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WOMEN'S CONSTITUTIVE REPRESENTATION IN TURKEY:

BILKENT UNIVERSITY 2025

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES ON HEADSCARF, ABORTION AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMAN

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VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMAN

A Ph.D. Dissertation

by
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Ankara
May 2025

To my beloved family,
& to all women who have suffered from any form of violence— *may justice prevail!*



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The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
of
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

by

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In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

THE DEPARTMENT OF
POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
İHSAN DOĞRAMACI BILKENT UNIVERSITY
ANKARA

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I certify that I have read this doctoral dissertation and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science.

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ABSTRACT

WOMEN’S CONSTITUTIVE REPRESENTATION IN TURKEY: PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES ON HEADSCARF, ABORTION AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMAN

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May 2025

This dissertation critically examines the substantive representation of women in Turkey by analyzing the parliamentary discourses of female MPs on headscarves, abortion, and violence against women. It investigates how these issues are framed, how womanhood is defined, and how such concerns are embedded in broader political narratives. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study explores parliamentary speeches from 2002 to 2023, focusing not only on what is said but how meanings are constructed, contested, and situated within wider debates. The analysis develops along two key dimensions. First, it identifies diverging definitions of womanhood, shaped by ideological, cultural, and party-based positions. Second, it traces how these discourses of womanhood are embedded in broader frameworks—community-based debates (citizenship, belonging, national identity) and practice-based debates (regime, governance, secularism, and democracy). By tracing how these discourses evolve across political parties and over time, the study uncovers the complex dynamics that shape women MPs’ narratives. It argues that women’s political representation is shaped by, and in turn helps shape, macro-level factors and socio-political contexts. The findings challenge the assumption that women in parliament constitute a

homogeneous group and contribute to the literature on both substantive and constitutive representation. Ultimately, the study offers a dual analytical framework that links discursive constructions of womanhood to broader ideological and institutional struggles, arguing that substantive representation is inseparable from its constitutive dimension—particularly in dynamic and complex political environments.

Keywords: substantive representation, constitutive representation, headscarf, abortion, violence against women

ÖZET

TÜRKİYE’DE KADINLARIN KURUCU TEMSİLİ: BAŞÖRTÜSÜ, KÜRTAJ VE KADINA YÖNELİK ŞİDDET ÜZERİNE PARLAMENTO TARTIŞMALARI

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Mayıs 2025

Bu tez, Türkiye’de kadınların özsel (substantive) temsiline eleştirel bir bakış sunmakta ve kadın milletvekillerinin başörtüsü, kürtaj ve kadına yönelik şiddet konularındaki parlamento söylemlerini analiz etmektedir. Bu meselelerin nasıl çerçevelendiğini, kadınlığın nasıl tanımlandığını ve bu tür kaygıların daha geniş siyasal anlatılar içinde nasıl yer aldığını incelemektedir. Eleştirel Söylem Analizi yöntemini kullanarak, çalışma 2002 ile 2023 yılları arasındaki parlamento konuşmalarını ele almakta; yalnızca ne söylendiğine değil, anlamların nasıl inşa edildiğine, tartışıldığına ve daha geniş tartışmalar içinde nasıl konumlandığına odaklanmaktadır. Analiz iki temel boyut üzerinden ilerlemektedir. Birincisi, ideolojik, kültürel ve partisel pozisyonlarla şekillenen kadınlık tanımlarındaki farklılıkları ortaya koymaktadır. İkincisi, bu kadınlık söylemlerinin nasıl daha geniş çerçevelere – topluluk temelli tartışmalar (yurttaşlık, aidiyet, ulusal kimlik) ve pratik temelli tartışmalar (rejim, yönetim, laiklik ve demokrasi) – gömüldüğünü incelemektedir. Bu söylemlerin zaman içinde ve partiler arasında nasıl evrildiğini takip eden çalışma, kadın milletvekillerinin anlatılarını şekillendiren karmaşık dinamikleri açığa çıkarmaktadır. Kadınların siyasal temsili, makro düzeydeki etkenler ve sosyo-politik bağlamlar tarafından şekillendirilmekte; aynı zamanda bu bağlamları da şekillendirmektedir. Bulgular, parlamentodaki kadınların homojen bir grup olduğu varsayımına meydan okumakta

ve hem 6zel hem de kurucu temsil literat6r6ne katkıda bulunmaktadır. Sonu olarak alıřma, kadınlık s6ylemlerinin daha geniř ideolojik ve kurumsal m6cadelelerle nasıl iliřkilendiğini g6steren ikili bir analitik ereve sunmakta; 6zel temsiliyetin kurucu boyutundan ayrı d6ř6n6lemeyeceğini, 6zellikle de dinamik ve karmařık siyasal ortamlarda, ileri s6rmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: 6zl6 temsil, kurucu temsil, bař6rt6s6, k6rtaj, kadına y6nelik řiddet

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my advisor, Assoc. Prof. Meral Uğur Çınar, for her unwavering support, patience, and guidance throughout the entire process of writing this dissertation. From the very beginning, she has listened carefully to my ideas, encouraged me at every step, and helped me bring this work to its best possible form. I truly feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with her.

I am also sincerely grateful to the members of my thesis monitoring committee. Prof. Dr. Aylin Özman has generously devoted her time and provided valuable feedback from the early stages of my research, and Dr. Esra İşsever Ekinci has been an inspiring presence, especially considering that I have had the honor of working closely with someone whose studies I have referenced extensively in my dissertation. At this point, I must also thank Prof. Dr. Alev Çınar, who was part of my committee until the final stages and whose insightful contributions were truly significant throughout the journey.

I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to my jury members, Assoc. Prof. Selin Akyüz and Dr. Senem Yıldırım, for generously dedicating their time and expertise. I am particularly happy and proud that my jury included scholars connected to Bilkent University and engaged in gender studies, which made this experience even more meaningful to me.

Beyond my dissertation, I owe special thanks to Assoc. Prof. Senem Ertan, who has been a mentor, collaborator, and supporter in my academic life since my undergraduate years. I am deeply grateful for all the projects we have worked on together, all the publications we co-authored, and all the mentoring she has provided throughout the years.

Of course, none of this would have been possible without the endless support of my beloved family, to whom I owe my entire academic journey. I am especially thankful

to my dear father, who was perhaps the first to suggest the idea of pursuing a Ph.D., my mother, who stood by me at every step, and my siblings, who always encouraged me and made this path possible.

I am also immensely thankful to Bilkent University, an institution that has shaped me in countless ways and made me feel fully supported from the moment I entered the program. To all the friends and people I met here, thank you for making this time so much richer and more enjoyable. I feel especially lucky to have met Cansu whose kindness, patience, and willingness to help made this journey much easier.

Beyond the university, I am grateful to all my friends whose emotional support and encouragement I have felt in every part of my life. To Halise, who has been by my side since high school; to Nehir, who started preparing for my defense celebrations a year in advance; and to Senem, who offered to organize my graduation dinner – thank you all for always turning everything into joy and celebration. You have been true examples of real friendship, unity, fun, and endless support.

And most importantly, I would like to thank my dear partner and best friend, İsmail Üzümcü, for his limitless support, presence, encouragement, and uplifting words, especially during the most challenging periods of this journey. I am profoundly grateful to have you in my life. With you it is better than ever.

And finally, a little credit where it is due — to myself. For years, I have been balancing a full-time job and a Ph.D., often wondering if sleep was just an optional luxury. It was not always graceful (and definitely not always on schedule), but somehow, I pulled it off, and honestly, I am proud of every late night, every tough deadline, and every small victory along the way. Of course, I know this is not the end — it is just one chapter closed, and a much longer adventure ahead. But for now, I am giving myself a well-deserved pat on the back.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AKP: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)

BDP: Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi (Peace and Democracy Party)

CDA: Critical Discourse Analysis

CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

CHP: Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party)

DTP: Demokratik Toplum Partisi (Democratic Society Party)

EU: European Union

HDP: Halkların Demokratik Partisi (Peoples' Democratic Party)

MHP: Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Action Party)

MP: Members of Parliament

TGNA: Turkish Grand National Assembly

UN: United Nations

VAW: Violence Against Women

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Definition of the Problem

In the literature, women's political representation has primarily been examined through the lenses of "descriptive" and "substantive" representation (Pitkin, 1967). Scholars of substantive representation have criticized earlier studies for focusing too narrowly on the increasing number of women in parliament—arguing that representation is not only about numerical presence (e.g. quotas or critical mass) but also about the substance of their political actions (Phillips, 1995; Lovenduski, 2005; Childs & Krook, 2008; Celis & Childs, 2008). These analyses typically assess female MPs' performance in terms of their support for women-related policies—such as advocating for women's rights, introducing relevant legislation, or voting in favor of gender-sensitive proposals (Celis, 2009). The degree of attentiveness to gender issues and women's rights is often treated as a key indicator of substantive representation.

However, this approach to representation remains heavily policy-oriented, with a dominant focus on outcomes—such as whether women MPs support or oppose particular legislative initiatives—while overlooking the processes through which representation is performed. These forms of representation are often treated as static, independent, and one-directional, with limited attention paid to how broader political contexts shape representatives' behaviors. Moreover, existing studies tend to assume that female MPs uniformly act in favor of women's interests, neglecting to interrogate how these interests are defined, negotiated, or even reconstituted in the first place. Most notably, the discursive dimension of representation—the ways in which women MPs articulate, frame, and embed women's issues within broader political narratives—has received insufficient attention. This reveals a significant gap in the literature: a lack of focus on representation as a dynamic and meaning-making process, rather than merely an observable policy-making process.

This dissertation aims to address this gap by bridging substantive and constitutive types of representation with a broader and comprehensive approach. It argues that focusing solely on whether female political representatives act on behalf of women is

insufficient for understanding representation and that existing literature falls short in addressing the “in a manner responsive to them” (Pitkin, 1967: 209) which is the second core pillar of substantive representation. Instead, it proposes that representation is a complex system influenced by multiple factors. Therefore, it suggests that substantive representation should be examined within a broader contextual framework.

This proposal is essentially framed by Mackay’s (2008) critical study on substantive representation, where she asserts that “understanding and analyzing the complexity and contingency of what is ‘going on’ with the substantive representation of women requires a ‘thick’ contextual framework comprising a whole-system approach rather than a narrow focus on whether or not female political representatives ‘act for’ women.” (Mackay, 2008: 125). Accordingly, one cannot predict in advance who will perform substantive representation, or when and where it will occur. While arguments about women representing women are concerned with solidarities rooted in shared gendered experiences and positions within gender hierarchies, this does not imply that women possess a common identity or a fixed political agenda. This leads to the conclusion, as well as raises a subject of inquiry, that the internal dynamics of institutions, their day-to-day practices, and their gendered dimensions are integral to representation.

Additionally, it marks out the concept of what substantive representation of women is or could be, emphasizing accountability (Mackay, 2008). At this point, she references an important scholar, Saward (2006), who argues that substantive representation encompasses claims of being a representative, representing women’s concerns, and actively constructing subjectivities and interests. The use of methods such as process tracing and discourse analysis enables the identification, negotiation, implementation, and realization of substantive representation framework, making the framework of representation and accountability functional.

So, what is required to make judgments about the quality of substantive representation or to evaluate its outcomes? For this study, the answer lies in interpreting Fraser’s concepts of “recognition” and “redistribution,” which she identifies as two indicators of social justice, within the framework of substantive representation (Fraser, 2003: 29-31). Recognition pertains to the extent to which

women's full political and social citizenship is acknowledged at the levels of institutions and politics. To what extent are the gendered outcomes of policies or barriers to full citizenship based on gender recognized? In short, how are women perceived? Are they regarded as legitimate political actors, with legitimate interests and differentiated concerns taken into account? In her work, Fraser provides examples such as domestic violence and sexual assault as injustices stemming from misrecognition, which result in gender-specific harms (2003: 21). According to her, an understanding of women's diversity and how gender intersects with other social distinctions and identities is also essential for addressing the harms of misrecognition. This, in turn, suggests that the dissertation should investigate how womanhood is defined and how it is embedded within broader political discussions concerning citizenship, nationhood, and regime debates—examining, for instance, what rights women hold as citizens, how they are positioned as members of the nation, and under which political conditions these women are (re)presented within the process of representation.

Moreover, emerging studies on constitutive representation suggest that women not only represent the interests of female groups but also reshape these interests, reconstructing social structures and identities (Saward, 2008; Squires, 2008). There are very few studies that employ these approaches. One of these, and perhaps the foremost, is the work of Childs et al. (2010), which examines how the Conservative Party in the UK Parliament constructs gender relations and notions of femininity. While the study focuses on a party with a particular ideological perspective, it draws attention to the importance of addressing “constitutivity” by emphasizing how substantive representation can influence gender relations.

This dissertation argues that womanhood is not a standalone category but is constantly constructed and reconstructed through broader ideological frameworks—including debates over citizenship, national belonging, and political authority—within which women's issues such as the headscarf, abortion, and violence against women are embedded. Under this light, the dissertation argues that the discourses of female parliamentarians do not merely reflect the interests of the represented groups but actively reconstruct their political demands. Through an examination of debates surrounding contentious topics such as abortion, violence against women, and the

headscarf within Turkey's intricate political landscape, this study introduces a new framework that sees representation as both descriptive, substantive, and constitutive process, emphasizing the fluid, multifaceted, and mutually influencing nature of representation that is shaped by wider political and societal factors.

Finally, by contextual specificity, I refer to how existing studies often take a narrow focus on descriptive and substantive representation, especially in dynamic contexts like Turkey, where broader political factors interact in complex ways. These studies fall short of capturing how varying national, religious, and ideological contexts influence women's political roles and how female representatives navigate these multi-layered demands. This lack of focus on the interplay between the represented and the representative, particularly in such multifaceted environments, leaves a significant gap in the literature.

1.2 The Purpose of The Study

The primary purpose of this dissertation is to analyze how female MPs in Turkey discursively construct and redefine the notion of womanhood, and how these constructions are embedded in broader political discussions concerning citizenship, national identity, and democratic participation in order to better understand how certain identities, rights, and interests are prioritized, redefined, and negotiated within women's political representation. In doing so, the study seeks to extend the theoretical scope of substantive representation by integrating insights from constitutive representation, and ultimately moving beyond them.

In order to achieve its purpose, this study analyzes the discourses of female representatives in Turkey on contentious woman issues such as abortion, violence against women, and the headscarf by conducting a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of parliamentary speeches from 2002 to 2023. Through this examination, the study aims to understand how concepts such as womanhood, national identity, and citizenship are represented in the political sphere by female parliamentarians. Specifically, by analyzing how these representations interact with broader political narratives in Turkey. As a result, this study believes that the discourses of female representatives not only reflect social and political demands but also actively reshape

these demands, highlighting a two-way relationship between representation and evolving social issues.

Typically, an agent presumed to act in a uniform or fixed manner may, in fact, be influenced by minor factors, personal inclinations, or political ideologies. In such cases, the majority of the studies on substantive representation of women discuss how representatives from different party backgrounds approach gender issues differently and examine the extent and scope of women's policies supported by female representatives from left- or right-wing parties. However, those studies on women's representation have not sufficiently explored the changing behaviors of female representatives throughout the representation process.

This dynamic interaction reveals how female representatives reshape their positions or statements on particular issues in response to changing political priorities. Female representatives, who tend to speak more frequently on women's policies, continue to reflect this approach, thereby prompting a reconstitution of womanhood and a reinterpretation of the representation process. In this context, the representation processes of female representatives are not only tied to party ideology but are also interwoven with a complex and dynamic structure shaped by shifting political conditions and priorities. Addressing these gaps in the literature, particularly focusing on the redefinition of womanhood and how it is embedded with broader political discussions in Turkey, this study aims to offer a deeper perspective on women's representation in politics, exploring how political dynamics influence the discourses and political performances of female legislators, thereby shaping women's political representation.

To address the aforementioned gaps in the literature and to challenge certain assumptions, this study analyzes the discourses of female members of parliament on contentious issues such as abortion, violence against women, and the headscarf within Turkey's complex and dynamic political environment. A particularly noteworthy point here is that it has identified discursive differences not only between female MPs from various political parties but also within the same party over time. This brings us to one of the central questions of the study: whether the discourses of female MPs merely represent the interests of a particular group or play a constitutive role by reshaping these interests and transforming social structures and identities. By

considering the impact of institutional structures on these representational processes, the study will explore how the discourses of female MPs align with party ideologies, political agendas, and historical contexts, as well as changing political contexts.

Therefore, it addresses the following research questions:

“(1) How do female MPs in Turkey conceptualize and articulate women’s concerns and interests?

(2) In what ways do female MPs’ discourses on women’s issues (such as the headscarf, abortion, and violence) reflect changing notions of womanhood?

(3) How are these issues constructed within claims of substantive representation? and

(4) How do the discourses of female MPs in Turkey evolve over time within the same political party, and how do these shifts compare to the discourses of MPs from different political parties, particularly in relation to issues of headscarf, abortion, and violence against women?”.

This study believes that seeking the answers of these questions allows to explore how female MPs’ discourses evolve in response to broader socio-political shifts, as well as internal party dynamics, providing a more comprehensive understanding of substantive representation in Turkey.

Moreover, answers to these questions can illuminate the relationship between substantive and constitutive representation, revealing that female MPs not only reflect the interests of social groups but also possess the potential to reshape these groups’ identities and demands, thereby reconstructing the political space. This is crucial to the primary aim of the thesis: to analyze the discourses of female MPs within macro-level contexts, thereby understanding how women’s representation intersects with social, political, and historical structures.

1.3 The Significance of the Study

The significance of this dissertation lies both in its theoretical and methodological contributions. Theoretically, first, this study challenges the literature’s assumption of female MPs as a homogeneous group, bringing attention to discursive differences

both across and within political parties. The difference in terms of their political performances includes the diversity in their ideologies, party priorities, and political standings, in relation to their approach to women's interests and concerns. While the literature on substantive representation of women often tends to homogenize female representatives, assuming uniformity in their political performances and advocacy prioritizing women issues (e.g. Mügge & De Jong, 2013; Celis & Childs, 2012), an analysis of female representatives in Turkey reveals a more complex reality. Turkey's societal structure includes significant ethnic, religious, and ideological richness, making it an intriguing case for examining how these cleavages influence women's political representation.

The TGNA encompasses a wide spectrum of political parties, from secular and nationalist to religious and pro-Kurdish groups, each with distinct positions on gender issues. This diversity provides a rich context for analyzing how female representatives from various party address and approach for women's issues. Therefore, studying the Turkish case is crucial for the substantive representation literature due to the country's exclusive sociopolitical landscape characterized by female MPs from diverse political parties. This research reveals that the discourses of female MPs are not solely shaped by individual views and experiences due to being a woman but are profoundly influenced by the ideological frameworks and political agendas of their respective parties. In this context, analyzing how female MPs' discourses on headscarves, abortion, and violence against women intersect with party affiliations and ideological contexts is critical for understanding the dynamics of women's representation.

Secondly, this study also critiques the substantive representation notion that women MPs act solely "for women" and "in a manner responsive to women" (Pitkin, 1967: 209) by addressing the concept of constitutive representation, which is an emerging concept in the literature. Studies on women's representation have largely focused on Pitkin's types of representation, particularly enriched by frameworks of descriptive and substantive representation, with an emphasis on the relationship between these two types. Major argument of substantive representation claims that not only the numerical presence of female representatives but also their performances acting "for the women" and "being responsible to them" should be taken into consideration for

women's political representation. However, recent research incorporating the concept of constitutive representation criticizes the "for the women" aspect of substantive representation, aiming to advance the substantivity of the representation.

Furthermore, the connection between group presence in legislatures and the representation of their interests, are already well-documented in the literature (Mackay et al., 2010). However, the relationship between constitutive representation (defining a group) and substantive representation (advocating for that group) still remains underexplored (Siow, Orly; Severs, 2012; Squires, 2008). In this dissertation, I argue that understanding how women's representation is constituted within substantive claims requires a more holistic approach. This involves recognizing the direct impact of macro level factors on the process of representing the women. Thus, this dissertation addresses these gaps within the context of Turkey, focusing on the challenges of treating representatives as a homogeneous group, the complexities in defining and expressing women's interests, and the theoretical and methodological limitations in existing studies on substantive representation

This dissertation also contributes to the existing literature on women's representation in Turkey by offering new insights into the discourses of female MPs and how these discourses are shaped and constructed. It examines both party-specific and temporal variations in their representation efforts, filling a gap in the scholarly understanding of how women's substantive representation unfolds in political debates surrounding women's issues.

In the literature of woman and politics studies in Turkey, most of the research on women's representation focuses on the low number of female representatives and scholars offer historical and/or sociological analyses to understand this fact (e.g. Arat 1994; Yaraman 2001; Örs 2006; Gökçimen 2008; Sancar 2008; Türeli & Çağlar 2010; Örtök & Tekelioğlu, 2013; Ayata 2015; Sumbas, 2015). However, analyzing existing deputies in the parliament and their actions are also important to understand substantive representation. Previous studies on substantive representation in Turkey (e.g. Bektaş & Ekinci 2019; Unal, 2020) mainly focused on women's equality issues, such as health care, education, women's economical participation etc. Female representatives' approaches to these are issues that can enable us to get clue about who or what women representatives represent can be reached by examining these

themes. However, focusing on common equality policies is important to take women as an existing person in the society, but those policies constitute only one dimension of being a woman.

Going beyond “equality policies”, this dissertation deals with three important issues of women in Turkey, namely 1) wearing headscarf in public area, 2) physical violence against women, 3) abortion. This dissertation argues that analyzing representatives’ discourses on these themes of abortion, headscarf, and violence against women are particularly useful for measuring the substantive representation of women in Turkey because they touch upon deeply rooted societal and cultural issues that directly affect women’s status and rights. These themes are of “status policies” (Htun & Weldon, 2010) which divides from equality policies which only provides equal recognition and ability to access state services such as health, education, justice, security. Status policies are the peculiar policies of women due to their gender identity. They are directly related with women’s concerns, interests and demands.

Themes of abortion, headscarf, and violence against women delve into how women’s substantive needs and interests are represented and addressed within policy making. These issues are central to the experiences of women and reflect the broader and divergent societal attitudes towards gender (Lombardo & Meier, 2006; Fraser, 2009; Walby, 2011). Therefore, analyzing parliamentary debates on these themes provides a richer and more comprehensive understanding of how female representatives advocate for women’s substantive representation in Turkey, beyond mere formal equality. In a country like Turkey where social cleavages are high, it is worth investigating the questions of which women are represented, which issue is seen as a women’s issue, and how the womanhood is defined and rearticulated. As a result, by emphasizing the discursive construction of concepts such as womanhood, this study provides a new analytical framework to better understand how female MPs actively redefine and negotiate women’s representation in the Turkish political context.

Methodologically, this dissertation conducts an in-depth CDA, which is simply defined as a research method for studying language regarding its social context (Lou, 2019), by focusing on the parliamentary debates from the 22nd to the 28th which sheds light on the evolving roles, challenges, and impacts of female representatives

in Turkish political discourse. In doing so, it fills a critical gap in longitudinal studies of female political representation in a complex and dynamic sociopolitical context. It enhances the comprehension of how female parliamentarians navigate and influence policy-making processes. CDA endorses for a critical examination of language in relation to power, ideology, and social structures (Wodak, 2011). In this sense, language plays an essential role in reinforcing or challenging dominant political, economic, or cultural ideologies and CDA can reveal it.

As a result, this study aims to identify trends and themes and to determine whether and how they differ among and within each other. Thus, it focuses upon the linguistic patterns and variations employed by these women when articulating and negotiating women's interests, as well as the proposed policies and the way they situate women's issues in relation to other political debates. Ultimately, this dissertation proposes a dual analytical framework—bridging substantive and constitutive dimensions of representation—to reveal how the political representation of women is shaped not just by votes and policies, but by the language through which women, and their place in the political community and practice, are rearticulated, constituted and contested.

1.4 Organization of the Study

This dissertation is structured into eight chapters, each contributing to a comprehensive understanding of women's constitutive representation in Turkey. Chapter Two develops the theoretical framework, discussing various types of women's representation and elaborating on how womanhood, citizenship, and democracy are conceptualized within the literature. It introduces the dual framework of divergent visions of womanhood and its embeddedness in broader political debates.

Chapter Three presents the methodology. It explains the rationale for using CDA, details the data collection and sample selection process, and outlines the thematic and schematic tools used in analysis.

Chapter Four provides a contextual background on women's political representation in Turkey. It includes a historical overview, examines the AKP's gender policies, and introduces the key parliamentary issues—headscarf, abortion, and violence against women—which serve as the core empirical focus of the analysis. Then, the themes of headscarf, abortion, and violence against women are each examined in depth, with a focus on how female MPs conceptualize these issues through their parliamentary speeches in separate chapters of five, six and seven. The final chapter synthesizes the findings, reflects on the implications for women's political representation, and discusses the limitations of the study.



CHAPTER 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Political representation, though often treated as a straightforward concept, encompasses a wide array of theoretical debates and analytical models. Classical accounts define representation as the act of “making present again” the voices or interests of the people in the political sphere (Pitkin, 1967). Later scholars have expanded this understanding by identifying key elements of the representative relationship: the actor, the audience, the content, the institutional setting, and the mechanism of recognition or judgment (Dovi, 2018; Rehfeld, 2005). These models emphasize that representation is not merely a legal or electoral relationship, but a dynamic and interpretive process, shaped by public recognition, institutional structures, and political context.

One central debate revolves around whether representatives should simply transmit their constituents’ preferences (as delegates), or exercise independent judgment on their behalf (as trustees). While the delegate model prioritizes direct responsiveness, the trustee model emphasizes leadership and political responsibility. Real-world representation, however, often blends these roles—especially in party-centered systems where loyalty to political platforms mediates individual agency (Eulau et al., 1967; Andeweg, 2003).

Hanna Pitkin (1967) famously observed that this tension is inherent to the concept of representation – a paradox that cannot be fully resolved because democratic representation demands both elements. Rather than choosing one model exclusively, successful representation may require a balance between acting for the people’s immediate preferences and acting for their long-term interests (Mansbridge 2003). Indeed, Mansbridge (2003) and others have suggested additional forms (e.g. recursive, promissory, anticipatory, gyroscopic representation) that show how representatives alternate between these roles across different time horizons and issues, further blurring a strict dichotomy.

Yet, as many scholars have argued, this framework risks viewing representation as a static process (Mansbrigde, 2003). It does not fully capture the ways in which representatives may also shape and redefine the very interests they claim to represent. This insight underlies more recent theories of constitutive representation, which highlight how political actors actively construct the identities, needs, and voices of those they speak for (Saward, 2006; Urbinati, 2000). Representation is thus not only a matter of acting on behalf of others, but also of shaping who those “others” are imagined to be.

This dissertation builds on both substantive and constitutive approaches, treating them not as opposing, but as interdependent dimensions of political representation. In the context of women’s political representation in Turkey, it examines how female MPs not only articulate women’s interests but also contribute to the construction of womanhood and the redefinition of broader political concepts such as citizenship, national belonging, and regime identity. In doing so, the study moves beyond the question of whether female MPs represent “women’s interests” in policy terms. It asks how womanhood itself is defined, contested, and embedded in broader political discourses—especially through issues like the headscarf, abortion, and gender-based violence.

This section outlines the conceptual architecture that guides this analysis. First, the dissertation discusses how womanhood is defined through diverse and often conflicting political discourses. In doing so, it also draws on the lens of intersectionality, recognizing that womanhood is not a monolithic category but shaped by the interaction of gender with class, ethnicity, religion, and ideology. Then, it explores how these definitions are embedded in broader debates—on the one hand, around community (membership, citizenship, nationality, belonging), and on the other, around political practice (regime, secularism, governance).

2.1 Types of Women’s Representation

The concept of representation gained a new dimension with Pitkin’s seminal 1967 book “The Concept of Representation.” Particularly influential in establishing the theoretical framework for studies concerning women’s representation, Pitkin’s work critically re-examined earlier categories and introduced new forms of representation.

For Hanna Pitkin (1967), theorists should avoid attempting to reconcile the idea of representation's contradictory character. In her definition, political representation "is primarily a public, institutionalized arrangement involving many people and groups, and operating in the complex ways of large-scale social arrangements. What makes it representation is not any single action by any one participant, but the over-all structure and functioning of the system, the patterns emerging from the multiple activities of many people" (Pitkin 1967: 221- 222). Instead, by preserving this contradiction, theorists can advocate for citizens to protect the autonomy of both the representative and those who are represented. Therefore, representatives must be the ones who behave in ways that protect the representee's ability to approve and hold their representatives responsible, as well as the representative's ability to act independently of the representee's preferences.

The notion of policy responsiveness has not only theoretical importance in political representation theories but it also directly framed empirical studies on legislation or decision-making attitudes of the politicians. Hannah Pitkin (1967) offered "responsibility" concept in political representation studies in which she made a meticulous categorization and formalization of representation.

Understanding the theoretical framework of this dissertation first requires a close examination of the types of representation originally proposed by Pitkin. Starting with descriptive representation, frequently utilized in early studies of women's representation, which emphasizes the importance of women's numerical presence in parliament—even if only in quantitative terms—the discussion progresses towards substantive representation. Substantive representation has become a major phenomenon in the literature, critiquing descriptive approaches for their lack of qualitative depth. However, substantive representation itself has also been criticized, primarily because it conceptualizes representation as a one-directional process and tends to overlook factors beyond gender. In response to these criticisms, the relatively recent concept of constitutive representation has emerged. This dissertation advances the debate further by creating dialogue and connections between substantive and constitutive approaches, moving beyond substantive representation to reveal the constitutive nature of the representation process. Therefore, this chapter clearly defines these three theoretical approaches, discusses their contributions and

shortcomings, and introduces new perspectives to firmly establish the theoretical framework of the study.

2.3.1. Descriptive Representation, Gender Quotas and Critical Actors

Scholars in the academic realm frequently delve into the historical development of women's participation in Parliament, investigating significant landmarks, temporal shifts, and the consequences of various movements and legislative measures. They also scrutinize how the presence of women in Parliament influences the representation of women's concerns and viewpoints, evaluating whether a greater female presence in Parliament results in enhanced descriptive representation. Comparative research extends to the assessment of women's participation in Parliament across diverse nations and regions, enabling cross-border comparisons and providing insights into the effects of different political systems.

Academic discussions on women's representation often center on the participation of women in political and public spheres, particularly within the context of elected and appointed offices. These discussions encompass various subtopics and themes, including: types of representation such as descriptive representation and substantive representation, electoral systems focusing on gender quotas, public opinion on women's representation and case studies conducted on various countries and regions.

I believe that representation types and quota discussions should not be explained independently from each other. These two issues are interrelated; especially the quota and the descriptive representation issues are engaged studied in the literature. To begin with, the quota, in a nutshell, refers to states determining a special percentage of seats for women so that they can be represented in the parliament. Debates around the efficacy and implications of gender quotas, reserved seats, and affirmative action measures in enhancing women's representation are constitute main academic discussions.

Gender quotas are seen as a means to rectify historical and structural gender bias within political systems. As it is discussed in previous sections, women have been underrepresented in political leadership roles due to discriminatory practices and societal norms, throughout history. Quotas aim to correct this imbalance by ensuring a minimum level of representation for women (Tremblay & Trimple, 2010) and, are

framed as a way to promote equal opportunities for women in politics. For Childs and Krooks (2009) gender quota helps break the “glass ceiling” that has traditionally limited women’s advancement in political careers. By ensuring a certain number of women in decision-making positions, quotas facilitate the entry and progression of women in politics. They seek to level the playing field by providing women with the same chances as men to participate in political decision-making processes (Schwindt-Bayer, 2010). Gender quotas encourage women to participate in politics, as they see a realistic opportunity to gain positions of influence (Dahlerup, 2006). This, in turn, can lead to more women becoming politically engaged and contributing to the democratic process. Therefore, gender quotas are argued to enhance the democratic nature of political systems (Franceschet & Krook, 2010). They aim to make politics more inclusive by reflecting the diversity of the population and allowing different perspectives and experiences to be considered in policymaking.

Increasing women’s representation in politics can lead to the development and implementation of more gender-sensitive policies (Kittilson, 2009) since women legislators are often more likely to advocate for and prioritize issues such as women’s rights, reproductive health, and family-friendly policies. Quotas have normative and symbolic significance by sending a message that gender equality is a fundamental democratic principle. They can act as a catalyst for societal change and challenge deeply ingrained gender norms (Lombardo & Meier, 2009). The concept of ‘critical mass’ is central to the argument for gender quotas in political representation. Gender quotas are often viewed as a means to expedite the attainment of this critical mass and thereby increase women’s impact and influence in political decision-making processes (Reingold, 1992; Osborn, 2006; Fridkin & Kenny, 2008; Hale & Power, 2017). Reaching a critical mass of women in political institutions is seen as a pivotal step toward achieving gender equality in politics and society because critical mass enhances women’s ability to amplify their voices. When women reach a certain threshold of representation, they are more likely to influence the political agenda and policy decisions. Below this threshold, they may be marginalized and their voices may be easily dismissed. Therefore, achieving a critical mass of women in political institutions can lead to institutional changes that are more inclusive and responsive to women’s needs and concerns (Chapell, 2007; Fridkin & Kenny, 2008; Hale & Power, 2017).

However, studies conducted on different countries resulted in different conclusions. For instance, Krook (2010) provides a comprehensive analysis of gender quotas in political representation on a global scale. It offers insights into the impact of different quota systems and their effectiveness in various countries, such as Pakistan, India, Sweden, the UK, Argentina and France. The study shows that percentage of seats in Argentina increased to 30% after the quota regulation (Krook, 2010: 161) while women of Sweden had 47% (Krook, 2010: 107), and women have 21% of the parliamentary seats in Pakistan (Krook, 2010: 57). As a result, countries such as India (%8), France (only increased to %18 from %12) and UK (%20) may have quotas on the books but lack mechanisms for ensuring compliance, which can limit their impact. Accordingly, cultural and social context of a country plays a significant role in determining the effectiveness of gender quotas. Moreover, deeply rooted gender norms, stereotypes, and societal attitudes, as well as intersecting factors, such as race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, can impact how quotas are received and implemented (Krook 2010). Similar studies (Kittilson 2001; Dahrup 2006; Meier 2010) also contribute to the understanding of the adoption and impact of gender quotas in political representation across different countries and regions, offering valuable insights into the global landscape of gender quota policies. However, it has become questionable whether quotas at best only increase the number of women and whether this ‘critical mass’ fully meets the concept of women’s representation.

The contribution of women’s presence in parliament only in numbers to women’s representation is the subject of not only the quota issue but also the descriptive representation of women (Pitkin, 1967). This concept of Hannah Pitkin (1967) focuses on the numerical presence of women in political bodies and the extent to which they reflect the demographic composition of the population. The primary goal of descriptive representation is to provide a voice and visibility to historically underrepresented groups, including women, by increasing their numbers in legislative bodies. It is often measured by the percentage of women in political positions and is crucial for achieving gender parity and diversity in politics (Phillips 1995; Dahlerup 2006; Cammett & Isaar 2010; Carroll & Sanbonmatsu 2013; Ford & O’Connor 2016; Carroll 2018). For example, in her book, Carroll (2018) presents cases where women legislators have advocated for and passed legislation on issues such as reproductive rights, domestic violence prevention, and family leave policies.

She illustrates how these policies may not have been prioritized or enacted without the presence of women in legislatures. Moreover, Ford and O'Connor (2016) posit that descriptive representation leads to greater accountability and responsiveness in political institutions. Accordingly, women in legislatures can hold governments accountable for their actions, particularly in areas related to gender equality. The authors provide cases where women legislators have actively monitored the implementation of policies aimed at reducing gender disparities and have held government agencies accountable for fulfilling their commitments to women's rights (Ford & O'Connor 2016). Last but not least, Cammett and Issar (2010)'s study which focuses on Indian women legislators argues that women in the parliament actively advocate for policies related to healthcare, education, and women's rights. However, the influence of women on these policies may differ depending on various factors, such as political party affiliation and regional context.

As it is seen, academic discussions explore the impact of increasing women's descriptive representation on policy outcomes and public perception. However, while descriptive representation is important in increasing the number of female parliamentarians, it does not guarantee that women's exclusive concerns and interests are addressed in policymaking (Phillips 1999; Lovenduski & Norris 2003; Lovenduski & Jensen 2005; Baldez 2006; Krook 2009; Krook & Childs 2010; Thomas 2017; Ore 2018). This constitutes the main argument of substantive representation.

The studies on substantive representation offer a range of perspectives on the limitations of descriptive representation and the need to shift the focus toward substantive representation to better address the interests and concerns of various marginalized and underrepresented groups.

2.3.2. Substantive Representation of Women

Substantive representation pertains to how effectively women elected officials advocate for women's interests and concerns. Scholars examine the role of women politicians in shaping gender-related policies and addressing issues such as gender equality, reproductive rights, and violence against women. In this sense, substantive representation complements descriptive representation by ensuring that women in

political positions not only occupy seats but also actively use their positions to promote gender equality and women's rights (Lovenduski, 2016). It plays a crucial role in advancing the well-being of women and achieving greater gender parity in society. Legislators engaged in substantive representation are argued as more accountable to their constituents, particularly women, and work to address their needs and concerns (Ballington & Karam, 2006; Franceschet et al, 2012; Carroll, 2015; Schwindt-Bayer, 2018). They seek to ensure that women's voices are heard in the policymaking process.

In Pitkin's words, substantive representation refers to "acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them" (Pitkin, 1967: 209). While this definition is frequently invoked in debates on women's representation, the question of how to operationalize or measure substantive representation was first systematically addressed by Celis (2009), who proposed three key criteria. These criteria serve, in a sense, as indicators for when substantive representation can be said to occur. The first and arguably most fundamental of these is "acting for women" (Celis, 2009: 95–98). At its most basic level, this refers to introducing or supporting legislative proposals that concern women's issues. This constitutes both the initial requirement and the most essential dimension of parliamentary activity for women representatives.

However, the representational process does not end with voting alone. During parliamentary debates, it is also necessary to speak on behalf of women and to incorporate women's perspectives—particularly their interests—into the legislative process. Since the 1990s, many scholars working within the framework of substantive representation have considered laws that address women's concerns, demands, and interests to be the cornerstone of this form of representation (e.g., Burrell, 1994; Tamerius, 1995; Swers, 1998; Kathlene, 2001; Dovi, 2002; Swers, 2002; Mazur, 2002; Cramer Walsh, 2002).

As some of these studies also argue, however, it is essential to examine how "women's interests" are defined, and by whom. Whoever defines and campaigns for these interests, it is expected that women MPs collaborate with them. At this point, women's movements and civil society organizations gain critical importance. These actors contribute to substantive representation by shaping laws through a gendered

lens or by offering feminist feedback on policy decisions (Mazur, 2002). According to Dovi (2002), this type of engagement not only amplifies the voices of diverse groups of women, but also constitutes one of the most meaningful advances in enhancing the scope and quality of substantive representation.

This study has nothing to do with civil society organizations of women at all, but this argument still matters because such collaboration ensures that the performances of female MPs on women's concerns to be grounded in the real-life experiences and needs of women. Consequently, this connection reinforces the argument that female MPs' substantive representation is intertwined with their agency and citizenship status, ultimately leading to a more inclusive and democratic political process.

Celis's (2009:101) second and third criteria for substantive representation go beyond the basic idea of simply "acting for women." They suggest something deeper: that women's interests should be placed at the heart of political priorities, and more importantly, that these interests are not fixed — they should be redefined through the very act of political representation itself. At the very least, they can be interpreted in this way. If I were to elaborate further, the second criterion is about giving priority to women's concerns. Being attentive to women's issues isn't enough; these issues must be treated as central, not secondary. In practice, this means that decision-makers are expected to treat women's needs as a primary lens through which policy choices are made.

The third criterion digs even deeper. It challenges the idea that women's interests already exist, waiting to be represented. Instead, it suggests that these interests are shaped, negotiated, and even contested through political processes. Celis (2009) argues that women's interests are too diverse to be seen as universal. Different women—depending on their class, ethnicity, geography, or lived experiences—may want and need different things. Politics, then, is not just about reflecting their interests, but also about helping define what those interests are, in dialogue with the women themselves.

This reflects a broader trend in feminist scholarship that resists trying to pin down a single, definitive version of what "women's interests" are. For instance, Sapiro (1981) suggests that women's social position, shaped by the gendered division of

labor in the private sphere (such as giving birth and raising children), generates particular interests that deserve political attention. On the other hand, Diamond and Hartsock (1981) argue that shared interests among women emerge more from their place in the gendered structure of productive labor, rather than domestic roles alone (Diamond & Hartsock, 1981: 194–196). Furthermore, Jonasdottir and Jones (1988) emphasize that women's interest in being present in parliament goes beyond mere representation; it is about having control over the conditions under which decisions are made rather than just the outcomes of those decisions. (Jonasdottir & Jones 1988: 9). Therefore, women having agency and influence in the decision-making process matters for interests to be defined in the parliament.

