

ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS OF POLITICAL ACTORS



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PLAGIARISM

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.



Başak Bozoğlu

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ABSTRACT

Political communication campaigns have always been very important for political actors for reaching the public. With the development of technology, the internet and social media channels, which were added to the mass media such as radio, newspapers, and television, have become new communication tools for political actors. Ekrem İmamoğlu, who won the elections on March 31, 2019, won them again by increasing the vote difference with his opponent, Binali Yıldırım, on June 23, 2019, in the re-elections, when his mandate was canceled due to the supposed irregularities in the previous run. In this thesis, the five most liked posts on Ekrem İmamoğlu's Instagram profile between May 6, 2019, the date of the cancellation of the mandate, and June 23, 2019, when the second elections were held, were analyzed using semiotic analysis and in-depth interview methods. Since Ekrem İmamoğlu is the CHP's candidate and the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality elections have an important place in Turkish politics, the political history of Turkey from 1923 to the present is outlined in the thesis, and main policies and the historical development of CHP are discussed. Main political ideologies are explained, and the use of media, particularly social media and Instagram, by political actors is discussed with examples from Turkey and abroad. As a result of the analysis made in this research, it was seen that Ekrem İmamoğlu used an integrative, loving, and hopeful language in his Instagram posts. In addition, it is seen that they involve contradictions as they transmit progressive meanings while also reproducing certain conventional social norms.

Keywords: Political communication, Ekrem İmamoğlu, social media, Instagram, 2019 local elections

ÖZET

Siyasal iletişim kampanyaları halka erişebilmeleri bakımından siyasal aktörler için her zaman çok önemli olmuştur. Teknolojinin gelişmesi ile radyo, gazete, televizyon gibi kitle iletişim araçlarının yanına eklenen internet ve sosyal medya mecraları, siyasi aktörler için yeni bir iletişim aracı olmuştur. 31 Mart 2019 seçimlerini kazanan İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediye Başkanı Ekrem İmamoğlu usulsüzlükler gerekçesi ile mazbatasını iptal edilince tekrarı yapılan seçimde 23 Haziran 2019 tarihinde rakibi Binali Yıldırım'la arasındaki oy farkını arttırarak seçimi tekrar kazanmıştır. Bu tezde mazbata iptal tarihi 6 Mayıs ile ikinci seçimlerin yapıldığı 23 Haziran arasında Ekrem İmamoğlu'nun Instagram profilinde paylaşılan postlardan en çok beğeni alan beşi göstergebilimsel analiz ve derinlemesine görüşme yöntemleri kullanılarak analiz edilmiş ve içerdikleri anlamlar incelenmiştir. Ekrem İmamoğlu'nun CHP adayı olması ve İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediye seçimlerinin Türkiye siyasetinde önemli bir yere sahip olmasından dolayı, tezde 1923'ten günümüze kadar uzanan Türkiye siyasal tarihi detaylı bir şekilde anlatılmıştır ve bu süreçte CHP'nin politikalarına ve siyasal gelişimine yer verilmiştir. İletişim mecralarının siyasi aktörler tarafından kullanımlarına değinilerek çalışmanın çekirdeğini oluşturan siyasi ideolojiler açıklanmış ve dünyadan örneklerle sosyal medyanın siyasal iletişimdeki yeri siyasi aktörlerin bu mecraları kullanımları üzerinden tartışılmıştır. Bu araştırmada yapılan analizlerin sonucunda Ekrem İmamoğlu'nun Instagram postlarında bütünleştirici, sevgi dolu ve umut verici bir dil kullandığı görülmüştür. Ayrıca belli konvansiyonel toplumsal normları yeniden üretirken progresif anlamlar içeren mesajlar da iletmesiyle çelişkili anlamları bir arada sunduğu görülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Siyasal İletişim, Ekrem İmamoğlu, sosyal medya, Instagram, 2019 yerel seçimleri

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ABBREVIATIONS

AP Justice Party

AKP Justice and Development Party

ANAP Motherland Party

CHP Republican People's Party

CKMP Republican Peasant Nation Party

CMP Republican Nation Party

DP Democratic Party

DİSK Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions of Turkey

DSP Democratic Left Party

DYP True Path Party

FP Felicity Party

GP Trust Party

HP Freedom Party

HP Populist Party

HADEP People's Democracy Party

HEP People's Labor Party

IBB Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality

IDP Reformist Democracy Party

IP Good Party

MP Nation Party

MP Conservative Party

MBK National Unity Committee

MÇP Nationalist Work Party

MDP Nationalist Democracy Party

MGK National Security Council

MHP Nationalist Movement Party

MNP National Order Party

MSP National Salvation Party

PKK Neo-Marxist Kurdistan Workers' Party

RP Welfare Party

SP Virtue Party

SCF Free Republican Party

SHP Social Democrat Populist Party

SODEP The Social Democrat Party

TBP Turkey Unity Party

TCF Progressive Republican Party

TIP Workers' Party of Turkey

TKP Turkish Peasant Party

TMSF Savings Deposit and Insurance Fund

TRT Turkish Radio and Television Corporation

YÖK Higher Education Board

YTP New Turkey Party

1. INTRODUCTION

Political communication campaigns are of great importance in terms of enabling political actors to communicate with the public. The addition of the internet and social media channels to mass media such as radio and television, which started with the newspaper and with the development of technology, offered new communication channels for political actors to reach the public. In this study, the 5 most-liked Instagram posts between the dates of May 6 and June 23, 2019, when Ekrem İmamoğlu's mandate was canceled, will be examined. Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Elections have been an important political election. Considering the political rise of the candidates in the past, it is of great importance to analyze Ekrem İmamoğlu's election campaigns on Instagram, a social media channel, and to analyze the messages conveyed in the posts made here to understand Ekrem İmamoğlu's election strategies. Examining these posts with content analysis and in-depth interview methods makes an important contribution to the literature as they have not been examined qualitatively in the literature before.

A comprehensive literature review was conducted to form the theoretical basis of this study. First, the explanation of certain ideological concepts used in political literature is important for a better understanding of political communication studies. For this reason, leftist and rightist thoughts have been defined under the title of political ideologies. Information was given about what conservatism, reactionism, and Islamist ideas are. Then, the differences between liberalism and neoliberalism and between socialism and social democracy are explained. In relation to these, general information about the concept of the third way is given. After these political ideologies are explained, the political history of Turkey is outlined. In this research, Ekrem İmamoğlu, whose communication works on Instagram are examined, is a

political actor belonging to CHP. Thus, while the political history of Turkey is explained, the institutional and ideological development of CHP from 1923 to the present is also discussed in the thesis. After that, discussions about the course of political communication studies in Turkey and what kinds of studies are carried out are included. In this context, it has been focused on what kind of work has been done in the media such as posters, newspapers, radio, television, and the internet. In addition, what kinds of communication studies are carried out around the world is also discussed. Finally, the importance of the Istanbul elections is explained, contextual information is given about how the election process developed, and Ekrem İmamoğlu's position in Turkish politics was discussed.

As mentioned above, in this study, the 5 most liked posts by Ekrem İmamoğlu on Instagram between May 6 and June 23, 2019 were examined according to the semiotic analysis method. In this context, Ferdinand de Saussure's (1959) thoughts are reviewed, and Roland Barthes' (1972, 1983) thoughts on denotation and connotation are explained, and the concept of "myth" is defined. In addition, in this study, in-depth interviews were conducted with people who were in decision-making positions in Ekrem İmamoğlu's political communication studies during the 2019 Istanbul local elections. Accordingly, Ulaş Yılmaz (İBB Digital Communication Coordinator), Özgür Karabat (CHP 3rd District Parliament Member), Necati Özkan (Ekrem İmamoğlu's Political Consultant and Campaign Manager) and Şükrü Küçükşahin (İBB Ankara Representative) were interviewed. Their participation in the study was on a voluntary basis, and their informed consent was obtained for their participation in the study and for their names to be clearly mentioned.

This research aims to obtain in-depth information about the strategies used by political actors in their communication activities in their election campaigns. In

addition, it aims to make discoveries about what kinds of messages, meanings and ideologies are found and supported in the posts of political actors on social media platforms and what kinds of social myths are reproduced.

When the literature examining Ekrem İmamoğlu's communication works in the 2019 Istanbul local elections was scanned, it was seen that this study makes an important contribution to the literature. A literature review on the use of social media by political actors in Turkey, specifically studies which include Ekrem İmamoğlu's strategies in 2019 elections, yielded multiple results. A few studies focus on the works of the two candidates on Twitter (Akcan, 2021; Alamaslı, 2019; Aydın, 2021; Uçan, 2021) while another study focuses on the communication strategies of the mayoral candidates in Istanbul, İzmir, and Ankara (Özbek, 2019). Paralleling that, another study examines the works of the candidates in the same three cities on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and Youtube (Demir, 2021). There was also a quantitative study which examines the communication strategies of the alliance candidates in Istanbul one week before the elections, as the 23 June elections approached (Celep, 2019). In addition, there was a study which focuses only on Ekrem İmamoğlu's works and examines his posts on Twitter and Facebook with a qualitative approach (Ayman, 2019). In the light of these, this research differs from other studies in that it focuses on Ekrem İmamoğlu's on Instagram posts in a qualitative framework, and it is hoped that his analysis of Instagram posts using a semiotic method and focusing this analysis on the period between two elections will fill an important gap in the literature and make a valuable contribution to the literature.

This research has reached various conclusions about Ekrem İmamoğlu's communication activities on Instagram. To begin with, it is clear that İmamoğlu uses a unifying, hopeful, and loving language in his works. In addition, with his emphasis on

the concept of family and his messages on gender equality, he both reproduces certain myths and gives progressive messages at the same time. In addition, the religious themes in his posts have allowed him to reach the public by destroying the "non-religious CHP" perception established in society, especially in the conservative segment. In addition, there are strong messages about democracy and people's sovereignty in his posts. In this sense, Ekrem İmamoğlu's communication works examined in this study have neither broken with the idea of secularism nor been ones that can be called completely secular. In the end, it has been concluded that these posts are important examples of a *Turkified form of secularism*, as it may be said.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, the theoretical discussions that form the basis of this study will be given. First of all, definitions of certain political ideologies will be made in order to provide conceptual clarity. Under this title, the definitions of left and right, conservatism, reactionarism, Islamism, liberalism, neoliberalism, socialism, social democracy, and finally the third way will be made, and the perspectives of these ideologies will be briefly discussed. Then, in order to understand the current political dynamics and the context in which political works are produced, important points in the political history of Turkey will be mentioned with a focus on CHP, Ekrem İmamoğlu's party. In addition, information about Turkey's political history and cultural context will be given. Because CHP is the first party to be established in Turkey and Ekrem İmamoğlu as the Mayor of Istanbul is a member of CHP, this chapter will discuss what happened in the process of CHP becoming an opposition party since 1923, including the process Turkey went through until the multi-party period, CHP's six arrow principles, the transition to the multi-party system, the pressures of DP on CHP and other opposition parties, the military coups and their consequences, the ideologies of the ruling parties and party presidents in Turkey and the paths they followed as they governed the country. The influence and power of Islamic discourses on political parties and party leaders, the Turkish-Islamic synthesis that emerged after 1980 will be discussed, CHP's post-1980 political policies will be evaluated, and the polarization in the political period after 1990, will be noted. Then, general information about the demographics of Istanbul and the 2019 Local Elections will be given after presenting the general outlines of the political campaigns in Turkey and the world. In addition, Ekrem İmamoğlu's position in Turkish politics will be discussed in the last part of the literature review.

2.1. Political Ideologies

It is important to know and understand basic political ideologies and what they mean in order to understand the messages that political actors include in their communication works. Within this framework, in this sub-title, leftist and rightist political views will be defined and socialism, liberalism, conservatism, Islamism, and third-way ideologies will be discussed.

2.1.1. Left-Wing and Right-Wing Political Thought

Before explaining ideologies, we should define the term ideology. It is a set of ideas that support each other. In other words, it is a set of beliefs that affect individuals' thoughts and behaviors, both for themselves and for their interactions in the society they live in (Mardin 1997, p. 26). Ideologies can offer perspectives that either support or oppose the existing order (Heywood, 2019a, p. 41). According to Heywood (2019a, p. 41), ideologies present worldviews that form our point of view about the existing order, describe an ideal future to be reached, and draw a roadmap on how to reach this utopia they have created.

The concepts of right and left commonly used in the world started to be used actively in Turkey after the 1960s. While rightism is an ideology that is not open to change and does not want the established order in which it lives to be altered, but wants this order to be preserved, leftism is open to change and aims to improve the world and society (Hançerlioğlu, 1993, pp. 13-14,118). The emergence of the concepts of right and left took place in 1789 with the French Revolution. The first national assembly convened after the revolution was divided into two. Those who were open to change, sat on the left; those who supported the continuation of the old order, that is, those who wanted the preservations of the royal regime, sat on the right

(Hançerlioğlu, 1993, p. 14). A right-wing perspective is one the supporters of which cling to the existing order in order to protect their own interests, which are the most important assets they care about (Hançerlioğlu, 1993, p.13). According to the right-wing attitude, human-beings are selfish creatures who can easily harm each other for their interests, and the way to prevent this is either to go back to the old order or to protect the current order (Hançerlioğlu, 1993b, p. 14). Leftism, on the other hand, represents not only forward-thinking but also revolutionism. According to Ozankaya (1975, p. 86), leftism is the general name of the thoughts and activities that advocate the protection of the interests of the people both in the economy and in the political field, and in this direction, they are against the economic and political order brought about by the capitalist system to a certain extent. The idea of being on the left suggests the elimination of the conditions of human exploitation brought by the capitalist system, the increase in the welfare level of the people with social development, and the improvement of socio-economic conditions (Hançerlioğlu, 1993b, p. 119)..

According to Hançerlioğlu (1993b, p. 399), from the moment it started to be used, the left represented forward-looking, innovative thought, while the right represented reactionary and/or conservative thought. After the French Revolution of 1789, the bourgeois sitting on the left is sitting on the right in today's conditions. For this reason, the bourgeois class, which could be considered progressive under the conditions of that period, supports a reactionary idea in today's conditions (Hançerlioğlu, 1993b, p. 14).

2.1.2. Conservatism, Reactionism, and Islamism

Conservatism, reactionism, and Islamism are different ideologies, although they are often used as synonyms. It is therefore important to give a general definition of these concepts.

Conservatism reflects a mentality in which individuals resist social changes by turning to traditions, history, and experiences (Birler, 2013, p. 315; Heywood, 2018, p. 168). According to Ozankaya (1975, p. 104), conservatism is the other name of fanaticism, and it means being closed to all kinds of social change and supporting the continuation of the established social order at all costs. In the 1800s, it emerged as a reaction of the feudal class against the reforms and ideas of the French Revolution, liberalism, and the rise of the bourgeois class (Huntington, 1957, p. 454). According to Heywood (2019b, p. 91), as well, conservatism in the political context is an ideology that approaches innovations and changes with suspicion and/or resistance.

However, conservatism cannot be seen as a monolithic ideology. It is roughly divided into two in itself: traditional conservatism and the "New Right" (Heywood, 2019b, p. 91). Underlying traditional/classical conservatism's defense of traditional values and established institutions is its effort to provide a sense of security, stability, and rootedness and to protect the fragile fabric of society (Heywood, 2019b, p. 91). On the other hand, the New Right supports a simple but strong state structure formed by a liberal economy and an authoritarian society (Heywood, 2019b, p. 91). The New Right, also called neoconservatism, argues that ideas advocating multiculturalism, multiracialism, and tolerance alienate society from its own culture and values, and it opposes those ideas and identities that deviate from social morals and norms (Birler, 2013, p. 327). They believe that social norms and values should be protected both within national borders and on a global scale, even with aggressive moves when

necessary (Birler, 2013, p. 327). The military operations of the George W. Bush government in the Middle East in the 2000s after the September 11 attacks can be given as a clear example of this idea.

The thought of conservatism, as mentioned, includes elements such as the continuity of the fixed order, stability, and traditionalism. Religion is also closely related to these elements. It is because, according to conservative thought, religious institutions and organizations play an important role in ensuring stability in society (Birler, 2013, p. 323).

Apart from conservatism, which focuses on preserving the existing system, reactionism represents a more radical view. According to the dictionary definition of the Turkish Language Association, reactionary thought describes people and/or views that "do not attach importance to contemporary values and innovations in society, miss the old in every way, or try to live the old order" (Geric, n.d.). Those who adopt this idea argue that the problems of the current system can be solved by going back to a system in the past. They oppose innovation and progressive thinking. For example, Islamic reactionaries (or radical Islamists) advocate sharia law and want to reshape the state in accordance with sharia.

In this context, it is important to mention the concept of religious fundamentalism, which can be associated with conservatism and reactionary ideas. The concept of fundamentalism advocates a complete change of the political order (Hançerlioğlu, 1993a, p. 324). According to religious fundamentalism, religion is intertwined with politics, and they are inseparable concepts (Heywood, 2019b, p. 321). Religious fundamentalism is not unique to one religion. Within the members of every religion, there are individuals with fundamentalist thoughts. However, although some of them can continue to exist in the current order, some of them (for example, in

Islam) have fundamentalist attitudes (Heywood, 2019b, p. 321). Islamic fundamentalists argue that the state structure should be reorganized according to Islamic rules and that individuals should live according to these values. Nonetheless, according to some authors, Islamic fundamentalism may adopt different approaches and show itself as either radical or moderate Islam (Somer, 2007).

In Turkey, Islamism can be seen as an ideology that both diverges and intersects with conservatism and reactionism. Islamism is an idea that states that the state administration and social structure should be shaped in accordance with Islamic rules and that today's problems can be solved in this way (Gürel, 2013, p. 453). Despite this, Islamism interacts with the economic policies and class dynamics of the age and can become an ideology that does not try to change the status quo and can even support it (Gürel, 2013, p. 441).

2.1.3. Liberalism and Neoliberalism

We see that the first uses of the term liberal have various meanings, and the uses date back to the 14th century. While it was a term used in the Middle Ages for peasants or non-slaves working on behalf of the landlord on the land given to him by inheritance, it was also used to express the size of the portions of food and drink and to express meanings such as generosity (Heywood, 2019b, p. 47). The term's meaning has evolved over time and has become synonymous with the concepts of independence and freedom of choice (Heywood, 2019b, p. 47). The political use of the idea of liberalism was first seen in Spain in 1812. However, from the 1840s on, it spread in Europe as a political ideology, representing a different worldview (Heywood, 2019b, p. 47). Liberal ideology is an individualist ideology and puts the individual at the center (Heywood, 2019b, p. 47). The aim of enabling people to

achieve their individual interests and creating an environment in which individuals can realize themselves has been the greatest goal of liberalism (Heywood, 2019b, p. 47).

Liberal thought argues that individuals can make conscious decisions within the framework of reason and logic (Heywood, 2019b, p. 47). Although individuals have equal rights and freedoms within the framework of this ideology, their socioeconomic status in society depends on their skills, abilities, and determination to work (Heywood, 2019b, p. 47). That is, the status of individuals is closely related to the capital they have (cultural, social, economic, physical, etc.) and how much they can use these different forms of capital. In relation to this, it is important to say that the social order dominated by liberal thought is a phenomenon arising from the understanding of the capitalist market (Heywood, 2019b, p. 47-48).

It can be said that John Locke, who was born in England in 1632, was the thinker who laid the foundations of liberal thought. Locke wrote his first articles on politics and religion between 1660 and 1662 and was initially in favor of the English church. Later, when he was appointed as Lord Secretary and witnessed the economic and political changes of the country closely, his political thoughts changed with his observations and experiences (Toku, 2003, pp. 21,22). Locke stayed both in Netherlands and France for a while to question his experiences and met with Unitarianism during his stay in the Netherlands (Toku, 2003, p. 26). Locke, who says that people cannot lead a life alone by their nature and that they must live with other individuals within social structures, argues that people have equal freedoms, but they renounce these freedoms while living in society and political societies are formed by recognizing the state authority as the sovereign political power (Öztekin, 2014, p. .68). According to him, the most important duty of the state is to protect the laws

(Dacombe et al., 2017, pp. 106, 107). The state takes the role of an actor who neutralizes the conflicts in society (Dacombe et al., 2017, pp. 106, 107). Governments that fail to fulfill these duties, i.e., fail to observe, respect, or restrict the rights of the people, are not legitimate, according to Locke; the state cannot have absolute power (Dacombe et al., 2017, p. 106, 107). In short, Locke argues that the power and function of the state should be limited (Dacombe et al., 2017, p. 106, 107).

When speaking of liberal thought, it is important to examine this worldview in two different categories. These are classical liberalism and modern liberalism.

Classical liberal thought advocates minimal government intervention. According to this idea, the state is obliged to protect the rights of citizens and ensure their safety, but other than that, it cannot interfere with the lives of citizens. According to classical liberal thought, state interventions in the economic field are "both unnecessary and dangerous" (Heywood, 2018, p. 36). Modern liberal thought, on the other hand, acknowledges the social injustices brought about by capitalism and argues that the state can intervene in order to protect the freedoms of individuals and eliminate the emerging inequalities by redistribution policies (Heywood, 2018, p. 36).

Since the mid-1970s, the failure of political parties that adopted the social state understanding to fulfill their promises has led to a decrease in support for these parties (Özaydın, 2008, p. 171). Conservative parties also started to defend liberal ideas in the economy, with the increase in support for the parties that argue that the government will be brought to an effective position by cutting the expenditures they think are unnecessary (Özaydın, 2008, p. 171). The most important of these ideas is neoliberalism. Neoliberalism, which the private sector paved fully supported, became an ideology that paved the way for privatizations. In other words, neoliberalism, which might be regarded as the revival of classical liberalism, is an understanding in

which the power and functions of the state are reshaped for benefiting the private sector (Saad-Filho & Johnston, 2014, pp. 25, 26). Neoliberalism, which was implemented and developed with the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and US President Ronald Reagan administrations in the mid-1970s, is an ideology that support minimal state intervention in the economy (Saad-Filho & Johnston, 2014, p. 9). Although neoliberalism protects the interests of the wealthy minority in the society in which it is applied, it has increased social income inequality due to the fact that labor classes have to work with lower incomes and less job security (Saad-Filho & Johnston, 2014, p. 9). While the neoliberal policies were pioneered by Turgut Özal in Turkey, the two of the most prominent political actors who championed neoliberal policies in the West was Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. The foundations of these leaders' ideologies lied in the free-market and individualism. In an opening speech he gave for the Turkey's Strategic Priorities in Economy and Foreign Policy Symposium on 5 November 1991, Özal remarks that the role of the government should be minimized in favour of giving more importance to the role of the individual (Duman, 2011, p. 111). His belief was that more active, creative, and productive individuals would create a freer environment (Duman, 2011, p. 111, 112).

The process of privatization started with the Özal era in Turkey and continued with the sale of various state properties and public institutions to domestic and/or international private companies during the reign of the following governments (Kurmuş, 2009, pp. 23, 24). Liberalization of trade led to a tremendous increase in consumption opportunities and consumption has come to be identified with freedom (Kurmuş, 2009, p. 39).

2.1.4. Socialism and Social Democracy

The term “socialist” is derived from the Latin word “sociare,” meaning to unite and share (Heywood, 2019, p. 125). The term was first used in 1827 in the United Kingdom (Heywood, 2019, p. 125). In the 1840s, it became a widely used term in states such as France, Belgium, and Germany.

According to socialist thought, the means of production should belong to society and the value arising from these means of production should be equally distributed among the members of society. Although socialism first emerged to defend artisans and craftsmen against the factory production of industrial capitalism, it later turned into a movement that opposes the social and economic conditions created by the capitalist system and the exploitation of labor within factories themselves (Heywood, 2019a, p. 92). With its stance against capitalism, socialism has become an ideology that offers an important humanitarian and social alternative. Socialism became widespread as the proletariat became more conscious and wanted to obtain certain rights, and it forms the basis of the proletariat's struggle for legal and economic equality (Öztekin, 2014, p. 291). In addition to social equality, community consciousness, unity, and common ownership are other elements of socialist thought.

Socialist thought can basically be divided into two categories: revolutionary socialism and reformist socialism. While revolutionary socialism contends that a radical system change is required to achieve an egalitarian society, reformist socialism contends that the capitalist system can be reformed through constitutional changes, that the working class's income and working conditions can be improved through reforms (Heywood, 2019a, p. 92).

The ideas of Karl Marx lie on the basis of what we can call revolutionary socialism. According to Marx's materialist understanding of history, capitalism,

socialism, and communism are stages of historical development that will follow each other sequentially. For Marx, socialism is a kind of intermediate step in the transition from capitalism to communism (Çam & Kayaoğlu, 2015, p. 387, 388). According to Marx's critique of the capitalist system, the labor of the working class is exploited by capitalists who own the means of production. According to Marx, workers are forced to sell their labor for a certain wage. In this process, the surplus value resulting from their labor is confiscated by the capitalist. This means that the labor of the working class is exploited. This exploitation of labor will ultimately leave the working class impoverished and create the social conditions that will lead to revolution (The Marxist Critique of Capitalism, 2020). According to Marx, the capitalist system is full of contradictions (Anon, 2020) and the crises resulting from these contradictions are doomed to result in the collapse of the system because they wear people out economically. Marx argues that the overthrow of the capitalist system and its replacement by a classless system, in which workers own the means of production themselves and where labor value is distributed fairly and equitably, will abolish this exploitation. As a result, Marx thinks that the transition from capitalism to socialism and ultimately to communism can occur as a result of a revolutionary process and predicts that this revolution will occur with the uprising of the proletariat (Çam & Kayaoğlu, 2015, p. 387).

Unlike revolutionary socialism, reformist socialism argues that with the constitutional reforms made within the capitalist system, a transition from the capitalist system to the socialist system can be made and an egalitarian society can be created. Reformist socialism, which started to spread in the late 1800s, aims to reach this egalitarian society by improving the working conditions of workers, increasing their wages, encouraging unionization, and supporting the growth of socialist political

parties (Heywood, 2019a, p. 92). According to reformist socialism, income distribution should be based on moral principles rather than capitalist market rules (Heywood, 2018, p. 377). This branch of socialism has also started to be called social democracy over time (Heywood, 2019a, p. 92). While social democracy defends the working class's right to work in more prosperous conditions, the concepts of equality and justice for all form the basis of social democracy (Emre, 2019, p. 91). However, although the idea of social democracy emerged from the idea of reformist socialism, and while the reformist socialists in the late 1800s advocated the idea that a socialist society would be achieved as a result of their efforts, in today's context, social democrats limited themselves to the idea of reforming and maintaining the capitalist system (Saraçoğlu, 2013, p. 366). Social democracy, in other words, represents non-revolutionary leftist thought (Saraçoğlu, 2013, p. 363). The idea of social democracy has become a mentality that aims to establish a balance between state intervention and a free-market economy (Heywood, 2019b, p. 156).

As a result of the rise of neoliberalism, social democracy made certain concessions after the 1980s in order to maintain its validity against changing economic and social conditions. However, this did not stop its loss of political power (Heywood, 2019b, p. 156), so some social-democratic wings were forced to adopt ideas like increased market efficiency and individualism in order to maintain power (Heywood, 2019b, p. 158). In some countries, the idea of social democracy has even moved away from Enlightenment principles, giving more weight to religious discourses than before, breaking away from socialist thought and staying closer to the right rather than the left, and it has become a thought resembling conservatism and liberalism (Heywood, 2019b, p. 157, 158). As a result, according to some critics,

social democracy has been absorbed within the capitalist system and has been cut off from its essence today.

2.1.5. The Third Way

New projects, new ideas and ideologies have developed in order to increase the welfare of the society as a result of the proliferation of factories that engage in mass production and massive rural to urban migration as well as the economic problems of small capital and the working class who have to live on very low wages while large enterprises earn a lot of money (Yağcı, 2007, p. 71). One of them is the phenomenon of the Third Way. According to Giddens (2000, p. 9), the start of deindustrialization in western countries towards the end of the 1970s, the gradual decrease in welfare state practices, and the loss of Marxism's power are major factors in the emergence of the Third Way.

From the Third Way point of view, the left or communist view that puts the collective good in the center focuses too much on income distribution and does not pay enough attention to income production, while the liberal view that puts the individual interest at the center is too individualistic and does not give enough importance to the well-being of society (Driver & Martell, 1999, p. 148, 149).

Although the Third Way is likened to social democracy in that it resembles neither the right nor the left, it adopts different values from social democracy in certain aspects and puts different elements in the foreground, as seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1*Social Democracy vs. Third Way*

TENSIONS WITHIN ... SOCIALISM (2)		
Social democracy	v.	Third way
ideological	↔	pragmatic
nation-state	↔	globalization
industrial society	↔	information society
class politics	↔	community
mixed economy	↔	market economy
full employment	↔	full employability
concern for underdog	↔	meritocracy
social justice	↔	opportunity for all
eradicate poverty	↔	promote inclusion
social rights	↔	rights and responsibilities
cradle-to-grave welfare	↔	welfare-to-work
social-reformist state	↔	competition/market state

Note: Table by Heywood (2021, p. 100)

The third way seeks to create a synthesis by taking the "best" of left and right views. The state encourages economic production but also provides social equality (Driver & Martell, 1999, p. 150). In this way, a balanced structure with a high level of welfare and social equality is achieved. In his election campaigns, Tony Blair, the leader of the Labor Party, the major left-wing party in England, redefined the traditional left as the "Third Way/New Way" and changed his policies along this line (Çankaya, 2019, p. 245).

