flow, 2001, when the AK Party was established, corresponds with the last moments of the 1990s, which may also be referred to as the time of coalitions or governments (Güneş-Ayata and Ayata, 2001). The post-Cold War globalization trends, which had a significant impact throughout the 1990s, wars in nearby geographies, economic crises, terrorist incidents, political turmoil, and the eleven different governments that were established, drove the Turkish people to an endless search for an alternative. For a long time, the needed climate of stability and trust for the well-being of the country could not be attained. In addition to this, the economic problems experienced during the 1990s reinforced the people's search for alternatives. Turkey prepared a new election calendar, where the current coalition government was identified with the economic crisis, damaged trust in the state by the İzmit earthquake, and the people's difficulties in accessing essential services. The AK Party shaped its first general election campaign with promises of economic growth and prosperity, commitment to EU membership and democratic reforms, as well as purely conservative ideals (Çarkoğlu and Yıldırım, 2018). Under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who introduced itself to large masses during the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Mayorship, the AK Party started its life in power by coming out of the election as the sole power with a high vote rate.

The AK Party found it plausible to implement liberal economic policies to address the economic crisis, one of the most significant agenda issues during its first term in power. As a result of these policies, privatization, observed throughout the Özal period, was carried out instead of the national economy model presented by the National Vision tradition, and integration into the global economy was emphasized (Boratav, 2013). During this period, the AK Party prioritized the elimination of inflation and unemployment, which especially affected its own voters. Economic growth gained momentum thanks to the integration into the global economy and direct

and indirect investments from abroad. While improvements in employment data were observed, significant increases were recorded in per capita incomes.

Those four years between 2012 and 2016: The Arab Spring, the Fethullahists' conflict with the system, the PKK and the failure of the solution process, and the Gezi protests transformed the AK Party's political discourse, political priorities, and political goals (Ete, 2020). According to Ete, when these political priorities and targets change, naturally, there is a change in the cadres. Before 2011, while the "democratization" agenda was prioritized, the current staff would be accordingly. When "surviving by introversion" was a priority, the current staff would not be the same. Therefore, the cadre changed in the new process. In this process, the social alliances established by the AK Party, both intra-state alliances and international alliances, began to change altogether. With those ongoing struggles, the AK Party started to use a confrontational political language as a dominant language. In the local elections held on March 30, 2014, the winner of this polarized climate was the AK Party. Erdoğan, who was the Prime Minister at that time, reinforced not only his own electorate and his party but also his "strong leadership position and perception" in Turkey and abroad with the election results (Keyman, 2014). Since these processes, the political discourse has continued to develop based on Erdoğan. According to Özbudun (2014), the 30 March 2014 municipal elections, held in a highly polarized and contentious atmosphere, became a nationwide vote of trust or distrust in the AK Party and Erdoğan. Moreover, according to Keyman (2014), since the AK Party saw that they could consolidate their base with polarized politics, they functionally used this discourse. Furthermore, Ete (2020) stated that if the political language and politics change, the political psychology of the social changes. The Fethullahist movement had been declared as a parallel state in 2014, and in 2016 it was named as Fethullahist Terrorist Organization (FETÖ) two months before the coup attempt of July 15th, 2016. With the coup attempt, the AK Party had to stand by and put the issue of democratic construction on the shelf as a state of being alert. According to Ete, during the four years of struggle, the anxiety and worry of losing power replaced the motivation of being the founding father of a democratic Turkey with a Devlet Bahçeli's presidential offer. The presidential government system was adopted in 2017 with a Referendum and started to be implemented in 2018.

Çaylak (2017) claims that the referendums had an effect that increased polarization in the post-2011 period of the AK Party. For him, the increase in the authoritarianism and nationalization coefficient of the AK Party government has impacted the division in Turkish society into two opposite poles. On the one hand, some people categorically supported the AK Party government; on the other hand, others categorically opposed the AK Party government and began to constitute two poles. At the main axis of the division was President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who wanted to bring the presidential system to Turkey. Likewise, in 2017 there was a referendum about the Presidency system, which was approved in the Parliament with the participation of the AK Party and MHP. Before the referendum, Turkey was again divided into two poles, between those who said "yes" to the amendments made to the Constitution and who said "no". According to Çaylak, under the charismatic and powerful leadership of President Erdoğan, the AK Party government has become increasingly authoritarian with the practice of "majoritarian democracy".

According to Özbudun (2014), the post-2011 period of the AK Party should be called "delegative democracy", which is created through majoritarian democracy. Delegative democracies are not institutionalized, but they can nevertheless be durable. They are based on a highly personalized understanding of leadership and are strongly majoritarian. In this model, institutions that provide accountability can be deemed unnecessary by the leader and can be often disqualified. Elections are the only place to call for accountability (Özbudun, 2014). The AK Party defined itself as a continuation of the DP tradition. At this point, it can be noted that the DP tradition is also accepted as a practitioner of majoritarian democracy. The DP exhibited all of the hallmarks of a delegated democracy. The Turkish nation was considered a monolithic society, and any social, economic, or ideological fragmentations within the nation were ignored; it introduced itself as a national movement. The only tool for citizens to express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction in politics is the elections in this system. Political decision-makers identified themselves with the national will; and displayed a highly personal leadership (Uyulur, 2020).

In 2018, the pre-election alliance was formed between the AK Party and the MHP, which was called Cumhur İttifakı (People's Alliance). In this alliance, the political

parties which supported Erdoğan's election as President came together. Büyük Birlik Partisi (Great Union Party, BBP) also joined this alliance. Immediately afterwards, the Nation Alliance was established by the CHP, IYI Party, SP and DP. In Turkey, there are five major parties in the recent election setting, such as the AK Party, CHP, MHP, IYI and HDP, as an ethnic Kurdish party, which have a reasonable chance of affecting the electorate. With the transition to the presidential system, the system turned to be two alliances rival: People's Alliance and Nation's Alliance. The electoral assessment started to be based on alliances in 2018. Therefore, four of the mentioned parties came together in the two blocks.

In the 2019 local elections, the AK Party lost many municipalities. For the AK Party, the loss of Istanbul and Ankara was a severe political failure. Big breaks within the party occurred, and two of the politicians who broke away from the AK Party founded their own parties. Former foreign minister and former prime minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, who left the party, established the Gelecek Partisi (Future Party, GP) in 2019, and Ali Babacan, the former Foreign Minister and former Minister of State Responsible for Economy, founded the DEVA Party in 2020.

Together with the changes in the political context, according to Çarkoğlu and Yıldırım (2018), following the June 2018 elections, Turkey faces challenging issues. Immediately following the elections, the vulnerable situation of the economy dominated the topic. It was feared that major electoral losses would occur if voters had anticipated the post-election situation of the economy. On the other hand, the economic voting theory is significantly dependent on holding the incumbent accountable for the economy's progress. It is not enough for the public to see the economy as weak. What is required is that the incumbent is called accountable for the economy's current state of dissatisfaction (Çarkoğlu and Yıldırım, 2018). In recent years, it has been observed that people often begin to ask the government to be accountable for the economic downturn.

There are great similarities between the period when Gunes-Ayata et al. studied Turkey in 2001 and drew attention to the findings of the opinions polls surveys made at that time and today. Election surveys taken today show that voters are looking for an alternative.

## 1.3. Theoretical Foundation

In qualitative research, literature citation is limited at first, and researchers do not make predictions about the findings. The use of literature validates or demonstrates the necessity of the study initially. However, at the end of the investigation, the literature is necessary to confirm or contradict the findings (Creswell, 2007). In this regard, I have described the initial review of voting behaviour literature within the framework of three main approaches: sociological model, identified as Columbia school, sociopsychological model, identified as Michigan school, and rational choice models. The three main models help us understand why the participants vote and to what extent they support political parties, and under which circumstances they have sincere or strategic support. During the fieldwork, I came across with the issue of affects, which the aforementioned voting behaviour modals do not suffice to discuss the voting reasons within the scope of affects. Therefore, a literature review in this field became a necessity. This chapter will also include literature review on the issue of affection.

### 1.3.1. Voting Behaviour Literature

Despite the existence of wide variety explanations of voting behaviour and approaches to understand voting, the sociological model, sociopsychological model and Rational choice models are the models that are predominantly used to explain voting behaviour in the literature (Ordeshook and Zeng, 1997). Firstly, I will describe the sociological model by giving reference to the study on electoral behaviour conducted by Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1944). The idea that the act of voting is influenced primarily by the voter's personality and media exposure is the initial assumption of the study. However, the study findings showed that the social groups to which the voters belonged had the most decisive influence on voting. The key finding of Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) was that the majority of voters voted based on their initial political predispositions. The relationship between electoral behaviour and the social groups they belonged to was very strong; thus, the electoral choices could be explained using the three factors: socio-economic status, religion, and place of residence (Antunes, 2010). The study findings propose that voting is not an individual act. Instead, people vote with their belonged social group and for what they belong (Lazarsfeld et al.,

1944). The other study suggests three different findings. Firstly, social differentiation, based on socio-economic status, religion, race, and place of residence, is a prerequisite for political conflict and subsequent electoral cleavage. Secondly, there is a social transmission of political choice from generation to generation. Thirdly, group members' social and physical proximity maintains contact and facilitates electoral cleavage (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Mcphee, 1954). The subjects get in touch with the people from their social groups to talk about their doubts and ask for advice, which lets them get advice that leads back them to the electoral position of the majority of their group (Lazarsfeld et al., 1954). The researchers define this phenomenon as reactivation (Antunes, 2010). Furthermore, Lazarsfeld et al. (1954) argue that the voters have less interest in matters of political affairs, unlike a democratic system requires. For them, an electoral decision is not a result of reasoning and calculation but is mainly related to which group they belonged to or are attached (Lazarsfeld et al., 1954). Despite the fact that the authors emphasize the sociological approach, they pioneered research in the psychosocial approach to voting behaviour (Antunes, 2010).

Lipset and Rokkan (1967), unlike Lazarsfeld et al. (1944; 1954) take a historical and macro-sociological approach to understand the Western European party system in terms of historical divisions resulting from revolutions. In their book, Party Systems and Voter Alignments (1967), Lipset and Rokkan suggest four main cleavages in modern western party systems: center-periphery; church-state; land-industry, and workers-capitalists. According to them, these four cleavages stemmed from two revolutions, i.e., the National Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, and were crucial in the formation of the modern European party system. The divisions between center and periphery, state and religion are associated with the national revolution, and the divisions between urban and rural, capital and labour are associated with the industrial revolution. When social groups establish perceptions of these distinctions, they become key political cleavages, and as a result, they become institutionalized in the political system (Manza and Brooks, 1999). This approach mainly focuses on sociological and historical long-term factors, and the social and political short-term factors are not included. With regard to this constraint, the psychosocial model tries to explain voting behaviour from different point of view.

The psychosocial model is derived from research on the U.S. presidential elections. The American Voter, written by Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes (1960), includes the study findings related to psychology and it suggests party identification as an essential component of voting behaviour. The authors argue that People identify themselves with political parties in the same way as they identify themselves with racial, ethnic, and religious groups (Campbell et al., 1960). The central concept of this voting behaviour model is partisanship with its characteristic of identification. The concept of partisanship combines the impacts of dispositional and long-term factors with the effect of short-term variables on voting behaviour. The model includes all these factors; however, its attention is not mainly on social factors but particularly on the relationship between partisanship, candidates and issues (Niemi and Weisberg, 2001).

> In characterizing the relation of individual to party as a psychological identification we invoke a concept that has played an important if somewhat varied role in psychological theories of the relation of individual to individual or of individual to group. We use the concept here to characterize the individual's affective orientation to an important group-object in his environment. (Campbell et al, 1960, p. 121)

Campbell, Gurin and Miller (1954) describe party identification as a sense of attachment to the political party of one's choosing. For them, people have long-term attachment to specific parties, regardless of the politicians or the issues in elections. The voters may occasionally stay away from their party and vote for another party; however, in the long run, voters have a tendency to return to "their" party, to which they have a sense of attachment (Bowler, 2018). Therefore, party identification is an important concept to understand party preference and voting behaviour. Changes in party identification are unusual and require major events (Campbell et al., 1960). According to the Campbell et al., party identification might change at the individual level if the social status changes, such as entry into a higher education institution, marriage, change in residence, change in job, or when there are changes in the larger sphere of social and political organizations, for instance, entry into the European Union; the end of the Soviet Union.

Some earlier studies about party identification, in the 1960s and 1970s, suggested childhood socialization and the idea that children "acquired" their parents' party loyalties. A relatively recent set of studies have the same conclusion; they claim that if the parents are highly politicized and give consistent cues, children are more likely to follow their parents' political views (Jennings, Stoker and Bowers 2009). According to Miller and Shanks (1996), partisanship is formed through a socialization process affected by the values and attitudes of family, colleagues and peers. Partisanship, in this model, is related to social identification. The concept does not refer to party affiliation, it is more about the sense of attachment, as result of political socialization process (Kalaycıoğlu and Sarıbay, 2000). According to this idea, citizens have a long-term understanding of what kind of people belong to the political parties and how they identify themselves with these social groupings (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler, 2002). Self-positioning is a matter of curiosity in this model, and the focus of the investigation is on the party which they find themselves identical with and the extent of their identification (Campbell et al., 1960).

Party identification serve as shortcuts, reducing the extent of information that voters should process. Voters do not require positioning themselves in specific issues; instead, using parties as heuristics allows them to have information shortcuts and provide cues from party leaders (Bowler, 2018). Hinich and Pollard (1981) and Enelow and Hinich (1982), claim that voters consider the positions of the parties or the candidates on issues, but they find it costly to learn about the positions directly. Therefore, they use linear mappings to forecast the positions based on the ideological positions of parties or candidates (Elff, 2018). Within this perspective, ideologies have an undeniable influence in this process of political identification. The spatial theory of ideologies, which goes back to Economic Theory of Democracy (Downs, 1957), has the assumption that ideologies can be represented in a single dimension, it is mostly identified with a left–right or liberal–conservative axis. The more similar ideologies are located closer to one another on the axis. Extreme ideologies are further out from the middle of the axis than centrist ones. Insofar as ideology influences voters' voting preferences, they vote for the party or candidate that is most ideologically identical to themselves (Elff, 2018). According to Downsian theory (1957), ideologies are important for voters to reduce information cost. They make it easier for voters to

choose between parties because they don't have to learn about each party's future government activities. Instead of assessing the activities cost and benefit, the voters tend to identify themselves with a party's vision and the role they would play in it (Elff, 2018). The voters consider ideologies only with regard to the issues that affect them. The causal relationship between partisanship and ideological identification may be reciprocal if the party system is sufficiently concentrated that specific parties may be, at least in public view, the only "owners" of particular ideological brands (Elff, 2018).

In this model, partisanship is not something that let us know which choice a voter has. According to Campbell et al. (1960), partisanship is a perceptual filter through which voters evaluate what is advantageous to their party's orientation and ignore what is negative. This model is criticized because of its weakness in explaining changes in voting choices by ignoring the considerations related to the rationality of voters (Antunes, 2010).

According to Yazama's (2003) study on electoral volatility, voters' search for parties better representing their social grouping is connected with cleavage-type volatilities but evaluating the incumbent's previous performance impacts retrospective-type volatilities. Voting is an effective way of control because voters support or punish the incumbent political party based on their satisfaction with its economic performance (Campbell et al., 1960). In that sense, the voters evaluate general economic variables such as taxation, income, inflation, unemployment rates (Akarca and Tansel, 2007), as well as personal economic factors (Kinder and Kiewiet, 1981) according to cost-benefit calculation. Within this regard, the incumbent's economic performance is the most crucial cause of short-term electoral volatility. Retrospective or economic voting is related to this evaluation. In his study, Yazama noted that the investigations on this topic in Turkey were rare. It is possible to claim that research in the Turkish context has mainly concentrated on social cleavage. I try to overview the concept of social cleavage in the following section by exemplifying it in the Turkish context.

According to Downs (1957), the pioneer of the rational choice approach, economic theorists mostly look at decisions as if rational minds made them. Within this respect, while dealing with the concept of rationality, Downs assumes that men pursue their own interests directly and without disguising them. In his model, he focuses only on

each individual or group's economic and political goals. For him, rationality pertains to action processes rather than the success in achieving intended outcomes. According to Downs, the phases in economic analysis are to discover the decision-makers aims and study which ways of achieving them are most rational. To find the most effective means to achieve it, theorists try to reduce the objectives of each economic agent to a single aim, and they propose that firms maximize profits and consumers maximize utility (Downs, 1957). In the rational choice model, there assumed a parallel between consumers and voters and between businesses and political parties. The assumption that firms strive to maximize profits and customers want to maximize utility is applied to political behaviour. Within this respect, the voters try to maximize the utility of their vote, and the political parties seek to maximize electoral gains acquired from their political propositions (Antunes, 2010). While establishing his model, Downs emphasized that he aims to investigate the economic and political rationality; thus, he states that although psychological elements have a valid and major position in economics and political science, he completely ignores them (Downs, 1957).

> This follows from the definition of rational as efficient, i.e., maximizing output for a given input, or minimizing input for a given output. Thus, whenever economists refer to a "rational man" they are not designating a man whose though processes consist exclusively of logical propositions, or a man without prejudices, or a man whose emotions are inoperative. In normal usage, all of these could be considered rational men. But the economic definition refers solely to a man who moves toward his goals in a way which, to the best of his knowledge, uses the least possible input of scarce resources per unit of valued output (Downs, 1957, p. 5)

There are different models that focus on voting decisions or concentrating on formulating a person's decision-making. The expected utility maximization or Downsian model (Downs, 1957; Riker and Ordeshook, 1968) suggests that people vote or abstain based on expected utility. The second is the "minmax regret" model (Ferejohn and Fiorina, 1974, 1975). As a decision rule, minmax regret states that a person should act to minimize maximum regret (Ordeshook and Zeng, 1997). Regret refers to a person's utility loss resulting from their action in this model. Expected utility theory is a version of rational choice theory for decision-making and is still prevalent in the literature on strategic voting. The expected utility theory posits that people make rational decisions when selecting one alternative over another; that is, people consider

the expected utility of each option and compare each of them to choose one. Lastly, they decide on the choice with the best-expected utility. Expected utility is the utility received from potential future benefits. The Downsian model applies strategic voting when deciding whether to vote if the most favoured option is unlikely to win, while the minmax regret model predicts that voters always choose their first-ranked alternative (Ordeshook and Zeng, 1997). Strategic voting is not a reasonable alternative if the most favoured option has a probability of winning the election (Aksoy, 2015). Strategic voting decisions not only regard the probability of the favourite party's prevailing, but also consider the risk of the elections concluding with an undesirable option. It means, when a voter vote for another party or candidate rather than their "sincere preference" means to prevent an undesirable outcome (Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu, 2021). That is to say; the strategic voting decision is heavily influenced by the desire to keep a particular party away from the government (Antunes, 2010). Strategic voting aims to prevent voter's satisfaction loss by minimizing the likelihood of the least preferred party becoming the incumbent. However, the motive for sincere voting is to raise the satisfaction gained by raising the probability of the most favoured party becoming incumbent or staying there. When a voter's degree of satisfaction increases, he confronts more loss and less gain. When combined with loss aversion, as the voter's satisfaction rises, so does the voter's likelihood of voting strategically to avoid loss (Aksoy, 2015).

According to Ordeshook and Zeng (1997), a rational choice approach provides less additional information about how people act in situations where decisions are based on strategically uncomplicated satisfactions. At this point, the "social-psychological" or "sociological" theories, which attempt to discover the inputs into strategically uncomplicated satisfaction, must have analytical precedence.

In this section, I attempted to overview the key explanatory theories of electoral behaviour. The brief overview shows us that the approaches complement one another (Antunes, 2010). The sociological models mainly contribute to understanding the emergence of political parties in social and historical contexts; in this view, party political divisions have an influence on voting behaviour. The psychosocial models mainly focus on partisanship; the relationship is influenced by the sense of attachment

and identification developed between voters and political parties. The rational or economic models believe that political and economic factors matter and evaluating them in each election per se plays a critical role in shaping voting behaviour.

To some extent, I attempted to discuss the voting reasons of the AK Party voters by referring to the voting behaviour literature. However, to examine the belonging and loyalty that the voters established with the party, I analysed the findings with the potential expansions of the affective sociology. The existing literature on voting behaviour was not rich enough to analyse the study findings within the scope of affects. Thus, I made use of a few studies that discuss affection from a Spinozist point of view. Therefore, I specifically invoked Deleuze and Baker's interpretation of Spinoza.

### 1.3.2. Affection Literature

In this study, I partly made use of the voting behaviour literature. I found out that the issue of affection has an important place in my fieldwork. I found that the voters often referred to particular feelings while describing their relationship with the party. In this context, it would not be enough to explain the voting behaviour without resorting to the notion of affect in the literature. On the way to uncover the voting reasons, it came out that the scope of the issue of affect was vague. The studies in the voting behaviour literature were mainly adopted the quantitative research methodologies which cannot deeply make sense of the phenomenon. In this study, I adopted a Spinozist perspective to shed light on the transformation of the voter's sense of belonging and loyalty to the party and the factors affecting their feelings towards the party.

The main argument put forward by this study is not that the electorate continues to vote by being manipulated. Rather, it mainly aims to discuss the affection in voting from the eyes of participants. Therefore, this study did not attempt to uncover the elements of manipulation. In this study, I also will not go into the depths of voting behaviour, as in the political science literature. I will deal with voting within the framework of loyalty and belonging which, rather than being just an act of voting and support, are more likely to be discussed within the scope of affects. I will claim that loyalty and belonging are a matter of affect, and I will discuss it with reference to Spinozist perspective in the conclusion chapter.

In this field, studies to explain the issue within the scope of affects are few in number. Tokdoğan (2018) is one of them. She departs from the sociology of affects to make sense of the issue of affection within the context of the AK Party's formation of political base through its discourses and symbols. In her study, Tokdoğan's focus is the party itself; however, this study differs from Tokdoğan's study in that its focus is the individual's own experiences and making sense of them rather than the party's. Each voter has experienced the encounters with the party differently. In that sense, the traces of the encounters with the party are a matter of the curiosity. I contend that a Spinozist point of view can help us understand the reasons for voting of the AK Party voters. To do so, I mainly refer to Deleuze and Baker's understanding of Spinoza, who have lots in common in understanding and interpreting the key concepts of Spinoza. To make sense of the voting act, I mainly make use of the notions of affect and affection, as interpreted by Deleuze (1988; 1992; 2006) and Baker (1998; 2020).

In his seminar "Art and Desire", Baker (1998) states that "an affect is always an increase or decrease in our power of acting, and nothing else."[1] He defines affect as "a relation between bodies through any possible means, which causes a differentiation in the powers of the affected body in a negative or positive way" (Baker, 2020, p. 76). Deleuze (1988) draws attention that the notions of affect (affectus) and affection (affectio) should not be confused. He defines affect as this: "Our power of acting or force of existing is increased or diminished in a continuous manner, on a continuous line, and this is what we call affectus, it's what we call existing" (Deleuze, 2006, p. 22[2]). Affection, on the other hand, is a trace of one body on another body arising from the mixture of two bodies (Deleuze, 2006). In other words, "they are the remnants of the affects the body becomes exposed to" (Baker, 2020, p.76). For Baker, similar to the pictures formed in the visual cortex as a result of light falling on the retina the body

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[1] This definition is from the seminar on Art and Desire on 14 May 1998. Available at: https://bellek.metu.edu.tr/tr/video/sanat-ve-arzu-seminerleri-7ders-14-mayis-1998

[2] Ulus Baker, in the preface of his book "Spinoza Üstüne On Bir Ders" (2006), states that Gilles Deleuze's lectures between 1972 and 1986 were transcribed in 1996 and published at http://www.imaginet.fr/leuze in French, English and Spanish. Since no access to the specified link, the address http://deleuzelectures.blogspot.com/2007/02/on-spinoza.html was used for the English translations of the excerpts. In this thesis the page numbers of the quotations are from the mentioned book.

is impacted by affects. "They last until they are replaced by other affections, by being exposed to other images" (p. 76).

According to Deleuze (2006), to define continuous variation in force of existence constituted by affects, Spinoza defines two poles of fundamental passions: joy and sadness, from which all the other affects derive. Deleuze explains them as follows: "Sadness will be any passion whatsoever which involves a diminution of my power of acting, and joy will be any passion involving an increase in my power of acting" (p. 20).

According to Deleuze (2006), Spinoza distinguishes idea and affect. "Idea is a mode of thought which represents something. [...] For example, the idea of a triangle is the mode of thought which represents the triangle" (p. 14). After this example, he notes that "We call affect any mode of thought which doesn't represent anything" (p. 15). He also exemplifies affect as this "There is an idea of the loved thing, to be sure, there is an idea of something hoped for, but hope as such or love as such represents nothing, strictly nothing" (p. 15). Deleuze noted that affect and idea are two kinds of modes of thought, and that an affect presupposes an idea. To elaborate what it means, he gives this example: "There is a primacy of the idea over the affect for the very simple reason that in order to love it's necessary to have an idea, however confused it may be, however indeterminate it may be, of what is loved" (p. 15). In sum, he says "the affect is determined by the ideas which one has" (p. 23). In the excerpt below, Baker explains this relation a different perspective.

> Spinoza has a profound understanding of human mind; he doesn't believe that our intellect only operates through indifferent ideas: Our bodies and minds function in such a way that we cannot be neutral or indifferent about the events round us. Every encounter we experience is already an idea, and we cannot experience this idea without experiencing an emotion, or affect. (Baker, 2020, p.77)

It is important to understand what the idea is. For Spinoza, there are three types of ideas and affection is the first type of idea. The idea of affection is the lowest level of knowing because it cannot grasp the external causes that have an act on one's body (Deleuze, 2006). The things which are external to the individual mind are sensed or imagined through their influence on the body (Alanen, 2018). But how they happen to

affect the body is not perceived in this level. "Whenever the mind is acted on by external causes it has inadequate or confused ideas, and since it is constantly acted on by external causes, the mind is always to some extent passive" (p. 317). Contrary to first type of idea, notion is an adequate idea which forms the basis of reason. "Common notions, however, are always adequate and are accessible to finite minds, providing a resource for acquiring some distinct understanding or explanation of the general nature of things based on their shared properties" (p. 319). The essence ideas are the third kind of ideas, which is for very few of us since it is challenging (Deleuze, 2006). In this thesis, I did not discuss second and third types of ideas, but the first idea.

As a first type of idea, affection is a "sensory impression" and externally conditioned changes in the body (Alanen, 2018). The mind does not understand the things causing the affections of the body clearly; therefore, its ideas are unavoidably inadequate, and incomplete. The ideas of these perceptions are defined as "images". They involve but cannot explain the nature of the objects that cause them. Furthermore, because of representing things as they affect one's body, they are subjective (Alanen, 2018).

Spinoza indicates external causes while explaining affects. He says "Love is nothing but Joy with the accompanying idea of an external cause, and Hate is nothing but Sadness with the accompanying idea of an external cause" (Spinoza, 1985, p. 502). Baker's insights regarding the external origins of love and hatred are noteworthy at this point. According to Baker, in Spinoza, the significance of images in his explanations of affects, particularly in the case of love and hatred, is unique (Baker, 2020). He states that "Love is the capacity of the mind to imagine the things which are not present. Hate, on the other hand, is rather more likely to be a matter of memory" (Baker, 2020, p. 93).

> Love is nothing but pleasure, a passage from a lower degree of completeness to a higher level, and Hate is the opposite. But they involve complex phenomena such as memory and imagination, the capacity to produce images and remembrances, so that probably only human beings and complex bodies (crowds, societies etc.) are capable of being affected by them. (Baker, 2020, p. 93)

Joy increases one's power of acting; however, sadness lowers or restrains one's power of acting, and the endeavour to preserve in his existence. Therefore, sadness is contrary

to striving. For this reason, one who is affected by sadness endeavour to eliminate sadness (Spinoza, 1985). The term Conatus is used to explain the notion. Conatus is "not a tendency to pass into existence, but to maintain and affirm existence" (Deleuze, 1988, p. 99). The below excerpt can help to understand the notion.

> The ability to be affected is necessarily realized in every case, according to the given affections (ideas of the objects encountered). [...] But the major difference between two cases is the following: in sadness our power as a conatus serves entirely to invest the painful trace and to repel or destroy the object which is its cause. Our power is immobilized, and can no longer do anything but react. In joy, on the contrary, our power expands, compounds with the power of the other, and unites with the loved object (IV, 18). This is why, even when one assumes the capacity for being affected to be constant, some of our power diminishes or is restrained by affections of sadness, increases or is enhanced by affections of joy. It can be said that joy augments our power of acting and sadness diminishes it. And the conatus is the effort to experience joy, to increase the power of acting, to imagine and find that which is a cause of joy, which maintains and furthers this cause; and also an effort to avert sadness, to imagine and find that which destroys the cause of sadness (III, 12, 13, etc.). Indeed, the feeling-affect is the conatus itself insofar as it is determined to do this or that by a given idea of affection. [...] The conatus is an effort to augment the power of acting or to experience joyful passions. (Deleuze, 1988, p. 101)

The ideas of affect refer to the state of the affected body and recognize things only by their effects (Şen, 2018). The desire to retain and enhance one's power, serves as a criterion for moral judgments. According to Spinoza, a goodness of an action is judged by whether it aids one's efforts to preserve and augment one's power (Curley, 1973). In this sense, Spinoza says "each one, from his own affect, judges a thing good or bad, useful or useless" (1985, p. 516).

> By good here I understand every kind of joy, and whatever leads to it, and especially what satisfies any kind of longing, whatever that may be. And by evil [I understand here] every kind of sadness, and especially what frustrates longing. For we have shown above that we desire nothing because we judged it to be good, but on the contrary, we call it good because we desire it. Consequently, what we are averse to we call evil. (Spinoza, 1985, p. 516)

Lastly, it is important to say that a body always has a tendency to strive for joyfully

interactions round us to increase the force of existing. For this reason, according to Spinoza "we strive to further the occurrence of whatever imagine will lead to joy" (p. 510).