These early studies from the 1980s, unsurprisingly, focused largely on a gender-difference-oriented perspective. There was a prevailing understanding that women's interests should be defined independently from gender norms, in the simplest terms. In contrast to these approaches, the 1990s witnessed the emergence of studies that explicitly refused to offer a single, universal definition of women's interests and concerns.

Some of these works offered individual-level diversity—for example, Phillips (1998), who argues that since each woman's life experience is different, the preferences they bring to parliament should also differ. Others, however, adopted a more social or collective perspective, such as Young (1997) and Williams (1998). In this approach, what matters is how individuals interpret events and issues within the framework of their social structures. Diversity here exists not only at the individual level, but at a macro level—shaped not only by gender, but also by culture, race, ethnicity, or religion.

Accordingly, women from these different social backgrounds may also have distinct definitions of interest, as having the same gender or sharing a common concern is not sufficient to define or represent these different groups (Young, 1997: 350). In other words, while it is true that women are marginalized due to gender roles, it must not be overlooked that the societies and communities in which women live also differ from one another (Williams, 1998). Following this argument, this study argues that in a country like Turkey, where various social cleavages exist, there are numerous factors shaping women's interests. These factors include ethnic identity, religious

beliefs, socioeconomic status, and regional differences. Understanding women's agency and their influence in decision-making processes requires considering how these diverse factors shape their interests. In this context, women's desire to be represented in parliament is not only about outcomes but also about having control over the conditions under which decisions are made. This perspective strengthens women's agency and participation in democratic processes and makes the analysis of the performances of female MPs valuable to study.

By the 2000s, the discussion had moved beyond merely defining interests and began to focus more directly on enhancing women's autonomy (e.g., Reingold, 2000; Wangnerud, 2000; Mazur, 2001; Lovenduski et al., 2005). This was increasingly seen as an indispensable element of substantive representation. In Wangnerud's words, representation is defined as "the desire to adopt policies that promote female citizens' autonomy" (Wangnerud, 2000: 72).

This statement is particularly significant for this thesis, as it emphasizes that what matters is not only the presence of women in parliament as agents, but also the need to ensure the autonomy of women as citizens. This thesis argues that Wangnerud's conceptualization is especially noteworthy in its focus on national citizenship, yet it remains underexplored in the existing literature. All these points demonstrate that, there is a relation between how female MPs formulate women's issues and interests and how these MPs approach and reproduce women's agency, citizenship status, and democracy. Understanding one of these aspects requires focusing on the others. This approach ensures that the performance of women's substantive representation is measured more effectively and comprehensively, which is frequently utilized in the empirical section of this dissertation.

Analyzing how women's issues are addressed in a democratic environment, which begins with the representation of women in the political arena, requires making inferences about both agency and citizenship. Pateman (1989) argues that developing a fully democratic society that includes women as full citizens requires rethinking the concept of the body politic (Pateman, 1989: 52-53). This argument reflects the feminist belief that the politicization of issues relegated to the personal sphere, often associated with women, is essential. Consequently, the politicization of women's issues leads to their existence as agents and citizens within social and political

contexts. According to Lee (2007), the emphasis on politicizing the individual presumes personal agency in choosing which aspects of one's life to politicize (Lee, 2007). In this context, democratic governance emerges as the sole means of politicizing women's issues. It is evident that women's agency, citizenship, and the approach of democratic governments to representing women's issues are directly interconnected. Therefore, framing the political representation of women without separating these concepts strengthens this dissertation theoretically and leads to more effective outcomes.

Other studies that utilize the concept of substantive representation and attempt to explain it conceptually are empirical works that show how the presence of women in parliament makes a difference. These studies have also contributed theoretically to the "critical actors/critical mass" debate. For example, Childs and Krook (2006) question whether a "critical mass" in parliament is actually necessary for substantive representation. According to them, women do not necessarily need to form a mass in order to make a difference in parliament. "Those who act individually or collectively to bring about women-friendly policy change"—so-called critical actors—can also fulfill the definition of substantive representation (Childs & Krook, 2006: 127). What matters is bringing women's issues onto the agenda and ensuring that laws are adopted in favor of women.

However, this should not lead to the misconception that the number of women representatives is unimportant. After all, in order for those policies to be passed, someone has to vote for them. Moreover, the number of women MPs should increase so that awareness of internal diversity among women—in terms of background, identity, and experiences—can also grow (Trimble, 1997).

But do women actually make a difference in parliament when they are present in greater numbers? Do their votes support women-focused policies? According to Lovenduski and Norris (2009), the answer is yes. Especially when it comes to supporting equality legislation, women are more likely than men to be in favor. Of course, factors such as education level, age, political ideology, and party affiliation can all influence this behavior. Yet despite these variables, women are generally found to be more opposed to traditional gender norms, and more supportive of steps to enhance descriptive representation of women.

Secondly, party affiliation has been identified as a major factor influencing this behavior (Lovenduski & Norris, 2009). A similar conclusion is found in the work of Lawless and Fox (2010), who argue that there must be a partisan balance between women representatives and their parties. In the U.S., for instance, the Democratic Party is more likely than its rival to raise women's issues in parliament and to nominate female candidates.

In fact, some studies focusing on voter behavior also show that voters care more about the political party of a candidate than their gender (Dolan, 2013). Therefore, what truly matters is not just whether the elected representative is a woman, but whether she actually takes action in parliament on behalf of women.

Substantive representation is, without question, a key concept in understanding how marginalized groups are represented in politics. However, as I explored it further in this dissertation, I began to notice some limitations that made me question its completeness. While it focuses on whether representatives advocate for the interests of their constituents, I believe that it oversimplifies what representation actually entails and misses some of the more dynamic aspects of the process. This study critiques and goes beyond substantive representation from four main perspectives, each of which reveals important gaps in the framework.

(1) The Assumption of Homogeneity: Studies on substantive representation often assumes that the represented group is homogenous, and this has always struck me as problematic. For instance, expecting female representatives to automatically advocate for “women's issues” implies that all women share the same concerns and priorities. But women's experiences are shaped by so many intersecting factors—ethnicity, class, ideology—that it's impossible to speak of a single, unified “women's interest.” I believe that substantive representation needs to engage more seriously with these complexities.

(2) Focusing Only on Advocacy and Policy Outcome: Substantive representation also places a heavy emphasis on policy outcomes—what representatives do for their constituents. While this is highly important, I believe it overlooks something equally crucial: the representation process is more than introducing or supporting bills during the legislation. The representatives talk, debate and deliver their speeches from the parliamentary podium. In doing so, this study argues that, they construct identities

and demands through their words and discourses. Representatives do not just advocate; they shape how the groups they represent are perceived and how their interests are defined. This is why I turned to constitutive representation, which helps explain how representation is not just about reflecting or “representing” the interests but also about constructing them.

(3) The Influence of Institutions: Another issue is how much substantive representation depends on the institutional environment. Representatives are not operating in a vacuum; they are part of political parties, legislative bodies, and other broader political structures that can constrain what they can actually achieve. Representatives do not act in isolation—they are shaped and affected by their political environment. I believe this makes it difficult to say that they are solely advocating for their constituents’ interests, as these institutional constraints often shape their behavior as much as, if not more than, the interests of the groups they represent.

(4) Representation as a Dynamic Process: Studies on substantive representation often fails to account for the dynamic and reciprocal nature of the representation process. Scholars describe it as a static process: representatives advocate, and the represented benefit. But in practice, representation is much more dynamic. Representatives do not merely act on behalf of static interests; they also respond to changing political contexts, evolving societal norms, and shifting party ideologies. Thus, political contexts shift, societal norms evolve, and representatives adjust their discourses and actions in response. I believe this reciprocity and fluidity are essential to understanding how representation actually works, especially in complex environments like the Turkish parliament.

To address these limitations, this dissertation goes beyond substantive representation and integrates with the concept of constitutive representation as a complementary analytical lens. Constitutive representation focuses on how representatives shape and reconstruct societal understandings of identity, citizenship, and group interests. The goal of this study is to offer a more comprehensive knowledge of the representation process, specifically with regard to women’s representation in Turkey, through an examination at both substantive and constitutive dimensions.

Through this critique, the theoretical framework situates substantive representation not as a self-sufficient concept but as part of a larger, interconnected process that reflects the complexity of modern political representation. In the next section, the relevance of the concept of constitutive representation to this dissertation will be addressed, establishing a clear connection between constitutive and substantive representation. This linkage will show how the two frameworks complement each other.

2.3.3. Constitutive Representation of Women

In the literature, there is a shift towards studying “the constitutive representation of gender,” which explores how political subjects’ identities, including their femininities, masculinities, and interests, are produced as part of the representative process (Saward 2010; Childs & Webb 2012). This type of representation is still emerging and developing, and as such, there are limited works on the concept of constitutive representation. It is challenging to identify specific discussions or authors on this term because constitutive representation largely stems from and exists within the framework of substantive representation. In this section, an overview will be provided, focusing on key works and authors who discuss this type of representation, highlighting its relevance to the broader concept of substantive representation.

Two prominent features of the concept of constitutive representation can be identified. The first is the more holistic approach to the notion that women act for women and are accountable to them, which forms the basis of substantive representation. This argument is put forward by Mackay (2008). As discussed in the previous section on substantive representation, the substantivity usage in studies exploring the representation of women often emphasizes its distinction from descriptive representation. Similarly, Mackay (2008) laid the groundwork for constitutive representation by discussing the conditional yet biological nature between descriptive and substantive representation and proposing a broader perspective on political representation. She agrees that merely having women in parliament is insufficient for representation. However, the phrase “for women” is, according to her, questionable. Instead of focusing solely on whether female representatives act “for women,” Mackay (2008) suggested considering whether

these representatives also act for other interests. This framework is necessary to understand women's representation because it takes into account policy environments and institutional contexts that shape the capacities of political actors and institutions.

In this sense, Mackay (2008) advocated for a holistic systems approach, emphasizing the importance of considering the institutional, political, and social contexts in which female representatives perform. This comprehensive approach aligns closely with the core of this dissertation, which examines women's representation in Turkey. It argues that the performance of female MPs in representing women is not the sole factor; rather, party policies significantly influence this performance.

Second prominent feature is that constitutive representation focuses on how representational claims shape gender relations. According to Squires (2008), representation is a dual process that is both "enabling" and "constraining," shaping not only the interests of women but also how gender is perceived and experienced. Constitutive representation is critical for understanding the role of representation processes in structuring gender relations, thus developing an understanding of how gender is constructed. A similar perspective is found in Saward (2006; 2010), who argues that representation involves not just advocating interests but also shaping the identities and interests of groups through representational claims.

Constitutive representation is worth addressing in this study from this perspective, as it focuses on how concepts are constituted during the representation process. In fact, in this regard, this thesis could serve as an empirical test of the constitutive representation theory. However, there are many aspects open to debate. Constitutive representation gives little attention to how women or the represented groups perceive this representation and how they respond to this process. For example, if female MPs develop an anti-abortion discourse, does this discourse truly shape the position of women in society? Or do some women resist it and construct alternative narratives? The absence of a methodological framework within the theory to assess how substantive claims shaping these relationships can be measured creates uncertainty.

In constitutive representation, the act of representing is formative, with the interests of the represented group being defined in specific ways, potentially leading to the

more effective representation of certain women's interests over others (Squires 2008). While constitutive representation explains how certain women's interests are prioritized over others, it does not adequately focus on how these representations evolve over time. The question of how political changes, crises, and intra-party transformations shape gender representation remains unaddressed within this theory.

Moreover, constitutive representation emphasizes the two-directional nature of the representation process, but the claim that gender relations are shaped suggests a top-down process where the upper level's representation of the lower level influences the latter's identity, impacting gender relations. I agree that the process is constitutive, but I believe that it constitutes *concepts* rather than *relations* and that more demand-based studies are needed to assess its impact on grassroots relationships. After all, women are not merely passive actors being represented, but active subjects who shape the meaning of representation. For instance, the anti-abortion discourse of female parliamentarians may not only challenge male-dominated politics but might also generate varied responses within feminist movements.

Taking all these aforementioned gaps into account, this dissertation positioning itself both within and beyond these theories of representation. The most accurate way to describe it would be that it goes beyond substantive representation while engaging with constitutive representation. Yet, while aligning closely with some aspects of constitutive representation, it does not focus on the shaping of gender relations. Instead, it specifically explores how the woman's concepts are constituted through substantive claims because examining the ways female MPs approach and redefine these concepts provides deeper insights into why certain identities, rights, and roles are prioritized within political representation processes. Rather than taking these concepts for granted, this study scrutinizes their construction precisely because it reveals underlying political and ideological dynamics that shape women's representation. Following section offers the key concepts that this study is framed.

2.2 Key Concepts of Women's Representation

The representation of women in politics is a complex phenomenon shaped by multiple theoretical concepts and debates. Understanding how these concepts—particularly those concerning women—are constituted within the process of

representation demonstrates that representation cannot be reduced merely to its outcomes.

Grounded in Nancy Fraser's (1995, 2003) theory of redistribution and recognition, this dissertation bridges outcome-oriented and meaning-oriented approaches to political representation. While redistribution aligns with the substantive representation literature—focusing on policy outcomes, institutional participation, and access to resources—recognition points to how identities are constituted, legitimized, or marginalized through political discourse. Yet, this study takes the argument further by engaging with the notion of constitutive representation (Saward, 2006; Mackay, 2008; Squires, 2008), which emphasizes how political actors participate in shaping—not merely expressing—the interests, subjectivities, and symbolic boundaries of the represented. Applying this approach to women's representation allows for a deeper analysis of how female MPs use, redefine, and negotiate key political concepts. This process not only involves advocating for women's interests but also actively shaping the boundaries and parameters of representation itself.

Building on this foundation, this dissertation examines how female MPs in Turkey define womanhood and how these definitions are shaped by broader political contexts. It argues that womanhood is not a fixed or standalone category. Instead, womanhood is constantly constructed and reconstructed through political discourse. These constructions do not emerge in isolation. They are deeply embedded in broader ideological debates—particularly those related to citizenship, national belonging, and regime narratives. In this sense, representation involves not only the voicing of women's interests but also the active production of political meanings.

The following sub-sections introduce the key concepts that structure this analysis. First, it clarifies how these key concepts are understood and used within the context of this dissertation. First, the concept of womanhood is discussed as a discursively constructed identity. Then, the broader political frameworks within which womanhood is embedded are explored. These are organized under two dimensions: community-based discussions (such as citizenship and national belonging) and practice-based discussions (such as governance, secularism, and regime type). Second, it situates these concepts within the existing literature—highlighting both

how they have been theorized and where this study offers new insights. Together, these concepts form the foundation for the dissertation's dual analytical framework and guide the analysis of parliamentary discourse in the chapters that follow.

2.2.1 Defining Divergent Visions of Womanhood

Understanding woman's agency in political representation requires an examination of how womanhood is constructed, contested, and mobilized within parliamentary discourse. In the empirical chapters of this dissertation, female MPs' narratives reveal diverse and sometimes conflicting conceptualizations of womanhood—whether through narratives of motherhood, moral values, or agender equality—are examined in detail, shaped by ideological, cultural, and political factors. This dissertation aims to uncover the diverging visions of womanhood articulated in the discourse of female MPs in Turkey. It investigates how womanhood is defined, redefined, and strategically rearticulated across different ideological, cultural, and institutional contexts. Rather than assuming a fixed or unified identity, the study treats womanhood as a site of discursive contestation—where meaning is negotiated, agency is expressed or constrained, and political subjectivity is produced. This section lays the theoretical groundwork for that inquiry by engaging with feminist debates on agency, autonomy, and the structural construction of gender.

One of the most widely cited texts in this field is Moi's essay "What Is a Woman?" (1999), which argues that womanhood cannot be reduced to biological sex. Rather, it is historically and socially shaped—through institutions, roles, and collective expectations. According to Moi, being a woman involves "new ways of experiencing the possibilities of a woman's body" (1999: 65–66), and it cannot be separated from the context of age, nationality, race, class, or lived experience. Following this line, Htun (2010) also describes womanhood as a historical phenomenon shaped by the interaction between individual agency and external structures.

Young (2002) builds on this approach by defining gender not as a personal attribute but as a structural feature. For her, gender is "an attribute of social structures more than of persons" (2002: 422). Regardless of individual preferences, both women and men are passively grouped and positioned within gendered power relations. These structures are not abstract—they shape daily life and are deeply political. According

to Young, the state reproduces gender inequality through mechanisms like the sexual division of labor, normative heterosexuality, and militarism.

Bringing these arguments together, Htun (2005) underlines that gender is shaped by large-scale institutional practices. She argues that to study gender, we must analyze its effects: wage gaps, employment discrimination, male dominance in politics. The state, through laws and policies, plays a direct role in shaping women's agency. For example, abortion laws not only regulate reproduction but also limit women's autonomy. Restrictions on abortion enforce biologically deterministic roles and frame motherhood as a duty rather than a choice. According to Htun, such legal frameworks diminish women's ability to act as autonomous subjects.

This points to an important question: when women engage in politics as representatives, to what extent do they act independently of the institutions they are embedded in—such as political parties that may themselves reproduce gendered norms through family-centered policies? Understanding how womanhood is defined becomes key to tracing these dynamics.

From this perspective, the question raised by Mouffe (2009) is especially relevant: if the category “woman” is not uniform or stable, how is it constructed within different political discourses? This question resonates strongly in the Turkish context, where diverse ideological, religious, and national frameworks shape how womanhood is imagined. Factors such as tradition, religion, nationalism, international norms, or human rights discourse all contribute to these definitions. Different political actors draw from different combinations of these elements, producing competing discursive constructions of womanhood.

Feminist scholarship has long pointed out how political discourse often constructs womanhood through traditional gender roles—mother, wife, caregiver (Mosse, 1983; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Nagel, 1998; Buss, 1998; Brandt, 2010; Enloe, 2011). Women are seen as both biological and cultural reproducers of the nation (Yuval-Davis, 2003), and are symbolically burdened with preserving national honor and moral order (Wobbe, 1995). In such narratives, issues like veiling are not just about personal choice—they carry significant symbolic weight, marking the boundaries between secular and religious, modern and traditional.

In Turkey, this dynamic has been especially visible in debates over the headscarf. The image of the veiled woman has often been contrasted with the “modern Republican woman” (Arik, 2012). Parliamentary discourse has reflected this tension, turning women’s bodies into symbolic battlegrounds for larger ideological conflicts (Parla, 2001). In nationalist or conservative discourses, women are frequently celebrated as self-sacrificing mothers who preserve family and moral values (Mosse, 1983; Mahmood, 2005; Rhouni, 2009). But this glorification often goes hand in hand with efforts to limit women’s autonomy—especially by reinforcing ideals of modesty and purity (Rhouni, 2009: 166).

Yet this does not mean that women are always passive objects in these identity constructions. As Mahmood (2005) argues, some women mobilize these very discourses to assert agency. For instance, pious women may frame veiling not as submission but as an act of moral or religious autonomy—challenging secular definitions of liberation. In this sense, womanhood is always being negotiated, and never neutral.

Lastly, it is important to note that discursive constructions of womanhood are neither monolithic nor universal. Rather, they are shaped by intersecting factors such as class, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and political ideology. The concept of intersectionality, originally developed within critical race theory and feminist scholarship (Crenshaw, 2016; Collins, 1990; Carastathis, 2016), provides a crucial lens through which to understand this diversity.

Intersectionality reveals that women do not experience gender as an isolated category; instead, their social position is shaped by multiple, overlapping identities. Thus, what “womanhood” means for a Kurdish woman, a veiled Muslim woman, or an upper-class urban woman may differ significantly—not only in lived experience but also in how it is framed and mobilized in parliamentary discourse. As feminist scholars argue (Berger & Guidroz, 2009; Celis et al., 2018; Stevens, 2018), these differences matter for political representation. When female MPs speak on behalf of “women,” the question arises: which women, and under what conditions?

An intersectional approach challenges the assumption that women MPs inherently represent all women. Instead, it asks how structural inequalities—linked to race,

class, religion, or sexuality—shape both the discourse and the policy priorities advanced in parliament. For example, some MPs may foreground issues of religious discrimination or ethnic marginalization, while others emphasize professional or class-based concerns. These distinctions are not secondary; they are constitutive of how womanhood itself is imagined and performed within political discourse. Thus, this study draws on the concept of intersectionality by recognizing that womanhood is experienced and articulated differently across axes such as class, ethnicity, and religion.

These insights suggest that womanhood in parliamentary discourse is inherently contested and performative. It becomes a vehicle for expressing broader ideological visions—whether nationalist, secular-modernist, or religious-conservative. Defining womanhood, then, is not a side issue in political discourse—it is central to how power, identity, and legitimacy are organized and contested.

2.2.2 Womanhood Embedded in Broader Political Discussions

This section outlines how this dissertation conceptualizes and operationalizes the notion of *womanhood*, along with its embedded connections to broader political categories such as *citizenship*, *national belonging*, and *political authority*. Rather than treating womanhood as a universal or fixed identity, the study approaches it as a discursively constructed concept—shaped by various political contexts. This perspective does not frame womanhood simply as an identity, but also as a political position, a normative vision, and a site of symbolic struggle within parliamentary discourse.

In this dissertation, womanhood is explored through a range of discursive definitions, from traditional gender roles to claims of individual freedom. In parliamentary debates—particularly those surrounding the headscarf—these contrasting meanings often come into sharp focus. Feminist scholarship has long shown that womanhood is frequently constructed through conventional roles such as mother, wife, and caregiver (Mosse, 1983; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Nagel, 1998). In contexts marked by conservative ideologies, discourses of modesty and honor are often mobilized to

reinforce patriarchal gender norms (Rhouni, 2009). However, other women challenge these narratives by asserting their agency through appeals to personal autonomy and religious expression (Mahmood, 2005).

In this dissertation, rather than assuming a universal or stable identity, the analysis explores the competing ways in which womanhood is framed—for instance, through maternal roles, as morally upright and modest figures, as devout religious subjects, or as autonomous and equal citizens, while taking their diversities into consideration. These varying definitions are not merely descriptive, but carry normative and ideological weight, reflecting the speakers' positioning within broader political and cultural narratives.

This dissertation does not merely ask how diverging visions of womanhood is defined in political discourse. It goes a step further by examining what these definitions reveal about broader political imaginaries—about who is included in the political community, under what conditions, and through which normative visions. In other words, the analysis explores not only the category of “woman,” but also the deeper questions embedded within: “Who are we?” and “What kind of political order do we want?”

When womanhood becomes tied to broader political discussions of national identity, women are often symbolically positioned as “bearers of the collective”—their appearance, conduct, and roles serving as markers of national boundaries and moral order (Yuval-Davis, 2003; Wobbe, 1995). This suggests that womanhood is not merely constructed on an individual level, but through broader ideological mechanisms that define the cultural and political contours of the political debates.

In this regard, womanhood becomes a symbolic and discursive site through which membership in the national community is articulated and contested. In community-based discussions, this includes questions of citizenship, belonging, and national identity—defining not just women, but the collective self.

In practice-based debates, the focus shifts toward the nature of the regime itself: whether the ideal political order is democratic, secular, conservative, or authoritarian, and how gendered identities are mobilized to legitimize or challenge that vision.

Thus, the representations of womanhood are not isolated statements about gender. They are deeply embedded in competing visions of political community and regime legitimacy, which include debates about regime type, state authority, secularism, Islamism, and the boundaries of democratic and authoritarian politics. Here, womanhood becomes entangled with broader normative visions of governance and the moral order of society. Female MPs' discursive constructions of women often align with or challenge dominant regime narratives, thereby functioning as a political resource or as an instrument in struggles over power and legitimacy.

The following sub-sections will address each concept in turn, beginning with womanhood, and then moving to community-based concepts (such as citizenship and national belonging) and practice-based ones (such as regime type, secularism, and governance).

2.2.2.1 The Community Based Concept of Womanhood: Citizenship, Membership and Belonging

Citizenship is a key concept in political theory, yet its gendered dimensions often remain underexplored in mainstream discussions of representation. In parliamentary discourse, female MPs actively engage with the concept of citizenship, framing it in ways that reflect their political ideologies, party priorities, and broader political dynamics. Female MPs' approach to womanhood is embedded in their approaches to citizenship, nationhood and national belonging. Whether citizenship is articulated in relation to rights, duties, national belonging, or cultural identity, the ways in which women MPs define and mobilize it directly shape their approach to representation. Since this study examines how female MPs invoke and frame citizenship in their speeches, this section sets the theoretical background necessary to understand its construction.

Policies aimed at gender equality often trigger broader social transformations. These changes affect the relationship between the state and market, the authority of religious and cultural institutions, and public understandings of citizenship. Yet such transformations do not impact all women equally. For example, Htun and Weldon (2010) distinguish two key dimensions of gender equality policies: whether they seek to improve women's status in society or address intersectional class inequalities, and whether they challenge culturally encoded traditions. Policies such as those targeting

domestic violence, restrictive abortion laws, or gender quotas are referred to as "status policies"—they aim to dismantle practices that place women in subordinate roles and hinder their participation in public life (Htun & Weldon, 2010: 209).

This distinction shows that how representatives conceptualize womanhood significantly affects their policy priorities. A narrow or essentialist understanding of womanhood often results in selective policies that focus on only certain aspects of women's lives while overlooking others. In contrast, a broader and more inclusive approach may lead to more comprehensive responses to women's diverse needs.

The way MPs define womanhood also informs the extent to which women are recognized as full citizens. Many feminist scholars build on T.H. Marshall's (1950) classic definition of citizenship as "a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community," which encompasses civil, political, and social rights. However, access to these rights has historically been uneven. Feminist movements and waves of activism have played a vital role in expanding women's citizenship—from securing voting rights to gaining access to education, employment, and bodily autonomy.

Still, feminist thinkers have long questioned the liberal model of citizenship. Scholars like Jayawardena (1986) note that nationalist movements have at times opened space for more inclusive citizenship claims, while simultaneously reinforcing traditional gender roles. Others, such as Elshtain (1981) and Ruddick (1989), offered alternative approaches centered around women's experiences in the private sphere, such as caregiving and motherhood. These "maternalist" and "social feminist" perspectives saw value in the private realm as a site of political and ethical significance.

However, these ideas have faced criticism for reproducing traditional gender roles and failing to offer a universal model of democratic citizenship. Dietz (1985) argues for a collective and inclusive model that treats all individuals equally, rejecting the mother-child relationship as a foundation for civic identity. Pateman (1988), from a radical feminist standpoint, critiques the dichotomy between public and private, pointing out how the feminine realm—emotion, care, intimacy—is systematically excluded from the masculine-coded domain of politics and law. Mouffe (2009)

similarly interprets motherhood as the “antithesis of citizenship,” highlighting how sexual difference is often treated as incompatible with political equality.

Moreover, feminist scholars have shown that the rise of the modern nation-state and nationalist movements played a decisive role in shaping women’s citizenship. As Pateman (1988), Yuval-Davis (1997), and Moghadam (1999) argue, modern civil society was built upon a foundational division between the public, civic sphere and the private, familial domain. Within this structure, women were granted citizenship, but often on unequal terms. They were included in legal status, yet excluded from full political participation and public visibility.

Pateman (1988) calls this the “Wollstonecraft dilemma”: to demand equality, women must conform to a masculine ideal of citizenship; yet to preserve the value of feminine experiences (such as care or motherhood), they risk reinforcing the very hierarchies that marginalize them. Kandiyoti (1991, 1997) builds on this argument, noting how nationalism is often “Janus-faced”—at once modernizing and deeply traditional. While it appears to expand citizenship, it simultaneously reinforces the private sphere where patriarchy operates most effectively. Nationalist discourses, she argues, assign symbolic roles to women as mothers of the nation and guardians of morality, yet deny them full civic agency.

In a similar vein, Moghadam (1999) supports this view, emphasizing how nationalist state-building projects have historically assigned men the role of breadwinners and political actors, while relegating women to motherhood and cultural preservation. Citizenship, in this sense, is not a neutral legal category but one shaped by gendered norms about who qualifies as a full member of the political community.

Ruth Lister (2003) and others have advanced the concept of “gender-inclusive citizenship” in response to these limitations. This approach foregrounds the structural exclusions women face, especially those rooted in the public/private divide. It argues for a recognition of care work, bodily autonomy, and reproductive rights as central elements of full civic membership. This lens is particularly useful for analyzing parliamentary discourse, where debates over issues like abortion often reveal deeper tensions over who counts as a full citizen.

The case of abortion is especially revealing. As Nossif (2007) and Ginsburg (1989) point out, when women's legal competence to make decisions about their bodies is questioned, their status as full citizens is undermined. In such cases, women are treated not as autonomous political subjects, but as vessels for future citizens—an approach that elevates fetal rights above women's rights. This logic appears in parliamentary discourse where “the right to life” of the unborn is used to justify restrictions on abortion, effectively sidelining women's autonomy and health.

These gendered notions of citizenship are also reflected in the tension between public recognition and private duty. Even today, traces of the liberal model that confines women to the private sphere persist in legislative language. Arguments like “a woman's primary responsibility is to her family” serve to re-inscribe women's roles as primarily domestic, undermining efforts to expand their presence in the political realm. A gendered lens on citizenship helps to uncover how these narratives shape policy preferences and limit the scope of representation.

In the Turkish context, Moghadam (1999) notes that although the early Republic granted women formal citizenship rights as part of its modernization efforts, the continuation of traditional roles through civil law led to their practical marginalization. Particularly in the post-1980 period, women's movements emerged in response to this disconnect, advocating for democratic inclusion and gender equality. These movements, although ideologically diverse—ranging from Kemalist to feminist to Islamist—shared a common demand: to be seen and heard as political actors in their own right.

This multiplicity of voices is especially relevant to this dissertation. Rather than assuming a uniform “woman's perspective,” it seeks to uncover how female MPs draw from different ideological traditions—some emphasizing productivity and public participation, others defending religious or moral values—to redefine the boundaries of women's citizenship.

Mouffe (2009) offers a compelling alternative to liberal citizenship models by proposing a radical democratic approach, where gender difference becomes “non-pertinent” to civic inclusion. She argues for a model in which individuals are recognized not as atomized subjects, but as socially embedded actors whose

identities emerge through multiple intersecting positions. In this model, women and men alike participate in a shared political identity rooted in democratic equivalence and pluralism.

This theoretical perspective is particularly relevant for interpreting parliamentary debates in Turkey, where women's rights claims are often portrayed as threatening to family values or national identity. Feminist literature shows that states sometimes instrumentalize women's reproductive roles for demographic goals—promoting motherhood while restricting broader social and political rights (Fischer, 2021; Yuval-Davis, 2003). These debates are not only about policy; they are about the terms on which women are accepted—or excluded—as full members of the political community.

Finally, the literature makes it clear that true equality in citizenship requires more than legal recognition. It requires full autonomy, bodily integrity, and the ability to participate in public life without structural or symbolic constraints. This dissertation situates itself within that conversation by asking: how do female MPs in Turkey contribute to reshaping the meaning of citizenship through their discourse? Are they expanding its boundaries, or reproducing its exclusions?

2.2.2.2 The Practice Based Approach of Womanhood: Regime, Rights and Democracy

While democracy is often viewed as a universal political ideal, both its meaning and application remain contested—especially through a gendered lens. Feminist theorists have long criticized mainstream democratic thought for overlooking women's exclusion from political life and for reinforcing public/private divisions that marginalize women's agency. This section does not focus on defining democracy per se, but rather on how discourses about women—especially those related to bodily autonomy—are embedded in broader regime narratives, and how these debates are framed by political actors in the name of democracy, secularism, or governance.

This dissertation examines how women MPs link issues such as abortion, violence against women, and the headscarf to normative visions of democracy and rights. Here, womanhood becomes not only a subject of social or moral discourse, but a

symbol within broader regime struggles—used to define the moral order, the boundaries of citizenship, and the legitimacy of political authority.

Theoretical debates from the 1990s distinguish two main approaches to democracy and gender: participatory and essentialist. Participatory democracy, advocated by scholars like Pateman (1991), emphasizes inclusive, shared political decision-making. Essentialist approaches, on the other hand, focus on how identity-based characteristics (e.g., gender) shape one's political roles and capacities (Fuss, 1989). Critics such as Mouffe (2009) challenge essentialist views, instead advocating for a democratic framework where identity markers like gender do not predefine political agency. Similarly, Palacios (2016) argues that feminist democratization requires restructuring the public sphere to make participation genuinely inclusive. In this context, the presence and voice of women in parliament is itself a democratic indicator—but not a guarantee.

Democratic ideals often call for gender equality in political participation, but in practice, formal inclusion does not always translate into substantive equality. Tremblay (2007) and others suggest that the structure of political institutions, electoral systems, and party ideologies significantly mediate women's representation. "State feminism" (White, 2003) further shows that gender-equal laws or institutions—like women's policy agencies—may exist in democracies, but these gains remain vulnerable to rollback in contexts of democratic erosion or authoritarian resurgence.

This produces a well-documented paradox: democracy as a principle may support gender equality, but democratic institutions do not inherently dismantle patriarchy. Phillips (1991) argues that gender-blind democratic theory often reproduces male dominance by failing to account for women's structural disadvantages. Therefore, democratic processes must be deliberately gender-sensitive to ensure they don't replicate existing inequalities.

Empirical evidence supports this. The politicization of gender-based violence, workplace harassment, and reproductive rights often coincides with moments of democratic opening. In Turkey, the legalization of protective laws aligned with EU norms, including the Istanbul Convention, offered a short-lived model of rights

expansion (Arat, 2021). However, these advances were later challenged by conservative narratives emphasizing morality, tradition, and the family. As Arat shows, women's rights were initially promoted to enhance democratic legitimacy, but later reinterpreted to reinforce patriarchal control—what she terms “selective democracy.”

This strategic use of women's rights for political legitimacy without genuine empowerment has been called “autocratic genderwashing” (Bjarnegard & Zetterberg, 2022). It refers to regimes that implement surface-level reforms to appear progressive while maintaining deeper structures of exclusion. In Turkey, parliamentary discussions on women's rights often reveal this double discourse: symbolic inclusion on one hand, ideological containment on the other.

Studies in other contexts further complicate the democracy–gender equality link. For instance, Rwanda and Jordan have passed progressive gender policies under authoritarian or hybrid regimes (Bauer & Burnett, 2013; Lust-Okar, 2006). While these reforms may expand rights on paper, their motivations often lie in foreign policy or legitimacy concerns rather than genuine commitment to women's empowerment. Forman-Rabinovici and Sommer (2019) even show that substantive representation—defined narrowly as policy output—can occur in non-democratic settings. Yet, this raises the question: who defines “substance,” and for whose benefit are these policies enacted?

Such findings are crucial for understanding the Turkish context, where regime debates often play out through gendered symbols. For example, the headscarf controversy is not only a question of religious freedom but a battleground for defining the ideological core of the state (Arık, 2012; Parla, 2001). Women's bodies become symbolic terrain upon which questions of modernity, secularism, and democracy are negotiated.

Thus, this study argues that the discourse around womanhood is inseparable from regime narratives. Parliamentary debates on violence against women, abortion, or the headscarf frequently invoke democratic ideals—but often in contradictory ways. Democracy is framed both as a guarantor of women's rights and as a tradition-bound

order that limits their autonomy. Whether these rights are genuinely protected or strategically mobilized depends on broader political shifts.

This dissertation, therefore, asks: how do women MPs themselves navigate and reproduce these discourses? Do their interventions reinforce the status quo, or do they challenge the ideological frameworks that marginalize women's agency? By analyzing how womanhood is embedded in practice-based discussions—of democracy, regime, secularism, and rights—this section aims to reveal the performative and ideological functions of gender discourse in Turkish parliamentary politics.



CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Taking a look at the studies on women's representation one can see that many of them (e.g. Schwindt-Bayer & Kittilson 2009; Carroll 2015; etc.) employ qualitative methods, such as content analysis and interviews, in order to explore the role of women in politics and their impact on gender-related policies. Content analysis often involves examining legislative documents, speeches, and media coverage in order to assess the contributions of women parliamentarians to specific policies. Moreover, scholars conduct case studies focusing on specific countries or regions to understand the contextual factors that influence women's representation, the strategies employed by women politicians, and the outcomes in those settings.

What is more, these researchers frequently conduct in-depth case studies of individual countries or regions to examine the substantive representation of women. Such case studies involve detailed analysis of the political context, policy processes, and the influence of women politicians on gender-related issues within a specific country. However, this study believes that representation process is more than introducing or supporting political outcome, but it is highly related with making speeches in the parliament.

This dissertation conducts CDA of the speeches of Turkey's female parliamentarians for the November 2002- June 2023 period. Step-by-step, it follows methodological work on CDA which has been developed by leading scholars such as Norman Fairclough, Teun A. van Dijk, and Ruth Wodak. According to these scholars, CDA is a recent branch of discourse analysis that looks at how power relations are expressed via language (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000: 447). It reveals that economic, social, and cultural transformations are not only processes but also exist as discourses that significantly influence these transformations (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999:4). This characteristic distinguishes it from other methods because CDA emerges as a critical tool for understanding both the linguistic and structural dimensions of these transformation processes. Thus, this method is suitable not only for understanding

how words used in discussions on women's issues are conceptualized and reproduced but also for uncovering the structural elements of the language employed. In this section, I present a literature-based discussion on CDA by emphasizing its importance and suitability. Following this, the research design details the specific techniques employed within this methodological framework.

3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

This study employs CDA as its main methodological tool to examine how female Members of Parliament in Turkey construct, negotiate, and embed meanings of womanhood within parliamentary discourse. CDA is particularly suited for this kind of analysis because it treats discourse not as a neutral medium, but as a form of social practice—one that is both shaped by and shaping the political and institutional context in which it occurs (Fairclough, 2002; Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

To understand CDA, it is first necessary to clarify what is meant by “discourse.” As Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000: 448–449) explain, discourse is more than the use of language; it involves the production, circulation, and interpretation of meaning within a specific social and ideological framework. Wodak and Meyer (2009: 2–3) further define discourse as encompassing a wide range of communicative acts, including speeches, narratives, policies, and even silence—each of which can carry political meaning. Language, in this sense, is never innocent; it is loaded with assumptions, ideologies, and representations that reflect and reproduce the worldviews of those who use it (Fairclough, 2013: 11).

CDA differs from descriptive approaches to discourse in that it is not only interested in how language is structured, but in how it functions politically and socially. While descriptive discourse analysis may focus on grammar, syntax, or cohesion, CDA pays attention to how language produces, legitimizes, or challenges power relations—for example, between genders, ethnic groups, or political ideologies (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997: 258; Hjelm, 2012: 234).

This makes CDA especially appropriate for this dissertation, which engages not only with substantive representation—the idea of acting in the interest of the represented (Pitkin, 1967)—but also with constitutive representation, which focuses on how

political identities, including “woman,” are constructed through language (Saward, 2006; Urbinati, 2000). CDA helps uncover how these identities are defined, which versions of womanhood are made visible or invisible, and how such definitions are linked to broader narratives of citizenship, belonging, and regime legitimacy.

Moreover, CDA’s attention to macro-level structures—such as institutions, ideology, and historical context—allows this study to investigate not just what is said, but why it is said in that way, by that person, at that time (Wodak & Meyer, 2009: 6, 10). For instance, when a female MP frames violence against women primarily as a threat to “family values,” this choice is not random. It is likely informed by the ideological stance of her party, the political pressures of the moment, or cultural discourses on morality and femininity.

As Van Dijk (2005) emphasizes, discourse always includes cognitive, cultural, and situational dimensions. It reflects not only what is socially acceptable to say, but also the speaker’s embedded assumptions, internalized ideologies, and strategic intentions. CDA is thus not merely descriptive, but diagnostic: it allows researchers to trace how language sustains or challenges social hierarchies.

CDA is also sensitive to temporal and spatial context. Discourse is historically and geographically situated. A headscarf debate in 2004 does not carry the same connotations as one in 2022. Similarly, a female MP from an urban secular constituency will frame gender-based violence differently than a Kurdish MP representing an eastern rural district. For example, in a 2021 debate, HDP female MPs demanded the inclusion of Kurdish in the KADES app, reflecting how ethnic identity intersects with gender concerns—a nuance CDA can illuminate.

Therefore, in this study, CDA is not only used to identify discursive variations among female MPs but also to explain those variations by linking them to ideological, institutional, and sociopolitical dynamics. This approach allows for an understanding of representation that moves beyond “what is said,” toward a more layered inquiry into “what is constructed, for whom, and to what effect.”

Finally, CDA enables this dissertation to address an often-overlooked dimension in the study of women’s representation: the discursive construction of interests. As

Saward (2006) argues, representatives do not reflect pre-existing interests—they articulate and perform them. Thus, analyzing how female MPs talk about issues such as abortion, the headscarf, or gender-based violence reveals not only policy preferences, but also how the category of “women” itself is imagined.

This methodological choice helps expose the diversity of ideological positions among women MPs and highlights how gender interacts with other factors like ethnicity, religion, and party affiliation (Reingold & Swers, 2011). In doing so, it contributes to both the literature on substantive representation and emerging work on the constitutive power of discourse.