In brief, we could say that the Third Way is a form of social democracy which stills adopts the traditional goals of the left and aims to eliminate social and economic inequality yet is renewed to achieve these goals and self-adapted to neoliberalism (Çankaya, 2019, p. 245).

2.2. Turkish Political History

A new era formation began in Turkish political history with the opening of the Turkish Grand National Assembly in Ankara on April 23, 1920 and the establishment of the republican regime on October 29, 1923. The most important feature of the newly opened parliament was that it was a national assembly which consisted of people from all walks of life, from civil servants to self-employed people, from healthcare professionals to tribal chiefs (Atabay, 2015, p. 84-85). In addition, it was a democratic assembly of people with different views and thoughts (Atabay, 2015, p.84-85). Abdülmecit Efendi, who was elected by the parliament as the new caliph on November 18, 1922, after Sultan Vahdettin left Istanbul and the sultanate was abolished, began to gain strength from those who supported the old regime both with the political speeches he gave and the religious ceremonies he organized (Atabay, 2015, p.101). The attitudes of those who were against the new regime caused a pro-caliphate attitude, which started to become a major obstacle for the planned revolutions and transformations (Atabay, 2015, p. 102).

The name of the first and only political party, "People's Party," which was in parliament at the time of the proclamation of the Republic on October 29, 1923, was changed to "Republican People's Party" with the word "Republican" added on November 10, 1924 (Karpas 2020, p. 23). In 1935, the "Republican People's Party" changed its name again and adopted the name "Republican People's Party" (Tarihçe, n.d.).

The Caliphate was abolished on March 3, 1924 (Koçak, 2003, p. 135–136). Thus, those who supported the caliphate and the old regime ceased to be a threat to the new Republic of Turkey, and the use of religion against the revolutions to be made was prevented (Koçak, 2003, p. 136). (Koçak, 2003, p. 136). With the disappearance

of religious authority, the Directorate of Religious Affairs was established as an institution under the control of the government (Koçak, 2003, p. 136).

The newly established Turkey took a new step by developing the constitution written in 1920. The first constitution that established the Republic as a democratic regime was accepted on April 20, 1924. On April 10, 1928, the sentence "The religion of the Turkish state is Islam" was also removed from the constitution (Atabay, 2015, p. 104). On December 5, 1934, a second regulation was made in the first constitution with an arrangement that included women's enfranchisements before many other countries in the world (Atabay, 2015, p. 105).

Since these radical decisions caused unrest among those who adopted a conservative and Islamic understanding, some political parties with reactionary mentalities were established. About a year after the proclamation of the Republic, an opposition group resigned from the Republican People's Party and founded the Progressive Republican Party on November 17, 1924, of which Kazım Pasha was the chairman of the board of directors (Koçak, 2005, p. 140). The Progressive Republican Party (TCF) had a liberal identity both politically and economically (Koçak, 2005, p. 140). With the Sheikh Said Uprising that emerged in Eastern Turkey in February 1925, Turkish politics advanced to a different point, and the government closed the Progressive Republican Party on June 3, 1925 (Koçak, 2005, p. 142) (Koçak, 2005, p. 142). After the Sheikh Said Uprising, Turkey started the single-party period again.

The effects of the Great Depression in 1929 were also felt in Turkey (Koçak, 2005, p. 147), which had already come out of the war and experienced economic and political difficulties. According to Atatürk, an opposition party that could criticize the government and express its ideas in parliament should be established, and the Free Republican Party (SCF), which adopted the liberal economic view, was founded on

August 12, 1930 (Koçak, 2005, p. 147). As a result of the disagreements that started in the parliament and the economic and political differences between the two parties, the Turkish Grand National Assembly started the single-party period again with the closure of the Free Republican Party on November 17, 1930 (Koçak, 2005, p. 149). On December 23, 1930, Mehmet Kabilay was beheaded and murdered in the Islamist uprising known as the Menemen Incident. This action, which was carried out in connection with the Naqshbandi sect, showed that the reaction to the new regime was continuing. Some historians (Koçak 2005, p. 149) associate the Menemen Incident (Atabay 2015, p. 110) with the closure of the Free Republican Party, in fact.

CHP is a party founded on keeping certain principles at the forefront and not deviating from them. The principles of Republicanism, Nationalism, Populism, and Secularism were accepted at the party congress held in 1927, and at the congress that lasted for eight days in May 1931, the principles of Revolutionism and Statism were added to the four previously accepted principles (Koçak, 2005, p. 133).

Briefly explaining CHP's principles of "6 Arrows" will clarify its ideology and political line. First, the principle of republicanism defends the supremacy of the republican regime, which prioritizes national sovereignty (Parla 1992, p. 40). For Atatürk, republicanism was an indispensable and permanent form of state administration for Turkey (Anon 1963, p. 10). A democratic state was established with the republican regime, in which the people decided to rule instead of the sultanate where the authority was passed down from father to son (Kayıran & Metintaş, 2018, p. 10).

Nationalism emerged from the French Revolution with the goal of defending the idea that the nation should be the foundation of political formation (Heywood, 2019b, p. 206). Towards the end of the 19th century, it was adopted with national

anthems, flags, and national celebration days, and while it was associated with progressive ideologies until then, it later turned into an ideology adopted by conservative and reactionary ideologies (Heywood, 2019b, p. 203). According to the concept of nationalism, every citizen living within the borders of the Republic of Turkey, speaking Turkish, knowing Turkish culture, and knowing the importance of the Turkish ideal is Turkish, regardless of their religious belief or ethnic origin (Anon 1938, p. 10). Nationalism in this sense is not racist but a unifying principle (Akşin, 2005a, p. 117). That is, the principle of nationalism ensures that every citizen living in the Republic of Turkey is equal before the law, regardless of their ethnic origin or religious belief.

According to the principle of populism, the people should always enjoy the priority, and the state must fulfill the necessary responsibilities to the citizen (Anon 1938, p. 10). Populism also means the equality of all citizens, regardless of income level, education level, class, ethnic origin, or religious belief, before the law (Anon 1938, p. 10). Since populism brought the equality of the rich and the poor before the law, it prevented granting of extra privileges by birth.

The purpose of the principle of statism is to use public goods and services for the people to increase their welfare level and strengthen the national economy, and it involves taking measures against economic difficulties that the people will experience (Parla, 1992, p. 47). Not giving privileges to certain individuals in economic affairs and adopting an equal approach to every individual from the public is another dimension of statism (Parla, 1992).

The principle of secularism has been one of the most discussed ones. According to the congress decision taken by CHP in 1927, the Republic of Turkey should be governed not by rules set by religion, but by the laws enacted by the

parliament on behalf of the nation. In other words, the religions and beliefs of Turkish citizens should not be mixed with state affairs. The principle means that religion has no place in state affairs (Anon 1938, p. 12). According to Parla (1992, p. 45), the aim of secularism was also to modernize the country and catch up with modern nations of the West.

According to the principle of secularism, since there are people from different religions and beliefs in society, it is important that the state is at an equal distance from every belief group so that there will be a principle of equality in social areas such as education, health, law, and security, which are under the control of the state. If people's beliefs and religious thoughts interfere with these institutions of the state, equality between people will deteriorate. Therefore, secularism sees religion as an individual matter and does not want religious influence on any institution of the state (Ertit, 2014, p. 109).

The word "revolution" represents not contending with the status quo and seeking radical transformation. Some of the changes brought about after the establishment of the Republic, such as women's enfranchisement and the acceptance of the Latin Alphabet, are among the greatest revolutions ever made in Turkish history. The principle of revolutionism aims to protect these changes. As such, according to Akşin (2005a, p. 118), revolutionism takes every step required for innovation, enlightenment, forward-looking development, and modernization.

The Republican People's Party (CHP) was in power alone from the establishment of the Republic until 1945 (Karpas 2020, p. 19). During its time in power, it opened many banks and factories, courts were established in many districts of Turkey, and some land was distributed to landless farmers with the Land Law (Anon 1963, pp. 22,25,26). The activities of CHP in that period were not limited to

these. CHP, which made many innovations in health, added rabies and tuberculosis to the fight against diseases such as malaria and syphilis, and prevented the spread of such diseases (Anon 1963, p. 26). Important and big steps were taken in foreign policy as well. With the 1936 Montreux Treaty, the straits that were within the borders of Turkey were completely taken under the control of Turkey, and Hatay was taken into the borders of the Republic of Turkey in 1939 (40 Years in the Service of the Nation, CHP, 1963, p. 28).

Although efforts to transition to a multi-party system were unsuccessful until 1945, İsmet İnönü, who became president after Atatürk's death in 1938 supported the formation of opposition parties as a means of both liberalizing Turkish politics and responding to democratic criticisms of the winning countries of World War II (Karpas 2020, p. 30). Thus, the political history of Turkey entered a brand-new multi-party period as of 1945.

According to the results of the July 21 elections in 1946, CHP came to power again, but it was no longer the only party in parliament. The elections of May 14, 1950 were the first loss for CHP, and the Democratic Party won the elections with a large margin, receiving 52.7 percent of the votes (Atabay 2015, p. 151). While CHP had been the ruling party until then, it became the opposition party for the first time. Thus, a new era began in the political history of Turkey. In the same election, CHP received 39.4 percent of the votes, while the Nation Party (MP) had 3.1 percent and the independents 0.4 percent (Atabay 2015, p. 151).

On May 20, 1950, the Democratic Party (DP), which had a majority of 415 deputies in the parliament, nominated Celal Bayar, who was the leader of the party between 1946 and 1950, as its presidential candidate, and Celal Bayar became the president on May 22, 1950 (Atabay 2015, p. 151). On June 2, 1950, Adnan Menderes

became the new chairman of the party and took office as the prime minister (Atabay 2015, p. 152). Adnan Menderes' appointment started a new era for Turkey, both economically, politically, and culturally. DP changed the language of the call for prayer (*ezan*) from Turkish to Arabic in 1950 (Avşar & Kaya, 2017, p. 128), which was an example of the use of religion in politics and a political move by DP to get more support from conservative groups (Avşar & Kaya, 2017, p. 128). DP also removed İsmet İnönü's name from school textbooks (Atabay 2015, p. 153). Besides, in 1951, religion lessons were added to the curriculum in primary schools, and village institutes were closed in 1954 (Atabay 2015, p.155-156). On the other hand, the Nation Party, which was founded in 1948, was closed in 1953 by the DP government since anti-secular people were in the party's administration (Karpaz 2020, p. 41), which shows the pragmatist attitude of DP in the way it dealt with religious politics.

In addition to these, DP enacted the "Foreign Capital Investments Encouragement Law" on August 1, 1921, to strengthen foreign capital in Turkey, paving the way for foreign capital investments in many important fields, from underground mines to transportation, from energy to tourism (Eroğul, 2014, p. 144). DP not only paved the way for foreign capital but also supported the country's bourgeoisie. In August 1950, the Turkish Industrial Development Bank was established (Eroğul, 2014, p. 138). DP, did not give the working class the right to strike, on the other hand, and did not allow the establishment of the "Workers Committee" that the working class wanted to establish before the 1954 elections (Eroğul, 2014, p. 201).

DP exploited the fact that it had far more deputies in parliament than CHP; it controlled the majority of local administrations, and the state institutions almost belonged to the governing political party. Those who voted for the DP staged violent

protests throughout İnönü's country tours in order to prevent CHP from gaining popularity, and the governor of Balıkesir refused to allow him to speak in public (Zürcher 2021, p. 259). Moreover, the People's Houses, which CHP founded and where the people were educated in various fields, were transferred to the State Treasury (Akşin 2005, p. 216). The damage done by DP to CHP was not limited to these. In 1953, DP turned having the majority of the deputies in the parliament into an opportunity and passed a new law. With this law, it transferred all the assets of CHP, including everything inherited from Atatürk, to the Treasury (Akşin 2005, p.216).

In the elections held in 1954, DP received 57.6 percent of the vote, CHP 35.4 percent, the Republican Nation Party (CMP) 4.9 percent, the Turkish Peasant Party (TKP) 0.6 percent, and the independents 1.5 percent (Atabay 2015, p. 157). This result was again a great success for DP. The fact that CHP's property and revenues were confiscated and that the party could not carry out the necessary works for the elections due to its lack of sufficient financial resources had a great impact on the success of DP.

As DP got stronger, it brought new sanctions and increased its pressure particularly on the opposition., When the leader of the Nation Party, leader Osman Bölükbaşı became a deputy from Kırşehir in 1954, DP made Kırşehir a district as punishment, and Malatya, which voted high for CHP in the same elections, was divided as punishment with the establishment of Adıyaman province. Similarly, Kocaeli, which voted for Nihat Erim in the 1954 elections, was divided and the province of Sakarya was established (Karpaz 2020, p. 158). DP imposed additional sanctions, relying on the large number of votes and deputies it received. Civil servants who voted for CHP were punished, the retirement law was amended, and the liquidation of CHP members both in universities and other state institutions began

(Göktepe 2012a, p.369). The pressures of the Menderes government on CHP were not limited to these. DP attempted to disperse the congresses held by CHP by inflicting heavy penalties and bad on the administrators who allowed them, and even tried to intimidate them with death threats. Also, it blocked the freedom of the press by closing newspapers and magazines that supported CHP (Bila 2008, p. 143).

Despite the power of the Menderes government, the unending economic troubles were causing the people to experience hard times. The large hikes made by the DP government, especially on monopoly products and necessities such as clothing, coal, paper, and transportation vehicles, further reduced the purchasing power of the people and made it more difficult to make a living (Atabay 2015, p. 159).

Another negative political development in the Menderes period was the events of September 6-7, 1955. The provocation of the people with fake news and propaganda presented in newspapers, radios, and magazines caused the looting of non-Muslims' houses and workplaces and resulted in great victimization of non-Muslim citizens (Trust 2005, p. 147). According to Ortaylı (2011, p. 98), the reason why the events grew so much was that the government tried to turn the policy it implemented with these provocations into an advantage, but lost control of the events. As a result of the protests that started after the news that Atatürk's house was bombed in Thessaloniki, great damage was done to the workplaces and homes of non-Muslims (Atabay 2015, p. 160). Although the government denied the news in Thessaloniki, Adnan Menderes reacted negatively to the accuracy and proof of the news about attacks against non-Muslims in the press, and upon this, nine deputies were expelled from the party, while ten deputies resigned voluntarily (Atabay 2015, p. 160).

The pressures of Menderes on both the opposition and the public increased the distrust and uneasiness towards the government. Especially after the events of

September 6-7, attitudes and behaviors involving repression, such as martial law, intervention and censorship in the press, political interventions in universities, and the use of radio, one of the most effective mass media of that period, as a propaganda tool by DP, caused the majority of those who voted for the party to turn against it (Göktepe 2012a, p. 370).

In the 1957 elections, DP received 47.9 percent of the vote, CHP received 41.0 percent, the Republican Nation Party received 7.1 percent, the Freedom Party (HP) received 3.8 percent, and independent candidates received 0.1 percent (Türk & Tuncer 1995, p. 62). There were rumors about corruption in the elections in Gaziantep, a large city in Southeastern Turkey, making the election results questionable (Atabay 2015, p.162). By increasing its pressure, the Menderes government did not allow CHP to participate in the Republic Day celebrations. In addition to arresting important members of CHP and imposing a broadcast ban on the murder of one of the citizens protesting the Gaziantep events in Mersin, it prevented the freedom of the people to receive information (Atabay 2015, p. 162).

In particular, the year 1957 was very important for CHP. At CHP's Karamürsel congress, a speech by a mute citizen enthusiastically registering with the party was a big step for CHP to raise hopes again (Bila 2008, p. 143). In the same year, CHP increased its communication with the trade unions for the first time since its establishment, and CHP members did not give in to the Menderes pressure and visited all the cities in Turkey, either collectively or individually, and established close contact with the people (Bila 2008, p. 143). While CHP won the people's love and trust again with an effective and strong opposition at the time, it also told the public for the first time with a successful performance about the state of the economy and

how DP abused political rights (Bila 2008, p. 143). The effective opposition of CHP gave positive results in favor of the party.

Towards the 1960s, İsmet İnönü entered a period of strength again by receiving support from intellectuals, universities, and the press, despite the pressures of Adnan Menderes on him and CHP (Göktepe, 2012b, p.405). In particular, the support given to CHP by the intelligentsia was very effective in the rise of the party. While DP gained 421 seats in parliament in the 1957 elections, CHP had 127 deputies, and although DP won the elections, the opposition's overall vote rate increased to 51.4 percent together with the other political parties, and DP lost votes despite the pressures and obstacles it implemented (Bila 2008, p.150). As this loss of votes caused DP to increase its pressure on both the opposition and the people, a great unrest started in the country. The fear of losing the power of the government has increased the dose of political restrictions implemented by DP so much so that İsmet İnönü, who went to Uşak, where he had fought so hard during the Independence War years, was attacked with stones and sticks, and similar attacks against CHP were seen in other provinces (Bila 2008, p. 157). Pressures on a leader like İsmet İnönü, who fought in the Independence War and was one of the founders of Atatürk's party, also caused discontent in the army. Especially since 1955, reasons such as the gradual deterioration of the country's economy, the increase in inflation, and the insufficient development despite the use of the country's gold resources caused army officers to react against DP (Göktepe 2012a, p. 370).

As a result of this tense political environment, the first military intervention in Turkey's history took place on May 27, 1960. This military movement is called a coup by the right whereas those who implemented it said to have made a revolution. The trial of the DP members and the making of a more democratic constitution were a

blow for the right, in fact. The soldiers who carried out the coup called themselves the National Unity Committee (MBK), and the administration of MBK in the country continued until the 15 October 1961 elections (Göktepe 2012b, p. 395). MBK tried former members of DP, deputies and businessmen who were thought to be related to government corruption, as well as local administrators and policemen who were thought to be effective in the armed incidents that caused universities to go into conflict and chaos (Göktepe 2012b, p. 396). As a result of the decisions announced on September 15, 1961, two former ministers, Fatin Rüştü Zorlu and Hasan Polatkan, were executed on September 16, 1961, and former Prime Minister Adnan Menderes on September 17, 1961 (Göktepe 2012b, p. 396). Former President Celal Bayar was first sentenced to life imprisonment due to his age but was released on November 11, 1964 on the excuse of his health problems (Göktepe 2012b, p. 396). With the first military coup in the Republic of Turkey, a prime minister was executed, and military power took over the administration. Turkey was ruled by members of the army from May 27, 1961 until October 15, 1961 (Göktepe, 2012c, p. 407).

According to Özdemir (2005, p. 228), the soldiers and officers who made a revolution on May 27 took a step towards the modernization of democracy, which had declined with the pressures of the Menderes government, and the new 1961 constitution contributed to the advancement of leftist thought and created a more democratic political environment for many groups, from students to the working classes.

One of the most important features of the new constitution was that it was submitted to a popular vote, namely a referendum. Thus, Turkey's first referendum was held. The new constitution was adopted on July 9, 1961, with a 61.7 percent “Yes” (Atabay 2015, p. 188). With the decision of the National Unity Committee, the

establishment of political parties was allowed on February 13, 1961, for the continuation of the multi-party system, and after that date, about 20 short and long-lived parties were established in Turkey (Atabay 2015, p. 190). One of these parties, the Justice Party (AP), was very influential in Turkish politics from the 1960s on. The Justice Party, the Republican Peasant Nation Party (CKMP), and the New Turkey Party (YTP) were very similar to DP in terms of ideology, and these parties claimed to be the continuation of DP (Atabay 2015, p. 195). The elections held on October 15, 1961 had an important feature. For the first time, Turkey would be governed by a coalition government because no party had gained a majority in parliament. The CHP-AP coalition was formed on November 20, 1961 (Göktepe 2012c, p. 402). This coalition did not last long, as the AP was the continuation of the DP, though (Atabay 2015, pp. 199, 201).

The fact that CHP formed a coalition with AP in the 1961 elections caused reactions from some sects within CHP (Bila 2008, p. 168). Young members resigned from CHP en masse on the grounds that the necessary steps to reinforce the revolution were not taken (Bila 2008, p. 176). Despite the ministerial changes made by the party in the coalition government, the unrest in CHP did not end (Bila 2008, p. 17). While AP increased its vote rate, CHP was again exposed to the loss of votes due to the disagreements within CHP. In addition, with the beginning of the Cyprus problem as a result of the pressures of the Greeks against the Turks in late 1963, the USA wanted a prime minister supporting its policy in Cyprus (Çaylak & Baran 2012, p. 435). The foreign press also supported Demirel in the same period and was effective in the overthrow of the İnönü government (Çaylak & Baran 2012, p. 435).

Upon the death of AP Chairman Ragıp Gümüşpala in 1964, Süleyman Demirel was elected as the party chairman (Atabay, 2015, p. 191). Thus, the period of

Süleyman Demirel, who was in very important positions in the history of Turkey for many years, began. In the election of October 10, 1965, AP came to power with a large margin of votes, and Süleyman Demirel became the new prime minister. AP received 52.9 percent, CHP received 28.7 percent, CKMP received 2.2 percent, TIP received 3.0 percent, YTP received 3.7 percent, and the independents received 3.2 percent of the votes (Türk & Tuncer 1995, p. 64).

Another significant aspect of the 1965 elections was that the socialists entered parliament with a party for the first time. When the Workers' Party of Turkey (TIP), which was founded in 1961, entered the Turkish Grand National Assembly in the 1965 election, they expressed domestic and foreign policy problems that had not been discussed before in the parliament (Özdemir 2005b, pp. 250-251).

1965 was also an important year of change for CHP. The terms "CHP" and "social democrat" were used together for the first time in the history of CHP, and with the emergence of the "Left of the Center" idea, the concepts of "social justice," "revolution," and "statism" began to find a large place in the political language used by CHP (Bila 2008, p.182,183). Although right-wing parties, particularly the ruling party AP, attempted to portray CHP as a communist and ultra-leftist party in their propaganda against CHP, İsmet İnönü continued to call its party "left of the center" in his speeches to clear up the public's confusion and to explain this concept to the public (Bila 2008, p.184).

The concept of the "left of the center" is a transformation that includes social justice as a response to the increase in the ranks of the working and middle-income classes due to industrialization and, accordingly, due to the increase in rural-to-urban migration (Emre 2019, p. 43). However, this concept was not enough for CHP to

come to power in 1965. A sect within CHP, which was against this concept and presented itself as the "right of the center," did not give the necessary support to CHP in those elections. An example of this was seen in 1966. The leaders of the party were so reactive to the left of the center idea that no one used this concept before the partial senate elections except Bülent Ecevit (Bila 2008, p.188).

Disagreements between the party chairman, İsmet İnönü, and the other party executives were one of the most important factors in the continuation of the unrest within CHP, which lost power. The result did not change in the 1969 elections, and AP came to power alone again. The electoral base of AP, which was a right-wing party, consisted of peasants and middle-income people, as did DP (Zürcher 2021, p. 292). On the other hand (Zürcher 2021, p. 292), young people and intellectuals in universities increasingly adopted leftist views during the decade.

The freer environment brought by the 1961 constitution allowed the establishment of many new journals. Among the most influential of these, the journals *Yön*, *Devrim*, and *Aydınlık* were left-wing publications and appealed to a wide readership (Zürcher 2021, p. 292). By 1965, idea clubs had existed in all universities, and students who were members of TİP established a national communication network as the "Federation of Idea Clubs." Those with right-wing ideologies, especially Islamists, were largely upset with these developments on the left. AP, like DP, did not tolerate opposition, particularly from the left, and those on the left sought alternative solutions (Akın 2012, p.385). Due to these alternative searches, there was a great decline in the popularity of CHP.

While some leftists were looking for new parties, right-leaning members were uncomfortable with the party leaders of CHP. As a matter of fact, the conservatives in the party later left the party and established a new party. Despite İnönü's efforts to

protect CHP's administration from disintegrating at the 1967 convention, CHP suffered a heavy internal blow with the resignation of more than thirty deputies and fifteen senators (Bila 2008, p.19). Those who left CHP founded the Trust Party (GP), which adopted a conservative view under the chairmanship of Turhan Feyzioğlu in 1967. But the party, which entered the parliament with 15 deputies in the 1969 elections, could not be successful in the next period (Çaylak & Baran 2012, p. 446, 447).

There were divisions and disagreements in AP, as well, before the 1969 elections. After Demirel expelled the deputies who did not support him in the budget negotiations in 1970, the deputies who left the party re-established the Democrat Party, but the party was not successful in politics (Çaylak & Baran 2012, p. 448, 449). The Turkey Unity Party (TBP), the party founded by Alevis in 1966, entered parliament with 8 deputies in the 1969 elections, despite not reaching the masses sufficiently and not being successful enough in organizing across the provinces (Çaylak & Baran 2012, p.448,449). TBP, which was the first party founded upon the Alevi identity, became very influential in in gaining Alevis' support for the left, however (Çaylak & Baran 2012, p.450, 451). In the same period, while the left movement gained power, the right wing, especially Islamists, began to unite among themselves and establish parties. Alparslan Türkeş, who was a member of the MBK and read the coup declaration on May 27 on the radio and was to take part in Turkish politics for many years until then, joined CKMP in 1965 and changed the name of the party to the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) in 1969 with the ideologies of "Turkism" and "Turanism" (Çaylak & Baran 2012, p. 450, 451). Regarding the strengthening of leftist movements as separatism, Türkeş saw the youth movement as a threat and therefore established the Idealist Hearts (*Ülkü Ocakları*) in 1969. In the

same period, Islamist groups did not stay idle and started their political activities more openly. Necmettin Erbakan, who founded the National Order Party (MNP), which prioritized Islamic views, in 1970, also took part in Turkish politics for many years. Erbakan, who entered parliament as an independent candidate from Konya in 1969, criticized AP for deviating from Islam (Zürcher 2021, p. 295). Erbakan, who prioritized religion in his political ideas and discourse, played an important role in the influence of political Islam in Turkey over the years (Çaylak and Baran 2012, p. 450). Erbakan criticized AP for its economic policies dependent on foreign capital and for its distance from Islam, and always used Islam in party activities (Zürcher 2021, p. 295). Necmettin Erbakan, who was a student of Sheikh Mehmet Zahit Kotku, the leader of the İskenderpasha Community affiliated to the Nakshibendi Order, founded the MNP with the support he received from this order (Zürcher 2021, p. 295). Sometimes openly and sometimes from behind, religious orders (*tarikatlara*) have always been in contact with influential political actors of each period because the Islamic trend in Turkish politics has always had an important and effective place since the proclamation of the republic (Çandar 2013, p. 224). Political actors associated with religious communities include not only Erbakan, but also future presidents such as Turgut Özal and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (Zürcher 2021, p. 295).

Although AP came to power in the 1969 elections, the unity and solidarity of the workers, and especially university students, became stronger. This situation was seen as a danger by AP, by the USA, which supported the AP government at that time, and by the large urban and rural capital in Turkey (Çandar 2013, p. 191). The fact that the youth movement, generally known as the 1968 Generation, was especially against American imperialism, confirms this. After the 6th Fleet of the USA Navy came to Istanbul in 1969, some American officers were beaten and thrown into the sea

by the protesting youth, and the conflicts between the right and left intensified (Çaylak and Baran 2012, p. 448).

AP, which won the 1969 elections, could not prevent the clashes in the streets and could not produce new projects and solutions for the Turkish economy (Zürcher 2021, p. 296). On March 12, 1971, the military government seized power for the second time. The environment of freedom, which was established with the 1960 revolution, received great wounds due to this coup. While some members of CHP supported this military coup, others, especially Bülent Ecevit, opposed it, and Bülent Ecevit resigned from CHP's general secretariat (Bila 2008, p. 208). The leftists, who likened this coup to the 1960 revolution, later realized that this coup was actually a blow to the left (Zürcher 2021, p. 296). In that coup, which was carried out to weaken leftist thought, the Workers' Party of Turkey (TİP) was dissolved. Also, the Islamist MNP party, whose chairman was Necmettin Erbakan, was dissolved, but Erbakan founded the National Salvation Party (MSP) in 1972 with the same beliefs and ideology without being legally tried. MHP members were not prosecuted either (Zürcher 2021, p. 298).

The coup plotters punished thousands of socialists and democrats, including writers, trade unionists, academics, and students, with heavy prison sentences and exiled some of them (Özdemir 2005a, p. 266). Those who carried out the March 12 coup d'état expelled the soldiers and officers known for supporting the left from the Turkish Armed Forces (Atabay 2015, p.225). One of the biggest blows to the left in this period was the death sentences. Despite İsmet İönü's application to the Constitutional Court to have the death penalty reversed, the execution of three revolutionary leaders of the youth movement was carried out because the majority in parliament, particularly AP, approved the execution (Özdemir 2005b, p. 266). Deniz

Gezmiş, Yusuf Arslan, and Hüseyin İnan were executed on May 6, 1972, while a strict attitude towards the left was being displayed (Çandar 2013, p. 206). AP, which inherited the DP's legacy, sought vengeance on Menderes and the other executed ministers. The March 12 coup d'état restricted the freedom environment brought by the 1961 constitution and shows that it was the product of an extremely authoritarian mentality with torture and killings (Çandar 2013, p. 207). In addition, the coup administration made changes to the 1961 constitution with more anti-democratic articles (Çandar 2013, p. 210).

This process was painful for CHP, too. Following internal party strife, İnönü resigned as chairman on May 8, 1972, and Bülent Ecevit was elected CHP's leader on May 15, 1972 (Bila 2008, p.228, 231). Thus, a new era started in CHP. Ecevit, who steered his political life when CHP announced itself to be the left of the center, further elaborated on this concept, arguing that democracy should not be merely formal or political; on the contrary, it should be an egalitarian democracy with solid social foundations (Emre 2019, p. 43). These discourses by Ecevit greatly affected everyone in the party. Turkey, which was ruled by the coup plotters from March 12, 1971 until October 14, 1973, returned to civilian rule with the 1973 elections (Özdemir 2005b, p. 269). The 1973 elections were surprising in terms of their results. Despite the negative effects of the coup administration, CHP emerged as the party that received the most votes in the election, but the votes it received were not enough for it to come into power alone.