> We strive to imagine, as far as we can, what we imagine will lead to joy, we strive, as far as we can, to regard it as present, or as actually existing. But the Mind's striving, or power of thinking, is equal to and at once in nature with the Body's striving, or power of acting. Therefore, we strive absolutely, or want and intend that it should exist. This was the first point. Next, if we imagine that what we believe to be the cause of Sadness, what we hate, is destroyed, we shall rejoice and so we shall strive to destroy it, or to avert it from ourselves, so that we shall not regard it as present. This was the second point. (Spinoza, 1985, p. 510)

### 1.3.3. Literature Review on Turkish Electorate

In the Turkish context, majority of the studies problematize voting behaviour with reference to social cleavage, which is a conceptualization within the sociological model. In this section, the social cleavage approach in the Turkish context will be presented. The literature review on the Turkish voter might give an insight into the historical context of the feelings and sense of belonging that are emerged in the electorate today.

According to Lipset and Rokkan (1967), social cleavages and socioeconomic situations play a key role in voter choice. In this respect, the social cleavage explanation of center-periphery interactions is crucial in explaining voter decisions (Mardin, 1973). Many scholars apply the social cleavage conceptualization to explain the rationale behind voting in the Turkish context. In Turkey's voting literature on social cleavage, there are many studies showing distinctions such as center-periphery, left-right, secular-conservative, Alevi-Sunni, Kurdish-Turkish, urban-rural (Kuru, 2016). In the literature review following the fieldwork, I will include the social cleavages that are most in focus in the interviews under this heading. In general, I will explain how these social cleavages take place in the literature through three main frames: center-periphery, left-right and secular-conservative. In addition, in this section, I will include explanations in the literature about how voters perceive the Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party, CHP) and the AK Party, which are located in ongoing existing conflicts.

In Turkey, according to Yazama (2003), leftist parties are more secular and supportive of the state's economic role than rightist ones, and right-wing political parties are more religious and pro-free market. Far-right parties, on the other hand, are less supportive of a free-market economy than center-right parties (Yazama, 2003). In his article, Yazama draws attention to two aspects of the right and left division, economic and religious and notes that not only in Turkey but around the world, religion is a fundamental defining factor of the left-right divide. Yazama, in his reference to Inglehart (1984) and Lijphart (1979), emphasizes the role of religion in the right-left divide. They stated that empirical findings revealed that religiosity influenced stances on the left-right scale more than socioeconomic class. Similarly, Çarkoğlu's argument is important. According to Çarkoğlu (2007), the left and right classification in Turkish politics have a relatively ambiguous nature. The employment of Left-Right as a campaign strategy in Turkish electoral politics and functioning as an explanatory framework in academic research is relatively recent. Although the intellectual foundations of Turkish left and right ideologies go back farther, Left-Right discourse first appeared in party politics after the 1960 coup. This event laid the groundwork for a liberal constitutional framework for working-class political participation, notably in left-wing groups. Right-wing discourse with patriotic/nationalist and a conservative religious overtone has a longer and more significant history, extending back to the pre-Republican era. Nevertheless, rhetorical parallels, as well as similarities in the form and organization of the respective left and right constituencies in Turkish politics, are ambiguous when compared to other Western democracies (Çarkoğlu, 2007). In addition, self-placement in the left and right scale does not have a clear socioeconomic ground, such as economic deprivation, but rather is based on ethnic and sectarian divides. Simple educational disparities across socioeconomic background characteristics appear important in shifting people along the Left-Right scale (Çarkoğlu, 2007).

Based on this approach, to understand the background of the current left and right cleavage in Turkey, we need to go back a bit. Feroz Ahmad (1994) states that the "western and secular-religious" social cleavage uncompromisingly takes place when explaining the word "laicism", which the participants often emphasize as

"undesirable", based on the contrast between secular and conservative in the current right-left division. According to Feroz Ahmad (1994), the main reason why the Kemalists decided on a strict secular policy was that they saw their own regime under the threat of the old regime due to the influence of the Islamic factor in Turkish politics. Another factor that encouraged secular politics was the pro-Westernism of the new regime. Laicism was recognized as one of the hallmarks of Westernization and became a dogma of the ruling elite. Hence, in the first generation of the Republic, French-style secularism, which means the state's strict control of the church, was taken as a model (Özdalga, 2014). According to Kuru (2009), there are two forms of secularism: passive and assertive. Assertive secularism, excludes religion from public sphere, is dominant in France and Turkey, on the other hand, passive secularism, tolerates public visibility of religion, is in the U.S. case. Because of assertive secularism, the Turkish state, led by the CHP, always neglected Islam. With this neglect, the government and the party alienated the people they ruled since the majority of the people belonged to this religion (Ahmad, 1994). According to Ahmad, the shift to the multi-party period, and the struggle for votes, forced the CHP and opposition parties to reconsider their attitudes toward religion. Since many of the previous 20 years' reforms provided little or no direct benefit to the people, which made the people apathetic and even hostile, the CHP should have started first. With the onset of political rivalry, the CHP began to do policies in favour of religion, hoping that it would increase the influence on voters in its favour (Ahmad, 1994). Knowing that this policy change could endanger their position, the DP members tried to protect themselves by accusing the CHP of being hostile to Islam. Although a series of reforms were carried out, and before the 1950 elections, the record of bureaucratic despotism, which lasted a generation, could not be cleared with a few concessions. There was scepticism and uncertainty about the sincerity of the CHP, which had long been associated with militant secularism. According to him, before the 1950 elections, the CHP made concessions while the DP could only make promises; but the winner was the DP in the election because of the CHP's past (Ahmad, 1994).

Starting from Feroz Ahmad, before explaining the secular and conservative tension between the AK Party and the CHP, which are positioned in the right and left division, Çarkoğlu argues that there is no conversion in the right-left distinction. Çarkoğlu

(2007) discusses the difficulty in changing predispositions. According to him, analysing the electorate appears to employ three categories: left, center, and right. It seems very unlikely to convert from left to right for individual self-placements. Instead, rising degrees of religion, for example, can only make a person who is already left-wing somewhat centrist but not rightist. A moderate who becomes more religious may eventually find himself on the right side of the political spectrum. In other words, once an individual has established a left, center, or right-wing predisposition, changing that prevailing tendency appears to be difficult. There is also the possibility of permanence in predispositions of the Turkish electorate regarding the geography-based analysis. According to Çarkoğlu and Yıldırım (2018), AK Party voters are predicted to perceive the economy through more rose-coloured glasses than the opposition. According to their findings, voters' economic judgments are more likely to be modified by the regional differentiation of the voters. They provided examples from different clusters where conservative and nationalist constituencies reside and are likely to have a biased perspective on the economy favouring the AK Party administration and President Erdoğan. This area is less exposed to global economic effects on the Turkish economy. When an economic shock hits the Turkish economy, the impact is most likely to be felt directly and promptly in the western coastal areas (different clusters).

Some other background information about the left-right schema in the Turkish context should also be mentioned. Küçükömer (2007) points out the difference in left and right positioning in Turkey. The polar axioms within Turkey gradually started to be organized in early modern times. According to him, the fact that Turkey's historical background has been based on the distinction between Westernist-secular-bureaucratic tradition and Islamist-Easternist tradition can lead us to understand the polarization in politics (Küçükömer, 2007). Morever, the categories of right and left in the political system are incorrect because the Westernist-secular bureaucratic tradition, which is viewed as left and the left of center, seems related to a right-wing stance in terms of its policies implemented (Küçükömer, 2007). There is a continuity between the Ottoman bureaucratic elite and the CHP with regard to elitism, Westernism, anti-populism and totalitarianism (Küçükömer, 2007; Yılmaz, 2007).

According to Küçükömer, this group of bureaucrats in Ottoman and Turkish history impeded the rise of productive forces. It caused the productive forces to diminish or even be liquidated, particularly during the Tanzimat period and afterwards. As a result, the Westernist movement has hindered the development of a true class movement within the movement, which we may term both Eastern-Islamist and populist. As a result, it has consistently avoided establishing a configuration that could result in a fundamental rejection of the current order. It is a historic mission, and this is the key to comprehending class issues in Turkey (Küçükömer, 2007).

DP, Adalet Partisi (Justice Party, AP), ANAP and the AK Party all of which gained the authority to form the government by themselves in the multi-party system- with significant support from the conservative segment of society- have been positioned in opposition to the CHP. It is controversial whether these political parties are in the same ideological line or not; however, their political positioning is in the same line which is against Western-secular-bureaucratic elites, as Küçükömer proposed in the book 'The Alienation of the Regime' in 2007 (Akın, 2021). Although the ideological positioning of those four political parties is a matter of controversy, they may have a counterpart regarding the continuity of the Turkish right (Akın, 2021). Küçükömer also claimed that the institutional Westernization process created an alienation between the central bureaucracy and the masses, and it is difficult for the left to stand by the people in this polarization due to its Westernist-secularist, anti-populist discourse. Those who can reconcile the people who are alienated from the order and make a progressive move are the Easternist-Islamist wing from among the people (Küçükömer, 2007). Along with these, Buçukçu (2021) claimed that the self-weight of the polar axioms positioned first within the DP and subsequently within the JP against the CHP began to rise as the 1960s drew to an end. Lastly, in the issue of left-right cleavage, Bulaç (1988) draws attention to the irony of Islamic movements being positioned on the right in Turkey while being placed outside the right-wing elsewhere in the world due to their anti-system nature.

When explaining social cleavages in the literature, another frequently used framework, which is the center-periphery framework, should be mentioned. The center-periphery paradigm has provided an efficient framework for examining left-right division

(Mardin, 1973). According to Mardin, the center-periphery division characterizes a battle between a secularist state's center's elites, comprising left-party members, military, and bureaucracy, and the traditional, religious, and heterogeneous periphery. Based on this conceptualization, according to Özbudun (2014), the rift between the secular center and the religious-conservative periphery has been the most crucial analysis to understand the division in modern Turkish politics. For him, since 1950, the center-right parties have won almost all elections by appealing to the peripheral majority.

From the perspective of the bureaucrat in the center, the "periphery" has been seen as a possible area of rebellion since the Ottoman Empire, whose influence in national policymaking should be limited (Kalaycıoğlu and Sarıbay, 2000). According to Mardin (1975), the 1950s was a period when the bureaucracy in center was tried to be dominated by the selected periphery representatives. In the words of Mardin (1975), the main conflict axis of the 1950s, the "bureaucratic" center and the "democratic" periphery, was concluded by the defeat of the democratic periphery in the military coup in 1960 (Kalaycıoğlu, 2000). A conflict between center and periphery dominated the 1960s (Mardin, 1975; Kalaycıoğlu, 2000). The 1961 Constitution created a legal-political equation that limited the sovereignty of the nation by bringing immunity to bureaucratic institutions (or bureaucrats) and Kemalist intellectuals in the eyes of political cadres who were identified with the periphery (Mardin, 1975; Kalaycıoğlu, 2000).

It is seen that the aforementioned frameworks still reproduced today. That is to say, Secular and conservative-religious cleavages are produced and reproduced currently by the CHP and the AK Party as left-secular and right-wing and conservative, as opposing socio-political traditions (Hale and Özbudun, 2009). In addition to this, it is considered that the process of migration from rural to urban could be what sparks the center-periphery conflict. In other words, massive rural-to-urban migration has brought a multitude of religious and ethnic identities to the center since the 1980s. It implies that it has pushed the culture of the periphery into the heart of the center (Güneş-Ayata and Ayata, 2002).

As mentioned above, the oppositional positions of the AK Party and the CHP have a historical background based on the transition from the single-party period to the multi-party period. Considering the AK Party's definition of itself along the lines of the DP, it is necessary to point out the beginning of the DP. In that sense, what Feroz Ahmad (1994) says about the establishment of the DP is important. He states that the founders of the DP spent their entire political lives within the CHP. In the beginning, the party's basic principles were the same as the CHP's; however, after its establishment, as it grew and expanded to the provinces, the nature of the party began to change. The people saw the party's sole reason for existence as hostility to the single-party government, and as a result, they joined the party. These members, who were different from the founding leaders of the DP, wanted to come to power in order to make reform programs aimed at eliminating the bureaucratic state identified with the CHP. The main issue of these members was to end the CHP administration and take revenge on those who persecuted them (Ahmad, 1994). At this point, it is necessary to briefly mention the CHP, which is accepted as the representative of the western-secular bureaucratic line. With the proclamation of the Republic, the CHP became the Turkish Republic's single political party, and its cadre was made up of the military's secular republican part. Following the establishment of the Republic, between 1923 and 1945, the CHP ruled Turkey as a single party until the multi-party elections. When the DP won the 1950 election, the CHP lost its power. Until the coup d'état in 1960, DP was the winner in each election. The coup resulted in the closure of DP and the execution of the prime minister and two other ministers. After then, the military drafted a new constitution (Özbudun 2011), and a coalition was established between CHP and the AP. AP, which was accepted as the heir of DP, had the majority of the votes after the impact of the coup and the CHP could not have electoral success in the subsequent elections (Kalaycıoğlu 2005). There was a center-periphery division in those elections. According to this framework, DP represents those in the periphery who traditionally live with religious values. In contrast, CHP represents a secular way of life with state elites, composed mainly of the military, judiciary, and certain intellectuals (Mardin, 1973).

After the 1980 coup, according to Kalaycıoğlu (1994), a fracture appeared within the center in terms of their responses against religious discourse and organizations, and

CHP also had this tendency. However, the impacts of the military, which positioned itself as a guardian of the republic, and the judiciary, led the CHP's policy move towards the secularist leaning. According to Aksoy (2021), the pro-Islamic RP's electoral success considerably impacted reinforcing secular tendencies. Military and judiciary were prompted by the RP's rhetoric and some religiously driven practices. The RP was pushed to leave the government by the military, and the RP was subsequently closed by the constitutional court judgment. The CHP's attitude was one of support for the center during the 28 February process (Aksoy, 2021). After the establishment, the AK Party, in which the majority of its cadres were former followers of the National Vision, described itself as a conservative democrat and did not associate itself with the Islamist stance of the Welfare Party. Instead, the party identified itself with the ANAP of the 1980s and the Democrat Party of the 1950s (Şen, 2010). However, the CHP maintained its secularist identity, and between 2002 and 2007, the military, judiciary, and the CHP, together known as the republican alliance (Belge, 2006), insisted on the threat of religious fundamentalism being resurrected by the AK Party and took action against it (Aksoy, 2021). The "Republican Meetings" that took place in 2007 and the "e-memorandum" can be an example of these counteractions. During this time period, secular and Kemalist segment opposed the AK Party's future presidential candidate, objecting that a President from the tradition of National Vision and whose wife wears a headscarf would be elected. After that, there were held meetings under the leadership of Atatürkçü Düşünce Derneği (Ataturkist Thought Association, ATA) in 2007, called Republican Meetings, where the protests were to defend secularism (Hale and Özbudun, 2010). These rallies were remarkable in terms of bringing together a very large group and claimed to be the protector of the secular and Kemalist republic. Although it was an example of a collective movement, it was insufficient in terms of creating a common word and effect in the long run (Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu, 2009). After the rallies, a rather harsh message, similar to an ultimatum, was published on the website of the Turkish Armed Forces (Cizre, 2008). The article on the website stated that there were concerns about the weakening of secularism and that the military administration was against the presidential candidacy of both Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül (Aknur, 2013). This event was a warning to the government and was accepted as an e-

memorandum because of its publication on the website (Çaylak, 2017). In 2008, a lawsuit was filed against the AK Party on the grounds of "being the focus of anti-secular activities". This attempt represented a situation that is very immanent to Turkey's political culture in the form of imposition of judicial power. Just as the military calls itself the guardian of Kemalism and the Republic, and in fact it determines legitimacy for itself; similarly, the judiciary in Turkey positioned itself as the protector of the Republic. However, this political culture continued to exist as a part of the *ceberrut devlet* tradition. Judicial institutions have always considered parties from the political Islam past as a threat in this respect and have fought these formations beyond their jurisdiction as part of this supervisory and monist structure of secular modernization (Çaylak, 2017).

These crucial events[3] are interpreted from the perspective of center and periphery framework prevailing for many intellectuals. In this context, Şen (2010) noted that at home and abroad, some scholars and policy-makers have regarded the electoral success of the AK Party as a historic triumph of "periphery" against "center." In this mainstream perspective, the peripheral is the oppressed and marginalized majority's cultural and political domain, or the site of civil society. In contrast, the center is the domain of the state, whose power is wielded by a secular military-civil bureaucracy (Şen, 2010). According to Şen, this approach distinguishes state and society as separate domains and depicts a continuous historical struggle between them.

> This approach not only identifies state and society as separate domains but also portrays a constant historical struggle between society (the periphery) and the state (the center), conceived as a monolithic unity against the diverse social forces and widely subordinated to its repressive apparatus: the military, "the guardian of the state" and "ardent defender of Kemalism." (Şen, 2010, p. 60)

Based on Şen's statement, it can be claimed that the extent to which the AK Party has political discourses that identify itself with the periphery, which has turned into a mainstream, and chosen to position itself against the center, legitimizes the existence

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[3] The February 28, the e-memorandum and the closure case are read as interventions of the military and the judiciary, which are among the elements constituting the center, in a similar line and constitute an important place in the field of struggle of the AK Party. These events were also fresh in the memory of the participants and were presented in the interviews as the success of the AK Party. It should be noted that in the interviews, all these events were described with a center-periphery division over the secular-conservative opposition.

of an ongoing struggle between the AK Party (periphery) and the center. In this field of struggle, it can be put forward that the voters position themselves within a similar framework. In this respect, it should be noted that the center periphery approach refers to secular and conservative-religious in the eyes of the participants. The participants perceive the Republic as a break from the Ottoman Empire with its religious background and as an imposition of a secular life by adopting Western values should be emphasized. It should be noted here that the word *laik* was used while explaining the antagonism rather than the word secular for the participants. Şen (2020) noted that instead of the word "secular" in Turkey, the French terms laic and Iaicism are used, and it denotes the separation of state and religion. Based on this separation and the excerpt below, it might be understood how secularism is used by the participants and with reference to what.

> It is widely believed that a small group of Westernised military and civil elites forcibly imposed laicism from above on Muslim majority society. Rooted in positivist and materialist thought, this elite was believed to be the product of nineteenth-century Western educational institutions for the purpose of modernizing the Ottoman Empire. Their educational backgrounds resulted in their alienation from the religious beliefs and cultural roots of their society, resulting in their choice to adopt French laicite so as to control Islam. Some even claim that led by this Westernised bureaucratic elite, the laic Turkish state attempted to eliminate Islam from the public sphere, entirely confining it to the private. In this narrative, attempting to reshape Islam as a matter of conscience or private belief and denying its public role, Turkish laicism is portrayed as an authoritarian and anti-democratic "comprehensive doctrine" imposed as state ideology by a Westernized elite on society against the will of the overwhelming majority. Therefore, it is argued that Turkish Iaicism has not been willingly accepted and supported by the Muslim majority, instead ardently defended and guarded by the military and civil bureaucratic elite, regarded as the core of the so-called Kemalist establishment. (Şen, 2020, p. 40)

# CHAPTER 2

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURE

### 2.1. Methodological Approach

The methodological approach of this thesis is qualitative in which semi-structured in-depth interviews are used by asking open-ended questions. I have followed Moustakas's transcendental phenomenology method, and I mostly asked "why" questions to detect the essence of the participants' experience (Moustakas, 1994). I followed a relatively neutral interview procedure with descriptive questions at hand and during the interviews, I modified my questions according to the participants' responses. The participants' experiences were different from one another; therefore, some questions did not work, so I did not ask each participant every question.

I aimed to achieve a maximum variety of preferences to discover patterns. To do this, I interviewed 27 different participants accordingly. It was critical to consider the differences in their attitudes towards the party; for this reason, I interviewed with the ones who continued to vote, hesitant and determined not to vote for the AK Party.

While conducting research, I handed a clear and concise informed consent form to the participants informing both the research's aim and participants' anonymity. In each interview, I asked the participants to give permission to audio record the interviews. Except for one, all participants allowed to be audio recorded. The one participant who did not agree to be audio recorded; I took notes throughout the interview. I transcribed all remaining interviews verbatim.

### 2.2. Procedure

I had anticipated that there would be changes in the electoral behaviour of the AK Party voters and I wanted to understand the reasons behind both the stability and the

change. The short conversations prior to the actual interviews I had had with people made me think that voting was a complex phenomenon and cannot and should not be approached superficially. After I got institutional review board approval, I started to investigate. First, I shared my research intention with my immediate social environment. To understand and describe the feelings and thoughts of potential participants through in-depth interviews, I conducted pilot interviews. Therefore, in the first step, I asked for volunteers to interview in my immediate environment. The volunteers answered my questions to help me test and review the questions during the conversations. After that, a few interviews were scheduled in 2019.

I held the interviews face to face. I told the participants that they were absolutely free to answer to the questions and they were also free to cancel the interviews at any time. After the interviews, I told the participants they could get in touch with me if they had any more questions. The majority of the participants wanted me to keep them updated on the findings both during and after the interviews. The length of the interviews ranged from thirty to eighty minutes.

## 2.3. Field of the Study

Istanbul is an important city for governments in Turkey because it is the most populous city in Turkey, and a high rating of votes could be reached from there. In addition, the city spatially and demographically can be considered a prototype of Turkey. Besides, the municipality of Istanbul is vital for governments in the election history because of its scope. Üsküdar, Ümraniye, Fatih and Başakşehir were suitable places to do research because of the high potential of the AK Party voters, where higher rates were observed in elections for the AK Party. Furthermore, it's also easier to do research in Istanbul with a wide variety of residents; It has the potential to reach all kinds of people.

## 2.4. Sampling

As Creswell (2007) emphasized, a phenomenological framework necessitates a relatively homogeneous group of participants. Purposeful sampling is defined as "Strategically selecting information-rich cases to study, cases that by their nature and substance will illuminate the inquiry question being investigated." (Patton, 2015, p.

402). To gather information-rich cases I applied purposeful sampling. I begin with criterion sampling, which is part of purposeful sampling, refers to picking cases that meet some prespecified criterion (Creswell, 2007). In order to select a group of participants who have had similar experiences, first, the researcher should specify some standard criteria. Based on the focus of the research, the first participant inclusion criterion was that they should have voted for the AK Party at least once, from 2002 till the present. The second criterion for the participant inclusion was that they should not have an official engagement with the party organization; however, those who had taken place in party organization once in the past, but if currently they are not officially affiliated, were also considered acceptable. The reason behind the second criterion was I intended to give the voice of the voters who do not officially belong to the AK Party organization. To collect richer data, I preferred the participants who were educated (at least high school education was required), as the more educated the participants were, the more expressive they would be. All in all, I have conducted research with the people who voted for the AK Party at least once; and I deliberately have chosen the participants dwelling in specific districts of Istanbul, where they could be considered the vote bank of the AK Party. Those places are Üsküdar, Ümraniye, Fatih and Başakşehir.

## 2.5. Participant Profile

Some points are common to each participant in this research because of criterion sampling. The first common point is that all participants voted for the AK Party at least once in their election past. Following this primary criterion, the second common point is that the participants reside in one of the four districts in Istanbul. Most of the participants live in Üsküdar district, a significant part of them resides in Fatih, and the rest in Başakşehir and Ümraniye.

Sixteen of the participants were female, and eleven were male. The ages of the participants ranged from 25 to 58. Three of the participants were in their 50s, five were in their 40s, eleven were in their 30s, and the rest were in their 20s. All participants except one, who was a high school graduate, had a bachelor's degree. Even some participants had a master's degree, one had a doctorate.

Since the ethnic identities of the participants were not determined as a criterion, no effort was made to capture ethnic diversity. Only very few participants declared their Kurdish identity. Apart from this, there is no other explanation for ethnic identity. Since the main criterion was that the participants were currently residing in Istanbul, no diversity was sought regarding their pre-Istanbul background. Some participants stated that they were born and raised in Istanbul, and their families were also the same. However, since Istanbul is a metropolis, a significant part of the participants consists of people who came to Istanbul to work or for school life, so it can be said that they have resided in other places before Istanbul in their individual lives. A few participants said that their birthplace was Europe (France and Belgium) or spent their childhood and youth there because of their families' immigration.

I prepared a table for participant profiles below to overview the general information about the participants. To provide the participants' privacy and confidentiality, I assigned them pseudonyms.

**Table 2 The Profile of the Participants**

| Pseudonyms | Age | Gender | Education | Profession | Marital Status | Voting Preferences (2002-2019) | | Personal Voting History | Family Political Background |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ali | 29 | Male | Bachelor | Officer | Single | AK Party- MHP- CHP (local) | AK Party- in every election | N/A | National Vision- AK Party |
| Ayla | 43 | Female | Bachelor | Education | Married | Not voted- AK Party | AK Party- not in every election | Not voted | Mother and sisters religious, father and brother secular |
| Ayşe | 32 | Female | Graduate | International business | Single | AK Party | AK Party- in every election | N/A | MHP -AK Party |
| Esin | 35 | Female | Bachelor | Translator | Single | Missing- AK Party | AK Party- in every election | N/A | CHP- AK Party |
| Filiz | 36 | Female | Graduate | Translator | Single | BBP- AK Party | AK Party- in every election | BBP | N/A |
| Afife | 56 | Female | Bachelor | Turkish literature | Single | AK Party | AK Party- in every election | Not voted | AP- DP |
| Tuğçe | 25 | Female | Bachelor | Lawyer | Single | AK Party- MHP (local)- AK Party | AK Party- in every election (general) | N/A | N/A |
| Emir | 29 | Male | Graduate | Sociology and education | Married | SP- AK Party | AK Party- not in every election | SP | National Vision- SP- AK Party |
| Hüseyin | 29 | Male | Bachelor | Business | Single | AK Party- not voted- AK Party | AK Party- not in every election | N/A | N/A |
| Halit | 56 | Male | Bachelor | Publisher | Married | AK Party | AK Party- in every election | Not voted | N/A |
| Bedia | 28 | Female | Graduate | Political science | Married | AK Party | AK Party- in every election | N/A | DP- MP- RP- SP- AK Party |
| Feyyaz | 33 | Male | Graduate | Physics | Married | AK Party | AK Party- in every election | N/A | DP- MP- RP- SP- AK Party |
| Metin | 44 | Male | Graduate | Economy | Married | SP- AK Party | AK Party- not in every election | National Vision | N/A |

**Table 2 The Profile of the Participants (Continued)**

| Pseudonyms | Age | Gender | Education | Profession | Marital Status | Voting Preferences (2002-2019) | Personal Voting History | Family Political Background |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hayat | 32 | Female | Graduate | Religion teacher | Single | AK Party- Not voted- AK Party / AK Party- not in every election | National Vision | N/A |
| Nihan | 27 | Female | Graduate | Architecture | Single | AK Party- Not voted / AK Party- not in every election | N/A | Not voted |
| Yusuf | 45 | Male | Postgraduate | Academician | Married | AK Party / AK Party- in every election | Not voted | National Vision |
| Bilal | 32 | Male | Graduate | Economy | Married | AK Party / AK Party- in every election | N/A | N/A |
| Süreyya | 34 | Female | Bachelor | English teacher | Single | AK Party- Not voted- AK Party / AK Party- not in every election | N/A | DSP- National Vision |
| Sevgi | 58 | Female | High School | Housewife | Married | AK Party / AK Party- in every election | Not voted | N/A |
| Yonca | 36 | Female | Postgraduate Std. | Philosophy | Married | AK Party / AK Party- in every election | N/A | Not voted |
| Tuğrul | 28 | Male | Bachelor | International relations | Single | MHP- AK Party / AK Party- not in every election | MHP | MHP |
| Ceylan | 37 | Female | Bachelor | Tourism | Married | AK Party / AK Party- in every election | N/A | National Vision- AK Party |
| Hatice | 30 | Female | Bachelor | Sociology | Married | AK Party- Invalid vote / AK Party- not in every election | N/A | Not voted- AK Party |
| Züleyha | 27 | Female | Bachelor | History teacher | Single | AK Party / AK Party- in every election | N/A | Not voted- AK Party |
| Feride | 33 | Female | Bachelor | Digital marketing | Married | AK Party / AK Party- in every election | N/A | Father side AK Party- Mother side MHP- IYI Party- CHP |
| Mazhar | 48 | Male | Graduate | Editor | Married | AK Party / AK Party- in every election | National Vision | National Vision- AK Party |
| Oğuz | 43 | Male | Bachelor | Football coach | Married | AK Party / AK Party- in every election | N/A | DYP- MP- RP- AK Party |

Along with all these sociodemographic characteristics, there are other characteristics about the participant's background and current relation with the party. There is no complete homogeneity regarding the political backgrounds of the participants and their relations with the party. Currently, no participant has an active organic relationship with the party. But some participants once volunteered to take part in the party's organisation. There is also one participant who was offered membership in the youth branches' board of directors and one participant who was offered a membership in the Istanbul metropolitan municipality youth council while Erdoğan was the mayor. Both of them said they had rejected the offers for various reasons. One of them stated that she disapproved of the aims of the youth branches of the party, and the other one said that she had refused to participate in politics with an Islamist mindset.

Some participants had their first political participation experience with the AK Party and those who had taken an active role in other parties before. For example, some participants come from the National Vision line and have supported Saadet Partisi (Felicity Party, SP) for many years. Some of them declared that they took an active role in the party organization. In fact, one of these participants stated that he voted for the AK Party in an election where he was a polling officer for the SP. In addition, there are also participants with a nationalist background. For example, a participant of the MHP origin, who took his name from one of the first idealist (ülkücü) martyrs, stated that he had received an offer for the provincial president of the hearths of the ideal (ülkü ocakları) in the province where he was a student. However, he noted that he did not accept it. As it can be understood from these examples, some participants established close relations with other parties before voting for the AK Party. Among these participants, the number of people who joined the AK Party years after its establishment is not small.

In addition to the participants who continue to be ballot box attendants with a stable desire in the elections, two of them became ballot box attendants with a sense of duty. Unlike this motivation, one participant stated that he likes to observe the excitement of the election environment and often prefers to be a polling officer because of watching the actions during the counting phase.

Apart from all these, a few participants said that they went out on July 15 night and went to the bridge. It is difficult to say that the participants who said this have similar voting attitudes. It might even be said that they have pretty different voting attitudes. There does not seem to be a meaningful correlation between going out that night and continuing to support the party.