3.2 Data Collection

Discourse analysis is used to investigate bigger chunks of language, such as full conversations, texts, or collections of texts, as opposed to concentrating on smaller language units, such as sounds, words, or phrases. The sources chosen can be examined on various levels. In this study, the dataset consists of speeches made by female MPs in the sessions held in the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) between 2002 and 2023. The assembly minutes of the female MPs’ general session remarks from the 22nd to the 27th legislative terms, which span the defined term, comprise the research’s data. On the TGNA’s official website, these minutes are accessible as searchable texts. For textual analysis, an “iterative process” (Braun & Clarke, 2006) is followed by repeatedly reviewing, analyzing, and refining the analysis of the speeches. It involves going through the data multiple times to identify themes, categories, codes, and structures, after revising initial interpretations based on new insights gained during the process. I believe this enabled me to analyze the data and provide new theoretical insights (Riessman, 2008: 54, 66, 74) in a both deductive and inductive way. In the presentation of the data, quotes are provided to substantiate my arguments regarding themes and categories.

In the analysis, I determined the texts to be analyzed in-depth by searching for keywords that denote the headscarf in various ways, such as the veil, or the turban in their various possible spellings. The searched keywords are *‘başörtüsü’*, *‘başörtüsü’*, *‘basortusu’*, *‘başörtülü’*, *‘başörtülü’*, *‘türban’*, *‘türbanlı’*, *‘tülbent’*, *‘başı açık’*, *‘başı kapalı’*, *‘kapalı kız’*, *‘kapalı kadın’*, *‘kapalı kızlarımız’*, *‘tesettür’*, *‘tesettürlü’*. Out of

1244 texts including the keywords, the ones that belonged to women deputies are analyzed. The keywords that signal abortion are searched with following spellings: *'kürtaj', 'kurtaj', 'bebek aldırma', 'çocuk aldırma', 'gebeliği sonlandırma', 'gebeliğini sonlandıran', 'gebeliği sonlandıran'*. 129 texts are found in the system and the speeches of female representatives on this issue are taken into consideration. Finally, the keyword of violence against women is searched as *'kadına yönelik şiddet'* which is the direct translation of violence against woman and found in 759 texts. Violence against women has many forms and variations however only physical violence against women is taken into consideration in this dissertation. Otherwise, data collection would be more overwhelming the study with too many variables. Expanding the scope to include other forms of violence, such as emotional or psychological abuse, would have made the data collection process significantly longer and potentially shifted the focus of the analysis, especially when compared to the other themes in the dissertation.

Once these terms are found, the minute that covers whole speech is read entirely in order to consider the context of the discourse. CDA relies on linguistic categories. The core operationalizations depend on linguistic concepts such as actors, mode, time, tense, argumentation and so on. Within the CDA, context, text surface, and rhetorical means are taken into consideration. Exemplary linguistic indicators are figurativeness, vocabulary and argumentation types (Wodak & Meyer, 2009: 28). Therefore, not only the words but their meanings and the way they are expressed in the parliament is also traced for the analysis.

The data collection involved a systematic review of the parliamentary minutes to identify and categorize the speeches made by female MPs. The following steps were taken:

1. Identification of Speeches and Categorization of the Data:

All speeches made by MPs were reviewed, and those delivered by female MPs were extracted. The speeches were categorized based on the date, the political party of the speaker, and the topic addressed.

The speeches were grouped by political party: namely, Justice and Development Party (AKP), Republican People's Party (CHP), Nationalist Action Party (MHP), Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP/BDP/DTP), Good Party (İYİP). Thus, analysis chapters are divided into findings sections that examines parties' discourses. The number of speeches per party and per year was recorded.

The numerical categorization provides a clear overview of the participation of female MPs across different political parties and their engagement with key policy issues.

The total number of speeches on three themes made by female MPs during the period from 2002 to 2023 was 432 [325 for VaW; 90 for Headscarf; 17 for Abortion]. These speeches were distributed among the political parties as follows:

Table 1: Number of Female MPs and Their Speeches in the Parliament

Political Parties	Number of Female MPs	Headscarf Issue		Abortion Issue		Violence Against Women	
		Number of Speakers	Number of Speeches	Number of Speakers	Number of Speeches	Number of Speakers	Number of Speeches
AKP	177	21	43	2	2	72	97
CHP	67	7	15	3	3	43	84
MHP*	13	2	1	1	2	14	10
HDP**	77	13	30	7	10	40	129
İYİP***	3	0	0	0	0	1	5
*They have been present in the parliament since the 23rd legislative term.							
** The total number includes Independents in the 23rd term along with BDP, DTP, and HDP.							
*** They were only present in the parliament during the 27th legislative term.							

Source: author's own research based on the TGNA manuscripts.

The speeches were further analyzed to determine their distribution by year and by key policy areas. This analysis provides three themes' areas of female MPs and their engagement with various issues over time.

3.3 Sample Selection Rationale

This study focuses on female members of the Turkish Parliament from 22nd Parliamentary Term until the end of the 27th Parliamentary term (years between 2002 and 2023). The primary source of data was the parliamentary minutes, which

are publicly available records of the proceedings of the TGNA. These minutes include verbatim transcripts of speeches made by MPs during parliamentary sessions.

The data collection process yielded a comprehensive dataset of female MPs' speeches on violence against woman, abortion and headscarf in the Turkish parliament from analyzed period. Every single speech of the female representatives regarding these themes are considered in this dissertation. Every statement made by women regarding the three key themes has been subjected to analysis. The primary criteria for inclusion in the analysis are that the statements must have been (1) made by female MPs, (2) must relate directly to these three themes, and (3) must have been spoken in parliament between 2002 and 2023.

In this study, the analysis of political parties is based on a comprehensive understanding of Turkey's political spectrum, which spans from Islamist to secular, left to right, and from democratic to authoritarian. Turkey's political landscape is often categorized by these distinct spectrums, as noted by scholars (e.g., Lipset & Rokkan, Sartori). Parties like the AKP represent an Islamist, right-wing, conservative position, while CHP aligns with secular, left-leaning ideologies. HDP is more progressive and feminist, representing marginalized ethnic group of Kurds, while MHP reflects right-wing nationalism. Each of these positions plays a crucial role in shaping women's substantive representation, as ideologies directly affect how women's issues—such as headscarves, abortion, and violence against women—are discussed and legislated. Therefore, examining the intersection of political ideologies and women's representation is essential to understanding the broader discourse within Turkey's parliament. This complex spectrum accentuates how parties' roles in government or opposition influence their discourse and how this, in turn, affects women's substantive representation.

However, it is important to note that understanding the spectrum of political parties in Turkey goes beyond simple left-right or secular-Islamist divides. One of the findings of this research shows that the distinction between opposition and ruling parties is also crucial in shaping their discourse. For instance, MHP traditionally maintained a nationalist, right-wing stance in opposition but altered its rhetoric after forming the People's Alliance (Cumhur İttifakı) with AKP, despite its ideology remaining the same. Similarly, İYİ Parti, a right-wing, nationalist party, aligns with

CHP in certain discourses, particularly on women's concerns, despite differing ideologies. These shifts reflect the influence of political power dynamics on discourse, demonstrating that even parties with fixed ideologies adjust their positions depending on their role in government or opposition. This distinction is key in analyzing how women's substantive representation is framed in different political contexts, reflecting the strategic alignment of parties rather than ideological consistency.

This study's methodology and data collection is based on four main inclusion criteria such as the gender, political affiliation, time and space.

- 1) *Gender*: Female parliamentarians who had seats in the TGNA.
- 2) *Political Affiliation*: Representatives from the all political parties represented in Parliament during this period (e.g., AKP, CHP, MHP, HDP/BDP/DTP, İYİP).
- 3) *Availability of Data*: Participants with available records of parliamentary speeches found in minutes online retrieved from:
<https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Tutanaklar/TutanakSorgu>.
- 4) *Time*: The parliamentary terms from 22nd and 27th are taken into consideration.

Studies on women's representation have largely revolved around the question of how important the presence of female MPs in parliament is for representing women's interests and concerns. Descriptive representation focuses on the similarities between representatives and those they represent, while substantive representation emphasizes how well representatives advocate for women's interests (Pitkin, 1967).

Descriptive and substantive representation approaches particularly highlight the potential of female MPs to shift the parliamentary agenda in favor of women's issues. According to these studies, the articulation of women's interests and concerns often occurs through female MPs (e.g., Celis, 2009; Celis & Lovenduski, 2018). In fact, Dahlerup's (1988) critical mass theory, as one of the pioneering studies, sparked debates in the literature by suggesting that reaching a certain level of female representation (i.e., the number of female MPs) contributes to the adoption of policies prioritizing women's interests.

Moreover, the constitutive representation theory not only questions the capacity of female MPs to represent women's interests but also criticizes the previous representation theories for their monolithic approach to female MPs' behaviors (Mackay, 2008). According to this theory, the mere presence of female MPs does not always guarantee the representation of women's interests (Squires, 2008). Female MPs may indeed be important actors in articulating women's interests and concerns, but this representation process can vary depending on how gender relations are constructed. Regardless, the focus is consistently on female MPs and their roles in the representation process.

When examining studies on women's representation in Turkey, it is evident that despite women being granted the right to vote and be elected in the 1930s, much of the research has focused on why female MPs have remained underrepresented in parliament. The literature has either discussed how the underrepresentation of women in parliament hinders the inclusion of women's interests and needs in policymaking processes or analyzed which female MPs, across the political spectrum, support which women's laws.

Similar methodology is used in this dissertation, which looks at the discourses of female MPs for the past 20 years, when there has been a notable growth in the number of female MPs in the Turkish parliament. The study examines how the discourses of female MPs influence the representation process using substantive and constitutive representation theories. Because of this, the study's sample consists solely of the discourses of female MPs.

Lastly, it is important to note that this study examined all the speeches one by one, as it is mentioned before, but did not write them all in the analysis chapter. The target samples' size is determined to 5 speeches of female parliamentarians for each analysis area in this dissertation. It opens a room for interpretation of the results stemming from the speeches while maintaining feasibility, instead of overwhelming the reader with excessive examples of statements.

3.4 Research Design

The critical examination of discourses not only aids in understanding social cleavages and power dynamics but also reveals the underlying structures, motivations, and ideologies of the speaker. This study employs CDA as the main methodological tool to explore the themes of headscarf, abortion, and violence against women, allowing for an analysis of both macro-level power structures and micro-level linguistic practices that illustrate how power, ideology, and identity are constructed and challenged in the discourse surrounding women's substantive representation in Turkey.

Conducting a CDA, I focus on how female MPs define and interpret notions of womanhood and embed these definitions within broader political discourses surrounding citizenship and democracy. The purpose of examining these definitions and interpretations is to reveal how these ideas are formulated and portrayed in political discourse, as well as how they fit into the larger framework of substantive representation in Turkish political contexts. Through this approach, this study reveals how female MPs' discourse contribute to and are shaped by the ongoing negotiation of power, identity, and representation within the Turkish political landscape.

The method of CDA in this dissertation is carried out following these steps:

1. *Identifying the Problem and Defining the Context:* According to Wodak (2001), the social issue addressed by the text to be analyzed must be identified. In this thesis, the topics addressed are headscarves, abortion, and violence against women.
2. *Selecting the Speech:* The text should provide examples of the discursive strategies to be analyzed (Van Dijk 2001). For this reason, the texts examined to answer my research question are not based solely on keywords in isolated sentences but consist of all the statements made by female MPs when discussing women's issues directly in parliament. Furthermore, the interaction recorded during parliamentary conversations is also included in the analysis. According to Lou (2019), interruptions and responses during a conversation can reveal the speaker's social or political inclinations.

3. *Linguistic Analysis:* At this stage, a detailed examination of the collected data is conducted. Particular attention is paid to the word choices, metaphorical expressions, and legitimization strategies used by female MPs in their speeches. In doing so, the reflection of power dynamics within discursive structures is assessed. When examining parliamentary records, I find it crucial to recognize that these documents follow specific conventions and objectives. Understanding how these records are constructed, the strategies employed in the speeches, and the purposes they serve helps me analyze the content more deeply. I believe that this perspective allows me to better grasp the underlying messages in the records and the context in which they were delivered.
4. *Interpreting the Results:* Lastly, the linguistic analysis of the collected discourses is interpreted. One of the most critical steps in CDA is understanding what discursive strategies are and which power relations they support (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). This, in turn, relates to the analysis of the macro structure of the speeches in this thesis. The substantive claims and the implicit meanings hidden in the female MPs' speeches are interpreted at this stage, which helps the thesis understand the shifts within the discourse. This analysis leads the thesis to examine the factors affecting the representation process, particularly focusing on shifts observed in some discourses.

As clarified above, CDA is a research method for studying spoken language in relation to its social context. It aims to understand how language is used in real-life situations, including social, political, and psychological contexts. Since the analysis in this thesis involves examining the institutional and political effects in the discourses, the four steps proposed by Lou (2019) are considered. Accordingly, to conduct this type of analysis, the researcher must focus on: (1) The purposes and effects of different types of language; (2) Cultural rules and conventions in communication; (3) How values, beliefs, and assumptions are communicated; and (4) How language use relates to its social, political, and historical context (Lou, 2019). These four steps are particularly important when interpreting the collected data. In order to uncover the hidden characteristics of the political institutions to which female MPs belong, the purpose, effect, cultural aspect, values, beliefs, or scope of the speech must be considered. This is because the diversity of social cleavages or

the existence of different political cultures within the parliament creates a complex and dynamic environment. Analyzing such an environment requires a multi-step and comprehensive research approach.

According to Van Dijk's (2013) CDA, the speech can be examined through a dual framework at both macro and micro levels. This approach allows for an in-depth analysis of texts and enables the simultaneous evaluation of elements at different layers. The macro structure includes "thematic" and "schematic" analyses. Thematic analysis addresses the overall structure and main topics of the text, while schematic analysis examines how events are presented and which information is highlighted. The macro-level analysis aims to understand the overall structure of the discourse and the initial impression it creates on the audience. The schematic structure not only provides information about events, context, background, and commentary but also plays a role in shaping the content of the discourse (Van Dijk, 2013: 73-93). This structure is critically important for understanding how the conveyed message is shaped.

At the micro level, sentence structure, word choice, and rhetoric are analyzed. These examinations at the micro level reveal the linguistic features of the text, helping to understand the author's intentions and how the text addresses its target audience. Since this thesis includes parliamentary speeches, data collection has shown that many of these speeches are delivered in a way that addresses the public or the seats in parliament without adhering to a specific text. Therefore, in micro-level analysis, the focus is not on grammar or sentence structures, but rather on word choice. Questions such as: Which words do female MPs use when discussing women's issues? What hidden structural factors are present in their discourse? What do these words represent? were the key considerations. For example, in discussions on the headscarf issue, women who support the freedom to wear headscarves use the term "başörtüsü," while those opposed prefer the term "türban." Although both terms mean the same thing, they represent two distinct ideologies: conservative and secular. Many such examples will be explored in the analysis.

Micro-level analysis has also played an essential role during the coding process. This analysis has aided in the inductive use of thematic and schematic structures during coding and categorization. The categories, subcategories, and codes created were

then subjected to macro-level interpretations. As the previous example demonstrated, the relationship between words and their underlying structures was established, leading to conclusions about representation. For instance, when an MP consistently refers to “motherhood” when discussing women, this concept becomes part of the traditional female role category. The emphasis on traditional roles in the discourse is interpreted as a sign of conservatism within that speech.

Consequently, this study uses both macro and micro levels of CDA. For this dissertation, the integration of macro and micro analysis in CDA allows for a comprehensive understanding of how female MPs navigate and negotiate the complex intersections of womanhood with broader political debates such as citizenship, and democracy within their political discourses. For the micro level analysis, the study focuses on terminological choices of the deputies in their speeches, whereas for the macro level analysis the study both conducts thematic and schematic structures. The use of thematic and schematic analysis ensures that the study not only identifies recurring patterns but also critically examines how these patterns contribute to the construction of gendered identities and political realities. In this way, the study believes that the relationship between the words and structures can be examined in a robust basement. Micro level analysis has already been mentioned above. In the following section, thematic and schematic analysis are clarified in detail.

3.5 Combining Thematic and Schematic Analysis

The analysis of this study incorporated both thematic and schematic approaches: (1) *Thematic analysis* is utilized to identify and interpret patterns within the data, focusing on recurring themes across the discourses. (2) *Schematic analysis* helps to understand the structure and function of the discourse, examining how different themes and categories are organized within speeches to convey specific messages. Through thematic analysis, recurring themes, patterns, and meanings in the discourse were identified, helping to uncover the underlying thematic elements beneath the surface structure of the text. These themes represent the overall narrative and core messages of the text. Schematic analysis, meanwhile, allowed for an examination of both the structural and content-related aspects of the text.

This combination proved highly effective in uncovering the deep layers of meaning within the texts. Such an integrated approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of how both the structure and thematic content of the text contributed to the meaning-making process. This phase helped reveal the relationships between how the text is organized and which messages are emphasized, thereby exposing political differences, such as ideologies and power relations within the speeches.

Finally, the findings from both thematic and schematic analyses were combined to examine the relationship between the structural organization and the content themes of the text. For example, which themes are concentrated in certain MPs' speeches? How do these themes emerge over time, and what is the effect of this temporal sequence? By answering these questions, the thematic elements in the analyzed political speeches were identified, and the ideological and discursive strategies of the speeches were revealed in light of these themes.

3.5.1 Thematic and Categorical Framework

The thematic framework is designed to align with the dissertation's objectives, focusing on how discourses are articulated in the parliamentary speeches of female MPs. This methodological approach, grounded in both theoretical rigor and empirical analysis, provides a framework for examining the intricate dynamics of women's substantive representation in Turkey. Each theme—headscarf issue, abortion issue, and violence against women—was analyzed using categories that emerged from both the literature review and preliminary coding. After the data collection, the findings revealed that whenever female MPs spoke about headscarves, abortion, and violence against women, they interrelate the issues with approaches to womanhood, the citizenship of women, and the relationship of these issues with democracy. As a result, it is decided to categorize the discourses under three main categories. All discourses draw attention to how the MPs defined womanhood, addressed women's citizenship, and linked women's issues to democracy.

Each theme is dissected through specific categories such as Traditional Roles, Individual Freedom, National Womanhood for the headscarf issue; Motherhood, Bodily Autonomy, Social Justice for abortion; and Protected Woman, Independent Woman, Multiple Identities for violence against women. These categories were

carefully selected based on existing literature and were refined through an inductive process during the analysis of parliamentary speeches. Moreover, micro level analysis of the different discourses from various MPs ultimately shaped the subcategorization and coding, and prepared a table for macro level CDA in order to reveal how these issues are framed within the broader discourse on women's rights and representation. Consequently, macro level analysis provided a place to accomplish the final step of the analysis section: that is the interpretation of the results.

3.5.2 Coding and Analytical Process

The coding process was both deductive and inductive. Initially, a set of codes was developed based on existing literature on women's representation, particularly within the framework of substantive and constitutive representation (Celis et al., 2008). These pre-determined codes were then refined through an inductive process, where new codes emerged from the data during the analysis of parliamentary speeches.

In this study, the headscarf, abortion, and violence against women themes are analyzed to reveal how these issues are framed within the broader discourse on women's rights and representation. Each theme is dissected through specific categories like Traditional Roles, Individual Freedom, National Womanhood for the headscarf issue; Motherhood, Bodily Autonomy, Social Justice for abortion; and Protected Woman, Independent Woman, Multiple Identities for violence against women. These categories were carefully selected based on existing literature and were refined through an inductive process during the analysis of parliamentary speeches.

The coding process, involving both deductive and inductive approaches, ensures that the analysis is rooted in existing scholarly frameworks while also being responsive to the Turkish political context. By applying thematic and schematic analysis, the study is able to underlie structures and functions that the discourses serve within the political arena.

This comprehensive methodological framework ultimately contributes to a deeper understanding of the intricate ways in which substantive representation is enacted

and contested in Turkey. It highlights the importance of considering the macro-structures of power and ideology as well as the micro-practices of language and discourse in analyzing the role of women in politics. By doing so, the study offers new insights into the challenges and opportunities for advancing women's rights and representation in a complex and dynamic political environment.

The reason for using thematic analysis in CDA is to examine how discourse is organized around specific themes and to delve into the meaning of these themes within social and political contexts. Thematic analysis allows me to identify recurring patterns and motifs within the discourse, revealing the power relations, ideological positions, or societal norms that the discourse reflects. This method is crucial for uncovering the social practices and ideologies underlying linguistic structures beyond their surface (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, 2001). For instance, within the theme of "womanhood," analyzing how MPs balance traditional roles and individual freedom in the headscarf debate helps me understand how these discourses reproduce gender norms.

Similarly, in the theme of citizenship, the question of "whose citizenship is prioritized" is a central focus of the analysis. For example, in debates on abortion, some MPs may develop a discourse emphasizing fetal rights, prioritizing the citizenship rights of unborn children over women's bodily autonomy. This creates tension between fetal and women's citizenship. Conversely, other MPs emphasize women's citizenship and individual freedoms, placing women's rights over their own bodies at the center of citizenship definitions. These discourses spotlight significant ideological differences in how citizenship is framed and whose rights are prioritized.

Thus, thematic analysis, as a core element of CDA, allows for the examination of such opposing discourses and reveals how different political groups frame the concept of citizenship and how these frames impact social policies. This, in turn, helps us to deeply understand social power dynamics and ideological structures.

In this context, thematic analysis is an indispensable tool for understanding how discourse is shaped, what strategies are employed, and what social purposes those strategies serve. Especially when studying women's representation, the thematic patterns in discourse make it easier to comprehend how womanhood concepts are

constructed and in what context they are used. This, I believe, enables me to analyze gender inequalities and women's political representation within a broader framework.

3.5.3 Schematic Analysis within Macro-Structural Analysis

Schematic analysis is included within the macro-structural analysis of CDA. This type of analysis focuses on emphasizing the background and contextual information of the discourse. Since this dissertation aims to identify the political or social implications of MPs' discourses, both thematic and schematic analyses are used. In schematic analysis, while attempting to explain the background, the social or political factors that led to the discourse are highlighted, as well as the events and circumstances surrounding it. For example, as mentioned in the analysis section, some MPs frequently refer to February 28th during headscarf debates, which holds significant political and ideological connotations. Furthermore, understanding changes in MPs' speeches over the years requires consideration of the circumstances in which these discourses were delivered. Schematic analysis helps with this. However, as Van Dijk (2001) points out, conducting a flawless or "complete" analysis in CDA is impossible, as it is challenging to identify all the practices underlying every discourse, context, or situation. This study addresses this limitation by analyzing legitimization strategies.

Schematic analysis plays a crucial role in CDA, as developed by Van Dijk (1980, 1988). This analysis focuses on the content of the text and enables macro-level interpretations in line with the research objectives. It examines the structural organization of a text and focuses on how discourse creates and disseminates meaning. Particularly, the arrangement of sections, the function of those sections, and the discursive strategies employed are analyzed. However, this dissertation does not focus on a single text but rather on various speeches delivered by MPs over time. While some speeches are based on longer texts, many involve dialogues or short statements. Therefore, the method of analyzing the organization of texts (introduction, development, conclusion) used by Van Dijk is not applied in this dissertation. Instead, the chronological sequence of speeches, analysis of discursive strategies, and identification of ideological structures form the three main steps of schematic analysis.

- 1) *Examining the Sequence*: Van Dijk (1988) argues that analyzing the order in which information is presented in a text influence how the reader or listener perceives it. However, this thesis approaches this step differently. As all the discourses from 2002 to 2023 are analyzed, the chronological order within sections allows for examining how the message within the discourses' changes over time, the content of those changes, and the factors driving them.
- 2) *Identification of Macro Structures*: Schematic analysis aims to identify the social, political, or ideological structures present in the text. This analysis is conducted to reveal the power relations and societal structures underlying the discourse (Fairclough, 1995). As a result of the analysis, the ideological and discursive structures represented in the text are interpreted (Fairclough, 2013). At this point, schematic CDA becomes a vital approach to use because the distinguishing characteristic of CDA lies in the notion that discourse is more than a mere language or mode of expression; instead, it provides a particular interpretation of the structural aspects in which the discourse is made. Discourse does not merely mirror reality directly but functions as a force that reconstructs reality from a specific standpoint (Fairclough & Wodak 1997: 271-280). Offering schematic structure of the research, therefore, can provide the solving the meaning in the discourses.

For this dissertation, it is important to note that women representatives come from diverse political backgrounds and hold a spectrum of political ideologies. According to Goddard (2018) even the core norms defining acceptable behavior and allowing states to judge the legitimacy of competing claims are socially constructed. Despite differences in context and style, there's a shared cognitive structure in society that responds to certain core legitimization structures over time. Different types of arguments, ranging from scientific evidence to personal experiences, are employed in legitimization, contributing to the construction of truth and cultural generalizations (McCann-Mortimer et al., 2004; Tusting et al., 2002). For instance, expressions of discrimination often come from political actors, who, through their control of public discourse, play a significant role in reproducing stereotypes and legitimizing or delegitimizing viewpoints (Van Dijk, 1992: 88). Political discourse, marked by linguistic intentionality, is carefully planned to maintain hegemonic power (Reyes,

2011, 783). Therefore, legitimization is a principal discourse goal in politics (Cap 2008), as politicians justify their agendas and set the direction of their agendas.

Since there are many themes and factors analyzed in this study, this section focuses on specific examples. A more comprehensive narrative is provided in the analysis chapter. Nonetheless, the relationship between codes and ideologies is as described here. These connections were made to establish links between theme and schema, but there is no specific formula for discussions, such as reasons for changes in discourse over time. That section is more interpretative, using CDA at both micro and macro levels, with multi-stage and multi-dimensional methods to verify these interpretations.



CHAPTER 4. WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN TURKEY

The representation of women in legislative bodies has become a central topic in gender and politics. Research in this field has focused on three main areas: electoral pathways of women, their legislative behavior, and their policy impact. These studies demonstrate that the challenges women face extend beyond gaining entry to parliament—they persist throughout their political careers.

Studies on electoral pathways highlight how institutional and cultural factors influence women's candidacy. Barriers such as party gatekeeping, gender stereotypes, and limited access to networks and resources often hinder women's political participation (Fox & Lawless, 2013; Carroll, 2019; Baturu & Gray, 2018). While party support, candidate recruitment, and training programs can ease these challenges, women still confront structural inequalities and discriminatory norms (Lawless & Fox, 2012).

Scholars have also examined voter behavior to understand how public perceptions shape electoral outcomes. Research shows that gender stereotypes affect how voters evaluate women candidates, sometimes attributing them strengths in empathy and social policy, but often questioning their leadership and competence (Dolan, 2013; Sanbonmatsu, 2002; Holeman & Schneider, 2013). These perceptions, along with media representation, campaign strategies, and cultural factors, influence electoral behavior. However, since this dissertation focuses on elected representatives rather than voters, this strand of literature is not explored in depth.

Legislative behavior and policy impact form the core of scholarship on women in parliament. Numerous studies show that women MPs play key roles in advancing gender equality, often sponsoring or supporting legislation on issues such as reproductive rights, domestic violence, childcare, and equal pay (Swers, 2002; Huddy et al., 2008; Franceschet et al., 2012; Murray, 2018). At a global level,

women parliamentarians have driven reforms in education, health, economic empowerment, and political participation (Iwanaga, 2019; Krook & Mackay, 2011).

Much of this research is framed through the concept of substantive representation, which refers to acting in the interests of women in a manner responsive to them (Pitkin, 1967; Franceschet et al., 2012). While early studies focused on whether female MPs support gender-equity legislation, more recent work has also examined ideological and partisan differences (Celis & Erzeel, 2015; Schwindt-Bayer & Malecki, 2023). Yet, the focus has largely remained on policy outputs.

This dissertation builds on this literature but also critiques it. While scholars often highlight the limitations of descriptive representation, their analyses of substantive representation tend to focus on quantifiable outcomes—such as votes, bill sponsorships, or support for equality policies. Few studies examine how women’s interests are discursively constructed or contested within parliamentary debates (Celis, 2009). As a result, the constitutive aspect of representation—how concepts like womanhood are divergently shaped and embedded in other political fault lines—remains underexplored.

This dissertation addresses this gap by moving beyond the question of whether women act for women, and asking how they define and negotiate these acts in discourse. It argues that representation should be understood as a dynamic and contested process, shaped by ideology, party politics, and broader socio-political contexts. Female MPs are not a homogeneous group; their visions of womanhood, their framing of women’s issues, and their rhetorical strategies vary significantly. These discursive differences matter—not only for understanding gendered political behavior, but also for revealing how political actors actively construct the meaning of women’s interests in parliament.

In the Turkish context, the literature has generally treated women MPs as a uniform bloc, focusing on whether they support pro-women policies. Yet, parliamentary debates on the headscarf, abortion, and violence against women reveal more complex dynamics. This dissertation shows that different political parties’ female MPs define womanhood in divergent ways and embed these definitions within broader debates on regime, democracy, and national identity. Such an approach draws from both the

substantive and constitutive dimensions of representation and contributes to a more nuanced understanding of women's political agency in contemporary Turkey.

4.1 From Symbolic to Substantive Representation of Women in Turkey

There is a striking fact that makes Turkey an interesting case in terms of women's political representation: despite gaining the right to vote and be elected at an early stage, women have continued to face significant problems in terms of representation. Interestingly, until the 2000s—a period of nearly 50 to 60 years after women were granted suffrage—the proportion of women in the Turkish parliament never even reached 5% (Yaraman, 1982: 74; Arat, 1995: 242). This naturally led to a central question in the literature: If women were granted political rights so early, why has their representation remained so low? Before the debate shifted toward the “critical mass versus critical actors” framework, the issue was largely examined through the lens of descriptive representation, with many studies focusing primarily on the numerical underrepresentation of women.

Some of these works emphasize the importance of women simply holding seats in parliament, while others focus on the structural barriers that women face. Still others adopt a more sociological or historical perspective to explain the persistent gap in representation (Yaraman, 1982; Arat, 1995; Ayata, 1998; Yaraman, 2001; Örs, 2006; Gökçimen, 2008; Sancar, 2008; Türeli & Çağlar, 2010). For instance, a study focusing on electoral systems argues that the fact that women's representation remained below even 1% until the 1990s can largely be attributed to the competitive nature of the multi-party period and the constantly changing electoral systems (Ayata, 1998: 237–238). These studies especially highlight that with the transition to multi-party politics, women lost their symbolic role in Turkish democracy (Yaraman, 1982: 75; Ayata, 1998: 237–238).

On the other hand, the issue of representation is approached not from a parliamentary perspective but rather through the lens of women's movements and civil society organizations (Arat, 1994). According to her, during the period up until the late 1980s, women's representation did not occur directly, but rather indirectly. The women's movements that gained momentum in the 1980s began to bear fruit in the

1990s (Ayata, 1998). The appointment of Tansu Çiller as the first female prime minister was seen as a significant milestone (Tokgöz, 1994). During this period, women's issues received more public attention, and the visibility of women in politics increased slightly compared to previous decades. Moreover, due to pressure from women's organizations, a quota system was proposed during this time; however, these quotas were not implemented effectively, as female candidates were placed in unelectable positions on party lists (Bektaş & Ekinci, 2019: 10).

After the 1990s, women began to be used more strategically in electoral campaigns. This period witnessed greater support for appointing women as ministers or mayors. For instance, the General Directorate for the Status and Problems of Women, affiliated with the Prime Ministry, was established. Nevertheless, the literature emphasizes that such developments did not truly enhance women's political representation; rather, they reinforced the view of women as passive figures within politics (İlter & Bulut, 2020: 175). Women continued to be confined to fields such as education, family, and health, which are traditionally associated with conventional gender roles. Well, the lack of systemic stability offers a fair framework to explain the challenges of women's representation. However, after the 2000s, even though the increase in the number of female MPs remained modest, it coincided with a shift in the literature—from symbolic or descriptive representation toward a growing emphasis on substantive representation.

The first study written within this framework is that of Ayata and Tütüncü (2008a), which is based on the critical mass/critical actors approach introduced by Childs and Krook (2006). In this study, the authors argue that it is not the presence of women in parliament, but rather the policies of political parties that shape legislative action (Ayata & Tütüncü, 2008a). These party policies, in turn, can lead to substantive representation only to the extent that they are influenced by women's movements. Besides, the authors also note that women's movements alone have not been sufficient in the Turkish context, and that particularly the initiation of EU accession negotiations and other democratic reforms in the early 2000s have been equally influential (Ayata & Tütüncü, 2008a: 461).

However, even without considering these broader shifts, the conclusion of this study remains clear: Due to the strong party discipline within Turkish political parties, it is very difficult for female MPs to act independently. In their words, “women MPs are constrained by party discipline regardless of their party affiliation” (Ayata & Tütüncü, 2008a: 464). Thus, strong party discipline in Turkey dictates the actions of women MPs and they are dependent on their parties for re-election. This inference is highly significant in the context of this study, which also examines the differences that emerge both among and within political parties—but through a methodological approach that differs markedly from previous literature.

To sum up, this study of Ayata and Tütüncü’s (2008a) makes great contribution to the literature by offering significant structural constraints on women’s political representation; however, it pays little attention to the individual agency and role of female MPs. The study emphasizes how feminist demands have been largely shaped by external actors (such as the EU, the UN, and women’s movements), reinforcing the importance of critical actors. However, it does not explore in detail how female MPs navigate strong party discipline, or engage in policy-making processes.

Moreover, the influence of these external actors on Turkey has also been examined within the framework of substantive representation. For instance, it has been argued that CEDAW Committee documents serve as the primary driving force behind achieving substantive equality in Turkey (Yargıç, 2020). However, the fact that this study overlooks the agency of female MPs raises the question of how effectively it actually engages with the concept of substantive representation.

Nevertheless, since the late 2010s, there has been a growing number of studies analyzing Turkey within this framework. These studies align with the global literature and focus on both the difference that the presence of women MPs makes in parliament itself, and the differences among women MPs themselves. In this regard, scholars have increasingly examined the legislative behavior of female representatives, particularly in terms of bill sponsorship and policy initiatives. At this point, the study by Bektaş and Ekinci (2019) is a quite striking example. They looked into which MPs supported or introduced bills related to women, specifically on the period between 2011 and 2015. They analyzed who took action, and in what areas.

The results are pretty clear. Right-leaning female MPs mostly focused on bills about family and children. Left-leaning MPs, on the other hand, supported more political and feminist proposals — especially on women’s rights and gender equality (Bektaş & Ekinci, 2019: 28–29). So even though these women shared the same parliament, the way they approached women’s issues was very different (Bektaş & Ekinci, 2019: 28–29). A similar study that covers a broader time period (between 2002 and 2015) is that of İlter and Bulut (2020). They primarily focused on quantitative data and found that CHP and HDP were the parties that provided the most support for legislation related to women’s issues (İlter & Bulut, 2020: 185). In other words, even when the topic is women’s rights, there are significant differences between political parties. The fact that this finding aligns with the results of Lawless and Fox (2010) and Dolan (2013) is also worth noting. Based on this, female MPs tend to differ from their male colleagues when it comes to addressing women’s issues. However, Turkish case take the issue a step further. As the studies show (especially Bektaş & Ekinci, 2019) that women themselves do not behave as a monolithic group either. Although female MPs on both sides focus on women’s issues, the types of bills they vote for are notably different.

In other words, it can be argued that political parties behave differently from one another, female MPs behave differently from male MPs, and even women from different political parties behave differently from each other.

So, what explains these differences in behavior? The literature offers the following answer: The increase in the number of female members of parliament is a positive development; however, this rise does not often translate into substantive representation due to the patriarchal structures within political parties and the rigid disciplinary environment (Taşkın, 2021). According to her, explaining women’s representation in Turkey requires not only universal feminist theories, but also a careful consideration of the country’s political history and cultural context.

Based on this, she conceptualizes the two main axes that shape women’s political representation as institutional and cultural factors: By institutional opportunities, she refers to the electoral system, party list structures, and quota practices, while cultural constraints include intra-party patriarchy, ideological prejudices, and prevailing

social norms (Taşkın, 2021: 3–6). She emphasizes that substantive representation is shaped not simply by the presence of women in parliament, but also by which party they belong to and what kinds of policies they support. Thus, she does not reduce women's representation to parliamentary behavior alone. Instead, she approaches it as a multidimensional process that also involves party structures, relations with women's movements, and engagement with cultural codes.

As a result, despite there is an important raise in the attempt to study this area of representation in Turkey, literature tend to slightly grow on this issue. In general, the literature in Turkey focuses on how female MPs influence legislative processes, how party ideologies shape approaches to women's rights, and how international factors impact women's policies (Ayata & Tütüncü, 2008a; Yargıç, 2020). However, other studies bring into focus significant differences between left-wing and right-wing parties in their approaches to women's rights, showing that female MPs in left-wing parties are more likely to propose feminist policies compared to those in right-wing parties (Bektaş & Ekinçi, 2019; İlter & Bulut, 2020). Nonetheless, the vast majority of these studies focus more on the extent of support given to women's rights rather than on how female MPs represent women's interests in a meaningful way.

At this point, this dissertation contributes to the existing literature by arguing that representation cannot be measured solely in terms of numerical presence or legislative proposals. Instead, it examines not only which policies female MPs support but also how they discuss these issues and construct a discursive framework for women's representation. In a politically polarized and ideologically dynamic setting like Turkey, the findings demonstrate that female MPs' representational behavior is not homogeneous but rather shaped by party ideologies, political contexts, and historical processes.

4.2 Woman and Gender Politics during The AKP Government

In November 2002, Turkey held general elections in which the AKP won the majority of the votes and consequently became the sole ruling party in Parliament. This political dominance has continued to the present day. However, over time, the AKP's policies have evolved significantly.

Looking back at the 2002 general elections, Turkey experienced several pivotal developments. First, the era of coalition governments came to an end. After years of unstable coalition politics, the AKP managed to come to power alone in its very first election. Second, as a conservative party that initially emphasized democracy and European Union (EU) membership, the AKP launched wide-ranging political discussions—from the headscarf issue to democratization processes for Kurdish citizens, as well as aspirations for full EU membership.

The AKP was a newly established party, but its founders had previously been involved in political parties rooted in religion-oriented ideologies. These predecessor parties—namely those associated with the National View (*Milli Görüş*) movement—had taken stances that were in stark contrast to the AKP’s pro-EU position. As a result, the AKP faced criticism not only from the secular segment of society, particularly represented by the main opposition party CHP, but also from religious and nationalist groups.

Despite this opposition, some scholars regarded the AKP’s rise to power as a potential opportunity for the consolidation of democracy in Turkey. For instance, İnsel (2003) interpreted the AKP’s emergence as a contribution to democratization, suggesting that it could open up a political sphere that had been restricted since the military regime following the 1980 coup.

In similar terms, the AKP defined its political ideology as “conservative democracy,” positioning itself at the center-right of the political spectrum. According to Özbudun, this signaled a transformation of political Islam into conservative democracy and “can be seen as a significant step toward bridging the age-old deep cleavage between secularists and Islamists, thus contributing to the consolidation of democracy in Turkey” (Özbudun: 555). The AKP’s discourse emphasized liberal, pluralist, and participatory notions of democracy. Although this represented a departure from previous Islamist parties, Gülağ (2003) argued that such a shift was not entirely surprising. Following the closure of the Welfare Party, conservative circles began to explore ways of “incorporating liberal democracy into an Islamic paradigm.” As a result, newly formed parties started to frame their objectives around human rights and liberal democratic values (Gülağ, 2003: 158–159).

Nevertheless, the AKP's political stance and its understanding of democracy were considered ambiguous by some scholars. To clarify this, Coşar and Özman (2004) outlined four dimensions of the AKP's interpretation of democracy. They noted that, due to the party's aspirations for full EU membership, the AKP often emphasized individual rights, civil liberties, and tolerance for diversity as key components of its democratic commitment.

Secondly, the AKP's view of democracy was described as "a political race for serving the nation and a regime of tolerance" (cited in Coşar & Özman, 2004: 64). According to the authors, this definition implied that political activities were perceived both as expressions of the national will and as a consensual platform aimed at eliminating confrontation.

Thirdly, party members frequently invoked the discourse of pluralist democracy. However, certain behaviors raised doubts about the sincerity of this commitment. For example, although the AKP emphasized the politically constructive role of civil society, it tended to equate civil society primarily with the commercial sector—an approach that arguably narrowed the pluralistic scope.

The fourth dimension concerned the AKP's claim to participatory democracy. This, too, was subject to interpretation. While the party appeared to support a network of agencies participating in the decision-making process—rather than concentrating decision-making solely in the state center—their conceptualization of "network agencies" remained ambiguous (Coşar & Özman, 2004: 64–65).

Another critical aspect of the party's ideological stance was its conservatism. According to Heper and Toktaş (2003), the AKP's brand of conservatism was grounded in a fusion of religion, tradition, and morality. Conservatism places particular importance on protecting the family, viewed as the most vital social institution because it preserves tradition and societal values. In this context, the AKP emphasized the preservation of the family, which was seen as synonymous with the protection of society as a whole—conceived as a large, unified family with a shared destiny (Doğanay, 2003: 72).

This ideological tendency, along with the party's other defining characteristics described above, is crucial for understanding the background against which women's and gender issues have been addressed in Turkish politics.