The distribution of the votes in the 1973 elections was as follows: CHP got 33.3%, AP 29.8%, and MSP 11.8% (Bila 2008, p. 242). The effect of the left of the center idea on CHP's increasing popularity was great. Parties on the right had a great influence on the decrease in the votes of AP, on the other hand.

In the 1973 elections, a coalition government was established due to the failure of a single party to come to power. After several unsuccessful coalition attempts, the CHP-MSP government was established (Bila 2008, p. 242). The coalition of these two parties, which differed completely in their ideological approaches, lasted 7.5 months (Bila 2008, p. 243). The two parties in this coalition agreed on foreign policy, and despite the USA's unwillingness, opium poppy production, which was banned by the coup plotters of March 12, was resumed. When the USA did not get what it wanted, it cut off its military aid and imposed an embargo on Turkey (Fedayi 2012, p. 501). Besides this, one of the most important events of the CHP-MSP coalition period was undoubtedly the Cyprus Peace Operation. The coalition government led by Ecevit, which carried out two major military operations, ensured security in those parts of the island where Turks lived (Özdemir 2005a, p. 272).

After the 1973 elections, different coalitions were established. In the country, there were problems in the state administration, economy, and foreign policy. In that period, AP leader Demirel also gave great support to ultra-nationalist and fascist paramilitary groups. Demirel's statement, "You cannot make me say that right-wingers are committing murder," was an important indicator of this support (Çandar 2013, p. 243). In 1975, the armed attacks of ultra-nationalists increased, and one was carried out against Ecevit and the CHP convoy in Gerede by the group led by AP Deputy Ahmet Çakmak (Çandar 2013, p. 244).

While the atmosphere of chaos and oppression was growing, Labor Day was celebrated by DİSK (Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions of Turkey) in 1976 in Taksim Square (Çandar 2013, p. 245). The celebration of May 1, 1977 was recorded in history as "Bloody May 1". A few days before the celebrations, although the right press wrote that there would be an "incident" in Taksim, and during the

celebrations 36 citizens were killed as a result of the police's use of sheer violence and firing on the crowd (Çandar 2013, p. 246). In 1977, when violence increased, elections were held on June 5. Although CHP emerged as the first party in those elections, it could not obtain the majority that would bring it to power on its own. In this election, CHP received 41.4 percent, AP 36.9 percent, MHP 6.4 percent, TİP 0.1 percent, DP 1.9 percent, MSP 8.6 percent, CGP 1.9 percent, TBP 0.4 percent and independents 2.5 percent of the votes (Atabay 2015, p. 231). The increasing chaos and violence in Turkey continued after the elections. On December 22, 1978, a great massacre took place in Kahramanmaraş. More than a hundred Alevis including children were massacred in this ultra-nationalist massacre, and their homes and workplaces were burned and looted (Zürcher 2021, p. 301).

In 1978, Abdullah Öcalan founded the neo-Marxist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) while he was a student at Ankara University and aimed to establish a socialist Kurdish state in the southeastern parts of Turkey, where Kurds were in the majority (Zürcher 2021, p. 302).

In 1980, a new coup took place in Turkey, where bloody conflicts and the right-left divide had gradually increased by then. The 1980 coup brought heavy sanctions. MHP manager Agah Oktay Güner has briefly explained the mentality of the putschists by saying "we are inside (prison) but our thoughts are in power" as heavy torture was being carried out in prisons and people were known to have died of torture (Çandar 2013, p. 264). Chief of General Staff Kenan Evren was among the top commanders who carried out the coup on September 12, 1980. The fact that the United States announced the coup to the world and that US President Jimmy Carter stated that the United States was relieved by the coup raises the possibility that the United States was behind the coup plan (Tanör, 2005). According to Tanilli, America

wanted a democracy in Turkey that it could control and manage and wanted a central party in cooperation with it to establish a "cheap bread paradise" (Tanilli 1989, p. 73).

With the coup, sanctions were imposed on political leaders, and political parties of the period were closed. After the coup, Demirel, who was the prime minister at that time, and Ecevit, the leader of the main opposition party, were held in detention for one month. Erbakan was detained for one year, and Türkeş for 4.5 years (Akın 2012, pp. 411-412). Bülent Ecevit, who resisted the 12 September coup and showed his reaction to the coup, published the *Arayış* magazine after the Gallipoli exile sanctioned by the coup administration. He was arrested and sent to Ankara Closed Prison due to the heavy criticism he made in this magazine against the new military administration (Çandar 2013, p. 265).

MGK also took a very harsh attitude towards non-governmental organizations and associations. MGK closed the labor confederations other than Türk-İş, blocked their goods and did not allow them to be used. It banned activities of all civil society associations, non-governmental organizations, and political parties except the Turkish Aeronautical Association, Red Crescent, and Child Protection Agency (Akın, 2012).

The coup administration's actions were not limited to these. They brought strict and new rules in many fields, from law to education. The steps taken to ensure control, especially in universities, were a fatal blow to education. This coup destroyed the modern and democratic understanding of the university, and authoritarian interventions into scientific research and creativity were implemented to create "monolithic thinking" and "monolithic student" models (Tanilli 1989, p. 135). In 1981, the Higher Education Board (YÖK) was established to control and discipline all universities (Tanilli 1989, p. 132). Here, the autonomous structure of universities was interfered with. Left-leaning intellectuals and professors were expelled from

universities and their right to work in public institutions was taken away (Tanilli 1989, p. 135). Heavy penalties were imposed as the courts were under the control of the coup plotters. There were also 124 people given the death penalty during the coup administration (Akın 2012, p. 414).

On April 24, 1983, the activities of political parties were allowed on the condition that the party's bylaws and the candidates received the approval of MGK (Akın 2012, p. 423). CHP and AP were not able to participate in the 1983 elections because they were closed by the coup administration. For the first time since its establishment, CHP was closed.

Erdal İnönü, İsmet İnönü's son, entered politics during that time. The Social Democrat Party (SODEP), established with him as the chairman on June 6, 1983, was vetoed by MGK (Akın 2012, p. 424) and was not allowed to compete in the elections, though. MGK gave approval to only three parties to participate in the 1983 elections. In the general elections held on November 6, 1983, the Motherland Party (ANAP) received 45.15 percent, the Populist Party (HP) 30.46 percent, the Nationalist Democracy Party (MDP) 23.27 percent, and the independents 01.12 percent of the votes (Taner 2005, p. 61).

With the large number of votes it received, ANAP came to power on its own, ushering in a new era of politics in Turkey with ANAP's leader Turgut Özal as the prime minister. In this period, the power of the USA increased in foreign policy and economic and political relations with the Middle East strengthened (Akgün, 2012). Defending liberal values, Özal implemented and developed an economic model based on a free market economy. The middle class, which gained economic power with Özal, who paved the way for privatization, found strength with new investment opportunities and became powerful vis-a-vis the state (Çaha 2012, p. 570). Özal

implemented mass housing projects, changed the tax policy, introduced foreign exchange liberalization, regulated the law on importing cigarettes and automobiles, and made great efforts for the development of the private sector (Özdemir 2014, pp. 367-369).

ANAP remained in power alone between 1983 and 1991. Özal, a member of the Nakshibendi Order, developed a conservative and liberal party ideology. ANAP received significant support from Islamic orders, conservatives, and liberals, who increased their wealth even further during Özal's reign (Ataman 2012, p.591). In the time of Özal, who brought new regulations in many fields from education to the media with the free market policies in the economy, private schools were opened besides public ones, and many local and national television and radio channels were established while there had been only the public TV channel TRT by then (Ataman 2012, p. 595) before. In other words, with the Özal period, the way for privatization was completely paved and private institutions and organizations were supported as an alternative to public institutions.

In 1983, the True Path Party (DYP) was established as the continuation of the Justice Party, the Welfare Party (RP) as the continuation of the National Salvation Party, and the Conservative Party (MP) as the continuation of the Nationalist Movement Party (Akın 2012, p. 428). SODEP and HP merged in 1985 to form the Social Democrat Populist Party (SHP), which was led by Aydın Güven Gürkan until Erdal İnönü took over as leader a year later (Candar 2013, pp. 277-278). In 1985, the Democratic Left Party (DSP) was founded by Rahşan Ecevit, instead of Bülent Ecevit, who could not form a party because he was politically banned (Çandar, 2013). Former party leaders, who were banned from politics, returned to politics after the 1987 referendum. Bülent Ecevit was elected as the leader of DSP, Süleyman Demirel of

DYP, and Necmettin Erbakan of the Welfare Party (Akın 2012, p. 430). MP changed its name to the Nationalist Work Party in 1985 as it was more similar to MHP, and Alparslan Türkeş became the leader of the party after his political ban ended in 1987 (Alishov 2020, p. 38)

When President Kenan Evren's term expired in 1989, Turgut Özal took over as the president. The task of forming the government was assigned to Yıldırım Akbulut, who became both the prime minister and the new chairman of ANAP (Tanör 2003, p.84). Özal, who supported Akbulut's election as chairman, was unable to apply the principle of impartiality in the presidency, acted as if he were still the leader of ANAP, and was very effective in carrying out decisions on a wide range of issues, from the economy to foreign policy (Tanör 2003, p.85). Mesut Yılmaz, who became the chairman of the party at the ANAP congress in 1991 took office as prime minister, replacing Akbulut in the same year (Tanör 2003, p.86). In the elections of October 20, 1991, RP, MÇP (later named as MHP) and Reformist Democracy Party (IDP) formed an alliance and entered the elections under the banner of Erbakan's RP, while SHP negotiated with HEP (People's Labor Party), the party known to support Kurdish separatism, and included names from HEP on its lists in the southeast provinces (Candar 2013, p.311). SHP, which increased its votes with the HEP candidates in the southeast, lost votes in the west, though, as there were negative reactions from within the party itself to its joint lists of candidates with HEP (Bila 2008, p.322).

In the 1991 elections, ANAP lost power and a new coalition government was established in the country. According to the election results, DYP received 23 percent, ANAP received 24 percent, SHP received 20.8 percent, RP received 16.9 percent, and DSP received 10.8 percent of the votes (Bila 2008, p. 322). In the newly formed DYP-SHP government, Süleyman Demirel became Prime Minister and Erdal İnönü became

Deputy Prime Minister (Bila 2008, p.323). This new government prepared a new law for the reopening of the parties that were closed after the September 12 coup, and with this law, the obstacle to the reopening of CHP, AP, MHP, and MSP was removed (Bila 2008, p.329). Deniz Baykal, who wanted to be the chairman of the SHP and lost against İnönü in all three congresses before, became the new chairman of CHP with the congress held on the anniversary of the opening of the party on September 9, 1922 (Bila 2008, p. 333). Ecevit did not respond positively to Baykal's request, who wanted to unite DSP and SHP under the banner of CHP (Bila 2008, p.331).

1993 was a bad year for Turkey. Journalist Uğur Mumcu, who was killed on January 24, 1993, said in his last speech that religious groups and orders had infiltrated the state's circles at the highest levels, and he explained the dangers of these for the future of Turkey. He was killed by a planted bomb (Mumcu Unforgettable Village Institutes Speech, 2020). After the unexpected death of President Özal due to a heart attack, Tansu Çiller was elected as the leader of DYP, replacing Süleyman Demirel, who became president on May 16, 1993 (Bila, 2008). The period of Tansu Çiller, the first female prime minister of Turkey, was a contested one due to her husband, Özer Çiller's involvement in corruption and her private properties in the USA (Akşin 2005b, p.166). Even though the allegations of corruption against Çiller and her husband occupied the agenda for a long time, the necessary investigations were not conducted. In addition, the country's foreign debt rose to 67 billion dollars in 1993, and the economic crisis in the country increased with the sudden rise of the dollar (Akşin 2003, p. 167).

During the DYP-SHP government, the hotel where intellectuals and artists stayed in Sivas for the 4th Pir Sultan Abdal Events on July 2, 1993, was burned down by an Islamist mob (Akşin 2003, p. 165). The reactions of Demirel and Çiller after the

incident to the death of 33 intellectuals and artists and the failure of the police and soldiers to intervene in the incident were met with a great reaction. In Turkey, Islamists have always had state support, particularly during the reigns of Menderes, Özal, and Demirel, and they were part of the state structure. The perpetrators of the massacres did not receive necessary punishments, and some of them were not even prosecuted.

Murat Karayalçın, who was elected as the Metropolitan Mayor of Ankara in the 1989 local elections took over the presidency of SHP at the party congress on September 11, 1993 after İnönü stepped down (Bila 2008, p. 338). The 1994 elections were of great importance in the history of Turkey. The fact that CHP and SHP did not form an election alliance and that both parties fielded strong candidates in Istanbul and Ankara aided RP. In the 1994 elections, DYP received 21.4 percent, ANAP 21 percent, RP 19.1 percent, SHP 13.6 percent, DSP 8.8 percent, MHP 8.0 percent, and CHP 4.6 percent of the votes. In this election, the first 3 parties were right-wing parties, and the left parties experienced a serious decline (Bila 2008, p. 337). Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who has been in power in Turkey for the last 20 years, became the mayor of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality in the 1994 local elections. This position has a great influence on President Erdogan's coming to this day as Istanbul is the most populous city in Turkey.

After the decrease in the vote rates of SHP, CHP, and DSP in the 1994 elections, on February 18, 1995, SHP and CHP united under CHP's roof, and Hikmet Çetin became the leader of the party (Zürcher 2021, p. 356). DSP, of which Ecevit was the leader, continued its life as a single political party. Ecevit refused to join CHP. Deniz Baykal became the chairman once again at the CHP convention held on

September 9, 1995 (Bila 2008, p. 341). When ANAP did not accept the coalition with DYP, CHP-DYP formed a new coalition government (Çandar 2013, p. 358).

The general elections of 1995 showed that the Islamist Welfare Party became much stronger and increased its vote share. In the 1995 elections, RP was the party that received the highest votes, with 21.4 percent, while ANAP got 19.7 percent, DYP 19.2 percent, DSP 14.6 percent, CHP 10.7 percent, MHP 8.2 percent, HADEP 4.2 percent, and other parties received 2.6 percent of the votes (Çandar 2013, p. 32). Being the first party was not enough for RP to come to power on its own, however. The search for a new coalition government began. Thus, the ANA-YOL government formed by ANAP and DYP was born (Çandar 2013, p. 332). The ANA-YOL government came to an end on June 6, 1996, as ANAP applied to the Constitutional Court to investigate the corruption allegations against Çiller (Akşin, 2005b, p. 169). The new government was established between RP and DYP. RP voted against ANAP's request to investigate Çiller's covert appropriation, and because Çiller received support from Erbakan, a new coalition government was formed between RP and DYP (Akşin, 2005b).

With the financial liberalization law accepted in 1989, a “politician-mafia-capital” alliance was formed and the paramilitary gangs of the anti-left struggle of the 1970s started to serve the state after the 1980 coup (Çandar 2013, p. 333). The Susurluk accident in 1996 also revealed that some high-level officials in the state were associated with the mafia (Çandar 2013, p. 334). Mehmet Ağar, the minister of interior affairs at that time, and some high-level police officials were not prosecuted, and Mehmet Ağar's immunity was not lifted. Minister of Justice Şevket Kazan's stated that they were “playing candles out” against the large-scale civil disobedience acts that targeted the state-mafia relations which was initiated by a group of

intellectuals, Kazan, a member of RP, used a discriminating and humiliating style against the Alevis in this statement. In fact, religious parties have generally targeted leftist and Alevi groups, as evidenced by their reactions and statements to the Maraş, Sivas, and Çorum massacres. The increase in the Islamist attitudes and discourses of the Welfare Party and the "Quds Night" organized to support the Islamist terrorist groups in Palestine in 1997 increased the tension between RP and the army (Zürcher 2021, p. 360). Although the dismissal of 161 officers and non-commissioned officers from the army because they were Islamists was implemented to stop the progress of Islamist movements, Islamists were always intertwined with different parties, political groups, and state institutions (Zürcher 2021, p. 361). RP went so far that the party leaders openly expressed their desire for anti-secular and Sharia rule at various events and speeches. Relying on the votes it gained and the support and power it received from religious leaders, RP, which wanted a regime change and an Islamic administration, invited those religious men to an iftar dinner at the prime minister's residence on January 11, 1997 (Ergin Sedat, 2019). The newspapers of the period wrote about this dinner for days.

February 28, 1997 was a historically significant day for Turkey as it known as the date of a postmodern military coup. Although the military's recommendations on February 28, 1997, in order to stop the progress of Islamists in the state, not to endanger secularism and prevent the Islamic regime, were officially approved by the Council of Ministers on March 13, the necessary sanctions were not implemented (Zürcher 2021, p.360). In response, RP was closed on January 16, 1998, and the party's leader, Erbakan, was banned from politics for five years and then for life (Zürcher 2021, p.361). Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who was the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Mayor at that time, was prosecuted on the charge of "inciting religious

hatred" and was sentenced to ten months in prison (Zürcher 2021, p.361). After RP was dissolved on February 23, 1998, the Virtue Party (FP) was founded by former RP members (Zürcher 2021, p.362).

In the 1999 elections, because of the close rates of the votes the parties received, there were several coalition attempts. DSP, which was in 4th place in the election, formed a minority government under Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit. That is, after 1979, Ecevit became prime minister once again (Akın 2012, p.460). During Ecevit's reign, Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the PKK terrorist organization, was captured in Kenya and brought to Turkey (Akın 2012, p.460). CHP went through a huge disappointment in the 1999 elections, as they received only 9% of the vote and were unable to enter parliament (Akın 2012, p.461).

Figure 2

Deniz Baykal Entering the 1997 CHP Convention



Note: Picture retrieved from Bildirici (2022)

At the party congress held two years before the elections, Deniz Baykal, the leader of CHP, descended through the smoke with Ricky Martin's then-popular song *Un, Dos, Tres* (see Figure 2). Deniz Baykal's flashy and smoky congress was also insufficient to get CHP into parliament. MHP became the second party with the votes it received, while the first party became DSP with 20 percent of the votes. On the other hand, ANAP and DYP could not achieve the success they wanted in this election, and their vote rates decreased compared to the previous elections (Akin 2012, p. 461).

Ahmet Necdet Sezer took office as the new president on May 5, 2000. The efforts of the coalition governments remained insufficient for Turkey, which was experiencing economic difficulties. The fight between Sezer and Ecevit in 2001 also triggered an economic crisis (Akin 2012, p. 365). The Virtue Party, an Islamist party which continued the legacy of RP, was dissolved on June 22, 2002, and the FP (Felicity Party) was founded on July 20, 2002, under the ideology and line of the SP (Virtue Party), of which Recai Kutan was the leader (Akşin 2005b, p. 180). In the same year, on August 14, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül founded the Justice and Development Party (AKP). Coming from the same ideology, AKP separated from Erbakan's anti-Westernism and drew a more moderate path towards the USA and the EU (Akşin 2005b, p. 180). Only two parties were able to enter the parliament in the November 3, 2002 elections (Bila 2008, p. 387).

After those elections, Çiller and Yılmaz resigned from their parties because they could not enter parliament. AKP had a larger majority with 363 deputies in parliament than CHP, which had 178 deputies. Since party founder Erdoğan was not a member of parliament, Abdullah Gül became the prime minister. With the removal of Erdoğan's ban on politics, supported by CHP leader Baykal, Erdoğan became a deputy

in the March 9, 2003 elections and formed the new government as the prime minister (Bila 2008, p.388). After Erdogan said that they would announce his presidential candidacy on April 28, Sezer, speaking at the War Academy against the rise of Islamist power, said that "the political regime in Turkey does not face as much danger as it is today, and that moderate Islam is a reactionary model for Turkey." "Republican Rallies" were held after his speech (Bila 2008, p.433). There was a lot of interest and participation in these rallies, which fell short of preventing the rise of AKP. In the elections held on July 22, 2007, AKP achieved great success. In the parliament, which had AKP as the first party with 46.6 percent of the votes, CHP as the second with 20.9 percent, MHP as the third with 14.3 percent, and the independents with 5.2 percent, Erdogan nominated Abdullah Gül as the presidential candidate and he became the new president on August 23, 2007 (Bila 2008, p.441).

With Abdullah Gül becoming the president, for the first time in Turkey, a president's wife wore a headscarf. The AKP government, which started to work for the release of the headscarf at the university, passed the constitutional amendment on the headscarf on February 9, 2008 (Bila 2008, p.449). The AKP government also made changes to Imam Hatip High Schools. The coefficient application, which was effective in university admissions from 2009 on, was abolished, but despite the cancellation of the Council of State, the coefficient point system was completely abolished with the new regulations made in 2011 (Kılıç 2018, p.342). Thus, those who graduated from Imam Hatip High Schools gained the right to apply to the field they wanted without having any deductions in their university entrance exam scores. In 2012, Imam Hatip Secondary Schools, which were closed before, were reopened.

Another important event of 2010 was the 12 September 2010 referendum. A referendum was held to amend 26 articles of the 1982 Constitution, which was

accepted with the September 12, 1980 Coup. The constitutional amendment was accepted with 57.88% of the votes of 'Yes' and 42.12% of the 'No' votes.

A group including writers, artists, academics, artists and politicians supported these amendments with the slogan “Not Enough, But Yes” as they thought they would improve democracy and freedom in Turkey and caused ongoing debates among intellectuals and leftists in the following years (Hamsici, 2017). According to Çiçek and Yaylagül (2011, p. 114-115) the 2010 Referendum was widely covered in newspapers, and the mainstream media's support for the government was instrumental in the positive outcome of the referendum.

One of the important events under AKP rule was the Ergenekon Case. This operation, in which bombs and explosives were found in a house in Istanbul on June 12, 2007, lasted for many years. The Ergenekon Case, in which senior military officials, journalists, and writers were arrested, ended in 2018 due to insufficient evidence and the prosecutor requested an acquittal for the detainees (Bila, 2008, p. 451). On the other hand, the political rise of AKP caused certain disagreements within CHP and Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu replaced CHP Chairman Deniz Baykal on May 22, 2010 (Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu Biography, n.d.).

Another important event that took place during the Erdogan government was the Taksim Gezi Park protests. Five citizens were killed by the police in the Gezi protests that started on May 27, 2013, which occupied the political agenda for a long time. The protests that started with the gathering of the citizens in Gezi Park, who did not want the trees in Taksim Gezi Park to be cut in response to the government's desire to build an artillery barracks, grew and made a big impact (Yiğit 2013, p. 1). Although AKP leader Erdoğan associated these protests with terrorism, it was born because of the protestors' opposition to the construction of shopping malls in a city

park. The police used disproportionate force and attacked the demonstrators with gas bombs. Many academics and artists have been arrested in the Gezi trial, which continues as of 2022. With the more active use of mobile phones and social media, protestors were in instant communication with each other through Twitter and Facebook, and thus they organized with great power (Bayhan 2014, p. 41). In other words, active and effective use of the internet was of great importance there.

On July 15, 2016, the Gülen Order led by Fettullah Gülen attempted a coup against the government. The July 15 coup attempt was the result of the Gülen Order's strengthening in almost every field in civil society and state and its growth over the years. Religious order and communities have always found a place in the political arena and have been involved in politics since the foundation of the Republic. The rise of Islamist parties to power has further strengthened these groupings.⁷

The AKP government, which has been in power since 2002, is still in power alone. People have become more polarized with the rise of identity politics in recent years. Due to the prevalence of identity politics, it also occupied a significant portion of CHP's political agenda during the 1990s and 2000s. In fact, the party moved away from the social democracy line and kept the understanding of national identity and the secular state at the center of its politics at that time (Emre 2019, p.93). The 2017 elections had a positive impact on CHP's political outlook, however. The politics represented by AKP and MHP increased the polarization of people, and CHP added the concept of "equality" to its core values. CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, who said that justice has also decreased with the AKP governments, walked from Ankara to Istanbul on June 15, 2017 to draw attention to the injustices in Turkey and ended his march with the Maltepe Rally on July 9, 2017. The slogan "Right, Law, and Justice" was also used at that time and became widespread.

In addition to justice and equality, secularism continues to be an important tenet of CHP's political stance. Although secularism, the most basic concept advocated by CHP, is still demeaned as "atheism" in some mainstream channels and newspapers, what CHP actually advocates by this principle is that people should be able to worship freely in their religion, but religion should have no place in the affairs of the state, and no religion or ethnicity should be superior to the other (Emre 2019, p. 37).

Another important referendum for Turkey was the April 16, 2017 referendum. As a result of this referendum, the political system in Turkey was changed and the presidential system was accepted, and Recep Tayyip Erdogan won the presidency. As a result of the changes made regarding the elections in 2018, it was accepted that the parties can make electoral alliances among themselves. In the same year, the People's Alliance was established between MHP and AKP, and tNation Alliance between CHP and IYI (IP) Party and Felicity Party. (*Millet Ittifakı Resmen Kuruldu... İşte Detaylar*, 2018). With the transition to the presidential system, almost all powers have been given to the president, that is, everything, including public institutions, has been directly or indirectly linked to the president (Yaman, 2014, p. 86).

2.3. Political Communication

To better understand political communication, we first need to explain what communication is. Communication is the interactions of individuals with each other and it involves the entire process of these interactions at the social level (Oskay 2019, p.319). Political communication involves the use of communication tools (written, visual, etc.) in order to convey the ideologies and political discourses advocated by the political actors to people in society and to other countries in the world, to make

themselves accepted both in their country's politics and in the world politics, and to achieve decision-making powers (Aziz 2017, p. 3). In other words, it is the use of all communication channels by political actors to have a say in politics.

The emergence of political communication dates to ancient times. Political communication, which was seen for the first time in Ancient Greece, has been a method used by the leaders of the state in the construction and protection of power, and although the name “political communication” was not used, they benefited from what it included (Aziz 2017, p. 1). As a result of the diverging patterns of development in each society, methods used by political actors of each society also differentiated from each other. From Ancient Greece to the present, political communication has many differences in terms of both its development and its interpretation. Political communication is a type of communication between individuals in society and political actors who want to be in power, and the political actors apply it to influence and to get the votes of the people (Ökten 2020, p. 64).

Political communication, which emerged in the modern sense with the end of the Second World War, grew in importance as an interdisciplinary field of communication and was used as a term during the same time (Tarihi & Demir 2018, p. 89). With the spread of mass media such as newspapers, radio, and TV, political actors found more opportunities and vehicles to express themselves, and this has led to the emergence of political communication as a separate and full-fledged discipline. (Aziz 2017, p. 1). Especially after 1945, economic depressions as well as various political and cultural developments increased the importance of political communication even more (Avşar 2020, p. 17).

2.3.1. Political Communication Campaigns in the World

Political communication has always been a developing and dynamic field of activity all over the world, and especially in recent years, the development of the internet technology has brought new dimensions and different perspectives to political communication. In political communication, new media have become the most preferred tools besides rallies, propaganda, posters, radio, television, and newspapers.

Propaganda, which has a very successful effect in manipulating the public, depends on a one-way communication model that is used to influence other individuals in society by an individual, a political party, or a group (such as ethnic or religious) and where it is important to be persuasive rather than false or true (Çankaya 2019, p. 23). Propaganda, the formation of which dates back to ancient times, increased in the First World War and was used as a powerful weapon to influence the masses, especially in dictatorial and/or authoritarian regimes but also in democracies (Çankaya 2019, p. 23). In fact, US President Wilson was the one of first modern leaders to use propaganda to support the government. The use of this method by a modern government has had a great impact on the world, and political actors have largely benefited from propaganda in the coming years (Çankaya, 2019, p. 25). The propaganda method, which was used a lot in active politics by Gobbels in Nazi Germany, was also exploited by many countries' leaders in later periods (Çankaya 2019, p. 25). Gobbels' work had a great influence on the Nazi Leader Hitler's continued power. For this reason, Hitler appointed Gobbels as his minister of public enlightenment and propaganda (Çankaya 2019, p. 27).

Radio played an active role in politics before the Second World War. Leaders of authoritarian countries, especially the Nazi Germany, used the radio in political communication by making political broadcasts (Avşar 2020, p.71). Although the first

television broadcast began in the USA in 1939, because television broadcasting at that time was limited, only in 1948, the Democratic Party officials made speeches and political actors appeared on television for the first time (Çankaya 2019, p. 76), and the first political advertisement was made by William Benton in 1950 in the USA (Çankaya 2019, p. 77).

Television has become a more accessible mass media tool over time. In the USA in 1960, Kennedy and his political rival Nixon appeared on a live TV talk show, which reached a large audience (Çankaya 2019, p. 81). In 1951, on television in Britain, political party leaders talked about their campaigns in the elections in a limited time of fifteen minutes (Çankaya 2019, p. 131). Another country that actively uses radio and television in politics is France. Charles de Gaulle, who was in power after 1960, used radio and television in favor of his own power and received great criticism from the opposition (Çankaya 2019, p. 153). Making programs about elections on television and giving place to the discourses of politicians provided the opportunity for the people to get to know politicians and their policies better (Çankaya, 2019, p.131).