Additionally, a significant number of participants stated that they had never voted before the establishment of the AK Party. They noted that the main reason for not voting was their Islamist sensitivities in the past. Even though the RP was a pro-Islamist party, it could not get them to participate in politics until the AK Party came. For this reason, it could be said that as of the establishment of the AK Party, some participants participated in politics by voting.

Together with these, there are some compelling points when examining the personal political environments of the participants. For example, some participants did not share similar political judgments or the same political habitus with their spouses. Furthermore, in some cases, their current political choices differed from one another. Another intriguing aspect was that some participants were unaware of their husbands' or wives' current political choices. Although the political habits of some participants appear to be similar, their political decisions did not have to be same. In one of the married cases, for example, the participant's wife's political choice was ideologically totally different from his. While he explained the reason behind it, he referred to her different political habitus. Other examples included participants discussing their families' political tendencies and providing examples of the differences between their preferences and their families'. Some participants do not share the same political views with their parents, even some hold entirely different political views. In that sense, one participant said that while her father was secular, her mother was traditional and conservative. She noted that her mother sent her girls to *imam hatip* schools to raise them in a conservative manner, whereas her brother lives a secular life. She said "My brother is different, very different. My sister and I are imam hatip girls." (Ayla, 43)

Moreover, she added that her and her husband's approaches to participation in politics are not similar. They do not display similar political behaviours with her husband, but they shared a common Islamist past. However, after the establishment of the AK Party, as she highlighted, her approach to voting begun to change. She expressed that she voted for the AK Party in a different way from her husband's approach to politics. In addition to this, her children are also not on the same political line as them. All the members of the family behave in different ways. Likewise, one of the participants said the kind of differentiation among her parents and the reflections on her siblings. She said that her father and brother supported Erdoğan like her and that her sisters and mother had different opinions and that they disagreed with her sisters about the choice. "My father, my brother and I, the three of us support Erdoğan. My two sisters and my mother […] don't like it either. 'Izmir mind'. Their preference is the CHP." (Esin, 35)

In another case, similarly, the participant noted the difference between her and her family. She said that her father and mother had used to support the AK Party, but they had a different political choice today. She highlighted that they had stopped voting before her. While talking about the political predispositions of her large family, I asked her the story behind the differences. She explained as follows.

> My father's side is not from the CHP, but they are not from here either. It seems like normal, empty life to me. My grandmother never voted for the AK Party in her life. My aunts have never voted for the AK Party. [...] They are on the right-wing, they voted for the MHP and the IYI party. But two of my aunts voted for the CHP. When you look at them, they are not wearing headscarves, but they pray five times a day. They are religious people who pray, fast, read the Quran and continue their worship properly. Well, why do they vote for CHP? Because of Kemalist Islam- that's what my husband calls. The times when I supported the AK Party, I argued a lot about why they [her aunts] didn't give vote for them. They said that honesty, stealing, Ataturk's hostility, etc. They gave the vote to the CHP because of Ataturk's ties. One of my aunts used to say, for instance, that she is voting for the CHP out of necessity. Because not to give it to the AK Party. She does not like what she is supporting [smiles]. My grandmother and aunts who voted for the MHP have voted for Mesut Yılmaz before. They are currently voting for the IYI Party. After the AK Party and MHP alliance, they moved to the IYI Party. My father used to vote for the AK Party, but his family did not. My father's side is not very conservative, but they are not on the left. By the way, if I convince my parents, they will give it to Babacan. (Feride, 33)

As seen in the examples above, there is no perfect homogeneity in the participants' families' political participation histories. Some of their families are of National Vision origin and supported the AK Party, believing it to be a continuation of this line, while some others are of center-right origin and supported the party, believing it to be a continuation of this line. Some other families are of Islamist origin and cut off the tie with the AK Party due to Islamic sensitivities. It can be said that there is a heterogeneous structure in the families, as shown above.

It is also very interesting that both the participants' families' relations with religion and their own relations with religion differ. At first glance, it would make sense to say that all participants belonged to the same religion. No different religion expressions were found other than Muslim identity. However, it is hard to state that the participants' attitudes toward religion are homogeneous. But to put it briefly, although some participants took the floor by directly explaining their political party preferences, many of the participants initially referred to religion to explain their political views. Some of them even emphasized that religion permeates everything. In contrast to this, when I asked them how the relationship between religion and the state should be, a few participants who stated that they found secularism meaningful.

Participants are not homogeneous in terms of their lifestyles. While some participants have a very religious appearance, some others have a more secular appearance. If we give an example in the case of women and assume the headscarf as a symbol, some participants do not wear the headscarf, some of them had used to wear headscarves and do not wear them now, but the majority of them wear headscarf. Similarly, if we assume the community or sect link as a symbol, some participants are active sect members, while others just sympathize with sect and community institutions. On the other hand, others are in the opposite position to these structures or have never created an organic link with such systems and have never considered doing so. While describing the place of religion in their daily lives, some participants talked about a regular series of religious practices; some participants, on the other hand, consider religion at the center of their life, not only at the practical level but also intellectual. However, some other participants do not have regular religious practices, but they

indicated the expression "I wish I could". Moreover, very few participants stated that they consume alcohol.

In addition to all these, it is possible to say that there are quite different behaviours among the participants in terms of being engaged in politics. A large majority of the participants' relationship with politics was as much as the act of voting during the elections. Perhaps, almost all the participants interpreted the act of voting as their only political act. A significant proportion of the participants are very involved in the political agenda, constantly following it and pondering their viewpoint. On the other hand, some other participants are not content with that; instead, they attempt to raise awareness of the people around them or the individuals they can reach on political issues.

Another critical aspect is that many of the participants' first experience with voting was for the AK Party due to the voting age. For this reason, the political socialization processes of these participants are inevitably directly related to the AK Party period.

Lastly, the participants used the abbreviation "AK Party" instead of "AKP". There was no one who prefer to call "AKP" in the flow of the speech; instead, two participants used both abbreviations together. Two different participants, after the interviews, advised me to write the thesis using the abbreviation "AK Party" since the AK Party officially expresses itself with the acronym of AK Party.

## 2.6. Data Collection

Face-to-face, in-depth interviews were used to collect data. Since there should be enough space for the discovery of new ideas and themes, the questions, which guided the interviews, were unstructured. As data collection progressed, the guide was modified to further refine questions to represent the categories and ideas that needed additional refinement (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

I contacted more than 30 people for the interviews, but 27 of them agreed to participate in the study. Some scheduled interviews were cancelled because of COVID-19.

However, I had many small talks with the voters whenever I got the chance. Because of the physical conditions during the pandemic, the fieldwork prolonged to 2021. The scope of the investigation was not what I had anticipated at first. However, there were certain advantages of the time span. Because over time, voters' preferences started to diversify.

When the researcher analyses the data and no new themes emerges, saturation is reached; that is, there will be no more data to be collected (Patton, 2015). I decided to stop recruiting participants when I was convinced that I reached saturation.

I interviewed almost all participants alone. I generally offered to interview alone with the participant if they would not mind, but I did not insist. The interviews could begin with a social conversation to establish rapport, as Moustakas (1994) proposed.

In qualitative research, the researcher should facilitate the flow of conversation and ease the participants to share their own experiences (Poggenpoel and Myburgh, 2003). To do so, during the conversation, the researcher can also share their own experience related to the phenomenon to make participants feel open to share their experiences in detail (Yüksel and Yıldırım, 2015). To ease the flow of the conversation and to make them speak more comfortably, I sometimes shared my own experiences or gave example from other participants' interviews.

Multiple interviews are frequently conducted with each research participant in phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2007). During the research process, we have come together with some participants, and I could chat with them and get information about their current situation. They were such conversations that took place in a chat setting without recording audio.

## 2.7. Data Analysis

Moustakas (1994) advised phenomenologists to ask what the individuals' experiences are, and in what context they have them. His method focuses on the wholeness of the experience and its essence. According to Moustakas, the phenomenological approach includes returning to the experience to gather the descriptions that serve as the basis

for portraying the core of the experience. The researcher avoids forming assumptions and instead focuses on the issue fresh and naively (Phillips, Strunk and Pickler, 2011).

I followed the procedure of transcendental phenomenology analysis in this study. According to Moustakas, interpreting phenomenological data follows a systematic technique. The following are the major steps in the Moustakas transcendental phenomenological model: Epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of texture and structure (Patton, 2015). According to Moustakas, the researcher should perceive the phenomenon without contaminating it with preconceived judgements and experiences; the process is called *epoche* (Moustakas, 1994). Bracketing the researcher's own experience or perception of the phenomenon is not easy (Creswell, 2007). To be able to do this bracketing, which I thought would be difficult, I traced my innermost moments during the pilot interviews. Before the interviews, I tried to clarify my own position. Especially since I share to some extent the effect of the abolition of the headscarf ban on women, I made an effort not to reflect my own thoughts on the flow of the interview during the interviews with the participants, for whom this effect was lost its importance. During the analysis process, I sometimes placed myself in the categories included in the findings. Even though I am the researcher of this study, there were times when I made myself talk like a participant as a person who met the criteria of the research. However, I believe that I have put my pre-judgments in brackets in the analysis.

Phenomenological reduction is the second phase. During this analytical procedure, the researcher brackets out the world and presuppositions in order to identify the data in its purest form (Patton, 2015). According to Creswell (2007), the researcher tries to create a list of nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping significant statements to transform them into meaning clusters or themes. With this methodological approach, I identified significant statements from the transcripts and collected them in a table to see the wholeness of the experience. I preferred them regarding the backgrounds of their experiences, political perceptions, voting motives and attitudes, feelings, and reactions. In the last phase, the researcher synthesizes the themes into a description of the individuals' experiences. After that, the researcher develops a composite

description of the meanings and essences of the experience (Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell, 2004). To do so, I selected noteworthy statements from the narratives. I made a list of significant statements about how the individuals experience the subject. After that, I grouped these statements into meaning clusters and themes.

Overall, this is the process of narrowing down the data to limited selected themes or categories that describe the phenomenon. There emerged six main themes to explain the rationale behind the votes for the AK Party: voting for the leader, national pride, ideological engagement and identity, voting out of conservative fears, anti-opposite standpoint, strategic voting. These themes will be discussed in the following chapter.
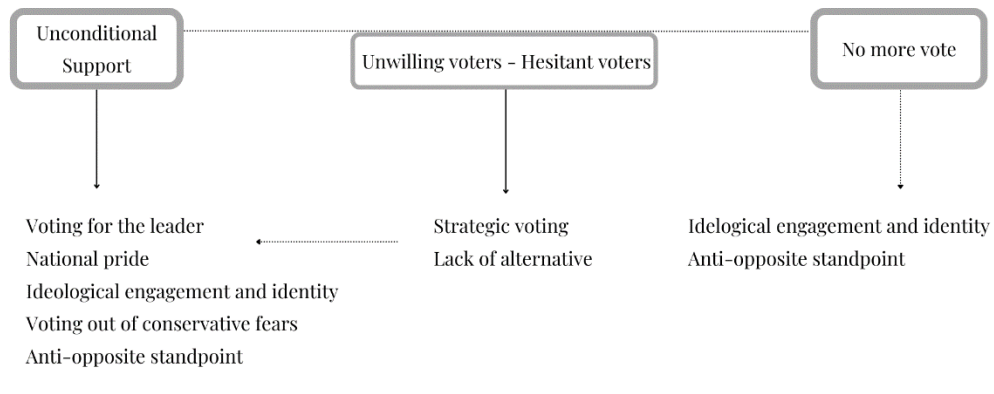
## 2.8. Researcher's Position

Many participants were very comfortable with the assurance that I had shared the same experiences with them during the interviews. That is, I have experienced the moments of being insider due to wearing headscarf. Some participants expressed their contentment with the interviews. Some even said that I gave them the impression of being trustworthy, that they felt very comfortable talking and transparent, and that they were relieved that the conversation would be kept confidential. In some cases, they stated that they spoke too openly because of their trust. For example, one of them said, "I am telling you all these things in an unconcerned way, maybe, some things I wouldn't have told anyone else" (Tuğçe, 25). Some of them stated that they never looked at the issues from this perspective and noted that the interview was beneficial. Then they thanked me and said they enjoyed the interview. I am grateful for this warm attitude. In some cases, specifically the experiences of the female participants, my primary concern was the problem of turning inward because while listening to the traumatic memories and participants' experiences about the headscarf, I -not always, but sometimes- turned to myself and recalled my memories. There was a trusting and supporting atmosphere in the interviews most of the time. The participants did not hesitate to tell me what was in their minds. Some participants even mentioned their families without asking or before I asked.

# CHAPTER 3


## REASONS BEHIND VOTING


The main goal of this research is to comprehend and analyse the main voting reasons of the AK Party voters. Despite the AK Party's changing political position, opinion polls suggest that a considerable number of voters are still willing to vote for it. As a result, I asked the simple question: why do some voters still continue to support the party? The second fundamental question was why the voters stopped voting for the party. Based on those questions, I read over the transcriptions and notes of my interviews and came up with some key themes under six categories to illustrate voting reasons. These are voting for the leader, national pride, ideological engagement and identity, voting out of conservative fears, anti-opposition and strategic voting. Strategic voting includes three sub themes: lack of alternative, risk-based motive and protest vote. I developed a table of themes to portray the voting reasons of the participants. As shown in the figure 1, to some extent, those reasons were common for all participants who voted for the AK Party at least once. However, since the attitudes toward the party have changed during the course of time, the reasons are not common for all participants today. That is, for the ones who were unwilling, or hesitant, strategic voting is the main voting reason. Even though some stopped voting for the AK Party, particularly the ideological engagement and identity and anti-opposite standpoint, maintain their importance for their voting decision. Furthermore, after reviewing all the data, I discovered a few prevalent reasons to stop voting. In this chapter, I will go through them.

| Unconditional Support | Unwilling voters - Hesitant voters | No more vote |

| Voting for the leader | Strategic voting | Idelogical engagement and identity |
| National pride | Lack of alternative | Anti-opposite standpoint |
| Ideological engagement and identity | | |
| Voting out of conservative fears | | |
| Anti-opposite standpoint | | |

**REASONS BEHIND VOTING**

Figure 1 Table of the Themes

From the data, three major key attitudes emerged to classify the AK Party voters: determined (determined to vote, determined to stop voting), hesitant, and unwilling. These meaning clusters have a relation to the participants' perceptions of voting. There appeared two poles, one of which includes the unconditional supporters and the other those who stopped supporting. These two types of voters were named determined voters because they transparently declared what they would do in the upcoming elections. Between the two poles, unwilling and hesitant voters were located.

In this study, I observed that although the participants did not exhibit the same attitude towards the party, the reasons for voting were mainly similar. For example, two participants who voted for keeping the opposition parties away did not have to display the same attitude towards the AK Party. In other words, some voted on behalf of the Party or the President, while some were not willing to vote for the sake of the party or president but for the sake of continuity of the right-wing. While the unconditional supporters continue voting for the AK Party, it is found that to a certain extent, the voting reasons lost their effect for those who are determined to stop supporting. But not at a point that fundamentally shakes the existence of these reasons. Some reasons seem meaningless, while some others are still important. In addition, some reasons turned into something disturbing. This point can be explained by a shift in the motivations of individuals who are determined to stop.

The unwilling and hesitant attitudes have an ambivalent nature. Why would someone stay where they don't want to be? Why has voting become so complicated and chaotic? I wanted to try to understand this ambivalent nature in the light of those questions. For example, I realized that the two attitudes' common reason for continuing to vote is a lack of alternatives; that is, the available options are no longer a preference. Therefore, their reasons for voting are about possible negative outcomes rather than positive future projection. This situation forces them to act strategically. In other words, the unwilling and hesitant participants have one thing in common: they are no longer sincere supporters.

There is a slight difference between the two attitudes although they are in common in terms of voting reasons. The unwilling voters are likely to continue to vote for the AK Party in upcoming elections, while the hesitant voters are more likely to stop voting and look for alternative voting acts such as voting for another party, casting a null vote, or not participating in voting. When there is a comparison between the two, the predominant group is the unwilling voters. They did not hesitate to express their dissatisfaction with many issues. In terms of political participation and civic responsibility, a large part of the participants attributes significant meaning to voting. Thus, voting out of civic necessity makes them discontented since they feel obliged to support a party they are not satisfied with. Similar to the hesitant voters, the common feature of the unwilling voters is that they are not confident with the AK Party, neither support, nor prefer, nor approve. But at the end of the day, unlike hesitant voters, the unwilling voters are more likely to act in favour of it at the ballot box.

Metaphors are frequently used to frame a wide range of political and economic issues, owing to their ability to present them in a simplified manner (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). At this point, I will apply the marriage metaphor, which is frequently used for relationships between political parties, business organizations, broader entities such as states or nations because they can be more understandable if associated with something more tangible and familiar such as personal relationships (Silaški and Đurović, 2020). To explain the unwilling attitude, I found it easier to explain the relations of the

participants with the party with the analogy of an unhappy marriage from time to time.[4] There is a routine, a mental comfort that life goes on to a certain extent. Under these circumstances, the burden of divorce may feel more unbearable than the unhappiness of marriage. Since what life will be like after abandoning the habitual order is unknown, some questions such as whether it will be easy to stand on your own feet in your new life emerge. There was a good relationship at first. Both parties thought that they had a convenient and harmonious marriage. However, after a certain period of time, the expectations that initially formed the bond of love began to be unfulfilled. To a certain extent, this marriage is continued for the sake of the good days and good things done at the beginning. As exemplified in the metaphor, there is a demand from the electorate to return to the founding discourses of the AK Party. The first discourses and actions which initially formed the bond of love are frequently remembered and reminded by unwilling voters.

I mainly focus on the general elections in this chapter because the study findings showed that voting behaviours differ in general elections and local elections. The interviews revealed that general elections reflect long-term evaluations, unlike local elections, which generally reflect short-term approaches. In this chapter, I will discuss the main reasons regarding why the AK Party electorate vote or do not vote in general elections in particular.

During the interviews, I observed that the participants had referred to various terms without directly expressing the terms left or right. I classified these various terms in two categories and discussed them under left-right dichotomy. Thus, all other dichotomies I came across during the interviews would be discussed in a well-coordinated and conceptual manner. The dichotomies that the participants used are as follows: secular/*laik*-conservative/religious, we-they/the other side. In addition to these, instead of the "left" or the "left wing", they used opposition, opposition side or

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[4] Marriage metaphor once used to describe the relations between Turkish electorate and the political party in 2021. It is available from https://www.haberturk.com/yazarlar/kemal-ozturk/3198735-ak-parti-giderse. In this text, the relation between the AK Party electorate and the party is metaphorized as a troubled marriage. By taking the approach of not disturbing the order in Anatolian culture as a reference, the tendency of maintaining the problematic marriage with the logic of not breaking the order is mentioned, even though there are problems in it.

opposition parties. Still, Kemalizm, CHP and CHP mentality[5] were the most frequently used terms to describe opposition.

## 3.1. Reasons for Voting

This section explains why the participants voted for the AK Party and why they still continue to vote although they criticize the party. For example, unconditional supporters vote mainly because of the leader, but the leader factor is also a reason to be a voter for the hesitant voters. First, I will explain voting for the leader, the most dominant reason for almost every voter. Then, I will explain the other reasons namely national pride, ideological engagement and identity, voting out of conservative fears, anti-opposite standpoint and strategic voting.

### 3.1.1. Voting for the Leader

Party leaders have the ability to influence a wide range of political outcomes just by virtue of their position in institutional leadership. They are often the key figures for government formation and policy suggestions and outcomes (Aaldering and Mughan, 2018). Besides, they have a reinforcement effect of strengthening the party loyalty of the voters through their personality and actions (Barisione 2009). It is argued that the magnitude of leader impacts changes according to the leaders' personality, institutional environment, and media coverage on them (Aaldering and Mughan, 2018). The research findings show that the leader's personality is the center of gravity.

What is more surprising is that voting for the leader is the most common reason for almost all participants to vote, regardless of whether they are reluctant or have a different political habitus. The majority of the participants have a firm leader perception of Erdoğan. While explaining the reasons for voting for the AK Party, most of them said that the main reason was Erdoğan himself. In a scenario where Erdoğan

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[5]In most cases, the participants preferred to use the statement of "CHP mentality" instead of secular, Kemalist, left-wing parties. They did not refer to the CHP itself as a political party. The factual data in political history shows that after multi-party period, The time that CHP was the governing party has been short in the Turkish political history. It is important to clarify that with the notion of CHP mentality, the participants mainly refer to secular, Kemalist, left-wing parties. They perceive the CHP as if it is a governing party which is a key example of this mentality. They also perceive the opposition parties in general as something deeply related with CHP mentality.

was not present, the number of those who said they would continue to support the AK Party decreased considerably.

The public appreciates particular personality traits in its political leaders, and they might be attractive enough to persuade people to change their voting habits and vote for a different party. Personality is defined as either an overall effect of the leader or the qualities attributed by the voters to the leader of the government (Aaldering and Mughan, 2018). In that sense, there were several remarkable narratives about Erdoğan's leadership characteristics. Most of the participants agreed on his leadership, but they have attributed different meanings to the phenomenon of the leadership, such as strength, unpredictability, impetuousness, having a stance, etc. Ceylan attributed him the quality of strength in an unstable, insecure atmosphere. After drawing a survival portrait of Turkey with its geopolitical and geographical location, she told the need for a leader comes to the fore, rather than a typical political system with main opposition and ruling party situation. She stated that "since we are fighting so many enemies, I think we need to have a powerful leader, and Erdoğan has this leadership quality" (Ceylan, 37).

Just like Ceylan, many participants referred to his character traits. The references of his characteristic traits have a critical role in understanding how Erdoğan is perceived as a leader from the eyes of the participants and the way his characterisrics are perceived. For example, some participants attributed unpredictability as a quality of leadership. Yonca well expresses the point. She admires the leader because of his unpredictable nature.

> I like the attitude of *Kasımpaşalı*. I like his leadership; he is an unpredictable leader. Look at all the leaders, look at Putin, he is truly an unpredictable man. Well, he can topple entire systems, and no one can predict what will he do. I love his such kind of things. […] This man [Erdoğan] is unpredictable, so he has a crazy side. […] He could be manipulated a lot more if it was known what he would do, but this man cannot be manipulated. (Yonca, 35)

While explaining Erdoğan's personality traits, Yonca pointed out that Erdoğan is cool, by associating being cool with being basically independent. At this point, how she exemplified independence is remarkable:

For example, for Atatürk, the French say "von dictator", so a good dictator, von means a good dictator in French. They say "good dictator". So the leader requires a bit of dictatorship. It requires independence from everyone. (Yonca 35)

During our interview with Yonca, when I asked her what kind of alternative she would like to have in a scenario where Erdoğan is not present, Yonca mentioned "victim" as a different kind of attribution to an alternative leader for her. She associated this attribution with activism.

I would like to have an activist leader from young people. […] The victim, like when he [Erdoğan] first appeared as an activist who went to jail- you know, we as a people are affected a lot, it is very effective on the basis of the people-. (Yonca, 35)

Like some other participants, Yonca keeps a distance from the AK Party. But when it comes to Erdoğan, her admiration is on a whole different level. She agrees on Erdoğan's leadership without any doubt, and for her, his leadership is something innate, not something he developed later on.

Davutoğlu's being from Kasımpaşa is missing. He [the alternative] should also be one of us. For example, I have memories of village. [...] The village life teaches people so much. For example, he [Erdoğan] came out of a village (country boy). In my opinion, Tayyip Erdoğan is also someone who was born a leader. He didn't become Tayyip Erdoğan afterwards; he was born Tayyip Erdoğan. It is not something that can only be achieved with education. (Yonca 35)

Hüseyin also emphasized *Kasımpaşa* in the interview. However, unlike Yonca, Hüseyin identified this feature with himself, with his slumlike nature, and he feels close to Erdoğan. He stated, "You call the leader Reis if you feel close to him. He's a Kasımpaşalı. I, too, am always a partial slum, deep inside." (Hüseyin, 29)

The leader's power is tested by how well he responds to the masses' specific psychological/ emotional needs and to what extent he allows people to identify themselves with him (Tokdoğan, 2018). At this point, Yonca and Hüseyin have felt close to Erdoğan by emphasising some of his traits, such as being from the country, not being educated, being slum, in a tone that makes them feel Erdoğan as "one of us".

These attributions are related to peripheral symbols. At this point, it can be said that Erdoğan's emphasis on the periphery and the participants' emphasis overlap.

Just like Yonca, Hüseyin also mentioned his *Kasımpaşalı* nature in relation to the characteristic of unpredictability, citing the Davos performance as an example.

> […] I mean, no matter what people say about "one minute" incident, I like it. Some people may call it a show, but to me, it's ok. Then you should have thought about it and done it. For example, I like his statement, "Davos is over. I will never attend this meeting again".[6] (Hüseyin, 29)

Some participants touched upon the notion of "stance" while talking about Erdoğan's characteristics. Bedia is one of them. While explaining what she meant by stance, she established a relationship with both impulsive and standing upright against injustice.

> One of the reasons I support Tayyip Erdoğan so much is that he has a stance. Suppose you want to have a say in the international arena. In that case, if you want to cooperate or exist somewhere, of course, you can negotiate, establish a mutual interest relationship and do something, the rule of this game. What you call politics is not something that can be done alone; of course, the results do not only affect you because it affects the other side. Where concessions are made in one place, at the same time, the other side makes concessions, too. But I think Tayyip Erdoğan acts more independently at this point. I believe that he has a stance and that he is a person who can stand upright and stand up to injustice when it comes to any political crisis in the international arena. He is someone who can act in a sudden way without asking what would happen. By the way, I am saying the impetuousness in quotation marks. I mean it in a positive sense, not in a negative, pejorative sense. I don't think he is someone's puppet, nor anyone guided him. He has his own route map. (Bedia, 28)

She used the word impulsive to describe Erdoğan's independency, as well. In this regard, Yonca's use of unpredictability and Bedia's use of impetuousness overlap. These two personality characteristics are seen as independence. She reiterated what she meant by stance in the explanation, mentioning his agency in the Islamic world. She said "If he is the only leader who can come out and protect the rights of many

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[6] "Reis, yakın gördüğün lidere söylenen bir kelime. O bir Kasımpaşalı. Ben de kısmi bir varoşum her zaman içten içe. Yani "one minute"e insanlar şov desin ne derlerse desinler, hoşuma gidiyor yani, şovsa şov yani arkadaş, sen akıl etseydin sen yapsaydın! "Bir daha da Davos'a gelmem" mesela, bence çok hoştu yani. Aynı yakınlığı Süleyman Demirel'e de hissedebilirdim. Süleyman Demirel böyle atar gider yapmazdı ama onun da alengirli cevapları falan bunlar benim hoşuma giden şeyler. Oy verme tercihim değil ama yakınlık duyduğum şeyler." (Hüseyin, 29)

oppressed people in such Muslim geography, this shows that he has a stance from my point of view." (Bedia, 28)

She also stated, "I don't want anyone to represent me other than Tayyip Erdoğan right now because I don't trust anyone" (Bedia, 28). The unique leadership style of Erdoğan from Bedia's eyes and her distrust of other existing representations can be linked. A situation similar to the subject-structure dichotomy can be seen here. In other words, some participants might be said to have committed all their political subjectivity to Erdoğan. There is absolute, unconditional trust in the leader. Unless large-scale betrayals are detected, there is trust in and surrendering the subjectivity to the leader. At this point, Bedia's emphasis on no one but Erdoğan to represent herself mirrors the mentality that "Erdoğan knows best for me." The attitude of entrusting political subjectivity to the leader with complete confidence can be seen in the following narratives.

> It is certain that if Tayyip Erdoğan were not the leader of the AK Party or if there was not such a trustworthy leader in the current situation, I would vote for another party, as would many others. There is a very powerful leader figure here, a trustworthy leader figure, a leader who has persuaded his people that he loves his country and is defending and fighting for its interests. In that sense, of course, Tayyip Erdoğan means a lot. (Filiz, 36)

As Filiz expressed, for some participants, Erdoğan is such a reliable figure that there is no doubt about his good intentions. They are confident that Erdoğan works for the sake of the country. Bedia's desire to be represented by no one other than Erdoğan appears to be related to this confidence. Behind this trust, there is a belief that Erdoğan is sincere in his job, and this sincerity might be regarded as another attribute needed in a leader. Süreyya explained this as follows:

> Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is one of the world leaders. […] No betrayal of the state or nation will come from these men. I never expected such malicious actions would happen by them, and I don't believe it happens in the case of Erdoğan, as well. I mean, he's a person who's trying to accomplish something, to move Turkey somewhere better, and he's doing it with all his heart and soul. Well, the outcomes could be problematic or not. That's what I'm trying to tell. One of the good points about the AK Party is Tayyip Erdoğan for me. I wish all the bureaucracy, all bureaucracy surrounding him, had such good intentions. (Süreyya, 34)

In some participants, there is an attitude of identifying leadership with dictatorship in the context of Turkey. This attitude is not negative; on the contrary, it is considered a necessity for Turkey. Feyyaz well expressed this point.

> I suppose it's in our Turkish genes. There has always been patriarchal leadership. Rather than planning for the past or the future, everyone has a passion for management and leadership. There is nothing they cannot give up to do so. [...] Erdoğan realized in the AK Party that everyone has a passion of leadership and management. As a result, he was forced to adopt the dictator model within the AK Party. So, there could only be one punch, one voice, and one force. He did it really well right now, and he should have done it, as well. It would be inappropriate for everyone to act differently [...] when there is a leader. This would not have been a sustainable movement for the party, government, or power. That's why he did it, and I feel that foreseeing this in the past and taking proper precautions is the main cause for his 17-18 years of standing. [...] If Erdoğan falls, so does the AK Party. (Feyyaz, 33)

Being able to lead alone may be regarded as a key trait associated with leadership. So much so that, taking into account Feyyaz's thoughts about the human condition in Turkey, being able to lead alone appears to be something needed for a leader in the Turkish context. At this point, Feyyaz, while explaining the feature of Erdoğan's leadership, indicates that he actually gained his trust with this feature.