Before the AKP, women's politics generally took its place in the literature as state feminism and women's movements. State feminism was actually a movement of providing equal opportunities for woman by state hand. As White (2003: 155) argued, state feminism was the only tool for women's activism and it actually was a product of modernization process which was promoted at the early years of the foundation of the Republic. It meant that the representation of women on public sphere was the charge of state in a monopolist way. Other than the Republic, state elites thought civil women organizations were unnecessary because the Republic had already offered women's rights. Therefore, only existing women's organization, the Turkish Women's Federation, was closed by the state in 1935 (Arat 1997: 101).

After the transition to multi-party system, not feminism or women's movement but Islamism gained a legitimate representation in political field. Such improvement was highly important because, for Ayata and Tütüncü (2008b: 366), despite 1980s were the years when women's movement had a sharp rise, as a result of the military regime's influence on leftist movements, women's movements found the opportunity to express them on the right-wing. At one point Islamist and feminist movements met in those years. That is, both of the movements had concerns regarding women's clothing, thus, starting debates about women who want to wear headscarves on public sphere, especially in universities.

Eventually, headscarf issue became one of the mostly discussed issues in Turkish politics after such debates on 1980s. As soon as AKP gained the power of the parliament, headscarf issue gained a huge importance on parliamentary debates. In 2007, the article on the headscarf ban in university institutions was changed, and in 2013, headscarves were allowed to enter public institutions. Fortunately, the place of women's issues in politics was not limited to this. First of all, some regulations were made to the advantage of women in the Civil Code and Penal Code. They provided equality among spouses in family affairs. AKP supported this change on the Civil

Code by arguing that previous article was not fitting the Turkish culture (Ayata & Doğangün, 2017: 613).

With the revision of the 1926 Penal Code, the AKP introduced a new law that redefined crimes related to custom, honor, and morality as sexual offenses. According to the 2005 Turkish Penal Code (Article 5; Article 122), “no discrimination shall be made between persons on the basis of sex.”

In line with this legal shift, Articles 10 and 41 of the Constitution were amended to strengthen gender equality. Additionally, Article 90 of the Constitution was revised to grant international agreements—such as CEDAW, which Turkey ratified in 1985—supremacy over domestic law in cases of conflict.

Another major development came in 2009, with the establishment of the Commission on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men and the enactment of the corresponding law. This marked a significant step forward for gender equality in Turkey, as the Commission—composed of members from all political parties—was tasked with reviewing proposed legislation in the TGNA from a gender equality perspective.

Some regulations concerning women’s position in working life were also introduced during this era. For instance, the Labour Law (No. 4857) included clauses addressing sexual harassment in the workplace. The government assigned the Unemployment Insurance Fund to cover the insurance premiums of newly employed workers, applying positive discrimination in favor of women. Maternity leave arrangements were improved (Law No. 6111), and a series of women’s action plans were implemented—the latest of which remains in effect and is scheduled to be renewed in 2023.

Violence against women was also addressed through various legal frameworks. For example, the Law on Municipalities mandated the establishment of shelters for victims of violence, and the Law on the Protection of the Family and Prevention of Violence Against Women aimed to provide more robust legal mechanisms. One of the most significant developments in this area was the government’s early support for the drafting of the Istanbul Convention (officially, the Council of Europe

Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence). The convention included language such as defining domestic violence as both a violation of individual rights and a form of gender-based discrimination. However, in 2021, the government controversially decided to withdraw from the convention, citing concerns that it undermined the traditional structure of the Turkish family.

In light of these developments, Turkish academia has analyzed the AKP's gender and women's policies from various perspectives. Scholars have explored the driving forces behind these reforms and examined the party's behavior accordingly. Ayata and Tütüncü (2008b), for example, argue that these gender-related policies were largely motivated by the AKP's desire to advance Turkey's bid for full EU membership. According to their analysis, the AKP sought to demonstrate its commitment to the EU integration process by adopting legal reforms, such as granting constitutional recognition to gender equality (2008: 369). Similarly, Arat (2010: 880) states that "The EU was very important in the democratization process and the expansion of women's rights in Turkey during the first AKP term of office."

On the other hand, Çakır (2000) views these reforms as the product of Islamic feminism. From this perspective, the new regulations facilitated the visibility of Muslim women in the public sphere. As cited by Arat (2005a: 115), previous governments had "challenged the parameters within which women were expected to practice Islam, to engage in politics, and to promote their self-interest," but this changed after the AKP came to power. Supporting this idea, Ayata and Tütüncü (2008b) noted that the regulations benefited both veiled and unveiled women and led to increased political literacy among women. From their viewpoint, the 2002–2007 period represented "an encounter between feminists and the Islamist AKP government" (2008b: 369).

However, other scholars offer a more critical view. Coşar and Yeğenoğlu (2011) argue that the AKP's legal reforms should be interpreted in the context of its broader rhetorical framework, which upholds patriarchal values under the guise of gender equality and family preservation. According to them, the AKP promoted women's participation in public life—especially in the labor market—while maintaining an

anti-feminist stance and emphasizing the sanctity of the family. This, they argue, reflects a new mode of patriarchy shaped by a convergence of neoliberalism, religious conservatism, and nationalism.

This argument is supported by other studies as well. For example, Güvenli and Tanrıöver (2009: 109–110), analyzing school textbooks, claim that the discourse on gender naturalizes the notion of the “sacred family” and frames women primarily as mothers and wives. Similarly, Arat (2016) notes that while extending maternity leave might seem like a positive development for women’s education and employment, it was also a reaction to secular feminists who opposed the AKP’s conservative gender politics.

Acar and Altunok (2013) contend that as the AKP grew more authoritarian—particularly after 2011—its conservative gender politics caused a backlash against gender equality. In the same vein, Arat (2022) argues that the AKP used women’s rights as a tool for democratic legitimation in its early years, only to reinterpret those rights in line with conservative objectives once it consolidated power. As she puts it: “AKP members initially needed to legitimize their rule in a secular context, so they expanded liberal laws on women’s rights. Once they attained this power, they sought to construct and legitimize their conservative ideology, so they reinterpreted existing laws to promote conservative goals” (Arat, 2022: 911).

In conclusion, while the AKP era witnessed important developments for women, the ideological foundations of the party’s gender politics can be read through the lenses of conservatism, neoliberalism, and nationalism. Although women’s political participation increased compared to earlier periods, the issue of women’s representation in parliament remains a contested and unresolved matter. The following section will discuss in greater detail the parliamentary debates surrounding abortion, the headscarf, and violence against women—three critical issues that have frequently shaped Turkey’s gender politics.

4.3 Parliamentary Debates on Women’s Issues in Turkey

In the literature, there are plenty of researches on headscarf and abortion issues discussions in the parliament. These studies also include theoretical impositions to frame

MPs, or government's approaches to women issues. For instance, White (2003) studied early Republican era and its approach to women concerns. She argued that there was a "state-feminism" which was a top-down movement to bring feminist ideals –i.e. bringing social, political, economic equalities to both men and women, to the Republic (White, 2003: 155). Replacement of civil code on early Islamic role, defining ideal citizenship and enfranchisement of women were important developments in that period. According to White, the veil issue was started to be negotiated in this era because the Republicans were offering a new monopolistic system to describe ideal citizen that was different from Ottoman era. New woman citizenship was shaped as modern, educated women who were discouraged to wear headscarf in the public (White, 2003: 145-50). However, such approach was highly against social morality. Despite elite women embraced this behavior, rural people were criticizing this policy (White 2003: 154). Additionally, most of the discussions about women's issues and equality of man and woman targeted this headscarf issue.

Despite there is a little or no study dealing with the discourses of the MPs during 1950s and 1990s, some scholars studied this era in the framework of feminist waves. For instance, Diner et. al (2010) believed that Kemalist, Islamist and Kurdish women's movements could be analyzed with first, second and third waves of feminism. According to Ayata and Tütüncü (2008a: 567), Turkish women's movement began to demand new policies for gendered inequalities and women actors tried to avoid from 'antifeminist rhetorics' of men politicians during 1990s. However, there is no data that shows this rhetoric in their article. Yet, in another work of them, Ayata and Tütüncü (2008b) argued that headscarf issue was one of the major debate topics of both feminists and Islamists. For them, women's movements, as well as Islamist movements, of 1980s were highly effective in rendering headscarf issue to be discussed in parliament.

2000s and beyond are more popular dates to examine discourses of politicians in Turkish literature. For example, Bulut (2020, 11) argued that the language of AKP members during parliamentary discussions was "religio-conservative gender rhetoric" which occurred as a top-down process and discouraged AKP MPs to participate in feminist legislations. In addition, the author argues that another conservative party, MHP, is more active in female issues. However, this study

neither includes other parties in the parliament nor makes a comparison between MHP and AKP. Moreover, it was a quantitative study which utilizes data regarding women in politics, economics, education etc. This is not a discourse analysis, thus, such statement of 'religio-conservative gender rhetoric' should be should be built on a solid foundation. Yet, focusing on his quantitative analysis, rather than representing veiled women in the parliament, MPs with religious background have no significant substantive representation of women in Turkey (Bulut, 2020: 11). In addition to this issue, Ayata and Tütüncü argued that the 'religious right' and its supporters were in women's concerns but the inequality that they were against was not gender inequality but not being able to wear veil in public arena (Ayata & Tütüncü, 2008b:469). In another study of these scholars, AKP MPs discourses on women's concerns has been analyzed and argued as the "intersection of Islamist, Westernist and Feminist discourses" (Ayata & Tütüncü, 2008b).

In short, these authors believe that there is no one title that can name the discourse of AKP MPs. When they identify women as mothers, it is Islamic but AKP also renders women to participate in public sphere by wearing their veil as well, and it can be categorized as feminist, too. Moreover, authors believe that AKP's close relationship with EU and other Western countries and implementations and regulations that these countries urge AKP to do for the sake of women citizens could be titled as Westernist (Ayata & Tütüncü, 2008c: 369-380). This study is important to inform that Islamist, Westernist of Feminist rhetoricalone, which are defined in the existing literature, is inadequate to describe a behavior of an MP in Turkey. However, this study only focuses on 2002-2007 era and only on AKP members. Small period of time and not including other parties in the parliament are the weaknesses of this research. Moreover, they do not meticulously analyze particular issues regarding women but they tend to examine AKP members general opinions and speeches on women issues during that era.

Another study that specifically focuses on the discourses of female MPs in Parliament is Unal (2021)'s. Her study employs content analysis to examine parliamentary speeches between 2002 and 2011, comparing the frequency of speeches by male and female MPs as well as the policy areas they prioritize. All in all, no significant difference was found in the total number of speeches delivered by

male and female MPs, indicating that female MPs speak as frequently as their male counterparts (Unal,2021: 544). However, gender differences emerged in terms of topic selection. Female MPs were found to speak more frequently on issues related to gender equality, children, family matters, and education compared to male MPs. In this sense, while right-wing parties such as the AKP and MHP emphasized women's social roles and family values, CHP and BDP placed greater focus on women's rights and gender equality (Unal,2021: 547).

Unal (2021) and similar studies make valuable contributions by examining the act of speaking in the representation process and shedding light on how female MPs participate in legislative processes in Turkey. However, a critical gap remains unaddressed: while we know what female MPs talk about, we still do not fully understand how they talk about these issues, what narratives they construct, and what strategies shape their discourse.

Existing studies largely rely on quantitative data such as support for legislative proposals, voting patterns, or frequency of speeches. However, what my dissertation seeks to do is shift the focus from how active female MPs are in parliament to how they construct representation itself. In other words, while female MPs may engage with certain issues more frequently, the key question is: how do they frame these issues? How do they define womanhood? And most importantly, how do party ideologies, political contexts, and historical processes shape their discourse?

This is precisely where my research identifies a significant gap in the literature. Instead of merely analyzing which topics female MPs engage with, my study examines how they approach these issues, what ideological references they employ, and how they construct narratives around womanhood and relevant concepts in which womanhood is embedded in political debates, such as citizenship, and political representation. Focusing on the headscarf, abortion, and gender-based violence, I analyze how female MPs' discourses evolve and demonstrate that representation is not merely about policy outcomes, but also a fundamentally discursive process.

4.4 Key Issues in Women's Political Representation

This dissertation examines three critical issues that significantly impact women's representation: violence against women, abortion, and the headscarf debate. Of course, there are a wide variety of women's issues studied in the literature, even within the framework of women's representation. However, these three issues are particularly important for addressing the main argument and research questions of this dissertation. These issues not only lie at the heart of women's rights discourse but also reflect broader ideological, cultural, and political dynamics, making them three key themes for this study. Therefore, before delving into the analysis and findings, it is crucial to explore how these three key issues have been addressed in the existing literature to provide a solid background for the analysis of this dissertation.

Violence against women hits at something deep: the state's duty to protect basic rights. Abortion? It brings out the clash between a woman's right to choose and the state's wish to control. And the headscarf? It is a symbol — a long fight over culture, over faith. In this part, I look at how female MPs move through these hard questions. How they tell stories about womanhood, about citizenship. How they leave their mark on the larger picture of Turkish politics. Each topic will be taken up one by one. What has already been said? Where does this dissertation step in? These are the paths the next sections will follow.

4.4.1 The Headscarf Controversy

The headscarf issue, also known as the “türban” controversy, was one of the most debated women's issues in parliament. It has been a significant and contentious topic, reflecting broader debates over secularism, religious freedom, and women's rights. Historically, the Turkish Republic, founded on secular principles, imposed strict bans on religious symbols in public institutions. This included prohibitions on wearing headscarves in government buildings, schools, and universities, aimed at preserving secularism and modernizing the nation (Gülalp, 2001). In this sense, the headscarf was banned in public institutions as it was seen as a symbol of political Islam and traditionalism that conflicted with the secular, modern image of the Republic (Göle, 1996). This ban was part of broader efforts to enforce a strict

separation between religion and state, a cornerstone of Turkish secularism (Gökarıksel & Secor, 2012).

This debate has evolved over decades, influenced by Turkey's historical, political, and social context. The headscarf issue gained renewed prominence in the 1980s and 1990s, coinciding with the rise of political Islam and the growing visibility of religiously conservative segments of society. The ban on headscarves in universities became a focal point of contention, with many Muslim women arguing that it infringed on their religious freedoms and right to education. The headscarf thus became a symbol of resistance against state-imposed secularism and a means for Muslim women to assert their identity (Arat, 2005). After the coup d'état in 1980, "Regulation on Dressing in Public Sphere", which was prohibiting headscarf in public institutions was launched by the government. The ban was stated in the fifth article of the regulation as: "For women: The clothes are clean, neat, ironed, plain; shoes and/or boots with plain and normal heels, dyed; head is always uncovered, hair neatly combed; nails are trimmed normally. However, if there is a special work outfit for some services, this outfit is used with the permission of the head of the institution." (See. Official Gazette dated 16.07.1982 and numbered 17849). This practice was reinforced by the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) and a headscarf ban was introduced in universities. With the February 28 process, the headscarf issue has been accepted as a priority threat within the framework of the concept of "reactionaryism" since 1997.

Social movements of 1980s, especially women's and Islamists', were based on identity politics which was an inevitable consequence of authoritarian modernization process of early period of Turkish Republic. 'Republican women,' according to early Republican rhetoric, were citizens who had the freedom to enter the public realm and so freely engage in public life. Despite the fact that the Kemalist nationalist agenda provided women with new positions in the public and private realms, their liberation from religion and the attendant backwardness did not result in true independence (Kandiyoti 1991). As a result of the secular nature of the national public arena, religion was restricted to the private sphere of the individual. Therefore, despite there was no law or regulation which was forbidding wearing headscarf at all, the 'modern' unveiled clothing was encouraged by the state elite (Arat 2010: 871). In

addition to this, women were actually able to wear headscarf on public; however, they were not able to wear it on state sphere (White 2003), also called official public sphere (Cindoğlu and Zencirci 2008: 799). This was the major reason of headscarf debates in 1980s and 90s. Thus, Göle (1996) claimed that this issue was about feminist agency. In her words “Islamic women have begun to redefine the Muslim female identity by their entrance to the social sphere. References made to feminism support their definitive transition from the position of being ‘objects’ to that of being ‘subjects’. They struggle to survive as objects leaving behind their identities which depend on others - including being the symbol of the Islamist movement, the wives of men, and the mothers of children” (Göle 1996: 72).

In 1990s, Motherland Party attempted to abolish the headscarf ban, but it was refused by the Constitution Court (Tank 2005: 12). However, such improvements caused secular feminism to emerge and started to protest political Islam, as well as headscarf in Turkey as a result of being “threatened by the increasing presence of veiled women in the public sphere” (Çınar 2005: 85). Furthermore, secular feminists “were concerned that the rising tide of Islamism would undermine women’s rights that had been secured by Kemalist reforms” (Arat 1995b: 76). These developments caused the division of women movements in 1990s.

The headscarf issue actually reflects different perspectives on laicism. Through discussions surrounding the access of veiled women to the right to education, laicism has been reconceptualized (Barras, 2014: 113). In this sense, conservative women redefined it by framing it as a respect for personal autonomy. They stressed that diverse individual subjectivities should not obstruct one’s ability to exercise citizenship, asserting that laicism should support women’s active presence in the public sphere.

In the last years of 90s, Turkey witnessed 28 February process which slowed the growing of political Islam. Hence, it calmed the debate on the headscarf issue until the election of Merve Kavakçı who were a veiled MP of Virtue Party. That day was important to discuss because when Merve Kavakçı entered the parliament, SDP MPs protested her. In addition to this, after all the reactions she took, another veiled MP, of MHP Nesrin Ünal took her headscarf off before coming into the assembly. When

the leader of SDP, Bülent Ecevit, supported the his party's members by mentioning that Kavakçı's behavior was equal to challenge whole state, Devlet Bahçeli, leader of NAP, understood Nesrin Ünal and stated that unveiling was one of the prior conditions for Ünal's recruitment of MP candidacy. In academia, this event was considered as a solid example of polarization of Islamism- secularism of Turkish politics, as well as pollicization of headscarf (Göcek 1999).

The headscarf ban became a significant point of contention in the 1990s and early 2000s, as increasing numbers of women sought higher education and professional careers while wishing to maintain their religious identity. These bans were viewed by many as discriminatory and a violation of individual rights, leading to widespread protests and legal challenges (Cindoğlu, 2011).

The issue took a decisive turn with the rise of the AKP, which framed the headscarf as a matter of personal freedom and religious expression. Under AKP rule, significant legal changes were implemented, culminating in the lifting of the headscarf ban in universities in 2010 and in public institutions in 2013. These reforms were framed as steps towards democratization and greater individual liberties, although they also sparked fears among secularists about the erosion of Turkey's secular foundations (Çınar, 2008).

In 2007, YÖK lifted the headscarf ban in universities (Aljazeera 2013). After 31 years of the ban in public institutions, the phrase 'head is always uncovered' in the fifth article of the 'Regulation on the Dress and Dress of Personnel Working in Public Institutions and Organizations', which determined women's clothing, has been removed (see. Amendment dated 4/10/2013 and numbered 2013/5443 of the Official Gazette 16.07.1982 dated 16.07.1982 numbered 17849) within the democratic package offered by AKP government.

As is has been argued in previous section, rise of civil movements during 1980s and democratization process which started during 1950s were important events that lead headscarf issue to be held in political agenda. The relation of women's movement, Islamic movement, and the headscarf sparked as a puzzling question for researchers studying the subject. Three intertwined arguments emerged from the literature on Turkey's headscarf issue: 1) The headscarf was perceived as nothing more than an

essential symbol of the Islamic movement; 2) the headscarf was a modern type of movement rather than a passive acceptance of patriarchy (Göle 1996; Göle 2003); and 3) this issue was neither Islamic nor feminist but represented the AKP's exclusive patriarchy mode (Arat 2005; Coşar & Yeğenoğlu 2011; Ayata & Doğangün, 2017). While the first two of these views were made by considering the movements of university students in the 80s and 90s, the third opinion was found as a result of a general examination of AKP's women's policies (including the headscarf). Therefore, although the pre-AKP headscarf issue and AKP policies met at a common point, the infrastructures of these two may differ from each other. According to Cindoğlu and Zencirci (2008), there were two main difference of headscarf debate in 1980s-90s and 2000s. First of all, Islamic movement was far more radical during 80s and 90s but became moderate in 2000s – just as political standing of AKP. Secondly, women movement was not only symbolized with political actors, such as veiled MPs or university students, but wives of politicians such as Mrs. Erdoğan and Gül.

For Arat (2010: 871- 872), one should not worry about the abolishment of ban of headscarf in state sphere, but the propagation of patriarchal religion of politicians could leave secondary roles for women through the state bureaucracy because it was the first time that a conservative party had won a majority in the parliament and changed the balance with secular one. Until then, events regarding headscarf issue were as such “reception crisis” or politicians’ perceptions toward veiled wives of AKP members who were not welcomed official receptions of important days of the Republic (Cindoğlu & Zencirci, 2008: 803). Even, the fact that the wife of AKP Presidential candidate Abdullah Gül was wearing a headscarf in 2007 was among the main reasons for the soldiers to issue the April 27 statement known as the “e-memorandum” (Aljazeera, 2013). For Cindoğlu and Zencirci (2008), during early years of AKP, the headscarf issue lost its characteristics of both democratic rights and feminist movements because it was not represented with individual citizens or non-governmental organizations but debates were encompassing personal troubles of wives of the AKP and conflict with opposition party's members.

The headscarf issue was once again on the parliamentary agenda with the constitutional amendment in 2008¹. In 2008, the Turkish Parliament passed a constitutional amendment to lift the ban on headscarves in universities. This move was controversial and faced significant opposition from secularist groups, leading to a ruling by the Constitutional Court that annulled the amendment (Tepe, 2008). However, the AKP continued its efforts to relax restrictions on headscarves. By 2013, significant progress was made when the government lifted the ban on headscarves in public institutions, including government offices and schools, except for the judiciary, military, and police forces (Küçükali, 2014). This policy change was framed as part of a broader democratization and liberalization agenda, emphasizing individual freedoms and rights. It was a significant victory for those advocating for religious freedom and the rights of Muslim women to wear the headscarf.

The amendment was approved in parliament with the support of the MHP. However, the amendment was repealed after the CHP appealed to the constitutional court. The headscarf ban for civil servants was lifted with the democratization package announced by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who was a Prime Minister, on October 1, 2013. The restrictive provisions were abolished with the amendment made in article 5 of the dress code. 4 AKP deputies, who declared that they would not remove their headscarves on the return of the pilgrimage, attended the Assembly General Assembly on 31 October 2013 while wearing a headscarf (Aljazeera 2013). The headscarf ban began to be lifted in the public sphere as well. It was abolished in 2015 for judges and prosecutors, in 2016 for police and in 2017 for members of the Turkish Armed Forces. Therefore, the issue seemed ended in the parliament. However, debates regarding headscarf issue still continues today. The most recent one, few weeks ago of writing process of this paper, veiled women were included ‘Helalleşme’ speech of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the leader of CHP (AA 2021). In his speech, Kılıçdaroğlu mentioned too many events giving reference to 28 February process, however, main response from AKP members were regarding headscarf

¹ See Official Gazette, issue 27032. 2008/16 numbered decision.
<https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2008/10/20081022-15.htm>

issue. As a result, despite developments of lifting the ban of the headscarf on state sphere. The motivation behind this behavior remains intriguing.

The lifting of the headscarf ban has had profound social and political implications. For many women, it represented a reclaiming of their rights and identity. However, it also intensified the polarization between secularists and Islamists in Turkey. Secularists argue that the increasing visibility of the headscarf in public institutions threatens the secular character of the state and may lead to social pressure on women to conform to religious dress codes (White, 2003).

The headscarf debate also intersects with broader issues of gender and modernization in Turkey. Studies have shown that for many women, wearing the headscarf is a complex choice that balances personal faith, cultural identity, and socio-political contexts. This choice is often influenced by the political climate and societal attitudes towards religious expression (Gökarıksel & Secor, 2012). While the legal landscape has shifted, societal attitudes towards the headscarf remain mixed. Some view its acceptance in public life as a sign of increased tolerance and pluralism, while others fear it symbolizes a move towards conservatism and away from secularism. The headscarf issue continues to serve as a barometer for Turkey's ongoing struggles with identity, modernity, and democracy (Arat, 2010). Researches indicate that the headscarf debate is not just about religious freedom but also involves issues of gender, modernity, and identity. Gökarıksel and Secor (2012) argue that the headscarf has become a multifaceted symbol: for some, it is a sign of piety and religious commitment, while for others, it is a statement of political resistance or personal choice. The diverse meanings attributed to the headscarf illustrate the complexity of the issue in Turkey's socio-political landscape.

At the end of the day, the headscarf issue in Turkey remains a deeply divisive topic, reflecting broader struggles over the role of religion in public life, individual freedoms, and national identity. The AKP's policies have significantly altered the landscape, making the headscarf more visible in public spaces and institutions, yet the debate continues to evoke strong emotions and ideological divides.

4.4.2 Abortion in Turkish Politics

Abortion politics in Turkey are shaped by a complex interplay of cultural, religious, and political factors, reflecting broader societal debates about women's rights, morality, and state control over reproductive health. Abortion has been legal in Turkey since 1983, when the Population Planning Law allowed for elective abortions up to 10 weeks of pregnancy. This legislation marked a significant liberalization compared to previous restrictions and was part of broader efforts to modernize and align with global standards on reproductive health (Öztan, 2014).

Despite the legal status of abortion, its practice and accessibility have been subjects of political contention, particularly under the governance of the AKP. The AKP, which has been in power since 2002, promotes a conservative agenda that emphasizes traditional family values and higher birth rates. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and other AKP leaders have publicly condemned abortion, describing it as akin to "murder" and calling for stricter regulations. This rhetoric has created a climate of moral and political pressure against abortion, influencing both public opinion and healthcare practices (Kılıç, 2015).

AKP's conservative gender politics heated political debates on women's bodies and sexualities (Kandiyoti, 2016). One of these debates was about women's abortion right. On 25th of May, 2012 in a conference about population, Erdoğan used harsh expressions regarding abortion: "I see abortion as a murder. No one should have the right to allow this. Either you kill a child in the womb or you kill it after birth. It makes no difference." (NTV News 2012a). Right after that day, criticizing those who reacted to the definition of murder, the Prime Minister said at the 3rd Ordinary Congress of the AKP Headquarters Women's Branch: "I say every abortion is a Uludere." (NTV News 2012b).

As a result, the AKP attempted to regulate abortion right by limiting the extensions of the pregnancy to six weeks. Such right, which was encompassing right to end pregnancy until tenth week, was granted them on 1988. Surely, the public opinion began to debate on this issue. In fact, these discussions revealed that the issue of abortion is a problem area that cuts across almost all segments of society: namely, secular, religious, feminist and liberal. As a matter of fact, intense discussions

showed that there was no homogeneous point of view even among conservatives (Şahin, 2012: 31-32). According to Şahin (2012), abortion issue was not only discussed in a Muslim religious Turkey but Western countries were having them as well. Both of the conservative segments showed that some of them were highly against abortion issue while others accept this right for medical reasons despite, they did not wish to use it. For Ünal, such regulation was actually “a de facto ban on abortion” (2018:3) because of practical reasons. According to her, “The AKP’s anti-abortion initiative can be regarded as a central part of the current conservative gender regime, which derives its momentum from a nationalist, neoliberal, pro-Islamist, antifeminist, and authoritarian political vision” (2018: 4). She perceived it as an attempt to build family ties through the AKP’s pro-family gender politics, which replaces the premise of gender equality with the Islamic concept of equity, fitrat (Ünal, 2018:4). Similarly, Altunok (2016) presented this act as the most obvious example of the state trying to control women’s bodies and sexuality.

This conservative shift has had tangible effects on women’s access to abortion services in Turkey. A study by the Turkish Medical Association found that while abortion remains legally available, practical barriers have increased. These barriers include a reduction in the number of hospitals performing abortions, administrative hurdles, and a lack of clear information provided to women seeking these services. Additionally, healthcare providers may face moral and social pressure, leading some to refuse performing abortions even within the legal timeframe (Çavlin & Yücel, 2018).

The AKP’s stance on abortion is part of a broader policy framework aimed at promoting higher fertility rates and reinforcing traditional gender roles. This approach includes incentives for large families and discouragement of contraceptive use, reflecting the party’s demographic goals and ideological commitments. Critics argue that these policies undermine women’s autonomy and reproductive rights, pointing out that restricted access to safe abortion can lead to increased health risks and illegal procedures (Gürsoy, 2010).

Unal and Cindoğlu (2013) offered a beneficial study which focused on MPs’ approaches to abortion during AKP era. They revealed remarkable similarities

between different political parties' positions on the same matter, abortion. When AKP's had an anti-abortion standing arguing that abortion is equal to murder due to its conservative politics in which womanhood is taken equally with motherhood, other parties in the parliament did not really have an opposite standing. Instead, authors argue that their pro-abortion rhetoric is severely hampered by discursive constraints that prevent them from making claims that prioritize women's autonomy (Unal & Cindoğlu, 2013: 29). This study is highly important to understand AKP's MPs' approach to abortion issue. It gives us an important clue on how AKP perceives women citizens but it lacks other parties' opinions. Moreover, it is weak at building a causal mechanism between different parties' ideologies and women's concerns. Besides, it is not only taking women MPs as level of analysis but male deputies are included as well. Data is collected not from parliament meetings but from newspapers. It could be related with substantive representation however it has no inference or hypothesis about it.

Public opinion on abortion in Turkey is divided, with significant regional and socio-economic variations. Urban, educated populations tend to support more liberal reproductive rights, while conservative attitudes are more prevalent in rural and less developed areas. This division is reflected in the political landscape, where opposition parties like the CHP advocate for maintaining and improving access to abortion services as part of their broader commitment to secularism and women's rights (Kandiyoti, 2016).

Furthermore, liberals (see Şahin 2012) were engaged in this debate with their arguments. For them, it was unclear to decide when a fetus became individual but what people needed to focus regarding abortion issue was leaving this decision not only to women but men, as well. Nonetheless, issue was closed after harsh criticism from the national and international community. However, for Baytok (2021), politicization of this issue makes it more difficult for women to exercise their rights. Because some medical doctors on public hospitals refused practicing this for political reasons, women had to go to private hospitals for abortion (Baytok, 2021: 14).

Consequently, debates on abortion added to political agenda in Turkish politics. Despite there has been no change in the law, AKP's political standing and

ideological tendencies were seen during the debates of abortion. The politics of abortion in Turkey are characterized by a legal permissiveness that is increasingly constrained by conservative political agendas and social attitudes. This dynamism reinforces the broader struggle over women's rights and the influence of political ideologies on personal and public health matters.

4.4.3 Violence against Women in Turkey

Violence against women in Turkey is a pervasive issue that intersects with cultural, social, and political dynamics. Despite legislative advancements and increased public awareness, the prevalence of domestic violence, femicide, and other forms of violence against women remains alarmingly high. Studies reveal that structural inequalities, patriarchal norms, and insufficient enforcement of protective measures contribute significantly to this enduring problem.

Since the rise of the women's movements in 1980s, violence against women has been one of the major concerns of women in Turkey. Despite 'violence' concept is a broad term that includes direct, indirect, personal, structural, physical and psychological versions, debates on violence against women in Turkey mainly regards domestic and physical violence toward women. As it is mentioned in previous sections, AKP government took important steps to handle this concern. One of the most important attempts was having an important role in drafting and introducing the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence in 2011. Turkey was the first countries that signed this convention; thus, it was also called Istanbul Convention. It was a highly comprehensive convention in which definition of gender and violence types were discussed. The purpose of this was to end gender-based violence and discriminations, as well as providing fundamental rights toward both sexes. Two years after the convention entered into force, another national law was offered by the government to end domestic violence against women (Law no 6284). This law was not as broad as Istanbul Convention, but it included articles aiming to protect women particularly from domestic violence in their homes (Ergöçmen, et al., 2013). However, the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention in 2021 under the leadership of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has sparked significant controversy and concern among

women's rights advocates, who view it as a setback for gender equality and protection against violence (Yüksel & Kavak, 2021).

One of the critical challenges in addressing violence against women in Turkey is the gap between legislation and implementation. While laws like Law 6284 provide a strong legal framework for protecting women, their effectiveness is often undermined by inadequate enforcement, lack of resources, and societal attitudes that stigmatize victims rather than hold perpetrators accountable. Aydin et al. (2018) argue that systemic issues within the police and judiciary, including bias and lack of training, often result in insufficient protection for victims and lenient sentences for offenders.

The cultural context also plays a significant role in perpetuating violence against women. Patriarchal values, which emphasize male authority and control, are deeply entrenched in many parts of Turkish society. These values are often reinforced by media portrayals and public discourse that normalize violence and victim-blaming. Kandiyoti (2016) discusses how traditional norms around honor and shame further complicate women's ability to seek help and justice, as victims may fear social ostracism and retaliation.

Despite the fact that violence against women has been one of the mostly mentioned issues of Turkey, especially by giving reference to huge numbers of femicide events, this issue was not really discussed in the parliament after AKP's standing toward Istanbul Convention changed. In 2019, some institutions, organizations and writers called for the withdrawal of the Istanbul Convention. A petition campaign was launched on the website "Change.org" for Turkey to withdraw from the contract. Such behavior was supported by some conservative, maybe Islamic, parties such as Hüdâ-Par, as well as by newspaper authors - such as Yeni Akit or Milli Gazete. For instance, in his writing, Ali Erkan Kavaklı stated that, "The family is an institution that men and women can run together. There is no way to keep the family alive by removing the man from home. The family cannot be sustained by imported laws. The contract should be cancelled. A regulation that will ensure justice based on our own religion, beliefs, customs, and keep the family alive should be done." (Yeni Akit 2019).

In 2020, AKP started to support these ideas arguing that terms such as “gender” and “sexual orientation” were posing a threat to Turkish family structure. On March, 2021, Turkey became the first country that resigned the Convention. In an interview conducted by Cumhuriyet Newspaper, Feride Acar (2021) evaluated this change in AKP’s attitude in relation to the essence of conservatism. For her, inequality results in discrimination and, accordingly, violence. Those with conservative worldviews reject this. In the same interview, Webb (Cumhuriyet News 2021) also stated that “In all these countries - Hungary, Poland, Ukraine and Turkey - women’s rights are not a government priority. Ideologically, they created the concept of a ‘holy family’. Moreover, the concept of family does not contradict the contract. Those who came to power in Poland and Hungary either embrace right-wing populist ideologies or do not really ideologically want to recognize equality for women.” Similar to her, Baytok (2021) concluded that not only in Turkey but some other state’s leaders, religious authorities, and conservative groups have backed each other in their efforts to denounce the Convention, while women have stepped forward to defend it (2021:9). Following that, Acar (2021) argued that through the discussions on Istanbul Convention, violence against women became added to domestic political agenda. Considering the fact that, after six months, president Erdoğan still gives responses to those who concerns Istanbul Convention during his speeches and defends himself (BBC News, 2021), one can clearly argue that violence against women issue became an important women issue of politics. In addition to this, when we look at the literature, the issue of violence against women was not discussed in the context of gender and politics before the issue of the Istanbul Convention. There is very little work written on this issue, and most of it is in the form of reports or news.

4.5 Party Politics and Ideologies in the Parliament Between 2002-2023

Examining the qualitative representation of women requires considering the political stances and ideologies of the political parties to which the members of parliament belong, as qualitative representation necessitates that representation be accountable to those represented. Whether a female politician represents her party’s women’s policies or represents herself as a separate autonomous agency through issues related to women will be used as an indicator to determine qualitative representation. There are few bases in Turkey that cause the formation, change, and termination of the

political stances and ideologies of parties. The historical, cultural, economic, and diplomatic conditions, the dynamism within political parties [or factors such as the party's concern for votes], the approaches of political actors/leaders, and political institutions are some of them (Oktay & Turan, 2023: 25).

Focusing on the ideologies of political parties is crucial when examining their policies. Since ideologies and policies are two engaged factors that mutually influence and change each other, they should be considered together. Therefore, the behaviors of political parties in Turkey should be examined in terms of their impact on the behaviors of members of parliament when examining the qualitative representation of women. Whether female politicians behave differently from other politicians in their own parties or from the general stances of their own political parties will also be a crucial aspect influencing the answer to the research question of this thesis. In this sense, an answer can be found to the question of whether a woman represents her constituency or the political stance of her own party.

Since its establishment, the TGNA has hosted many different political parties and ideologies. In the republic established as a nation-state, while Turkish nationalism dominated in the early periods of the republic, during the single-party period, there was a political environment where reformist, secular, and national development were prioritized within the framework of the strong state principle. Although there were attempts at multi-party life during this period, the dissolution of parties was ensured as the establishment of “parties with conservative expectations/goals” was contrary to the principles of the official ideology (Güray, 2020: 405). In the post-1945 multi-party period until the period of coups, liberalism and conservatism reappeared with the Democrat Party. During the periods of coups in 1960 and 1980, the emergence of social democracy and conservative nationalists can be observed (Başak, 2016).

The CHP, which evolved into a social democratic line under the leadership of Bülent Ecevit, especially emphasized workers' rights and social justice in the 1970s, while the Justice Party, established as a center-right and conservative party under the leadership of Süleyman Demirel, continued the legacy of the DP and embraced the nationalist ideology that played an important role in the right-left conflicts of that period, founded by MHP Alparslan Türkeş. Liberal conservatism came to the fore

with the True Path Party and Turgut Özal after the 1980 coup, while terms such as Turkish-Islamic Synthesis and Turkish-Islamic Idealist were more prominent in the post-1980 period, and National Vision and Welfare Party entered the political scene with their Islamist and anti-Western identities. While the economic system was fully integrated into capitalism during this period, conservative values also came to the fore.

This period also witnessed the emergence of Kurdish-oriented politics. The 1990s, when the left wing politically fell into the background, corresponded to a period when political parties were relatively weak (Öniş & Keyman 2003). One of the most important political events of this period was the February 28th, and the Welfare Party was closed down during this period. The AKP period, which lasted from 2002 to the present, began in the 2000s.

The Justice and Development Party (AKP), founded in 2001 by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and other former members of Turkey's Islamist and center-right political traditions, has played a transformative role in Turkish politics. In its 2002 party program, the AK Party defined its political identity as follows: "Our party has a conservative democratic identity." (AKP, 2002) Its rise to power in the early 2000s marked a significant shift from the secularist and military-influenced politics that had dominated Turkey for decades (Yavuz, 2009).

The AKP advocates for a blend of Islamic values and democratic governance, often described its ideology as "conservative democracy." This ideology seeks to harmonize Turkey's Islamic cultural heritage with its aspirations for modernity and economic development. The party promotes policies that emphasize family values, social conservatism, and national unity, while also pursuing economic liberalization and integration with global markets. The AKP has been credited with significant economic growth during its early years in power, attributed to its pro-business policies, infrastructure investments, and efforts to attract foreign investment (Keyman & Öniş, 2007).

The AKP's approach to governance has been characterized by a centralization of power, particularly under the leadership of Erdoğan, who transitioned from Prime Minister to President (Özbudun, 2014). This centralization has been accompanied by

a series of constitutional and institutional reforms aimed at consolidating executive power, most notably the shift to a presidential system in 2018. Critics argue that these changes have undermined democratic institutions and eroded checks and balances, leading to concerns about authoritarianism.

The relationship between the AKP and other political entities, such as the MHP and the HDP, has been complex and strategic. The AKP initially sought to engage in a peace process with the Kurdish community, involving negotiations with the HDP. However, this process collapsed in 2015, leading to renewed conflict and a crackdown on Kurdish political activism. Conversely, the AKP has developed a strategic alliance with the MHP, formalized through the “People’s Alliance” (*Cumhur İttifakı*). This alliance has been crucial for maintaining the AKP’s parliamentary majority and bolstering its nationalist credentials, particularly in the face of rising opposition (Taşpınar, 2019).

On the whole, the AKP’s politics and ideology reflect a blend of conservative values, economic liberalism, and strategic pragmatism. However, the party’s increasing authoritarian tendencies and centralization of power have also sparked significant controversy and debate about the future of Turkish democracy (Hale & Özbudun, 2010). According to Esen and Gümüşçü (2016), the AKP could not fulfill its promise to democratize the country; instead, it initiated a process of democratic backsliding and the emergence of competitive authoritarian rule.

The Republican People’s Party (CHP) was founded in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Republic of Turkey, as the country’s first political party. It emerged from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire with the aim of transforming Turkey into a modern, secular, and Western-oriented nation-state. The party’s ideology, known as Kemalism, emphasized principles such as secularism, nationalism, and statism, seeking to break away from the Ottoman legacy and establish a new identity rooted in Turkishness (Zürcher, 1994).

From 2002 to 2023, the CHP in Turkey underwent significant transformations in its politics and ideology, reflecting the evolving political landscape and the party’s attempts to remain relevant in the face of changing societal dynamics. Historically, the CHP has been associated with Kemalism, a secularist and nationalist ideology

inspired by the principles of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey (Tunç, 2014).