Social media networks that emerged with the development of the Internet have brought a different dimension to political communication. The social media, which started with the first e-mail sent at the University of New Jersey in 1978, has become accessible to almost everyone until today (Karal et al., 2017, p. 14). Social networks that individuals use for purposes such as socializing and finding a job have developed over time, and today they serve in many areas of our lives, from consumption to socialization, from spending quality time to personal development (Karal et al., 2017, p. 14). Social media platforms are used intensively and actively by people. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram have become the most popular channels of recent

years. Social media have offered tremendous networking opportunities whereby people can express themselves and write what they think, as the ability of people to write comments under a tweet or a shared image makes communication mutual instead of the one-way communication flow of newspapers, television and radio.

Social media, which have developed with the Web 2.0 internet technology, have also offered a space where a medium where political actors express themselves and share their discourses rather freely. In particular, social media have more power due to its two-way communication pattern. The biggest example of this was seen in US President Barack Obama's 2008 election campaign during which his effective and innovative use of the internet had a great impact on his success. Obama agreed with Teddy Goff as the campaign director (Avşar 2020, p. 23). Goff, who collected 690 million dollars for the election campaign over the internet and created one million registered voters, made Obama's Facebook posts the most liked Facebook posts ever made until then, and had a great impact on the follow-up of Youtube shares and tweets that reached a record level of retweets on Twitter (Avşar 2020, p. 23). The account that Obama opened on Twitter reached 1,600,000 followers a day later and entered the Guinness Book of Records (Türk & Koz 2021, p. 253). One of the reasons why Obama was so successful in his campaign is that he included young people actively in the election campaign (Türk & Koz 2021, p. 253).

The fact that young people are active on the internet has increased the tendency of politicians to use social media to get votes from young voters. Like Obama, Biden actively used social media during his presidential candidacy. Biden, who especially preferred Instagram, reached young people and became the winner of this election because Instagram was more popular in America at that time and young people preferred Instagram instead of Facebook.

2.3.2. Political Communication Campaigns in Turkey

After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Republic of Turkey, which was established out of great wars and struggles, has experienced the reign of different ideological parties, from the transition to the multi-party system to the coups and coalitions. Especially since the transition to the multi-party period, political communication efforts have also widened and intensified, and political actors have used political communication in diverging ways.

From the establishment of the Republic in 1923 until 1946, CHP was in power as the single party although there were various failed attempts to establish opposition parties. Turkey started a multi-party system in 1946, so the introduction of candidates to the public was the main political communication method of the single party period until 1946 (Aziz 2017, p. 180). Therefore, the candidates determined by the party administration did not have concerns about not being elected. DP, which took power from CHP with the 1950 elections, received a high number of votes and came to power alone with the political campaign it carried out against its rival CHP in line with the possibilities of that period. Before the elections, the DP's slogan was "Enough! "Word belongs to the Nation." On the other hand, CHP used the slogan "Appreciation belongs to the Nation" and the slogans were included both on posters and in rallies (Ökten, 2020, p. 69). Menderes, leader of DP, shared the election manifestos, which set out the party's goals and the political ideology it advocated, with the public both at rallies and indoor sports halls, and criticized CHP government in an accusatory way (Aziz 2017, p. 180). A large-scale rally in Turkey was held for the first time after the establishment of DP (Koçak 2005, p. 182).

Radio, which was a very important mass communication tool in that period, broadcast from Ankara and Istanbul then. There were radio receivers in many parts of

Anatolia, and the public was informed about the elections, the promises made by the parties that would participate in the elections were carried out through the radio (Aziz 2017, p. 181). After DP won the 1950 elections, as the governing party it stipulated that the news broadcast on the radio should be only government news. In other words, DP did not allow any opposition party to use the radio to convey their messages and to conduct their election campaigns (Aziz, 2017, p. 185). This means that the government used the radio for propaganda purposes only for its own interests. As long as it was in power, DP did not give up on this policy. Since the political pressure was also applied to the press during the Menderes period, opposition parties tried to express themselves with rallies and posters and country trips (Aziz, 2017, p. 186).

Before TRT was established in 1964, it was decided in the 1961 Constitution that radio and television broadcasts should be broadcast with the principle of autonomy and impartiality (Aziz 2017, p. 186). The biggest factor in this decision was that the DP used the radio only for its own power during its 10-year rule. The fact that television could not reach every house increased the importance of slogans and posters of the parties. The nicknames used for politicians also became very effective among the people. In 1973, Bülent Ecevit began to be called “Karaoğlan,” and this name was widely adopted by the public (Ecevit 2008, p. 8). Ecevit, who used the white dove symbol that symbolizes peace, was remembered as Karaoğlan for many years. Another example related to this is Süleyman Demirel. During Menderes’ reign, Demirel was the General Manager of the State Hydraulic Works (DSİ) and was dubbed the “King of Dams” for the dams he built during his tenure and “Shepherd Sülü” as it was learned during his visit to his hometown in Isparta in 1969 that he had been a shepherd before and “Father” after the 1980 coup (Oğuz 2018, pp. 87-88). For Demirel, the slogan of "Save us, Father," especially against ANAP’s leader Özal, was

very effective in the eyes of the public (Oğuz 2018, p. 88). These examples are not limited to these two political actors, and different nicknames have been used for political leaders throughout the modern political history of the country.

The party that made an agreement with the advertising agency for the first time in Turkey and used political advertising in politics was AP, of which Süleyman Demirel was the leader in the 1977 elections (Ökten 2020, p. 92). Before the 1977 elections, audio cassettes were prepared with Demirel's voice by Cenajans and 5 million flyers along with 20,000 audio cassettes were delivered to different parts of Anatolia (Çankaya 2019, p. 177). This was the first political advertising in a professional sense used in Turkey.

After the 1970s, Bülent Ecevit successfully used important elements of nonverbal communication, such as body language, colors, and posture in posters and photographs. He gave the message that he was one of the people especially of the working and the low-income classes (Ökten 2020, pp. 97-98). He reproduced the myth of the “man of the people” with the shirt he wore and the colors he used in his clothes.

For the first time in Turkey, political actors talked about themselves and their political campaigns regarding the elections on television in 1977 elections (Çankaya 2019, p. 173). Although TRT had already been established until then, political actors were not screened, and only election news had been broadcast (Çankaya 2019, p. 173). Therefore, until the 1977 elections, political leaders tried to explain their campaigns to the public mainly through the radio, brochures, and rallies.

Political advertisements and campaigns were banned after the 1980 military coup, and political campaigns took their place back again on the political scene with the 1983 elections (Çankaya 2019, p. 179). After 1980, political parties focused on working with advertising agents. One of those was Turgut Özal's ANAP. Taking

American political campaign models as an example, Özal saw that political advertising and working with professional agencies in the USA, where he lived for years, had an impact on election success and applied this to his own campaign (Çankaya 2019, p. 181). Before the 1983 elections, political leaders came together for the first time in an open session on TRT (Çankaya 2019, p. 185). Since television sets had started to become widespread in houses by the 1983 elections, voters had the opportunity to watch the party leaders' campaigns on television. Özal's use of the state channel TRT in his favor caused reactions from other parties in the following process, however. Prior to the 1987 elections, Özal was shown on TRT screens for 65 minutes, while other opposition leaders were shown for 35 minutes (Çankaya 2019, p. 202).

In the same year, using the slogan "No to being bored like a lemon!" SHP prepared an election campaign that prioritized women and youth (Çankaya 2019, p. 203). This slogan received a lot of support, especially from those who were experiencing economic difficulties, and its effect has been talked about for years. For the first time, the position and expectations of women in the elections were taken into consideration by SHP and included in the campaign contents. The 1987 elections were important in this respect. SHP, which prioritized both women and the youth besides economic problems, became the second party that received the highest number of votes in the elections (Çankaya 2019, p. 206). After SHP prioritized women voters and their demands, the demands of women voters started to gain importance among other political parties in the following years.

The owners of *Star TV*, the first private channel founded in 1989, were Cem Uzan and Ahmet Özal. The privatization of the channels and the establishment of the first private channel by Ahmet Özal, the son of the president of the time, was an example of the media falling into the hands of political actors. With the increase in the

number of private channels and the opening of private radios, the competition between the political parties of the country increased, and this enabled the adoption and implementation of the “American style” political campaigning in Turkey (Doğan, 2021).

The posters and message contents used by RP in the election campaign in the 1991 elections also made a lot of noise at that time. The party aimed to get votes from outside its regular supporters with questions such as "Is it a crime to be from the East?" referring to the Kurdish question and showing images like "prostitutes," "beardless man" and "uncovered woman" (Çankaya 2019, p. 221). In this way, RP tried to address people who were victimized by the existing socio-economic and cultural structures and had economic difficulties through its election campaign messages

In the 1995 elections, CHP leader Deniz Baykal adopted the slogan of "secularism that respects beliefs" to spread the idea of the "new left" and followed a policy focused on Tony Blair's concept of "the third way, the new left" (Çankaya 2019, p. 248). CHP, which frequently used the concept of "secularism" in its discourses in the 1999 elections, also employed the discourse of the 1960s with the slogan "We will realize the social state" (Çankaya, 2019, p. 221).

AKP, which came to power in 2002, established its own website during the election campaign in response to the widening use of the internet and actively uploaded its projects, election campaign messages and information about the party events (Doğan 2021, p. 222) there. CHP, which aimed to reach young people via the Internet, also placed advertisements on its websites (Doğan 2021, p.222).

Television advertisements banned by YSK in 1995 became free before the 2011 elections, and political parties aimed to get votes from the electorate through television by placing their own advertisements on television (Doğan 2021, p. 224).

In the 2015 elections, while AKP gave detailed information about its candidates, communication activities and party policies on its website www.akadaylar.com, CHP held 101 rallies, which were led by CHP's leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu with the slogan of "A Turkey to Live," in addition to him being present in television programs, newspapers and digital arenas (Doğan 2021, p. 224, 225).

Cell phones, which developed and became widespread in the 2000s, have become another communication channel widely used by political actors. Messages such as celebrations of national and religious holidays and the dates of rallies began to be regularly communicated to people's mobile phones via messages.

Political actors, in their efforts to increase communication with the public, benefit from every medium, but the importance of face-to-face-communication is still undeniable. In recent years, face-to-face meetings with students and certain occupational groups have been organized quite frequently in political communication. Examples of this are Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Meral Akşener. While AKP Leader and President Erdoğan has regularly invited people from different backgrounds such as *muhtars* (heads of villages), families of martyrs, businessmen and sportsmen at the presidential complex, CHP Leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu has met with motor couriers, students, and farmers via the internet or face-to-face. Another opposition leader, Meral Akşener, from the Good Party, communicates face-to-face with tradesmen and citizens through her city and district tours (Doğan 2021, p 227).

Apart from these, political communication is also carried out extensively through social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

The first party to use Facebook, Twitter and YouTube for political communication in Turkey was the Felicity Party, and it has been using all the three since 2009 (Doğan 2021, p. 231). CHP started using Facebook and Twitter in 2011 and YouTube in 2013, AKP started using Facebook in 2011, Twitter in 2013 and YouTube in 2014 (Doğan, 2021, p. 232).

Due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic, the limitation of face-to-face communication has led to restrictions in political communication. Political actors have benefited greatly from the Internet in this process.

2.3.3. Use of Media in Political Communication

Media channels have been important tools for political actors to make their voices heard. The first mass medium, the newspaper, was published in Germany in 1609 (Cereci, 2012, p. 91). People had the opportunity to develop their knowledge and thoughts through the newspaper. Since the members of the society gained new ideas regarding both political and cultural fields, they had the opportunity to obtain more detailed information about the society they lived in (Cereci 2012, p.91). The development of technology has, of course, allowed the development of newspapers. Newspaper made a significant contribution to the functioning of democracy by informing the public (Cereci, 2012, p. 91).

Newspapers also had a very important role in reaching voters and communicating political ideas and messages. With the gaining power of political actors over time, independent newspapers have started to turn into a medium where the government has a say and can shape political news as it wishes (Cage, 2016, p. 5). Newspaper owners, individuals, institutions, or organizations are also subject to the control of wealthy and powerful people (Cage, 2016, p.7). The Panama Scandal is a

good example and a turning point to the understand the distrust people may have towards newspapers with the turn of the 20th century. Most of the French and American newspapers with their debt coverages received great reactions from the readers because of their news content (Cage, 2016, p. 7).

In Turkey, trust in many newspapers in the print media has decreased or ended in recent years. While the freedom of the press was heavily oppressed by political interventions, some newspapers played a largely supporting role for the government. After 1980, examples of this close relationship were seen more frequently. Turgut Özal brought businessman Asil Nadir into the media so that he would not criticize his government and not make news against him and his party (Önkibar, 2015, p.10). Media bosses, who have business relations with the state and want to increase their tax privileges and economic power, have remained silent about political developments from time to time, have chosen not to cover important events: They have either covered them superficially or they have published false news in favor of the government and against the opposition. For example, since Erol Simavi, the former owner of *Hürriyet* newspaper, and Turgut Özal were very close, he did not make negative news about Özal and supported Özal through his newspaper (Önkibar, 2015, p. 23).

AKP, which has been in power for 20 years, also has important relations with media barons. Ethem Sancak, owner of the newspapers *Star* and *Akşam*, has been close friends with Erdoğan since the establishment of AKP and has always made news supporting the AKP government (Önkibar, 2015, p. 128, 137). *Sabah* newspaper, which was sold through TMSF (Savings Deposit Insurance Fund of Turkey), was purchased by Ahmet Çalık with the loan support of state banks, and since mortgages

were not taken for these loans, it became one of the newspapers that supported the AKP government most (Önkibar, 2015, p. 23).

Banners and posters hung on street walls and shopping windows to announce an event are a communication tool used for commercial activities as well as for announcing political campaigns and rallies. Political actors sometimes use these posters by renting space from commercial entities and sometimes with the permission of the municipality. Posters, in which text and picture are used together, have an important place in political communication (Özkan, 2003, p. 16). Political posters, whose emergence dates to the French Revolution, were also actively used in the 1st and the 2nd World War (Özkan, 2003). Especially before the development of mass media such as radio and television, banners and posters played a major role in political promotions and activities. Billboards, on the other hand, are another important outdoor advertising and communication tool that developed in the United States especially after the Second World War (Gürbüz et al., n.d., p. 184). With the development of technology, 3-D billboards have become an effective promotion medium both for political actors and for advertising companies. Billboards placed on crowded roadsides

are prepared with eye-catching colors and designs to attract the attention of many people and they leave a lasting impression on the audience with their advertising and promotional contents (Gürbüz et al., n.d., p. 184,185).

The radio, which started to be used at the beginning of the 20th century, has undoubtedly been one of the most important mass media. Radio has an important place in transmitting news, political developments, events and announcements to the public (Cereci, 2012, p. 104). Radio, which has become widespread over time, has become a mass communication tool widely used by political actors. Hitler can be

given as an example of a leader who used the radio as an important propaganda tool in world politics. Radio, which has an important place in Turkey's political history, was the media channel through which the military coups were announced Evren (Cereci, 2012, p. 104).

Television, in which visuals are added to with written and verbal communication, is still a highly important mass communication medium. At the same time, television culture is a very effective on socio-cultural transformations by creating an alternative to traditional cultures (Cereci, 2012, p.161). With the spread of television, reaching the audience has gained great importance for political actors. Television channels are also very important for ruling parties.

The communication of the news content to the audience is managed by powerful elites. The fact that names close to the government have media institutions and organizations in Turkey in recent years is an indicator of this. For example, *ATV* was sold to Çalık group by TMSF, and *Skytürk* belongs to Ethem Sancak. *Habertürk* and *Show TV* belong to Turgay Ciner, and it is argued that the appointments to the important positions of these channels have been made by the AKP government (Önkibar, 2015, p. 128, 137, 162).

Another example of media channels and newspapers in Turkey being close to the government and was seen during the Gezi protests. When there were Gezi protests in Taksim, pro-government NTV broadcast a wildlife documentary about penguins (Önkibar, 2015, p.167). After the movement attracted great attention both in the foreign press and among the domestic public, fake news about the protesters were broadcast in pro-government newspapers and televisions for days (Önkibar, 2015, p. 168). As can be seen from the examples, as the political power gets stronger, it can direct the media companies as it wishes.

The development of the computer is one of the most important developments in the field of technology. The internet, which facilitates access to all kinds of events and activities such as news, entertainment, culture and art, has also become a very important channel for political actors. After the first e-mail sent in 1971, there have been rapid and great innovations and changes in the internet world (Adıgüzel, 2018, p.21). Turkey's meeting with the internet was on April 12, 1993 (Karal, Fiş Erümit, & Erümit, 2017, p.12). Word Wide Web (www), which started to work in 1989, was opened to digital access with its first website in 1990 (Karal et al., 2017, p.17). The application, which was opened as Web 1 and later became Web 2.0, Web 3.0, and recently Web 4.0, has developed as a web environment where users can develop and control their own data (Karal et al., 2017, p.18). Social media networks became widespread among users by the establishment of YouTube in 2003, Facebook in 2004, Twitter in 2006 and Instagram in 2010. Social media platforms have started to be used intensively, and the use of social media has increased by adding all ages to their user base (Adıgüzel, 2018, p. 22). Although the people from various different age groups use social media, older generations do not use social media as much as the younger generations (Berger, 201, p. 190).

Social media, which have become easier to access with mobile phones and the internet, have also offered an important communication space for political actors. Using the wide networking and communication facilities he established over the internet during his election campaign, Barack Obama came out to be a political actor who uses the internet most effectively in politics. Donald Trump, the next US president, also actively used Twitter in his election campaigns.

As mentioned above, the fact that most of the mass media such as television and newspapers are monopolized by the names close to the government has further

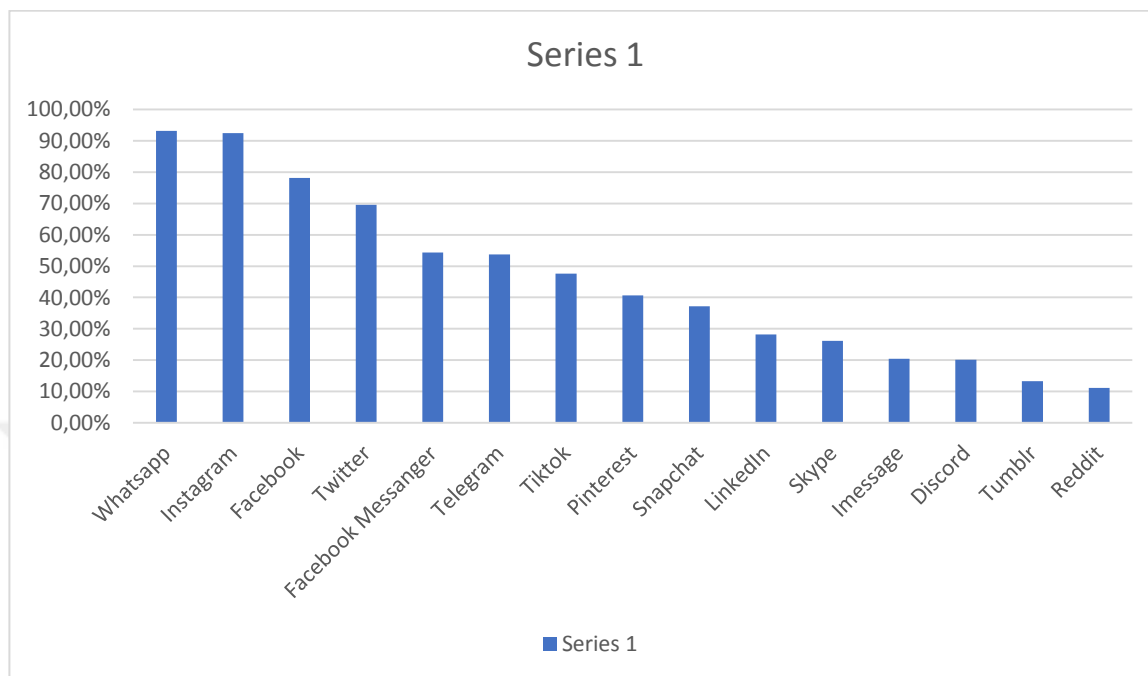
strengthened the importance of the social media. One of the best examples of this is the Gezi protests. Thousands of people who did not know each other on Twitter gathered in Taksim and started the protests in an organized manner (Adıgüzel, 2018, p. 117).

The increase in the use of social media also means an increase in the areas they are used by politicians. With the addition of not only visual, audio, but also live broadcast feature, political actors share their rallies and events live on their social media accounts. Currently, all party leaders in Turkey have social media accounts, and social media platforms were also actively used by Ekrem İmamoğlu in his election campaign.

Research conducted in the first months of 2022 shows that around 82 percent of Turkey's population uses the internet (We Are Social, 2022). In January 2022, the number of social media users in Turkey reached 68.90 million and this number increased by 8.9 million from the number measured in the previous year (We Are Social, 2022). Actually, when we look at the data, we can see that the use of social media increases every year. Social media platforms, which are used both for social communication and access to news, have an important place today and people spend an average of 2 hours and 59 minutes a day on social media (We Are Social, 2022). The usage rates of different social media platforms in Turkey are given in the figure below:

Figure 3

Rates of use for social media channels in Turkey among Users



Note: Table is created by the author with the data retrieved from the report of We Are Social (2022).

Looking at the data above, we can conclude that WhatsApp is the most used platform. Instagram is in the second place. Although Instagram users in Turkey correspond to 61.1% of the population, 76.5% of the population uses Instagram when the population above the age of 13, which is determined by Instagram as the lower limit for its users, is considered (We Are Social, 2022). While 44.5 percent of these users are female, 55.5 percent are male (We Are Social, 2022).

2.3.4. Instagram As a Tool of Political Communication

According to the 2022 data of We Are Social, 44.5 percent of the Turkish population says that Instagram is their favorite social media platform (Kemp, 2022). In addition, it is the platform where Turkish people spend the most time with 20.2

hours per month (Kemp, 2022). Although there is no information about which age groups use Instagram most in Turkey, it is observed that it is mostly used by the 25-34 age group, with 31.6 percent, when considering the worldwide data (Kemp, 2022). Following this age group, the second group that uses Instagram the most with 30.1 percent is the 18-24 age group (Kemp, 2022).. In other words, the largest user base of Instagram consists of teenagers and young adults.

The active use of Instagram is a major factor for political actors to benefit from Instagram as a political space. In addition, since it is mostly used by young people, it can be said that the active involvement of political actors in Instagram can increase their interaction with the young audiences. For this reason, Instagram has an important potential tool in terms of reaching the young audiences in political communication.

Thanks to the ease with which the photo can be taken with smart phones, people's desire to take a photo and instantly see the photo they take and share it on any medium has increased. Unlike Facebook and Twitter, Instagram differs from other social media channels because it only allows sharing photos and videos (Adıgüzel, 2018, p. 121). The original aspect of Instagram, where photos and pictures are shared intensively, is that it can be shared without writing any text under the picture, if desired. The fact that the message to be given with the shared picture or photograph is easier to understand and there is no need for reading has increased the popularity of Instagram, especially among young people (Adıgüzel, 2018, p. 122).

Compared to Twitter and Facebook, Instagram is a more friendly and preferred medium by young people. While Facebook has become a medium used mostly by middle-aged people, Twitter has become a relatively more “serious” medium where topics on the public and political agendas are discussed more than Instagram. Among these channels, Instagram stands out as a more casual, fun, friendly and effortless

channel. On the other hand, exactly for this reason, political actors actively use Instagram to reach young voters.

Social media channels are of great importance in terms of both political communication and social organization. Instagram, an important social media platform, has become one of the most popular channels in recent years. Political actors actively use Instagram in mass communication with the photos they upload and the explanations they write under the photos. Looking at the Instagram accounts, CHP has 539 thousand followers on its official Instagram page, while there are 1.5 million followers on AKP's official Instagram page and 760 thousand followers on MHP's official Instagram page as of today (AKP, 2022; CHP, 2022; MHP, 2022). While the speeches of party leaders and deputies are published on official accounts, the events they attend are also published there.

There are recent academic studies on the use of Instagram in political communication in Turkey. Kurtuluş (2018) examined the use of Twitter and Facebook, along with Instagram, by some political actors in Turkey. In his study, Kurtuluş concluded that the number of followers and comments increases as the social media shares of political actors in Turkey increase (Kurtuluş, 2018).

Kutlu (2019) evaluated the posts, likes and comments shared by Erdoğan and Kılıçdaroğlu on their Instagram accounts. According to the results of Kutlu (2019), Erdoğan and Kılıçdaroğlu follow a few people from their Instagram accounts. He concluded that they use their own accounts one-way since they do not comment on their own posts or other accounts.

Kaderoğlu (2020) researched the social media usage of Muharrem İnce and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, candidates for the 2018 presidential elections, on Twitter and Instagram. According to the findings of Kaderoğlu (2020), although Muharrem İnce

used Twitter more actively, the number of Erdoğan's followers on both platforms is more than İnce. While the number of İnce's followers on Twitter increased by 17.76 percent during the election campaign, the number of Erdoğan's followers increased by 1.52 percent, and Erdoğan shared 6 posts on Instagram and İnce 239 during the campaign (Kaderoğlu, 2020).

In another study, the use of Instagram by *muhtars* was examined, and it was concluded in this study that Instagram posts and hashtag titles of *muhtars* were used effectively in election campaigns and were beneficial for the voters' process of recognizing candidates (İnanç et al., 2020). Overall, while the use of social media is beneficial for gaining votes for some political actors, it was not very effective for others. Hence, whereas the use of social media can be a useful tool for communicating with the people, it does not guarantee an increase in the number of votes. However, the effective use of social media can result in reaping abundant benefits.

In another study, the Instagram shares of political actors in the 2015 general elections were evaluated by Ekinçi (2019). According to Ekinçi (2019), political actors in Turkey could not use Instagram effectively in the 2015 elections. The reasons for this are that the comments made were not answered by the politicians and there was no active campaign to guide the voters (Ekinçi, 2019). Similar evaluations regarding the use of Instagram by political actors in Turkey are made in another study (Çakır & Tufan, 2016). In the findings of this study, it was seen that political actors use Instagram but do not use it actively enough (Çakır & Tufan, 2016). According to Çakır and Tufan (2016, p. 24), the political actors use social media unilaterally, do not make use of its interactive nature, and the topics they post about in their profiles are limited.

2.4. Istanbul and 2019 Elections

Due to its geopolitical location and cultural diversity, Istanbul has an important position among world cities and has been a center of attraction throughout history. Today, it is a city at the focal point of many people both in the country due to the opportunities and advantages it offers, and from abroad due to its touristic, historical and cultural richness. According to the 2022 data of TURKSTAT (Turkish Statistical Institute), 15,840, 900 of Turkey's population, which is composed of 84,680,273 people, appear to be registered in Istanbul (Address Based Population Registration System Results, 2021, 2022). According to this data, approximately one-fifth of Turkey's population resides in Istanbul. However, these data are dependent on the registered addresses and do not include persons whose residence is not registered in Istanbul. Therefore, we can say that a higher number of people live in Istanbul than the official data. Considering the internal migration movements in Turkey, Istanbul, which is the city that received the most immigrants, has been welcoming immigrants from all parts of Turkey and gathered many people from different ethical origins, religious beliefs, races, and orientations (Emeç et al., 2019).

The 2019 Local Elections have become an event that has an important position in Turkish politics. Two political actors, Binali Yıldırım from AKP and Ekrem İmamoğlu from CHP, come to the fore in the elections where political actors from many parties were nominated. These two people come to the fore with their different duties in state institutions. While Binali Yıldırım came to the fore by serving in various top positions in the state, as he served as the minister of transport, maritime affairs, and communications first and became the chairman of AKP and the last prime minister of Turkey before the transition to the presidential system, Ekrem İmamoğlu was known for his duty as the Mayor of Beylikdüzü. The first of the elections, in

which individuals nominated for the post of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Mayor, were held on March 31, 2019. Ekrem İmamoğlu won the elections with a margin of 13,729 votes compared to Binali Yıldırım, who came second, and his mandate was subsequently granted on April 17, 2019, but it was withdrawn after the elections were canceled on May 6, 2019, following the AKP's objection to YSK (Supreme Election Council). After the Istanbul elections, which were repeated on June 23, 2019, Ekrem İmamoğlu won again with a margin of 806,456 votes compared to Binali Yıldırım. These elections in Istanbul, whose results were given in the figure below, became a turning point that has largely shaped the way Turkish politics will follow in the upcoming years.

Figure 4

June 23 Election Results

23 JUNE 2019
İSTANBUL METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY RENEWAL ELECTION

METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY ELECTION RESULT

NUMBER OF REGISTERED VOTERS	10.560.963
NUMBER OF POLLS	31.186
NUMBER OF VOTERS	8.925.166
VOTER TURNOUT (%)	84.51
NUMBER OF VALID VOTES	8.746.566
NUMBER OF ELECTED MAYORSHIPS	1
NUMBER OF INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES	17

DISTRIBUTION AND RATIO OF VALID VOTES TO POLITICAL PARTIES AND
INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES

POLITICAL PARTIES	VALID VOTES	
	NUMBER	RATIO (%)
FELICITY PARTY	47.832	0.55
PATRIOTIC PARTY	13.962	0.16
REPUBLICAN PEOPLE'S PARTY	4.742.082	54.22
JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT PARTY	3.936.068	45.00
INDEPENDENT	6.622	0.08
TOTAL	8.746.566	100.0

Note: Table retrieved from the official website of the Supreme Election Council (Election 2019, 2019).