> What are we looking at when we vote? Are we looking at who the deputies are in Istanbul and who the candidates are? No. [...] We vote if Erdoğan is present, and we don't look at anything else. [...] Why? Because he carries out all the policies alone, all projects and decisions go through his approval. [...] They ask Abdullah Gül "why you did not veto any decision during your presidency" He replied, "We were meeting with Erdoğan in the background, and we were getting along with Erdoğan. That's why I didn't feel compelled to veto [...]". It was also good that everything was planned and under followed up. I believe that is the best thing a leader can do. (Feyyaz, 33)

What is note taking is the fact that most of the participants believe almost all the achievements are dependent on the leader; therefore, in the possible absence of the leader, they have concerns about past traumas to re-happen. Only a few participants stated that they were not worried about a scenario without the leader. Some participants with this attitude believe that the transformations under Erdoğan's leadership are institutional, so they will not be dramatically lost. Some others explain it by relying on Erdoğan's vision, which he inherited. This point is explained in detail by Mazhar.

> Such political movements have profound roots. Undoubtedly, another new formation will emerge, which will ensure the continuation of political movements. There are three pillars in Turkey: Westernism, Turkism, and Islamism. These three pillars will undoubtedly find their representatives in Turkey. The policy is on the three axes. (Mazhar, 48)

Mazhar agreed on the leadership of Erdoğan without any doubt. For him, the other candidates are out of question, neither because of their inadequacy nor their weakness, but because of the uniqueness of Erdoğan's struggle. He draws attention to how much Erdoğan struggles for the vision he inherited from the former politicians.

> No leader can overtake Tayyip Erdoğan as long as he is in politics. In reality, the 20-year, 30-year process demonstrates this. Which leader would you think of instead of Erdoğan? Are we going to compare him with Kılıçdaroğlu? With Karamollaoğlu? What exactly is Babacan! Bebecan, born yesterday. Tayyip Erdoğan can dominate politics not because he is Tayyip Erdoğan, but because his fight is enormous. He was always the target. He was the one who fought, and he was the one who triumphed. He entered into a war that no one dared to enter. Would someone demolish Turkey's tutelage system?[7] […] Nobody would believe it if someone said that the military schools would be closed and that the staff officers would be drawn from the university. The state has undergone a significant transition. These are institutional transformations that are not dependent on Erdoğan's existence. The structure of Turkey's military institutions has shifted. The design of the Turkish army was aimed at controlling the inside rather than fighting against the outside. […] In Turkey, even the smallest town has a military garrison. One of the things that happened after July 15 is that all the military locations and barracks in the city are relocated. These are critical things. [That is] "You don't have a job in town, friend. When I command you to go to war with the enemy, you will go", which is a soldier's duty. There are structural transformations. The presidential system and economic independence are substantial structural steps. (Mazhar, 48)

According to research findings, party attachment depends on the leader's presence for many participants. In other words, claiming that the voter is the AK Party voter may not be possible because Erdoğan himself is the key reason for keeping AK Party voters in the party. The interviews raised the topic of whether there are homogeneous party grassroots or not. In this regard, one of the participants asked "with Turgut Özal's departure from the political arena, ANAP's votes fell from 35% to 5%. If Erdoğan

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[7] Tutelary regime was a system that AK Party struggled with. It is accepted as a system that makes democracy difficult or even impossible (Ete, 2019).

leaves, what would be left?" (Halit, 55). In fact, what Halit discussed in this statement is about who the true agent is: the leader or the party? The question arises here which has more grassroots support: the leader or the party? For him, the leader is the determining factor in voting behaviour. He explained his full support to Erdoğan, not the party in this regard. Similar to Halit, many other participants stated their attachment to the party's leader. During the interviews, they generally gave reference to Erdoğan while talking about the party. Many of them are not very interested in the party's organization, cadres, policies etc. as if he represents the party alone, even the state. Hüseyin well expresses the point.

> Carrying out those operations in northern Syria, the policies they are carrying out in the Eastern Mediterranean are supra-political issues. I think Tayyip Erdoğan has a strong character, both inside and outside. And he can positively use this power and convert it to a positive output. (Hüseyin, 29)

The statement of "supra-political issues" is the perception of the policies of Erdoğan from Hüseyin's eyes. For him, these issues are proper to Erdoğan only, not the political institution. Hüseyin also has additional explanations about the reason why he separates the party, and the leader is as this:

> I believe that Turkey walks not with systems, but with names, in business life, football, politics, art, culture, academia, everywhere, not systems, but names, not institutions. AK Party is not a promising institution and is not an institution that promises a culture for me either. Even it doesn't seem very likely. But I think that Tayyip Erdoğan carries out this very well, so Tayyip Erdoğan is there for me. (Hüseyin, 29)

The loyalty to Erdoğan is another example of this voting reason. Just like Hüseyin, some participants only accept him merely as a representative of the state, and they are not interested in other factors like party organization, party cadres, etc. Ayşe is one of them. While explaining her loyalty to the leader, she says:

> For example, if Recep Tayyip Erdoğan says that we are forgetting the AK Party and establishing another party with other people, we will still vote for him. Because this person is doing all these things, the people under him are constantly changing. (Ayşe, 32)

For her, no matter what happens or what is done, Erdoğan is the only doer. The people around him are temporary. Therefore, whether this political party or that, she only

regards where the leader is. Fiorina (1976) points to expressive voting to explain a voter's act of support, which is to support their favoured candidate or party. He argues that the instrumental and expressive components should be combined to understand voting behaviour. In the instrumental explanation of voting, in brief, the voters care about the election outcome and expect maximizing utility from Downsian sense associated with the cost and benefit of voting (Aldrich and Jenke, 2018). As for expressive voting, political identity is meaningful. In Ayşe's case, the act of support is not related to instrumental voting, but to some extent, it could be explained by expressive voting. Even if she is not partisan, she has a kind of partisanship attachment to the leader with the act of voting for him regardless of no matter what party he is in.

There was another example of loyalty votes when I analysed Afife's approach to voting. She was voluntarily working for another right-wing party organization until recently and she was the Fatih District President of that small party, which did not enter the elections. Although she was in some other small party's organization, she always supported the AK Party in all elections. She stated that "my political views were determined there, but my vote was always for the leader and will continue to be" (Afife, 56). Although her party attachment is different, and her political engagement matured in somewhere else, she defined herself as a loyal supporter of Erdoğan. It is important to ask which leadership traits would matter for the voters who change their vote for the sake of another party leader other than the one they usually have a sense of loyalty (Aaldern and Mughal, 2018). For Afife, the most prominent feature is related to religion. The similarity in the religious identity provides her to feel him as "one of us". That is to say, she feels herself close to him in terms of long-term ideological placement because for her, they are close to each other in an ideological mapping.

Emir is another participant whose political engagement was shaped by another right-wing party, the Felicity Party, but his loyalty is direct to Erdoğan. He feels himself distant from the AK Party, but he votes for the party in elections. He stated that "the reason why the vote is still being cast is Tayyip Erdoğan's individual efforts. I vote for the AK Party with full of disgust" (Emir, 29). Emir separates the party and its leader. It can be possible to say that it is related to the logic of considering the state and the leader as one and the same.

Elections limit voters' ability to express their electoral preferences. Most electoral systems allow for the selection of only one option. As a result, the only inference about preferences that can be drawn from choices is the relative preference of one of the options -the one chosen- over all others (Fisher, Fieldhouse, Franklin, Gibson, and Cantikoch, 2018). Emir's perspective can be explained with reference to the distinction between preference and choice. Two terms (preference and choice) are frequently seen as synonyms or an apparent similarity between the two notions. However, keeping them conceptually distinct has practical consequences (Eijk, 2018). Downs (1957) conceptualizes choice as the consequence of a comparison of preferences, which he refers to as utilities. He hypothesizes that voters have preferences for each of the possibilities from which, in most electoral systems, they may pick only one, and distinguishes choice from preference; choice, according to this distinction, is a result. The system itself has a limited nature (Converse, 1974; Sartori, 1976; Powell, 2000), and it is emphasized that the ballot, and the surveys about choice, is not a suitable basis for the interpretation and the analysis of the preferences of voters because of the constrained options from which they can choose (Eijk, 2018). In Emir's case, as some others, the AK Party is not a preference; it is just a choice among the other political parties. Therefore, he says he feels disgust while voting. However, for him, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is a preference; consequently, he chooses him willingly. The other candidates, not the parties, the names, are not preferable for him when there is Erdoğan as a candidate.

Another participant, Hayat, also distinguished between Erdoğan and the party. While criticizing what happened negatively, she kept Erdoğan separate. For her, what is behind inconsistencies is misinformation because he is sincere in his good intentions.

> Sometimes it bothers me that he is so blind to certain things. […] Here, the empathy I have established with him comes to the fore. I asked how much of the existing information reached him and how it reached him because I think nothing reaches him as correct information. I think the information has already been manipulated. So, how does it reach? Maybe I'm approaching Erdoğan with a protective instinct, but this is the one issue I can defend him on. I hope he's not thinking badly; I want to believe that it's not something he did on purpose; his decisions were made unintentionally because the information reached him wrong. (Hayat, 32)

It does not seem possible to make a single list of the attractive traits of leaders to voters in general (Aaldering and Muhgal, 2018) because voters are identified themselves considering different characteristics. However, from the findings, making a list of characteristics that attract the participants to the leaders seems relatively possible. The participants mainly appreciated those personal traits: Strength (including independence, challenge), political craftsmanship (including unpredictability, foresight, resourcefulness), sincerity, passion (including assertiveness), stance (including religiosity), one of us (including *Kasımpaşalı*, representing periphery).

According to Edelman (1967), the leader's biography, personality, acts, and discourses have a symbolic and public character. Leadership is primarily constructed based on what the leader symbolizes for the people and the historical events and figures with which he is related. In other words, the leader contributes to the symbolic construction of the past, present, and future through the symbolic interactions he has with the people and the identities that emerge from these interactions (Tokdoğan, 2018). From this point of view, it is possible to say that the aforementioned attractive traits are directly related to the voters' psychological and emotional needs. However, this study cannot be capable of investigating the idea that the leader's characteristics are a descriptor of the people; hence, further research could be required to conduct. The emphasis on the leader factor has a similar character to the next reason for voting, national pride. In other words, the following reason can provide a description for the psychological/emotional needs of the voters.

The other important attribution to the leader is to be protector of the conservative achievements. The fear of conservatives regarding the negative consequences of any opposition party's rule is explicit. At this point, the idea that the achievements depend on Erdoğan makes Erdoğan's presence vital for many participants. In that sense, many participants support Erdoğan, to protect themselves from the difficulties. To see him as the only one who keeps them safe, especially, impacts the unwilling voters. When those voters no longer have those fears, their attitudes may transform more rigidly. For example, in Feride's case, the voting process that initially willingly supported the party evolved into anxiety-based support to its leader only. Feride already had stopped supporting the party in 2015, but she supported Erdoğan till 2019. However, she

became reluctant to support the last election, only vote. After a while, there was a clear-cut when her lifestyle and worldview were also changing. Her feelings were entirely reversed when she began to believe that he used the fear to manipulate them politically. Her feelings turned into hatred. She said, "I don't want him to die right away, let him live a dog's life." (Feride, 33). It is such a hatred that she wants the worst for him. Hatred seems to be the trace of the party on her. Her completely leader-oriented voting process shows that abandon the party was also leader-oriented.

### 3.1.2.    National Pride

National pride should be interpreted in coordination with the motivation of voting for the leader. For participants, Erdoğan appears to be the primary source of this motive, both in his personality and the tradition to which he is attached. However, instead of the attributed leadership qualities, which were the emphasis of the previous section, the leader's policies are the focus of this section, especially the political themes about international politics; therefore, this section can be read as a continuation of the previous section, but with a different emphasis.

National pride is another important reason for voting, especially for unconditional supporters. On the contrary, those who gave up voting feel no more proud of the party or its leader. For some of them, the improvements are valuable, but they are not dependent on the party or its leader, so for them, national pride was not considered a result of the leader's achievements.

Some participants believe Erdoğan is as visionary as former politicians Turgut Özal and Necmettin Erbakan, who represent Turkey on a global scale. These participants, in this regard, do not believe in politics but rather in Erdoğan as a leader with his vision. Oğuz, explained the position of the leader within a specific identification map by locating himself close to the leader.

> Özal was also an extroverted politician, Erbakan already, you know the issue of D8. These are conservative people. These are all children of this climate, the people who are aware that Turkey is not only Turkey. From that point of view, it is perfectly reasonable to think that Tayyip Erdoğan is the continuation of the same trend. Erdoğan is someone who has already gone through the training

of Erbakan. Currently, the majority of the AK Party is like this. These are the children of the same soil, the roses of the same garden. I don't think there is any difference. (Oğuz, 43)

Oğuz explained what he meant by the vision and defined it as the opposite of what the USA and the West want to see Turkey as. He explained what he associated with the vision in the excerpt below. For him, together with the AK Party, this pride has begun to be felt again.

> Erdoğan is holding the wall. The political climate changes in Turkey: party A goes, party B comes, opinion A goes, B view comes. These are things that can happen. But my main concern is, for instance, the breakthrough we are making in the defence industry right now. More than anything, I want this to continue. […] Now, I believe this is the biggest reason for indigestion related to the AK Party and Tayyip Erdoğan, especially in the USA and the West, and the main reason behind the motivation "Tayyip Erdoğan must go". In other words, the first is the breakthroughs Turkey has made in the Defense Industry, and the second is the breakthroughs it is trying to make in Foreign Policy. No matter what political power comes to power in Turkey, if it puts the defence industry in the secondary, and if it abandons the foreign policy and turns the inside, the country will be governed by a rosy nature. (Oğuz, 43)

While explaining the reason behind support, Hüseyin frequently emphasized Turkey's foreign policy actions. He is proud of Turkey's strategic behaviour in foreign policy, which makes him feel powerful. He relates what Turkey does to a sense of a challenge.

> The Eastern Mediterranean is an important place. America, France and Israel are all there. With their ships, aircraft carriers, etc. There is a severe power squeeze right now, and I think we have taken a good position in that power squeeze. Against Greece, Southern Cyprus, Israel, and Egypt, we have taken a good position against our number one opponent, the enemy, no matter what they call them. We had good advantages. I think we acted wisely. These are more important things to me than the economy. (Hüseyin, 29)

Similarly, to the narratives mentioned above, Mazhar was also impressed by foreign politics. On the other hand, Mazhar claims that he views all of them as a holistic vision inherited from the National Vision.

> The tradition of National Vision has a dimension that does not reconcile with global powers. You can see this in Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's latest performance. The performance that revolts against global financial capital emerge because of this self-confidence. Trusting the dynamics of its own society and being aware of the cultural hinterland that Turkey has inherited from history are

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crucial things for me. Turkey is a much larger country than Anatolia in terms of its cultural hinterland. I think the AK Party grasps this vision well. In other words, if Turkey exists in Libya and Africa today, it is the result of this vision. Take the Kemalist paradigm: "Peace at home, peace in the world" is a big deception. When you withdraw, they eat you. You must go outside. You can also meet the threats against you outside if you go outside. What I mean, the AK Party has realized this, so it is taking perfect steps to expand Turkey's cultural geography in Africa, Central Asia, and the Balkans. And I think this worries Western countries a lot, the imperialists actually in general terms. This is what lies behind the very negative propaganda and vilification attempts against Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Even this may be a valid reason for me to vote for the AK Party. Can a person be that bad? Can it carry out a propaganda activity to demonize a person so much? What did this man do to you? We saw Demirel's, we saw Özal's, we saw Ecevit's, we saw Ahmet Necdet Sezer's. None of them was exposed to such demonizing propaganda. It was only made about Necmettin Erbakan, the deceased. It was done to him for the same reasons. In other words, after installing D8, there was a February 28 process. All kinds of attempts to "exist" in this country against the West are interrupted. This is what Tayyip Erdoğan is going through. (Mazhar, 48)

Just like Mazhar, the sense of being in a constant struggle with the West was also frequently emphasized by some other participants. Since there is a struggle, moves against the West are always welcomed. In this regard, Tokdoğan (2018) states that the moves against the West, such as the "one-minute" incident, have resonated not only with the AK party voters but also with a broader base.[8] It is possible to say that the national pride motive is often based on the narrative of the historical struggle with the West.

Like the approach of the continual conflict with the West, some participants emphasized that there is a war outside. They have concerns about possible threats of today's insecure environment. Therefore, the improvements in the national defence system are perceived as protection of the nation against the certain impacts of the war. Emir explained this point as follows:

I don't think that Tayyip Erdoğan can make a mistake that will end my relationship right now because I said that the reason why I voted for Tayyip Erdoğan was for the benefit of the country. Not about a city or a location. We are not a fan of a team here. If he does anything against the country's interests, we will not vote, of course, and stand in front of him if necessary. But the

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[8] Tokdoğan (2020) explains this phenomenon in relation to the narrative of new ottomanism. For a detailed explanation, see the book "Yeni Osmanlıcılık Hınç, Nostalji, Narsisizm." İletişim Yayınları.

national armament moves he is making now are critical because the sui generis security issues due to our geography require it. If domestic and national armament - I'm talking about heavy weapons - continues, I can still vote, even if all other aspects are wrong, because it is for the country's benefit. Right now, our country is not in a place where we can just focus on our own internal issues and spend the day. [...] There really is war all around us, which is a serious problem. The reflection of this war on our country looks at very simple events. In truth, we're not that far away. Tayyip Erdoğan saw this and gave importance to domestic armament, so this is a behaviour that deserves support on its own. In other words, if Tayyip Erdoğan ruins the economy – I don't want to talk big. I have a job right now, and I am comfortable, but I think like that– even if the economy collapses, even if we go hungry, none of them is more important than our country's occupation and independence. As long as domestic and national armament continues, I will still vote for Tayyip Erdoğan. (Emir, 29)

The emphasis on improving the national defence system strongly relates to the feeling of being threatened. Therefore, for some participants, the developments in the national defence industry field are accepted as the most protective precautions for the country's good. The reason why Emir and some others support Erdoğan might be embedded in this threat.

Another point that brings pride to the fore is Turkey's place in the world. Ayşe has proud of the idea of the leadership position of Turkey for the Islamic world and African countries. Ayşe has proud of that, even no matter how much it costs to the society.

> Because we are a powerful country, America is fighting with us and attempting to destabilize our economy. For example, if we had remained silent as previously, this inflation would not have occurred if we had not spoken up. [...] Turkey did not remain silent. Which was the right action: to sit calmly and watch to ensure that no harm will come to oneself or intervene? Then you get in trouble. […] Since I know that because Turkey cares about other nations, cares for the ummah, and interferes with other countries' affairs, this is obvious. As a result, there are embargoes and sanctions. That's why I can understand the opposition party's viewpoint. They claimed, "Erdoğan came, and inflation worsened". They are right, inflation worsened, but it's not because he didn't work. […] I know how powerful our country is, and I am proud of that. However, it affects us negatively; for example, it negatively impacts our money. But we should not think only of ourselves in the world. [...] No one would permit Syrians, for example, if it weren't for us. I don't know, but the oppressions would have continued today if we hadn't spoken up. For example, the majority of Muslim nations in Africa consider Turkey as a beacon of hope. […] We can say that he is not only the President of Turkey but also the leader of the Islamic world. In fact, many of them wish Erdoğan was our president, and I know that they would do anything for it. (Ayşe, 32)

Filiz and some other participants indicated that Turkey's image abroad was insignificant in the past; however, they are pleased with where it is now. For them, Turkey's reputation is so bound up with Erdoğan. Filiz described the issue well.

> In my opinion, this country has developed a reputation thanks to the AK Party government, particularly its leader. We saw this when Turkish delegations went abroad. In the negotiations, for instance, the ministers were not taken seriously. We were not taken very seriously as a country. But they must now take it seriously and at the very least treat it with respect, whether they like it or not. (Filiz, 36)

Filiz also established a kind of identification between today and Abdülhamid period in relation to the conflict with the West be struggling with the West.

> Europe does not want a strong Turkey. The West does not want a strong Turkey that can defend its rights. […] The West wants such a thing, that is, it never wants to see someone stronger than them. It is not just Turkey, as they did in the time of Abdulhamid, as they did to other countries in other periods because they defame all the heads of state of the countries they see as a threat in the same way.

What is surprising is that notably, the male participants often touched upon the concepts such as the big picture, vision, foreign policy, national struggle, and the defence system as the primary issues. Some female participants talk about such topics, as well. But it would not be wrong to say male participants are more in number.

To sum up, along with the participants whose narratives are taken place in this section, some other participants also believe that we have been a stronger country with the AK Party. These people have common ideals, such as being able to stand upright to the West, defend the country by making progress in the defence industry, and bring solutions to the issues of the Muslim world. They can tolerate the mistakes of the AK Party because of these ideals. Even if they are uncomfortable with the party's problems and mistakes, they can tolerate them since they believe both Erdoğan and they share the same ideals. The desire for a common goal and to be a part of the same story is an important factor that keeps people's support active. Those who do not share a common story or vision with the party, or those who have overcome the old struggles and do not have a new common struggle, appear to be on the verge of severing relations with

the AK Party. Those who do not have in common even in the "loss aversion" have entirely cut off their ties with the party.

### 3.1.3. Ideological Engagement and Identity

Ideological engagement and identity were the most prevalent reason for voting among all participants. Although the participants' ideological engagements were various, the affinity of ideology and identity was one of the grounds on which they developed relationships with the party. With reference to Bourdieu, Doğan (2016) proposed in her book that the past political habits, that it should be noted that the past political habits of the party members, such as their closeness to the right-wing nationalist and Islamist line, have effects that go beyond the party policies. In this respect, what is striking in this study is that the past political habits of the participants constituting the AK Party base are not the same. For example, the past political habitus of the party members coming from the National Vision and from the MHP tradition are different from each other. It does not seem possible to say that the participants completely left out their past political habits while they were in the AK Party. As I mentioned above, Tuğrul, one of the participants from MHP political habitus, did not hesitate to show his tie with MHP engagement, both ideological and sociological. He said, "This does not mean that I have entirely given up on the MHP. I mean, I still have that nationalist side of me." (Tuğrul, 27)

Just like Tuğrul, Metin also referred to his past political habitus. The two participants came from different political habitus; however, they chose the AK Party. For Metin, AK Party is the one that keeps the tradition of National Vision alive. He said, "The reason we voted for the AK Party is that AK Party has more support for the National Vision caused than the Felicity Party" (Metin, 44).

I can argue that there is a heterogeneous electorate of the AK Party. Like the above two examples, some other participants have bonded with different political agencies other than the AK Party. Still, one way or another, they are willing to vote for the AK Party while keeping the influences of the habitus. In other words, because of the variety of political identities, the participants from different backgrounds have different glasses to evaluate the AK Party politics.

There is a slight difference between the two participants. Unlike Tuğrul, Metin has completely lost his attachment to SP in political course. He said, "I disapprove of the Felicity Party in general. They are generally on the wrong path. The Felicity Party has currently two deputies elected from the CHP." (Metin, 44). It is possible to say that for Metin, to be in a particular habitus is an inclusive criterion. Who is in that political habitus and who is not matters for him. In this sense, he separated the party and the other National Vision organizations from each other.

> I have no ties to the Saadet Party, but I have still a sense of attachment to the Saadet Party's youth organizations, AGDM and MGDV. My attitude towards them is different; I don't regard them as a party; instead, I want to see them as a true opposition because young people's expectations of politics and the world are different. They are more enthusiastic and reactive. Therefore, I find the opposition of the youth more meaningful. I do not regard the politics of the party at the top as a beneficial policy; instead, I see it as a hostile policy. (Metin, 44)

As is seen in the economic voting literature, reducing the system in two opposing/ dichotomous parties is considered useful. Examples of such reduction include the usage of the distinction between government and opposition parties, a binary distinction between "left" and "right" parties. Party family distinction is another dichotomous tool. The party family distinction raises various issues, such as how to classify parties within a typology, particularly for the parties that do not easily fit within any of the families. It seems that the main method in the countries is to place parties according to one single dimension (for example, left/right) (Eijk, 2018). Regarding this reduction, in Turkey, from 2018 onwards, there has been a dichotomous alliance which reduces the party system: the Cumhur İttifakı (People's Alliance) and the Millet İttifakı (Nation's Alliance). Some participants wish that the right-wing parties should join the People's Alliance or expected not to be in the Nation's Alliance as an opposition bloc. For them, the parties' ideological placement necessitates such kind of preference. Because of this expectation, Oğuz thought that there is an ideological disorder or disharmony was in Nation's Alliance.

> Once I had hope for the IYI Party. In other words, I had hope that I didn't think there was a chance the IYI Party would take part in the bloc of the CHP and HDP they are in. Frankly, I was saying no. Let's say I understood the CHP to a certain extent, but I didn't think it was possible that it would be on the same

side as the HDP. Therefore, I wanted something too much that Tayyip Erdoğan to persuade the IYI Party. I agree with the thing, IYI Party is a party that broke away from the MHP, and Tayyip Erdoğan formed the People's Alliance with the MHP. Of course, it is not an easy task, challenging to make it real. I know how difficult it is, but I wish that Erdoğan persuaded the MHP and the IYI Party to be in the same alliance. I wanted it would strengthen the nationalist conservative bloc. It was my wish. Later, I realized that the primary motivation of the IYI Party was much different. I have faced it. Unfortunately, my wish was too optimistic. […] We know that the MHP and the IYI Party are at odds, okay, but what was the fight of the Felicity Party? The situation of the Felicity Party is more absurd. Some things are very difficult to explain. It can be used goodwill to explain it to a certain extent. I hope they will be part of the People's Alliance. Or I expect them not to participate in the opposition bloc. I don't know how they will explain this to themselves if they participate in the Nation's Alliance. Hopefully, they can explain. (Oğuz, 43)

Mazhar sees the AK Party as a continuation of the National Vision line and Erdoğan as the one who bears the movement's vision. Mazhar distinguishes the National Vision from Islamism. He believes that the Islamists separated from the AK Party because they did not grasp the domestic and national orientation.

I think that the Islamist thought pumped in the 80s and 90s had difficulties in understanding this local and national vision. They had a more ummatist (ümmetçi) line. I think this ummatist line could not perceive the indigenousness and being national transformation that has just been introduced. Therefore, one of the reasons for the break with the Islamist wing is the perception of this "are we nationalizing!". But the place where Islamism came is evident in Turkey; in other words, you cannot see any projects in the name of Islamism. In my opinion, during the new "sharing wars" in this world, anchoring a more nation-oriented state vision is not a strange situation. Because the Islamists have not developed an ideological movement that can even come to terms with each other. Islamism was already a reflexive manner rather than an ideology, and I think it's outdated. National Vision is a movement that comes from the Islamist tradition, but National Vision also protected the people from the Salafist movements from Saudi Arabia after the 80s. National Vision has an emphasis on tradition and history. For example, what came out at the end of the Salafist movements? Something like ISIS emerged, the one who rejects everything, does not enjoy life, says everything is haram, constantly conflicts with society. The obstacle in front of this was the National Vision. Because if you are dealing with politics, you have to establish a dialogue with other people, and dialogue softens people and develops empathy. Therefore, I think that Erbakan's attitude, local and national goals, and putting ideals in front prevented the establishment of Salafist Islamism in Turkey. National Vision is Islamist, but a national Islamist; It is a movement that does not exclude locality and attaches importance to the national direction. (Mazhar, 48)

Another example of the ideological engagement and identity is Bedia's case. She defined herself as a pious person. For her, the essential characteristic of a party is religiosity. Therefore, when evaluating a party, she looks at its religious discourses and tries to find similarities in this respect. She said, "HDP is telling that they will respect everyone's rights. If I am not voting for HDP right now, there are reasons; one of them is the lack of religious discourse" (Bedia, 28).

To establish a religious identification with the party is one of the fundamental reasons for supporting it since seeing the religious practices provides the feeling of attachment. The examples show the importance of religiosity in party preference. Although it is difficult to measure the religiosity (Norris, 2004), it still works in political decisions.

> Since I have a Muslim background, of course, when the first AK Party was founded, we perceived it as an Islamic movement anyway. It was a new paradigm, a new beginning, especially for people like us who have the headscarf problem. As a matter of fact, we had expectations regarding this during the initial establishment phase. Because that was the most troublesome thing about being a woman with a headscarf at that time, not being able to have an education while wearing a headscarf. To tell the truth, we perceived it as a Muslim entity. How true is this, something discussed in politics, but at that time, of course, we gave a lot of support to the AK Party with that motive. (Hayat, 32)

Like Hayat, religiosity comes to the fore in identity formation for Yusuf. For him, the religious practices and physical appearances matter for the feeling of being identical. He is certain that what religious symbols he sees are not a political act; instead, he feels they are sincere in their use of religious symbols.

> I look at this; I consider who best represents Islam or is most similar to my views and lifestyle, and I decide accordingly. In fact, "the lesser evil" (ehven-i şer) is a phrase I may use there, even if it is not well overlapped. The AK Party is the party I can easily choose among the current ones, not because it perfectly reflects me, but because it is the closest to me. It is what the AK Party has been doing since its establishment. At the very least, these people appear to be of similar origin to me, and they are aware of my sensitivity. Tayyip Erdoğan's wife and children wear headscarves, and I believe this is real, not a show. I feel he is a true Muslim believer. Is he never mistaken? We all make mistakes and are sinners like everyone else; may Allah forgive us all. In this sense, though I find many things good in the AK Party, I also believe there are many mistakes. In other words, if I knew that a more correct and sincerer political formation would be there, I may shift towards it to evaluate at that moment. Yusuf (44).

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From the narrative itself, it is apparent that he felt safe with the party because of its identity. Ideology has some advantages for the voters in the sense of being safe in the broader range of issues that a voter should deal with. According to Downs (1957), ideologies reduce information costs for voters, making it easier to choose between parties. In this approach, a voter finds party ideologies useful because they remove the necessity of relating every issue to his own philosophy. With this shortcut, a voter can save himself the cost of being informed upon a broader range of issues. According to the rational choice theory, even if what matters for voters is political activities rather than political intentions and ideologies, the ideological comparison is preferable if the voter is aware of past tangible indications referring to actions taken (Antunes, 2010). Yusuf appears to be one of those who compare ideologies and feel safe with this calculation. For him, the more identical is the better.

Moreover, the ideology makes him determined regarding whom he will not choose. Therefore, he has strong judgements about the opposition parties (CHP and HDP). Since he does not see MHP and AK Party in the same party family in an ideological, he also criticizes the AK Party because of the nationalist discourses.