Following its defeat in the 2002 general elections and subsequent electoral losses, the CHP embarked on a process of ideological repositioning and organizational reform. The party sought to distance itself from its rigid Kemalist image and appeal to a broader segment of the electorate, particularly younger and more progressive voters (Koç, 2018). This shift was evident in the leadership of Deniz Baykal and later Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, who emphasized themes of social justice, democracy, and human rights, while downplaying the party's traditional emphasis on secularism and nationalism (İçduygu & Toktaş, 2017).

Kılıçdaroğlu's leadership marked a significant shift in CHP's political strategy and rhetoric, aiming to broaden the party's appeal, modernize its image and softening its emphasis on secularism and adopting a more inclusive rhetoric (Özbudun, 2011; Tekeli 2017). Kılıçdaroğlu sought to distance CHP from its rigid secularist stance and embrace a more inclusive approach that resonated with a wider segment of Turkish society (Kurban, 2015). Under his leadership, the CHP adopted a more inclusive and pragmatic approach, forging alliances with other opposition parties and civil society groups to challenge the ruling AKP. This strategy was particularly evident in the formation of the Nation Alliance (Millet İttifakı) with the İYİ Party and other smaller parties, aimed at presenting a unified front against the AKP's dominance (Aras & Gözler, 2020).

The CHP positioned itself as a center-left party advocating for social democracy, pluralism, and the rule of law. While maintaining its commitment to secularism and the principles of the republic, the party also embraced progressive policies on issues such as gender equality, environmental protection, and minority rights (İçduygu & Toktaş, 2017).

Despite these efforts, the CHP faced challenges in translating its ideological reorientation into electoral success. The party struggled to overcome its historical image as the party of the secularist elite and to appeal to conservative and religious voters, particularly in rural and conservative-leaning regions (Çarkoğlu & Kentmen-Çin, 2012). Additionally, internal divisions and leadership struggles occasionally

undermined the party's cohesion and effectiveness as an opposition force (Aras & Gözler, 2020).

All things considered, the CHP's politics and ideology from 2002 to 2023 reflect a dynamic process of adaptation and renewal in response to shifting societal norms and political realities. While maintaining its core principles of secularism and democracy, the party sought to modernize its image and broaden its appeal, positioning itself as a progressive alternative to the ruling AKP. However, the challenges of overcoming its historical baggage and building a broad coalition of support remained persistent obstacles to the CHP's electoral ambitions (Koç, 2018).

The Nationalist Action Party (MHP), founded in 1969 by Alparslan Türkeş, is a significant political entity in Turkey, characterized by its far-right, nationalist, and conservative ideology. The MHP's political stance is deeply rooted in Turkish nationalism, promoting a vision of Turkey that emphasizes the supremacy of the Turkish nation, culture, and language. This nationalist sentiment is often intertwined with a strong opposition to perceived threats to the Turkish state, including separatist movements and political entities advocating for Kurdish autonomy (Esen, 2018).

Ideologically, the MHP adheres to a doctrine known as "Turkish-Islamic synthesis," which integrates elements of Turkish nationalism with Islam. This synthesis points out the party's conservative social values, advocating for the protection of traditional family structures, moral values, and the Turkish-Islamic identity. The MHP's commitment to these principles is reflected in its policies, which often prioritize national unity, security, and sovereignty. The party has been particularly vocal against the influence of Western liberal values and has maintained a staunch stance against Kurdish separatism and political organizations like the Kurdistan Workers' Party- PKK (Toktaş & Kurt, 2010).

The relationship between the MHP and the ruling AKP has evolved significantly over the years, marked by both periods of opposition and strategic alliances. Initially, the MHP was a critical opponent of the AKP, particularly concerning its approach to the Kurdish issue and its efforts to expand individual freedoms, which the MHP viewed as potential threats to national unity and security. However, in the wake of the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey, the MHP shifted its position, forging a political

alliance with the AKP. This partnership was formalized through the “People’s Alliance” in 2018, which facilitated a cooperative framework for the 2018 general elections and subsequent political processes (Balci, 2019).

The MHP’s support has been crucial for the AKP in maintaining its parliamentary majority and stabilizing the government amid growing domestic and international challenges. This alliance has also influenced the AKP’s policy directions, leading to a more pronounced nationalist and conservative tilt in its governance approach. The cooperation between the two parties extends to various policy areas, including constitutional changes, security measures, and responses to geopolitical issues. The MHP’s influence within this alliance makes its role in shaping Turkey’s contemporary political landscape explicit. In a sense that it reinforcing its nationalist and conservative ideology in alignment with the broader objectives of the AKP-led government (Öniş & Kutlay, 2020).

At the end of the day, the MHP’s politics and ideology reflect a steadfast commitment to Turkish nationalism and conservative values, shaping its legislative and political strategies. Its alliance with the AKP highlights the dynamic nature of Turkish politics, where strategic partnerships can significantly impact policy directions and governance frameworks (Yavuz, 2020).

The Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP), in Turkey is a left-wing, pro-Kurdish political party that has significantly influenced the country’s political landscape since its establishment in 2012. The HDP emerged as a broad coalition of various leftist groups and marginalized communities (Gürer, 2015). Its political ideology is rooted in advocating for minority rights, social justice, and democratic governance. The HDP’s primary focus is on addressing the Kurdish issue in Turkey, promoting the rights and cultural recognition of the Kurdish population, which has historically faced significant repression (Gürer, 2015).

The HDP promotes a radical form of democracy that seeks to decentralize state power and enhance local governance. This approach aligns with the party’s commitment to human rights, gender equality, and environmental sustainability. The HDP has been vocal in its opposition to neoliberal economic policies, advocating instead for social and economic reforms that prioritize the needs of disadvantaged

communities. Its platform includes comprehensive reforms in education, healthcare, and labor rights, aiming to create a more equitable society (Çelik, 2015).

The HDP's relationship with the ruling AKP has been complex and contentious. Initially, there were periods of dialogue between the two parties, particularly during the AKP's attempts at a peace process with the Kurdish community between 2013 and 2015. This period saw some cooperation as both parties engaged in negotiations aimed at resolving the Kurdish issue. However, the collapse of the peace process in 2015 marked a significant turning point, leading to intensified conflicts and a crackdown on HDP members by the AKP government. The HDP has since faced severe political repression, with many of its leaders, including co-chairs Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ, being imprisoned on charges related to terrorism, which the HDP claims are politically motivated (Güneş & Zeydanlıoğlu, 2014).

The AKP's hardline stance against the HDP has been part of a broader strategy to consolidate nationalist support and marginalize pro-Kurdish voices. This strategy has involved legal actions, arrests, and the dismissal of elected HDP mayors, replaced by government-appointed trustees. Despite these challenges, the HDP remains a critical opposition force, advocating for democratic reforms and minority rights. The HDP's resilience and its commitment to a diverse, inclusive political platform points its significant role in Turkey's democratic struggle (Watmough & Öztürk, 2018).

In the grand scheme of the things, the HDP's politics and ideology emphasize inclusivity, social justice, and minority rights, positioning it as a pivotal actor in Turkey's political arena. Its adversarial relationship with the AKP shows the ongoing tensions within Turkish politics, particularly concerning the Kurdish issue and broader democratic governance (Casier & Jongerden, 2012).

The İYİ Party (Good Party), established in 2017 by Meral Akşener, is a center-right political party in Turkey that seeks to offer an alternative to the dominant political forces, primarily the AKP and the MHP. The İYİ Party emerged from a splinter group of the MHP, with Akşener and her followers disagreeing with the MHP's close alignment with the AKP and its perceived drift away from traditional nationalist principles (Özpek, 2018).

Ideologically, the İYİ Party positions itself as a nationalist and secular force, advocating for democratic reforms, rule of law, and human rights. The party emphasizes a commitment to restoring and strengthening Turkey's parliamentary system, which was altered by the AKP to a presidential system in 2018. The İYİ Party also supports a mixed economic approach, combining elements of free-market policies with social justice principles to address income inequality and ensure fair opportunities for all citizens (Özpek & Demir, 2019).

A significant aspect of the İYİ Party's platform is its dedication to upholding secularism and countering the perceived erosion of secular values under AKP rule. The party advocates for the separation of religion and state affairs, aiming to protect Turkey's secular heritage as established by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Additionally, the İYİ Party promotes policies to enhance women's rights, improve education, and address the Kurdish issue through democratic means while opposing any form of separatism (Ağırdır, 2020).

The relationship between the İYİ Party and the AKP can be characterized by opposition and competition. The İYİ Party was founded explicitly as a response to dissatisfaction with the AKP's policies and the MHP's alliance with the AKP. This opposition is reflected in the İYİ Party's critique of the AKP's governance, particularly regarding issues of democratic backsliding, corruption, and authoritarian tendencies. The İYİ Party has positioned itself as a defender of democratic norms and a proponent of political pluralism, contrasting sharply with the centralizing tendencies of the AKP (Öniş, 2020).

Despite being a relatively new party, the İYİ Party has gained a notable foothold in Turkish politics, securing significant votes in national and local elections. The party's ability to attract a diverse voter base, including disenchanted MHP supporters, secular nationalists, and moderate conservatives, shows its growing influence. In alliances such as the Nation Alliance (*Millet İttifakı*) with the CHP, the İYİ Party has played a crucial role in challenging the AKP's dominance and advocating for a return to a more balanced and democratic political system (Sayarı, 2019).

Taking everything into account, the İYİ Party's politics and ideology reflect a blend of nationalism, secularism, and democratic reformism, positioning it as a key player in Turkey's political opposition landscape. Its ongoing fight against AKP policies, and its push for something more inclusive and democratic, shows why it remains such a key part of how Turkey's political future is being shaped (Taşdemir, 2018).



CHAPTER 5. HEADSCARF DEBATES IN THE PARLIAMENT

Globally, the headscarf debate has been extensively studied in the context of secularism and religious freedom. Scholars like Göle (1996) and Mahmood (2005) have analyzed the headscarf as a symbol of identity, examining how it is perceived and regulated in different sociopolitical contexts. In Turkey, the headscarf issue is particularly significant due to the country's unique secular-religious dynamics. Researchers such as Navaro-Yashin (2002) and Cindoglu (2011) have explored the headscarf as a site of political and cultural contention, with women representatives playing key roles in this discourse.

This chapter offers the CDA of the headscarf issue as discussed by women representatives in Turkey between 2002 and 2023. The headscarf, a symbol deeply intertwined with identity, religion, and gender politics, provides a rich context for exploring the intersection of personal freedoms and societal norms. Analyzing their approaches to womanhood, this study aims to uncover the substantive, as well as constitutive claims of women representatives on this issue. The significance of this analysis lies in its exploration of the headscarf debate as a microcosm of broader societal tensions between secularism and religious freedom- thanks to thematic coding and discourse mapping. In this way, this analysis not only contributes to understanding the specific dynamics of Turkish politics but also adds to the global conversation on women's rights and religious expression by dissecting the various arguments and rhetorical strategies used by female representatives.

This method of CDA helps to examine the findings of speeches and statements made by women parliamentarians, investigating how they define womanhood in relation to the headscarf. The findings for each party are examined in separate sub-sections to see how their discourses on the headscarf issue constitute the concepts such as women's nationhood, citizenship, and its usage in regime discussions. At the end of each section, there is a brief evaluation summarizing how the party relates the headscarf issue to these concepts. This evaluation section only provides a general

assessment of the findings by addressing the evolution of the party's discourse over time.

After these detailed analyses of the parties, there is a mini-results section that brings together the approaches of all parties. This section examines the similarities and differences in the discourses of the parties regarding the headscarf issue. However, this is not the final results section because other concepts and frameworks are still addressed: I am referring to citizenship and democracy. The same process is applied to these concepts as well. For this reason, general results sections are included to provide a broader framework addressing all the concepts tied to womanhood—as well as its relation with nationhood, membership, citizenship etc. —and to show how these concepts are redefined within these discourses.

At the end of the chapter, a deeper discussion goes beyond the general results to examine how the headscarf issue reproduces or questions the concept of womanhood. It discusses the differences and approaches in the discourses, through evaluating them in terms of body politics, representation, and Turkish politics. Furthermore, it discusses what these findings mean within the larger picture of Turkey's social and political context.

This structure admittedly appears somewhat complex, but it ensures a flow from detailed analysis to general assessment and, finally, to critical reflection. In this way, it helps us gain an understanding of the multifaceted role the headscarf issue plays in the discourses of different political parties.

5.1 Diverging Notions of Womanhood in Abortion Debates

5.1.1 Constructing Womanhood and The Symbolism of the Veil

The headscarf debate in Turkey has long been more than just a matter of personal choice or religious expression—it's a reflection of deep-rooted ideological, cultural, and political tensions. Across different parties, the headscarf has been framed in diverse ways: as a symbol of personal freedom, a marker of identity, or even as a challenge to secular principles. But at its core, this debate often revolves around how womanhood is defined, regulated, and represented in the public sphere.

This section delves into the narratives surrounding the headscarf issue to examine how political parties and their female representatives have approached the question of womanhood. From the findings, this study believes that the headscarf has been at the center of debates about secularism while also standing as a symbol of cultural and religious identity. Therefore, it is highly important to examine them in order to demonstrate the core claim of constitutive representation—that representation is not merely about advocating for existing interests but about actively shaping and redefining identities, roles, and norms.

In the context of the headscarf debate, the way political actors frame women's choices, rights, and societal roles goes beyond passive reflection; it constitutes a deliberate effort to mold public perceptions of womanhood. Whether through secularist concerns about modernity or religious appeals to cultural heritage, these narratives shape how society understands what it means to be a woman in Turkey. Through an analysis of parliamentary speeches, this section aims to explore how different parties connect their positions on the headscarf to broader ideas about gender roles, women's autonomy, and their place in society. They give us a glimpse into the conflicting ideas about what it means to be a woman in Turkey today, capturing the tension between tradition, politics, and personal choice.

5.1.1.1 CHP: Womanhood as Secular Modernity

The headscarf issue has long been a focal point for female deputies of the CHP, offering valuable insights into how the party views womanhood. For the CHP, this debate has always gone far beyond a simple choice of attire. It is deeply tied to larger questions of secularism, modernization, and women's roles in public life. This section explores how the CHP has framed female identity through its stance on the headscarf debate. Women's clothing choices and the societal perceptions surrounding them reveal how the party has connected its principles of modernization and secularism to its broader vision of womanhood.

Notably, the findings only include speeches from the 22nd and 24th legislative terms because after the liberalization of the headscarf, CHP female representatives have remained silent on this issue. Moreover, it is also important to note that not all discourses by the representatives directly define womanhood. This is why some of

my arguments draw on how indirect discussions and policy critiques reflect broader attitudes toward womanhood, which I believe still hold significant value.

5.1.1.1.1 Findings of the 22nd Parliamentary Term

In the 22nd legislative term of the Turkish parliament, there were 24 women deputies and the political representation of women was 4.4%. More than half of the female deputies -15 of them- were deputies of AKP which nailed on being the only party of power in the parliament in 2002. During the 22nd legislation term, one of the foremost promises of AKP was lifting the headscarf ban in universities and public sphere. However, considering the deputies' speeches in the general meetings of the parliament, none of the female deputies of AKP made any claim on the headscarf issue is found during the data collection. Besides, despite their small number, female deputies of CHP, main opposite party in the parliament, expressed their opinions regarding the promise of lifting the headscarf ban. Accordingly, such promise was seen as a tool that would hinder the emancipation of women rights, especially the right of education. It was seen as a religious symbol of underdeveloped patriarchal countries.

In this term, CHP MPs believed that there is another motivation behind the lifting of the headscarf ban, rather than women's emancipation. This motivation was seen as the product of a patriarchal mentality with ultimate reactionary goals. They approached to free headscarf idea as the first step of a gradual process of bringing religious applications back to the Republic. Therefore, it the issue was approached by CHP MPs as a reactionary plan that would open other ways to implement religious practices in the public sphere.

For this belief, the representatives of CHP directly and indirectly argued that women's presence, rights and freedoms in the public sphere would be restricted as the mentality lives behind the lifting headscarf ban spreads or gains legitimacy (e.g. Karabekir,2003; Okucu, 2003, etc.). Their speeches regarding the headscarf defined women as secular individuals whose rights and freedoms were granted by the Republic and who succeeded as long as they were free from any religious or cultural pressure. For instance, in Sıdıka Karabekir's words:

While the place of women in the country is so dire, it cannot be expected that the AKP government, which still condemns women to headscarves, **detaches our youth from science through religious education, distances them from being thinking people, separates women from men, ‘women’s place is in their home’, should deal with women’s problems.** (Sıdıka Karabekir, CHP, 2003)

The above statement shows that the representative rejects conventional ideas of womanhood that restrict women to home responsibilities and restrict their ability to engage in public life. As an advocate for a redefining of womanhood that recognizes women as active agents capable of engaging in all facets of society, the representative criticizes government policies that uphold patriarchal attitudes. In the literature, such manner is titled as “state-feminism” (Mazur, 2007; White, 2003; Kantola, 2012; Kamala, 2023). In a brief explanation, this type of feminism is “state-led promotion of women’s equality in the public” (White, 2003: 155). However, while the representative’s critique resonates with the ideals of state feminism, particularly in its call for women’s active participation in public and political life, it also reveals some of the challenges that come with this approach. In the Turkish context, state feminism has often emphasized women’s visibility and roles in the public sphere, sometimes at the expense of addressing the deeper, systemic patriarchal norms that persist in private and domestic spaces.

This creates a paradox: women’s rights are frequently framed as tools for modernization and national progress, rather than as fundamental, inalienable rights. Seen through this lens, the representative’s speech reflects both a continuation of this legacy and a subtle push for something more—an approach that acknowledges the need to dismantle patriarchal structures more holistically, beyond the confines of public life

Speaking out against social conventions that limit women’s agency and autonomy, the representative argues that women’s rightful place in the public, social, and political domains. Emphasis is placed on women’s ambitions for equality and empowerment, as well as their desire to make a contribution to society outside of the home. This points a more inclusive definition of womanhood that goes beyond stereotypical gender roles and contributions. In the continuation of her speech, Sıdıka Karabekir stated that:

It is unacceptable that **Atatürk's Turkey**, which is a candidate for the **EU**, displays common features with societies that **leave women ignorant**. Our women...want to **take their place in business life** in a manner befitting human dignity, to **contribute to their home with what they earn**, to benefit **from social security rights**, to receive **education** ... you stress the society with the **subject of headscarf, Qur'an courses, imam hatip issues, and put dynamite in the social peace**. (Sıdıka Karabekir, CHP, 2003)

In these words, it is seen that there is a fear that the introduction of the headscarf in the public sphere would put the country in a reactionary position, restrict women's freedom and move away from European standards. The representative argues that women are not looking for charity but rather dignity through their involvement in social security, business, and education. This is consistent with the idea that women should be active, independent, and entitled to equal opportunities. Moreover, lifting the ban on headscarf is seen as a threat to women security, as well as a threat to national security. According to her, lifting headscarf ban could result in restricting women to attend schools and it should not be witnessed in welfare states.

Detachment from science, comparing welfare societies with Islamic ones, references to religion and religious schools leads to that conclusion. In addition, she mentions Atatürk's name during her speech to prove her ideas. Such behavior is and evident showing that she conducts a Kemalist discourse.

To sum up, the findings show that the CHP representatives frequently built a bridge between headscarf liberalization with religious oriented education system. It is evident in the statements where the representatives begin by discussing various actions taken by the government, such as seizing control of educational institutions and promoting religious-oriented education. They used this to frame a discussion about how this kind of policies might shape societal values, including the way womanhood is perceived. The mention of imam education and girls' imam-hatip schools (e.g. Guldal Okucu's speech, 2003, CHP), for example, highlights the role of religion in shaping societal norms, particularly regarding the education and roles of women. This could be interpreted as reinforcing patriarchal structures within religious institutions and potentially limiting opportunities for women outside of traditional religious roles. On the whole, the headscarf issue was recognized as a step to impose a religious system on the society. The representatives perceived this as a threat to national security.

The other important aspect in their discourses is that, the CHP deputies linked statist values to the objectives of Turkish modernization, aligning them closely with modern values, notions of progress, and freedom. Secularism is presented as a cornerstone contributing to social values, and any alteration to its principles is viewed as a direct threat to the fabric of these values, particularly in the context of Kemalist principles. It is credited with women's liberation and empowerment, such as equality of opportunity in education, women's entry into professional and scientific fields, and their liberation from traditional coverings.

5.1.1.1.2 Findings of 23rd Parliamentary Term

The discourse of CHP female MPs in the 23rd Legislation Term is much more limited than their discourse in the previous period. This period, in which only a few names came to the fore, was not drawn in a very different framework from the previous period.

In general, the speeches of CHP representatives present a critical viewpoint on the subject of headscarf policy in higher education, bringing up issues with women's citizenship rights, secularism, and democratic ideals. In doing so, they defend the upholding of secular values and legal norms to safeguard women's rights and liberties while also placing womanhood within the context of religion and cultural identity. For example, Fatma Nur Serter criticized AKP women's approach to the headscarf with the following words:

By releasing the turban [(headscarf) in universities], which is a political and religious uniform, in universities, the secular state is clearly targeted and the door is opened to practices that cannot be prevented in a short time. Turban is not just a way of dressing. The turban is a tool of expression of identity, and this identity is an identity that expresses politicized religious belief.” (Fatma Nur Serter, CHP, 2008)

Serter presents the headscarf, as she expresses “the turban”, as more than just an article of apparel; rather, it is an expression of political-religious belief and a marker of identity. This implies that Serter's discourse on the headscarf aligns with the CHP's general stance, which is shaped around secularism and modernization.

However, this discourse is open to criticism for not sufficiently addressing women's individual agency in expressing their identities. It demonstrates that debates around the headscarf often reflect ideological polarization within society rather than focusing on women's individual agency.

Moreover, a closer examination of Serter's statements reveals that she frames the headscarf not as an individual choice but as a social and even political issue. While her remark that "the turban is a tool of expression of identity" appears to engage with how women's religious and political preferences shape their identity formation processes, her framing of the headscarf primarily as a threat shifts the focus from recognizing women's individual agency to delivering a political critique.

So, what conclusions can we draw from this? Her statement suggests that women wearing the headscarf may not be acting out of individual choice but rather as part of a broader religious-political framework. However, it reflects a paternalistic assumption, as it downplays the potential agency of women who choose to wear the headscarf. Thus, even within progressive frameworks, there can be a tendency to instrumentalize women's choices to serve broader ideological debates, rather than centering their voices and experiences. Such an approach calls into question whether the debate truly addresses the lived realities of women or primarily reinforces pre-existing ideological divisions.

Generally, women CHP deputies argued that the headscarf had nothing to do with women's freedom; on the contrary, it was seen as a step towards the imposition of Islamism. It is expressed that there is concern that further practices will be implemented when the secular order is abolished. Seeing the headscarf as a political Islamist symbol was also stated by other CHP deputies. For example, in Arat's words:

The restriction on the use of headscarves in our universities is **a self-protective reflex of the secular, democratic republic, and is fair and natural**. In our opinion, religious belief should not be influential and dominant in state affairs. This approach already constitutes **the essence of secularism**. (Necla Arat, CHP, 2008)

The representative's approach to womanhood, as inferred from their statements, revolves around the contentious issue of the headscarf in higher education

institutions. The representative frames the headscarf as a symbol with deep religious and political connotations, suggesting that its presence in universities is not merely a matter of personal choice but carries broader ideological implications. The headscarf is described as more than a piece of clothing. It is connected to the Islamist movement and to the idea of a religious state. Through this framing, the representative points to something deeper. In this perspective, womanhood is not seen as a matter of personal choice or empowerment. It is shaped by political and religious loyalties.

In addition, the representative argues that allowing the headscarf in universities contradicts the principles of secularism and equality, as it grants privileges to a specific group based on their religious attire. This implies a view of womanhood as inherently tied to religious identity, with implications for access to education and public life.

These statements of Arat also constitute a brief summary of CHP's female deputies' approach to headscarf issue. First of all, they were using the word 'turban' rather than 'headscarf' because for them, it was a symbol of Islamic reign. Second, despite other parties' deputies were arguing that lifting the ban would result in equality among men and women, female deputies contradicted with this idea. For them, such elimination on the ban would cause an increase in the inequalities between men and women.

Moreover, it was harmful for secular feature of the state. For them, allowing women to wear the headscarf would pave the way for allowing some religious practices which would cause retrograde in whole state. In conclusion, lifting the ban would not only decrease women's rights but it would also endanger the modern style of the country. Examining the discourses, the deputies had a Kemalist approach to the issue. It suggests a definition of womanhood that is influenced by broader political and religious ideologies, rather than individual agency or rights. This idea of womanhood is shaped inside the framework of secularism and public affairs. It does not stand alone; it carries the speaker's clear belief in protecting a secular and democratic republic. Through this framing, the speaker ties the image of women directly to the future of the state itself.

In conclusion, the statements made by CHP representatives during this period strongly argue that women's identities are used as political tools, but they also tell us how women's individual agency often remains sidelined in these debates. The findings include various key themes such as, including the historical significance of secularism, political agenda, gender equality, constitutional concerns, and potential threats to secular principles. However, there are no explicit declarations defining women directly, but rather indirect remarks tied to secularism versus Islamism debates that allow for interpretation. This further proves that the process of representation is not merely about advocating for interests but also about redefining women's identities and roles.

5.1.1.1.3 Findings of the 24th Legislative Term

When analyzed in terms of meaning and subtext, it is observed that the statements of CHP representatives in the 24th legislative term do not significantly differ from the findings of the previous terms.

In this period, while there is no clear or direct expression that explicitly defines the approach to womanhood, the issue is framed in a context far removed from women's agency. Instead, it is used within the framework of national secularism, with claims that women—or indirectly, the image of women envisioned during the founding years of the Republic—would be undermined as a result.

Headscarf, or turban as frequently expressed by CHP members, is seen as a religious symbol, and the idea that lifting the headscarf ban would be contrary to secularism is dominant in the discourses. According to the MPs, rejecting the secular image associated with women's dress codes while supporting the conservative image symbolized by the headscarf reflects concerns about the potential erosion of secularism in education. The following statement sets an example of this argument:

When we look at the events that have happened in recent days, under the name of free dress code, children are not allowed to wear skirts above the knee, tank tops in schools. But in these schools, headscarves are allowed, and even, friends, as you can see in this photo, chadors are also allowed. (Dilek Akagün Yılmaz, CHP, 2013)

In this statement, the representative subtly criticizes the social mores and clothing regulations that are enforced on kids in schools, emphasizing the ban on tank tops

and skirts that fall below the knee. This raises questions about what society expects of women in terms of conduct and attire. Adhering to the principle that dress regulations ought to be applied uniformly to all students, no matter their gender or religious affiliation, the representative draws a parallel between the proscription of particular types of attire and the allowance of headscarves and chadors in educational institutions.

We all know that the Constitutional Court, in its decision regarding the headscarf, stated that the headscarf is a political symbol and therefore it is not possible to enter the university in this way. (Dilek Akagün Yılmaz, CHP, 2013)

In this text, the speaker discusses the Constitutional Court's decision regarding the headscarf. She frames it within narratives of political manipulation and erosion of secularism within the education system. The headscarf, which is frequently connected to a woman's religious and cultural identity, is one way that the speaker subtly tackles the topic of womanhood.

In other words, there is the perception of the headscarf as a threat to secularism and secular life, and the concern that this 'symbol' (according to CHP MPs), that is liberalized in these universities, spreads to other areas of public life. Şafak Pavey expressed another example of this in a long speech as follows:

While many women cover themselves out of belief, many girls **are forcibly covered by the family forces** that control them...I am talking about our girls who were veiled at the age of 5 and married at the age of 15. Our future is truly changing terribly because of the situation of our women. (Şafak Pavey, CHP, 2013)

Pavey's statement given above stands out as a significant example in this analysis because it slightly diverges from the rhetoric of other representatives by acknowledging the right of women to cover themselves as an act of faith. However, she directs attention to the critical issue: how this choice can be manipulated into a mechanism of control over young girls who lack the capacity to make autonomous decisions. Pavey frames the coercion of girls into wearing headscarves as a violation of individual freedoms, emphasizing that this practice serves as a tool to exert control over children. In this sense, the issue goes beyond individual cases, pointing to a broader and systemic problem.

Furthermore, Pavey connects such practices to deeper societal issues like child marriages, presenting the compulsion to cover as part of a larger chain of systemic oppression. She critiques this coercion not only as a personal infringement but as a reflection of structural inequalities that threaten societal progress. Accordingly, personal freedoms and societal norms intersect. Thus, it can be argued that this approach recognizes women as autonomous individuals while also critiquing how social norms and systemic pressures limit this autonomy.

Here, the patriarchal control and oppression that certain women face in regard to the headscarf by talking about girls who are forced to wear them by family members are recognized. This emphasizes how family, society, and societal expectations are intertwined with womanhood. As a result, her approach redefines womanhood by emphasizing freedom and rights, while simultaneously challenging how these freedoms are constrained by societal expectations. This perspective presents women as both individuals and integral actors in social and political processes. By doing so, Pavey's understanding of womanhood articulates the need for a representation process that integrates individual autonomy with a critical examination of systemic oppression, ultimately urging a redefinition of womanhood in the broader socio-political context.

5.1.1.1.4 Summary of Findings

The findings given in previous sections show that female deputies from the CHP consistently positioned the headscarf as a symbol of religious regression and patriarchal oppression, associating it with a perceived threat to the secular, democratic values enshrined in Turkey's republican ideology. CHP consistently framed womanhood through a secular and modernist lens, viewing the headscarf as a symbol of regression rather than empowerment. Therefore, female MPs argued that true emancipation required liberation from religious symbols and traditions. Their speeches framed womanhood as modern, secular, and emancipated from traditional roles.

For example, MPs like Fatma Nur Serter and Şafak Pavey argued that lifting the headscarf ban would endanger women's freedom by legitimizing reactionary practices and reinforcing patriarchal norms. Serter's depiction of the headscarf as a

“political symbol” suggests concerns over its role in undermining secular governance and gender equality. Similarly, Pavey critiqued the oppression faced by girls forced to wear headscarves, suggesting that true liberation for women could only be achieved through secularism. Also, Necla Arat framed the headscarf as a political symbol associated with Islamist ideology. She suggests that its presence in universities would threaten the secular fabric of the republic. These discourses reflect an understanding of womanhood that prioritizes individual autonomy and the rejection of religious or cultural constraints.

Looking at the broader picture, women were often portrayed as symbols of progress, unburdened by religious or traditional expectations. CHP representatives drew an image of womanhood that is secular, independent, and deeply tied to ideals of Western modernization. CHP’s female representatives played a visible role in headscarf discussions, particularly during the 22nd term. Yet after the ban’s removal, the party’s focus on the issue steadily declined. By the 24th and 26th terms, references to the headscarf had become rare, pointing to an apparent reluctance to revisit old controversies.

5.1.1.2 AKP: Conservative Womanhood Framed with Equality and Tradition

AKP’s approach to the headscarf issue is a significant policy area that shapes its broader perception of womanhood. Since the moment female representatives entered the parliament, they actively participated in debates on this topic. The AKP often framed the headscarf ban as a barrier to women’s access to equal opportunities in education and employment. Moreover, the party advocated for lifting the ban as a reform for women’s rights and freedoms. This stance aimed not only to increase women’s visibility in the public sphere but also to reflect a conservative worldview, which became more pronounced in the party’s rhetoric after the 24th legislative term.

This section examines the speeches of AKP’s female representatives on the headscarf issue. It analyzes the findings show the party’s perception of womanhood has been constructed and how this perception aligns with gender equality, individual freedoms, and religious values. The findings span from the 23rd to the 27th legislative terms, as the first significant discussions on this topic emerged during the 23rd term.

5.1.1.2.1 Findings of 23rd Parliamentary Term

In the 22nd legislation term and earlier, there was a limited number of female members of parliament. However, in the 23rd term, the number of female MPs increased, and their discussions on issues related to the headscarf, in particular, became more prominent. In the 23rd legislative term, AKP had the highest number of female MPs in the Parliament. With its arrival in parliament, a new perspective is introduced into the discourse surrounding the headscarf issue: despite women have equal rights and freedoms with men at the constitutional level, they are left behind in terms of equal opportunities in education due to the headscarf issue.

Article 10 of the Constitution, titled Equality before the law, states that ‘Everyone is equal before the law without distinction as to language, race, color, sex, political thought, philosophical belief, religion, sect, and similar reasons.’ Women and men have equal rights, and the state is obliged to ensure the realization of this equality...As a woman, the existence of such a restriction [headscarf ban] hurts and wounds me if there is one. (Guldal Akşit, AKP, 2008)

In this speech, Akşit emphasizes her position as a female MP, referring to national and international legal norms. She supports the freedom of young women, especially in terms of education, to wear headscarves in public. There is no mention of any religious or ethnic references in her speech. On the contrary, it strongly points out democratic and secular principles that the Republic is based on. Speeches by female AKP MPs on the headscarf issue generally fall within this framework during this term. In line with this perspective, the representative presents womanhood as inextricably related to the ideas of individual rights and equality. She questions prevailing ideas about gender roles that might restrict women’s agency and autonomy. Thus, the importance of women’s rights and equality was emphasized.

Moreover, the representative’s personal comment on being hurt and wounded by prejudice based on gender has an emotional appeal. Emphasizing on the personal stakes in discussions about women’s rights and liberties, this statement humanizes the problem. The lifting of the ban is presented as an initiative promoting gender equality, a key objective of the state. Akşit, for instance, asserted the need to apologize on behalf of those who had harmed young people with headscarves and their families, emphasizing the deprivation of their basic liberties and the

discrimination they faced. She expressed concern about the inability to shield these young people from the socio- psychological violence inflicted upon them (Alev Dedegil, February 6, 2008). As noted by Reyes (2011, 790), emotions were recognized as playing a crucial role in moral justification. While the CHP MPs stirred emotions of fear which is discussed early, the AKP legislators evoked distinct feelings such as shame, referring headscarved young women's challenges in universities. Moreover, they sought to gain the sympathy and support of the audience by narrating the experiences of women adversely affected by the headscarf ban, thereby justifying their position on the headscarf issue. AKP deputies also utilized mythopoesis as a legitimization strategy. In response to the bleak future scenarios presented by CHP MPs, they encouraged the audience to empathize with the narratives of women wearing headscarves and their families.

Furthermore, the representative tackles a particular example of gender-based discrimination by criticizing laws that restrict women's access to education because of their choice of attire, such as the headscarf ban. This implies a more comprehensive view of womanhood that takes into account social and cultural aspects of her identity in addition to her legal rights. For example, in a speech, the then State Minister (ministers were selected from among the parliamentary members due to the parliamentary system at that time), Nimet Çubukçu, expressed her thoughts on the headscarf ban as follows:

Indeed, boys, who think the same way, are attending school without any restriction, while somehow, girls are deprived of the right to education. Alleging that those who view the exclusion of headscarved women from universities as a threat to the country's founding principles are engaging in a typical gender [sex] discrimination. (Nimet Çubukçu, AKP, 2008)

First of all, in this speech, the statements made regarding whether the lifting of the headscarf ban poses any threat to the founding principles of the country are criticized. On the contrary, it is seen as an effort to comply with constitutional rights and freedoms, uphold the democratic and secular system, and address gender discrimination. The representative draws attention to the discriminatory practice of denying girls their access to an education, especially if they are wearing headscarves. This emphasizes how gender and religious identity intertwine to shape women's experiences. Moreover, the representative raises issues with prejudices and

stereotypes that marginalize particular groups of women because of their religious convictions by contesting the idea that letting female students to wear headscarf is threat to the secular and democratic society. According to Çubukçu, women are asserting their equality, whether or not they choose to cover. This opposes stereotypes of what it means to be a woman and promotes unity and inclusivity between women from all backgrounds.

The concepts used in the speech include multiculturalism, modernism, and references to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. For instance, Ayşenur Bahçekapılı (AKP, 2008), in one of her speeches, quoted Atatürk's emphasis on gender equality in education, stating "All these words are verbal testimonies to how careful and sensitive Atatürk was on women's education.", she connected the issue of the headscarf to education, arguing that the lifting of the ban would contribute to the modernization of women.

5.1.1.2.2 Findings of 24th Parliamentary Term

This legislation period lasted between the 24th legislative term and years. While in the previous period, the headscarf issue was discussed and legitimized in terms of human rights including female students' right to access education, gender equality, secularism, democracy, and modernism, in the 24th period, the issue is emphasized on the women's role in family and the headscarf freedom. Ensuring equality of opportunity and justice for men and women, religious elements began to be included in the discourses. This interaction in legitimation behavior was generally seen in AKP MPs. The analysis of this period will begin with AKP female MPs.

During the 24th Legislation Term, the number of female AKP MPs increased to 79, and they gained about 14% of seats in the parliament. Talks about the headscarf took place more frequently in this period in comparison with previous periods because the legal regulations for lifting the ban on headscarf is made in this term. In this term, discourses of AKP MPs have similarity on regarding the visibility of women in the public sphere however, is different from previous term because this time conservative and partisan concepts are also included in the discourse.

Some of the representatives of AKP call attention to the family as the most significant institution in society and places women at the core of stable and strong

families. This implies a conventional understanding of womanhood as intimately related to familial roles. For instance,

When we say let's list the factors that somehow helped us survive the 2001 crisis and the dozens of crises and collapses, we experienced before, **the concept of family undoubtedly comes first. Family is the most important institution of society.** We have always used these expressions together: **Strong woman, strong family, strong society.** (Nurcan Dalbudak, AKP, 2013).

Here, the representative prioritizes the significance of women's agency and autonomy inside the home. When she uses the phrase "strong woman, strong family, strong society", she conveys her conviction that societal well-being and women's empowerment are intertwined, with the former implying that the latter advances and stabilizes society as a whole. Moreover, while conservative discourse manifests itself more in religious references, it seems that praise for party leaders also comes to the fore on headscarf issues during this period. An example can be offered with the following words of Dalbudak: "I thank God a lot for this, and I express my gratitude again to our *Prime Minister* who eliminated all obstacles on this path." (Nurcan Dalbudak, AKP, 2013) Both the use of conservative terminology and the use of political party elements appear as distinguishing features of the discourse of female AKP MPs in this period.

Here, Erdoğan is also used for the legitimacy of the discourses on headscarf issue. The plenty of MPs express gratitude for the removal of the headscarf issue, citing it as a pivotal step in ending injustice and equalizing opportunities and Erdoğan's endeavors are shown as the main factor for ban lifting.

As for the concept of womanhood, it can be argued that this representative of AKP generally defines womanhood as being intimately tied to familial roles and responsibilities, emphasizing the importance of women in maintaining stable and strong families. Additionally, the representative recognizes the significance of women's agency and autonomy outside the home, linking women's empowerment to factors such as education, work, and social life involvement. In her words: "Women's empowerment is possible through uninterrupted education, employment, and presence in social life" (Nurcan Dalbudak, AKP, 2013) As a result, it can be said

that the speaker's definition of womanhood encompasses both traditional familial roles and the broader societal contributions and agency of women.

Nevertheless, the headscarf issue is evaluated in the context of violence against women. According to Öznur Çalış:

First of all, I would like to emphasize that **in our literature**, violence against women is a **custom of ignorance**; All kinds of discrimination against girls and women, let alone violence, are ignorance, primitiveness, and unconscionability. **In our history, in our civilization, in our deep-rooted family structure**, there is never any discrimination between children or between men and women. (Öznur Çalış, AKP, 2013)

Within this statement, the representative denounces violence against women, calling it an unconscionable, ignorant, and primitive behavior. It is implied that discriminatory actions against women go against society norms and ideals when it is said that such behavior is inconsistent with the values of literature, history, civilization, or family structure. In order to effectively address violence against women, the representative highlights the necessity of removing restrictions placed on women's will and honor.

According to her following words, "Of course, violence against women should not be considered only physical; The greatest violence is the shackle placed on **women's will and women's honor**." (Öznur Çalış, AKP, 2013) However, it is important to note that the speech emphasizes family, history, together with women's honor. Also, the period of ignorance (*cahiliye devri*) is a concept in Islamic history therefore mentioning it has conservative implications.

Moreover, she does not emphasize the significance of women's agency and autonomy in determining their own lives out of the private sphere. This reflects the traditional understanding of womanhood. As it is discussed above, AKP MPs see headscarf ban as a form of violence against women, framing it as a custom of ignorance. It argues discrimination against women as primitive and unconscionable, aligning with a historical perspective that rejects such practices. In this respect, the role of the family as an institution and the empowerment of women through uninterrupted education and employment are central themes in defining womanhood.

The removal of the headscarf issue in public spaces is shown as a positive development that equalizes opportunities for women.

Similar to previous legislation terms, there are also other representatives in AKP that link the significance of maintaining gender equality and women's rights in Turkey, calling for a commitment to these issues, when they make speeches on the headscarf issue. These representatives criticize the objectification or marginalization of women based on their looks or apparel by opposing the idea of politics based on women's attire and emphasizing the necessity for equitable representation.