The population in Istanbul is almost capable of forming a representative sample of the Turkish population in terms of hosting a wide variety of identities with the migration movements from different regions of Turkey to this city. Considering the previous Istanbul mayoral elections in the political history of Turkey, an inference can be made about the importance of the Istanbul elections. The mayorship of Istanbul, which has the most populous population in Turkey, is of great importance for political actors in their careers and provides an opportunity for a rise in their future political lives. For example, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who became the Mayor of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality after the March 24, 1994 elections, became one of the most important actors in Turkish politics, and his duty as the Mayor of Istanbul was a turning point in his career. Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu can be given as another example. Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, who was the candidate for the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality in the 29 March 2009 elections, lost the election against the AKP candidate Kadir Topbaş, but became the CHP's leader in the 2010 convention.

For this reason, Ekrem İmamoğlu, who won Istanbul with a larger margin, especially in the second elections, now acquires an important place in Turkish politics. Ekrem İmamoğlu, who was born in Trabzon on June 4, 1970, moved to Istanbul with his family in 1987 (Kılıç 2019, p. 14,29). İmamoğlu, who loved to play football even before his university years, graduated from Istanbul University's Business Department in English and got to know Istanbul better because he went to many districts of Istanbul due to his family's work (Kılıç 2019, p. 29). İmamoğlu moved to Beylikdüzü in 1991 and got interested in politics from 2000 on (Kılıç 2019, p. 33,34). İmamoğlu first refused to be the candidate for the mayorship of Beylikdüzü, which was a town in 2004, because he was in the management of Trabzonspor (Kılıç 2019, p. 35). Officially, he started politics in 2008. İmamoğlu, who has been a member of CHP

since then, applied for the candidacy for the mayorship of the Beylikdüzü municipality, which became a district in the same year, for the 2008 elections. Since he lived in Beylikdüzü for years, he immediately focused on his campaign and first made a survey in Beylikdüzü (Kılıç 2019, p. 45). According to this survey, he was known in only five of the 10 neighborhoods in the district. CHP presented Prof. Dr. Vecdet Öz as the mayoral candidate in Beylikdüzü instead of İmamoğlu and AKP won the mayoral elections in that municipality (Kılıç 2019, p. 46). İmamoğlu, who was appointed as the head of CHP's Beylikdüzü district organization in 2009, increased his communications with the public almost like a mayor, followed a path that stayed away from polemics in his communication efforts but talked about his own projects instead. İmamoğlu, who had face-to-face conversations with the people of Beylikdüzü, became a politician who used social media effectively at that time, too. Twitter, Facebook and Youtube were actively used, especially by the volunteers formed by the young people around him (Kılıç 2019, p. 60). Making great efforts to involve women in active politics, İmamoğlu increased the number of female CHP members in his district, as well (Kılıç 2019, p. 69). Ekrem İmamoğlu, who used both face-to-face communication and social media channels very actively until the 2014 elections, became the Mayor of Beylikdüzü with the 2014 elections (Kılıç 2019, p. 69). Ekrem İmamoğlu, who was the CHP's candidate for Istanbul Metropolitan Mayor on December 18, 2018, became the Mayor of Beylikdüzü in 2014-2019 and then the Mayor of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality with the 2019 elections.

Ekrem İmamoğlu's slogan during the March 31 elections was “There is a solution with İmamoğlu” (“*İmamoğlu varsa çözüm var.*”) at first; however, before the elections, his slogan was changed to “There is hope with İmamoğlu” (“*İmamoğlu varsa umut var.*”) (Doğan, 2019). However, during the June 23 campaign period, his

slogan was replaced with "Everything is going to be alright" (*"Her şey çok güzel olacak."*). The slogan was one of the elements which shows his close relationship the public. The fact that the slogan was coined not by Ekrem İmamoğlu's campaign team, but a 16-year-old supporter of his, Berkay Gezgin, is the proof of this.

Ekrem İmamoğlu made various trips to shopkeepers in order to be in a one-on-one communication environment with the people of Istanbul. He made public visits to markets and bazaars and talked to shopkeepers and citizens about their problems and listened to what they had to say. However, he did not fail to keep up with being present on social media in the meantime. In fact, he used them very actively and Instagram was one of the platforms he posted frequently.

This study examines Ekrem İmamoğlu's 5 most liked posts on his Instagram profile between May 6 and June 23, 2019. In addition, it aims to obtain information about the communication strategies applied in his campaign by conducting in-depth interviews with four experts who took an active part in it.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this section, information about the subject, purpose, scope and limitations of the research will be given, the questions and hypotheses that the research seeks to answer will be stated, the methods used will be explained, and the areas in which the research contributes to the literature will be explained.

3.1. Topic and the Purpose of the Study

This research examines the communication works of Ekrem İmamoğlu during the Istanbul local elections between May 6 and June 23, 2019, by making a semiotic analysis of the images in the posts he made on his Instagram account and the captions under them. In addition, the strategies followed were examined by conducting in-depth interviews with people who took part in decision-making positions in this campaign. In this way, this research aims to obtain in-depth information about the strategies used by political actors in their communication activities in their election campaigns, and to examine what meanings are found in the messages they give, what ideologies are supported, and what social myths are reproduced in their posts on social media, particularly on Instagram.

3.2. Scope and Limitations

As in any study, this study also has certain limitations. As mentioned, this study only focuses on the Instagram posts made between 6 May and 23 June, 2019, and the ones with the most likes among them, and examines them according to the semiotic analysis method. For this reason, the posts on Ekrem İmamoğlu's Instagram page which received less likes during this process and less and more likes outside this process, were not included in the analysis. For this reason, the results are not

representative of İmamoğlu's all Instagram posts. In addition, Ekrem İmamoğlu's posts on other social media platforms were not included in the analysis. In addition, although interviews were conducted with people who were in a decision-making position in his communication campaign, no study was conducted on how Instagram users, the people who see these photos make sense of these images and how they interpret these images. In this respect, it will be valuable for future studies to conduct research in these areas.

3.3. Research Questions and Hypotheses

Question 1: What communication strategies did Ekrem İmamoğlu and his team follow in his second campaign?

Question 2: How were the communication strategies used in Ekrem İmamoğlu's second campaign reflected on his Instagram account?

Question 3: What kind of ideological connotations are there in Ekrem İmamoğlu's most liked Instagram posts shared between May 6 and June 23, 2019?

By answering these questions, the following hypotheses are going to be tested:

Hypothesis 1: İmamoğlu as a social democratic candidate uses conservative and modern codes together in his political discourse.

Hypothesis 2: Although İmamoğlu as a social democratic politician in Turkey has adopted a secular ideology in general, he frequently includes religious elements in his political discourse.

Hypothesis 3: While Ekrem İmamoğlu's communication works reproduce certain conventional social norms, he uses an integrative language in his campaigns whereby he tries to embrace both the conservative and modern sections of society around popular myths.

3.4. Method

This study makes use of different methods to investigate the communication strategies used in Ekrem İmamoğlu's posts in his Instagram account during the 2019 İstanbul Local Elections period. The sampled posts in this analysis have been chosen on the basis of them having been posted between May 6 and June 23, 2019, which are the dates of the annulment of the first elections and of the second elections, respectively. To choose the posts to be analyzed, the number of likes has been selected as the basis of sampling. Hence, in this study, only five of his Instagram posts shared at that time which received the highest number of likes have been selected. To analyze them, a semiotic analysis method has been employed. The denotative and connotative meanings and the myths that are reproduced or challenged within them have been analyzed based not only what is present in the pictures but also what is not. In addition, to look further into the strategies which were been employed by Ekrem İmamoğlu's communication team, a series of semi-structured in-depth interviews have been conducted with four individuals who were in decision making positions in Ekrem İmamoğlu's campaign team.

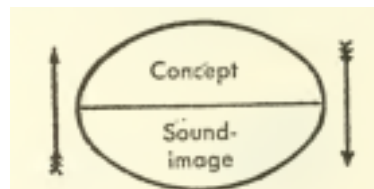
3.5. Semiotic Analysis

The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's book titled *Courses in General Linguistic* (1916) is considered one of the seminal works on semiotics. Saussure's (1959) theory argues that language is made up of two components: signifier and signified. He argues that signs consist of concepts and sound-images which, to illustrate with a metaphor, are the two sides of the same coin and recall one another (de Saussure 1959, p. 66). In his theory, sound-image and concept respectively

correspond to the signifier and signified. The following drawing is a helpful illustration of his explanation of signs:

Figure 5

The relationship between concept and sound image



Note: Image by de Saussure (1959, p. 66).

To give further details on Saussure's theory, signifiers are the symbol which refer to meanings and concepts, whereas the signified is the thing which is referred to by the signifier. For example, the word "dog" is the signifier which refers to the image that appears in our minds; it refers to the concept of dog. However, as de Saussure (1959) notes, this relationship "between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary" (pp. 66-67). What this means is that signifiers are culture-specific. They vary depending on which cultural context a concept is expressed in. The concept of a tree has different signifiers in different languages such as "tree," "arbor," "ağaç," "baum" and so on. It is important to point out that signifiers are not limited to words, however. They can be anything from hand gestures and mimics, and from images to sounds. The aim of semiotics is to analyze and uncover the signified meanings behind signifiers in any given text.

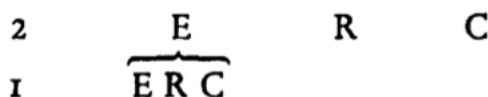
Building his theory on Saussure's theory, Roland Barthes adds another dimension to Saussure's ideas. In simple terms, he argues that there is another level within the relationship between the signifier and signified: signified concepts are signifiers of meanings themselves. According to Barthes (1983, p. 89), significations comprise of two planes: the plane of expressions (E) and the plane of content (C).

Here, the expression corresponds to the “signifier” and the concept corresponds to the “signified.” What brings about the signification between the two is the relation (R) between them; it is the connection we make between the two.

Barthes (1983, p. 89) notes that a system of signification (ERC) can become the signifier within a second system. In this case, the signified concept within the first system (ERC) becomes the denotative meaning and the signified concept within the second system ((ERC)RC) becomes the connotative one. Barthes (1983) illustrates this with the drawing below:

Figure 6

Illustration of connotative systems



Note: Image by Barthes (1983, p. 89)

Connotation expresses meanings of a second plane; it refers to deeper meanings. While the denotations of linguistic expressions such as “dog,” “red rose,” and “white dove” refer to the material manifestations of such concepts, their connotative meanings signify concepts such as “loyalty,” “love,” and “peace.” Still, it is important to note that the relationship between the signifier and signified is just as arbitrary and culture specific on connotational level as they are on denotational level. It is the acceptance of cultural associations of such concepts by others that make up the relationship between the two and the more they are reproduced, the stronger the bond between the two gets.

Barthes also defines another system of meanings which he terms “myth.” While Barthes describes myths as a “second-order semiological system” (Barthes

1972, p. 113), there are those who describe it as a third order of signification (Fiske and Hartley 2003, p. 43) for it is a combination of denotative and connotative meanings which extends to a mythology/ideology. The following chart is useful in visualizing Barthes' concept of myth:

Figure 7

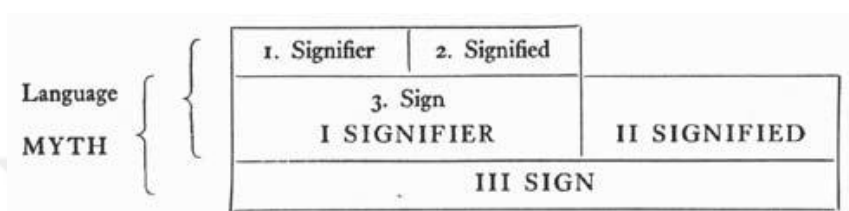


Illustration of Barthes' concept of "myth."

Note: Image by (Barthes 1972, p. 113)

While denotation reflects the literal meaning and connotation reflects the “‘expressive’ values” that are attributed to signs, myths reflect the “major culturally-variable concepts underpinning a particular worldview - such as masculinity, femininity, freedom, individualism, objectivism, Englishness and so on” (Semiotics for Beginners, n.d.). They can be thought as discourses, of how we think and talk about things.

According to Barthes (1972) myths are a “type of speech” (p. 107) or more precisely, “stolen language” (p. 131), and anything can be a myth (Barthes 1972, p. 107). A few examples about myths might involve motherhood (that it is a women’s job and sacred duty to become a mother), manhood (that it is the superior gender and that they need to be independent, competitive, and emotionally stoic), and about the people of a nation (such as every Turk is born a soldier). However, Barthes (1972, p. 108) also notes that myths are built upon a historical foundation, and they are not

immune to change. They can be challenged, broken apart and replaced by another myth.

In relation to this, the semiotic analysis part of this thesis will try to decipher the denotative and connotative meanings conveyed through the selected Instagram posts in Ekrem İmamoğlu's profile. In addition to that, the analysis aims to explore the different myths that are reproduced in them.

In this regard, a number of elements will be analyzed in the posts. The people in the posts, the way they stand, sit or act are important signs which convey meaning. In addition, their facial expressions, their proximity to other people and objects and their appearance such as their clothes will also be analyzed to uncover what kinds of messages are conveyed in the posts. Furthermore, their surroundings are composed of important signs. The decorations, furniture, devices, or miscellaneous items can add meaning or support the intended messages within a post. Thus, analyzing them will also be beneficial to understand Ekrem İmamoğlu's communication strategies. Also, the captions of the photos will be examined to understand the messages a post as a whole is meant to give.

3.6. In-depth Interviews

As mentioned in the previous sections, to have a deeper understanding about the communication strategies that were used in Ekrem İmamoğlu's campaign for the local elections in Istanbul between May 6 and June 23, 2019, a series of semi-structured in-depth interviews have been conducted with individuals who held a decision-making position in Ekrem İmamoğlu's political campaign. The standards for selecting the participants were that they held a decision-making position during the campaign and that they volunteered to participate in the study. For the interviews,

several individuals have been contacted (or contact attempts have been made), including Murat Ongun and Ekrem İmamoğlu himself. The names of the people who accepted to participate in the study are Ulaş Yılmaz (İBB Digital Communication Coordinator), Özgür Karabat (CHP 3rd District Parliament Member), Necati Özkan (Ekrem İmamoğlu's Political Consultant and Campaign Manager) and Şükrü Küçükşahin (İBB Ankara Representative), whose explicit and informed consent have been taken to use their names in this study. Many attempts have been made to reach Murat Ongun and Ekrem İmamoğlu through e-mail, telephone and direct messaging to social media accounts such as Instagram and Facebook. However, none of these attempts were successful. In fact, the İBB officers who noted on the phone that Ekrem İmamoğlu would be available for an interview in six months later turned down the researcher's request when she called them six months later for the reason that Ekrem İmamoğlu had no available spots for an interview.

Before the interviews, the participants were informed about the nature of the study and its purpose. In addition, they were informed that the interviews would be recorded in the form of an audio file and their permissions were taken in this regard. Some of the interviews were conducted online while some of them were conducted face to face in accordance with the participants' preferences and convenience. Ulaş Yılmaz, Özgür Karabat and Necati Özkan were interviewed face to face while Şükrü Küçükşahin was interviewed online because he was in Ankara. In chronological order, the interviews were conducted on October 15, 2021 with Ulaş Yılmaz, January 17, 2022 with Özgür Karabat, January 20, 2022 with Şükrü Küçükşahin and February 28, 2022 with Necati Özkan, and each interview lasted for about 50 to 60 minutes.

3.7. Contributions to the Literature

There are several studies examining Ekrem İmamoğlu's communication works in the 2019 Istanbul local elections, it is seen that in this field. Some of them scrutinized the communication campaigns the two candidates, Yıldırım and İmamoğlu, have conducted on Twitter (Akcan, 2021; Alamaslı, 2019; Aydın, 2021; Uçan, 2021). In addition, Özbek's (2019) study deals with the communication campaigns of the candidates not only in Istanbul but also in İzmir and Ankara on Twitter. Paralleling that, Demir (2021) focuses on these candidates' communication campaigns on their Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. In addition to these studies, Celep's (2019) study comes to the fore as a quantitative one which examines the communications of the candidates on Instagram one week before the June 23 elections.

As a thesis examining only Ekrem İmamoğlu's works, Ayman's (2019) research constitutes an important example. In his study, Ayman analyzes İmamoğlu's posts on Twitter and Facebook through critical discourse analysis.

Considering the available literature about the topic, the need for a qualitative study focusing on Ekrem İmamoğlu's Instagram posts between the two elections can be clearly seen. This thesis contributes to the literature by filling this gap. In addition, this study uses two different methods: semiotic analysis and in-depth interviews. In this sense, it also contributes to the literature by combining two different analyses with the goal of drawing deeper and multi-faceted conclusions.

4. FINDINGS

In this section, first, the selected posts will be examined one by one, and the denotations, connotations and myths involved in them will be discussed. It will then include the findings of the interviews with the participants. The in-depth interview findings will be examined under three headings: “Media Use During the Campaign,” “Comments on the Most Liked Instagram Posts” and “Considerations in Social Media Posts”

4.1. Semiotic Analysis of Ekrem İmamoğlu’s Instagram Posts

In this sub-section five of Ekrem İmamoğlu’s posts on his Instagram account will be examined. As mentioned, these posts have been selected according to how many likes they have received and only the posts with most likes which were posted between May 6 and June 23, 2019 will be taken into consideration. The dates the selected posts were posted and the number of likes they have received can be seen in the table below.

Table 1

The dates and number of likes received by the analyzed the posts

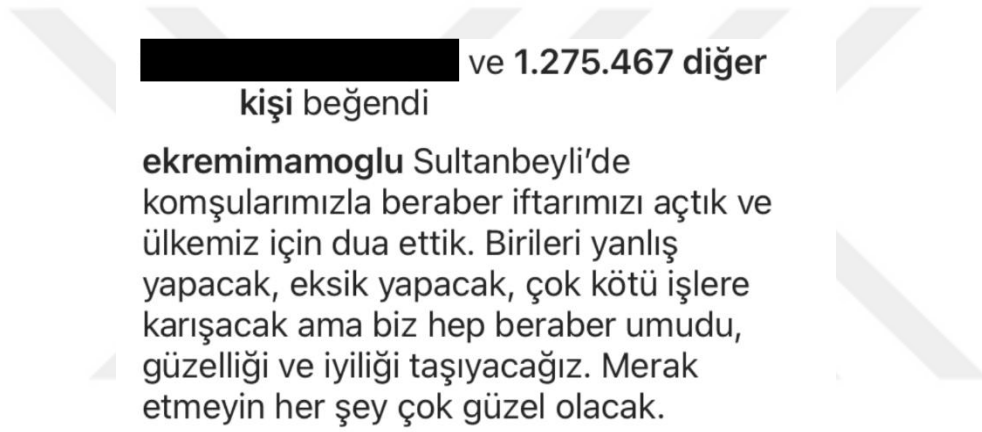
Post Number	Date Posted	Number of Likes as of September 11, 2020
Post 1	May 6, 2019	1.275.467
Post 2	May 7, 2019	1.370.194
Post 3	June 17, 2019	1.172.214
Post 4	June 20, 2019	1.700.211
Post 5	June 23, 2019	1.796.473

Post 1

The first post of the analysis was posted on May 6, 2019 and contains seven pictures. At the date the screenshots of the posts were taken, which is September 11, 2020, the post had 1.275.467 likes. The pictures were posted on the night which the results of the March 31 elections were annulled. It was not an official response to the decision to annul the elections, but it carries strong implications as being one.

Figure 8

Caption to the first post



The caption reads as follows: *“We broke our fast and prayed for our country with our neighbors. Some [people] will do wrong, miss out some, get involved in bad business but we will always bear hope, beauty, and goodness together. Do not worry, everything is going to be alright.”*

From a denotative sense, the caption expresses that Ekrem İmamoğlu visited a family in İstanbul who reside in Sultanbeyli (a neighborhood which is mostly habited by lower income, conservative families and whose residents dominantly vote for AKP) as an iftar guest and has joined them in their (and his) worship. In addition, he notes that he and the Turkish public will embody hope, beauty, and good intentions while there are some who do not act ethically or do their responsibilities in justice. As

a concluding remark he tells his followers not to worry and finishes off with his tag line “everything is going to be alright.”

From a connotative sense, the caption reminds the readers of Ekrem İmamoğlu’s Muslim identity, presents an implied criticism of the decision to annul the elections by the government and aims to console the people who voted for him for the annulment of the elections and to give them hope. The remark about his visit as an iftar guest to one of the resident families in Istanbul expresses that he is a devout Muslim who fulfills the necessities of his worship. This challenges the common notion (especially held and supported by Turkey’s conservative parties and conservative population) that the political actors in CHP and people who vote for them are “heathens.” Thus, while this is a crucial remark for Turkish voters who are predominantly Muslim and take into account the religious beliefs of politicians while voting, the discourse around the unacceptability of a non-Muslim political actor remains unchallenged. Also, this reproduces the myth about all Turkish people and Turkish politicians being Muslim. To be honest, the expression of İmamoğlu’s religious beliefs and worship are among his personal matters and should not be tied to his persona as a political figure for it goes against the principle of secularism. Admittedly, secularity in Turkey has always been in a dire position and Ekrem İmamoğlu is neither the first nor the only political actor who does so.

The first sentence also mentions that İmamoğlu visited a family who resides in Sultanbeyli. This is important because, as already mentioned, it is a neighborhood which is mostly habited by lower income and conservative families and whose residents dominantly vote for AKP. İmamoğlu’s visit to one of the families in that neighborhood signifies that he does not look down on lower income people with a conservative worldview. It presents an image that he is not detached from the public

but walks among them and by doing so challenges the perception that CHP is an elitist party supported mostly by the rich and upper-middle-classes. Furthermore, it gives the message that, as a political figure, he does not discriminate people based on their political views and their voting decisions. The caption signifies that he does not refrain from visiting people who most likely have not voted for him and listening to what they have to say.

Posted on the night of and after the announcement of the annulment of the local elections in Istanbul, the remarks about some people's wrong, lacking, and unethical actions in the caption is referential in its implied criticism of the AKP governments' objection to the election results and its annulment. The caption implicitly expresses that although an inadequate government with unethical actions is in power, there is hope for the future. It calls the readers to be hopeful for the future because İmamoğlu is going to change it for the better and bring along a brighter future.

Figure 9

First picture of the first post



The first picture in the post depicts İmamoğlu at the iftar table with the members of the household. On the table there is a tablecloth and on top of it there are glasses of water, pieces of bread, and bowls of soups in front of everyone and some of them have spoons in them. The plates on and soup bowls look conventionally modern with abstract patterns on one corner. The soups have an orange color and look either like lentil soups or tarhana soups. There are also two bowls of simple salads, four bowls of yoghurt, three small bowls of dates, a pink saltshaker in the middle and a milk bottle made of glass and repurposed as a water pitcher. Lastly, there is another pink saltshaker at the right corner, but it appears to be above the table. Thus, we can assume there is someone holding it who is out of the picture.

İmamoğlu is placed in the center of the picture and sits at the end of the table with his hands gathered at chest level. On his right there sits a man eating his soup whom we can assume to be the father of the household and in front of him sits a woman whom we can assume to be his wife. At the left-bottom corner of the picture

there is a woman with a head scarf who is looking at İmamoğlu. She appears to be one of the elders of the family, probably one of the grandmothers. We can infer that she is talking to him because İmamoğlu is attentively listening to her, looking directly at her along with the woman who sits left to him. In front of the woman at the left corner there is a boy eating a piece of bread and next to him there is a man holding a spoon, of whose face we cannot see.

The family members in the picture are wearing modest clothes. The father of the family wears a blue shirt; the mother of the family wears a blue top and a black cardigan, a simple necklace, and a black head scarf with beaded edges; the grandmother wears a black top and a grey headscarf with pink undertones and beaded edges, and the boy wears a black sweater and a smart watch. İmamoğlu, on the other hand, wears a blue suit, a white shirt, and a blue, patterned tie. Lastly, the man whose face we cannot see wears a blue jacket, a white shirt, and a blue tie.

The room itself looks clean and modest. There are not pictures, clocks or any other items hung on the walls. There is a window with white frames at the back of the room and in front of it there is a sitting area. The outside from the window looks like it is getting dark. On the sitting area, there are black and white pillows with stripes and flower patterns. In front of the window there is a white curtain with flower patterns.

From a connotative sense, when we look at the table and what is on it, it is a modest and traditional dinner table. The dishes such as the soup, salad and the yoghurt are traditionally Turkish and are not expensive. They signify the family's traditional tastes and lower-class status. The design of the house and the repurposed milk bottle as pitcher also supports and reinforces this meaning. The dinner set, however, looks modern and middle-class rather than traditional. Despite their lower economic status

and traditional background, the dinner set reflects that the family also holds modern middle-class values, or rather, they serve as bearers of such codes.

The dates on the table represent the family's commitment to religious traditions, on the other hand. The depiction of İmamoğlu in this picture presents him as a humble person who does not see it beneath him to dine at a modest table as this one. It does not represent him as elitist but as a person of the people. In addition, it represents him in an implicitly religious context and challenges the notion that political actors of CHP are non-believers.

At the dinner table, the most esteemed spots are the end of the table, its right side and then its left side, in order. In the picture, İmamoğlu sits at the most esteemed spot. After him, the father of the family takes the seat at his right and the mother takes the seat at his left. The seating order, thus, follows a hierarchal and patriarchal norm and reproduces the myths that politicians have a higher social status, have higher esteem, that they should be respected and that men have higher social status than women.

In the picture, as noted, İmamoğlu attentively listens to the grandmother of the house, looking directly at her. This connotes that he listens to and cares about people's opinions, that he is not detached from the public but cares about what they say. In addition, the family appears to be a socially conservative, religious family. The picture also conveys the message that İmamoğlu does not discriminate them. However, the reproduction of the "Muslim Turk" and "Muslim Turkish politician" myths mentioned under the analysis of this post's caption is also present in the picture.

Lastly, the picture presents İmamoğlu within a domestic space. It presents him in an intimate, informal, and familial area. Thus, in the picture, there's a discreet emphasis on the theme of family. As a communications strategy, İmamoğlu's visit to

one of the resident families of Istanbul and presenting him in such a context makes him appear more approachable and as a “man of the people,” so to say, and a “family man” as well.



Figure 10

Second picture of the first post



In the second picture İmamoğlu, the grandmother and a young woman are sitting at the couch in the room. İmamoğlu is, again, at the center. He has a Turkish flag pin on the collar of his jacket. He looks relaxed, has a smile on his face, is leaning back and towards the young woman with his hand behind her back and his belly sticks out. The grandmother is on his right and the young woman whom we can assume to be the daughter of the family is on his left. All of them are sitting very close to each other and are smiling.

İmamoğlu and two women's relaxed body language adds sincerity to the picture. İmamoğlu's stuck out belly signifies his authenticity. This is apparent because he could be warned by the people in his team to sit with a better posture and upright or his belly could easily be cropped out of the picture or photoshopped before adding the picture to the post. Hence, we can concur that it was a conscious choice meant to present him as he is, that is, to present him authentically. In addition, the smile on İmamoğlu's face connotes that he is unfazed by the annulment of the local elections in

Istanbul. His overall relaxed, calm, and unfazed appearance signifies the meaning that he is hopeful and not worried. It connotes the meaning that even though the elections may be annulled, and he will have to campaign again to be elected, he is secure in his honesty, that he did not cheat during the elections, and he will be elected again. He trusts that it was the will of the people which gave him his title as the Mayor of Istanbul and the people will elect him again. Also, the pin on his jacket signifies his commitment to the Turkish Republic and its people. It conveys the meaning that he works for this country and is committed to serving its people.

In the picture İmamoğlu sits next to two women, an older one with a head scarf and a younger one without one. The lack of men in the picture, except for İmamoğlu, connotes the significance of women as individuals of their own and how İmamoğlu values them as individuals. In addition, the age and the clothes of the women gives the message that İmamoğlu is loved by a variety of people, both by old and young people and people with different approaches to religion and beliefs. While İmamoğlu sits between the two women, he is leaning towards the younger one. His closeness to the young woman symbolically implies his closeness to the youth of Turkey and how much he values them. Having his hand behind her back further implies the support he has for the Turkish youth. It signifies the protection of a paternal figure and implies that he will support young people and provide them with security. While there are positive connotations as such, at the same time, it contains discrete patriarchal connotations. Having his paternal and protective hand behind a young woman contains messages that reproduce hierarchal gender relations where men are stronger and more competent than women who are assumed to need their protection. As a result, the picture also contains sexist meanings and reproduces the “strong, protective patriarch” myth.

Figure 11*Third picture of the first post*

In the third picture, İmamoğlu and the family members are sitting at the sitting area at the back of the room, behind the dinner table. The dinner table looks neat, and the plates are clean. The room looks tight with the “L” shaped couch and the dinner table very close to each other. On the table there is a microphone and behind it there is a woman who is not in the other pictures and whose identity we do not know but from the microphone we might assume her to be a member of the press. From left to right the sitting order is as follows: The boy, the woman, the grandmother, Ekrem İmamoğlu, the young woman and the father. İmamoğlu is talking to the grandmother with his hand raised in front of him. He looks relaxed, humble, confident, and contented. Everyone in the photo is looking at İmamoğlu except for the father. The young woman looks relaxed, is leaning back onto her hand and has her other hand on her lap. The rest of the family also looks relaxed and humble with their hands gathered in front of them. The father, however, looks inattentive and distracted. He is looking towards the table, at the phone on the table, cutlery or something else in that direction. This creates an impression of authenticity in the picture.

The small size of the room, again, signifies the lower-class economic status of the family. İmamoğlu's relaxed and contented body language connotes that he does not shy away or feel discomfort from being in close proximity to lower-class individuals and that he does not look down on them. He looks like he feels comfortable in their home and respects them as individuals. The picture makes him look approachable. It connotes that he is not detached from the public.