> HDP is PKK for me, nothing else that is what it really is. It is the political wing of the PKK. The PKK is a Marxist, Leninist organization and atheist. In this sense, it supports atheism. For example, because most of the Kurdish people are very pious, but it did something even to them, here is ethnicity… It is a racist, fascist organization. I will never support such a racist, fascist organization. CHP is also racist in this sense, in the sense of Turkish racism. What I don't like about the AK Party is its nationalization and Turkification. Maybe his alliance with the MHP, he had to do something with it - which was forced as a political decision - but it is one of the aspects that I do not like. For example, the discourse is nationalistic in this sense. (Yusuf, 44)

One of the participants who find the alliance with the MHP inconvenient is Sevgi. Sevgi and Yusuf have in common that they have an Islamist background and never voted before the AK Party. In this context, their reaction to the alliance with the MHP has a similar pattern, in which MHP's ideology is not welcomed in any sense. However, their attitude toward the People's Alliance has a slight difference. For Yusuf, the alliance is strategically acceptable, while for Sevgi it is a big mistake of the party.

> For example, I do not think the People's Alliance is a big deal. I don't like MHP's ideas at all. Because the MHP is not always what it seems, be it Islamic

or religious, it is a racist party. MHP has something from the past. We all know we have never defended the idea of this MHP because it has always been racist. There is no such thing as racist in Islam. I think the AK Party lost even more with the alliance. The MHP gained more. Wherever you go somewhere, they are there. (Sevgi, 58)

Another example may be discussed under the heading of ideology and identity. In this example, the participant comments on the opposition parties' present policy. Her attitude reminds The Prince while exemplifying the opposition party policies. In this book, Machiavelli (2008) asserts that a prince does not need actually have all the enumerated qualities, but he must appear to have them. From this perspective, Nihan noted that even if she believes they are dishonest, being pragmatic for the benefit of citizens who want to be represented is what she approved and appreciated.

> The last municipal elections happened, you know, I don't know whose proposal it was but [...] I think they realized the necessity of using an encompassing language, and they act accordingly. […] In most of Ekrem İmamoğlu's visuals, there are, for example, athletic, young, dynamic pictures of headscarved people that are constantly present. Could you have expected to see something like this in the CHP visuals five years ago? No. However, you can maybe see a veiled individual among the deputies right now. He may not be sincere about it, which I don't believe he is. I don't believe that people who dislike the conservative segment can be sincere about this, but I don't blame them. Why? Because it's instinctive. I wouldn't say instinctively; that's how they grew up. They have been taught this, and they do not know us. They believe they are dealing with unlovable people whom they have never met and that they do not love us. [...] Therefore, I don't think that this group is sincere and all-encompassing in this respect, but it behaves as if it is, and it must. It must do so; a political party must do so. [...] I may or may not like someone, but I must treat everyone equally. I have to be polite, respectful and courteous to both of you. Suppose I do this, who cares if I love you or not? That's why I think the CHP's current promotion makes sense. (Nihan, 27)

No matter how Nihan likes the current political campaign of the CHP, she does not find it sincere. Instead, she only shows respect to it as a role model of inclusive political language. Her family has an Islamist past and had not voted. Unlike her family, she voted for AK Party, but rarely, only in times of risk. She does not have consistency in voting and no loyalty to the AK Party. However, she has no attachment to today's opposition parties. In her case, identity comes to the fore in voting behaviour, and a long-term identity perspective emerges instead of entrenched partisanship. For this reason, no shift to the opposition parties is observed at all. No matter how good the

campaigns are, she looks for sincerity. What is frequently observed in the interviews that whenever the participants told something positive about the left-wing parties, many referred to sincerity in the meantime. No ideology will be welcomed if it has any relation to restricting the conservative's living space. Çarkoğlu's argumentation (2007) where he asserts the difficulty in changing predispositions in the left-right spectrum is worth mentioning. For him, conversion seems very unlikely from left to right for individual self-placements. Likewise, none of the participants who expressed their dissatisfaction about the AK Party positioned themselves in the opposition parties. Even Ali, who had voted for the CHP in the last election, preferred the word "right-wing" when expressing his political opinion. It is possible to say that the effect of ideology and identity has not disappeared even though the participants cut off their ties with the AK Party. The behaviour of considering ideology continues. Ambivalent identities seem out of question. Züleyha well expressed this point.

> I certainly wouldn't be pleased if Babacan was allied with the HDP or the CHP. I believe he also believes it would be a poor decision. So, he cannot keep it up. But if it goes with the GP, if it goes with the SP; in other words, if it goes with the conservative part, it gives me confidence. Then I would certainly support it, as I am likely to do that at the end of the day. But otherwise, I'd say the wrong companionship. He'd shoot himself in the leg because I don't trust the HDP, which I don't trust even more than the CHP. I support if the right conservative, or independent. (Züleyha, 27)

Religiosity and applying a binary distinction between right-wing and left-wing come to the fore to embody ideological interconnectedness and the ground of belonging. At this point, the ground of belonging that people from different political backgrounds establish with the party is different from each other. At this point, four different backgrounds stand out: National Vision, Nationalist, Islamist (never voted), secular. The meanings they attributed to the party also differ from each other. While the participants from the National Vision and MHP backgrounds explain their family origins, they also mention Center-right parties such as DP and ANAP. The ones who came from Islamist background, on the other hand, never voted before the AK Party and chose not to participate in the system by not going to the ballot box. However, most of them define themselves with right-wing, even if they do not have a right-wing past. At this point, the research findings show that right-wing seems like a common

ground of belonging for almost all participants. Religiosity is a kind of cement of the right-wing for some participants. No matter how hesitant they are or do not support the AK Party, many participants are pretty sure to support the right-wing. Tuğçe explained this point well with her expectation that the administrators of a predominantly Muslim country be Muslim. She said, "In my opinion, the Turkish nation cannot live under anything else in a country where more than 90% is Muslim anyway. It has a bond stemming from its unique structure." (Tuğce, 25).

Although it is claimed that the participants are on common ground in the form of the right-wing, it should be noted that their belonging to the party and their expectations from the party differ. At this point, religiosity is the differentiation point. It is possible to say that there is more expectation from the party at the point of signifying Islamic identity in politics, especially among the participants from the Islamist background. For example, some participants from this background express their discomfort about the shift of political discourse from the ummah to the nation through the influence of the MHP. In addition to this, it may also be possible to say that those who show less tolerance for the party's mistakes from an Islamic point of view are mainly the ones who came from the not voting background. Furthermore, in the expectation of religious intervention in politics, there are some overlapping aspects between the participants from National Vision and the Islamist background.

### 3.1.4. Voting out of Conservative Fears

Most of the participants mentioned and reminded of the political past in a negative sense that there was oppression on religious people, conservative institutions, or whatever related to religion. Almost all participants had in one way or another the memory of humiliation as a result of religious discrimination, or they witnessed others' sufferings, or they inherited others' feelings and experiences. Most of the participants see the side they choose as a precaution against the possibility of repetition of past traumas. It can be said that primarily female participants draw much more attention to this issue. The majority of the headscarved participants, but not all, had faced traumas in their individual past. However, those who do not experience traumas also have a

considerable memory of what was going on in the past. This is such a powerful memory that profoundly affects voting behaviour.

> When we go back to the past, we can see that the notion of freedom has only been present for a relatively short period. It began with the AK Party, a more all-encompassing party. During the CHP era, we did not see anything like this; in fact, a considerable portion of society was ignored, excluded, and despised. Even though I was not in Turkey at that time, I remember the pre-AK Party period in that way. [...] I was never far from Turkey's agenda. In fact, I wanted to study at a university in Turkey, but because I wear a headscarf, I could not come here because of the headscarf ban. That's why I know my country, since I was following it more or less, from abroad. We were terrible at rights. I don't forget those girls who were beaten, those who had to go abroad, or the women with headscarves who could not visit the military, although their sons were in the military. I don't forget those who were dismissed from the army because of praying at work. Or when we come here, in Turkey, for example, when you simply go to the counter and talk with a civil servant, they snore you and exclude you because you are wearing headscarf. Unlike when a woman who doesn't wear headscarf, comes to them, she is treated well, but when he sees you with headscarf, you know, he acts like he saw a bug. So, I always remember them. (Filiz, 36)

Filiz is one of the participants who had lived abroad. Her experiences left her with a bad impression of the current opposition parties, particularly the CHP, which is an extension of the dark picture of the pre-AK Party period for her. After explaining her memory, she said, "I don't want the opposition to come to power right now. [...] Because if the opposition comes to power, much worse things will happen." When I asked Filiz the question exactly in what way worse things could happen, I got the following answer: "I certainly believe that we will go back to the past." Then, she added that "For me, the spiritual thing is definitely more important". Therefore, the AK Party is important to her because of this aspect.

Another female participant who refers to past traumas while describing the reason for voting is Ayla. Unlike Filiz, she has unwilling attitude towards supporting the party, but like Filiz, she is afraid of losing the fundamental rights that she did not have in the pre-AK Party period. She explained her expectation of the administration as follows:

> Still, I am in favour of an administration that will protect the rights of Muslims. Because we suffered, we went through those days; I can't choose anyone who

will make me suffer the same because they don't give me confidence in any way. (Ayla, 43)

Some male participants also have similar conservative concerns and act according to those concerns when in times of elections. One of them is Yusuf. What is notable in the case of Yusuf is that he spoke of a considerably harsher distinction when describing the opposition parties' view toward his side. For Yusuf, they have a sense of ontological distinction which legitimizes their ruthlessness.

> I know they will do the same if they can; They drown us in a spoonful of water, we go back to the same period before February 28, and the same things happen. This is because it is in their genes. They did it the same way and will do it again. [...] As long as there is this perception of threat, and therefore unless they eliminate my existence as a threat -which is not possible, let me say that too-. This is not possible; this is an existence [...] it will not disappear. For example, if I knew this, it is not like the Saadet Party; for instance, if something happens with the Saadet Party; I say, "look my brother, we are both on the same side", or I try to find a mid-course, or I do not make takfir, I do not accuse them of blasphemy because I know they are not. But the other side is different; the other side is entirely different. There is no mercy on the other side. For there to be mercy on the other side, they must see you ontologically the same. I don't think they see us ontologically the same. (Yusuf, 44)

In the case of Yusuf, fears run deep as the issue of existence and the threat of existence in Spinozist terminology. The number of participants who share conservative fear is quite a lot. For some, it is the fear caused by the painful experiences of their own in the past; on the other hand, for some others, it is a fear arising from the experiences transferred to them. But it basically has a similar feature for everyone, and it finds a place in the dichotomy of religion and secularism. No party in power imposes top-down secularism in a scenario where religious people will exist by preserving their own identity. Therefore, this fear creates a stance that can be called anti-CHP. Afife is one of the participants with this stance. She never ever imagines a scenario that the opposition parties will come to power primarily because of those conservative fears. She strictly advises her children not to vote for those who made religious people oppressed. She conveys this history to her children and wants them to know who not to vote for. She said, "I tell my children in every election that you know where not to vote, you are so young, but if you vote for them, my milk is haram" (Afife, 56)

Hayat thought there is discrimination against the religious people in the opposition parties. What she meant by the opposition is the CHP and its secular mindset. She normally defines herself as apolitical. However, she has party preference. There was a period when she applied for jobs before the 2019 elections. She started looking for a job somewhere outside the conservative segment for various reasons that she was uncomfortable with. Even though she was pretty qualified compared to other candidates, she was not accepted for a job. One of the places she was rejected told her that she was not suitable for this environment because of wearing a headscarf. This experience, one after another, prompted her to behave reactive political stance. Associating her experiences with the opposition parties in this process, she willingly voted for the AK Party in the 2019 election.

> Even intellectually, feel as close to them as you want, that is, feel close to the other side, think of the same thing, no matter how much you understand them, and no matter how much say you understand them, they do not understand you at some point. That breaking point is religion and the headscarf. Not even religion, not even faith. Maybe they think 'we are religious' within themselves, but if you are a woman with a headscarf, you cannot exist there. After realizing this, it's okay, you are angry with your Islamist friends, maybe because they are doing this, but at least you can get angry with them. [...] Those separate us from the very beginning, so they don't look at you, it's enough if you're wearing a headscarf. This was a breaking point for me. I voted for Binali on this break, and it just happened right after it. [...] I realized that they would never, ever understand me. There is one thing, in fact, if I were a man, perhaps they would even hire me right away. They do not think that men implicitly wear a headscarf. Concretely, they do not accept you because you are wearing a headscarf. (Hayat, 32)

The example of Mazhar is also quite remarkable. His mode of speech underlines the polarized nature of the political system in Turkey. He said, "Our choice of voting is related to our experiences. Our experiences greatly affect our voting choices." By saying so, he claimed, it is quite natural for him to be against any formation that may cause him to suffer as before. So much so that he was quite sure that Turkey's current political conditions do not allow him to take a different action.

> I would love to live in such a country that I can vote social democrat, Islamist or nationalist based on election promises. Just "Look, these guys have put forward a vision, it looks good, I'll vote for it". Now think about Germany, for example. Is there any difference between voting for a social Democratic Party in Germany

and voting for a Christian Democrat in terms of your individual interests, none. But I am still worried about what will happen to me when I vote for the CHP. Will I still be humiliated for being religious? Will my wife have problems in business life because she is wearing headscarf? For example, suppose such a meritocracy occurs. In that case, it does not become essential to me; that is, I can vote for Christian Democrats or Social Democrats, 'I looked at this election; I didn't like it, the country is getting worse, I'll give it to the other party'. I would like to live in such a country, but the current conditions are not like this. (Mazhar, 48)

Some participants are grateful to the party for struggling with the oppression on conservatives. Their grounds for supporting the party are the party's positive activities in favour of conservatism. Some participants have the feeling of gratitude to the AK Party in this regard. The interviews show that practically all the participants who feel this are female participants who have had similar past traumas because of the headscarf issue. Those participants mainly associated lifting the ban on wearing headscarf with the AK Party's attempts to liberate those women. As a result, despite their many criticisms, they voted for the party. The debt of gratitude as a reason for voting is, in fact, also related to a lack of effective alternatives which ensure this liberation.

As I said, although we are not happy with the efforts made against the headscarf ban as the people of February 28 - a platform that I am also in - I think that as a headscarved individual, we have come a long way at this point. You more or less know the situations of the women wearing a headscarf. […]
We achieved this with this government, not before. In other words, if coffee is served today in the offices we go to, as people who have been expelled from schools, these are the government's pluses, for that I am grateful. On the other hand, is there a deficiency? Yes, there are. Have our rights been restored? No. What was shown to different segments was not shown to us; there are many shortcomings, okay, but this is not a situation that we should erase altogether. On the contrary, I wish this could be done better; -I say it more comfortably because there are young people around us- the current generation is at the point where the country has come, the country is bad like that, Erdoğan is doing this, doing that, our rights, our laws... They are used to looking so critically! However, because they couldn't remember the 25-30-40 years ago Turkey because the 15-20 years old didn't know, "everything was already rosy in the country anyway, Erdoğan broke it, the AK Party came and broke it". There is no such thing. Do they need to be reminded more often about the water and bread queues? Even if it is recent history, it needs to be taught a little better to the next generation. (Ayla, 43)

It can be said that an attitude very similar to Ayla is also present in Nihan. Referring to her experienced trauma, she said that it is natural for those who experienced this problem to sympathise with the party that relieved it.

> I don't have partisanship at all; it's not just in politics, on many issues, you know. This partisanship is like something instinctive. For example, someone who is not very engaged in politics is very possessive of the football team and does everything for it, invests all his money in it, and follows it. Some to a music group, some to something… I think people need to own something and stand behind what they own. I don't think I'm politicized. In fact, there is no party that I own to. I think I was close to the AK Party in the first place because of the side I'm on. The ones who were born in our period, being my age -I thought what would happen if I couldn't go to university in the last year of high school because of the headscarf ban- we could enter the university entrance exam only if we do not wear a headscarf, at that time. But the headscarf problem was solved just the year I entered, and I took the exam in 2010, that year. I was nervous on the way to school because we were the first year to go to school wearing a headscarf. So, there was anxiety at school. The lecturers and the environment weren't used to seeing us either; we weren't used to seeing them, that collision situation. Therefore, I do not think there can be someone who experiences it and does not sympathize with it. It's a bit like someone owning you—a sense of ownership. While someone is excluding you, someone embraces you. It's like you're paying your debt of gratitude and loyalty to them. (Nihan, 27)

When I asked her whether she remembered anything about her attitude towards the AK Party when she was not in a voting age, she said, "it had seemed to me more sympathetic during the times I couldn't vote, which was, in fact, the times when AK Party was more sympathetic, I guess [Smiles]" (Nihan, 27). So, she also does not have sympathy for the party right now. But she feels grateful to the party because of that relief.

Conservative fears are one of the few reasons that kept the unhappy marriage, mentioned at the beginning. It has related to the reason of lack of a sufficient alternative which was discussed in detail under the heading of strategic voting. In addition, conservative fears were ineffective for those who overcame conservative fears or made them meaningless. They are neither a primary reason for voting nor capable of keeping them in the party. Tuğçe is one of them. The invalid vote seems closer to her.

Sensitive values, which had been a source of problem for me, have been resolved. Perhaps it has been resolved for you as well. For example, I believe they won't close the state cadres for us [headscarved people] later. That is, the new administration will be unable to do so. Kemalists, I suppose, saw how people got combative and whipped. The headscarf problem, I believe, is the reason why the opposition has been unable to gain power for many years. Because anytime we retreat within ourselves, we attach so significance to the meaning of headscarf and hug it. Therefore, we support the ruling party because it emancipated us. I can say that it has always been our first argument for us. (Tuğçe, 25)

Tuğçe's confidence in merit is a factor that partially reduces her worries about the future. In other words, she thinks that she can somehow find a place in the cadres in a scenario where the opposition comes to power because she is confident in the context of merit.

I also believe that I think we worked a lot, like a dog, to come to a place, the environment in academia, science and laboratory was very hard, I mean, we have always scraped with our nails to get somewhere. That's why I say that; even if it comes in a government that is not in my view and fills all the staff with what looks like its own, I always think that if I somehow got somewhere, again, somehow, I would find somewhere. (Tuğçe, 25)

### 3.1.5. Anti-Opposite Standpoint

Being anti-opposition is one of the reasons for voting. To be anti-opposition is in fact an attitude that arises from fear, particularly conservative fears. It has a critical function for some participants to ensure their standpoint. In this section, it will be examined why the participants had this stance.

Since the opposition parties sparked huge anger in the past because of the conservative discrimination he and his wife experienced, Yusuf distrusts them. He underlined the power struggle between the AK Party and the opposition parties, as below.

I had always dreamed of being an academic, but I never believed that it could come true. We said, "let's go abroad" after the period when we were not given the right to live. The post-February 28th period was my reason for leaving. [...] I'm glad I didn't stay. We were not given the opportunity to grow up here. Giving us, there, the right to breathe, and the right to self-development for people like me - look, giving rights is not a privilege - giving rights! We attribute the giving back of rights, things acquired by the AK Party and just before it, through the municipal elections. But we can say it's not because of democracy or anything. Yes, something was given because of democracy, but

they would put democracy on the shelf if they could! I am well aware of it. This is a power struggle; right now, the AK Party has done it; They tried to take power slowly into the hand, and they did it. (Yusuf, 44)

In this narrative below, Yusuf exemplified in detail how he described the politics in Turkey. For him, it is a struggle for power between secular and conservatives.

Why was there always a knob, a threat on us in the past? And you were constantly reminded of your identity, you were Muslim, and you were discriminated against because of your Muslim identity. This identity remained alive because you were constantly reminded. You were in power during the AK Party period, so you became everything. There is a situation of sluggishness. And with money, position and the blessings brought by this position and power, the test was a little more difficult. We have never experienced this test before. And the biggest concern of the opposition -HDP is a little different but- especially CHP's years; I see it as the loss of the power they had since the foundation of the Republic. Even since the Union and Progress, they have had no other problems, for example, the hijab? If you are a doorman, a doorkeeper's wife, okay, that's fine, or a woman working in the fields, that's fine to wear a headscarf. In fact, a class struggle continues. […] In this sense, there is a Muslim class called the Islamic class. The Islamic class, of course, can certainly do something like green capital, capital level, non-capital class -and different categories can be added-. But what I'm looking at is that there really is a war here. Well, how did Mehmet's son Yusuf go to America? How could he speak languages like them, speak a foreign language, speak English, scan the literature, and look at the world from a different perspective? Same level. They looked at all this. (Yusuf, 44)

Yusuf frequently emphasized the discrimination he was subjected to in the past. He said that he always keeps these experiences fresh in his memory when it comes to elections. Elections, where the political actors are determined and reshuffled, are crucial for him. Since he sees politics as a struggle for power, he never wants the opposition parties to come to power.

A friend works at a private college, and I've always worked at a private college. I said, If I applied to the school where you are, he said, "They won't even let you in with this ring" because I wear a silver ring, and it is a sign of identity. [...] I have not forgotten, and we must not forget. Whenever I forget and feel complacent, the following comes to my mind; No, that's why I'm afraid of change in power. That's why I was devastated when Istanbul lost the elections. (Yusuf, 44)

Lastly, with his statement, "The HDP is the PKK for me, nothing else, it really is this: It is the political wing of the PKK" (Yusuf, 44), Yusuf equates HDP with PKK.

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Therefore, just as he does not want the CHP in power, he does not want them either. He added, with this regard, "I would not vote for any organization where there is CHP or HDP". Just like Yusuf, Hayat put the CHP and its mentality on the side that she opposed, but on the other hand, unlike him, Hayat's attitude towards HDP is different.

> The CHP and CHP mentality, that is, even if they immerse themselves in gold, so to speak, I don't care. I find it cruel to be their supporter no matter what. […] Yes, I do start to support in times of risk [smiles]. But if his [Erdoğan] opponent was not CHP, but HDP, then things would change. […] Well, HDP also has a left Marxist line, but HDP has a side that is a little more from the public, of the people. I'm not saying it in connection with terrorism, I'm just talking about political discourse rather than terrorism. [...] If its rival was the HDP, I would probably say that it could create an alternative to the AK Party there. Because, in a sense, that happened in the June 7 elections. Even though I didn't vote on June 7, in a way, that's what I felt. Yes, it is from among the people, really from the people; that is, that misery, poverty, humiliation, marginalization, being under the pressure of the sovereign, etc. I feel as if they lived all of them. That's why I think I can give support when they are there. (Hayat, 32)

In general, as the examples given under the title of anti-opposite standpoint indicate, the main thing that the participants called as opposition is the CHP and its mentality. Here, the CHP is evaluated beyond being a party, based on the baggage it has since the foundation of the republic. In this assessment, the CHP is positioned on the other side of the binary opposition because of its secular tendencies, in which the religious people are not included.

To understand anti-opposition stance, it is important to focus on the dominant dichotomy between religion and secularism because many participants had common in this binary opposition. The memory of the exclusion of religion from the public sphere is present in the vast majority of the participants. All the participants, who were above a certain age group, referred to the oppression experienced by religious people in the pre-AK Party period and to the deprivation of rights. In this respect, according to the participants, the main content of the expression uttered as the CHP mentality is Kemalism. For many participants, Kemalism, which produces discourses and practices with reference to secularism based on the acceptance that religion must remain in the private sphere and should not become visible in the public sphere, is the main representative of secularism in politics.

The main source of the traumatic experiences they mentioned frequently is secularism, which excludes religion from the public sphere. The research findings show that it's a kind of collective memory. Its influence is so strong that the opposition parties have no credibility. The expression of "one of us" was a kind of measure for most of the participants in the interviews. Being one of us is being on the same emotional ground, sharing the same memory of being under pressure. While the AK Party can produce discourses that touch this emotional ground and memory, the opposition parties cannot touch here. As a hypothetical question, when I asked the participants how an alternative should be so that they could vote, one of the prominent features was the Muslim identity that could be inserted into the phrase "one of us". Except for a very small number of participants, Muslim identity was among the features sought in an alternative. The main concern here was the desire to be understood.

There are some other examples that reflect the influence of the voting reason differently from conservative fears. Some participants emphasized their distrust to opposition parties in terms of political craftsmanship. For example, Mazhar well expressed the approach as follows:

> The vision represented by the AK Party is a vision that goes beyond the Kemalist paradigm. The Kemalist paradigm has left this country barren. This country was made impossible to raise its head. It was prevented from being aware of its geography. Erdoğan and the AK Party are currently representing this vision. (Mazhar, 48)

Süreyya's approach also has similarities with the idea of the left-wing government's inability to benefit the country. Therefore, she has no trust in opposition.

> No government on the left, especially the CHP, has benefited this country. I mean, it is like turkeys voting for an early christmas. These men have not changed at all. At least, the Islamist line has changed a bit – like it or not – you know. There is no change in these guys. In other words, if you give some power to their hands, if you give them the ability to act, they repeat the 1920 behaviours, do you understand me? If the CHP were very strong, if there were great chances, of course I would give it to the JDP. This is not a partisan thing, but the visions of the men have never changed. (Sureyya, 34)

A decision by strategic voting not only regard the probability of the favourite party's prevailing, but also consider the risk of the elections won by an unwanted political party; that is, the strategic voting decision is heavily influenced by the desire to keep

a particular party away from government (Antunes, 2010). Süreyya's attitude is related to strategic voting because her main aim is to keep them away of the government. At this point, it is important to note that in most cases, the anti-opposition motivation includes strategic voting.

Another factor that strengthens the anti-opposite stance is the current alliance structure in the country. Mazhar, who seems very determined to support the side that represents his worldview, does not have any doubt when deciding which side to support. He explained the reason as follows: "The country has come to such a point that, as a matter of fact, I can now determine who I can vote for from alliances. So, we are in such a process." (Mazhar, 48). Hüseyin has a similar standpoint.

> It can be said that I am on the side of the AK Party even though I did not vote, I was on that side and feel close to them, but I was not called myself a supporter. Voting or not is more about my personal preference. My stance with the AK Party is a little more independent. I'm not a person who believes in voting most of the time. I'm not a person who believes that it can change things. But that has changed a bit now. Recently, when these alliances emerged, I started to think that one vote is precious. (Hüseyin, 29)

There is another case to illustrate the importance of the alliances. Oğuz perceives Turkish politics in a way that there is a conflict of deep-rooted polars who have different imaginations about the country. For him, in this polarized political atmosphere, compromise between alliances seems impossible.

> Now, the only party, the only mind, the only school that can do this is that school that Tayyip Erdoğan embodied under the AK Party leadership. Others do not have this spirit. Even if they want the benefit for the country, the spirit does not exist. They do not accept the past. They see the Turkish Republic as a separate state from the Ottoman Empire. 780-thousand-meter square is enough for them. Eighty million is enough for them. In fact, if it were not most of the 80 million, it would be better for them, but that's another matter! That is very clear. I can say for both sides that 'it would actually be better for half of this country without the other.' [...] If there are two dissimilarities, the solution is that one of the two sides would become similar to the other. Either it would make the other similar to itself, or the other one would do so. Neither side actually has any intention to resemble the other side, nor will they ever. (Oğuz, 43)

With the statement "They see the Republic of Turkey as a separate state from the Ottoman Empire", Oğuz explains a kind of intransigence criterion. There is also

another judgment that Oğuz underlines and is actually quite sure of. The possibility of chaos if the Nation's alliance comes to power. Therefore, it is pretty clear for him what to do.

The possibility of insecurity and chaos is a common fear that some other participants also have emphasized. Oğuz is one of them. Differences in the ideals in the opposition bloc, lack of unity of purpose, self-interest, and narrow vision frighten him since he thought that in the period of the AK Party there has come a long way; important works have been achieved; and there are still critical policies that are still in progress. He thinks that such a fragmented opposition bloc cannot handle these ongoing policies. In addition, his main fear is that the opposition bloc has composed of completely dissimilar parts that cannot rule the country and can shake the whole order. This raises his security concerns about the nation.

> There is no unity of purpose, instead, their only aim is to destroy. But it is easy to destroy, what will they put instead? This is where it scares me. *Reis* is holding that wall; if he leaves, the wall will fall. Let's solve the internal events; what about the relations with the outside? Who will keep the Syria policy, and how? What about the Eastern Mediterranean project? That's my concern. […] The AK Party is not in good shape, pragmatist, raw, full of the peasantry. But I am very afraid of what will come after the AK Party. (Oğuz, 43)

### 3.1.6. Strategic Voting

Strategic voting is voting for the party that is most likely to win when the most favoured party is unlikely to succeed. Maurice Duverger was the first to explain this circumstance theoretically, and it is called as "Duverger's Law" (Leighley, 2012). Voting for a party other than the most preferred one is realized to achieve a particular goal. This behaviour, called strategic voting, has been addressed in the voter behaviour literature. The mechanical effect of an electoral system, according to Duverger's law, relates to how votes cast for political parties are turned into seats won by those parties, but the psychological element refers to how parties and voters behave in expectation of these mechanical effects (Alvarez et al., 2018). Regarding the mechanical factor that indicates the winner-take-all nature of converting votes into seats, people respond tactically by voting for a more electable candidate than their first choice. Because

psychological considerations play a role in tactical or strategic voting, voters tend to avoid spending their votes on losing candidates, even if they are possibly the favourable choice for them ideologically (Grofman, Blais, and Bowler, 2009).

For a voter, it seems easy to vote for a party that they favour the most. However, not every election is a simple decision for voters. Voters may opt to vote for a party other than their favourite party for a variety of reasons. Therefore, in strategic vote, voting might not be supporting. One of these reasons is that the party he likes has little prospect of winning the election. In this situation, the voter wishes to avoid wasting his vote by voting for another party that has a possibility of winning and is mostly identically similar to his (Aydoğan-Ünal, 2018). Tuğrul's perspective about voting is tactical. He states the strategic motivation explicitly by emphasizing where his party loyalty is.

> Afterwards, I decided to vote for the AK Party, which is the strongest right against the left, thinking that the Kurdish initiative ended, FETÖ's portrayal as terrorism, its withdrawal, and then the government's policy became nationalized and that it would serve Islam more. (Tuğrul, 27)

MHP is the party he feels sense of attachment. His family also favours the party. He was even offered the head of the hearths of the ideal of the city where he was a student. According to him, the main reason why he supports the AK Party is strategical; that is, he prefers to vote for the AK Party particularly to keep the rule away from the left-wing, and to provide the right-wing stay in the rule.