An example statement is as follows: "This was an issue that was necessary to ensure **equality between men and women** in Turkey and to ensure fairness in representation. In Turkey, politics based on women, politics based on women's clothing, and the fact that it is an agenda item, an issue that we all should have rejected from day one." (Mihrimah Belma Satır, AKP, 2013). Just because "it is written in the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey that it is a democratic, secular, and social state of law." (Mihrimah Belma Satır, AKP, 2013), the representative argued that they need to imply the rules of law. "Having these friends [headscarved women MPs] under the roof of the TGNA is a requirement of democracy, secularism, and the rule of law." (Mihrimah Belma Satır, AKP, 2013) The representative's awareness of the multiplicity of women's experiences and identities in political representation is implied by her admission of the need for headscarved women MPs within the TGNA.

5.1.1.2.3 Findings of 26th Parliamentary Term

During the 26th term, AKP MPs generally focus on the discrimination women have suffered in the past. Attention is drawn to the female body and freedom of dress, but the emphasis on secularism, which was made in previous periods, is no longer included in their discourses. However, conservative, especially religious elements, praise for party leaders is much more pronounced during this period. Speeches of AKP MPs define womanhood within the framework of conservative values, emphasizing traditional gender roles, family values, and the intersectionality of women's experiences. Representatives in this term advocate for women's representation and empowerment within the confines of societal norms and cultural

identity, while also addressing historical injustices and contemporary challenges faced by women, particularly those related to religious and cultural identity. This all shows that the representatives commonly conduct moral evaluation as the main legitimation method in their speeches. Morality here is directly integrated with traditional societal beliefs which prioritize the place of the family and women's role as a mother. For example;

We don't really want this **distinction anymore. We are here as representatives of all kinds of women, whether veiled or uncovered, alhamdulillah, and** we promise to **God** to defend them in the best way possible and to carry them to the following days and our future.
(Hüsnîye Erdoğan, AKP, 2016)

Here, the headscarf issue is discussed in the context of women's representation with mentions of women's success in various fields and the importance of supporting women's rights. This suggests a belief in the agency and capabilities of women, albeit within certain societal norms and structures. This speech, made using a conservative language, also points out equality between women. In another example below, women are discussed together with the family. In the AKP period, women's While praising what has been done in the name of empowerment, she also adds that the headscarf ban should be lifted for the betterment of women.

As it follows:

We talked about the **importance of family ties**. We clearly see terrorism, drug abuse, turmoil and chaos, especially on young people, in countries where family structures are disrupted. We do not allow the **strong family structure we inherited from our ancestors** to deteriorate; we work to make it even stronger. (Nursel Reyhanlioğlu, AKP, 2017)

As the example reflects above, the speeches frequently point traditional gender roles, such as the importance of family ties and the role of women as nurturers and educators. While the discourse emphasizes women's roles within the family, it also suggests a form of empowerment through their contribution to maintaining family unity and stability. Women are depicted as active agents in fortifying the family structure, thereby empowering themselves and their communities. For example, phrases found in Reyhanlioğlu's speech such as "Come on girls, go to engineering and management!" suggest an encouragement for women to participate in

traditionally male-dominated fields while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of maintaining familial and societal structure.

In the 26th Legislation Term, praise for the party's women's policy is also seen in the speeches regarding headscarf issue. The grievances experienced by women in the past are frequently mentioned in this period and party leaders are thanked. The following example demonstrates this:

As stated in the events just mentioned, I am absolutely against dividing violence against women into violence against those who are uncovered or those who are veiled. Additionally, I would like to point out that our Prime Minister, or any senior executive of the AK Party has never used the headscarf as a tool of abuse. On the contrary, they have always supported us in our just struggle. (Sema Kırıcı, AKP, 2016)

The assertion that senior executives of the AK Party have never used the headscarf as a tool of abuse portrays a narrative of solidarity and support for women's rights within the party leadership. Emphasizing this support, Kırıcı seeks to position the AK Party as a champion of women's rights and empowerment, thereby shaping a narrative of womanhood that aligns with the party's values and policies. This stance challenges the notion that the experiences of women wearing the headscarf are fundamentally different from those who do not, suggesting a rejection of essentialist perspectives on womanhood.

Another aspect that stands out clearly in the speeches made during this period is the reference to the February 28 period. During this period, headscarved people were mentioned together with other conservative elements. To examine speeches with similar messages, following speeches also represent an understanding of the interconnectedness of womanhood with religious identity and the prejudice suffered by women who wear headscarves.

Twenty years have passed since February 28. The most important targets of those who carried out the coup targeting our nation's values are imam-hatip students. They were headscarved people and believers. During this process, a generation's right to education was taken away. (Hatice Dudu Özkal, AKP, 2017)

In the similar vein;

We are experiencing the honor of living these days when we take part in the Parliament as the representatives of the nation, without discrimination

between headscarved and uncovered, from those days that were said to last a thousand years. Although February 28 is against the headscarf, it is actually against the development of Turkey through the headscarf and women. (Emine Yavuz Gözgeç, AKP, 2017)

In these speeches and more, references to the practices that took place during the headscarf ban, reference to February 28, and victimized women were frequently mentioned, and the coming of the bans were described as regression. References to historical events like the February 28 period serve to contextualize the struggles faced by women, particularly those who wear the headscarf. These references frame the discourse around women's rights within a narrative of overcoming oppression and discrimination, often positioning conservative women as victims of unjust policies. In this context, womanhood is defined as the right to religious expression and the freedom to practice one's beliefs without fear of discrimination or persecution.

5.1.1.2.4 Findings of 27th Parliamentary Term

In the 27th term, AKP representatives emphasize the intersectionality of femininity, especially regarding the experience of wearing the headscarf in Turkey. Speakers draw attention to the special difficulties faced by headscarved women in the past. They positioned them as victims of discrimination and violence. Not only because of their gender, but also because of their religious and cultural identities.

Let's put the name of the issue correctly: Neşe Nur Akkaya was subjected to violence **not only because she was a woman, but because she was a woman with a headscarf**. Those who delay a confrontation by telling us 'Don't do victim literature' every time we try to decipher **Islamophobia** in this country are complicit in this crime. (Zeynep Yıldız, AKP, 2021)

The representative offers in this speech the intersectionality of womanhood, especially regarding the experience of wearing the headscarf in Turkey. She draws attention to the special difficulties faced by headscarved women, positioning them as victims of discrimination and violence not only because of their gender, but also because of their religious and cultural identities. In the example given, the woman was exposed not only to violence against women but also to Islamophobia. This points to intersectionality.

The definition of womanhood presented in this speech was made in this direction. It recognizes that being a woman is defined not only by gender but also by other social identifiers such as religious beliefs and cultural practices. According to the representative, Neşe Nur Akkaya's experience of violence, when examined in the context of wearing the headscarf, constitutes a clear example of the complex interaction between gender, religion and social norms.

Additionally, the speech rejects the stereotypical portrayal of women and draws attention to the discrimination that headscarved women face in public spaces. In Yıldız's following words, it is stated that: "Those who define 'public space' and exclude headscarved women from almost every area except their homes and streets are the real perpetrators of the audacity that imposes the class distinction in the sentence 'We don't want people like you here, go to Gaziosmanpaşa', spoken in Nişantaşı yesterday." (AKP, 2021). Here, the representative argues that the exclusion of headscarved women from certain regions perpetuates social inequalities and reinforces class divisions in society. According to this, headscarved women are also subjected to class discrimination in addition to other violence forms. The criticism here also focuses on the view against restricting women to the private sphere has a different approach when it comes to headscarved women. The headscarf is considered as an element that enables conservative women to exist in the public sphere.

As a result, AKP representatives offer a comprehensive perspective on womanhood taking different experiences and identities of women in Turkey into account. While discussing the headscarf issue, the various types of concerns that conservative women are subjected to are emphasized. Thus, only the issues of these particular women are discussed. They underline the need to address not only discrimination based on gender but also discrimination based on religious and cultural practices, ultimately advocating for greater inclusion and social justice for conservative women.

5.1.1.2.5 Summary of Findings

The findings show that, AKP's female deputies' discourse underwent significant transformation. Early narratives emphasized equality and individual rights, framing

the lifting of the headscarf ban as a democratic and secular achievement. Over time, however, the discourse shifted toward a conservative framing of womanhood, integrating religious and familial ideals.

During the 23rd term, AKP representatives such as Gül Akşit and Nimet Çubukçu described the headscarf ban as a breach of constitutional gender equality. They spoke about women's right to choose freely, placing agency at the center of their arguments. However, by the 24th and 26th terms, a shift took place. The focus moved toward women's roles inside the family, suggesting that familial duties were part of what it meant to be a woman. Yet the call for women's presence in public life was never fully abandoned. In 2008, for instance, Nimet Çubukçu defended lifting the headscarf ban as a way to fight gender discrimination. But by 2013, Nurcan Dalbudak placed "strong family ties" at the heart of societal strength, signaling a clear turn toward more traditional idea.

By the 26th term, a new tone had settled into the discourse. Memories of the February 28 process came to the forefront. Headscarved women were now portrayed as victims of systemic injustice. Their stories blended morality, faith, and loss. Emotional appeals filled the speeches, recalling the discrimination endured, especially during the post-coup years.

Themes of fairness, dignity, and religious freedom were drawn upon again and again. Womanhood, as shaped through these speeches, was tied both to the private world of family and to the public life of the nation. Headscarved women were now seen not just as survivors, but as symbols of resilience and bearers of national and moral values. Next chapter identifies the findings of HDP.

5.1.1.3 BDP/HDP: Intersectional Womanhood and Diverse Identities

The DTP, the BDP, and the HDP are pro-Kurdish and left-leaning parties that have succeeded one another. All of them have the same manner: presenting a distinctive approach to womanhood and the issue of headscarves in Parliament. These interconnected parties view the headscarf debate not merely as a gender issue but as a fundamental component of the struggles for social justice, ethnic identity, and cultural autonomy. Their discourse surrounding the headscarf goes beyond a purely

religious or political context, instead shedding light on how it intersects with the lived experiences of Kurdish women.

This section lays out the findings behind these observations. It looks closely at the speeches of female deputies, from the DTP to the HDP, on the headscarf debate. Through their words, a new idea of womanhood begins to take shape. Their arguments push back against old norms and challenge the roles the state once tried to fix in place. Step by step, a different picture of women's place in society is drawn — one that questions, resists, and reimagines.

5.1.1.3.1 Findings of 23rd Parliamentary Term

DTP was closed by its leader in 2009. 19 deputies of the Party participated in BDP Party which was founded in 2008 and took its place in the parliament after the closure of DTP. Therefore, both parties are analyzed under the same title. In the 23rd term of the assembly, female deputies of these two parties conducted the same discourse when they were dealing with headscarf issue.

Main themes that they were focusing on were democracy, freedom, human rights — especially right to education, identity politics, women's rights and equality among people. Deputies of the parties were supporting the lifting of the ban on headscarf. They were approaching this issue as violation of human rights. According to them, the state had to respect different groups, religions, and ethnicities in the society. For them, headscarf was a type of clothing of some pious women. Because headscarf was not allowed in universities and public sphere, some religious women were lacking their right to education. Some examples of the deputy speeches are as follows:

Concerns of our **young girls and women**, related to people's beliefs and lifestyles, has been abused, how it has been politicized in order to protect the status quo. And how our peoples have been turned into a reactionary alliance against the **free future of the Kurdish people** and their will to live together. (Aysel Tuğluk, DTP, 2008)

According to this speech, Tuğluk understands that the headscarf debate is more than just a matter of attire; it also involves more general concerns about religious and conscience freedom as well as individual rights. This brings a sophisticated comprehension of the intricacies associated with the headscarf and its importance to women.

The complexity of the headscarf and the various ways that people and organizations interpret are accepted and the headscarf is described as both a political object and an ideological symbol. Overcoming societal tensions and divisions, especially those between progressive and reactionary forces and secular and anti-secular factions, depends on finding a solution to the headscarf dispute are implied. She also take issue with the politicization of the headscarf discussion, claiming that it has been twisted to uphold the status quo and fuel social tensions. This indicates an understanding of how the headscarf controversy may affect women's identities and rights in society and political and ideological aspects of womanhood are entwined with it, as the headscarf turns becomes a focal point for conflicts and differences in society.

The representative also offers her party's support for liberties and calls for a solution to the headscarf dispute by stating that "My party DTP is in favor of freedoms in the headscarf issue." (Aysel Tuğluk, DTP, 2008) In short, despite there is no clear definition of womanhood in this statement, the representative's discourse on womanhood reflects a recognition of the complexities surrounding the headscarf issue and its implications for individual rights, political ideologies, and societal cohesion.

The project **to create a uniform citizen** has not only suppressed **Kurds**, but also all different **identities and cultures, minorities and different belief groups** in this country. While the Alevi identity was ignored, believers were tried to be marginalized in the person of **headscarved women**. (Gültan Kışanak, DTP, 2009)

In these speeches, the headscarf ban is seen as a method of oppressing women of faith, as part of a project to create an undemocratic, uniform citizen. It is claimed that this approach is seen as suppressing different identities or cultures. For this reason, the abolition of the headscarf ban is supported. The issue is mostly expressed by combining the problems of Kurdish and Alevi identities. MPs stated that this behavior hinders the development of the country and causes failure in the process of entering the EU. This view shows that there is a need to be aware of the difficulties faced by women who cover their heads and that discrimination based on cultural or religious identity needs to be addressed. It draws attention to the diversity of experiences and identities of women in Turkey by drawing attention to the efforts to

marginalize headscarved women and exclude the Alevi identity. Therefore, it is thought that this diversity should be included in the definition of femininity.

As long as you do not see women as **free and equal members of society**, regardless of their **ethnic identity, belief, language or religion**, both those who wear a headscarf or those who will never be free. (Ayla Akat Ata ,DTP, 2008)

Here, it also should be noted that the deputy was underlying that lifting the ban on headscarf was not enough to offer freedom to women. It was only for a particular group of women in the society. Thus, it is important to define women as equal and free members of society, irrespective of their language, religion, ethnicity, or beliefs. The reduction of women's identities and experiences to their choice of clothes by emphasizing that seeing women's independence exclusively in terms of the headscarf would not be true freedom for women. Therefore, women's issues and concerns should be identified in accordance with their demands but it should not be thought with only one dimension.

5.1.1.3.2 Findings of 24th Parliamentary Term

In the 24th legislation term, BDP/DBP female MPs are among the actors who essentially support the lifting of the headscarf ban. However, they express their comments regarding the way this issue is handled. First of all, they interpret the lifting of the headscarf ban not with any religious element, but as a criticism of the male-dominated structure. Of course, they state that the solution to this problem, that is, the lifting of the headscarf ban, is the result of the efforts made not only by AKP women but also by themselves. The most obvious example of this can be found in the following speech of Sebahat Tuncel:

But we know that **women's problems are many, not only the headscarf issue, but also when we consider the freedom of belief issue**, we know that uncovered women, especially **Alevi women, have very serious problems**. (Sebahat Tuncel, DBP, 2013)

The discourse recognizes the interdependence of womanhood with concerns of religious and cultural identity by highlighting the challenges encountered by uncovered women, especially Alevi women. This demonstrates the variety of experiences and difficulties that Turkish women have outside of the headscarf controversy. The hardships of both religious and non-religious women are laid bare.

Through this, the need for broader, more inclusive approaches to women's rights and citizenship becomes impossible to ignore. Continuing the speech, the following was added:

We are always someone's sister or mother or sister. We want to say this once again: **We are not anyone's sister, sister, or mother.** We are people who engage in politics with men here in Parliament, and we express our stance in politics as free individuals. (Sebahat Tuncel, DBP, 2013)

By denying the idea that women are only defined in relation to others (mother, sister), the discourse questions traditional gender roles and affirms women's identity as independent, politically active persons. Cultural definition of womanhood that restricts women's autonomy is criticized by drawing attention to the complaints made by women living under a male-dominated system that minimizes femininity and assigns women to subordinate tasks. It is inferred in the statement that: "this culture of the male-dominated system that sees femininity as secondary, as a substitute for men, sees women in the kitchen, or sees women as someone's sister, mother, sister, is actually the main source of the problems we experience today." (Sebahat Tuncel, DBP, 2013) This states that women's problems arise from gender inequality and that defining "woman" only in the context of family members is a reflection of the patriarchal system. In other words, it can be said that the representative defines womanhood as an individual of the public sphere rather than the private sphere.

Thus, it is understood that the MP sees women's issues through the headscarf issue as a tool that ensures the continuation of the male-dominated order through the expressions used in debates on democracy, freedom of belief and dress. Additionally, an emphasis on women from different identities, Alevi women, is observed. Third wave feminist concepts are frequently used in this issue, as in other issues. As another example of this:

Dear women, not only on the headscarf issue, but also on all kinds of rape, violence, we should be able to come together on the issue of harassment and defend women's rights. (Pervin Buldan, BDP, 2013)

This speech emphasizes the importance of inclusivity and women's rights activism in a variety of societal contexts, addressing concerns of freedom and rights that go

beyond the particular context of the headscarf. The discourse acknowledges that women's rights and liberties extend beyond the discussion of headscarves and points the importance of addressing other forms of discrimination and oppression that women face, like rape and assault. The discourse emphasizes women's agency and autonomy in advocating for equality and their own welfare in society, as well as women's rights and solidarity in the face of harassment. The remark cited above recognizes that women face a variety of challenges and experiences that go beyond the boundaries of their cultural or religious identity.

5.1.1.3.3 Findings of 26th Parliamentary Term

In the 26th legislation term, speeches on the headscarf issue are only belong to AKP and HDP MPs who frequently used religious references in their speeches. There are both similarities and differences in those speeches. On the one hand, defenses against the headscarf ban are similar but the way they defended or their stance after lifting the ban are different. AKP members often focus on the discrimination women have suffered in the past by referencing February 28. Emphasis is placed on the female body and freedom of attire and the headscarf is demonstrated as a thought of as progress and democracy.

The HDP, on the other hand, defended the lifting of the headscarf ban on the basis of women's liberation, expressing the desire for the liberation of all women regardless of their ethnic backgrounds or religious affiliations, rather than just those of a single belief or identity. In this regard, the government's stance has also been criticized. It has been criticized for both portraying the headscarf issue solely as the political success of the AK Party, disregarding the efforts of activist women, especially those with HDP views, and for problematizing the continued lack of women's representation. Kurdish women are specifically mentioned, just as Alevi women were mentioned in previous legislation terms. HDP MPs argue that they have a share in the struggle of achieving the freedom of headscarf. It is claimed that AKP is using this issue for political reasons.

One of the criticisms of the government is that those who claimed that the lifting of the headscarf ban would increase the visibility of women in the public sphere, especially in the field of political representation, did not see their expectations

fulfilled. Even after the ban lifted, women's number, which is still low in political representation, especially in the high ranked positions, is discussed by HDP MPs asking that: "You have been saying for years: 'We changed the headscarf law, today women with headscarves are here'. How many deputies of prime ministers are women?" (Besime Konca, HDP, 2015).

In the 26th legislative term, female MPs from the HDP developed their definitions of womanhood through a feminist discourse similar to previous periods. They focused on women's empowerment, their right to education, and women's participation in politics, revolving around the issue of the headscarf. Although criticisms of racism and fascism are frequently seen and associations are made specifically for Kurdish women, the feminist terminology that HDP frequently used in its previous periods is not clearly encountered in their speeches on headscarf this period. As mentioned earlier, HDP MPs advocated for the lifting of the headscarf ban as a means of women's freedom. However, upon examining the speeches delivered during this period, criticisms were directed towards the government's stance following this liberation. The HDP claimed that in the lifting of the headscarf ban, there was also a contribution from women activists advocating for this cause. As Huda Kaya stated:

Headscarf freedom was not won by the AKP... it was won by resisting women. Headscarved people do not owe their freedom to the AKP, they do not owe it to a person, on the contrary, this government and this person owe this day to the resistance of headscarved women. (Huda Kaya, HDP, 2016)

Those who strive for this cause are not only political but also women who have been negatively affected by the ban, and these women have also been supported by HDP MPs. At this point, women's representation and the concept of womanhood can be thought of as encompassing women who voice their own issues in the public sphere. The agency and resistance of women in fighting against oppressive practices and advocating for their rights are underlined including the intersection of womanhood with religious identity and political activism. Nevertheless, representing Muslims' preferences, the speaker of this speech, HDP MP, presented a more conservative discourse compared to others. For instance:

Were the winners **the head scarved ones or the Muslims? Headscarf freedom was achieved**, yes, but we were faced with losing our conscience,

virtue, justice and many similar human values... The headscarf became free, but the principle of '**justice for all**' was forgotten. (Huda Kaya, HDP, 2016)

This argument raises questions about the wider ramifications of headscarf freedom, speculating that it could have come at the price of other significant ideals like justice, morality, and conscience. The representative, therefore, concerns that the emphasis on headscarf freedom may have eclipsed more general problems of justice and fairness, thereby affecting women's experiences in society, by highlighting the need for justice for everyone.

Moreover, The HDP MPs perceive the headscarf issue as part of a broader struggle justified solely by moral evaluations. HDP MPs express discontent with the narrative portraying the lifting of the headscarf ban as an exclusive victory for the AKP or Erdoğan, asserting that the HDP also played a role in the headscarf struggle. The slogan "Justice for All, Freedom for the Headscarf" offered by Kaya constitutes an example symbolizing the collective demand for justice and freedom. These are shown as the essence of the protest and the broader principles driving the movement, which are also the components of morality in the legitimization strategies of HDP representatives.

Furthermore, in this period, reference was made to February 28th, addressing the issue of the headscarf. "The February 28 coup period, like all coup periods, was a process targeting the people, yes, but in this period, the beliefs and preferences of headscarved women were especially targeted." (Huda Kaya, HDP, 2017) This statement constitutes an example how HDP MPs emphasized intersectionality of gender and multifaceted identity of women which are influenced by religious beliefs and practices when defining womanhood.

5.1.1.3.4 Findings of 27th Parliamentary Term

There are three main frameworks that HDP MPs use when defining femininity in the 27th term. These are the agency of womanhood, challenging male-dominated politics and ensuring the recognition of Kurdish and Alevi women. As an example that includes all of these elements, Hatimoğulları Oruç's discourse can be shown as follows: "The headscarf is not a political symbol, it is women's own choices in line with their beliefs. We do not and will never accept that male-oriented politics

monopolizes the headscarf.” (Tülay Hatımoğulları Oruç, HDP, 2021) said Hatımoğulları, and continued by talking about Alevis and Kurdish citizens.

First of all, representatives argue that the headscarf is not just a political symbol, but a personal choice that women make in line with their beliefs. This framework emphasizes women’s agency and autonomy in deciding how to express their religious or cultural identity. Their discourses challenge narratives that attempt to define women’s appearance according to political agendas or social norms by centering women’s choices.

Secondly, the representatives also condemn the monopolization of the headscarf by male-oriented politics. This criticism reflects a broader concern about gender inequality and the marginalization of women’s voices in political discourse. Rejecting the idea of male dominance in matters of women’s clothing, the discourse advocates greater gender equality and participation in decision-making processes.

Finally, when talking about womanhood, even if the issue involves intersectionality, such as the headscarf issue, it includes the view that other ethnicities, more precisely Kurds should also be included in this definition. With this definition, it follows that womanhood is not free from various social structures. Including these different social structures and relationships in the definitions is important for citizenship and democracy, as can be seen in other themes.

To sum up, during this period, HDP employed moral legitimization strategies by establishing a conceptual equivalence between their discussions on the headscarf issue and various struggles, encompassing cultural and identity expressions, as well as human rights and justice. In addition, they are addressing the balance between secularism and religious freedoms, marking out the importance of coexistence and mutual respect and rejecting the reduction of the headscarf to a political symbol, emphasizing women’s empowerment and the fight against male-dominated politics. By conducting a feminist language, the discourses explore the challenges posed by a male-dominated society, including gender-based discrimination and the impact on women’s experiences and choices.

5.1.1.3.5 Summary of Findings

Female deputies from HDP, and earlier BDP/DTP brought a new voice to the headscarf debate. They emphasized that women's identities could not be reduced to a single religious or cultural frame. In their words, gender, ethnicity, religion, and culture were not separate boxes but overlapping parts of real lives. They spoke up for Kurdish, Alevi, and other women often pushed to the margins, women whose stories rarely made it into the bigger picture of citizenship and belonging.

One can see that they refused to let the headscarf become just another tool in the hands of male-dominated politics. They demanded a deeper, freer understanding of what it means to be a woman. For example, Sebahat Tuncel and Huda Kaya stood at the heart of this call. Tuncel's rejection of traditional gender roles felt like a direct challenge to an traditional patriarchal world that no longer fit to solve gender related issues. Kaya, in turn, gave voice to the women who had fought from the ground up to lift the ban, making sure their efforts were not forgotten.

Through these interventions, HDP deputies challenged narrow definitions of womanhood and called for a vision that respects diversity and embraces multiple lived realities. This manner of them never changed throughout different parliamentary terms.

5.1.1.4 MHP: Womanhood as Privacy and National Tradition

The MHP stands out in parliament as a party that approaches the issue of the headscarf by evaluating the concept of womanhood within the context of national values and cultural identity. The statements made by its female representatives carry various messages regarding Turkish nationalism and the roles of women in society. The headscarf is not merely considered as a religious or conscientious choice but also as an element of national identity.

This section takes a closer look at the statements from MHP's female representatives about the headscarf issue. The goal is to understand how the party views womanhood and the factors that influence their perspectives. What emerges is a picture of women not just as individuals with rights, but also as central figures in maintaining cultural traditions and a sense of belonging to the nation.

5.1.1.4.1 Findings of 24th Parliamentary Term

Only one female MP in MHP made a statement on the headscarf issue. This woman is Ruhsar Demirel. Ruhsar Demirel made comments on the headscarf issue twice during this period. The first of these is her criticism of the pro-government person who said “A woman with a headscarf is like a house without curtains”, which is said about those who do not wear a headscarf. This criticism was made very briefly and is not included here because it does not contain a category, code or theme to be reflected in the analysis. However, her longer speech, which started with a reference to female MPs entering the parliament wearing headscarves and is excerpted below;

You have **wives and daughters**, who cares how they dress? Moreover, if this is an extension of a belief, it is not anyone’s place... Privacy is the most important **value in our society**. (Ruhsar Demirel, MHP, 2015)

In what follows, the representative expresses a discomfort for understanding of ‘woman’ in the parliament. According to her: “Privacy is the most important value in our society. Do not intrude our privacy. What a woman covers, how many children a woman give birth to, should she give birth to this child by cesarean section, should she drink ayran, these are our private lives. These are our privacy. - I’m telling male friends - we are uneasy when our privacy is intruded upon” (Ruhsar Demirel, MHP, 2015). She relegates women’s clothing to the private sphere and describes men’s discussion of it as ‘intrusion of *privacy*’. While emphasizing that women have a say in matters concerning them, the Member of Parliament employs a traditional and somewhat -maybe not intentionally- but a masculine language. For instance, the term she uses to define privacy is “*mahrem*” in Turkish and this term is of traditional terminology. In particular, it can be used to refer to a more restricted or surveilled area of women in society. Therefore, the term “mahrem” may reflect a patriarchal or traditional perspective in some discourses.

When conducting a discourse analysis, the use of the word “mahrem” should be interpreted taking the overall context and the context into account. For example, if the term mahrem is used in speech or writing to emphasize a social order in which women’s lives are controlled or limited, the term could be interpreted as reflecting a patriarchal or traditional understanding. Of course, there is no statement in the given speech that supports restrictions of women, but it is also noteworthy that the term

“*özel alan*” (private sphere) is not preferred to be used by the MP. In this context, we cannot say that the MP used a patriarchal language, but she did not use a feminist language either. In short, it can be said that she used traditional expressions when expressing her thoughts, which is a common behavior of her political party affiliated with nationalist ideology. Therefore, in addition to the dominance of traditionalist and nationalist elements in this MP’s discourse, there is also the issue of women’s liberation and criticism of the masculine language used in the parliament.

The speech here highlights the interference into women’s private life and critiques the scrutiny and criticism that these women must endure when they decide to follow their ideas about what they should and cannot wear. The traditional approach in the discourse is also worth noting. Considering women as *wives and daughters* directly signals patriarchal definition of womanhood. Also, the rhetoric focuses on women’s autonomy and control over their own bodies and lives by claiming that decisions about attire, childbearing, and nutritional preferences are private concerns. Yet, in favor of more respect for women’s choices and privacy, this is a rejection of cultural standards that attempt to impose gender stereotypes and religious demands on women’s conduct and appearance.

5.1.1.4.2 The Summary of Findings

The MHP brought a narrower, yet distinct, voice to the debate, framing womanhood around ideas of privacy and nationalist conservatism. Compared to other parties, the fact that only one female deputy spoke is both thought-provoking and surprising. By that one person, the headscarf was treated less as a political banner and more as a matter of private life, tied to the protection of tradition.

Ruhsar Demirel, speaking in 2015, criticized the public discussions on women’s clothing, using the word ‘mahrem’ to underline how deeply private such matters are. Yet even as they defended privacy, MHP’s rhetoric stood apart from other conservative parties. They rejected heavy-handed patriarchal control, though the language they used still carried the clear marks of nationalist and conservative thought.

5.1.1.5 Results: Constructing Womanhood Through the Headscarf Debate

This long view over parliamentary discourses on the headscarf issue brings something important into focus. It shows how the idea of womanhood in Turkish politics has shifted, changed, and at times, been fiercely contested. Nothing about these constructions has been fixed. They move with the tides of institutions, ideologies, and cultural stories — a reminder that representation is always in motion, shaped by the worlds it seeks to reflect.

The findings make one thing very clear. The headscarf was never just a piece of cloth. It became a mirror, reflecting back different visions of womanhood, each struggling for space.

At the beginning, CHP deputies spoke loudly for a version of womanhood tied to secular modernity. They imagined freedom as a path away from tradition and religion. For them, lifting the ban meant a risk — a step backwards into old, patriarchal ways. The headscarf, in their eyes, was a symbol that threatened progress, a sign that could pull women away from public life and equal citizenship.

Over time, another voice grew stronger. AKP deputies reshaped the debate, weaving together ideas of tradition and personal agency. At first, they spoke of equality — a woman's right to education, to work, to be seen. Yet as years passed, their speeches began to echo with different notes: family, faith, and duty. Modern ideals stayed, but they sat alongside older visions of women's roles.

Against both these currents, the HDP offered something different. They refused to see women only through religious or cultural labels. Instead, they insisted on something bigger — a politics that could hold many identities at once. Kurdish women, Alevi women, those whose voices often went unheard — all found space in their vision. For the HDP, the headscarf was neither a trap nor a flag. It was about choice, about freedom carried not just by one group, but shared by all.

Looking across the years, the headscarf debate opens up something larger. It reveals the deep ideological divides about what it means to be a woman in Turkey. Four main patterns, as the findings show, run through the discussions — each shaped by

different party visions, by shifting institutions, by the changing winds of political life.

5.2 Womanhood Embedded in Broader Political Debates on Headscarf

5.2.1 Citizenship: Empowering Women or Restricting Freedom

The headscarf debate in Turkey has always been about more than just a matter of clothing. It is a window into bigger questions about identity, gender roles, citizenship, and the country's ideological divides. For years, this issue has long been framed with the tension between secularism and religion, modernity and tradition, personal freedom and collective cultural values (Göle, 1996; Çınar, 2008; Cindoğdu & Zencirci, 2008; Olson, 2018). However, this study aims to take its focus a little bit further. In parliamentary discussions, I believe that, the stakes are even higher, as these debates not only shape policies but also reveal deeper ideas about what it means to be a woman, a citizen, and a participant in public life.

This section explores how different political parties and their female representatives have framed the headscarf debate across legislative periods. These speeches go beyond policy, touching on personal freedoms, cultural norms, and political ideologies. From the secular-modernist critiques of the CHP to the culturally rooted but pragmatic views of the MHP, and the intersectional, inclusive lens of the HDP, each party offers a unique perspective on how the headscarf connects to larger societal issues.

By unpacking these narratives, this section aims to show how the headscarf debate is about more than just clothing—it's about the shaping the understandings of gender, identity, and citizenship in Turkey. And, perhaps more significantly, it is about the representation process that includes how these debates contribute to redefining what it means to belong in this society.

5.2.1.1 CHP: Citizenship with Constitutive and Secularist Framework

This section analyzes the findings by examining the approaches to citizenship reflected in the discourses of the CHP when addressing the headscarf issue. As the founding party of the Republic of Turkey, the CHP carries an ideological legacy

rooted in the principles of secularism, social justice, and equality. In this context, this section explores and discusses how the CHP's discourses on women's rights and citizenship reflect the party's ideological stance and its interpretation of the transformation processes within Turkey's social structure.

The terminology and themes employed in their discourse tend to remain consistent, but the party's level of engagement with the issue has not been uniform across all periods. In fact, as of the 26th legislative term, there is no discernible discourse related to the matter. For this reason, this section is constructed solely on the findings derived from the party's discourse during two legislative terms. Within these boundaries, the analysis of the discourses of CHP's female deputies offers a critical lens to understand both the party's ideology and its approach to gender equality.

5.2.1.1.1 Findings of 22nd Parliamentary Term

During the 22nd Legislation Term, despite their small number, female deputies of CHP expressed their opinions on the matter, viewing the promise as potentially hindering the emancipation of women's rights, particularly the right to education. They perceived the headscarf as a religious symbol associated with underdeveloped patriarchal countries. Specifically, the issue of the headscarf was often discussed in conjunction with religious school issues. This suggests that the female deputies from CHP are critical of policies that they believe may reinforce traditional gender norms and hinder women's empowerment, particularly in the realm of education. For instance, In Sıdıka Karabekir's words:

Especially in countries like ours that lagged behind the income level and living opportunities of **advanced welfare societies**, **women** should benefit from the **opportunities of the social state** at the highest level in order for women to **take the place they deserve in public, social and political life**. (Sıdıka Karabekir, CHP, 2003)

The representative discusses women's citizenship in terms of their ability to obtain social security, health, education, and basic amenities. This suggests a conception of citizenship that includes social and economic rights in addition to legal status. In a speech of one CHP representative, Sıdıka Karabekir (2003), for instance, argued that "It is unacceptable that **Atatürk's Turkey**, which is a candidate for the **EU**, displays common features with societies that **leave women ignorant**." For her, the

introduction of the headscarf in the public sphere would put the country in a reactionary position, restrict women's access to education and move away from European standards. In the continuation of her speech, she stated that:

Our women do not ask for help with a net of food or a pack of coal; they want to take their **place in business life** in a manner befitting human dignity, **to contribute to their home with what they earn**, to benefit **from social security rights, to receive education**. While these are your main duties as a social state. (Sıdıka Karabekir, 2003, CHP)

Asserting that political ambitions or societal injustices should not override women's rights as citizens, the representative emphasizes how crucial it is to provide equal rights and opportunities for all citizens, regardless of gender. There is a need for the government to carry out its obligations as a social state by giving women the tools and encouragement they need to fully engage in society. This illustrates a conception of citizenship that includes both access to sources for societal engagement and empowerment as well as active participation in public life.

Moreover, lifting the ban on headscarf is seen as a threat to women security, as well as a threat to national security. According to Güldal Okucu (CHP, 2003), lifting headscarf ban could result in restricting women citizens to attend national schools and it should not be witnessed in welfare states. Detachment from science, comparing welfare societies with Islamic ones, references to religion and religious schools leads to that conclusion. In addition, she mentions Atatürk's name during her speech to prove her ideas. Such behavior shows that she conducts a Kemalist discourse. For instance, Güldal Okucu, argued that:

We are witnessing its [government's] efforts ... making society to accept the headscarf issue, **to direct students to tariqa schools, to institutionalize religious-oriented education and training, imam education, girls' imam-hatip schools and Anatolian imam-hatip high schools** to be examples of a new system to be imposed on the society in order **to replace the general education model** and we also see that the process continues with new dimensions that gnaw at the foundations of the republic.(Güldal Okucu, CHP, 2003)

This statement suggests that women's citizenship is being influenced by government actions aimed at institutionalizing religious-oriented education and training, particularly through the promotion of headscarves and the establishment of religious

schools such as imam-hatip schools. By emphasizing these initiatives as efforts to replace the general education model, the representative implies that they undermine the principles of secularism and gender equality upon which the republic was founded. Just as her other colleagues, headscarf issue is recognized as a step to impose a religious system on the society. It is seen as a threat to national security of the republic, as well as a threat to women citizens who may not exercise their rights.

Furthermore, the reference to “girls’ imam-hatip schools” specifically tells how these policies may affect women’s access to education and their ability to participate fully in society. What it really shows is this: women are losing ground as citizens, and it’s happening most visibly in education and religious life, all because of what the government is doing. The party framed citizenship and equality through a limited, urban-elite prism, and although its reforms—such as providing voting rights and encouraging women in education—were progressive. They frequently excluded rural and religious women. Critiques of elitism and restricted inclusivity resulted from this strategy’s positioning of women as symbols of the Republic’s achievements while failing to adequately confront patriarchal dynamics in the private sphere (White, 2003). Notwithstanding these drawbacks, CHP’s “state feminism” laid the groundwork for women’s civic engagement while ignoring structural gender inequality, a legacy that still influences its rhetoric today.

5.2.1.1.2 Findings of 23rd Parliamentary Term

In the 23rd Legislation Term, CHP representatives suggest that the headscarf symbolizes the Islamist movement and the religious state, and that wearing one promotes a specific ideological agenda that could affect how people view women. Concerns over how wearing a headscarf may affect women’s access to education and engagement in public life are raised by the suggestion that allowing it in higher education settings constitutes discrimination, potentially impacting women’s citizenship rights and their ability to fully participate in civic life.

Serter, for instance, preferred to use the word “turban” instead of headscarf. This nuance is highly importance since the word turban is not preferred to be used by conservatives. Indeed, in the findings of the discourses, it is frequently possible to encounter with AKP representative’s interruptions pointing that they do not

appreciate the word “turban” being used in debates about headscarves (e.g. see Radiye Sezer Katırcıoğlu, 2020). Anyway, Serter emphasizes that veil is a symbol of religious identity and thinks that the founding elements of the Republic of Turkey are threatened. According to her, “the headscarf is a style of clothing that **reduces women to the status of a second-class individual**, eliminates equality between men and women, and cannot be described as freedom.” (CHP, 2008) In this sense, Serter expresses women’s freedom from a completely different perspective.

Serter criticizes the proposed constitutional change that would permit headscarf wearers on college campuses, portraying it as a danger to the secular state. This brings to light worries about how women’s citizenship rights and the larger secular framework may be affected by religious symbols used in public organizations. In a secular state, the representative raises concerns about the consequences for women’s rights and freedoms by claiming that the headscarf is a politicized religious identity. This shows a concern for upholding secular values and stopping actions that could jeopardize women’s equality and rights as citizens. The case against permitting the headscarf in universities is supported by references to national and international court and legal rulings. This emphasizes how crucial it is to preserve legal requirements and human rights concepts in order to defend the liberties and rights of women.

Treating the headscarf issue as a national security issue has been discussed more harshly and clearly by some MPs of CHP. Stemming from Baytok’s words: “Turban is not limited to educational institution; it is also rapidly becoming widespread in government offices.” (CHP, 2007) It is inferred that the representative seems concerned about the decline of secular values in public institutions based on her depiction of the headscarf as a danger to secularism. This might be an indication of a larger concern for the protection of women’s liberties and rights in a secular context. The representative also makes the implication that religious factors may have an impact on or limit women’s participation in public life by drawing attention to the headscarf’s growing popularity in political and educational settings.

In her following words, she stated that: “**After the turban, comes the black chador.** After the black chador and turban, comes the terrorist organization that kills people with hogtie.” The headscarf’s link with detrimental societal changes, like the term

“terrorist organization,” raises questions about how religious symbols affect social cohesiveness and stability.

The suggestion that allowing the wearing of headscarves in higher education settings constitutes discrimination raises concerns over how it may affect women’s access to education and engagement in public life. This implies that the normalization of headscarves in educational institutions could create barriers for women who choose not to wear them or who belong to religious or cultural backgrounds that do not align with this practice. The CHP representatives argue that permitting headscarves in institutes of higher learning goes against ideals of equality and court rulings, as it favors some groups at the expense of others. By presenting the ban on headscarves as a self-defense mechanism of the democratic republic, which is secular in nature, the Arat suggests that maintaining secular values and preventing religious views from taking over public life are imperative. For her: “which [turban] is known to have been transformed into **the symbol of the Islamist movement and the religious state all over the world, contrary to the principle of secularism.**” (Necla Arat, CHP, 2008)

The claim that religious convictions should not control or dictate public activities implies that maintaining women’s equality before the law and safeguarding their right to citizenship depend on the secularism. Additionally, the representative frames the headscarf as a political and religious symbol, implying that wearing it carries more ideological ramifications than just being a question of personal preference in higher education.

Perhaps it is useful to remind that there is no finding that goes beyond these speeches or has an attitude that contradicts these speeches in the statements of CHP women deputies. The findings given as examples in this section are not the only existing statements, but they are selected examples that reflect the general attitude in this subject. Therefore, it can be argued that CHP representatives in the 23rd legislative term claimed headscarf symbolizes the Islamist movement and the religious state, and it promotes a specific ideological agenda that could affect how people view women. The argument that permitting the wearing of a headscarf in higher education settings is discriminatory raises questions about how it may impact women’s access to education and participation in public life.