When we look at the people, we can see that the father, the grandmother, and the son of the family are present in the photo, but the mother is not. Keeping in mind that the picture was taken before they started having their iftar dinner, we can assume that the mother is in the kitchen, preparing the dinner. The lack of the mother in the picture while the father is in it, contains patriarchal messages. The picture reproduces the sexist norms that it is a woman's job to take care of domestic chores such as cleaning and cooking, and men do not participate in such actions. Thus, the picture contains messages that reproduce patriarchal norms through not only what is present in the picture but also what is not.

Figure 12

Fourth picture of the first post



The fourth picture shows İmamoğlu, a few members of his team and the host family breaking their fast with a glass of water at the dinner table. Traditionally, people first break their fast with a glass of water. This means that the picture shows the moment they first break their fast, which means that it was taken before the first picture of the post. The difference from the first picture is that the picture also shows the traditionally Anatolian wall rug and a few members of İmamoğlu's team. There is also an empty seat with another bowl of soup in front of it, which means that there should be another person on the table, and it is probably the person who is taking the picture. This reminds the viewer that this picture, like any other media content, is produced and it breaks the realism of the picture.

On the connotative level, the picture, again, presents İmamoğlu as taking part in a religious ritual and emphasizes his Muslim identity, reproducing the “Muslim Turk” and “Muslim Turkish politician” myths once more and presenting an image which goes against the principle of secularity but countering the conception that

political actors from CHP are non-believers, which is used by conservative circles as a tool to smear them.

The myth of the “man of the people” is also present in this picture. İmamoğlu is shown seen as he breaks his fast and eats a modest iftar meal, connoting that he is humble and approachable. In addition, the empty seat at the table which reminds the viewers that there is someone who takes the picture adds authenticity to the picture. It makes the pose look candid, even though it probably is not. Thus, it adds to İmamoğlu’s image as an authentic person who does not present himself other than how he is in real life.

The traditional Anatolian wall rug at the back connotes the Anatolian roots of the family. As a metropolitan city, İstanbul is home to a variety of people who come from all around the country. The rug represents the family’s culture and traditions. With this in mind, the picture signifies that İmamoğlu values people from provincial parts of the country, is familiar with their life-style, is not distant towards them and can be the right leader for them.

Another important element in this picture is İmamoğlu’s team, who were not visible in the previous pictures. What is important about his team is that all of them (at least the ones we can see) are men. The picture itself is male-dominated and the only women in it are the the mother and the supposed grandmother in the family. Regardless of the intention behind it, the picture gives the message that women have domestic roles in society while men function within the public sphere and are participants of the world of politics. The lack of women in his team contradicts the feminist meanings in his other pictures which connote that he supports and values women as individuals of their own.

Figure 13

Fifth picture of the first post



The fifth picture shows a building with tiled façade. The residents of the building are on their windows, looking out and taking pictures with their phones. They are all looking in the same direction. The two women in the front are wearing head scarves and smiling. Also, one of them wears white and the other wears a red shirt and they are standing next to a Turkish flag which is hung next to an Arabic writing which we can see a part of it but the whole text most likely reads “Bismillahirrahmanirrahhim.” On the upper floor there is a woman with a black and white patterned head scarf and another woman two windows right to her in the same apartment taking a picture. On the third floor there is a man and a woman at the window and there is another Turkish flag hung in between them. They both look middle-aged, and the woman is wearing a head scarf. The people at the top floor, however, are blurry but there seems to be a man and a woman looking out of the same window.

The picture shows that people from lower-class economic backgrounds with religious beliefs approve and like İmamoğlu. This, again, challenges the conservatist perceptions about CHP's values and attitude towards religion and religious people. It presents İmamoğlu as a non-elitist political actor and a man of the people. In addition, the most prominent ones in the picture, the people at the forefront, are women and they are smiling next to a Turkish flag. The women, individually, signify the prominence, importance and value of women among İmamoğlu's supporters, and the flag next to them enhances this meaning while the smile on their face signifies the women's support for İmamoğlu.

The Turkish flags in the picture are meaningful as well. They signify that the people in the picture love their nation and have patriotic feelings. Hence, it conveys the message that religious people with patriotic beliefs love and approve İmamoğlu. Considering that a big portion of CHP voters have left-wing ideologies, the picture connotes and promotes a sense of unity. Thus, it can be said that the picture reproduces the "one flag, one nation" myth. The flag at the forefront which is hung next to the Arabic text "bismillahirrahmanirrahim," however, contains additional meanings. Here, nationalist and religious symbols are used right next to each other. While this supports the previous meaning that religious people with patriotic feelings support İmamoğlu and CHP, too, the use of religious symbols next to those which represent the Republic of Turkey contradicts conventional secular ideals. It helps to perpetuate the false conception that Turkey is an Islamic country and to erase non-Muslim identities in Turkey (such as Christian, Jewish or atheist Turkish citizens), accordingly; that is, it reproduces the myth that "all Turks are Muslim."

Figure 14

Sixth picture of the first post



In the sixth picture, İmamoğlu stands in the middle of a crowd on his way to his car and is smiling. The outside is dark, but the camera lights brighten up the area. The people around him are reaching towards him and are recording him with their phones. There are also cameras of the press in the crowd. In the background someone is raising their child so that they can see İmamoğlu.

The picture, like the other pictures in the post, reproduces the “man of the people” myth. The connotative meaning in it is that he is adored by underprivileged, lower-class people. The kid at the back signifies that he is not only loved by the adult population but also by children.

While there are a few women in the crowd, it is predominantly made-up of men. When we pair this picture (and the seventh one) with the fifth picture where women are looking out of the windows of their apartments, some patriarchal meanings begin to emerge. The women in the fifth picture represent their confinement to their domestic spaces. They are looking out of the window to see and interact with

İmamoğlu, probably wanting to be outside, in the public sphere but cannot while men are there, participating in their communal support for İmamoğlu. While the pictures connote the meanings that women belong to domestic spaces while men belong to public ones, they also contain underlying patriarchal meanings. In addition to the patriarchal norms about women belonging to domestic spaces and men belonging to public ones, the pictures connote, or at least are reminiscent of, the human rights crisis in Turkey in terms of women's rights. The women in the picture appear to want to be outside to see İmamoğlu. However, it is at night and there is big crowd of men. The reason women are not outside may not only be because of the patriarchal norms of their society but also they might be afraid that something bad might happen to them in a crowd of men at night. Hence, the pictures together can be read as reflecting the current social problems, as well.

Figure 15

Seventh picture of the first post



In the last picture of the post, a large crowd of people are chanting with their fists up in the dark. Some of them are holding their phones up and recording. İmamoğlu is not in the picture but the direction the crowd is looking at indicates his general location. In the crowd there are people from ages but it is a predominantly male group.

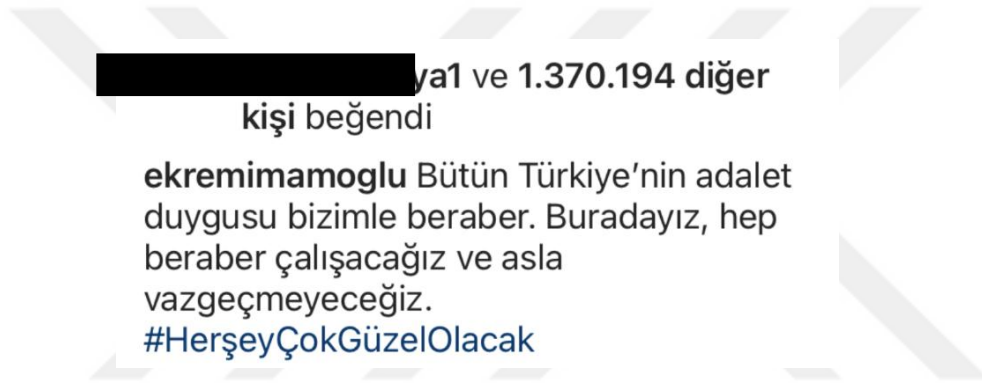
Like the one above, this picture, too, reproduces the “man of the people” myth. The people in the picture look like they come from a lower-class background and their approval of İmamoğlu supports the “man of the people” myth.

Post 2

The second post of the analysis was posted on May 7, 2019 and contains seven pictures. At the date the screenshots of the post were taken, the post had 1.370.194 likes. The pictures were posted on the next day of the annulment of the March 31 elections in Istanbul. The post contains pictures from the official release about the annulment of the Istanbul elections.

Figure 16

Caption to the second post



The caption reads as follows: *“The sense of justice of the whole Turkey is with us. We are here, we are going to work together, and we will never give up.*

#EverythingIsGoingToBeAlrigh”

On the denotative level, the caption to the second post expresses that the people of the country support İmamoğlu in what they deem as an act of injustice. However, he advises people to not fall into despair and that they are going to work together to remove the injustice that they face. The caption ends with a hashtag of İmamoğlu’s tagline, “everything is going to be alright.”

On the connotational level, the first sentence conveys the message that the Turkish people do not turn a blind eye to injustices and unites to defend the sufferer. The sentence expresses a message of unity of people who gather around İmamoğlu’s rightful cause. The second sentence and the hashtag express resistance, determination,

and hope. It conveys that the government in power will not be able to send İmamoğlu away from his rightfully elected position, that he is here to stay, and he is not going to give up and is determined to work for the people and will take back his seat with the support of the people. Hence, the caption, overall, gives a message of hope for the future, of determination, and resistance and rather than dividing the people by discriminating some groups against others, the post's discourse expresses a message that unites people.



Figure 17*First picture of the second post*

In the first picture of the second post, İmamoğlu is waving his hand and saluting a large crowd of people who are waving Turkish flags in their hands and behind them there are many dots of light. İmamoğlu looks formal with his blue suit and is standing next to a lectern in the bottom-left corner of the picture. The lectern also has a number of microphones on it, which belong to many different press outlets. At the top-right corner there is a hung banner which has the logo and the name of Beylikdüzü Municipality.

The large crowd of people in the picture shows the people's support for Ekrem İmamoğlu. The Turkish flags represent the public's patriotism and national unity. The microphones on the lectern signify the media's as well as the general public's interest in what İmamoğlu has to say. İmamoğlu's clothes indicate formality, and the blue color of his suit indicates trust and reliability. His posture indicates that he is relaxed and confident. The municipality banner into the top-right corner connotes that

İmamoğlu is at his home, in his comfort zone and alludes to his previous achievements as the mayor of Beylikdüzü Municipality.



Figure 18*Second picture of the second post*

In the second picture, İmamoğlu has his back turned to the camera, facing the public and giving a speech with his right hand up to emphasize his words. In contrast to the first picture, he has his jacket removed, is wearing a white shirt and has his sleeves cuffed to his elbows. The crowd is listening attentively to him, and the press is recording him.

İmamoğlu's posture and hand gestures indicate his confidence and self-assuredness in his words and in his cause. Without his jacket, he looks less formal yet more sincere. The white color of his shirt indicates purity and honesty. His overall appearance connotes that he is a dynamic, vigorous leader who is ready to work. In addition, the picture conveys the message that he is a man who does not give up in the face of injustice but one who resists it. It signifies that he is a leader who respects and is determined to protect the will of the people.

Figure 19*Third picture of the second post*

In the third picture, İmamoğlu is standing behind the lectern and is in the middle of his speech with his hand up in a pointing gesture. In the picture, he is wearing a blue suit, a white shirt, and the same blue tie he wore in the previous post analyzed in this study. The screen behind him shows a picture of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk looking up with the Turkish flag behind him, his signature at the bottom-right corner and his quote “Sovereignty unconditionally belongs to the people” in the bottom-left corner.

On the connotative level, the picture emphasizes İmamoğlu’s image as a leader. His confident posture and fervent body language indicate that he is a leader who knows what he is talking about. The low angle from which the picture was taken enhances this meaning by glorifying him. The picture of Atatürk at the back, however, signifies the idea of the democratic state, and the unity and sovereignty of the people. It also presents a criticism of the annulment decision while conveying the message that the people will chose İmamoğlu in the next elections as they did in the first one.

Thus, it connotes that the decision is unjust and undemocratic. In line with that, İmamoğlu's hand in the picture looks like as if it were pointing to the picture of Atatürk at the back. Even though his finger actually does not point at the picture, it draws attention to the picture at the back and conveys the message that İmamoğlu follows Atatürk's way and works to create an ideal democratic state.



Figure 20

Fourth picture of the second post



On the denotative level, the picture shows İmamoğlu standing in front of the microphones on the lectern with a serious and stern facial expression and his index finger pointing up. He is wearing a white shirt with his sleeves cuffed to his elbows and is not wearing a tie.

In the connotative sense, İmamoğlu's hand gesture indicates the importance of his words and emphasizes them. It also makes him look as if he were refusing and saying "no" to the annulment decision. It conveys a sense of resistance. The cuffed sleeves of his shirt and the lack of his tie make him look sincere and connote that he is ready to get to work. It conveys the message that he is vigorous, determined, and ready to work to fulfill the will of the people of Istanbul and serve them. His cuffing his sleeves can be metaphorically described as him drawing his guns. It is a show of masculinity, of patriarchal power. Further emphasizing this, the low angle of the shot glorifies him, makes him look stronger, and his finger serves as a phallic image. The microphones in front of him show the people's and the media's interest in him and connotes that he is not only talking to the group in front of them but also the general public.

Figure 21

Fifth picture of the second post



The fifth picture depicts a large crowd of people. The people are holding and waving Turkish flags and some of them are recording the stage with their phones. The members of the press are also recording the stage with their cameras and taking pictures.

The picture connotes the people's support for İmamoğlu. It conveys the meaning that lots of people support him and do not accept that the annulment of the local elections in İstanbul. In addition, it conveys hope because people in their homes or outside who see this post and see the crowd will not feel alone in their support for İmamoğlu. The photograph aims to give them hope so that they will not fall into despair, will not think that their votes have been wasted and will vote again in the next election. The Turkish flags connote the people's patriotic feelings, their devotion, and their determination to defend democracy and aims to evoke the same emotions in the viewers.

Figure 22

Sixth picture of the second post



In the picture, İmamoğlu is wearing his jacket and his tie again. In parallel to the previous picture, he is wearing a Turkish flag pin on his collar. He is in the middle of his speech and has a calm facial expression. His hand is up with his palm facing the crowd and his hand is relaxed. He is talking to the microphones in front of him.

The picture gives a reassuring message. İmamoğlu's calm and confident body language and facial expression encourage viewers to be optimistic. It connotes reassurance about the annulment decision and conveys to people the message that what is just will come to fruition. The most prominent symbol in the picture which gives this message is İmamoğlu's hand gesture. His relaxed hand, with his palm raised and tilted towards the crowd, conveys the message to be calm, to have no worries, to have hope, and to trust that it is going to be alright, and that the annulment decision will not change anything because he is sure that he is going to be elected again. In addition, his hand gesture is reminiscent of the gesture in DP's posters with their slogan "Enough! People have the say" (*Yeter söz milletindir*). Thus, the picture, again, implicitly reminds the viewers of the sovereignty of the people. The low angle of the picture, again, glorifies him and makes İmamoğlu look stronger and more competent.

Figure 23

Seventh picture of the second post



From left to right, the picture shows Dilek İmamoğlu (İmamoğlu's wife), Semih İmamoğlu (Dilek and Ekrem İmamoğlu's son) and Yeşim Ağırman (Head of CHP's Women's Branches). They all have serious facial expressions, looking in the same direction and applauding. There are also three people around them whose faces have either been blocked by them or cropped by the frame of the picture. There is a blue light reflecting onto them, which gives Dilek İmamoğlu's black trench-coat and Yeşim Ağırman's black leather jacket a blue undertone. Dilek İmamoğlu also wears a grey turtleneck under her jacket and Yeşim Ağırman wears a white V-neck top. Semih İmamoğlu, on the other hand, is wearing a blue jacket and a black t-shirt. There is also a red light reflecting onto them from the screen at the back, which takes the attention from the people at the back and highlights the three people at the front.

The picture, above all, reminds people that Ekrem İmamoğlu has a family. It connotes that he is a father and a husband, and he has his family's support. Dilek İmamoğlu, Semih İmamoğlu and Yeşim Ağırman's facial expressions show their displeasure with the annulment decision. However, they look serious, stoic, and

confident, which connotes their trust in Ekrem İmamoğlu. Hence, there is a strong emphasis on the concept of family and a family that sticks together through thick and thin. In addition, Yesim Ağırman, as the Head of CHP's Women's Branches, represents women's support for İmamoğlu.

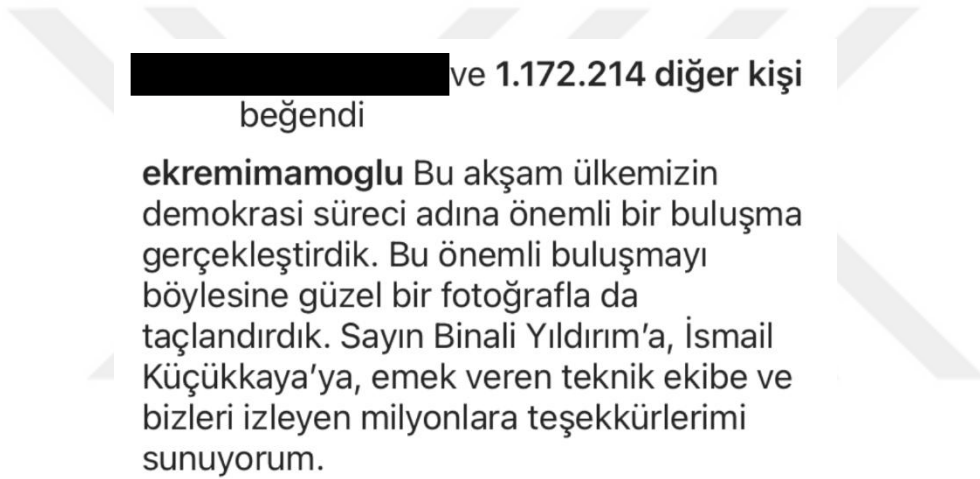
Their smart-casual clothes connote their esteemed status but not formality. On the contrary, they make them look chic but casual. Still, it presents an upper-middle-class image. The blue in their outfits connotes trust and intellect but Semih İmamoğlu's outfit also signifies his youth with the black t-shirt he wears inside his jacket. The picture presents an image in which middle-class families can see parts of themselves or parts of what they aim to achieve. The picture reproduces the modern, educated, middle-to-upper-middle-class family myth. It also reflects CHP and Ekrem İmamoğlu's main voter base.

Post 3

The third post of the analysis was posted on June 17, 2019 and contains one picture. At the time the screenshots of the post were taken, the post had 1.172.214 likes. The picture was posted six days before the second elections. The post contains a picture which was taken in the aftermath of the television special *Seçim Özel 2019* in which Ekrem İmamoğlu and Binali Yıldırım faced each other in a debate.

Figure 24

Caption to the third post



The caption reads follows: *“Tonight, we had a significant meeting for the sake of the democratic process of our country. We crowned this significant meeting with a beautiful picture like this one. I would like to thank Mr. Binali Yıldırım, Mr. İsmail Küçükkaya, the technical team who put their labor [in its production] and the millions who watched us.”*

On the denotative level, the caption mentions that İmamoğlu participated in a broadcast meeting with Binali Yıldırım, which was presented by İsmail Küçükkaya, and it was an important event for Turkish democracy. It mentions that a picture was taken on that day, and it is the one posted with this caption. In the caption, İmamoğlu

also thanks the people who partake in the meeting, the production team who worked behind the broadcast and the people who watched the program.

The caption connotes that Ekrem İmamoğlu is working towards creating a more democratic political environment. It signifies that his meeting with Binali Yıldırım shows that he is actively working towards that goal. Furthermore, the image created by the caption about İmamoğlu indicates that he is an honorable politician who is respectful towards his opponent even after the annulment of the local elections in Istanbul and does not hesitate to face him in front of a public arena and be photographed with him. Besides, it presents him as a humble politician who is thankful to the team who worked in front and behind the scenes to make the broadcast possible and to his opponent for meeting him. Besides, the mention of the production team's labor in the production of the program connotes leftist meanings. It emphasizes İmamoğlu's political stance which leans towards social democracy.

Figure 25

Picture in the third post



Büşra Köylübay (Semiha and Binali Yıldırım's daughter), İsmail Küçükkaya, Ekrem İmamoğlu, Dilek İmamoğlu, Semiha Yıldırım (Binali Yıldırım's wife), Binali Yıldırım and Semih İmamoğlu are all standing together from left to right in the picture. While some of them are looking directly into the camera, others are looking in other directions which indicates that there are multiple cameras around. Behind them there is a banner with a picture of the Bosphorus and Maiden's Tower. At the top there is a text which reads *2019 Election Special*.

The people in the picture have different styles. Büşra Köylübay wears conservative clothes. She wears a red head scarf and a white top inside her black and white coat, which extends to her shins. İsmail Küçükkaya wears a black suit with a red tie and black shoes. Ekrem İmamoğlu and Binali Yıldırım both wear blue suits, a Turkish flag pin on their collars and black shoes. However, Binali Yıldırım has a darker colored suit and wears a red tie while İmamoğlu wears a blue tie. Dilek İmamoğlu wears a white top, a black jacket with black pants and silver shoes. Semiha

Yıldırım wears a white head scarf, a purple scarf with flower patterns, a white top, a white laced jacket, black pants and black heels. Lastly, Semih İmamoğlu wears a white t-shirt, a dappled dark grey jacket, black pants, and black sneakers.

On the connotative level, the picture signifies unity and democracy. The people in the picture connote different ideologies and perspectives and the people's belief in them. Having them in the same picture signifies the unity of the people who have different beliefs and reproduces the "one country, one nation myth," no matter their differences.

The clothes Semiha Yıldırım and Büşra Köylübay wear signify their conservative and religious beliefs. They look showy and fancy, though, so as their clothes signify their upper-class status as well. Besides, they appear formal as do Binali Yıldırım, Ekrem İmamoğlu and İsmail Küçükkaya. Both İmamoğlu and Yıldırım's clothes signify trust and reliability. The pins on their collars signify their dedication to the Republic of Turkey and its people, and the unity of the people. Contrary to Semiha Yıldırım and Büşra Köylübay, the clothes of İmamoğlu's family look more casual. The relatively simple and smart casual look of Dilek İmamoğlu's clothes makes her look more approachable and presents a middle to upper-middle class image. The same can be said for Semih İmamoğlu as well; his clothes also connote his youth. The t-shirt and jacket combination makes him look more casual and presents an image which the middle-class Turkish youth can relate to. Thus, while the İmamoğlu family presents a more relatable image which does not look detached from the people, the Yıldırım family looks showy and fancy, and they present an upper-class image.

The young people in the picture are reminiscent of young voters in the country. The children of İmamoğlu and Yıldırım families represent the young population of the

country who are eligible to vote. The picture connotes and reinforces the idea that the young people of the country can take up space within the Turkish political arena and should have a say in it. The picture also signifies that young people in the country with different perspectives, beliefs, or lifestyles should not be divided but work together. The picture, thus, conveys a message of unity for future generations.



Post 4

The fourth post of the analysis was posted on June 20, 2019 and contains one picture. At the time the screenshots of the post were taken, the post had 1.700.211 likes. The picture was posted three days before the second elections.

Figure 26

Caption to the fourth post

██████████ ve 1.700.211 diğer
kişi beğendi
ekremimamoglu Biz büyük bir aileyiz,
şimdi Instagram'da 5 milyonuz. Sandığa da
bekleriz 😊🎉

The caption reads as follows: “*We are one big family and now we are 5 million on Instagram. Hope to see you at the ballot boxes, too*”

The caption is ambiguous in its message. It states that “we are one big family,” but it is ambiguous whether “we” refers to İmamoğlu’s followers on Instagram, the people of the country or both. It also states that İmamoğlu reached five million followers on Instagram and is partly posted as a celebration of that. Lastly, the caption ends with a call to the ballot boxes and two emojis.

The caption expresses unity. Regardless of whether it is the unity of İmamoğlu’s followers or the people of the whole country, it expresses that the people are one big family. It opposes discriminatory discourses and replaces them with one that brings people together. It also implies that İmamoğlu has a large number of followers, both on Instagram and in real life, as people who follow and support him as a leader. The last sentence functions as a call to action and connotatively expresses that the will of the people that they will determine which way the results will swing. The emojis at the end add sincerity and make the post less formal.

Figure 27*Picture in the fourth post*

Denotatively, the post shows the İmamoğlu family. They are all gathered around their couch. Dilek and Ekrem İmamoğlu are seated at the front and Ekrem İmamoğlu has his hand wrapped around Dilek İmamoğlu. They are both smiling and looking at the camera. Their children are at the back, and they are also smiling and looking at the camera. Mehmet Selim İmamoğlu and Beren İmamoğlu are standing on the couch behind their parents and Semih İmamoğlu, who stands behind the couch, is reaching forward and embracing his younger siblings.

In the picture, Mehmet Selim and Dilek İmamoğlu are wearing white while Semih, Beren and Ekrem İmamoğlu are wearing different shades of blue. Dilek and Ekrem İmamoğlu are dressed rather formally while their children are wearing t-shirts. Dilek İmamoğlu also wears a long pendant. Ekrem İmamoğlu is not wearing a tie and the top button of his shirt is unbuttoned.

They are in what seems to be their living room. There is a frame hung on the top-left corner of the picture, a sideboard at the bottom-left corner, and a lamp behind them. The couch the children are standing on is wide and white.

The picture puts great emphasis on the myth of the heteronormative, nuclear family. It represents an ideal, modern, middle to upper-middle-class, heteronormative, nuclear, Turkish family. In simpler terms, the family in the picture does not deviate from societal norms in terms of what a family should look like and the picture reproduces the idea that people should be in a heterosexual marriage and have children to be a family. It conveys the message that a happy family is one that has parents who are in a heterosexual relationship and have biologically related children. It legitimizes the privileged position of heterosexual marriages with children who are biologically related to their parents over non-normative ideas of family such as single parent families, chosen families, families with adopted children and homosexual families. In addition, the clothes that connote their middle-to-upper-middle-class image also convey trust and purity. The white and blue colors of their clothes present them as honest, reliable, and good people whom people can put their trust in.

The emphasis on the family also connotes the unity of the Turkish people. The picture, along with the caption, likens the Turkish people to a family and gives the message that, as a family, the people should not be divided by their differences but embrace each other and stand in unity; that is, they should turn not onto but towards one another. It expresses a message of love and encourages people to be accepting of each other. In addition, the picture connotes that, if elected as the mayor, İmamoğlu will also embrace the people of Istanbul, regardless of their background. It expresses that he will unite the people as a family just like he embraces and unites his own family.

The happy family picture also signifies the message that Ekrem İmamoğlu has good family relations, is a good father, a good husband, and a good patriarch. Combining that with the resemblance of the Turkish people to a family implies the message that, as a successful head of the family who makes his family members happy, İmamoğlu will make the people of Istanbul happy, too. Thus, the picture connotes that, as a candidate, İmamoğlu would be a good mayor and the voters should choose him if they want a happy life.

The location of the children in the picture is also meaningful. In Turkish society, children are dominantly dependent on their families and their individuality is limited at best. Parents tend to be highly involved in their children's lives and make decisions for them. Rather than placing the children lower than their parents or in front of them, the picture depicts the children as standing behind their parents. Thus, connotatively, the picture puts significant value on children and future generations. It presents them as autonomous, independent individuals. Hence, while the picture reproduces the concept of a nuclear, heteronormative family, it also challenges the power dynamics within the family.

The picture contains patriarchal messages, as well. Similar to the messages in the first post, Ekrem İmamoğlu's hand around Dilek İmamoğlu is telling of the hierarchal dynamics in the family. His hand around Dilek İmamoğlu is a sign of dominance and signifies that Ekrem İmamoğlu is the patriarch of the house. The picture conveys the message that although they might seem equal, implicitly, at the end, this equality is bestowed upon the other members in the family by him and he has the last say in the family. In addition, Semih İmamoğlu's embrace of his siblings can be said to signify his status as a future patriarch who supports and protects his family.

Thus, the two instances can be said to reproduce the “strong, protective patriarch” myth.



Post 5

The fifth and final post of the analysis was posted on June 23, 2019 and contains one picture. At the time the screenshots of the post were taken, the post had 1.796.473 likes. The picture was taken on the day of the second elections.

Figure 28

Caption to the fifth post

 ve 1.796.473 diğer
kişi beğendi
ekremimamoglu Demokrasiye sahip
çıkmaq için oyumuzu kullandık. Herkesi de
sandığa gidip oyunu kullanmaya davet
ediyorum. #HerŞeyÇokGüzelOlacak

The caption reads as follows: “*We voted to protect our democracy. I invite everyone to go to the ballot boxes and vote. #EverythingIsGoingToBeAlright*”

The caption to the fifth post expresses that Ekrem İmamoğlu and his family have cast their votes for the second elections. It denotes that they did their part to protect the Turkish democracy by voting. In addition, Ekrem İmamoğlu also encourages and invites people to vote. The caption, again, ends with his tagline, “everything is going to be alright.”

The caption connotes that the Turkish democracy is still alive and well but needs protection and the best way to do so is to vote. The sentence implicitly aims to evoke hope in people who may have fallen into despair when it comes to how fair Turkish democracy can be and aims to encourage them to vote. In addition, it signifies and reminds people of their suffrage and that they are still entitled to choose their representatives. Furthermore, it conveys the message that the government in power is the source of the threat to Turkish democracy and criticizes the government for this.

Thus, the caption implies that to protect the Turkish democracy, people should vote for İmamoğlu and if they choose him, “everything is going to be alright.”