Emir's strategy is very similar to Tuğrul's but with a slight difference. What the difference is that Emir no longer belongs to his former party. He said, "I am a person who started voting for the AK Party when I was a polling officer of the Felicity Party" (Emir, 29). Once he preferred SP since his family's pattern was in the radical right with the pathway of National Vision. However, against his family, his choice was the AK Party. He saw the AK Party as the more appropriate candidate to achieve power against left-wing parties, especially the CHP because of its power in the right-wing parties, rather than its ideological engagement. He does not favour the AK Party right now, and he said, "We didn't like the party, we didn't like it when we voted, we don't like the party right now, we never liked the party, I say on my behalf" (Emir, 29).

However, he still has a motivation to vote for the AK Party because for him, in this dichotomic political context, voting is a necessity, not a choice.

"Isn't it good for a different party to come and change while the existing leader is already in power?" (Ali, 29) Ali is one of the AK Party voters who has very much engaged in the leader indeed. However, in the last local elections, he changed his voting behaviour, and for this time, he supported the CHP's candidate, Ekrem İmamoğlu. According to Ali, there must be changes in the political atmosphere in Turkey, there must be new faces within the changing Turkey. However, it is not an easy task for Ali to vote other than the AK Party. According to Ali's estimates, voting for a different party while the AK Party's leader *Reis* is in power reduces the danger or minimises the risk. Because for him, if things go worst *Reis* can control and intervene.

"When the two were combined, I gave it to MHP. Because they were united" (Ali, 29). In this quote, Ali shows another changing voting preference. This quotation referred to the 2018 general election when Ali voted for MHP due to the People's Alliance. In this case, Ali has the same motive as the last local election. He has a desire for change, but on the other hand, he does not want something in the form of a radical departure of the AK Party. It is safer to have changed under the same leader he trusts.

> If the CHP was the one dealing with that FETÖ attempt, I would support him by any means. In such an environment, no matter which ideology or party is at the head of the state since it is the owner of the government at that moment, I frankly owe to support it as a civic duty. (Süreyya, 34)

There is a different type of strategy in Süreyya's case. She rarely voted for the AK Party and has never thought to vote for the CHP. The excerpt above was a hypothetical statement, but it was meaningful. Süreyya actually defines herself as if she is not engaged in politics in any way. She does not have an interest in what is going on in politics, who is in the cabinet, what the incumbent party is doing right now, and so forth. However, she said that she went to the ballot box very few times in her election life, and one of them was right after the July 15 coup attempt. The main objective why she votes that time is to protect the state against terrorist attacks. Therefore, I interpreted her approach to voting as a civic duty.

### 3.1.6.1. Lack of Alternatives

Unlike the above-mentioned tactics, the research findings show that the fundamental motivation for strategic voting is a lack of alternatives. Many participants, particularly the ones who have no other party engagements, thought that in no way do the other parties in the existing system could be an alternative for them.

"As soon as the alternative comes, I am done with the AK Party" (Nihan, 27). Nihan is one of the participants who do not have party attachment to AK Party. However, she stated that if you are a conservative person today, no other chance, but the AK Party is the only option. She explains what she meant by alternative as below.

> In fact, none of them is an alternative at the moment. In other words, in order for it to be an alternative, it must be as a rival; that is, as powerful as its opposition. In other words, it is not possible for a candidate who is a minority and has no possibility of being in power and who is not likely to be elected, to be an alternative. Even if it is an idealist party for me, or whose ideas are very compatible with me, doesn't matter. If it cannot get people behind it, if it cannot appeal to many people, if there is no possibility of being elected, then this is not an alternative. It won't be elected anyway, so it's like a blank vote. (Nihan, 27)

Nihan does not look for just an option, but she wishes to find a reasonable choice that has a high chance of winning in the current system. While expressing the very important achievements for her, such as being present in the public sphere with the conservative lifestyle, she added that "the AK Party is not the guarantee of these achievements. But since there is no alternative, the AK Party is the only option at the moment." (Nihan, 27).

> Here we come to what we were just talking about. The alternative is not better at the moment if there is a risky situation. Even if the alternative had given confidence in me, I would not have voted for it. (Nihan, 27)

Feyyaz is another participant who does not feel loyalty either the party or the leader. From the current options, he looks for the best that can be. He stated that "we prefer the AK Party not because our political views overlap completely, but because we have almost no common ground with other political parties" (Feyyaz, 33). For him, the AK party indirectly becomes the best option, as others are not an option.

Tuğçe is another participant who looks for change. She feels very upset about the wrong things happening in the party and wants something to change. For this reason, she was happy with the outcome of last election. She exemplified this situation with "dilemma".

> In fact, I thought that the election of Ekrem İmamoğlu in Istanbul would be an opportunity for the government to renew itself, or it would be an opportunity to shake off. I don't want it to fall into the hands of the opposition. This is our dilemma. (Tuğçe, 25)

Another participant who has strategic vote decision is Bilal. He had a very hopeful picture about the party in its first period, and therefore he gave de facto support to the party. For him, as a young person who wants to take part in politics, there was a party which was capable to representing him in politics, and he could be provided with an environment where he could easily announce his thoughts as a religious person. He also expressed his hope for Muslim representation. It was a kind of desire for future prospect that the voices of the people like him would be heard. Therefore, to speak in Spinozist terminology, the encounter with the newly established party had increased Bilal's power of acting. After then, when he voluntarily worked for the party organization and saw the inner face of it, his feelings were changed. He stated that he had a feeling of cooling down because the party, which he had believed to represent his values and hopes for the future, was different from the one in the showcase. For him, there are things that were done. His first encounter in the party organization, at an organic level, takes place at a level that makes him question even his career goals in politics. He abandoned de facto participation in politics and positioned himself as a citizen who votes from election to election. He is now voting for his civic duty as he stated. Within this perspective, he said that he makes his choice with the logic of lesser evil. In this strategy, he selects the least evil option from the available options because they all include evil in some form. He no longer looks for who represent himself well, instead, he asks who lesser evil is. So much so that even the point of view towards the political institution is affected.

> I think there is a segment of a society that gives obligatory support because it would be worse if someone else came. Sometimes, when I look at it like this, I say it is the lesser evil and I vote. At first, I gave willingly, but as I said in the last few elections, […] I say, 'I am a guarantor for the right things they did, I am free from the mistakes', that is, I am not a supporter. (Bilal, 32)

After a while, he became alienated from the party he supported with belief, with the hope of being represented, with enthusiasm. The story that started with enthusiasm turns to seeking the lesser evil. It is not supporting any longer that keeps him in politics, it consists of going to the ballot box and voting for the most appropriate option to fulfil his civic duty. Bilal had a highly politicized past, but he turned into a rather indifferent in politics and carefree about what will happen if the party does not win. His hopeful picture turned into a disappointment, and there has been no political party to attract him as the AK Party once did.

> An opportunity has passed, I do not say this because it is a financial opportunity, or the power, or the money, I do not mean it in terms of power, but an opportunity has passed to establish some things, to put things in order, to live the values we believe in. There were many times I was sad about that this opportunity should not have been wasted. In the matter of merit, in the matter of stance in some political or different issues, I wished that they would not do this, and I felt sorry many times. (Bilal, 32)

Spinoza describes disappointment with pain. He says, "Disappointment is pain accompanied by the idea of something past, which has had an issue contrary to our hope." (p. 55)[9] Although Bilal mentioned his first encounter with the Party with hope, he said that the process did not go as he hoped, and he expressed his state of feeling with disappointment. This affection prompts him to act strategic vote. The rationale behind his point of view can be explained with the utility function, as Downs (1957) states. From this perspective, choices range from "least-repugnant" to "best-that-can-be" (Eijk, 2018). And he makes his decision with the least-repugnant, rather than the best that can be. Because they have no common ground with the party.

### 3.1.6.2. Risk-Based Motive

When the participants were asked hypothetically whether they would support the party in the upcoming election, the participants (under this title) stated that they would vote for the party if the rule of any opposition parties appears as a possibility.

Voting in risky times, do not require any loyalty to the party. Most of the participants with this motivation did not go to the ballot box in each election in their personal electoral history. For this reason, it seems appropriate to evaluate their behaviour under

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[9] Elwes's (2000) translation was preffered for this quoatiton from The Ethics.

the heading of strategic voting behaviour. They went to the polls especially in times of crisis, or the elections right after the breaking times, such as the Gezi protests, the events of 17-25 December, the coup attempt of 15 July are the times mentioned in the interviews. The election of November 1, the second of the 2015 elections, can also be described as an election that marks the time of crisis. The behaviour of going to the ballot box with the fear of dragging the country into chaos is striking.

In risk-based voting motivation, the prominent common point of some participants was conservative concerns. When the potential of the current government to lose power is revealed, voters with this motivation go to the polls, even though they usually lead a life that is not engaged in politics in their daily lives. Nihan well expressed this point, when I asked her what she would do in a risky election.

> I would vote in the general election [to the AK Party], not in the municipal election. [...] The important thing for me is whether I have a living space. Of course, I do not want the ones, whom I think will not give me a living space, to take over the rule. (Nihan, 27)

Nihan also explained what she meant by the notion of living space as follows.

> There is something like this, whether you are unemployed or not, even if you are in trouble, you are in social life. You are apparent. My mother was not visible in the public sphere. Still not. Is the previous generation visible in social life? Are they active? Can they sit in a café? It may be a cultural thing, but they are not used to do it. They are not accustomed to even going to certain districts. This woman [my mother] cannot go to Beşiktaş alone. If she goes to a café and sits down, everyone gazes at her, they do something with their eyes like that, you know, because she doesn't belong there. But right now, we somehow got into this society, so we are in it. When I enter an environment, I don't know; when I enter an institution, they don't look at me like saying "get out", they don't look at me like "what are you doing here". So, I'm not being treated like an alien. Maybe this is a basic thing, but because it is possible not to have something basic! There is such a difference. You know, like a person is on thorns where he lives, where he walks. (Nihan, 27)

Her stance in a strategic voting is mainly to be ready to support the party for the sake of right-wing in case the left-wing would possibly come to power. She said, "[...] yes, I'm ready. But other than that, would I vote, no I wouldn't". (Nihan, 27).

The other common point for those participants is that make a distinction between general and local elections in terms of risk. They evaluate the general elections as a greater risk factor. Since they read the scope of the local elections on a smaller scale, they went to the polls mainly at the time of the general elections in their electoral history. Nihan behaved similar to this. She stated that "I would give a vote to the general election, not to the municipal election".

### 3.1.6.3. Protest Vote

Züleyha is one of the participants who stop supporting the party and then had a protest vote in the last İstanbul local elections in 2019. Until that time, she was always supporting the AK Party. At that time, she had doubts, and she refused to vote because of the unclear activities of the Party.

> I grew up in the AK Party process. When I opened my eyes, they were already there. Because of my own family, my mother and father, we were brought up with the "we give vote to him" style. I think the year I participated in the first election was 2012. Since then, I have always given it to the AK Party. This Istanbul election was an election where I cast a blank vote. In the second of 2019, I cast a blank vote for the first time. I didn't vote then as a reaction. Because at the time, I thought it was unfair. A questionable (şaibeli) situation had arisen etc., so I cast a blank vote for the first time. Before that, I always gave vote for the AK Party. (Züleyha, 27)

In this case, Züleyha had defined herself likeshe had actually voted in favour of the AK Party from her first vote until the second local elections in 2019. She states that the second election was an opportunity to protest the party, especially its unfair and anti-democratic attitudes.

> I was not upset that they lost Istanbul, as I thought it should have happened. But you know, if you had lost him with your own hands with honesty, when you were talking about your Muslim identity and your Islamic identity... If he had taken deservedly. But with such trick (katakulli), when another election was made, you were defeated. So, in that sense, I was really angry with them. I can't say that I'm very sorry, it was something they deserved, they called it with their own hands, and it happened, so it should have been. So, losing isn't always a bad thing. I wish they had given birth to something new; they said, "we got the necessary answer from our nation" [after the defeat], but I don't think they got it. (Züleyha, 27)

Some participants who had given protest vote also stated that in case of risk, they would generally remain on the side of AK Party. Therefore, protest vote can be intertwined with the above title. In Züleyha's case, there is also something like this. While continuing her support until the last elections, she gave an invalid vote to punish the party with a protest attitude by concluding that it was a suspect in the previous election. During the interview, she also stated that her protest attitude turned into her general attitude towards the AK Party that is not to support the party from now on. She has an opinion that it is impossible for the party to be transformed. Therefore, she has no hope that the party will recover. However, her attitude is not completely uncompromising. If the party recover itself, for her, it might be possible to re-evaluate the party. She stated that she is in a watching position to the party, even if it is hopeless.

## 3.2. Reasons of Giving up Voting

In the above section, what is basically examined that the reasons for voting. The above section included reasons for voting of all participants who continue to vote, stop voting or hesitant. This section, however, covered the reasons for specifically the participants who stopped voting. They are few in number among the other participants. Their arguments, to some extent, are coincided with the hesitant and unwilling participants' dissatisfaction. The participants mainly focused on these points: Confrontational and distorting political language, contradictory representative of the public will (disconnection and alienation from the people), growing distrust of politics (thinking critical events as fiction), abusing the discourse of oppression (arbitrary and excessive use of the repression discourse), freedom from fears, moral dimension of voting, alliance with MHP. Participants also drew attention to leadership personality vs. management skills, shifting to authoritarian leadership from cadre movement, indifference about Erdoğan's worldwide leadership, and misrepresentation of Muslim identity.

First, communication is a critical factor that the participants indicated a lot. There were complaints about confrontational communication among politicians. They want to get rid of that the typical political language as they got used to it. Not only that, but they perceived the existing political language vulgar and rustically and the time is over for this political language. Instead, there is a wish for a change in a more civilized way.

I don't want to see contentious (belligerent) politics anymore. That's why I say that the political rivalries of Ekrem İmamoğlu and Babacan can be much better. At the point we've come to, maybe we've had enough of it now, those fights, shouting, you're like this, you're like that, we've had enough. So, for example, seeing the debates in the Parliament, I've had enough of them now. I think Babacan can do it if Turkey is ready for such a leader profile. Let him do his job and go on his way; I think there is no need for him to chant such slogans and enter into discussions. I've been thinking about this more for the last year. I even said it to my environment by saying, 'I will not give it to the AK Party, I will give it to Babacan'. […] I think Babacan could not keep the excitement alive. That's why I don't think Babacan can get a very good vote. But I want to give him at least strength. Because I don't want to see anything like this, the other is a negative profile for me now. Shouting, that's the belligerent profile I'm talking about; I don't want to vote for people who say only me, who say I won't give you a seat if you don't obey me. I think that Erdoğan and the AK Party are like that. (Züleyha, 27)

Another striking point in the above narrative is that she will support Babacan even though she knows he will not win; in order not to see contentious politics, she wants to give him strength. This attitude, to some extent, resembles a strategic vote.

I was very angry with Devlet Bahçeli. He would shout so much that he used such insulting and hurtful words at the rallies that it was mean. Now, I don't like that making such a benefit with them. So, you can walk up to a point, but now they're dependent on them. They gave so much, or they were exposed so much that they saw each other's dirty faces so much that they had to each other, they couldn't let go. (Züleyha, 27)

She mentioned the president of MHP's speeches, which she found them irritating. In terms of political language, she did not happy with the People's Alliance. She did not attribute any reasoning to understanding this alliance; conversely, she argued it might be an obligatory relation for both.

Another common factor is the contradictory representative of the public will; that is, a disconnection and alienation from the people. They interpret the party's current situation and approach to its leader with this respect. Once they were the connector; but now they are the separator between the state and the public. They were there in the name of people, but people's voice is silent. They are no longer aware of what is happening and what the people wish, instead, there is only the big projects that they focus on.

I believe they have lost sight of the need of reaching out to the public. [...] They now, for example, throw toys from the bus or something. In the past, they were talking to each other; they were being addressed more, face to face. When there was a complaint, they were also more accessible. I regard this situation as power poisoning. (Züleyha, 27)

She related the disconnection between the party and the public with the power poisoning. To exemplify what is happening right now she used this metaphor, "getting to the other side of the table".

I am angry. I hate them getting to this point. I think there was something very good quality. […] I think people who move to the other side of the table forget where they came from. They forgot their connection with the people… In Turkey, as they say, the nation-state system is actually united; that is, after the nation, the family and the state are all together as a whole. I think this has been forgotten. That's why I think they don't deserve their position right now. You know, Malcolm x has a saying, "it's not a blessing to put a 9-centimetre knife in and then retract a 6-centimetre blade". That's what's done now. Yes, it has been done, a lot of things have been done, a lot of steps have been taken, but it is also important to preserve the position you are in at the point we have reached. I do not think that they can maintain the position they are in. (Züleyha, 27)

Growing distrust towards politics is the other main reason for giving up supporting. Thinking some constitutive events as fictional especially the times of crisis and breaking points has importance. Some believed that many things that happened in the time of crisis, like the period between June 7 and November 1, were politically fictionalized. Even two of the participants stated that the 15 July coup attempt was also fictionalized. They believed that the political discourses constituted in those times were not sincere. Hatice is one of the participants who thought there was too much fiction in the AK Party era, not before 2009, but particularly after it. There was a story of breaking away from the AK Party, starting in 2009, continuing with the Gezi events, until 2015. She stated that the ropes were completely broken when it came to 2015, and she did not get confused afterwards.

I don't remember getting confused. For example, the things look filthy (pislikçe) to me. In the meantime [June to November in 2015], they did all the manipulation they could. It's a bit of a bother. That's why I never wanted to support them. (Hatice, 31)

Feride was a participant who gave priority to the issue of fictional politics while explaining the process of breaking away from the AK Party. She continued to vote in favour of the AK Party in the 2019 elections, even though she lost her support for the party due to her doubts. Feride's real break with the party occurred after the last elections. She also stated that her biggest motivation in the previous elections was the matter of faith and that she was fed by anxiety. She said her mother and father stopped voting long before Feride. Her husband was also one who stopped supporting the AK Party. Her mother's side and her father's side family did not support either. In other words, Feride was like the only member of the extended family who had the longest relationship with the party. When she looked back and remembered where the rupture process started, she expressed that the Davutoğlu process in 2015 and his discourses made her eyes open. When she stopped supporting the party, her retrospective view was shifted. Her belief that the 15th of July coup attempt was a fiction also coincided with a relatively recent date. After her complete break with the party, her retrospective readings, in her own words, "unifying the pieces", changed her attitude towards the party from a mere act of not supporting the party and turned it into hate speech. So much so that she absolutely does not want the AK Party to come back to power. As if she has started to reconstitute the past from her new glasses. It would not be weird to say that she has an anti-AK Party stance right now.

> I don't believe on July 15th, let me say this first. I think everything is fiction. I also believe that a lot of people died for nothing. I think Tayyip Erdoğan knew everything. He completely turned a blind eye to turn events in his favour. Of course, July 15 is also effective [at her breaking]. Of course, I believed it at first, but then, I put the pieces together. (Feride, 33)

One of the crucial factors is freedom from fears. Relatively, they do not have conservative fears as before; rather than this, they believe in merit and democracy in the current Turkish context. As a result, there is no clear concern for the continuity of the right side concerning the conservative fears, or it is relatively minimal. Rather, there is confidence in merit and democracy, and there is a demand for liberal politics to provide merit and democracy. For some of them, Babacan has the merit to governance; however, he has no leadership quality compared to Erdoğan. But there is no need for such leadership qualities in the scenario of the post AK Party period because the crucial thing is a meritocracy.

We have a conservative family, and we wanted such an administration to continue. However, I no longer believe that the subsequent government would dare to do so. So, you can call it living in the 21st century, call it the power of social media, and call it the power of the youth or the z generation. I am a member of the z generation, and they cannot keep the new generation by doing this. They have to respect all opinions and differences in every sense. Since they see this Europe and America as an example, they have to do it both in this sense and in the sense of the age we live in. The AK Party 7, 8 years ago, also laid the groundwork for this. I'm not talking about the current AK Party. [...] The AK Party showed such a thing; there is great power here -I say for CHP, HDP or MHP- "we need to respect them in order to attract these groups". I don't trust them when they come in this sense; I know they will still prefer their own people. They will choose people according to them. But something more balanced could go. I can see this. I can make something of my own. Or it could be vice versa. But I will experience it. They would always say "we experienced these", but if you are making these mistakes as someone who has experienced these, let me do it by living. I think like that. That's why I'm not afraid. If they made mistakes like this, I have the right to make mistakes, too. (Züleyha, 27)

The excessive use of oppression discourse causes some participants to lose sense of credibility. Even though the past hurt and pain have a significant effect on those participants, they are ineffective to interfere to their present anymore. In their own experiences, these periods of pressure and suffering are a thing of the past. In the case of Züleyha, for instance, she had some sort of conservative concerns, but she thought that the liberation is not bound to the AK Party. Instead, she felt insecure about her conservative rights because the incumbent party does not entirely solve the problems but pretend to solve them.

We were under a lot of intervention in our time, so we were. We have been very interfered with. 'Choose this', 'it should be like this', 'you did not experience this', the example is always given from February 28 period. I participated in volunteering activities a lot; I participated in foundation activities a lot; it was the 28$^{th}$ of February period that we have always been whispered in our ears. In fact, I was so full for a while that so much information was given to February 28, so what should we do to avoid this? It was always said that we had experienced this, we had experienced that, we have done this, we have done that, and the AK Party was the example for not to live those problems. But you see, there is still talk of the victims of February 28, the headscarf issues that have not been completely resolved. When a political regime is gone, then what will you do? How many of your rights are protected? There is no guarantee that we will not live in those periods; I mean this in the sense of the law, these rights were not protected. That's why I see our day as problematic. (Züleyha, 27)

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Züleyha stated during the interview that Erdoğan's leadership in the world used to please her. Hatice also has talked about it. Hatice stated that the issue of the leadership of Islamic geography is no longer exciting for her. These discourses, which are among the critical discourses of the AK Party, seem to have lost their validity both in the case of Züleyha and Hatice. When I asked Züleyha what she thought about whether Babacan could afford it when he came, I got the following response.

> I don't think Babacan can afford it. But I don't think the world wants it anymore. I don't think the Islamic world wants to respond to this with such an appetite. You know, sometimes there are moments you hit bottom, you hit bottom, and then there may be a take-off. No matter how hard Erdoğan tried to wake them up, he couldn't get a response. That Erdoğan took them under his wings for a certain period of time. (Züleyha, 27)

Hatice had a rather critical and, at the same time, indifferent stance on the issue of Erdoğan's worldwide leadership. While stating that she does not need such a leader, she critically addressed the question of why she should need such a leader. Hatice has the opinion that the interests of their own country and citizens should be prioritized before the leaders of the state can lead the world. Therefore, the discourses of the AK Party that take into account the Islamic geographies do not have a positive effect on Hatice. On the contrary, she does not think Turkey's current government is strong enough to assume this power.

> For example, I don't think there should be such a leadership right now, so it doesn't matter to me whether he does it or not. For me, it would be more beneficial not to do it because if you have a certain power, you can do this leadership, but if it is a burden to your country, you should not do it. For example, don't open the border gates to Syrians; yes, you can in certain aspects, but you shouldn't do this without an area to employ them because this should not weaken your homeland. You have to keep your people strong, not only economically, but the economic dimension actually affects psychology; that is, you have to keep their spirit strong. The people should not only believe in you but should believe and trust the state's power. Are you taking this away from them and doing something to others, so okay, I'm the leader of all of you. Is there such a thing? Frankly, it seems stupid to me to even try such a thing. I don't know; I guess I don't have such a Muslim mind; everyone should rule their own geography in a certain way. Oh, those who want to unite, this also happened in the Ottoman Empire; maybe I will experience such processes. But I don't have any concerns or thoughts about having such a leader or not; why would it be? (Hatice, 31)

Furthermore, in the following narrative, Hatice exemplified leader qualities in the Turkish context. In this sense, she resembled Erdoğan's leadership quality with Ataturk's. There is no doubt or question about Erdoğan's leadership qualities for her. She focused on whether a state administration necessitates a leader. In her view, management does not necessarily require leadership qualities. She makes a distinction between management skills and leadership and states that she does not seek leadership conditions.

> I don't expect the leadership qualities that Erdoğan portrays from Babacan at all. I do not expect that charismatic leadership quality expected in Turkey because I do not think that Babacan has that leadership quality. Not only that, but I don't know, I don't think he is not big-bodied or anything. But in my opinion, the ability to manage is a different skill. A lot of people have come to power, for example Erdoğan, he is someone who filled that charismatic leadership well. Atatürk was like that either. But neither I expect such a thing from Babacan, nor I want him to do so. I would like him to solve the problems in Turkey in the first place. Let him do that, not to go and deal with Syria's internal politics, but focus on how to employ Syrians in this country; what will he do about the Syrians? You know, I expect him to manage this problem rather than putting futile efforts in unimportant problems. Well, doesn't everyone benefit from other lands? Yes, it does. Let him use his tongue properly and fairly, then okay, take what he deserves to do, do what needs to be done. But it's not that he is the leader [world leader], these are big words, it seems to me too big. (Hatice, 31)

There was a distinguishing factor in Hatice's case. This is Hatice's different attitudes in the general and local elections. In other words, she says that she broke her ties with the AK Party in 2015 by not voting in the general elections, and she never used it afterwards. However, she has a different attitude when it comes to local elections. She implies that as an Istanbulite, she has concerns about the interests of Istanbul and the citizens of Istanbul. However, the interesting thing is that despite having these concerns, she still did not vote as a citizen of Istanbul in the local elections. What influenced her act of voting is, to a great extent, the rejection of the Ak party rule.

> I didn't care if Ankara lost. […] But the lost of the AK Party made me worry in Istanbul. Why? Because, actually, I don't see it as the departure of the AK Party. For example, I liked Kadir Topbaş, he worked really well. It was clear. Binali Yıldırım also achieved a certain result in his works. It seems crucial to me that there are people who have completed something. That's why I thought Binali was more competent. I don't know Ekrem İmamoğlu. I don't remember

his previous work in the municipality. There is such a thing in Istanbul that it will be heard if a municipality works very well. It is really audible. […] I've never heard anything about İmamoğlu, I mean, he is someone who was made shined, so I was worried about that. […] a lot of things got better when Erdoğan was mayor, about water, sewerage, infrastructure works in Istanbul, I mean, it was really bad in the past. […] Other than that, I don't know, the people from the left-wing made me worried about something. For example, how will the social facilities be? Will there serve drink? For example, the places you go with your child, since the previous municipalities considered my religious needs, I have concerns about them now. For example, places of prayer were not secluded, they were very clean and neat places. [...] For example, I was worried about Üsküdar. You know, Üsküdar was like a castle for the AK Party. I was worried not because of the AK Party's lost but because of the question of who would come. […] at least it is a place that I see as a district where I can live as a Muslim. Since I love such things, I would be sad that he lost in that sense, but I don't see it as the loss of the AK Party. I don't have such sadness at all. This concern did not encourage me to vote in 2019 either. (Hatice, 31)

She evaluates the candidates in the municipal elections from the perspective of citizenship, and as an Istanbulite citizen, she cares about the election outcomes. Fiorina (1976) had argued about the instrumental voting that the instrumental benefit is that they may be simply Downsian voters, that is, expected utility maximisers. Their accounts are associated with the costs and benefits of voting. Hatice focuses on instrumental benefits while thinking about her possible actions in the municipal elections. However, her act of voting was not the same as her reasoning. It can be said that right here, the wish of weakening the AK Party's power seems to prevail. This attitude cannot be explained by partisanship or instrumentality. Nor with indifference to politics, for her action is not random but purposeful. Her main purpose or priority seems to weaken the incumbent party, not her own citizenship interests.

There was something remarkable in both Hatice's and Züleyha's case. Even though both declared that they completely gave up supporting the AK Party, Züleyha still thinks that she can give it a chance. She feels that if a person she can really trust comes to the head of the AK Party, she might choose him again if the party corrects itself. However, Hatice does not recognize this possibility in any way because she is convinced that the party is now at a point where it cannot be cured, and she does not even have a shred of hope. She has now completely turned her direction on another side. However, they both have one thing in common: the bond they have established with the party in the past. They attribute this bond to their good representation of

themselves in the past and their Muslim identity. However, Züleyha pointed out that they are not well represented in the Muslim identity. In relation to this, when I asked her how she defined herself, such as conservative, religious or Islamist, her answer included criticism about AK Party's political identity which cannot overlap Muslim identity.

> I don't think I'm as religious as I used to be. Let's call it Islamist. Religious sounds like a very personal thing. I don't think it's healthy to be conservative, to a certain extent because of the AK Party. It seems like over conservation, too introverted and not open to innovation. […] I don't think Conservatism is a healthy identity for today. I don't believe conservative people will be more successful today. […] My relationship with religion is freer compared to the past. It used to be more fear oriented. Now my relationship with God is purer. No intermediaries. (Züleyha, 27)

She drew attention to insincerity while emphasizing that she did not wish to identify herself with the AK Party in terms of religious identity.

> What used to worry us is that if the AK Party does not come, there is a headscarf problem, we cannot go to schools. If this is not the case, Muslims will be rooted out. But it did much more damage. [...] It frustrates me that people talk about Islam and steal money in the background. That's why they have to go, it's better to lose if it's going to be better. So, they should lose. (Züleyha, 27)

Therefore, they are not indifferent to the AK Party's situation; on the contrary, they feel sorry about them. Since it was a formation, they believed in and trusted in the past, and because they had a feeling of sympathy and closeness, the fact that it has become what it now, makes them sad as if they were sad for a friend or the like.

> For example, I was supporting the party politically at that time, I was never really a partisan, but I was saying that I was voting for the AK Party. You have a bond with them in such a way there are people there; when they appear on the screen, they make a proper representation in response to your vote. It makes you sad that the people who represent you leave, not only leave but that the structure deteriorates and resolves in that way. You have given vote for them in the past, do you understand? You have contributed to the bread of those people. At the same time, you have allowed them to act as your spokesperson. [...] At the same time, the establishment of the AK Party after Erdoğan's mayoral term, that is, they did good things until a certain period, but it also makes me sad that he manages and carries out such a bad policy. Why is this happening? But I'm a bit like that with people I feel closeness; for example, if they make a mistake, I feel bad. (Hatice, 31)

After the above excerpt, I asked her if she still had a bond because I thought that there is no question of complete indifference. She replied to it as below.