The findings show that CHP's female deputies reframed the issue of women's citizenship in the context of social equality and secularism. According to them, lifting the headscarf ban could pose a threat to women's individual freedoms and make them more vulnerable to societal pressures. Within this framework, they expressed concerns that allowing the headscarf in public spaces might limit women's equal participation in social and public life, creating an environment where they are unable to fully exercise their rights and freedoms.

In this context, CHP deputies did not view the removal of the headscarf ban as an act of individual freedom but rather as a mechanism that could expose women to the pressures of societal norms and religious references. Secularism served as a cornerstone in their evaluation. They argued that permitting the headscarf in the public sphere would not lead to women's emancipation as individuals but would instead allow religious references to exert greater influence on both private and public life, ultimately undermining women's citizenship rights.

This approach by CHP's female deputies reflects a conceptualization of citizenship that extends beyond individual rights, connecting it closely to social equality, the preservation of a secular order, and the liberation of public spaces. In this sense, their understanding of women's citizenship considers the broader social context, emphasizing the sustainability and applicability of rights within that specific framework.

5.2.1.1.3 Findings of the 24th Parliamentary Term

In the 23rd Legislation Term, CHP deputies did not perceive the removal of the headscarf ban as an act of individual freedom but rather as a tool that could expose women to the pressures of societal norms and religious references. Secularism, in particular, served as a fundamental point of reference in their evaluation. They argued that allowing the headscarf in public spaces would not lead to women's emancipation as individuals but would instead enable religious references to exert greater influence on both private and public life, ultimately weakening women's citizenship rights.

In the 24th legislative period, neither the claims nor the discourses of the CHP MPs have changed. While the speeches expressing concern about the country's further

Islamization at a dominant rate continued, MPs criticize the moral evaluations of other MPs -particularly of AKP- that keep equivalence between the headscarf ban's lifting and rights and freedoms. In this sense, the MPs accuse the AKP of using the headscarf issue as a tool for political manipulation, suggesting that it serves as a distraction from core issues and is employed as a mask for religious policies through women.

When we look at the events that have happened in recent days, under the name of free dress code, children are not allowed to wear skirts above the knee, tank tops in schools. But in these schools, headscarves are allowed, and even, friends, as you can see in this photo, chadors are also allowed. (Dilek Akagün Yılmaz, CHP, 2013)

Concern for women's civic rights in the educational system is evident in the speaker's questioning of the Minister of National Education, especially in relation to matters of dress code and religious expression. An implied criticism of how female pupils are treated differently because of what they wear suggests that there is a problem with inclusion and gender equality in the classroom. The talk promotes equal rights and opportunities for all students, regardless of gender or religious affiliation, and rejects the idea that women's citizenship is constrained or defined by cultural expectations surrounding attire and religious expression.

Moreover, the criticism of the AKP government's purported intentions to weaken secularism in the educational system subtly tackles women's citizenship. This implies a concern for women's freedom of expression and access to education within a secular context, because possible elimination of secularism from the Turkish Penal Code and Constitution raises concerns about women's freedoms and rights as citizens of the country within the political and legal framework. Government measures that might deny women access to education or restrict their liberties because of their cultural or religious identity are implicitly criticized, raising issues of inclusion and gender equality in the larger social context.

Finally, interpretations on how cultural norms and practices affect women's freedoms and futures are found in the speeches of CHP in this term. For instance, Şafak Pavey shows her worry for young girls who are married off at an early age and covered up is a reflection of her larger care for women's rights and welfare by stating

that: “While many women cover themselves out of belief, many girls are forcibly covered by the family forces that control them ... I’m talking about our girls who were veiled at the age of 5 and married at the age of 15.” (Şafak Pavey, CHP, 2013) The discourse criticizes the weakening of women’s rights and social independence, especially in situations when girls are forced into early marriage and veiling. This emphasizes the significance of women’s civic rights, such as the freedom from oppressive behaviors and control over their bodies.

5.2.1.1.4 Summary of Findings

The findings suggest that CHP’s engagement with the headscarf debate largely persisted until the 24th legislative term. Yet after the lifting of the ban, a noticeable silence followed. No major statements were made by female deputies on the subject.

It becomes clear from this period that CHP’s approach to the headscarf and to citizenship was shaped by a deep commitment to secularism and the constitutional order. The lifting of the ban was framed not as a victory for personal freedom, but as a threat to the fabric of the secular republic. In their discourse, citizenship was rarely discussed in terms of individual rights. Instead, it was imagined as a collective duty — a means of preserving social balance and protecting secular values. No deputy stood up to say directly, “this is what citizenship means to me.” Still, the framework they built spoke volumes.

The statements of female deputies showed a consistent pattern. Citizenship rights were interpreted not through the lens of personal choice, but through the needs of the constitutional system. Some warned that lifting the headscarf ban could weaken secularism and open the door to democratic backsliding. There is a tension here — a visible pull between the desire to defend individual freedoms and the fear of losing the secular foundations of the state. Yet, again and again, the solution was framed as lying within equality and constitutional justice, not personal liberty.

In the end, CHP’s view of citizenship in relation to the headscarf centered more on maintaining public order than on expanding personal freedom. Women’s rights, too, were discussed within this protective frame. In a world where secularism seemed under siege, the defense of citizenship became inseparable from the defense of the secular public sphere itself. Through imagined scenarios of democratic decline, the

idea of citizenship was gradually reshaped — no longer simply a set of rights, but a safeguard for a fragile social order.

5.2.1.2 AKP: Conservative Framework of Citizenship

This section examines the approaches of AKP's female deputies to women's citizenship through their discourses on the headscarf issue. The Party has addressed the headscarf issue in Turkish politics not only as a matter of religious freedom but also as an indicator of citizenship rights and social justice. Both conservative and modern elements are combined in the discourses on the headscarf. Specifically, women's rights to education while wearing the headscarf and their presence in public spaces are framed within the context of individual freedoms and equal opportunities.

In this section, findings examine the legislative periods from 2002 to 2023 in detail. They explore the efforts during the 23rd and 24th legislative terms to lift the headscarf ban and recognize rights, and during the 26th and 27th terms, the resolution of the headscarf issue. However, references to this issue persisted, emphasizing past grievances and AKP's role in addressing them, offering insights into how the party constituted citizenship through female representatives' discourses.

5.2.1.2.1 Findings of 23rd Parliamentary Term

What is prominent in the speeches of AKP representatives in this term is the framework for women's citizenship includes constitutional rights and freedoms, especially the idea of equality before the law. The AKP representatives in the 23rd term claims that women should not be subjected to discrimination on the basis of their gender or religious beliefs and that they have equal rights as citizens when they were discussing headscarf issue. For instance, Güldal Akşit, who offered her thoughts on the headscarf issue, started her words with an introduction that is:

The Republic of Turkey is an indelible **democratic, secular, and social state of law**. Among the fundamental duties of the state is to not limit basic rights and freedoms in a way incompatible with the principles of justice.(Güldal Akşit, AKP, 2008)

Moreover, the state is being urged to carry out its obligation of removing social, political, and economic obstacles that prevent women from fully engaging in society.

This is consistent with the idea of citizenship as participating actively in public life and having access to tools for personal growth and empowerment. According to Güldal Akşit, for instance, “If there are such social, political, or economic limitations, they should be lifted, and the necessary conditions for the material and spiritual development of individuals should be provided.” Moreover, “imposing such restrictions **on the access of our young girls to higher education** solely based on their choices of clothing is extremely hurtful and shameful.” Here, the representative is in favor of ending discriminatory laws that restrict women’s access to education and obstruct their spiritual and material growth, such as the prohibition on headscarves.

The representatives also criticized the de facto scenario that was at present during the 23rd legislative term that governed Turkey, depriving female students with headscarves of their right to an education. The disparity that exists between the actual discriminatory practices that exist on the ground and the constitutional ideals of justice and equality are discussed in this manner. For instance, “Will we **protect the secular system** by not educating girls? Will we protect the secular system by throwing girls out of university? Or will we solve this problem by educating our girls equally with boys under the rule of equality and justice?” (Nimet Çubukçu, AKP, 2008), the Minister (and a representative at the same time) advocates for institutional solutions by presenting the issue as one that lawmakers must address within the walls of parliament in order to guarantee women’s equal access to education and so fulfill their rights as citizens. Accordingly, the preservation of the secular system is not only possible through laws and regulations but also through education. Such approach contains a critique that associates secularism with the restriction of women’s access to education. Additionally, the statements in the form of questions suggest that a strict implementation of secularism could lead to negative consequences and appear to advocate for a more flexible understanding of secularism. This could indicate that secularism is being redefined in the context of social transformation and is attempting to move beyond an orthodox perspective.

In short, ban of headscarf from the universities is seen as a “typical gender discrimination” (Nimet Çubukçu, AKP) and in order to combat gender discrimination, there is an appeal to the ideals of justice and equality, promoting the

education of female children on par with that of male children. This is consistent with the idea that citizenship entails access to opportunities and rights as well as active involvement in society. Accordingly, the primary duty of the state is not to limit fundamental rights and freedoms in a manner incompatible with justice. The MPs sought to demonstrate the ban's inconsistency with the rights and freedoms outlined in the 1982 Constitution, referencing specific articles of the constitution. Additionally, they pointed to particular articles emphasizing the right to education for all citizens. The importance of education, particularly higher education, is emphasized as a critical element contributing to the development of individuals' personalities. They draw attention to the European Court of Human Rights decision, emphasizing the role of education in preventing hindrances to personality development. Moreover, female deputies from the AKP also employed role model authority by referring to Atatürk, the founder of the secular Republic, as an authoritative figure to support their position by focusing on Atatürk standing that supported equality in education.

In conclusion, the discourses in this term address citizenship rights through access to education. The restriction of women's right to education in the name of secularism is strongly criticized, and it is argued that citizenship, as a fundamental right, is directly connected to education. At this point, secularism is redefined, asserting that allowing women with religious or traditional freedoms to attend university wearing headscarves aligns directly with the founding principles. In this sense, secularism is reinterpreted not as an obstacle that restricts citizenship rights but as something harmonized with social justice and equal opportunities.

When examined in this context, the citizenship implicit in these discourses is presented not merely as a legal status but as a concept that guarantees individuals' rights and equal access to opportunities. As previously discussed, this equality and these rights are argued to originate from the constitution itself. Moreover, citizenship is not only addressed on an individual level but also collectively, as findings demonstrate that women's education is portrayed not only as an individual right but also as a necessity for societal development and modernization.

5.2.1.2.2 Findings of 24th Parliamentary Term

When the speeches regarding the headscarf issue in the 24th legislative period are examined, the distinguishing feature of the AKP compared to other periods and other parties is the coexistence of conservative elements and modern elements in the language used. This situation is also seen in their approach to women's citizenship.

When we look at the AKP MPs' definition of womanhood, although the role of women in the family is prioritized, it is implied that women's problems can be solved by the presence of women in the public sphere. Especially, the discourse that the headscarf issue affects women's educational status has been associated with the presence of women in the public sphere. For instance, the representative Dalbudak in the 24th legislation term emphasizes the importance of social interaction, work, and education in empowering women by stating that:

Women's empowerment is possible through uninterrupted **education, employment, and presence in social life**. ... I think that with the right policies implemented, women's employment rates will be much higher from now on. Additionally, with the removal of the headscarf issue in public spaces, this injustice has ended and opportunities have been equalized. (Nurcan Dalbudak, AKP, 2013)

With these words, she also suggests that women's citizenship rights and possibilities for full involvement in society should be recognized. For her, removing obstacles to women's inclusion and involvement in public life needs recognition of the elimination of the headscarf issue in public areas as putting an end to injustice and equalizing possibilities. In her following words, the Prime Minister is thanked for removing barriers surrounding the headscarf problem, indicating support for the idea that government actions are important in advancing women's rights and citizenship possibilities.

Safeguarding women's rights and citizenship is handled within the larger context of society. "**In our history, in our civilization, in our deep-rooted family structure,** there is never any discrimination between children or between men and women" (Öznur Çalış, AKP, 2013).

Here, the representative emphasizes on how crucial democratization is to lift the headscarf prohibition, which is shown as the reason for the discrimination of women

which claimed as have never seen in the tradition. From a discourse analysis perspective, this statement constructs a narrative of women's citizenship as an integral part of societal fabric, rooted in historical and cultural traditions of equality. It suggests that any discrimination against women is not only contrary to contemporary values but also goes against deeply ingrained cultural norms and historical practices.

In addition to that, more conservative discourses are also expressed in the speeches of AKP representatives in this term. An example is as follows:

We are doing everything we can to improve the situation and we continue to do so. But please, friends, no one should criticize anyone's religion. **We, alhamdulillah, were born Muslims, we are willing to die Muslims**, but please, you don't go there and point out **Islamophobia**, but you over and over and say, 'No, sir, there is such a situation in Turkey: Turkey is anti-secular, Turkey is anti-democratic...' There is no such thing. I said: 'What are we doing? Where are we going when there is a headscarf ban in a Muslim country?' (Tülin Erkal Kara, AKP, 2013)

Stemming from this speech, it can be argued that the representative voices Muslim women's citizenship rights and liberties, especially when it comes to wearing a headscarf, by denouncing Islamophobia and urging listeners not to disparage anyone's faith.

The representative's focus to have been born a Muslim and to be prepared to die such demonstrates a sense of religious identity and unity, and it may also be seen as an endorsement of the defense of Muslim women's liberties and rights within a larger social framework. This shows that inquiring as to why a headscarf prohibition exists in a nation where Muslims predominate, the representative suggests criticism of laws that limit women's freedom to express their cultural identities and religious convictions.

On the other hand, some representatives of AKP also mention of guaranteeing equity in representation implies a dedication to advancing women's civic rights and political engagement possibilities. For instance, it is argued that "Having these friends [headscarved women MPs] under the roof of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey is a requirement of democracy, secularism, and the rule of law." (Mihrimah

Belma Satır, AKP, 2013). AKP MPs strongly condemn violence against women, framing it as a custom of ignorance. It denounces discrimination against women as primitive and unconscionable, aligning with a historical perspective that rejects such practices. In this respect, the role of the family as an institution and the empowerment of women through uninterrupted education and employment are central themes. For instance, the removal of the headscarf issue in public spaces is seen as a positive development that equalizes opportunities for women. Therefore, the representative validates the presence of women wearing headscarves as part of women's participation and representation in democratic governance.

In conclusion, it is observed that during this period, religious references or moral values were used to shape the understanding of women's citizenship. In AKP's discourses, it can be argued that a form of "balance policy" was pursued by blending conservative values with modern approaches. This discourse asserts that women's ability to express their religious identities in social life is considered part of their citizenship rights. The headscarf ban is framed not only as a violation of individual rights but also as a restriction on women's participation in the public sphere. Ultimately, these statements indicate that during the 24th legislative term, the AKP attempted to build a bridge between secularism and citizenship through a conservative modernity perspective.

5.2.1.2.3 Findings of 26th Parliamentary Term

The 26th legislative term marks the beginning of a new era in which the headscarf ban has been officially lifted, and discussions about whether the issue should remain on the political agenda have come to an end. The discourses of this period redefined women's place in the public sphere, their rights, and freedoms from a more conservative perspective than before. Yet, similar to previous terms, headscarf issue is once again handled as an obstacle for women's exercise of education rights.

Come on Girls to School!' (*Haydi Kızlar Okula!*) We started our journey by saying, 'Come on girls, go to engineering and management!' after a serious schooling rate. By saying this, we support the power and success of women in fields that have been seen as men's work for years. (Nursel Reyhanlıoğlu, AKP, 2017)

This speech tells the government's dedication to encouraging women in historically male-dominated sectors like management and engineering, signifying an acknowledgement of women's rights and their status as members of society. Women's involvement and inclusion in such facets of society by endorsing governmental programs aimed at protecting their education rights and empowering women in this way is promoted.

In the speeches of AKP representatives, a wider acceptance of women's citizenship and rights, such as the freedom of speech, the right to an education, and the ability to engage in public life without fear of discrimination or retaliation is demonstrated. The discussion of AKP MPs upholds women's rights to full participation in society without being subjected to violence or prejudice because of what they choose to wear. Another example is as follows:

Additionally, I would like to point out that our Prime Minister, or any senior executive of the AK Party has never used the headscarf as a tool of abuse. On the contrary, they have always supported us in our just struggle, **in our struggle for the headscarf**, and they have struggled to lift this ban, this meaningless ban. I wish these reactions had been given years ago... I wish the same sensitivity had been shown years ago and I had not been expelled from **METU** for **attending class with a headscarf**. (Sema Kırıcı, AKP, 2017)

Recognizing the backing of political figures in the fight for the headscarf ban, one of the important features of this this speech is that it reflects an opposing discriminatory behavior towards women's citizenship right of education. Such an approach, which embodies moral evaluation, can be justified through positive concepts such as "inclusion" and "social development". This strategy can be used to emphasize various values and highlight the search for solutions to social problems in order to have a positive impact on society at large. Additionally, legitimization through moral evaluation can be achieved by referencing universally accepted ideals such as human rights advocacy and activism. In this way, the vision of social change and progress offered by the discourse may have a chance of gaining broad social support and acceptance.

Another important feature of this term's speeches is reference to the February 28 period as being "against the headscarf" which draws attention to the challenges faced

by women in expressing their religious identity in the public sphere. The representatives legitimize their support on headscarf lift in order to prevent the renewal of past grievances, rather than to explain why the headscarf ban should be lifted. Therefore, the headscarf issue is brought up repeatedly in relation to the struggle of women MPs themselves, and previous incidents, such the victimization-causing February 28 process.

In this vein, the representatives of AKP strongly criticize the oppressive policies implemented during the February 28 period, which targeted headscarved individuals and restricted their access to education. Their discourse in this term frames these challenges as obstacles to women's citizenship, suggesting that restrictions on religious expression undermine women's rights as citizens and impede the development of the nation.

Today is **February 28**. We are experiencing the honor of living these days when we take part in the Parliament as the representatives of the nation, without **discrimination between veiled and unveiled**. (Emine Yavuz Gözgeç, AKP, 2017)

Gözgeç's discourse, for instance, connects women's citizenship to the broader development goals of the nation, suggesting that inclusivity and respect for religious freedom are essential for Turkey's progress. Her following words stated that "Although **February 28** is against the headscarf, it is actually against the development of Turkey through the headscarf and women." (Emine Yavuz Gözgeç, AKP, 2017) This perspective positions women as active participants in the development process, whose citizenship rights are integral to the advancement of society as a whole. The importance of education is given as a means of enabling women to fully participate in society, assert their rights, and contribute to the nation's development.

For sure, this denial of education rights is exposed for a specific group of women, namely headscarved individuals attending imam-hatip schools. This stance suggests the intersectionality of gender and religion in shaping women's experiences of citizenship, particularly in the realm of education. It is seen in the following words:

Years have passed since **February 28**. The most important targets of those who carried out the coup targeting our **nation's values are imam-hatip students**. They were **headscarved people and believers**. During this process, a generation's **right to education** was taken away. (Hatice Dudu Özkal, AKP, 2016)

The discourse implicitly recognizes the intersectionality of gender and religion in shaping women's citizenship experiences. Specifically addressing the discrimination faced by headscarved women, the representative acknowledges the exclusive discriminations they encounter due to their religious identity, while also advocating for their rights as citizens.

Consequently, one of the most striking aspects of this period is the frequent references to veiled, devout Muslim women, the February 28 process, and Imam Hatip students. These references often emphasize the role AKP played in resolving these issues in the past. This recurring pattern seems to reflect an effort by AKP to anchor its discourse in a historical narrative while also engaging in identity-based politics. There might also be other reasons behind this approach, such as strengthening ties with the conservative voter base or pointing to what they see as the flawed practices of the secular regime to justify their current policies. Of course, these are just possibilities. While this thesis does not claim to provide definitive answers to these motivations, the findings do show how issues related to womanhood are framed in a way that constitutes women's citizenship and even reimagines it as a part of a national identity.

5.2.1.2.4 Findings of 27th Parliamentary Term

In the 27th legislative term, AKP MPs' discourses on headscarf are framed with women's citizenship in terms of political empowerment and social inclusion, particularly through the lens of educational opportunities and religious freedoms. During this period, AKP female MPs see the headscarf issue as a success of the AKP. The speakers, representing the AKP, praise their party's efforts in challenging discriminatory policies, particularly the headscarf ban imposed during the February 28 postmodern coup period. By addressing this ban, the discourse suggests a broader struggle for women's rights and citizenship, emphasizing the AKP's role in restoring the rights of marginalized groups, such as headscarved women, vocational high

school students, and Imam-Hatip students. For instance, Bilgin Uygur stated in her speech that:

The AK Party also ended the coefficient tyranny, which was implemented at the expense of completing vocational high schools. Headscarved women, vocational high school students, and Imam-Hatip students who are treated like stepchildren by providing equal opportunities in education. Their usurped rights were returned. (Belgin Uygur, AKP, 2020)

The discussion centers on the AKP's efforts to abolish discriminatory laws. The topic of women's access to school is brought up when discussing the repeal of the headscarf ban. It presents the party as a defender of equal citizenship and women's rights, particularly for those marginalized due to their beliefs in religion. From a critical perspective, the discourse promotes a citizenship narrative that is strongly associated with one's religious identity and educational opportunities.

During this period, AKP's discourse clearly reveals its efforts to legitimize its policies by emphasizing past grievances and framing them around the restoration of rights and the establishment of social justice. For instance, terms like "coefficient tyranny" strongly highlight the discrimination experienced by headscarved women, vocational high school students, and Imam-Hatip students. Subsequently, by emphasizing the restoration of the rights of these groups, the party positions itself as a defender of social equality and opportunities. This demonstrates that the discourse during this period extends beyond education policies and reflects an ambition to define and expand the citizenship rights of women and other conservative social groups.

In summary, AKP's understanding of citizenship during this period, as in other periods, combines both conservative and modern elements. The lifting of the headscarf ban, a matter that AKP takes pride in and views as a significant achievement, is framed as part of individual freedoms and equal opportunities. At the same time, these rights are also defended in the context of protecting and enhancing the visibility of religious and cultural identities. This approach shows that women's citizenship is conceptualized not only as a matter of individual rights but also as a notion intertwined with social values and identities. Thus, it can be said that AKP places the grievances experienced by these groups at the center of both a historical narrative and a political argument.

5.2.1.2.5 Summary of Findings

The findings show something different in AKP's approach to the headscarf issue. Citizenship here was not framed as something fragile to be protected, but as something to be expanded and restored.

Unlike CHP, AKP did not see the headscarf as a threat to the constitutional order. Instead, it became a symbol of rights regained, of wrongs being set right. Their speeches spoke to a broader idea of citizenship — one tied to equal access, visibility, and the right to carry religious and cultural identities into public life.

At its core, AKP's discourse blended conservative values with modern hopes, looking both backward to address old injustices and forward to imagine a more inclusive public sphere in the early legislative terms, AKP emphasized the headscarf ban as a violation of women's fundamental rights, particularly their right to education. Female deputies explicitly argued that lifting the ban was essential to ensuring democratic equality and enabling women to participate in the public sphere on equal footing with men. For instance, the headscarf ban was described as part of a broader system of discrimination, as reflected in the statement: Will we protect the secular system by throwing girls out of university? Or will we solve this problem by educating our girls equally with boys under the rule of equality and justice?" (Nimet Çubukçu, AKP, 2008). This statement captures the heart of AKP's vision of citizenship — one deeply tied to social justice. Here, addressing systemic inequalities is not a luxury, but a duty of the democratic state.

In the later terms, especially after the headscarf ban was lifted, a shift became visible. The focus moved toward healing old wounds. Female deputies often spoke of the women who had suffered through the February 28 process. Their stories were not forgotten; they were brought into the open as reminders of a justice long denied.

One deputy put it simply: "Headscarved women... who are treated like stepchildren by providing equal opportunities in education." (Belgin Uygur, AKP, 2020) Through these words, the lifting of the ban was framed not only as an act of restoring individual freedom, but also as a step toward collective dignity. The headscarf itself took on new meaning. It became a symbol of women's agency, a flag for resilience, woven into the larger narrative of national pride and democratic growth.

Looking at the broader picture, AKP's approach to citizenship in the headscarf debate stands on three pillars: restoring personal freedoms, promoting social justice, and embracing cultural and religious diversity. Here, citizenship is more than a matter of legal equality. It is about creating a public space where every identity can breathe without fear. The headscarf debate, in this sense, gave AKP a platform. A chance to claim itself as a defender of a deeper democracy — one that ties conservative values to modern dreams of justice and equality.

5.2.1.3 DTP/BDP/HDP: Pluralist Framework of Citizenship

This section explores the findings on how the HDP, as well as its predecessors the DTP and the BDP, approached women's citizenship through their discourses on the headscarf issue and the frameworks they used to address it. A closer look reveals that HDP female deputies have consistently supported the removal of the headscarf ban, legitimizing their stance as a matter of women's rights and freedoms. However, unlike the AKP, they did not justify their position by referencing conservative values or, as they did initially, the founding principles of the state. Instead, they foregrounded marginalized groups in their discourses, consistently pointing out Kurdish and Alevi women.

This critique introduces another feature of the HDP's understanding of citizenship: women are portrayed as active agents who are aware of their rights and challenge the system to claim them. This reimagining of citizenship introduces a new dimension to the party's discourse. In this section, this study examines the findings of DTP/BDP/HDP representatives' discourses on headscarf in detail to uncover the nuances of this approach and its implications for understanding women's citizenship within the HDP's political framework.

5.2.1.3.1 Findings of 23rd Parliamentary Term

DTP and BDP, also known as the pro-Kurdish and leftist parties in the parliament, which are successors of each other, have been pro-headscarves from the very beginning. Similar to the AKP, they discussed the headscarf issue within the framework of women's rights, freedom and democratization in Turkey. The freedom to wear a headscarf was supported by DTP/BDP deputies. Headscarf was seen as part

of an all-encompassing value system that embraces citizenship rights. In the debate over the headscarf, the representatives defended liberties and rights, stressing the significance of doing so, without caving in to political expediency or justifications. This shows a dedication to maintaining the values of equality and individual liberties, especially for women.

To begin with the findings, Aysel Tuğluk of DTP's speech in 2008 sets an example of the party's approach to women's citizenship. She focused on the multifaceted nature of the headscarf issue, stating that:

It is about the **freedom of religion and conscience** as much as it is about the **rights and freedoms of the person**. It is a political material that everyone uses according to its own as well as being an **ideological symbol**, causing regime crises, dividing the society into 'progressive-reactionary', 'secular-antilaic' (Aysel Tuğluk, DTP, 2008)

These statements acknowledged that the headscarf debate has a significant impact on people's identities, lifestyles, and beliefs—especially those of young girls and women. Thus, women's agency and autonomy in choosing how to exhibit their cultural identities and religious beliefs are something that should be protected in order to provide implications for women's citizenship rights in the larger political environment.

The representatives of DTP/BDP are committed to making sure that women have equal access to citizenship rights and opportunities, regardless of their cultural or religious background, by supporting equal treatment regardless of identity. According to Sebahat Tuncel (BDP, 2008), "the more valuable the Turk is, the more valuable the Kurd is in this country, the more valuable the Alevi is, the more valuable the headscarf is, and what the state should do is to treat everyone equally in this regard." The speaker's identification of democratization as the primary issue points to the necessity of addressing structural obstacles that prevent women from participating fully in society, such as problems with inequality and discrimination based on cultural or religious identity.

In their criticism of the standard citizen policy, the representatives of DTP/BDP defend the liberties and rights of all citizens, especially those of women from

different backgrounds. This suggests a dedication to guaranteeing women's equal access to citizenship rights and opportunities, irrespective of their ethnic or religious identity. According to Gültan Kışanak (BDP, 2008), "The project to create a uniform citizen has not only suppressed Kurds, but also all different identities and cultures, minorities and different belief groups in this country. While the Alevi identity was ignored, believers were tried to be marginalized in the person of headscarved women." In these speeches, the headscarf ban is claimed as a method of oppressing women of faith, as part of a project to create an undemocratic, 'uniform citizen'. It is claimed that this approach is seen as suppressing different identities or cultures. For this reason, the abolition of the headscarf ban is supported. The issue is mostly expressed by combining the problems of Kurdish and Alevi identities.

The representative seems to be acknowledging the need to remove structural obstacles preventing women from participating fully in society and to defend their rights as citizens by bringing up the 'marginalized' situation of headscarved women and other ethnic groups.

To sum up, DTP/BDP's female MPs challenges the idea that persons with headscarves should be the only ones entitled to freedom of religion and conscience. Instead, she promotes a more inclusive definition of religious freedom that defends the rights of all people, regardless of their religious practices or beliefs. According to Ayla Akat Ata (DTP, 2008), "As long as you do not see women as free and equal members of society, regardless of their ethnic identity, belief, language or religion, both those who wear a headscarf or those who will never be free." There is a claim that advancing women's citizenship rights and guaranteeing their full participation in public life depend on viewing women as free and equal members of society.

When the speeches of DTP and BDP female deputies are examined, it is seen that the headscarf ban is wanted to be lifted. It is stated that this ban is an antidemocratic ban and that similar bans are also imposed on various religious and ethnic groups. This shows a perspective that views advancing social cohesiveness and democracy can be achieved through valuing diversity and defending the liberties and rights of every citizen, particularly women from underrepresented groups. But this is not only how she approaches but an example of how DTP/BDP representatives frame women's

citizenship. They think that not only conservative women, but also different groups of women in society have their own needs and that the state should see women as equal citizens and respond to their needs. In these respects, it can be said that the representatives' conducted a discourse that is utterly influenced by the third wave feminism.

5.2.1.3.2 Findings of 24th Parliamentary Term

During this period, BDP/DBP's representative generally used the headscarf issue in the context of their concern that the headscarf issue should not be seen as the only problem of women but other problems of women, especially the ones regarding various identities and cultures, should be recognized, as well. Diversity of the citizens in the representation is frequently underlined by the representatives of these parties.

Dear friends, freedoms should not only be about the headscarf issue. Today, in Turkey, not only turbans or headscarves are banned. Today, languages, identities and cultures, as well as beliefs, are banned in Turkey. As a whole, we have to create together a Turkey where there should no longer be any prohibitions on any subject, where people can express themselves freely and live freely on every issue. (Pervin Buldan, BDP, 2013)

In support of an unrestricted Turkey, the speech marks out the value of freedom of speech and the inherent right to live in liberty for all people, irrespective of their origins or identities. The discourse also points the significance of women's citizenship rights, especially the right to safety, dignity, and equality within society, by focusing explicitly on women and advocating for collective action on harassment concerns and defending women's rights. She interpreted the ban on headscarves as restricting citizens' freedoms and diversity in a broader context. This demonstrates a dedication to diversity and support of women's rights as essential components of the larger fight for liberty and equality in society.

This [lifting the headscarf ban] is not the success of a government, **it is also the success of women who paid the price for this issue.** Once again, we salute with respect and love those who stand by the women who paid the price on this issue and the women who fight together. (Sebahat Tuncel, DBP, 2013)

The statement emphasizes the sacrifices and efforts made by women to this cause, acknowledging their role as those who paid the price for the repeal of the headscarf

prohibition. This praises the agency and activism of women in questioning social conventions and fighting for their rights.

Moreover, the discussion emphasizes how women's issues encompass broader issues like belief freedom and transcend beyond the headscarf topic. As stated by Tuncel:

But we know that **women's problems are many, not only the headscarf issue, but also when we consider the freedom of belief issue**, we know that uncovered women, especially **Alevi women, have very serious problems...** We know that **not only those who follow a religion, but also those who do not** are experiencing serious problems in this country.
(Sebahat Tuncel, DBP, 2013)

This demonstrates empathy for the freedoms and rights of all women, regardless of their ethnic or religious background, as citizens. By acknowledging the major obstacles faced by both religious and non-religious women in Turkey, the discourse emphasizes the significance of inclusive and intersectional strategies in resolving women's rights and civic problems.

5.2.1.3.3 Findings of 26th Parliamentary Term

In the 26th legislation term, HDP MPs emphasize the concept of citizenship, specifically in terms of justice and democratic principles, calling for equal rights and opportunities for all citizens, regardless of religious beliefs or attire. In addition, citizenship also involves active participation in democratic processes. Active citizenship and collective action in shaping democratic processes and advocating for social justice are also discussed regarding headscarf issue.

“That day, while we were **protesting for the freedom of the headscarf**, we had a slogan that we never stopped talking about: ‘Justice for all, freedom for the headscarf’ ... Where is justice for everyone? We fought our struggle with people, we supported those with conscience (*vicdan*), everyone with conscience stood by us in our struggle that day, and our struggle was not just for the headscarf.” (Huda Kaya, HDP, 2016)

The argument affirms the autonomy and independence of women in determining their own paths and defying social conventions by attributing headscarf freedom to the resistance of headscarved women rather than to any political party or individual.

The right to wear a headscarf and its implications for broader social norms and ideals relates to active citizenship. This illustrates how important it is to recognize and appreciate women's efforts to social progress and shows appreciation for their courage and tenacity in defending their identities and rights.

Freedom of dress is clearly stated in both national education legislation and international law. Distributing headscarves is a coercion, an imposition. This [a photograph of girls taken by a headmaster of school] is the product of a mentality that does not value the **individual's freedom of belief and usurps the right to education**. (Meral Daniş Beştaş, HDP, 2015)

This speech was made on an incident that stated that the lifting of the headscarf ban was used as a method of oppression. Citizenship entails not only legal membership in a state but also the enjoyment of certain rights and responsibilities within that state. In this speech, the MP emphasizes the importance of individual rights, particularly in educational contexts. The rights of citizens to education and freedom of belief in this speech in order to maintain the values of liberty and self-determination are mentioned, stating that people ought to be able to wear however they like, free from outside pressure or intervention.

All findings considered, this term the HDP representatives call for inclusive citizenship, where all individuals, regardless of their beliefs or attire, are treated equally under the law and have equal access to education and other rights, since in a democratic society citizenship should be inclusive and ensure equality for all citizens.

5.2.1.3.4 Findings of 27th Parliamentary Term

In this term, HDP deputies again touched upon identity issues by considering other ethnicities -mainly Kurds and Alevis, and discussed the headscarf issue accompanied by criticism of the male-dominated society. The behavior of naming female citizens directly from their headscarves is also seen among HDP MPs. For example, Hüda Kaya said,

The Minister of Internal Affairs targeted the person who was detained in Yüksel for taking an intellectual and political action related to human rights; A headscarved girl who was subjected to physical and visual

harassment by a police officer. Merve Demirel has been detained for the fourth day today and today, her detention period has been extended for another four days and her headscarf has been removed from her head while in custody, the headscarf is not given to her, friends. (Hüda Kaya, HDP, 2019)

However, it needs to be emphasized that the person mentioned in the speech question was of Kurdish ethnicity. The issue is speaking the Kurdish language. With this discourse, while the citizenship rights of headscarved women were defended and their access to the public space was paved, a negative situation was claimed for another citizen who wore a headscarf and was Kurdish. At this point, it can be said that the citizenship approach has various indicators. Even if the government's policy is only to ensure the rights of headscarved women, if this headscarved woman has a different identity, it is claimed that there are still inequalities in accessing the said right. This reflects that there is not only one aspect but many aspects when defining womanhood. Ethnic factors, not religion or gender, are also included in this definition. This shows that womanhood is socially constructed. Therefore, it can be said that the citizenship of women, headscarved women, and headscarved Kurdish women is rated differently according to this representative. As seen in previous periods, this issue of intersectionality is an approach that HDP MPs frequently bring up when talking about women's issues.

Furthermore, various MPs frequently stress the need to lift all bans on language, identity, culture, and beliefs in Turkey. There is an advocacy for an inclusive society where individuals, regardless of their beliefs or ethnic backgrounds, can coexist peacefully and enjoy equal rights. Particularly, HDP MPs draw analogies to draw parallels between the headscarf issue and the Kurdish issue, seeking moral legitimization for Kurdish demands through analogy. They assert that similar official approaches attempting to prohibit the public expression of Kurdish identity exist, akin to the removal of women from the public sphere in the context of the headscarf issue.

5.2.1.3.5 Summary of Findings

The findings show that the HDP approached the headscarf debate through a different lens. Their language stayed rooted in ideas of social pluralism, equality, and rights — a steady thread running through their discourse.

Unlike the AKP, which focused on religious freedoms, or the CHP, which warned of threats to secularism, HDP kept their eyes on a broader horizon: inclusion, dignity, and representation for all. For them, the headscarf was never just about one group. It was part of a much larger fight — the struggle for Kurds, Alevis, and all those pushed to the margins to claim their rightful place in the public sphere.

In the early legislative terms, HDP framed the headscarf ban as more than just a ban. It was a symptom of a deeper sickness: a state too narrow to hold the many identities within it. Female deputies stood up to say that real democracy meant recognizing every shade of identity, not forcing them into silence. One moment captures this spirit vividly: “As valuable as the Turk is, so is the Kurd; as valuable as the Alevi is, so is the headscarf. The state must treat everyone equally in this regard.” (Sebahat Tuncel, HDP, 2010). In these words, equality stretches far beyond individuals. It gathers every overlooked community under its wings.

After the ban was lifted, HDP’s message shifted again. They challenged the idea that this victory belonged to any one party. They reminded everyone that real change had not come from political promises alone, but from the persistence of women’s movements and grassroots activism. One deputy captured the lingering gap: “The headscarf has become liberated, but today, consciences have not been liberated; the headscarf became liberated, but living humanely and honorably and demanding it could not be liberated...” Through such voices, HDP made it clear: true citizenship is not about lifting one visible barrier. It is about breaking every hidden wall. It is about justice that reaches into the daily lives of every person.

In the end, HDP’s vision of citizenship was never about a state granting rights from above. It was about the people pushing from below, demanding recognition, equality, and a place to belong. The headscarf issue was only one thread in a much larger tapestry — a fight to build a democracy broad enough to hold every story, every identity, every dream.

5.2.1.4 MHP: National Unity and Privacy of MHP

The MHP adheres to an ideological framework shaped by nationalism, the preservation of state sovereignty, and traditional societal values in Turkish politics. It

is not surprising that the party approaches women's citizenship and the headscarf issue within this framework. By this framework, I refer to the party's emphasis on maintaining social order and prioritizing nationalist values. The MHP's discourse on the headscarf issue includes both the defense of individual rights and freedoms and the promotion of a citizenship understanding aligned with nationalist-conservative values.

In this section, the statements of female MHP deputies will be examined to reveal how their approaches to women's citizenship have been shaped. Specifically, the analysis will focus on the discourses developed around the headscarf issue and how the MHP combines conservative values with nationalist identity-building while defining women's citizenship rights within this framework. However, the findings discussed in this section are based solely on the statements of a single deputy from the 24th legislative term. As previously mentioned, the number of female deputies in the MHP is significantly lower compared to other parties. Among these, the number of deputies who have addressed this issue in their statements is even smaller. Furthermore, when narrowed down to statements on the headscarf issue that provide insights into citizenship, the number decreases further. Consequently, only a limited set of findings has been obtained.

5.2.1.4.1 Findings of 24th Parliamentary Term

The representative of MHP's discussion on headscarf argues that people, especially women, should have the freedom to make decisions about their own life free from outside influence or criticism. "Politics, yes, is a set of choices, but these choices consist of choices to be made in the name of the **nation, the homeland, and the country**. Get out of **our privacy**." (Ruhsar Demirel, MHP, 2015). This statement reflects a perspective on citizenship emphasizing on one's belonging to a nation, and a country, carrying a nationalist tone. Thus, for the representative, political decisions should primarily serve the interests of the nation, and homeland, rather than intervening women's choices on clothing.

In addition, the discourse of MHP representative hints at the importance of inclusive citizenship rights that protect people's liberties and autonomy, regardless of their gender or religious ideas, in opposition to gender-based politics and discrimination

against women. This indicates a view of citizenship as a responsibility to contribute to the betterment of society while also respecting individuals' autonomy and their privacy. This is in line with demands for women's civic rights—such as the freedom of choice, privacy, and equality before the law—to be more acknowledged and safeguarded.

One of the few discourses regarding the headscarf issue in this period was initiated following a particular incident. The incident occurs following the criticism by the CHP after four female parliament members, who returned from Hajj and wanted to enter the parliament wearing headscarves, faced opposition. MHP's representative called this incident as a 'mobbing' because she argued that the use of headscarf is a matter of faith, the lifting of the headscarf ban is supported in the name of women's freedom of exercising their faith.

Throughout her speech, she adopted a nationalist tone, placing significant emphasis on the sake of "*the nation, homeland, and the country*". In addition, the terms globalization and identity politics in the content of the speech are used in a negative sense. In her words:

This is what they call globalization. This is what is called identity politics. We need a mind that will multiply us with our commonalities rather than making us obvious with our differences. Underlining our differences does nothing for any of us. How many species, how many genders, how many ethnicities, how many sects are we? (Ruhsar Demirel, MHP, 2015)

The statement "*We are a political party that wants to grow together through our commonality*" clearly expresses a focus on commonality instead of diversity can be seen as an indicator of the nationalist tone that is also the ideology of her own party. This also demonstrates that this member of parliament defines the concept of citizenship as belonging to a nation, a country.