Figure 29*Picture in the fifth post*

From a denotative sense, the picture shows Ekrem, Dilek and Semih İmamoğlu casting their votes for the repeated 2019 İstanbul Local Elections. They are in a classroom and are standing next to a ballot box. Ekrem and Semih İmamoğlu are standing at the rear of the ballot box and Dilek İmamoğlu stands at the front. Behind them, there is a news reporter standing on the left corner, next to the white board. Next to the news reporter, there are poll workers who are mostly blocked by the İmamoğlu family.

The clothes that the İmamoğlu family wear are similar in color. They all dominantly wear different shades of blue, white, and black. Ekrem İmamoğlu wears a white shirt, dark blue jacket, brown pants and no tie; Dilek İmamoğlu wears a white

top, a blue jacket and a pair of black pants; and Semih İmamoğlu wears a black t-shirt, dark blue jacket and white pants.

From a connotative sense, the most prominent message that the picture conveys is a call for people to vote. The picture is meant to function as a call to action. However, it contains additional meanings as well. First of all, like in the previous post in this analysis, it reproduces the idea of a nuclear, heterosexual family with biological ties. It reproduces and reinforces the “happy, nuclear family” myth. In addition, their clothes, again, connote trust, reliability, and purity with their colors and their style which present them as being middle-to-upper-middle-class, creating an image of them as not detached from the people. Furthermore, again, Semih İmamoğlu’s clothes emphasize his youth and present him as a symbol of the Turkish youth.

Another connotative message conveyed by the picture is having faith in the Turkish democracy. It conveys the message that the people’s word is final when it comes to the election of state officials and highlights that Turkey is a democratic state. In addition, it implicitly expresses that, in a democracy, there is no power higher than the people’s will and voting is an inseparable part of democracy. Thus, voting is critical to preservation and strengthening of the Turkish democracy. The picture gives messages to strengthen people’s faith in Turkish democracy and give them hope for the future. It implies that, after the elections, the people of Istanbul will see better, brighter days under İmamoğlu’s mayorship.

The positive attitude of İmamoğlu family, even on the day of the second elections, also has the ability to instill hope in his supporters. The picture gives hope to people that there is nothing to worry about and if they go to the ballots and vote, İmamoğlu will win again, connoting that the annulment of the first elections was unjust.

Lastly, Ekrem İmamoğlu's son, Semih İmamoğlu is also present in this post, just like he was in the second, third and fourth posts in this analysis. Semih İmamoğlu's consistent presence in Ekrem İmamoğlu's post connotes the meaning that, through these posts, Ekrem İmamoğlu is trying to get younger generations more involved in politics and encouraging them to vote. The emphasis on Semih İmamoğlu's youth and his involvement in his father's political life as a supporter expresses the meaning that the younger generations have a say in politics and should use their voice. By doing so and knowing that CHP's and his popularity is growing among younger citizens, Ekrem İmamoğlu aims to target the demographic group which he has a higher chance of receiving votes from through this picture and other pictures in which his son is present.

4.2. Analysis of the In-depth Interviews

In this sub-section, data obtained from in-depth interviews with decision makers in İmamoğlu's campaign in the 2019 Istanbul local elections will be presented in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the strategies used in Ekrem İmamoğlu's campaign. For this part of the study, in-depth interviews were conducted with Ulaş Yılmaz, Özgür Karabat, Şükrü Küçükşahin and Necati Özkan. The participants were asked questions about their campaign works, their opinions on the most liked Instagram posts analyzed in this thesis, and their attitudes about the use of social media in İmamoğlu's election campaign.

Media Use During the Campaign

When the participants were asked questions about their media use during Ekrem İmamoğlu's campaign and what the preferred media outlets were, Yılmaz stated that all media were used and that İmamoğlu was tried to be reflected in his

essence, including his managerial and political sides. Karabat, on the other hand, emphasized the importance of getting the support of the voters who have already put their belief in CHP again and winning the votes of the youth, who make up the majority of undecided voters. As regards the same question, Küçükşahin drew attention to the importance given to increasing İmamoğlu's recognition and stated that social media were given additional importance and underlined the importance of presenting İmamoğlu without breaking with his essence. Özkan, on the other hand, stated that with the limitations on the independence of the media in Turkey, they turned their focus to a campaign based on face-to-face contacts and communication through social media.

Yılmaz said the following:

We use all the channels. We are present on all channels that can be defined as social media. (...) We have a basic principle of attempting to reflect Ekrem İmamoğlu as a manager, a public administrator, and a politician. (Ulaş Yılmaz, 15 October 2021, personal communication)

Karabat stated:

It is very important that the mass of voters who have voted for us for a long time continue to vote for us. Otherwise, saying that we will leave that voter there and find new voters would not be the right thing in politics to change what they set out to do with what they saw on the road. (...) The understanding of service has become much more important in local elections. It is important to be able to explain this. There is definitely a need for a new language in politics here. Beyond all this, when we look at who the undecided voters are, younger voters are undecided. (Özgür Karabat, 17 January 2022, personal communication)

Küçükşahin said:

For example, including correct sentences... With these features, I am... We believed that it would overcome this recognition problem. (...) Apart from this, I think that the disproportionate pressure or suppression of the government also attracted a special interest in society. This, of course, was not in the mainstream media. Social media channels were used very well in Ekrem's campaign. (...) Younger generations also gave very strong support. I mean, from the people. (...) I mean, it is already a feature of Ekrem Bey, as long as they come face to face. There is no one from whom he can not get sympathy after coming face to face. As I said, Ekrem Bey was someone who could easily penetrate into that person with his facial expressions, speech and warmth. For the young, the old... (Şükrü Küçükşahin, 20 January 2022, personal interview)

Özkan commented as follows:

There is no longer an independent and impartial media in Turkey. The current ruling party manages more than 90% of the established media in Turkey, so the current ruling party will not help a candidate from the opposition to be heard. On the contrary, it will make the negative camp. That is why we have to act as if we do not have any media in our hands, and um... We said that we should determine our own method of struggle and we gave importance to two areas. The door-to-door area, which is one of the oldest communication areas... That is, the candidate's going out on the street and visiting the market on Sunday, visiting neighborhoods and touching people was the most important thing we chose. The second is to dominate the digital space because, as the first opposition candidate, it was impossible for him to make his voice

heard in the traditional media dominated by the ruling party, so these were the newest media, digital media, social media, and mobile media, as an area where he could make his voice heard. (Necati Özkan, 28 February 2022, personal communication)

When asked about the importance of social media in the communication efforts of the campaign, Yılmaz stated that social media is very important for them to convey their own messages due to the obstacles they face in the mainstream media. In parallel to Yılmaz, Karabat also underlined the necessity of using social media and the contribution of voters' participation in communication to the success of the campaign. Likewise, Küçükşahin stated that the need to turn to social media, created by the impossibility of finding a place in the mainstream media, caused such a path to be followed.

Yılmaz gave the following answer:

We try to make ourselves, that is, the works we want to do, the works we want to realize, the messages we want to give, the information we will give, through social media channels, and we try to activate the accounts in a lively way, especially at this time, because the mainstream media is under a very serious blockade. It is a very important tool for us. (Ulaş Yılmaz, 15 October 2021, personal communication)

Karabat commented as follows:

For the first time, we used social media more than anyone else in this election. We did not use social media like this. Let me tell you, we did not just let our candidate talk. The biggest key to Ekrem Bey's success is that he got the voters talking. It is because he has effectively shared his opinion of the other

candidates with voters. (...) We had to do that, and this is the point reached in the world now. (Özgür Karabat, 17 January 2022, personal communication)

Küçükşahin said:

As I said before, the disproportionate pressure of the government, the inability of Ekrem Bey to appear in the main media... For example, we were not on the billboards. We were having a hard time finding a newspaper or TV channel that could even advertise with our money. We have never been to many of them. When this is the case, people inevitably started using social media channels to learn about Mr. Ekrem, "what is going on, what is going on, what kind of person is he?" (...) We had to use it anyway, but we had to use it. Because why? Especially the young audience was present in this medium. It was also widely used, but the pressure of the government to reduce the visibility of the candidate, that is, his inability to appear in the mainstream media, in the conventional media, made the voters more concentrated on social media. (Şükrü Küçükşahin, 20 January 2022, personal communication)

When asked to talk about what social media means to them and its importance, Yılmaz mentioned that social media channels are powerful organs that can be used to guide, inform and warn individuals. Karabat and Özkan, on the other hand, explained how the ability to interact with individuals provided by social media contributes to their campaigns.

Yılmaz said:

Because we aim to guide people on many issues, to inform them, to warn them about certain issues, and to create public opinion on certain issues... That is why all these channels are powerful organs with which we come into contact with Istanbulites. (Ulaş Yılmaz, 15 October 2021, personal communication)

Karabat included the following sentences:

For example, Ekrem Bey's agency did not find Ekrem's slogan, "everything will be fine." It came from the public, it came out of the streets, so the campaign was a lively campaign that evaluated the situation, drew conclusions from it, and revised itself every moment like this. I think this is very important. It was very important in this success; that is, a language that constantly improves itself was important. Therefore, of course, we did social media and street interviews; these are very important other things. (Özgür Karabat, 17 January 2022, personal communication)

Özkan said:

Contents related to the dialogues Ekrem Bey had with the citizens on the street, that is, non-fiction real content and commercial content, various desktop animations...All these were distributed on these channels, and as a result, Ekrem İmamoğlu's videos became a phenomenon all over Turkey. And thanks to these videos, Ekrem İmamoğlu was recognized by the citizens of the Republic of Turkey, from the youngest to oldest. (Necati Özkan, 28 February 2022, personal communication)

Social media platforms differ in terms of their structure, usage patterns and purposes. When the participants were asked which social media platform they preferred in the campaign, Yılmaz and Özkan stated that they used all the available social media platforms and did not give more weight to one than the others.

Yılmaz talked as follows:

We do not concentrate on one particular medium. We use them all. Namely, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook... This is because they all have different users

and different profiles. That is why we use them all. (Ulaş Yılmaz, 15 October 2021, personal communication)

Özkan said:

That is, we used all the channels such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and even TikTok and looked at ways to directly reach the different constituencies that use those channels on all these channels. (...) We didn't have a special preference, or we were on all channels. (Necati Özkan, 28 February 2022, personal communication)

However, Küçükşahin said "Twitter and Instagram" were the most preferred platforms during the campaign (Şükrü Küçükşahin, 20 January 2022, personal interview) and that these are the channels they give the most weight to. Karabat, on the other hand, stated that these platforms are Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook with the following sentence:

Mr. Ekrem was very influential on Twitter, we have to say that. (...) But we did not put any of these (...) in front of anyone. People say that there are, for example, older voters on Instagram and Facebook today, Ekrem is still influential on Facebook. Instagram also uses it. I would like to say that we use these three platforms highly effectively. (Özgür Karabat, 17 January 2022, personal communication)

When asked the question of "What was the importance of Instagram in the campaign?", Yılmaz stated that Instagram stands out as a medium where İmamoğlu is represented as a person and tried to convey himself as he is. Küçükşahin also said that Instagram has a sincere dimension and that it is a medium where İmamoğlu's sympathy comes to the fore. Özkan, on the other hand, stated that the importance of

Instagram lies in the fact that it is a medium used by citizens, and Karabat highlighted the younger user profile of Instagram.

Yılmaz said the following:

It is a world where we tell what kind of character Ekrem İmamoğlu is. It became a medium where we conveyed his view of the world, communication, family structure, contact with people, dialogues, and directness rather than a political thing. We have a principle, such as using the media in accordance with those media. So, we tried to use Instagram the same way people use Instagram on a daily basis, during a presidential profile or a candidate's campaign. (Ulaş Yılmaz, 15 October 2021, personal communication)

Karabat talked about this subject as:

What if Instagram is a place where, compared to us, there are younger voters, less political voters, instant consumption, and a mass of voters who like instant consumption? Therefore, designs and shares unique to him were made in that process. But while we were doing all of this, we paid attention to unity, so Instagram is one thing and Twitter is not something else. (...) Instagram is still like this, especially at a point where young voters are the majority after TikTok, voters who can change their minds, voters who can evaluate their decision... (Özgür Karabat, 17 January 2022, personal communication)

Küçükşahin stated the following:

People prefer to see happy and cute things there. As such, it is the most suitable profile for Mr. Ekrem. Let's just say that Ekrem İmamoğlu was the person with the highest sympathy among the candidates. I'm not talking about recognition. Sympathy... In other words, giving photographs, video footage... Ekrem was more advantageous than the other candidates, regardless of the

visual. For this reason, it has made a serious contribution to him on Instagram.

(Şükrü Küçükşahin, 20 January 2022, personal communication)

Özkan said:

It is because our main point of view was as follows: Citizens, wherever you are, be there. If a citizen goes to Instagram, we are there. If there are citizens who go to TikTok, we have to be there too. If anyone uses Twitter, we will be there. If anyone uses YouTube, we will be there. Or I do not know, if anyone uses Facebook, we will be there. In other words, Ekrem İmamoğlu was almost exactly where the citizen was because that is how things works in nature.

(Necati Özkan, 28 February 2022, personal communication)

Participants were also asked who their target audiences on Instagram were.

Yılmaz, Karabat and Özkan stated that their target audience is not limited to a single group. While Yılmaz stated that content is produced for people from all walks of life, Karabat stated that a little more weight was given to young people as they were the group that changed their minds the most (Özgür Karabat, 17 January 2022, personal interview). In addition, Özkan said that special content is produced for women and youth. Besides, according to Küçükşahin, on Instagram one can produce content as based on user demographics.

Yılmaz said the following:

So, when you enter this Instagram account, a young person can find something about himself, a middle-aged character can find something about himself, regardless of his economic level, so that he can see an Ekrem İmamoğlu profile. We had something so that he could extract this from both the sharing of the photos and the general style, but we did not have an approach that we

were specifically addressing this community. (Ulaş Yılmaz, 15 October 2021, personal communication)

Özkan gave the following words:

Of course, naturally, some platforms, that is, some social media channels, have naturally differentiated citizen clusters; you can say consumer cluster... ım... or voter cluster. For example, Instagram is a channel where mostly young people and women take part, so we did some work by targeting it, but some of the content was distributed across the platform or segment, regardless of the channel or segment (...), and distributed in all directions without discrimination. (Necati Özkan, 28 February 2022, personal communication)

Küçükşahin said:

In other words, which messages will be sent to which audiences or which messages will be given on which channels... They were always looked after. (...) You can capture a very detailed viewer profile. And you know what they're interested in. Adjustments are made, of course. It is shared accordingly. (Şükrü Küçükşahin, 20 January 2022, personal communication)

Particularly after winning the first election, when asked how much coverage Ekrem İmamoğlu could find in the mainstream media compared to his rival Binali Yıldırım, all the participants stated that they faced obstacles and could not find a place in the mainstream media. In addition, Karabat and Özkan stated that when İmamoğlu found a place in the mainstream, these representations presented him in a demonizing way. In addition, Küçükşahin stated that the audience's belief in unfair and pro-government news in the media has decreased.

Yılmaz said the following in this regard:

There was a serious bombardment of obstruction, restriction, manipulation, and false news in the mainstream media. There were many things that made very heavy accusations about us; false news, provocative ones... In other words, even the official television of the state did not want to show us. It did not... When you look at it this way, there was a very unequal distribution. In general, the blockade of the mainstream media caused people to follow us on social media. (Ulaş Yılmaz, 15 October 2021, personal communication)

Karabat said:

In general, we still cannot say that it is too much, but it has always been in negative news. If we do a measure of coverage, think of it like this, it went from 10% to 20%, but 90% of it happened in the presence of negative news. It still continues. (Özgür Karabat, 17 January 2022, personal communication)

Özkan said:

Ekrem Bey was either never seen or not even heard of, or he was often portrayed in negative news in a demonized way. Therefore, the number of channels or traditional channels that support Ekrem Bey's election campaign is either almost non-existent or very limited. (Necati Özkan, 28 February 2022, personal communication)

Küçükşahin made the following comment:

Of course, it still did not get enough coverage in the conventional media. Looking from the other side of the scene, society has decreased its receptivity to smear campaigns, especially during this election period. (...) I put it in quotation marks. News like this started to work in favor of Ekrem Bey because this news was being investigated and when it was found that it was not true,

"God damn you" was said. (Şükrü Küçükşahin, 20 January 2022, personal communication)

As mentioned above by the participants, Ekrem İmamoğlu was a candidate who had difficulty in finding coverage in the mainstream media during the election process, was not covered at all or was given limited coverage there. In this regard, the participants were also asked about how İmamoğlu's lack of opportunity to be presented on conventional media outlets affected their social media efforts while Binali Yıldırım found extensive coverage on conventional media. Yılmaz stated that as a result of this injustice, the public actively turned to social media channels to get news from Ekrem İmamoğlu.

Karabat, in parallel with Yılmaz, said, "Of course, of course, exactly... When the media does not include it, that is the mainstream..." (Özgür Karabat, 17 January 2022, personal interview). He also stated that the campaign turned to social media due to the obstacles in the mainstream media, with the following sentences:

In fact, people have largely reacted to injustice. There was an unjust process throughout the entire campaign. (...) We have something before us that uses all the possibilities of the state, that uses the ministries. Here, too, we are a candidate who communicates with our own means, in our own channels; we are in the position of a candidate. In this way, people noticed and felt this injustice. This led to a serious backlash. For this reason, people quickly concentrated on the channels where they could turn and alternatively get information about us and follow us. That is why our accounts attracted a lot of attention. (Ulaş Yılmaz, 15 October 2021, personal communication)

Referring to a different point, Küçükşahin stated that this injustice was negatively received by both the opposition and the masses supporting the government.

Özkan, on the other hand, said that this unfair competition forced them to meet face-to-face with the public in their campaigns and to also try to reach the public via social media.

Küçükşahin said the following:

There, the voters said, “We are behind the candidate we previously elected; we want Ekrem İmamoğlu to lead us” once, twice... Do not try to usurp the right of the national will at the ballot box, just be it”. (Şükrü Küçükşahin, 20 January 2022, personal communication)

Özkan commented as follows:

We assumed it never happened and we focused on our own agenda, and as I said, we made our own agenda by increasing the interaction on social media channels in the digital world.... As I said, when we came to the end of the election campaign, a video of Mr. Ekrem was watched by 5-6 million citizens within 24 hours. However, our competitor did not even have a tenth of this, so while one side was strong in traditional media, the other side became strong in digital media. (Necati Özkan, 28 February 2022, personal communication)

When asked about the reason for the difference in vote rates between the two elections, Yılmaz attributed this to the fact that the injustice İmamoğlu experienced was also seen by the public, that he was not indifferent to it, and that he only talked about his promises despite the negative words from his opponent. Karabat, Küçükşahin and Özkan stated that the reason for the difference in the vote rates was the public's reaction to injustice and the feeling of protecting democracy, and they said that, as a result, Ekrem İmamoğlu received the votes of both the supporters of the government and the undecided.

Yılmaz answered the question as follows:

The reason is that, as I mentioned earlier, there was a serious injustice, and people reacted first to the injustice. It is because, on the one hand, there was a structure that used all public facilities and established a constant manipulation thing, and on the other hand, there was someone who talked about what they wanted to do about Istanbul, no matter what. (...) In other words, on the one hand, there is an approach that constantly denigrates us, makes unfounded claims about us, and points fingers at the citizens; on the other hand, there is a person who constantly talks about what they want to do. (Ulaş Yılmaz, 15 October 2021, personal communication)

Karabat made the following comment:

They took care of democracy and voters who did not go to the polls went to the polls this time. (...) Those who voted for Binali Bey but saw the injustice done, but those who did not want to vote for the candidate of a left-wing party or a social democratic party, withdrew from the ballot box. Some of those who voted for Binali Bey also voted for Ekrem Bey, but mainly for the ballot box. Voters who did not go came and made the difference. This is the situation. (Özgür Karabat, 17 January 2022, personal communication)

Küçükşahin included the following words:

Especially conservative voters said that "it wouldn't be that unfair". In other words, all the conservatism-based, ethnic-based, or ideological-based propaganda, all the zealous propaganda, were not received by conservative voters after small-scale research. On the contrary, it aroused anger. He needed to teach a lesson to the electorate, and he taught that lesson. (...) Here is whether or not Mr. Muharrem İnce sat in front of the Supreme Election Board due to the attitude towards the Republican People's Party in the elections.

There was a particularly young electorate who acted with this anger. Some of them did not go to the polls on March 31, but Mr. Ekrem's performance on the night of March 31 attracted this electorate back to the ballot box. (Şükrü Küçükşahin, 20 January 2022, personal communication)

Özkan said:

In the first elections on March 31, CHP had no hope that this election would be won, including some of the voters. That is why some of them did not even come and vote; that is, those in the holiday destinations did not even come and vote, but in the second elections, everyone saw that this was won. That is why they came and voted. Therefore, the vote difference that emerged on June 23 is a cluster formed by both Ak Party voters, MHP voters who are angry with their own party, and CHP voters who do not support their own candidate, and the reason for the formation of this whole cluster is the feeling of injustice. (...) In summary, the choice of the citizens here is not only to protect Ekrem İmamoğlu, but also to protect their own democratic rights, to protect their own electoral rights and to protect their own future. (Necati Özkan, 28 February 2022, personal communication)

When asked about what effect Instagram posts have on the differences of the shares of the votes cast for İmamoğlu between the two elections, Yılmaz stated that people from all walks of life can find something of themselves in the posts and that İmamoğlu is his sincere presence here. Karabat, on the other hand, said that the reason is that this platform is mostly used by young people. While Özkan stated that not only Instagram but also the shares made on all social media channels were equally effective in achieving this result, Küçükşahin just mentioned its "positive effect." During the interview, he was informed by word of mouth that Ulaş Yılmaz was also interviewed

for this study. Thereupon, he said that Ulaş Yılmaz was more knowledgeable about İmamoğlu's media communications so he would be a more accurate source about the issue.

According to Yılmaz, the answer is as follows:

So, everyone can find something for themselves there. People found it more sincere, more realistic and more direct to the extent that we reflected it in the accounts, at the rate that we reflected it as it was. (...) In other words, his communication was not to share, but to communicate. That is why, to the extent that we reflected this energy on our social media accounts, especially on Instagram, people found it more like themselves. (Ulaş Yılmaz, 15 October 2021, personal communication)

Karabat said the following:

For example, who is the voter who reevaluates their decision the most? Mostly young voters... Maybe it is the first time voter; we can say that this election is for the voter who uses Instagram more because he is young. Therefore, I think that the use of that platform has a significant impact. (Özgür Karabat, 17 January 2022, personal communication)

Özkan made the following statement:

I cannot say that this or that platform has been more effective than the other during this entire campaign period. In other words, Youtube was not more ineffective than Instagram; for example, Facebook was not more ineffective, Twitter was not more ineffective... All of them have had an impact in one way or another. (...) Instagram, like other platforms, played an important role in this process. (Necati Özkan, 28 February 2022, personal communication)

Küçükşahin made the following comment:

Okay, I mean, at this point, I also take into account what Ulaş said. You should also consider it, but I especially see its positive effect. (...) For us, his assessment is the most accurate and healthy assessment. (Şükrü Küçükşahin, 20 January 2022, personal communication)

Comments on the Most Liked Instagram Posts

The participants were also shown the photographs in the posts examined in the semiotic analysis part of this study and were asked to interpret these photographs. Looking at the first post, Yılmaz stated that a non-discriminatory, non-targeting and rather embracing language is used here. Karabat drew attention to the naturalness of İmamoğlu and stated that visuals that are not disconnected from the culture of the people presented here. Küçükşahin also underlined the positive messages in the posts while drawing attention to İmamoğlu's naturalness. Özkan, on the other hand, recalled the events that took place in the previous presidential elections and stated that the receipt of the mandate caused a reaction in the public. According to him, that this post was made to relieve the public's anxiety, and that is why it received so much appreciation.

According to Yılmaz:

That is why we have done something by expressing that the language and style we use here are not targeting anyone or any community, a handful minority, a handful of characters who do this manipulation, and a handful of characters that exist today and will not exist tomorrow. We have never established a language by targeting any segment, regardless of which party votes for us. We have chosen a language and style that always grasps and embraces people, but also says that they are wrong when they make mistakes. (Ulaş Yılmaz, 15 October 2021, personal communication)

Karabat said:

The table... Another feature of this table is its natural environment, which is more appreciated here. There is naturalness here; there is the naturalness of the table. Ekrem Bey has his own naturalness. Let's take a look at it here, there is a young girl, there is a boy who is younger, there is an Anatolian man with two unbuttoned buttons, all of them and a woman with a headscarf... These are all Anatolian motifs. Therefore, as far as I can see, there is a neighbor, I guess there is such a thing here. Mr. Ekrem and here, for example, there is the Turkish flag looking out of the windows. Here, everyone has everything. Look, there is a young woman with a headscarf, there is an old woman with a headscarf. This is a campaign for everyone. (Özgür Karabat, 17 January 2022, personal communication)

Küçükşahin made the following comment:

Ekrem is a candidate suitable for the average lifestyle of the society. In other words, none of these are things that he does reluctantly, just for the sake of politics or propaganda. In his life... I mean, the iftar table already exists in Mr. Ekrem's life. (...) It is not something that does not exist. Therefore, there is no artificiality there. On the contrary, you see its warmth in all these things. (...) As a family... He can communicate with ease. (...) Look, the most important aspect of our campaign is that it is a smiling campaign. (...) There are no bad words. There are no bad words. There is no hit and run. It is not in those words. (Şükrü Küçükşahin, 20 January 2022, personal communication)

Özkan said:

It triggered the case of Muharrem İnce, who vanished according to citizens during the previous presidential elections. Therefore, this social media post

was shared, so that Mr. Ekrem should sit down no matter what the circumstances are and call out to the citizens, and right after that, you know, um... a live broadcast was made. (...) Therefore, these 1,275,467 likes or likes here are a taste that emerged under the social climate conditions of that night. (Necati Özkan, 28 February 2022, personal communication)

When asked about his comments on the second post, Yılmaz stated that the themes of unity, justice and determination dominate the photograph. Karabat, on the other hand, stated that İmamoğlu was young and determined and said that taking off his checkered shirt, wearing a white shirt and rolling up his sleeves represented starting a job and drew attention to the family theme in the photographs. Küçükşahin also stated that there is determination and perseverance in the photographs, and also underlined that they represent resistance and the support that İmamoğlu received from his family and the public for his cause. Özkan, on the other hand, drew attention to the emphasis on the unshakable sovereignty of the people in the photograph.

Yılmaz said the following:

In both cases, before the speech there, the speeches in that second situation were something that aimed to make people fight together and to eliminate this injustice together, and the majority of people made their decisions that night. One of the most resolute, self-confident and memorable phrases in the photographs was “I will not offend anyone's right, I will not let anyone eat my right.” (Ulaş Yılmaz, 15 October 2021, personal communication)

Karabat said the following in his comment:

Look at his body language: Mr. Ekrem is determined and young here for once. Mr. Ekrem is not sullen in any way, but he is a faithful and determined man. (...) It is very clear that he should take off his jacket and wear a white shirt.

Having a white shirt, rolling up his sleeves... Here we start again; we are not tired; we continue; we are determined in our perception. (...) The dominant motif in these meetings is also the family model. (...) He is not alone. I mean, he is a politician. There is an Istanbul, its president, and a man who gets support from everyone. (Özgür Karabat, 17 January 2022, personal communication)

Küçükşahin stated the following:

Look at the facial expression. Look at the facial expression and hand gesture that show how determined, how serious and how heavy this decision is. (...) Determination and indeed, perseverance... He is showing it. In other words, this photo shows that this decision was wrong, and I think this is a great photo that shows that it will be a victory in the end, that he does not give up, does not get tired, and that he will take this matter seriously. (...) Look at their faces. In other words, they give this image of resistance and determination. In that speech, Mr. Ekrem said, "I said goodbye to my family." (...) He said, "Are you ready to walk next to me?" and this is a very good campaign that shows that the support of the family is in this together with him. If I'm not mistaken... (Şükrü Küçükşahin, 20 January 2022, personal communication)

Özkan said:

Here is the poster with a Turkish photograph, with Atatürk saying, "Sovereignty unconditionally belongs to the nation." (...) These are the photos with his family, imm... All these are actually Mr. Ekrem's own personality as a candidate; these are the photos in which he shows his courage and his belief in democracy, and, thus, he becomes a leader. (Necati Özkan, 28 February 2022, personal communication)

When it comes to the third post, Yılmaz stated that the photo here fills a gap that has been missing in Turkish politics for many years. Karabat also mentioned the emphasis on the themes of unity and family in it. In addition, he emphasized the importance given to labor in the captions below the photo. Küçükşahin, on the other hand, emphasized messages about women's solidarity given in the photograph and talked about the need for the sense of public unity communicated through the photograph. Özkan, on the other hand, underlined the themes of peace, unity and reconciliation in the photograph.

Ekrem İmamoğlu has the following structure: he has an attitude of meeting with everyone, establishing a dialogue with everyone, establishing a dialogue with everyone who will benefit the country and benefit Istanbul, and not excluding anyone. (...) Talking, telling, and arguing about Turkish politics have disappeared for many years; it is not talked about. There was an attempt to do something as manipulation through the media, so such a ground for dialogue was not formed. (Ulaş Yılmaz, 15 October 2021, personal communication)

Karabat gave the following statement:

What Turkey needs is a family photo like this one. Leaders in Turkey cannot come together. When the leaders cannot come together, the society becomes polarized and this actually leaves Turkey's knowledge incomplete. The government does not benefit from the accumulation of the opposition. The opposition cannot establish a dialogue with the government or cannot establish a dialogue. Turkey needs this. (...) Of course, Mr. Ekrem makes his own statement there, and his team is very good in this regard. In other words, his team who explained this situation is also very good and he thanks Binali Bey.