> This is something like this. It's there for a religious thing. You know, the case of taking care of your Muslim brother, a worry about your Muslim brother, a bond with him. Otherwise, I feel a lot of discomforts apart from that... Indeed, I do not like Erdoğan or anything, but I have some things in my mind that a Muslim should not do such and such, I just feel sad because of those situations, I don't know, I mean, the state of the society should not have been like that. And he's causing it. [...] So this man will be held to account. You know, what I'm talking about is not being called to account in this world -I want them to withdraw from elections in this world- there is an afterlife, and he did a lot of things there. Many people were exiled and took refuge in other countries, and many people were imprisoned unjustly during the time of FETO; their jobs were taken away, the justice system collapsed, and it was not properly managed. In this sense, I regret that this man will be called to account. It is nothing other than that, in the dimension of Muslim brotherhood. (Hatice, 31)

Lastly, the AK Party's shift from being a cadre movement to the fact that it gathered in the person of Erdoğan, has a great impact on changes in Hatice's attitude. And this shift, she argues, has evolved into a merit-destroying nature. So much so that Erdoğan and those who do not oppose Erdoğan are on the stage, not the deserved ones.

> In the past, I didn't read the AK Party and Erdoğan together, it wasn't like that, but now Erdoğan and the AK Party are one. […] There was the AK Party with lots of people around it in the past, now there is absolutely no such thing. I am very much certain of the fact that whoever looks after his/her interests today, he/she becomes the man of substance. (Hatice, 31)

Similar to Hatice, Sevgi also gave reference to cadre movement of the AK Party in its initial period. Namely the period when she had hope from the party because of trust in its cadres. As a matter of fact, she did not use to go to polls before the AK Party. However, even though the trust in AK Party had triggered her to go to polls, she has lost her confidence in the party because of its fundamental internal structural changes. Now, she does not find the party the same with what once she supported with enthusiasm. She explained as below.

> They weren't just one person; they were teams before. Abdullah Gül, you know one of the founders of that team, Arınç also, they gave us confidence. They all made a great debut together; they did a great job. They were acting with the team, and we all know that all of them came from the National Vision. We

knew they were going to do great things, and that attracted me; I was thinking of them as a team. But now, there is no such team. (Sevgi, 58)

Sureyya is among the participants who initially felt close to the party. However, as she did not see moves in the politics of the party that would support the feeling of trust, there were changes in her attitude. While explaining the Party's way of doing politics, she emphasised that this party is just as ordinary as the others despite all its claims.

A very serious engagement with the world order, the world paradigm, emerged. Think about all areas of life, large and small, that the AKP brought with their power, wealth and all that power field, in other words, all areas of life, [...] Again, there emerged an engagement to world paradigm. [...] Somethings are already really unfair on the world and what I understand from politics, either this transform you to itself, or your administration say something that rebels against it. I don't think the AKP is doing anything that is rebelling, on the contrary, I think it is very seriously engaged in the world order and this is a very disturbing thing for me. (Sureyya, 34)

# CHAPTER 4

## CONCLUSION

In this study, while focusing mainly on the voting behaviours of the AK Party voters, I tried to examine the belonging and loyalty that the voters established with the party. The studies in the literature I searched before the fieldwork included voting behaviour in general and the social divisions in Turkey. In this study, I discussed the voting reasons for the AK Party by referring to the voting behaviour literature. The fieldwork of this study made it necessary to discuss the issue on a new dimension, seeing that the existing literature does not suffice to discuss it thoroughly. To be more concrete, I found out that the issue of affection has an important place in my fieldwork. However, the literature on voting behaviour is not rich enough to discuss this fieldwork within the scope of affection. Thus, in this study, I made use of a few studies that discuss the issue of affection and adopted a Spinozist perspective. I shed light on the transformation of the voter's sense of belonging and loyalty to the party and the factors affecting these feelings. In addition, I found that the voters often referred to particular feelings while describing their relationship with the party. In this context, it would not be enough to explain the voting behaviour without resorting to the notion of affect in the literature. I have analysed the related results from the study.

The research findings show that there is a transformation in affection of their feelings towards the party from the beginning. Even some participants experience a clear-cut disengagement in terms of their feelings towards the party over time. During the course of time, going to the polls with enthusiasm and confidence has turned into a sense of obligation; that is, a new pattern in the affections of the voters emerged. While many participants initially voted with joy and hope, they experienced disappointments and anger over time, and it is resulted with the behaviour of voting with fear and disgust. The participants frequently used the following words to explain their feelings

respectively: hope, joy, satisfaction, excitement, expectation, disappointment, sadness, anger, fear, disgust, and hatred. To understand the reason behind this transformation, I applied the Spinozist terms of *affect* (affectus) and *affection* (affectio) with reference to Spinoza (1985), Deleuze (1988; 1992; 2006) and Baker (1998; 2020).

Relatively young participants who voted for the first time and chose the AK Party after 2002 and those who already experienced voting and voted various parties before the AK Party has a familiar feeling pattern, and they expressed the first encounter mostly with the feeling of excitement. In Spinozist terminology, it might be described as a mixture of two bodies, in which one body has act on another, or there is a trace of one body on the other (Deleuze, 2006). It means that the establishment of the AK Party or the first encounter with the AK Party during the ruling period had effects on the participants. When they talked about the positive effects of the party on them, it is possible to infer that their statements are about how they were affected; and it is conceivable that they were affected with "joy", in which this affect was increasing their "force of existing" or "power of acting" simultaneously when they first encountered (Deleuze, 2006). Baker (1998) states that an affect is an increase or decrease in our power of acting. In that sense, when the party was established, the affect of joy had increased the force of existing of the participants who had experienced oppression in their past. Also, there occurred the feeling of excitement as an effect of being represented in politics for them. The forms of the first encounter such as being represented, being protected, being understood, making their voices heard, and liberation paved way to an affect of joy which improved their power of acting.

The most emphasized effect was the excitement as a consequence of being represented. The words "we" and "they" were frequently used in this context. While "they" could be represented before the AK Party period, the emphasis that "we" could be represented with the party was a narrative that implied a conservative identity. They felt a strong hope that this situation would change when the party came to power, while they were previously in the "other" position, unwanted people in the institutions, and could not even enter the doors of the institutions due to bans. Since there was oppression, the word "liberation" was preferred to use, as the strongest act that was expected from the party because it represented the participants' religious identity.

There is a passage of affects between two poles, which Spinoza called them as joy-sadness, and according to him, they are the basic passions (Deleuze, 2006). It is important to say that the participants remembered the first encounter with the party as a hopeful picture. In most cases, the hope is related with both being politically represented and announcement of their thought in political arena as religious individual. In that sense, by relating this hope to the Muslim representation the encounter had increased those participants' power of acting. However, during the course of time the sense of excitement out of hope has transformed into in the feeling of cooling down. This is because the party, which they initially believed in, does not take their values and hopes into consideration for future projection. As a result, enthusiastic support turned into voting as a civic duty. After a while, the participants who supported the party with enthusiasm became alienated from the party. In most cases the story that started with enthusiasm and joy turned into be seeking the lesser evil due to the lack of alternative.

Züleyha, who in the beginning worked with enthusiasm for the youth branches of the AK Party, has noted some harsh transformations in her feelings towards the party, since she faced too many problems that made her disappointed and pushed her stop voting. She exemplified her disappointment with an analogy of making a cake. For her, at first, there was a beautiful cake, it was served beautifully, but it has been deteriorated over time, was thrown away, and the efforts of those who work to make that cake are wasted. As can be inferred from the above exemplification, Züleyha was once a willingly supporter of the party, has now a total distrust towards the party and what is more striking is that she wants the party to be overthrown. However, as many other participants, she continued for a while to vote for the AK Party based on the anxiety. In other words, the AK Party is seen as a formation, a kind of formula that allows people to live their religious identity. If it failed, it would be difficult for them to exist with religious identity and their power of acting would decrease. At this point, the bond is maintained by worries and therefore, when they get rid of their worries, they can cut off their relationship with the party.

Research findings show that for those who willingly supported the AK Party in the beginning, it is seen as the guarantee for protecting gains, for retaining vision and for survival. As a result of this, the sense of fear became predominant when faced with the party's possibility of losing power. There are three components of fear to consider specifically: Fear of loss of gains, fear of lack of vision and fear of chaos. The first is the fear of losing the gains. The second component is the lack of vision and a decline in the power that comes from a feeling of national self. The main concern here is if the AK party is defeated, no one will be able to carry this vision. The fear of chaos and insecurity is the third component which perpetuated the idea of if the AK party loses its power, the country will be in chaos, both inside and outside, the country will be divided etc. All these three components of fear formed deep traces on the participants and might drive voters to be loyal to the AK party. At this point, the main affect underlying the support and belonging of the electorate is no more joy, but fear becomes the reference point. Post AK Party period is not a desirable future, but a scary one. In this context, the main affection is fear. When it comes to fear, the relationship that the participants establish with the opposition parties comes to the fore, not the relationship they establish with the AK Party. The source of the feelings were their own experiences in general. And this fear is a hypothetical. In other words, there is a fear of a scenario about post AK Party era, and this fear can actually keep their support, whether they are satisfied or not. For those participants, AK Party is the guarantee for protecting gains, for retaining vision and for survival.

The fear as an affection is deeply rooted to the past encounters with the left-wing parties. It is directly related with the past experiences of the participants with the opposition parties. The source of the first component of fear is related to the oppression on religious people in the past under the secular and Kemalist state. Those experiences had traces on the participants' present. In other words, the fear is mainly about the post AK Party era and whether the participants are satisfied or not it has capability to keep them in the same supporting attitude. It has a hypothetical nature; however, because of its relation with the past encounters there are concrete traces on the participants. The mixture of two bodies can be applied here from Spinozist terminology. The conservative/ religious participants remember their experiences with the CHP and its mindset in a negative way or sometimes with full of pain. The participants almost

equated the encounters with "sadness". They had a considerable memory about how they were affected from the encounters, and the inhibition of their power of acting. Most of the narratives are their own experiences rather than the narratives they are exposed to. However, for some, the experiences have negative impact on their feelings, too. The fear is related to the experiences and the narratives about the opposition parties which affects them in a way that diminishes their force of existing and takes these rights from them and decreases their power of acting or even wants to destroy it and interferes with their existence. To illustrate this fear better, Hüseyin preferred to use "witch hunt"[10] metaphor as an expression that he refers a threat only for the conservative segment of society.

Second aspect of fear is about narrowing down the vision since the idea that the opposition parties are not appropriate to make it real. AK Party has the spirit to develop and protect it. This vision reinforces the participants' sense of a national self. The emphasis on what is domestic and national, the developments in defence industry, the discourse of cultural hinterland and indigenousness have made the participants feel stronger, compared to the left-wing governments in the past. In that sense, if AK Party loses its power, who will care the vision that is mentioned above? The participants believe that the opposition parties are not capable of sustaining this vision, depending on the opinion they got during their past experiences with the opposition parties.

Third component of fear is the possibility of chaos and insecurity. The voters who initially chose the AK Party were acting out of joy. The mixture of the two bodies positively affected and moved them forward (Deleuze, 1992). The ones who willingly chose the party, somehow, started to choose with the motive of sadness. The fear of chaos started to be emerged especially in the times of crisis, particularly from 2013 onwards. Before 2011, the agenda was democratization. However, securitization became a priority after then. Throughout that time, the political discourse and political priorities changed dramatically. Concerns about security, chaos, anarchy, and threat of

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[10] "When it comes to power [the Kemalist mentality], these fake conservatives [Davutoğlu and Babacan] will get their share even if they are in the same alliance with them because they're going on a witch hunt. First the AK Party, then the MHP. It will be the turn of these fake conservatives. They will say, you are also out of them. Then people will see the situation and raise their voices. Then an early election will be held." (Hüseyin, 29)

fragmentation became a matter of survival. In other words, the voters went to the polls with enthusiasm but after a while, they went with anxiety, bearing in mind the wars around us, the enemies both inside and outside all of which pave way to the third component.

After the transition in voting behaviour the search for alternatives has begun. What is expected from an appropriate alternative is its capability of fulfilling the demands of the voters, which the Ak Party succeeded in doing once, such as liberating those who are under oppression. For this reason, the feeling of lack of alternative comes to the fore, since the appropriate one is not easy to find.

The initial encounter with the AK Party, which is a reference point to detect what is a proper alternative, shows the expectation for the hope which increases the power of acting at the time of encounter. A significant proportion of the participants believe that the party does not meet this expectation anymore. Contrary to the past, AK Party votes seem to be based on sadness now, not on liberating them and increasing their power of acting. For this reason, there is a search for an alternative, but the handicap is that there is no alternative that surpasses the AK Party in terms of power in this search. For this reason, reluctant voters may find themselves voting for the AK Party again at the ballot box. At this point, the study findings show that there is a transformation from sincere vote to strategic vote. No sincere vote is observed among the participants who are reluctant and hesitant, who constitutes the intense part of the interviews.

Another important result of the present research is the dominance of leader vote among others. The incumbent party and its leader have been an electoral edge over competitors in earlier elections. However, in this research, I found out that almost all participants, on whom the party has no influence, gave importance to the leader. The sense of loyalty to the AK Party is very low. The only factor that keeping them loyal to the party is Erdoğan's presence. There is a base made up of people who perceive the AK Party as a cement party. The segment that Erdoğan appeals to as a leader is quite large, but the group that appeals to the party only is almost non-existent in this research. Erdoğan is the cement that holds all the electorate that come from different political habitus, different religious groups, different political engagements together. When it comes to supporting the AK Party in a scenario without Erdoğan, no one said

that they would confidently support it. This cannot be interpreted as severing relations with the party immediately, but it means that AK Party loyalty has been completely over. However, it can be interpreted as a non-partisan relationship with the party. This is because the party does not stand in an indispensable place, the approach of everyone to this scenario is that they will watch and see.

Is the AK Party an independent party with an entrenched electorate, or is it a party that appeals to the center-right base because it is the only current representative of the Center-right? If most of the participants see an alternative that appeals to them and believe that it will come out strong from the ballot box, they will change their choice without a sense of loyalty. Yet they emphasized that this alternative should never integrate with the CHP mindset, and it should not ally with HDP.

There were participants from different political habitus. The general attitude of the participants who moved to the AK Party from other parties such as MHP and SP is related to the presence of Erdoğan. It is a kind of conditional support, rather than a conversion. Since the behaviour of these people is dependent only on Erdoğan, they still have the potential to be the entrenched vote of the party they came from. Particularly, the participants from MHP are relatively more loyal to their origin. On the contrary, those from the Felicity Party are more inclined to support it, whether reluctantly or not, as they do not think that there is another party representing the National Vision. Those who have an unwilling attitude are either those from the Islamist segment, who started voting with the establishment of the AK Party, or those who are engaged in politics with a National Vision background. Participants with a National Vision background appear to have an unwilling attitude, whereas those who did not vote before appear to have a hesitant attitude. Those with a MHP background have a relatively comfortable position regarding future elections. Others tend to perpetuate the existing order, like desperate spouses continuing their unhappy marriages.

Although it can be said that it is the political culture in Turkey and the structural transformations in the current political system that dominate the leader vote to a certain extent, the study findings show that the main dominance is the leader's character traits and the identification of the participants with him. Especially strength, independency,

resourcefulness and unpredictability were frequently emphasized characteristics of the leader.

For many participants, Erdoğan was the one who is called accountable for anything good or bad. Therefore, there is a strong tendency to equate the leader and the state. The voters who stopped voting for the AK Party had the same mindset. For some of them, since the only stimulus left for their political act (voting act) is the leader himself, their decision on giving up voting is necessarily shaped merely by the leader. This renunciation was so drastic that there were participants who developed hate speech against their once beloved leader.

The second result is the problem of belonging. When I asked them to explain their political view, the most prominent explanation was the right-wing. The continuation of right wing was the main aim behind their voting. As a result of the prevalent left-right dichotomy and the impossibility of belonging to any left-wing movement, some people had to define themselves within the right-wing though they were not happy with this definition.

The study findings show that the participants' political habits have impact on their belonging to the party. Those from MHP did not feel themselves belong to the AK Party; however, those from Felicity Party feel themselves loyal to Erdoğan because of his vision, and they have no longer an attachment to the Felicity Party. Those who did not vote before AK Party also define themselves with right-wing. The three different group of participants from different political habits come together in religiosity. In that context, it is proper to claim that their belonging to the right wing is somehow in relation with religion.

There is a predominant wish of the continuity of the right-wing. In this regard, the participants are ready to support anyone who can get ahead. To make the wish real, the participants exhibit a similar strategy. In other words, since the AK Party is the strongest party that has strategically represented the right-wing so far, the main aim of supporting the party is to make the most rational choice for the continuity of the right-wing. While this may indicate an entrenched right-wing/conservative voter presence, it shows that rather than party affiliation, identity comes to the fore in voting behaviour

and that a long-term identity perspective emerges instead of entrenched partisanship. While the participants focus on the cost, they state that they cannot afford the cost of losing religious gains. For this reason, no shift to the Nation's Alliance is observed at all. No ideology is accepted that will restrict the right-wing conservative's living space and reduce the power of acting of the people on this side.

Almost all participants feel a sense of belonging to the right-wing and they do not feel a sense of belong to left. However, each participant did not attribute the same meanings to the sense of belonging to the right-wing. While some emphasized the religious context, some emphasized the national context. However, almost all participants more or less underlined religion. No matter how different their attitudes towards the AK Party is, opposing the left-wing is another pushing factor for them to be related to the AK Party. The thing that stands out at the point of not belonging to the left side is the desire of being understood, particularly regarding the religious identity. They have a strong belief that they would not be understood by the left. Therefore, they feel a sense of belonging to the right-wing with the belief that it is where they are understood. This sense of belonging to the right wing is relatively less among the participants coming from an Islamist background, but it is hard to say that it does not exist.

When asking to explain their political view, some participants touched upon being rightist. However, in the continuation of the interview, they also stated that the right-wing is not enough to define them and that they were not very happy to be in one of two different poles (rightist-leftist). However, since they are not on the left-wing, there is a sense of desperation that they are necessarily on the right-wing. The other problem is with self-definitions. When I asked how they would describe themselves, conservative, religious or Islamist, all three definitions were not adopted by them and some feel that they do not fit into them. Some found them political, some ideological, some traditional. Other than these definitions, some defined themselves as "Muslim" or "human" by seeking alternatives. However, even if they do not fit themselves into the right wing as a collective identity, they do not deny belonging to the right-wing categorically among the existing definitions. But to call it the right-wing is an understatement because there are so many ideologies on the right-wing that they do not find themselves identical. For example, many do not like to call themselves

conservative since this word has a politicized meaning and do not want to define themselves with an ideological or political expression. Some pointed out the non-innovative character of this definition and asked what we conserve for what reason? On the other hand, religious is perceived as a concept that is reduced and matched with tradition, and sometimes the participants do not feel like they belong to it either. Islamist looks pretty political, and they do not want such a politicized definition for themselves. Those who prefer to call themselves Muslims are very common. However, those who prefer the term human also come to the fore. One of them said liberal instead of those definitions because this definition seems to have a more liberating or neutral character compared to the others. The reason behind coming up with such alternatives is their wish to demonstrate that they do not have any ideological engagement. Therefore, it can be possible to claim that new concepts need to be defined, associated with participants' needs in today's world. This existing picture is not where they feel belonging.

The study findings suggest that the determinant character of religiosity in the issue of voting is open to discussion. There might be difficulty to claim that religious people behave in this way or that way. For example, some participants who express themselves as pious, exhibit a determined attitude to vote; however, some other participants who are also defined themselves as religious positioned themselves against the AK Party. Because they think it is not moral to support something that is wrong.

To what extent it is possible to measure religiosity has always been debated. Studies on religiosity have taken a far simpler approach. These studies treat religion as if it were a fixed phenomenon that exists in everyone to some degree. As a result, qualitative differences between people might be neglected, and religiosity is presented as a concept and reduced to something that can be quantified (Akşit, Cengiz, Küçükural, Şentürk, 2012). I collected information about the religiosity of the participants through their answers and my observations. I did not apply a religiosity scale.

The above-mentioned study findings about religiosity in Turkey show that religious people are not a homogeneous group; instead, there is diversity in the interpretation

and practice of religion in Turkey among five main tension axes (sacred-secular, traditional-modern, private-public, religious knowledge-scientific knowledge, daily life-bookish principles). This finding demonstrates that attempts to totalize and generalize pious people do not correspond to reality. In order to unconceal the differences in religious opinions and practices, the tensions between them, and the reasons behind these differences, more sociological research should be conducted. Similarly, totalizing secular people and viewing them as homogeneous is incorrect (Akşit et al., 2012).

Even though there is no homogeneity in terms of religiosity of the participants, the leader's religiosity makes sense for most of them while, at the same time, they express their wish for an alternative. For some religiosity is a necessity, while for the others, it is enough for the leader to understand the pious people and treat them fairly. Even for some, there must be a separation between religion and politics and the morality of the administrator, not its religion should be questioned. The study shows that all these distributions cannot be directly related to the attitudes. The person, who wishes the manager to be moral, can defend the AK Party and highlight the importance of the vision despite all its faults. Again, a very high degree of opposition to the AK Party can arise from those who expect piety from the ruler and those who do not separate religion and politics, with different motives, such as competence, merit, justice. There are also those who are very religious and said that the ruler should be tolerant enough; even for some it is better to be liberal. Thus, I come to the idea that the phenomenon of religiosity is not an obvious distinguishing factor in voting act. Almost all the participants are on the right-wing in some way, especially for to be understood as religious people. However, it is difficult to claim that they prefer the AK Party because they are religious.

Glock and Starl's model (as cited in Aksit et al., 2012), which is used in most of quantitative studies today, approaches religiosity as a fixed phenomenon with several compartments and attempts to categorize people as either very religious or less religious based on the quantity of their beliefs. Although the classifications created for this purpose appear to focus on the differences between the forms of religiosity at first glance, the content of the classifications is far from focusing on aspects of religiosity

that can differ qualitatively from one another - and may cause great differences between individuals - and instead emphasizes quantitative differences (Aksit et al., 2012). According to Akşit et al., by taking religiosity as a fixed phenomenon and quantifying it, religiosity studies miss and reduce qualitative differences. Similarly, religiosity is generally considered as a fixed phenomenon in election polls, and there is an approach that the votes of the religious people go to the AK Party. In addition, it can be mentioned that there is a linear relationship in which the rate of support for the AK Party increases as religiosity increases. This linear relationship was not encountered in my thesis. To sum up, the results have shown that there is a common acceptance regarding the direct proportion between the Ak Part votes and the religious people. However, the scope and the definition of what is religious and what is not in this discussion are still ambiguous.

There are still effective reasons for the continuation of the bond between the AK Party and the voters. However, the bond with the AK Party is not like the one established with the right-wing, which has come out as a result of social division in the Turkish context. The AK Party is a form of right-wing representative today, but it is temporary for some participants who believe that when it goes away a new one arrives to fulfil the representation. But for some, as mentioned above, Erdoğan himself is the representative and guarantee for continuation of the right-wing; therefore, he himself is the main reason to hold the bond. In that sense, for some, Erdoğan is expected to offer a successor to make the story go on. The fact that there is no institutionalization in Turkish politics, anything is possible for many of the participants; that is, the story may end with the hands of new actors, or the steering wheel may be driven in a completely different way. In this sense, many participants feel themselves on shaky ground, which is not trembling due to Erdoğan's presence but will shake with his absence. All these ideas and feelings connote the risk society. Ayşe's statements that everything can be "upside down" sums up the current situation well.

> Unfortunately, the political structure in Turkey, in my opinion, is a political structure that can be turned upside down in a moment. […] Let's say that if the CHP, not the AK Party, come tomorrow, everything would change in Turkey, the whole system would change from the scratch. This is bad.

> [...] Because there is an unsettled system in Turkey, and when he [Erdoğan] leaves, everything will be turned upside down. And as I said, we don't vote for AK Party, we vote for Erdoğan, his behaviour and actions and strategy. Therefore, if someone who will not follow this strategy comes, even if this person is from the AK Party, everything can be turned upside down. (Ayşe, 32)

The study shows that there is a growing distrust in the political establishment. This situation was observed in both those who voted for the AK Party and those who stopped voting. Those who feel such a distrust are indecisive about whether to vote or to cast a null vote. What is noteworthy is the fact that although those who stop voting are regarded in being a state of apathy, it is possible to claim that they still have a sense of future projection. Is it plausible to talk about apathy where these participants mentioned about punishing the party, the desire of reaction, the need of a new breath and indeed from within the politics itself? On the other hand, some participants have an indecisive attitude since they do not want to be a partner in the mistakes participate in wrongdoing. And these do not have any intention of punishment, calculation, switching party or a future hope or projection. The only meaning of their invalid votes and the rejection of going to the ballot box are a way of self-expression.

When coming to the last part of conclusion, it should be noted that most of the participants have some common interpretations regarding the politics. For them, politics is a power struggle, and power enables people who hold it to maintain their existence in the system. In that sense, they necessarily choose a side in three historical and social division that is mentioned throughout the study. Therefore, it is meaningful for them to be in one side. It seems this necessity is re-constructed in current politics, and it leads to the reproduction of the historical-social divisions (secular-conservative, left-right and center-periphery). There also some people who claimed to be discontented with this division and these people are eager to take place in an ideal scenario where there is no polarization and where politics serves as a means of integrating people and protecting the common good. However, they cannot escape being categorized under one side of the dichotomy.

It is possible to say that there is a clear polarization from the expressions of belonging of the participants. For some, this is the nature of politics, for others it is an undesirable situation. At this point, while some are happy with the AK Party's strict preservation

of its right-wing identity, especially the elder participants, some are quite tired of the politics of polarization, particularly the younger ones. There are participants who share the concern that this polarizing politics will make living together impossible. At this point, those participants do not feel like they belong where they are supposed to. They are in an ambivalent state, thinking that they are not represented in any way within this polarized political system. Polarization, the polarizing results of ideological discourses, the inability to live in the same society but not being able to form a society, and to establish a dialogue are all wounds for these people.

Another remarkable point in the study was the following. It can be said that the long-term retrospective perspective, particularly the social cleavages, is a common feature of determined supporters of the AK Party or the leader. The majority of these were the participants who were slightly older in age. The long-term retrospective glasses of the participants, who vote not willingly, are also active. Most of the participants who are in hesitation and stop voting, have short-term retrospective glasses, which emphasizes the facts that the AK Party has changed, transformed negatively, deprived of merit and competence, polarized, etc. The participants experiencing hesitation or giving up are also those who had used to prefer willingly, without experiencing any indecision. However, in recent times, they have had some breaking points where they have started to change their minds. Such as the Gezi period, the period of big breaks from the AK Party such as the separation of Davutoğlu, Babacan, and so on. Some were sparked off by the repetition of the last Istanbul elections. As a result, it can be said that there are long-term and short-term glasses which is actively used in the decision-making process The determined voters are more inclined to make their decisions from the long-term perspective.

There is broad common ground with the AK Party in terms of goals and aspirations. But over time, this ground began to narrow. Common ideals, common areas of struggle, have begun to come to an end. These commonalities are actually the factors that strengthen the bond between them. As the number of common ideals, goals and aims decreased, the ground become narrow, and the bond weakened. In this shrinking common ground, there are still commonalities that mostly feed on fear and pride. One of the most common fears comes fore when it comes to the revival of Kemalist

oppression while one of the most common prides is seen in the form of a national defence move. To be more concrete, this move of narrowing down designates a disengagement with the ideal and moral principles, which established the founding discourse of the party. What seems thought provoking in this discussion is the question that is there a steady relationship between the common ideals of the party and the bond that the voters establish with the party?

It is also observed that the general election and local election behaviours of some participants differ considerably from each other. While some can be more partisan in the general election, they can act more issue-oriented in the local elections. Some participants, who withdraw their support from the AK Party in the general election, find it appropriate to support them in the local elections. Likewise, some participants perceive the general election as having greater importance, while they perceived local election less significant because its effects are on a smaller scale. Thus, they behave free and easily when they vote. It can be said that the participants who took different attitudes during the general and local elections, acted with an issue-oriented perspective rather than collective identity. In that sense, it can be claimed that those participants do not have a complete enduring partisan predisposition.

Another attention-grabbing point in the study is that the participants who stopped voting had a party preference in general. This preference was usually the DEVA Party. The Future Party was not mentioned. Because the figure of Davutoğlu is not considered successful when looked at his past political actions. Here, too, the question DEVA or Babacan? was on the agenda. Because when these people announced their preferences, they always said the name of the party chairman, not the name of the party. In fact, conversations progressed over the name Babacan, and I saw that a name-based attitude was exhibited again. Most of these people did not look at the cadre and organizational structure of the party, and so forth. Just as the name Erdoğan is dominant, when it comes to newly established parties, the names of Davutoğlu and Babacan were spoken rather than the names of the parties. It can be said that name-based politics has become one of the prominent attitudes.

**Limitations and Implications for Future Research**

According to Edelman (1967), leadership is primarily constructed on what the leader symbolizes for the people, as well as on the historical events and figures with which he is related to. In that sense, the leader's leadership traits are directly related to the voters' needs. Within this perspective, the leader can contribute to the symbolic construction of the past, present, and future by the symbolic interactions he has with the people (Tokdoğan, 2018). This study did not cover how the characteristics of the leader are a descriptor of the people. Thus, further research about these symbolisms could be conducted.

This study was conducted between two election periods. In order to understand the essence of this study, basically the essence of stable and changing voting behaviour, it would be meaningful to conduct new qualitative research right after the next election. Likewise, a new study that will take place after the 2023 elections can improve this study in terms of confirming the determinations made in this study. It can be a detailed discussion of what I mentioned in this study. One last suggestion is that a new study will be noteworthy for the analysis of the preferences of the youth, who will use their first vote.[11] Such a study can also be valuable in contributing the voting literature thinking that a huge number of young populations will be voting in 2023 elections, and they are likely to influence the entire political balance.