For example, he thanks his rival. There is the concept of labor here, for example, thanking the technical team, so that is very important there. (Özgür Karabat, 17 January 2022, personal communication)

Küçükşahin said:

With her opponent... Already Ms. Dilek, you know she made an important debut there. (...) She empathized very well with Ms. Semiha and showed solidarity. The two of them are side by side in this photo. It was something very important. There was also her warmth when this photo was taken. (...) Also, this was a picture that Turkey had been missing for nearly 20 years. (...) The opponents were not giving any points in the same square. From that point of view, this image also created such a thing: it also created empathy in society. This photograph also created the type of politician we miss and want. (Şükrü Küçükşahin, 20 January 2022, personal communication)

Özkan made the following comment:

You know, for nearly 25 years, political leaders in Turkey have not come together to talk, discuss, or share what they think about the future of the country, the life of the citizens... However, Ekrem had always suggested meeting with Binali Yıldırım and other İBB candidates from the very first day, but they always ran away and never even gave an answer (...) but this is the first debate, the first couplet, that the citizens of the Republic of Turkey have seen in the last 25 years. (...) The photograph was important; that is, giving a picture of peace to society is a photograph given for the sake of reconciliation. That is why it got so many likes. (Necati Özkan, 28 February 2022, personal communication)

When asked to comment on the fourth post, Yılmaz talked about the family theme in the photo and stated that it also represents unity and hope for the future. Karabat and Küçükşahin also drew attention to the sincerity and warmth of the family theme here and talked about its importance in politics. Özkan, on the other hand, stated that the photograph represents İmamoğlu not only as a politician but as a family head and individual, and underlined the themes of love and support in the photograph as well as the value attached to children.

Yılmaz said the following:

This photo is very energizing, so people are laughing, looking to the future with hope, so that is what we need. (...) We always look to the future with hope; we think that we can solve the problems together, that Turkey has a strong human material, that it has a strong nature and a strong-rooted tradition. We believe that many problems can be overcome. Here, the smiling faces actually express it. It is a family business; the energy of the family also gives people a positive outlook. (Ulaş Yılmaz, 15 October 2021, personal communication)

Karabat said:

The concept of family is important to us, too. (...) He has a daughter and a very smart girl. For example, as a father, the children are higher, and since the brother is older, he has embraced both his sisters; namely Semih... (Özgür Karabat, 17 January 2022, personal communication)

Küçükşahin said:

A very nice family photo. (...) Family is a very important thing in politics. Im... it is a figure. (...) Here are two boys, one girl... three children. Mom, dad... Smiling faces... Cute faces... They're all cute. (...) Also, they exist as a

family in politics. Apart from that, they are absent in decision mechanisms, so on and so forth... (...) It felt like family warmth. It felt very intense. (...) Even the president's hand on Dilek Hanım's shoulder, believe me, is a wonderful sight. It affects people. (...) There is also a happy family photo here. (Şükrü Küçükşahin, 20 January 2022, personal communication)

Özkan commented as follows:

We see each politician, each candidate individually and only know the stories about that candidate, as if that candidate came from outer space. In our election campaign, we wanted to show that Ekrem Bey is not a single politician, he is a family head, and that every member of that family is an important, valuable and good person. (...) In other words, showing the family is an element of the modernity of Turkey. It was important to show that we are a family, but also that we are a loving family. That is why it is so popular here. (...) Yes, the children in the family are usually down on one's laps in all photos. It is the opposite here. Therefore, it is important to show what the values in the family are. (Necati Özkan, 28 February 2022, personal communication)

When asked about his comments on the fifth post, Yılmaz stated that people hug their phones more at times like elections, and that there is a description of the struggle. Karabat and Özkan also stated that the photograph represents the end of the elections and the victory. Küçükşahin also stated that confidence and hope that the elections would be won were emphasized in a similar way.

According to Yılmaz:

People's use of social media is increasing in times like these. This is the reason why the likes are high, everyone is looking at the results with their phone in

hand, when you are curious about the results, your posts attract more attention. Here, too, is the result of a struggle. Everyone is curious about the result, here is the final picture. (Ulaş Yılmaz, 15 October 2021, personal communication)

Karabat stated:

Now, this is where people are, and there is a rising trend as well. Towards the end of the elections, when he won, it was believed by everyone. (Özgür Karabat, 17 January 2022, personal communication)

Küçükşahin said:

Yes, so this is, of course, a photo that spreads hope and shows that we will "win". Look, there is no worry, no grievance here. We are sure. We will win. (Şükrü Küçükşahin, 20 January 2022, personal communication)

Özkan says:

And this is exactly what it is, now it is the last moment of the elections and the whole campaign, it has been liked approximately 1.8 million times. (Necati Özkan, 28 February 2022, personal communication)

When asked why the posts examined in this study were liked most, Yılmaz said that it was because they were shared at important moments when the “heart rate” was high. Karabat, on the other hand, said that the reason for this was the injustice suffered by İmamoğlu and the reaction of the people to it. Küçükşahin also stated that these photos were liked because they were positive and natural photos.

Yılmaz said:

These were all times when the heart rate was very high. In other words, when everyone is curious about what is going on there that night and how Ekrem İmamoğlu will behave, the posts always get more likes. In other words, the shares are made when the heart rate rises. (...) Because at that time, our

televisions did not broadcast, very few television channels were broadcasting... Nothing was done about our shares, so people turn to these kinds of channels and look. (Ulaş Yılmaz, 15 October 2021, personal communication)

Karabat made the following comment:

I mean, first of all, the undecided voter effect came through after that and Mr. Ekrem.... There is also an injustice. It is extremely important to stand up against injustice in Turkey. The people of Turkey stand with the victims of injustice, and as we get closer to the end, towards June 23, Mr. Ekrem's campaign is more dominant, and it is clear that he will win. In other words, AKP members are very recessive in any case; the likes are increasing rhythmically, and you see it as you get closer to the end. (Özgür Karabat, 17 January 2022, personal communication)

Küçükşahin made the following comment:

Like I said before, these are hot shots. Smiling frames... Frames that are very visible... (...) Their messages are also very strong. I think that is why it was liked more. (...) Let me also say one thing: none of this is posing. (...) Natural... (Şükrü Küçükşahin, 20 January 2022, personal communication)

Considerations in Social Media Posts

When the participants were asked what they paid attention to when sharing photos on social media and how they chose their photos, Yılmaz said that visuals are more important than text and that there are posts that try to reflect İmamoğlu's management approach. Karabat, on the other hand, stated that while the campaign reflects spiritual values, it is important to be young as well. Küçükşahin stated that the photo should be in accordance with the message conveyed. Özkan also stated that

certain guidelines were determined, and posts were made to comply with these guidelines.

Yılmaz stated the following:

In general, we try to choose the frames where the visual makes more sense than the text below. Those frames are actually our way of expressing our understanding of management with a photograph, namely the dialogues we will establish, how we will communicate with whom, where this story will go, what we want to show people... Photographs that reflect these. (Ulaş Yılmaz, 15 October 2021, personal communication)

Karabat said:

Mr. Ekrem cares about moral values, but he also cares about young people. They also come to the fore in the photographs, and the photographs are selected accordingly. The campaign itself, its language, its candidate... were already young. (Özgür Karabat, 17 January 2022, personal communication)

Küçükşahin stated:

Whatever the subject is, if you want no elements that will contradict the subject, it is in that photograph. (Şükrü Küçükşahin, 20 January 2022, personal communication)

Özkan said:

We have defined certain guidelines, how sharing should be... We told you what to pay attention to, how to share Mr. Ekrem, but to always have real photos, real moments, candid and authentic photos that are not fiction. That is how they were determined. (Necati Özkan, 28 February 2022, personal communication)

The participants were asked about what kinds of processes they went through before posting on social media. In response to this question, Yılmaz and Karabat stated that Ekrem İmamoğlu's style is familiar to his team and they aim to make posts that will fit his style. While Küçükşahin stated that the target audience was taken into consideration, Özkan stated that certain principles were determined before, and posts were made in this direction.

According to Yılmaz:

Here, we are actually doing something as people who know Ekrem İmamoğlu's language, style... That is, we try to reflect Ekrem İmamoğlu's phrases and approaches, rather than writing our own sentences. (Ulaş Yılmaz, 15 October 2021, personal communication)

Karabat said:

The situations that Mr. Ekrem cares about are known, so those photos are for him. For one thing, it is required to be equally presented as a painting of Turkey. (Özgür Karabat, 17 January 2022, personal communication)

Küçükşahin made the following statement:

Our overarching theme was... Of course, how much of an audience does it concern? Which social strata does it concern? Whom is it addressing? (Şükrü Küçükşahin, 20 January 2022, personal communication)

Özkan commented as follows:

We simply did these things, such as talking about general principles from the start, analyzing and evaluating what was done at specific times, correcting them if there were errors, and understanding and continuing according to new social expectations, if any, while our friends were always free behind. These are the things that friends freely choose, their own things, their own decisions,

their decisions, choices... (Necati Özkan, 28 February 2022, personal communication)

When the participants were asked what kind of approach they took when a negative comment was received under the posts, Yılmaz stated that these comments were not deleted unless they contained insults. Karabat, on the other hand, also stated that they did not accept insulting comments against any of their competitors, and that they ran a campaign based on positivity.

Yılmaz gave the following answer:

We are not deleting it; that is, under our pages, no one should insult or use various derogatory expressions about another political view. We sift or filter them as much as possible. This is important to us. In other words, no political view should feel humiliated and excluded under our cover. (Ulaş Yılmaz, 15 October 2021, personal communication)

Karabat had the following to say about it:

In fact, when negative things happened about Mr. Binali's wife, independently of Mr. Ekrem, in a part of the campaign, Mr. Ekrem's wife immediately took care of Mr. Binali's wife. He never directed the campaign in that direction, so the whole of the campaign was based on positivity and what we would do, what kind of Istanbul we wanted... Mr. Ekrem also paid great attention to this. (...) The other side was constantly attacking, and we rarely responded to them, so we did not make it our axis that much. (Özgür Karabat, 17 January 2022, personal communication)

When asked how much of an active role Ekrem İmamoğlu played in the sharing of social media posts, all the participants stated that İmamoğlu followed the posts but did not take any action to remove them:

Yılmaz answered the question as follows:

President Ekrem also follows the media very closely. He also directs many things. So there is no gap between the account itself and the president. (...)

Until today, there has been no such thing as removing this and deleting it.

(Ulaş Yılmaz, 15 October 2021, personal communication)

Karabat made the following statement:

Mr. Ekrem is aware of all the posts, but it is very rare that Mr. Ekrem intervenes because his team is very compatible with him. It knows and understands what he wants, and that team is not just a team that worked with Mr. Ekrem during the election campaign. It is a team that he has been working with since Beylikdüzü District Mayorship. (Özgür Karabat, 17 January 2022, personal communication)

Küçükşahin said:

I swear a few, of course, happened. It did not happen. Mr. Ekrem is a person who knows how to relate to and communicate with society. However, Mr. Ekrem is a person who attaches great importance to the experts of the business. (...) There is no concrete example that comes to my mind. In other words, I do not remember anything saying, "he interfered with this and removed this; he did not like that but he liked that". But in general, he was looking after it, too. (Şükrü Küçükşahin, 20 January 2022, personal communication)

Özkan made the following comment:

The president will definitely know about it, the president will definitely approve it, then it will be shared and always while sharing everything. (...)

Mr. Ekrem's post, which was shared and subsequently deleted, is almost non-

existent. This did not happen much, because since there is a close working team here, important tasks like this are not shared without seeing and getting Mr. Ekrem approve it. (Necati Özkan, 28 February 2022, personal communication)

When asked how they decided on the captions of the Instagram posts, Yılmaz stated that they were in accordance with İmamoğlu's own expressions and style and reflected him. Karabat stated that no negative language was used, while Küçükşahin pointed out that the photograph and the text should be compatible. Özkan, on the other hand, stated that İmamoğlu's language and writings reflect him as well as the hope for a democratic country.

According to Yılmaz:

The texts here are ultimately Ekrem İmamoğlu's own speeches, his sentences, his expressions, his style. Whatever language and style there is, their posts reflect them. (Ulaş Yılmaz, 15 October 2021, personal communication)

Karabat said:

So, there is no negative language, no hopeless language. There is a language that always points to the good and the beautiful. There is a language that emphasizes being grateful and giving thanks in most of the photos and in all of the posts. (Özgür Karabat, 17 January 2022, personal communication)

Küçükşahin made the following comment:

So, if your message is something else, you do not use this photo. You are using another photo. You are looking for a suitable photo for him. You find it. So, this happened in two ways. (...) But there is a short explanation at the bottom, and this is where the importance of this social media comes from. He is reading it, too. When he supports it, people's minds become clearer and

more open about photography. (Şükrü Küçükşahin, 20 January 2022, personal communication)

Özkan said:

All are in line with the main messages of the campaign. They say the same thing as their main message says. (...) Mr. Ekrem's campaign is a campaign of hope and utopia. (...) It is hoped that this country will reach a better democracy in a short time and achieve the democracy it will win. Therefore, the social media content repository that defines these two has also been posted. (Necati Özkan, 28 February 2022, personal communication)

When asked whether these considerations have an effect on the reception of the posts, Yılmaz stated that people increase the interaction when they see a style close to theirs, while Karabat mentioned that positive comments are usually written under the posts. Özkan, on the other hand, stated that the interaction they received from here was effective in shaping their communication tactics.

As Yılmaz said:

In those media, people increase their interaction as soon as they notice a language close to them. People increase interaction when they have a language, style, or approach that is close to them, something that they can feel and understand. (Ulaş Yılmaz, 15 October 2021, personal communication)

Karabat said:

Everyone is focused on what their candidate is doing and saying positive things about him. You are great, you are beautiful, you are hardworking, you will win, we will succeed, something else is possible. Istanbul is you. We will take Istanbul. There was a language that we focused on. (Özgür Karabat, 17 January 2022, personal communication)

Necati stated that:

Of course, interaction is important and valuable for what the citizen does not like, what the citizen wants to see, and it is valuable every time the team listens to him; if necessary, they make some minor visions on the roadmap.
(Necati Özkan, 28 February 2022, personal communication)

When asked why Ekrem İmamoğlu has more followers on Instagram than Twitter, Yılmaz stated that because Twitter is a politically polarized place and Instagram is more suitable for daily life and personal life. While Karabat attributed this to the young people's interest in İmamoğlu, Küçükşahin stated that İmamoğlu appeared on that platform with a sincere and positive personality, almost as a “love bug.” Özkan, on the other hand, stated that he expected the difference on Instagram to be greater and that the reason for the difference between his profiles on Instagram and his Twitter being so small was that Instagram is a younger platform than Twitter.

Yılmaz said the following:

Twitter is a place that has been very politicized in recent years. People use Twitter because they want to follow the instant news feed, but Instagram is a medium that includes our daily lives. That is why people see their personal lives as a shared medium rather than political discussions in their daily lives. Here, too, following Ekrem İmamoğlu as a character is more important for them. (Ulaş Yılmaz, 15 October 2021, personal communication)

Karabat made the following comment:

In other words, his Instagram was below 650, and by the way, Instagram probably increased. It means that young people are starting to show more interest in Mr. Ekrem. (Özgür Karabat, 17 January 2022, personal communication)

Küçükşahin gave the following words:

It was not artificial. I mean, it was obvious from his facial expression that it was not pretentious. Those who looked at it saw this. The voters did. Just like that... Yes. Mr. Ekrem has something like “a love bug” and “a flower of love”. He has a way of expression. He has a style. This is very natural; I mean that it is most accepted on Instagram. We are talking about a politician who is very suitable for the structure of Instagram. (Şükrü Küçükşahin, 20 January 2022, personal communication)

Özkan used the following statements:

While Twitter is a platform that is less popular all over the world, Instagram is a platform with much larger crowds. (...) Therefore, it should normally be much higher. The only difference is that Instagram is much younger than Twitter; that is, Twitter is about ten or more years old, whereas Instagram is five or six years old, which I attribute to this. Otherwise, I would normally expect Instagram to be at least twice as large as Twitter. (Necati Özkan, 28 February 2022, personal communication)

Finally, when asked whether they followed Binali Yıldırım's posts on social media between these two elections and if they did, how their competitor's posts affected their campaign, all the participants said that they followed Binali Yıldırım's posts but remained true to their own path and were not affected by their competitor's work. They also stated that they did not imitate him.

Yılmaz said the following:

We followed Mr. Binali as we followed all the competitors during the election process. Well, discourse, projects, etc... We have always followed them. We also looked at it in terms of style, but generally we did not change our

communication line, which we created from the beginning, on the way. Mr. Binali's ideas changed over time. After the first elections, he took on the attitude of pretending to establish warmer communication, but we continued on the same line of communication without changing our attitude. (Ulaş Yılmaz, 15 October 2021, personal communication)

Karabat said:

Of course, we followed the opponent, but we did not proceed according to what our opponent was doing. Of course, we looked at it in case it was strategic and would affect our axis. Maybe he can suggest something nice; we looked at him, but we never did that: What Mr. Binali did, let's do that and imitate him... Look, we have a basic principle and that is whoever follows wins. We were already being followed. (Özgür Karabat, 17 January 2022, personal communication)

Küçükşahin made the following statement:

No, there is no such thing. No, no, I have never witnessed this. So... Of course, from time to time, we had meetings about the opponent's rhetoric, so on and so forth... (...) So, on the other hand, I think about it and make up my words for him. I honestly do not remember. (Şükrü Küçükşahin, 20 January 2022, personal communication)

Özkan made the following comment:

It had no effect; we did not follow it, we assumed it did not exist, we assumed it. We knew that the language of the campaign they used was completely negative and far from the truth. We looked at it from time to time to make a really accurate assessment. We saw that we were so right, we did not even

take it into consideration, so we made it to the campaign as if they did not exist. (Necati Özkan, 28 February 2022, personal communication)

Considering the findings in the in-depth interviews, there is a common observation that the participants turned to social media because their discourses could not find a mainstream place. In addition, since Instagram is a sincere and casual channel mostly used by young people, Instagram has come to the fore as a very suitable channel for Ekrem İmamoğlu's campaign, which is based on love, unity and hope and aimed at reflecting an authentic picture of him. In addition, common findings were found in the participants' comments about the emphasis on the people's will, democracy, and family in the social media messages of the campaign. In light of these findings, it is important to say that the words of the participants in the interviews are in line with the findings in the semiotic analysis part of this study.

5. CONCLUSION

In this thesis, the five most liked Instagram posts between the dates of May 6 and June 23, 2019, when Ekrem İmamoğlu's mandate was revoked, were examined and in-depth interviews were conducted with four people (Ulaş Yılmaz, Özgür Karabat, Necati Özkan and Şükrü Küçükşahin) who took active managing roles in his campaign. In this direction, it was tried to obtain information about what kind of a communications strategy Ekrem İmamoğlu followed in his election campaign and how it influenced his Instagram use. In addition, the ideological connotations of Ekrem İmamoğlu's most liked posts shared between May 6 and June 23, 2019 were examined.

Considering the Turkish political history reviewed in this study, we can argue that conservatism in Turkish politics is closely related to political Islam and religious orders Political Islam, which became stronger especially after the 1980 coup, still maintains its power today. In addition, today's ruling party has gained strength from it and has managed to maintain its power for 20 years so much so that this right-wing and religious discourse has penetrated deeply into politics. This penetration has been so deep that even the parties on the left cannot go much beyond this discourse. Political actors have to compromise secular values and give place to religious discourses to a certain extent in order to be supported by society. As a result, it can be said that Turkey does not comply with secular values in the conventional sense of the term. However, it cannot be said that there is a complete break with the idea of secularism. Instead, it would be more correct to talk about a Turkified state of secularism in the Republic of Turkey.

In this direction, we have looked at Ekrem İmamoğlu's posts on Instagram between May 6 and June 23, 2019 and discussed how this is reflected on them. In

addition, in the light of the posts examined in this study, it has been observed that Ekrem İmamoğlu's election work breaks certain prejudices and reproduces some social norms and myths simultaneously.

When we look at Ekrem İmamoğlu's posts, certain themes come to the fore. Looking at the first of these posts, it is seen that adherence to the values of Sunni Islam is emphasized, the myth of the man of the people is reproduced, and a message that unites the people and gives hope to them is attempted to be given. Looking at the second post, the meanings of Ekrem İmamoğlu being a self-confident, determined, and courageous leader, the emphasis on democracy and on the sovereignty and unity of the people outweigh. Looking at the third post, it is seen that the belief in unity and democracy is emphasized, and the myths of “one nation, one state” and “man of the people” are reproduced. In addition, it was observed that a message was given to young people to be active in politics through featuring Semih İmamoğlu in the post. This message is also available in the fourth and fifth posts. Looking at the fourth post, the myth of the 'happy, heteronormative nuclear family' is reproduced with the message that Ekrem İmamoğlu is a good family head and accordingly he will be a good leader and mayor. Looking at the fifth post, the most prominent message is a call to vote. In addition, the reproduction of the heteronormative nuclear family myth and an emphasis on the supremacy of democracy are also included.

In general, although Ekrem İmamoğlu's posts contain positive and modern meanings such as unity, solidarity, justice, the superiority of democracy and people's will, and hope for the future, he cannot break away from the myth of the nuclear family and related social norms and his posts actually signify his being a member of the upper-middle classes. In his posts, positive and normative messages were given together with the creation of a middle-to-upper-middle class image by reproducing the

myth of the “man of the people.” In addition, although the emphasis on İmamoğlu's Muslim identity is meant to shake the negative conservative attitude towards CHP and people from this party, this situation means compromising the principle of secularism. On the other hand, Ekrem İmamoğlu's egalitarian messages about women and his pro-feminist attitude reveal his contemporary and modern perspective. For this reason, it can be argued that Ekrem İmamoğlu's posts have contradictory meanings when considered together. It can be said that Ekrem İmamoğlu's posts do not conform to the conventional definition of secularism, with his use of religious themes, but presents an example of the Turkified understanding of secularism.

When people from Ekrem İmamoğlu's election team were interviewed, the social media strategies they implemented were asked about most. The participants said that they had difficulty in finding a place in the mainstream media during the campaign, so they focused on social media works and took an active part in every social media platform. Moreover, they stated that social media is important in terms of informing the public, interacting with the public, and introducing Ekrem İmamoğlu to the public as he is. When asked about their Instagram use, the participants stated that this medium stands out as it is a sincere, casual one mostly used by young people.

When the participants were asked to make comments on the posts analyzed in the study, it was observed that they gave answers in line with the findings in the semiotic analysis part of this study. In addition, it was stated that the target audiences to which the messages would be conveyed were determined as a result of a careful examination of the changing voter base and Ekrem İmamoğlu was not disconnected from these processes while these shares were being made. In addition, it was emphasized that the language of the campaign is a positive one, does not contain insults, and aims to unify the public around a central message of love. In addition, the

participants stated that they remained loyal to these values throughout the campaign and were not influenced by their opponent's discourses.

As a result of the interviews, important findings were obtained about how social media can be an important tool for politicians in conditions where the media is under the domination of political power. Opposition politicians in countries where democracy does not work well might find significant opportunities to reach the public using social media when they have difficulty in finding a place in the conventional media or where it is almost impossible to find a place in the conventional media. In addition, it is seen that the divergent nature of the media affects the way political actors use these mediums while managing and implementing their communications. As mentioned by the participants, the fact that Instagram, a sincere, casual medium generally used by young people, is preferred to produce images of Ekrem İmamoğlu as an authentic and sympathetic leader, a man of the people, and a family man and is a timely example of how the medium is the message, as McLuhan (2005) has once suggested. In addition, the interviews showed that social media, particularly Instagram, is an important tool for reaching and influencing young people.

Considering the discussions in the literature, it is observed that the social and political structure in Turkey cannot break away from religious values and discourses so much so that not only the right-wing political parties and actors but also the ones who are relatively closer to the left have to adopt and integrate religious discourses into their own in order to appeal to the public. As discussed in the "Turkish Political History" chapter of the thesis, integrating religious themes into their politics is nothing new to political actors, as historically exemplified by politicians like Menderes, Demirel, Özal, Erbakan and Erdoğan. Ekrem İmamoğlu's posts examined in this research can set another example in this matter. These discourses break the deeply

rooted perception of the "non-religious CHP" in society, especially among the conservative circles. In addition, there are progressive messages about democracy, the superiority of the people's choice, women's power, and gender equality in his posts. While there are such progressive messages, there are also religious messages in the posts as well. The inclusion of such discourses in politics creates a contradiction and does not fully comply with the idea of secularity, but it does not break free of it either. In this respect, it can be said that Ekrem İmamoğlu's posts are important examples of a Turkified form of secularism in Turkish politics.

However, while the participants in this study have talked about how they aimed to present İmamoğlu authentically in his post, they have made no mention of the conservative/religious and sexist/patriarchal messages that are also present within them. Thus, the findings of the semiotic analysis and the interviews contradict each other in this matter. Though, the lack of mention of such meanings during the interviews is not unexpected. Although it can be argued that secularity in Turkey does not fit the conventional definition of the concept, it is still one of the fundamental values of CHP and the people who work in it would not want to admit to conveying messages that fundamentally go against it. In addition, CHP argues that it is a party which supports gender equality. Hence, again, people who work in the campaign would be reluctant to admit the patriarchal/sexist meanings in the posts. Thus, whether if the non-secular and sexist messages in the posts are intentional or not or whether people who share them are even aware of them or not, the contradiction or the disconnection between the findings of the semiotic analysis and the interviews is not surprising but deserves further analysis by future studies

In addition, when Ekrem İmamoğlu's posts are examined, it is seen that they reproduce certain social myths. First, the family theme occupies an important place in

his posts. While reproducing the heteronormative nuclear family myth over this theme, a separate emphasis was placed on concepts such as unity, togetherness, support, and love. In addition, with the myth of the "man of the people" reproduced in the posts, Ekrem İmamoğlu has drawn a sympathetic image for himself, as belonging to the middle-to-upper-middle classes, coming from the people and being "one of us." It has been seen that there are no discriminatory discourses in the language used in the posts; on the contrary, messages that unite and embrace the society are given. In this way, it is observed that Ekrem İmamoğlu's posts produce discourses that will not create polarization in the society but instead will break it.

In this direction, despite the contradictory meanings of Ekrem İmamoğlu's posts, they are important in that they take steps that have not been seen in Turkish politics for the last 20 years in the sense of giving unifying messages by using the language of love, thereby creating a turning point in the field of political communication. At this point, this study has tried to contribute to the literature by examining the ideological meanings of İmamoğlu's most liked Instagram posts.

Although the studies on Ekrem İmamoğlu's political communication works have increased in recent years, they are still limited. For this reason, studies in this field will be valuable studies for the political communication literature. In addition, how the audiences read İmamoğlu's Instagram posts and what effect they had in his election as the mayor were left outside the limits of this study. Thus, future studies which analyze how Instagram users read Ekrem İmamoğlu's posts and what meanings they make of them will greatly contribute to the literature. Also, analyzing how his use of social media in his political communication campaigns affected Ekrem İmamoğlu's votes will be extremely valuable for the literature.

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Appendix A. In-depth Interview Questions

1. Can you introduce yourself? In which roles did you take part in Ekrem İmamoğlu's communication works? How long have you been working together?
2. What do you pay attention to in your communication works? What are your preferred media (considering traditional mass media, social media)?
3. What is the importance of social media for you in your communication efforts? What does social media mean to you? What is its significance to you?
4. Which social media platform do you particularly prefer (especially considering the election period)?
5. How much importance did you give to Instagram in your election efforts?
6. Do you pay attention to the voter groups you target in your Instagram posts or likes (Women, young people, students, retired people, employees, etc.)? What is your target profile on Instagram?
7. Especially after winning the first elections, how much space did Ekrem İmamoğlu find in the mainstream media, if we compare it to your opponent Binali Yıldırım?
8. How did the fact that Binali Yıldırım was featured in mainstream TV channels and newspapers but not E. İmamoğlu affected your social media efforts?
9. There is a serious difference in the votes cast for İmamoğlu between the two elections. What do you think is the reason for this difference?
10. Considering the difference in the votes cast for İmamoğlu between the two elections, how effective were your Instagram posts in the election results? How do you think different voter groups interpreted these posts?

11. I want to show you the five most liked posts. What did you intend to convey in these posts? What do you see in them?
12. How do you interpret the reception of the highest number of likes by these posts? Why did these photos get more likes, especially during that period?
13. I noticed that your most liked photos always include a hug, being in line with family and the public. In this regard, I want to ask you two questions:
 - a. What do you pay attention to when uploading photos? How do you choose your photos?
 - b. What kind of processes do you go through before making your shares?
14. How effective is Ekrem İmamoğlu in creating and uploading content to social media? Does he make any checks and comments, or are there cases where he asked not to have a post shared or deleted after being shared?
15. You write captions under the photos; what do you pay attention to while writing these captions? Do you think these also affect the likes?
16. Do you think these captions have a role in the interpretation of these posts by people who view and interact with (viewing, liking, commenting) your posts? If so, what role do they play?
17. As of October 15, 2021, Ekrem İmamoğlu has 6,201,792 followers on Twitter and 6.7 million followers on Instagram. Why do you think he has more followers on Instagram than Twitter?
18. Between the two elections, did you follow Binali Yıldırım's posts on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and take a path accordingly? Or what kind of effects did your competitor's posts have on you in this process?