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[11] The 2020 youth population statistics show that there are almost 13 million youth population in 15-24 age. The data is available at https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Istatistiklerle-Genclik-2020-37242

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# APPENDICES

# A. APPROVAL OF THE METU HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE

20 Şubat 2020

Konu:     Değerlendirme Sonucu

Gönderen:  ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)

İlgi:     İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu

**Sayın Mustafa ŞEN**

Danışmanlığını yaptığınız **Esra SÜZEN'in** "**Adalet Kalkınma Partisine Oy Vermiş Seçmenin Seçim Davranışlarının İncelenmesi**" başlıklı araştırması İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülmüş ve **088-ODTU-2020** protokol numarası ile onaylanmıştır.

Saygılarımızla bilgilerinize sunarız.

Prof. Dr. Mine MISIRLISOY

Başkan

| | |
|---|---|
| Prof. Dr. Tolga CAN | Doç.Dr. Pınar KAYGAN |
| Üye | Üye |
| | |
| Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Ali Emre TURGUT | Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Şerife SEVİNÇ |
| Üye | Üye |
| | |
| Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Müge GÜNDÜZ | Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Süreyya Özcan KABASAKAL |
| Üye | Üye |

## B. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Türkiye'de çok partili siyasi sisteme geçildiğinden bugüne Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi en uzun süre iktidarda olan parti olmuştur. 2001 yılında kurulan parti, girdiği ilk seçimden itibaren en son gerçekleşen genel seçime kadar iktidar partisi pozisyonunu korumuştur. Kurulduğu günden bugüne parti içinde radikal kadro değişimleri olmuş ve parti söylemleri özellikle 2011 yılı sonrasında kurucu söylemlerinden oldukça farklılaşacak şekilde değişmiş olmasına rağmen bu değişimler seçim sonuçlarına önemli ölçüde yansımamıştır. Bu noktada çalışmanın temel aldığı problem kurulduğu günden bu yana geçirdiği değişikliklere rağmen, seçmenlerin AK Parti'ye oy verme konusunda gösterdikleri istikrardır.

Çalışmanın amacı AK Parti seçmeninin partiye oy vermeye devam etme nedenlerini ve eğer seçim tercihlerinde değişiklik olduysa, değişimlerin sebeplerinin anlaşılmasıdır. Bu amaca yönelik olarak seçmenin AK Parti'ye niçin oy vermiş olduğu, oy vermeye devam ediyorsa neden devam ettiği ve kararında veya tutumunda bir değişiklik olduysa neden değiştiği sorularının cevapları aranmıştır. Tüm bu sorguların temelinde aranan, seçmenin parti ile kurduğu bağ ve aidiyetin parametrelerini anlamaktır.

Seçim davranışı literatürü araştırıldığında seçmen davranışını izah etmeye çalışan üç temel model bulunmaktadır. Sosyolojik model, sosyo-psikolojik model ve rasyonel seçim modeli şeklinde isimlendirilen bu modellerin izlekleri sunulmuştur. Ağırlıklı olarak nicel araştırmalar bu modellerin izleklerinin oluşmasında temel teşkil etmektedir. Bununla beraber Türkiye bağlamında yapılan çalışmalar incelendiğinde, bu çalışmalarda da nicel araştırma yöntemleri ile seçmen davranışının çalışıldığı gözlemlenmiştir. Oy verme davranışının anlamlandırılması için derinlemesine görüşmeleri ihtiva eden nitel araştırma yapılması uygun görülmüştür. Aidiyet ve bağ kavramlarının temelde duygu ile ilintili olduğuna ulaşılarak duygu literatürü

araştırılmıştır. Türkiye'de duygu literatürüne başvurarak seçmen davranışlarını anlamak çabasını güden az sayıda çalışma olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Bu çalışmaların açtığı güzergahı takip ederek AK Parti seçmeninin parti ile kurduğu bağ ve aidiyet ilişkisinin ve oy verme davranışının anlamlandırılması için Spinoza'nın duygu terminolojisine başvurulmuştur. Duygu (affect) ve duygulanış (affection) kavramları çerçevesinde yapılan tartışmalar için Deleuze ve Baker'in yorumları temelde referans alınmıştır.

Türkiye bağlamı üzerinde yapılan literatür taramasında mevcut çalışmaların, sosyal bölünmelere dikkat çektiği, bilhassa kır- kent, merkez- çevre, sağ- sol, seküler/laik-muhafazakâr/dindar gibi belirli sosyal bölünmelerin Türkiye bağlamında seçim süreçlerini anlamada başvurulan kavramsal çerçeveler olduğu gözlemlenmiştir. Bu noktada sağ-sol ve seküler-muhafazakâr/dindar gibi ikiliklerin mevcut siyasi atmosferde sürekli yeniden üretildiğinin vurgulandığı gözlemlenmiştir. Bu çalışmada da sağ-sol ve seküler-muhafazakâr şeklinde bahsi geçen iki kavramsal çerçevenin süregittiğini gösteren bulgular açığa çıkmıştır.

Nitel araştırma yöntemleri temel alınarak kurgulanan çalışmada fenomenoloji yönteminden faydalanılmıştır. Moustakas'ın fenomenoloji basamakları temel alınarak araştırma yürütülmüş ve analizler gerçekleştirilmiştir. 27 farklı katılımcı ile yarı yapılandırılmış mülakatlar yapılmıştır. Katılımcılar tespit edilirken amaçlı örneklem yöntemi uygulanmış ve araştırmanın odağına göre kriterler belirlenmiştir. Bu kriterlerden ilki katılımcının en az bir defa AK Parti'ye genel seçimlerde oy vermiş olması, ikincisi AK Parti ile organik bir ilişkisinin bulunmaması, üçüncüsü ise İstanbul'da belirlenmiş olan ve AK Parti'nin en çok oy aldığı dört ilçeden birinde ikamet ediyor olması. Bu ilçeler Üsküdar, Fatih, Ümraniye ve Başakşehir'dir. Çalışmada farklı yaş gruplarından ve cinsiyetten katılımcılar olmasına özen gösterilmiştir. Bu noktada katılımcıların yaş aralığı 25 ila 58 arasında değişmektedir. 11 erkek ve 16 kadın katılımcı ile görüşmeler yapılmıştır.

Araştırmada ana sorular ve sonda sorular olmak üzere iki tip soru yer almıştır. Sonda sorular gerekli durumlarda başvurulan sorular olmuştur. Çoğunlukla ana soruların ilki olan siyasi görüşü açıklama sorusunu katılımcının cevaplama şekli, ardından gelecek soruların sırasını da belirlemiştir. Sonda sorular arasında bazı soruların görüşmelerde

olduḳça işlevsel olduğu tespit edilmiş ve bu sorular her bir katılımcıya yöneltilmiştir. Örneğin Erdoğan'ın siyaset sahnesinde olmadığı bir senaryoda seçmenin nasıl davranacağı sorusu herkese yöneltilen sonda sorular arasındadır.

Mülakat süreci devam ederken katılımcıların AK Parti ile ilgili tutumlarının değişiklik arz ettiği gözlemlenmiştir. Bu gözlem doğrultusunda AK Parti'ye karşı tutumlarının farklılık arz ettiği katılımcılara ulaşmanın araştırmanın zenginleşmesi açısından önemli olduğuna karar verilmiştir. Bu doğrultuda oy vermeye her durum ve şartta kararlı olan, oy vermekten vazgeçmiş olan, oy verme konusundan tereddüt içerisinde olan ve oy vermeyi istemeyen ama gönülsüz bir şekilde sandığa giden şeklinde dört farklı tutuma sahip seçmene ulaşılmıştır. Her koşulda oy vermeye kararlı olan ile oy vermekten tamamen vazgeçmiş olan katılımcıların iki ayrı kutbu teşkil ettiği düşünülmüş ve bir sonraki seçimde nasıl davranacaklarını oldukça net bir şekilde belirttikleri için kararlı tutum adı altında gruplandırılmışlardır. Kararlı tutum sergileyen katılımcıların oluşturduğu bu iki kutup arasında gönülsüz ve tereddütlü tutuma sahip katılımcıların yer aldığı tespit edilmiştir. Gönülsüz ve tereddütlü tutuma sahip katılımcılar 27 kişi içerisinde sayıca en kalabalık grubu oluşturmaktadır.

Tereddütlü tutum, bir sonraki adımı konusunda net olmamayı içerir. Bu tutuma sahip olan katılımcılar sıradaki seçimlerde nasıl bir eylem gerçekleştirecekleri hakkında bir eminlik hissetmemektedirler. Seçim tercihlerini değiştirmeye daha yatkın gözükmektedirler çünkü oy vermekten vazgeçmiş olan katılımcıların sorgulamalarına daha yakın durmaktadırlar. Bununla beraber katılımcıların büyük çoğunluğu için öne çıkan gönülsüz tutum, uygun alternatifin olmayışı sebebiyle mevcut seçenekler arasında kendilerini en yakın gördükleri parti AK Parti olduğu için istemeyerek de olsa oy vermeye devam edeceğini varsayan katılımcıların tutumunu ihtiva etmektedir. Bu katılımcıların kimisi ehven-i şer ifadesi ile kendi durumlarını izah etmişlerdir. Oy vermeye her koşulda devam edeceklerini bildiren katılımcılar ile gönülsüz tutum sergileyen katılımcıların bir ortak yönü mevcut politikalar ile ilgilenme eğiliminde olmamalarıdır.

Hiç kimsenin rastgele oy kullanmayacağı varsayımıyla katılımcıların oy verme nedenlerinin araştırıldığı çalışmada oldukça çeşitli nedenler olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Analiz sürecinde bu nedenler altı tema altında toplanarak sunulmuştur. Bu temalar;

lider için oy verme, milli gurur, ideolojik angajman ve kimlik, muhafazakâr korkular, muhalefet karşıtı duruş ve stratejik oy verme şeklindedir. Bu temalar AK Parti seçmeninin oy verme güdüleyicilerini açıklamak için kullanılan anlam kümeleridir. Bu güdüleyiciler dört farklı tutumu sergileyen seçmenler için de geçerlidir, ancak etkileme oranları değişmektedir. Kararlı tutumu kendi içinde ikiye ayırdığımızda desteğine devam etme yönünde kararlı olan grubun belirtilen motivasyonları daha güçlü bir şekilde taşıdığını söylemek mümkündür. Kararlı tutumun ikincisi olan desteklememekte kararlılık tutumunda ise bu motivasyonların etkisini önemli ölçüde yitirdiğini belirtmek gerekir. Ancak bu motivasyonların varlığını temelden sarsan bir noktada değildir. Desteklemekten vazgeçen seçmen için oy verme sürecinde etkili olan motivasyonlar ideolojik angajman ve kimlik ile muhalefet karşıtı tutumdur.

Oy vermekte kararlı olan katılımcılarda dikkat çeken nokta, kararlılık gösteren kişilerin, kararlı oldukları konuda farklılık göstermeleridir. İki farklı yöne işaret eden bu farklılık şu şekilde özetlenebilir; AK Parti'ye oy vermeye devam etmelerinin tek nedeni Erdoğan olanlar ve AK Parti'ye oy verenler. Sadece Erdoğan'a oy verenler, Erdoğan orada oldukça oy kullanacaklarını açıkça ilan etmişlerdir. Bu iki farklı yön dikkate alındığında partiye değil Erdoğan'a destek vermeye kararlı olanların sayısı oldukça fazladır.

Gönülsüz tutum bu tezde açığa çıkan ve oy verme tutumları olarak isimlendirilen anlam birimleri arasında en yoğun olan kısımdır. Katılımcıların pek çoğu memnuniyetsiz oldukları bir dolu hususu dile getirmekten çekinmemişlerdir. Oy vermeyi bir siyasal katılım olarak değerlendiren katılımcıların yine büyük bir bölümü oy vermeye çok büyük bir anlam yüklemektedir. Bu sebeple memnun olmadıkları bir partiyi desteklemek fikri onları yormaktadır. Gönülsüz tutum adı altında değerlendirilecek olan katılımcıların ortak özelliği AK Parti'den memnun olmamaları, desteklememeleri, tercih etmemeleri, tasvip etmemeleri ancak günün sonunda sandıkta yine onun lehine davranmalarıdır.

Tereddütlü tutuma sahip olan katılımcılar, genel olarak gönülsüz tutuma sahip katılımcıların isteksiz olma sebepleri ile benzerlikler taşımaktadır. Neredeyse hepsinin ortak olarak belirttiği, tercih edecekleri ve bu sistem içinde seçimi kazanma potansiyeline sahip güçlü bir alternatif olarak ortaya çıkan, kendilerini temsil

edebilecek, kendi oylarını gönül rahatlığıyla emanet edebilecekleri ideal bir adayın olmamasıdır. Bu tutuma sahip olan katılımcıların büyük bir bölümü AK Parti'nin ilk kurulduğu zamanları olumlu bir şekilde anmaktadırlar. Hatta bazıları AK Parti öncesinde sandığa gitmezken, parti ile birlikte her seçimde sandığa gittiğini belirtmiştir. Ancak zaman içinde, gönüllü bir destek için şevk ve umutla gittikleri sandığa, gönülsüz bir şekilde gider hale gelmişlerdir. Tereddüt de genel olarak gönüllü bir eylemin, gönülsüz bir eyleme dönüştüğü yerde başlamaktadır.

Oy vermiş olma veya oy vermeye devam etme şeklinde AK Parti'ye oy verme davranışını açıklamak için öne sürülen ilk tema lider için oy vermedir. Bu sebep diğerleri arasında en baskın olan nedendir. Katılımcıların çok büyük bir kesimi liderin varlığı sebebiyle AK Parti'ye oy verdiklerini ifade etmişlerdir. Liderin olmadığı bir senaryoda parti, mevcut diğer partiler ile eş bir açıdan değerlendirmeye tabi tutulacak gibidir. Mevcut lider, sahip olduğu özellikleri ile katılımcıların iktidarda arzu ettikleri özellikleri yansıtmaktadır. Mevcut lider, siyaseten mahir olma, öngörülemez olma, güçlü olma, bağımsız olma gibi arzu edilen özellikleri mevcut siyasi ortamda öne çıkan diğer adaylardan ciddi bir farkla daha fazla taşımaktadır. Kimi katılımcılar fevrilik, öngörülemezlik gibi başlangıçta olumsuz çağrışım yapan kelimelere oldukça olumlu anlamlar yükleyerek mevcut lideri nasıl gördüklerini açıklamışlardır. Bu tanımlamalar ile liderin bilhassa manipüle edilemez oluşuna dikkat çekmişlerdir. Oy vermekten vazgeçmiş olan katılımcılar dışında, özellikle koşulsuz destek verenler için lider, halkı ve ortalama vatandaşı temsil edebilme kabiliyetine sahip kabul edilmektedir. Bu noktayı vurgulamak için Kasımpaşalı, bizden biri ifadeleri gibi çeşitli ifadeler tercih edilmiştir. Bu konuda hemen hemen tüm katılımcılar için, ancak özellikle her durumda Erdoğan'a destek vereceğini belirten kesim için mevcut liderin bir alternatifi bulunmamaktadır.

Öne çıkan ikinci tema milli gururdur. Milli gurur motivasyonunun lider için oy verme ile belirgin bir ilişkisi vardır. Bu motivasyonda en çok dile getirilen husus Türkiye'nin küresel ölçekte söz söyleyen bir ülke haline gelmesi, dış politika ve savunma konularında gösterdiği ataklar sebebiyle küresel ölçekte hareket kabiliyeti elde etmesi gibi gurur ile ilişkilendirilerek sunulan başarılar olmuştur. Tüm bu ilerlemelerin

Erdoğan'ın mahareti ve geçmiş politikacıların vizyonunu sürdürmesi ile ilişkilendirilmesi sebebiyle lider için oy verme ile milli gurur temaları kesişmektedir.

Öne çıkan motivasyonlardan bir diğeri de ideolojik angajman ve kimliktir. Seçmenin kendisini parti ile ideolojik düzlemde eşleştirmesi ve kimliksel olarak özdeş görmesi bir bulgu olarak açığa çıkmıştır. Katılımcılar sağ-sol spektrumunda partiyi konumlandırdıkları sağ tarafta kendilerini tanımladıkları için ve partiyi sağ kanadın iyi bir temsilcisi olarak gördükleri için parti ile bir aidiyet ilişkisi kurmuşlardır. Partiyi seküler/laik olarak adlandırdıkları sol kanadın muhalifi olması sebebiyle de kendileri ile özdeş görme eğilimindedirler çünkü kendilerini bilhassa seküler/laik olarak adlandırdıkları sol kanat, CHP ve CHP zihniyeti ile eşleştirdikleri muhalefet kanadından taban tabana zıt olacak şekilde ayrıştırarak tanımlamaktadırlar.

Dikkat çeken ve katılımcıların büyük bir çoğunluğunda etkisini hissettiren bir diğer güdüleyici de muhafazakâr korkulardır. Bu korkular AK Parti sonrası döneme ilişkin varsayımsal korkuları ihtiva eder. Ancak bu korkuların çıkış noktası AK Parti dönemi öncesine dair katılımcıların belleğinde yer alan muhafazakâr kesimin yaşadığı baskılardır. Burada açığa çıkan fikir muhafazakâr kesimin AK Parti'nin siyaset sahnesine çıkmasından sonra kazanım elde etmesi ve bu kazanımların garantisinin AK Parti olması şeklindedir.

Muhalefet karşıtı tutum da bir diğer oy verme motivasyonunu oluşturmaktadır. Mülakatlarda geçmiş tecrübelere referans vermek suretiyle bu motivasyon gündem edilmiştir. İçinde muhafazakâr korkuları da barındıran bu tutum geçmiş başarısızlıklara atıflar verilmesi suretiyle muhalefet partilerin iktidar olması halinde ülkenin menfaatlerinin riske girmesi şeklinde derin korkuları da beraberinde taşımaktadır. Muhalefet partilere olan güvensizlik, muhafazakâr korkuların yanında, ülkenin kaosa sürüklenmesi, bölünmesi, yönetilemez hale gelmesi gibi yönetimsel anlamda muhalefet partilerin yetersiz olacakları varsayımını içerir.

Stratejik oy verme tereddütlü ve gönülsüz tutum sergileyen katılımcıların durumunu temsil etmektedir. Stratejik oy verme üç ayrı alt tema içermektedir. Bunlar; alternatif yoksunluğu, risk temelli oy verme ve protesto oyu şeklindedir. AK Parti ile kıyaslanan mevcut seçeneklerin katılımcılar nezdinde karşılık bulmaması tezde alternatif

yoksunluğu olarak adlandırılmıştır. Tüm eleştirilerine rağmen katılımcıların mevcut seçenekleri tercih edilebilir kabul etmemeleri sebebiyle yine AK Parti lehinde sonuçlanan oy verme davranışları olduğu gözlemlenmiştir. Bu noktada gönüllü oy vermek yerine parti ile güçlü bir bağlılık ve aidiyet ilişkisi söz konusu olmadığı için daha kötü seçenekleri engellemek adına katılımcıların oy verdiği gözlemlenmiştir. Bununla beraber bazı katılımcılar için seçimler, parti ve politikacılardan hesap sorulan yer olarak kabul edilmektedir. Bu anlayış çerçevesinde bazı katılımcıların protesto oyu olarak adlandırılan davranışı sergiledikleri gözlenmiştir. Kimi seçimlerde, ders verme yahut cezalandırma maksadıyla AK Parti lehine oy vermeme tablosu ile karşılaşılmıştır.

AK Parti'ye oy verme motivasyonları yanında AK Parti'ye oy vermekten vazgeçme nedenleri de çalışma sürecinde araştırılmıştır. Katılımcılar arasında vazgeçen katılımcıların sayısı oldukça azdır ancak tercihlerinin değişmesini etkileyen faktörler itibariyle her birinin fikirleri araştırmada önem taşımaktadır. Vazgeçme nedenleri yedi farklı tema şeklinde sınıflandırılarak sunulmuştur. İlk öne çıkan sebep siyasi dildir. Çatışmacı ve kavgacı bir dil ile siyasi sahnede hareket edilmesi pek çok katılımcı için arzu edilmeyen hatta rahatsız edici bir yerdedir. Katılımcılar böyle bir dil ile hiçbir şekilde muhatap olmayı istememektedirler. Bu dilin kutuplaştırmayı tetiklediğini düşünmektedirler. Bu noktada saygı çerçevesinde bir dilin geçmişte örnekleri olduğunu düşünmekte ve bu dilin imkanlarının aranması gerektiğini öne sürmektedirler. Diğer öne çıkan tema halkın temsil edilmesindeki çelişkidir. AK Parti'nin başlangıçta halkı temsil eden kurucu söylemlere sahip olup iktidarda geçirdiği süre zarfında iktidarda kalma eylemleri ile siyaset yaparak halkı temsil etme amaçlarının yitirildiği belirtilmiştir. Bu yabancılaşma sürecini tetikleyen faktörler arasında güç zehirlenmesi de öne sürülmüştür. Yöneticilerin hizmet verdikleri insanlara yabancılaşması bu bağlamda en çok üstünde durulan konu denilebilir.

Vazgeçişi tetikleyen bir diğer neden de mevcut siyasetçiler üzerinden siyasete güvenin azalmasıdır. Herhangi bir şeyin kolaylıkla siyasi malzeme olarak kullanılması varsayımından hareketle, AK Parti'nin iktidar döneminde yaşanan kimi kırılma noktalarının bilerek kurgulandığı belirtilmiştir. Diğer bir öne çıkan sebep baskı dilinin keyfi bir şekilde kullanımıdır. Bu keyfi kullanım baskı geçmişinin ve tecrübesinin bir

siyasi malzeme haline getirilmesi ile bağlantılı olarak okunmuştur. Bu baskı dilinin sık kullanımı yerine bazı katılımcılar, siyasi erkin umut vaat eden söylemler, liyakat ve demokrasi gibi kavramlarla öne çıkmasını arzu ettiklerini belirtmiştir. Korkuyu tetikleyen bir dil kullanımı kabul edilmemektedir. Bu noktada korku söylemlerinin uyandırdığı endişe halinden sıyrılmak ile vazgeçmeye yatkın hale gelmek birbiri ilişkilidir.

Vazgeçme kararını tetikleyen bir diğer faktör de dini göstergeleri aramak ve oy vermenin ahlaki boyutuna dikkat etmek ile ilişkilidir. Bu, bilhassa İslamcı bir geçmişe sahip olan katılımcılarda öne çıkan bir durumdur. Partinin dini anlamda zıtlık oluşturduğu düşünülen politikaları olumsuz anlamda bir yaklaşım yaratmaktadır. Benzer şekilde bazı katılımcılar MHP ile ittifak yapmayı da aynı yerden okumakta ve milliyetçi söylemin İslamiliğini sorgulayarak ırkçılıkla eşleştirdikleri söylemleri taşıyan MHP gibi bir parti ile ittifakı kabul etmemektedirler.

Mülakatlara genel olarak bakıldığında katılımcıların parti ile kurduğu ilişkide açığa çıkan duygularda bir dönüşüm olduğu gözlemlenmiştir. AK Parti'nin çoğunlukla ilk dönemlerinde seçmenin sevinç içinde, temsil edilmenin verdiği güven duygusu eşliğinde, şevkle sandıklara gitmesi söz konusu iken zamanla aynı seçmen sandığa şevkle gitmeyip bir çeşit zorunluluk hissi ile gitmeye başlamıştır. Partinin onda oluşturduğu duygulanım dönüşüm geçirmiştir. Bu dönüşüm neticesinde sevinç değil keder duygusu ile eşleştirilebilecek olan korku duygulanımı açığa çıkmıştır. Açığa çıkan ve neredeyse bütün katılımcılarda dikkat çeken bu duygulanımın korku ile adlandırılmasının sebebi bu duyguyu paylaşan katılımcıların korku kelimesi ile eş anlamlı ifadeleri tercih etmiş olmalarıdır. Çoğunlukla bu katılımcıların korkuları geleceğe yöneliktir ve AK Parti sonrası dönemine ilişkin endişeleri ihtiva eder.

Yaşça büyük olup siyasi geçmişlerinde AK Parti öncesi dönemde de siyasi katılım yaşında olanlar ile yaşı gereği AK Parti döneminde siyasete oy kullanarak katılanlar arasında bir ortak bir duygu örüntüsü vardır. Bu örüntü parti ile ilk karşılaşmalarını ve sonrasını anlatırken ifade ettikleri cümlelerde açığa çıkmaktadır. Ortalama olarak katılımcıların önemli bir bölümü partinin kurulmasından duydukları heyecanı dile getirmiştir. Nihayet kendilerini temsil edebilecek bir oluşumu görmenin kendilerinde yarattığı sevinç duygusundan bahsetmişlerdir. Bu sevinç duygusu onlarda temsil

edilme, sahip çıkılma, anlaşılma, seslerini duyurma, özgürleşme gibi Spinozist tabirle eyleme kabiliyetlerini artıran etkileri beraberinde getirmiştir. Bu noktada en çok üzerinde durulan husus temsil edilme üzerinedir. Temsil edilebilir olma bağlamında "biz" kelimesi ve "onlar" kelimesi sıklıkla kullanılmış ve AK Parti ile "biz"in de temsil edilebilir olduğu vurgusu muhafazakâr kimliği imleyen bir tarzda öne çıkmıştır. Daha önce "öteki" konumunda; kurumlarda istenmeyen kişiler olma konumunda iken parti ile birlikte bu durumun değişeceğine dair güçlü bir umut hissedilmiştir. Kimi katılımcılar özgürleşme kelimesini tercih etmişlerdir. Eyleme kabiliyetini artıran bu ortak duygu değişime uğramıştır. Bugün mevcut olan ortak duygulanım korku haline gelmiştir. Bu manada oy verme tutumları değişiklik arz etse de bir şekilde her bir katılımcı az veya çok bu duyguyu taşımaktadır. Bu korku muhafazakâr kesimin kazanımlarının kaybedilmesi ihtimalini içerdiği gibi memleketin bekası ve kaosa sürüklenme korkusu gibi çok güçlü endişeleri içermektedir.

AK Parti seçmeninin dindarlığı veya dindarlık seviyelerinin yüksek olduğu üzerine kanaatler mevcuttur. Benzer şekilde seçim anketlerinde genelde dindarlık sabit bir olgu olarak ele alınmakta ve dindar kesimin oylarının AK Parti'ye gittiği şeklinde bir yaklaşımdan hareket edilmektedir. Ancak dindar kesim ifadesinin neyi kapsadığı muğlaktır. Seçim anketleri, genellikle dindarlığın içindeki fraksiyonları göz ardı etmekte ve homojen bir okuyuş sunmaktadır. Kimi anketlerde çok dindar veya az dindar kategorileştirmesi yapıldığı, bu kategoriler üzerinden dindarlık seviyesi arttıkça AK Parti'yi destekleme oranı artıyor gibi bir doğrusal ilişkinin öne sürüldüğü gözlemlenmiştir. Bu tezde, yukarıda sayılan kanaatleri desteklemeyen sonuçlara varılmıştır.

Aidiyet noktasında açığa çıkan bir sonuç da katılımcıların önemli bir bölümünün sağ kanatın devamlılığı hususunda hemfikir olmasıdır. Bu hususta sağ tarafta kim öne geçebilirse onu desteklemeye hazır oldukları gözlenmiştir. Stratejik olarak da benzer bir davranış sergiledikleri söylenebilir. Şöyle ki, AK Parti'ye şimdiye kadar stratejik olarak sağ kanadı temsil eden en güçlü parti olduğundan dolayı oy verenlerin sayısı bir hayli fazladır. Bu tip katılımcıların temel motivasyonları, sağ kanadın devamlılığı için en rasyonel seçimi yapmaktır. Bu da kemikleşmiş bir sağ/muhafazakâr seçmen varlığına işaret edebilirken, oy verme davranışında parti aidiyeti değil kimliğin öne

çıktığını, kemikleşmiş bir particilik yerine uzun dönemli bir kimlik perspektifinin açığa çıktığını göstermektedir. Mülakatlarda katılımcılar nezdinde "CHP zihniyeti" tabiri ile seküler, Kemalist, sol, batıcı gibi tüm kavramları kapsayan bir karşı cenah, muhalif taraf tanımlaması yapılmakta ve karşı cenaha geçiş gözlenmemektedir. Bu bağlamda sağ muhafazakâr kanatın yaşam alanını kısıtlayacak, eyleme kabiliyetini daraltacak hiçbir ideoloji kabul görmemektedir. Bu noktada katılımcılar için siyasetin bir güç mücadelesi olduğu anlayışı baskın anlayıştır ve kendi içinde zorunlu olarak bir taraf olmayı gerektirir.

Katılımcılar arasında farklı politik habituslardan gelen katılımcılar bulunmaktadır. MHP ve Saadet Partisi gibi partilerden AK Parti'ye geçmiş olan katılımcıların genel tutumu Erdoğan'ın varlığı ile doğrudan ilişkilidir. Onları partiye çeken, partiye geçişten ziyade Erdoğan'ın tercih edilmesi olarak ifade edilebilir. Bu kişilerin davranışlarının kaynağı Erdoğan olduğu için geldikleri partinin kemik oyu olma potansiyellerini saklı tuttukları söylenebilir. Ancak Saadet Partisi kökenli katılımcılar Millî Görüşü temsil eden başka bir parti olduğunu düşünmedikleri için MHP kökeninden gelen katılımcılara kıyasla gönüllü veya gönülsüz partiyi desteklemeye daha yatkın söylemlerde bulunmaktadır. Gönülsüz tutum sergileyenler, çoğunlukla oy vermeye AK parti ile başlayan İslamcı kesimden gelenler ya da Millî Görüş geçmişi olan siyasete angaje katılımcılardır. Bu katılımcıların kimisi mutsuz evliliğine devam eden umutsuz eşler gibi mevcut düzeni sürdürme eğilimindedir. MHP kökenliler ise görece daha rahat bir konumlanış sergilemektedir.

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**YAZARIN /** AUTHOR

**Soyadı** / Surname : Süzen Akkaya
**Adı** / Name : Esra
**Bölümü** / Department : Sosyoloji / Sociology

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