5.2.1.4.2 Summary of Findings

The findings suggest that the MHP's stance on the headscarf issue was not shaped by isolated concerns, but rather by the party's broader vision — one rooted in nationalism, state unity, and the safeguarding of traditional values. While the AKP

framed the headscarf around religious freedom, and the HDP tied it to a call for pluralism and inclusion, MHP approached the matter from a different starting point. For them, citizenship rested on collective belonging, not individual distinction.

In this framework, the headscarf was never simply a question of personal liberty. It was bound up with something deeper: the defense of the moral order and the protection of the social fabric that bound the nation together. Although MHP's female deputies rarely addressed the headscarf directly, when they did, their words made the party's priorities clear. National identity and moral strength were inseparable in their discourse. The wellbeing of the nation, they implied, depended not on the celebration of diversity, but on the protection of shared values.

One deputy expressed it with particular clarity: citizenship, in this view, was less about embracing difference and more about safeguarding a tradition that gave meaning to unity. Even when notions of inclusion surfaced, they came with a clear condition. Inclusivity, for MHP, did not mean making space for divergent identities; it meant encouraging all citizens to align with a common moral and cultural frame.

All in all, the headscarf issue became another reflection of MHP's deeper commitments. Through it, the party reaffirmed its loyalty to unity over diversity, tradition over change, and collective strength over individual freedoms. The headscarf, then, was more than a piece of clothing; it was a symbol — a reminder of the kind of nation MHP sought to protect: stable, cohesive, and firmly rooted in a shared moral vision.

5.2.1.5 Results

The headscarf debate in the Turkish parliament became more than a dispute over attire. It turned into a stage where different visions of citizenship clashed. Across five legislative terms, definitions of what it meant to be a citizen shifted — caught between secularism and religiosity, between individual freedoms and collective identities, between universal ideals and particular experiences.

At first, parliamentary discussions painted citizenship in narrow legal colors. But over time, the frames widened, grew more contested, and carried deeper social meanings. Each party brought its own lens. For CHP deputies, the headscarf stood at

odds with the secular, modern identity of the Republic. Religious symbols, they argued, should stay outside public life to protect equality. Yet, this position came with a cost. It pushed headscarved women to the margins, questioning their place in citizenship itself. AKP deputies chose another path. They saw the lifting of the ban as a democratic breakthrough — a way for headscarved women to reclaim rights long denied. Their speeches, especially after the February 28 process, reframed these women not as threats, but as victims whose dignity demanded recognition.

HDP deputies pushed even further. They challenged the very boundaries of the conversation, tying the headscarf issue to broader struggles for justice and inclusion. For them, true democracy meant making room for every identity — Kurdish, Alevi, religious, secular — without forcing them into silence or invisibility.

The debates show that women's citizenship in Turkey has never been a fixed idea. It evolved alongside shifting ideas about education, equality, and identity itself. In the early years, the focus sat heavily on access to education — whether headscarved women could attend universities without barriers. But as political and cultural landscapes changed, the meaning of citizenship expanded too.

5.2.2 Democracy in Tension: Strengthening Freedoms or the Irtica

The headscarf issue in Turkey has never been just about personal choice. It opened a larger stage — one where the boundaries of democracy, social equality, and representation were pushed and tested. Political parties approached this issue through their own mirrors, shaped by ideology, social roots, and changing priorities. In every word they spoke, a different idea of democracy was revealed.

At the center of this section stands a simple but crucial question: How did female deputies carry these competing ideas into a debate about women's lives, about the right to wear a headscarf? In order to respond this, this study traces how the AKP, CHP, and HDP tied the headscarf to their visions of democracy. Differences between the parties are clear, yet changes within each party over time tell an even richer story.

The AKP, for instance, first celebrated the lifting of the ban as a victory for individual freedoms and a step toward democratization. Later, their focus shifted — toward the equal participation of women in public life and the struggle to claim

visibility. In the most recent years, a new emphasis emerged. Speeches turned to the wounds of the past, especially the injustices women faced during the February 28 process. Through these shifting narratives, the headscarf became more than a symbol. It became a test — of what democracy could mean, and for whom.

The CHP, on the other hand, has at times been highly active on the issue, while in other periods, despite being the main opposition party, it has remained notably silent. The findings indicate that the CHP approached the headscarf issue from a distinct perspective, often framing it within the context of democratic regression. As with other contexts in which it addressed the headscarf issue, the discourse frequently emphasized the idea that lifting the ban would pose a threat to the principle of secularism and the constitutional order. CHP's female deputies discussed the issue within the framework of preserving social order and ensuring the continuity of democratic principles.

HDP's discourse, unlike that of the AKP or CHP, did not evolve over time nor fluctuate in its level of engagement. Instead, the HDP consistently redefined democracy through the lens of social pluralism and equitable representation. The party treated the headscarf ban not merely as a matter of religious freedom but as part of the broader struggle for the rights of marginalized groups. In its earlier periods, HDP's deputies advocated for lifting the headscarf ban as a necessity for a democratic system that valued diverse identities and cultures equally. They also connected the issue to the struggles of other marginalized groups, such as Kurds and Alevis. After the ban was lifted, the party developed a critical stance toward framing this achievement as a success of the AKP alone, instead presenting democracy as a grassroots-driven process focused on the pursuit of rights.

This section looks more closely at these dynamics, organized by different time periods. The analysis follows how each party reframed the headscarf issue through its own ideological lens. The discussion opens with the CHP, whose discourse on the headscarf first emerged during the 22nd legislative term — a time when no female deputies from other parties had yet entered the debate. Because of this, the CHP's discourse is examined first, tracing its development until it fades from the parliamentary agenda.

Attention then shifts to the AKP and HDP, whose exchanges over time shaped a more direct and reciprocal debate. Their approaches are presented consecutively, showing how their arguments responded to one another, especially in framing the meaning of the headscarf. Finally, the chapter concludes by addressing the theoretical implications drawn from these evolving debates.

5.2.2.1 CHP: Headscarf as a Threat to Secular Democracy

The CHP has positioned democracy as a fundamental principle within the ideological framework of Turkey, which was founded on the basis of secularism. When the issue of lifting the headscarf ban emerged, female deputies within the party addressed this matter within the scope of democratic values. Their statements emphasized democratic principles, framing the issue as far more than a struggle for individual rights. The potential disruption of constitutional principles, social order, and the proper functioning of democratic institutions as a result of lifting the headscarf ban was frequently presented as a recurring scenario.

This section examines the discourses of CHP's female deputies regarding the headscarf issue, focusing on how these discourses were connected to democracy and the position the party adopted in the context of secularism and democracy. The findings, covering the period from the 22nd to the 24th legislative terms, reveal that by the 24th term, this discourse was replaced by silence. The conclusions drawn from the deputies' statements—or the lack thereof—are presented at the end of this section.

5.2.2.1.1 Findings of 22nd Parliamentary Term

The 22nd legislative term is the term when only the CHP's female deputies expressed their concerns about lifting the headscarf ban. Arguments of this party were mainly based on legal grounds which were intertwined with ethically commendable Republican principles like the rule of law, justice, and nondiscrimination. Most obviously, secularism was put at the forefront as the constitutional principle, emphasizing its unchangeable nature and role as a fundamental characteristic of the state for the past 71 years. For them, lifting the headscarf ban would constitute a vital problem, a significant threat to secularism and, by extension, to all constitutional principles. Building on this, the issue was linked to democracy, with concerns

expressed that lifting the headscarf ban could trigger a regression process that would harm democracy.

The findings show that, CHP female representatives viewed the promise of lifting headscarf ban as potentially obstructing the advancement of women's rights, particularly in education, and perceived the headscarf as a symbol of backward patriarchal societies. They criticized government policies, citing women's rights and education in particular, they believe were retrograde and harmful to democracy.

Stemming from Sıdıka Karabekir's words:

It should not be overlooked that these basic services, especially education and health, are basic **public needs** and the most **basic human rights**... Especially in countries like ours that lagged behind the income level and living opportunities of **advanced welfare societies**, **women** should benefit from the **opportunities of the social state** at the highest level in order for women to **take the place they deserve in public, social and political life**. (Sıdıka Karabekir, CHP, 2003)

In this finding, the importance of ensuring equal access to essential services such as education and healthcare are taken as the fundamental components of democracy, particularly for women. Such approach is also clearly seen in the statement of Güldal Okucu who argued that:

We are witnessing its [government's] efforts... to direct students to **tariqa schools**, to institutionalize **religious-oriented education and training, imam education, girls' imam-hatip schools and Anatolian imam-hatip high schools** to be examples of a new system to be imposed on the society in order to replace the general education model and we also see that the process continues with new dimensions that **gnaw at the foundations of the republic**. (Güldal Okucu, CHP, 2003)

Here, the representative draws attention to the disparity between democratic ideals and the actualities of governance by contrasting them with the acts of the government. In contrast to what the representative perceives as attempts to impose religious doctrines and restrict individual freedoms, democracy is connected with inclusivity, secularism, and respect for individual rights. This points to a more expansive interpretation of democracy as a framework that supports diversity, tolerance, and pluralism. Generally, the MPs express concerns about the degradation of secular principles and the possibility of indoctrinating students with religious

ideas. According to them, the government's emphasis on matters such as religious instruction and headscarves have nothing to do with compromising social harmony and peace, but have destructive implications secularism- thus, democracy.

Moreover, CHP deputies frequently offer their "cautionary tales" (van Leween, 2008: 118) regarding what would happen if the ban is lifted. The discourse that there would be much worse events that would happen as a result of a policy change, which mostly consists of scenarios such as the destruction of secularism, may actually affect the emotional state of the citizens by creating fear for the future. Fear of the series of events that would occur as a result of the removal of the headscarf, legitimizes that discourse. According to CHP deputies, retroactive developments can begin with the removal of the headscarf. Concerns are raised regarding the potential violation of the constitution through attempts to introduce religion-related regulations indirectly. This is seen as a significant threat to the constitutional integrity. Also, the proposed changes to headscarf regulations are portrayed as a direct threat to Atatürk's principles and revolutions, specifically targeting secularism, a unique aspect of Turkey's political identity.

To sum up, the discourses of women MPs of CHP in the 22nd legislation term are formed with a feminist viewpoint that questions established gender norms, supports equal citizenship rights and women's empowerment, and advances democratic ideals like tolerance, secularism, and respect for individual liberty. As Sıdıka Karabekir argued that "It is unacceptable that **Atatürk's Turkey**... displays common features with societies that **leave women ignorant.**" (2003, CHP), she refers foundation principles of the Republic of Turkey are not compatible with restricting women's freedom.

She claimed that by lifting the headscarf ban, a more reactionary attitude would be displayed and the rights and freedoms that women had gained with the republic would be abolished. Similarly, Güldal Okçu's statement shows the same concern: "**to institutionalize religious-oriented education and training...** a new system to be imposed on the society in order **to replace the general education model...** process continues with new dimensions that gnaw at the foundations of the republic."(CHP, 2003). The representatives present women as proactive members of society who push

for opportunities, rights, and recognition that go beyond cultural norms and laws they believe to be backward or repressive.

5.2.2.1.2 Findings of 23rd Parliamentary Term

CHP representatives usually make the argument that permitting headscarves on college campuses undermines secularism and targets the secular state in the 23rd Legislation Term of the Assembly. This shows worry about wider ramifications for democratic ideals like equality, pluralism, and secularism. Referencing rulings from both national and international courts, the representatives emphasize how crucial human rights norms and legal frameworks are to defending democratic values.

According to Serter, **“Turban is not just a way of dressing. The turban is a tool of expression of identity, and this identity is an identity that expresses politicized religious belief.”** (Fatma Nur Serter, CHP, 2008) This shows a dedication to defending the rule of law and shielding private property from possible violations. The speech poses concerns about how democratic ideals and religious symbols in public spaces coexist, especially in light of women’s rights and liberties. This emphasizes the difficulty in maintaining a democratic society while balancing equality, secularism, and religious freedom.

Generally, CHP representatives’ discourse reflects a critical stance on the intersection of democracy, secularism, and women’s rights, particularly in relation to the headscarf issue. They emphasize on the importance of maintaining secular values and institutions to safeguard democracy and prevent the encroachment of religious influence on public life. For instance, Nesrin Baytok evaluates the headscarf issue as an attack on secularism. In her words:

The shirt of **national view** has been put back on. **Secularism is under attack** ...Turban is not limited to universities, it is rapidly becoming widespread in high school and primary education.” In following, similar concerns are reported: “Turban is not limited to educational institution, it is also rapidly becoming widespread in government offices.” (Nesrin Baytok, CHP, 2007) Finally, it is evaluated as: **“After the turban, comes the black chador.** After the black chador and turban, comes the terrorist organization that kills people with hogtie. (Nesrin Baytok, CHP, 2007)

It seems, Nesrin Baytok's anti-national view attitude shows that she continues her comments within the framework of her own political party policy. The national view had an Islamist and conservative political stance in Turkey in the 1970s and was generally defined under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan (Rabasa and Larrabee, 2008, 31).

The representative presents the issue of the headscarf (turban) as part of a broader attack on secularism and national values. This interpretation implies that the headscarf is not just a religious or cultural item, but also a sign of a specific ideological position. The reference to the "black chador" and its connection to terrorism clearly shows the representative's approach to headscarf issue because it highlights a negative impression of religious clothing, which may have an effect on how people view women who wear headscarves. Therefore, headscarf for CHP representatives signifies a change in cultural norms and values by relating it to more significant developments in society, such as the headscarf's growing popularity in government and educational settings.

The discourse analysis of CHP representatives shows that speeches of them provide a critical viewpoint regarding the growing acceptance of headscarves in public institutions, characterizing them as a danger to democracy, national values, and secularism. In accordance with this viewpoint, the representatives of CHP raise worries about the headscarf's potential effects on women's citizenship rights, social cohesiveness, and democratic values by portraying the headscarf negatively. The representatives make the case that maintaining the secular, democratic republic is vital and that the prohibition on headscarves in college is a reflection of democratic ideals like equality and secularism. In Arat's words:

Since this situation has been determined by court decisions, the restriction on the use of headscarves in our universities is **a self-protective reflex of the secular, democratic republic, and is fair and natural**. In our opinion, religious belief should not be influential and dominant in state affairs. This approach already constitutes **the essence of secularism**. (Necla Arat, CHP, 2008)

Arat here argues that the policy, which supports democratic values and legal standards, prohibiting headscarves at universities is in accordance with justice and

the rule of law by citing pertinent court decisions. Based on this, secularism is said to be the essential element of the state, meaning that preserving secular ideals is necessary to uphold democracy and ensure the liberties and rights of all citizens, especially women.

5.1.3.3 Findings of 24th Parliamentary Term

24th legislation term witnessed CHP representatives' argument regarding the validity of permitting some religious garb while prohibiting other types of clothes questions the democratic ideals of freedom and equality in educational settings.

The speaker holds the government responsible for policies and actions that might maintain inequality and restrict female students' ability to participate in democracy by addressing the Minister of National Education. Accordingly, the representative said that "When we look at the events that have happened in recent days, under the name of free dress code, children are not allowed to wear skirts above the knee, tank tops in schools. But in these schools, headscarves are allowed, and even, friends, as you can see in this photo, chadors are also allowed." (Dilek Akagün Yılmaz, CHP, 2013)

Moreover, CHP representatives' attitude of equalizing headscarf issue with a threat to democracy of the Republic of Turkey continued in this term, as well. This statement constitutes an exact example for that: "We clearly see how the AKP government is trying to destroy the secular education system. Now the principle of secularism will be removed from the Turkish Penal Code and then from the Constitution, or it will be completely emptied of its contents, and the way for education in different languages will be paved." (Dilek Akagün Yılmaz, CHP, 2013) Upholding democratic principles like equality, freedom, and inclusion for all students is emphasized in the discourse, which expresses a need for responsibility and openness within the educational system. Accordingly, the discourse exposes the AKP government's purported attempts to weaken secularism in the educational system as a danger to democracy. Concerns regarding the undermining of democratic values like equality and freedom are brought to light by the discourse, which connects the elimination of secularism from legal and constitutional frameworks to

more general issues of education and language rights. Within the discourse, there is an underlying appeal for accountability, transparency, and democratic governance, expressing worries about the legitimacy of government activities as well as how they affect women's rights and freedoms.

All in all, the discussion points the difficulties in negotiating identity, agency, and political power in forming women's experiences and rights within society and raises issues about the confluence of democracy, secularism, and women's citizenship within the Turkish setting.

Once again, secularism is referred as a need for the protection of women's rights and religious freedom in opposition to religious advice that could have the power to shape the future by the representatives of CHP. For them, "The greatest guarantee of freedom of belief is not controlling our future with religious guidance, but a perfect secularism." (Şafak Pavey, CHP, 2013) Accordingly, secularism is the reason why Turkish women has achieved their rights and freedoms. It is clearly seen in Pavey's words: "Please remember, in the Middle East, our secular society was shining like a solitaire diamond." (Şafak Pavey, CHP, 2013) Invoking the idea of a "glittering secular society in the Middle East", the discourse shows secularism's capacity to advance women's rights and social freedom. This seems to be a criticism of the role of religion in politics and a plea for a return to secular values in order to defend individual liberties and rights in a community.

After the 24th legislative term, no statements are found from CHP female deputies addressing the headscarf issue, particularly in connection with democracy.

5.2.2.1.3 Summary of Findings

The findings show that during the early legislative terms examined, the CHP often framed the headscarf issue as part of a larger ideological struggle against what it perceived as reactionary and anti-secular movements. CHP representatives frequently associated the headscarf with political Islam, suggesting that lifting the ban in public institutions posed a threat to the secular foundations of the republic. For instance, CHP MPs characterized the headscarf not as a symbol of personal choice or religious freedom but as a politicized tool aimed at undermining secular governance.

One prominent example is CHP representatives' discourses, which framed the headscarf as a "political symbol" that threatened to erode secular education and democratic principles. The way that they insist on their concerns about patriarchal control and the potential use of the headscarf to oppress women, linking it to broader fears of societal regression shows that they approach to headscarf issue as a regime concern, not only as a women's concern. While these arguments sought to protect secularism and gender equality, they also contributed to a narrative that excluded and marginalized headscarved women from participating fully in public life.

Interestingly, after the headscarf ban was lifted, a notable silence emerged in the discourses of CHP representatives. Despite their vocal opposition to lifting the ban in earlier terms, CHP MPs largely refrained from engaging with the issue in subsequent debates. This silence marks out a strategic shift, as the party appeared to distance itself from a now-resolved controversy, potentially to avoid alienating voters or reopening ideological divides. This retreat raises questions about the extent to which the party's earlier concerns about democracy and secularism were rooted in principled opposition versus political expediency.

5.2.2.2 AKP's Evolving Rhetoric: From Equality to Historical References

AKP's female deputies have always linked the headscarf issue to democracy, but they have done so in different ways across various periods. The findings, which will be examined in more detail shortly, demonstrate that three distinct contexts stand out.

This section analyzes the discourses of AKP's female deputies on the relationship between the headscarf issue and democracy across different periods. It details how their statements were shaped by and evolved around themes of women's rights, representation, and the remembrance of past grievances.

5.2.2.2.1 Findings of 23rd Parliamentary Term

Despite headscarf freedom was a prominent promise of the AKP, female deputies from the party did not address the headscarf issue during their first legislative term, the 22nd. Their participation in oral discussions on the headscarf issue started in the

23rd legislative term. To support their discourses and arguments, they frequently resorted to democracy. In their speeches, democracy is portrayed as a system based on the ideas of fairness, equality, and freedom. Restrictions on headscarf is seen as even with restrictions on women's access to school are criticized by the representatives of AKP as being incompatible with fundamental democratic objectives, especially the freedom of education. For example, for Güldal Akşit (2008, AKP) "The Republic of Turkey is an indelible **democratic, secular, and social state of law**. Among the fundamental duties of the state is to not limit **basic rights and freedoms** in a way incompatible with the **principles of justice**." Firstly, the use of the phrase "indelible democratic, secular, and social state of law" suggests an emphasis on Turkey's constitutional framework, highlighting principles such as democracy, secularism, and the rule of law. This framing serves to legitimize the argument against the headscarf ban within the context of democratic principles. Secondly, the mention of the state's fundamental duties to uphold basic rights and freedoms aligns with democratic values of equality and individual liberties. By framing the headscarf ban as incompatible with these principles of justice, the representative positions the restriction on wearing headscarves as a violation of women's rights within the democratic framework.

In the following of her speech, Akşit offers her position as a female MP in connection with democracy, referencing both national and international legal norms. Accordingly, "**Article 10 of the Constitution**, titled **Equality before the law**, states that... **Women and men have equal rights**, and the state is obliged to ensure the realization of this equality." (Güldal Akşit, AKP, 2008). She specifically advocates for the freedom of young women, particularly in education, to wear headscarves in public spaces by giving reference to legal norms. Notably, her speech avoids any religious or ethnic references, instead emphasizing Turkey's democratic and secular principles. During this period, speeches by female AKP MPs on the headscarf issue generally align with this framework.

Referencing global consensus on the significance of safe guarding individuals' rights against discrimination, the representative draws attention to decisions made by organizations such as the European Court of Human Rights and international standards.

Following statements in her speech is “Despite **the CEDAW** Turkey report in 2005, which stated that the headscarf ban is an **obstacle to the educational freedom of young girls** in higher education and needs to be addressed, unfortunately, no solution has been implemented to date.” (Güldal Akşit, AKP, 2008). It is said that the headscarf prohibition is a failure of democracy, indicating a disconnect between democratic principles and the actuality of administration, in spite of advice from international organizations.

In general, headscarf discussions of AKP deputies represents a viewpoint that opposes discrimination based on gender, defends the rights and equality of women, and advances democratic principles like justice, equality, and freedom during the 23rd legislation term. The representatives advocate for real action to remove discriminatory practices that prevent women from fully participating in society and frames femininity within the framework of equal citizenship rights.

Indeed, men who think the same way are going to school without any restriction, while somehow, girl children are deprived of the right to education... female students are not making any effort or work to endanger the **secular and democratic system**, on the contrary, they believe in the **founding elements of this country** as much as unveiled women do, **which I sincerely believe**. (Nimet Çubukçu, AKP, 2008)

Here, the representative raises the question of whether denying girls an education or forcing them out of college is necessary to uphold the secular system. This focuses on the significance of education as a fundamental right in a democratic society and undermines the idea that limiting women’s rights is required to protect democracy. In describing the problem as a classic case of gender discrimination, the representative draws attention to the wider consequences for democratic principles and social norms. This implies an understanding of the relationship between democratic values and gender equality. The representative’s appeal for cross-party cooperation in addressing gender discrimination is indicative of her dedication to democratic administration and the rule of law. This emphasizes how crucial it is for everyone to take responsibility for maintaining democratic principles and defending each person’s right.

As a result, female AKP deputies predominantly employed **moral legitimization**. They viewed the constitutional amendment as a crucial step in Turkey's progression towards becoming a "more democratic country that is more respectful to human rights and liberties" (Alev Dedegil, AKP, 2008). They also perceived it as a symbol of a civilized nation that upholds and safeguards human rights and that ensures equal public service provision for everyone since AKP MPs framed the issue within the moral responsibilities of a state, defining it as part of its *raison d'être*. Moreover, defining headscarf as a "piece of cloth", some representatives of AKP discussed wearing headscarf in relation with multiculturalism (Özlem Piltaneoğlu Türköne, AKP, 2007).

Such resemblance was highly criticized by MHP representatives in the parliament. Central to the discussion for them was the constitutional emphasis on equality before the law. Gender equality, in these meanings, was offered as a prominent theme, emphasizing that women and men have equal rights. And the state obligated to ensure the realization of this equality. It can be understood from the MPs attempts to justify the removal of the headscarf ban by emphasizing that achieving educational objectives, implementing pro- women policies, and safeguarding the secular system are unattainable without lifting the ban.

5.2.2.2.2 Findings of 24th Parliamentary Term

During the 24th legislation term, it is seen that impersonal authority, one of the legitimization strategies, was used in this period, as in the previous period. The first signal of this is that the MPs frequently discuss the significance of headscarved women's participation in the parliament as essential for democracy, secularism, and the rule of law. The representatives of AKP focused on the democratic rights and freedoms of women when they dealt with the headscarf issue. On the one hand, some speeches had similarities with previous discourses that focused on secularism, rule of law and constitutional rights of women in terms of democracy and its relation with the headscarf issue. On the other hand, democracy was considered within conservative references in this term. In order to give example to the former, representatives, such as Mihrimah Belma Satır, suggest a dedication to maintaining democratic, secular, and legal norms inside the Turkish political system by equating the presence of headscarved women MPs with these ideals. In her words:

If it was written in the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey that it was a democratic, secular, and social state of law, we had to do what was necessary together. Having these friends [headscarved women MPs] under the roof of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey is a requirement of democracy, secularism, and the rule of law. (Mihrimah Belma Satır, AKP, 2013)

This speech is also important because it involves the issue of representation. The representatives demonstrate headscarved MPs' presence in the Parliament as a means to ensure equality between men and women and to achieve fairness in political representation. It was emphasized that as women's visibility in the public sphere increases, their level of representation also increase. It constitutes another indicator of impersonal authority strategy's being used.

This term, the representatives believed that "with the removal of the headscarf issue in public spaces, this injustice [women's nonexistence in the public phrese] has ended and opportunities have been equalized." (Nurcan Dalbudak, AKP, 2013). The representatives' speech highlights the significance of women's empowerment for the health of society, putting particular emphasis on elements like social involvement, work, and education. The removal of barriers pertaining to the headscarf problem is recognized as a contribution of government measures to the advancement of women's rights and opportunities in a democratic setting. Same attitude is also seen in other representatives of AKP but in a conservative manner.

For instance, one representative framed ban on headscarf with violence against women and democratic values like equality and freedom are crucial in combating violence against women, as seen by her reference to the repeal of the headscarf ban as part of a package of democracy. "We continue to remove these shackles one by one. On October 31, we put an end to the headscarf ban, one of the biggest forms of violence against women, with our democratization package. In this way, we have eliminated this violence in private and public spaces." (Öznur Çalış, AKP, 2013) This demonstrates a dedication to advancing democratic principles of equality, freedom, and human rights while also opposing violence against women through legislative and policy initiatives.

In addition, mentioning women's dignity, being against gender discrimination, and democratization elements are included together with these conservative elements. In addition to using both traditional and modern concepts together, it has also been seen that the subject is intensively discussed in terms of religion, introducing itself with purely religious references. As an exclusive example of this;

We, alhamdulillah, were born Muslims, we are willing to die Muslims, but please, you don't go there and point out **Islamophobia** over and over and say, 'No, sir, there is such a situation in Turkey: Turkey is anti-secular, Turkey is anti-democratic...' There is no such thing. I said: 'What are we doing? Where are we going when there is a headscarf ban **in a Muslim country**?' (Tülin Erkal Kara, AKP, 2013)

Nevertheless, harsh criticism of the discourses that Turkey is anti-democratic or anti-secular proves that the discourses are realized by combining the conservative and modern principles mentioned above. The representative appears to be defending democratic ideals and principles, particularly women's rights to cultural identification and religious expression, given that Turkey is a "Muslim country", within the Turkish context when she rejects accusations that Turkey is anti-democratic or anti-secular. In general, the speech is a defense of women's liberties and rights, especially when it comes to expressing their cultural and religious identities, within the framework of democratic values and religious tolerance. Finally, it should be noted that despite the AKP representatives were trying to persuade other representatives that they had no religious but democratic motivations in their support of headscarf liberation, this term they started to use conservative tone in their discourses.

5.2.2.2.3 Findings of 26th Parliamentary Term

The discourses of AKP MPs in the 26th legislation term consist of various discussions that framed headscarf issue with discrimination and violence against women which undermines democratic values of justice, equality, and human rights. The representatives of AKP are trying to justify their rhetoric during this time by equating the repeal of the headscarf prohibition with advancements in society. Through stressing ideals like activism, human rights advocacy, violence prevention, and positive development, they hope to make the case that society is moving in the direction of a more just, equitable, and compassionate framework. In this sense, the

discourse's vision of morally grounded social change may find widespread acceptance and support in society. Referring to headscarf issue, for instance, a speech stated that:

We are making efforts to prevent such shamefully lynching campaigns from happening again, where people are forced to impose limits, where psychological violence is applied, **just because you are a woman and only wear a headscarf.** (Nursel Reyhanlıoğlu, AKP, 2017)

This speech does not only demonstrate headscarf issue as a form of gender-based discrimination but the representative also offers a dedication to advancing social justice and democracy by opposing discriminatory behaviors and defending the liberties and rights of women who wear headscarf. Similar standing is also observed in other speeches. For instance,

Not only I, but also **many people who think like me, have fought for rights** on many issues that are not related to us, and we continue to do so. Because **human rights** are not a situation that is monopolized or monopolized by anyone. (Fatma Benli, AKP, 2017)

This speech reflects an approach to democracy that prioritizes individual agency, collective action, and the intersectionality of women's rights and religious expression by offering headscarf issue as a human rights issue. While the representative emphasizes on the difficulties experienced by headscarved women in public, this speech is also important to note that the representative herself addresses her own struggle for headscarf. It is also reflected in her words that:

It is true that I wrote thousands of petitions during the **February 28** period, lost hundreds of cases, and spent thirteen years of my life to lift the headscarf ban. However, everyone who has known me since 1997 knows that not only I, but also many people who think like me, have fought for rights. (Fatma Benli, AKP, 2017)

Her persistent efforts to challenge the headscarf ban during the February 28 period is given as her involvement in writing petitions, fighting legal battles, and dedicating a significant portion of her life to the cause. This portrays a commitment to democratic principles, including the right to religious expression as well as active participation of women in political and social processes. Same attitude is also seen in another speech that states: "It is true that I wrote thousands of petitions during **the February**

28 period, lost hundreds of cases, and spent thirteen years of my life to lift the headscarf ban.” (Fatma Benli, AKP, 2017) Thus, the representatives position themselves in a particular ideology and political standing which fought against February 28’s consequences that are claimed to undermined democratic values of religious people in general and women in particular.

Moreover, asserting their presence and voice in the political arena, headscarved MPs are portrayed as active participants in shaping the nation’s democratic processes, thereby challenging stereotypes and empowering marginalized groups. Giving reference to living in days without discrimination between headscarved and uncovered individuals challenges the historical narrative of marginalization of headscarved women, a representative argue that:

Today is **February 28**. Shouting ‘Out! Out!’ to our headscarved MP elected by the votes of the nation, their voices are still in our ears. We are experiencing the honor of living these days when we take part in the Parliament as the representatives of the nation, without **discrimination between veiled and veiled**. (Emine Yavuz Gözgeç, AKP, 2017)

The act of shouting “Out! Out!” to headscarved MPs is portrayed as an affront to democratic principles. It suggests a tension between democratic representation and societal biases against religious attire. Participating in Parliament without “discrimination between veiled and unveiled” is promoted as inclusion and equality in treating all representatives as equals, regardless of their religious beliefs or attire.

Moreover, there are variety of findings in which AKP representatives criticize February 28 events (e.g. Hatice Dudu Özkal, AKP, 2016; Hatice Dudu Özkal, AKP, 2017; Emine Yavuz Gözgeç, AKP, 2017 etc.), known as postmodern coup d’etat, as assaults on democracy and national ideals, emphasizing the effects on the freedom of religion and education in particular. For instance, by stating “The most important targets of those who carried out the coup targeting our nation’s values are imam-hatip students. They were headscarved people and believers.” (Hatice Dudu Özkal, AKP, 2016), the representative alludes to the influence on women’s access to school and their denial of education rights for a generation. As a result, it can be concluded that the representatives intersect headscarf issue with democracy in various ways,

touching upon fundamental principles such as freedom of expression, equality, political representation.

5.2.2.2.4 Findings of 27th Parliamentary Term

In the AKP MPs speeches, the mention of the headscarf ban is portrayed as casting a shadow on democracy and national will. The MPs begin their speech on headscarf by framing the ban lifting as a result of past struggle for democracy, especially regarding women's rights. In this struggle, emphasis is placed on the difficulties encountered in establishing and maintaining democratic principles such as access to education. Moreover, the representatives usually suggest a critical perspective on past policies that restricted the rights of certain groups. Their speeches are based on the notion that the headscarf ban was detrimental to democracy. Therefore, they spotlight the importance of protecting individual freedoms within democratic systems when they dealt with the headscarf issue. For instance, Ravza Kavakçı Kan said that:

The national will who always struggles to pave the way for women and young people. I would like to express **my heartfelt gratitude to our President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan**, who paved the way for headscarved women to exercise their rights in representation, and to those who contributed to the headscarf ban, which cast a shadow on our democracy and national will, in the dark pages of history, and to enable them to fully exercise their right to vote and be elected after 81 years. Praise be to me, **alhamdulillah**. (Ravza Kavakçı Kan, AKP, 2020)

The speech represents a narrative of democratic advancement and shows a commitment to expanding rights and freedoms for all citizens, even as it acknowledges historical hurdles and hails current advances, such as the repeal of the headscarf ban, as a success for democracy. Moreover, the use of religious language, such as “Praise be to me, alhamdulillah,” adds a religious dimension to the discourse on democracy. This intertwining of religious sentiment with democratic values may reflect a particular ideological stance that frames democratic principles within a religious tone. By doing so, the representative expresses appreciation to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan for his contribution in enabling headscarved women to participate in political representation. His personal authority is used for the legitimization of the notion that is being based on the speech.

The lifting of the headscarf ban was once again discussed within the framework of women's representation. It was thought that by using language that referred to religion, headscarved women were given their right to vote and be elected. A similar approach can be found in these words of Meliha Akyol:

You took and stole eighty years from us. You took away the right to education of half of my country's women, women who wear headscarves, and banned politics... In this regard, I would like to express my gratitude and gratitude to our President for putting an end to inequalities and prohibitions on behalf of the women of my country. This nation has not forgotten these, it will never give you a license again. (Meliha Akyol, AKP, 2021)

The historical complaints and injustices that women who wear headscarves have experienced are highlighted in this speech. The representative argues that women's rights, particularly the right to political and educational engagement, were taken away from them by previous regimes' prohibitions on headscarves. Through characterizing this procedure as both robbery and oppression, the representative draws attention to the injustice that headscarved women endure. The speaker also says how much she appreciates the present President for ending these restrictions and inequality. The repeal of the headscarf prohibition is cited in this speech as a critical first step in making up for historical wrongs.

As a result, in this period, the speeches provide a complex examination of democracy. Due to the fact that the headscarf ban had already been lifted, the issue was discussed mostly by giving examples from old experiences. The lifting of the ban has been praised. Headscarf issue is discussed both with achievements and obstacles while emphasizing the need of leadership in fostering democratic change. Furthermore, the speeches bring religious themes into the discussion of democracy even as they emphasize how crucial it is to defend individual liberties and rights in a democratic society. Sometimes, even when different issues, other than headscarf, were being discussed in the parliament, references were made to the times when the headscarf ban took place. The opposition parties express discomfort in such moments. Nevertheless, there is no significant number of female MPs addressing the headscarf issue, except for AKP and HDP.

5.2.2.2.5 Summary of Findings

The findings show that female AKP representatives first approached the headscarf ban as a violation of democratic rights. Their early speeches emphasized equality, the constitutional right to education, and the principles of secular democracy. For them the ban was not only unfair, but a form of gender-based discrimination that targeted women for their beliefs.

And for many, lifting the ban was a simple matter of justice. However, as the debate unfolded, the language began to shift. References to the February 28 military memorandum — a symbol of past repression — grew more frequent. The headscarf issue was no longer framed solely as a legal or democratic question. It became part of a larger story: a story about overcoming old wounds and reclaiming cultural and religious identity.

By recalling the suffering of women during the February 28 period, AKP deputies sought to give moral weight to their cause. In doing so, they cast themselves not only as defenders of individual rights, but as champions of historical justice and a more inclusive democracy.

5.2.2.3 HDP: Democracy and the Political Instrumentalization of the Headscarf

The HDP and its predecessors, DTP and the BDP, framed a connection between the headscarf and democracy through the lens of equality among diverse identities and cultures, as well as the defense of individual freedoms. An analysis of the party's discourse reveals that they approached the headscarf issue as a test of social pluralism and democratic values. The headscarf ban was viewed as an inequality that hindered women's visibility and rights in the public sphere. HDP deputies advocated for lifting the ban as a necessity of a democracy that values all identities and cultures equally.

This section examines how HDP's female deputies connected the headscarf issue to democracy. It further demonstrates how this approach differs significantly from the perspectives presented by other parties in earlier sections, shedding light on how key concepts are redefined and reproduced in the process of representation.

5.2.2.3.1 Findings of 23rd Parliamentary Term

The DTP/BDP representatives' discourses during the 23rd legislative term address critical issues related to democratization, diversity, social justice, and human rights in the context of Turkey. They emphasize the challenges faced in establishing a democratic society and the persistent issues surrounding equality and discuss various topics, including denial and assimilation policies, diversity, social injustice, and the need for a democratic constitution.

DTP and BDP, also known as the pro-Kurdish and leftist parties in the parliament, which are successors of each other, have been pro-headscarves from the very beginning. Similar to the AKP, they discussed the headscarf issue within the framework of human rights and democratization in Turkey. Through this legitimization, DTP deputies legitimized the freedom to wear the headscarf as part of a comprehensive value system that includes rights, freedoms, democracy, human rights and pluralism. As it has been discussed in other sections, 23rd parliamentary term witnessed DTP and BDP's female representatives' problematization of social divisions and unequal treatment toward different ethnicities engaged in their speeches on headscarf issue. In order to overcome these societal divides and injustices, especially those pertaining to various identities and cultures, the representatives argue that democratization is necessary. According to Sebahat Tuncel (BDP),

Now, we say that one of Turkey's main problems is democratization, and democratization has two main subjects for us: The first is to see differences as wealth, to defend the freedom of different identities and cultures, and to take the necessary measures for this. In other words, **the more valuable the Turk is, the more valuable the Kurd is in this country, the more valuable the Alevi is, the more valuable the headscarf is**, and what the state should do is to treat everyone equally in this regard. (Sebahat Tuncel, BDP, 2010)

With these words, the representative respects women's agency in expressing their identities by acknowledging the headscarf's relevance in specific cultural and religious contexts and saying that it is valuable. Speaking up in favor of the freedom of various identities and cultures, the representative supports democratic values like inclusion, pluralism, and respect for individual rights. The representative's demand for treating everyone equally demonstrates her dedication to democratic governance,

which respects the idea of equality before the law and makes sure that all people are treated decently and fairly, regardless of who they are.

All things considered, the discourse demonstrates a dedication to advancing women's rights and citizenship in the larger framework of democratization and diversity appreciation. The representative promotes equal treatment and opportunities for all women while highlighting the significance of appreciating and respecting various identities and cultures, including the decision to wear a headscarf. Therefore, gender equality is implied by the representative's appeal for treating everyone equally, regardless of one's religion or cultural background, women's rights and citizenship are important.

Moreover, women's status as free and equal members of society is seen consistent with democratic values of inclusion, equality, and individual liberties. For instance, Ayla Akat Ata argued that:

As long as you do not see women as **free and equal members of society**, regardless of their **ethnic identity, belief, language or religion**, both those who wear a headscarf or those who do not will never be free. (Ayla Akat Ata, DTP, 2008).

This suggests a promoting democratic governance that upholds the liberties and rights of every individual, irrespective of their gender or their religious affiliation. According to her following words: "the understanding of **secular state** must be at an equal distance from all **religions and beliefs**. If you think of **freedom of religion** and conscience only for headscarved people, this would not be freedom." (Ayla Akat Ata, DTP, 2008) It is implied that genuine freedom for women extends beyond dressing in accordance with one's religion, indicating an understanding of the multiplicity of women's identities and experiences. Speaking out against a limited interpretation of women's freedom that focuses only on the headscarf, the representative emphasizes how crucial it is to defend women's rights and liberties in all spheres of life, including work, education, and political engagement. Thus, advancing gender equality and democracy, which are linked with each other, can be achieved by supporting women's full inclusion and engagement in society and acknowledging them as independent persons with a variety of identities and experiences.

5.1.3.3 Findings of 24th Parliamentary Term

The discussion on headscarf by BDP/DBP representatives in the 24th legislation term clarifies the broader context of challenges that Turkish women face, including discrimination against individuals who practice different religions and restrictions on their freedom of belief. This demonstrates concern for democracy and human rights in the context of Turkey. The speeches in common emphasize the importance of democratic ideals like freedom, equality, and inclusion by addressing women's concerns outside of the headscarf debate and advocating for inclusive solutions to problems affecting women.

To begin with, representatives of these parties dissociating the success of lifting the headscarf ban from being solely attributed to the government. As it is referred: “This [lifting the headscarf ban] is not the success of a government, **it is also the success of women who paid the price for this issue**” (Sebahat Tuncel, DBP, 2013). It implies a broader understanding of democracy, where societal changes are driven not only by government actions but also by grassroots movements, especially women's movement and activism.

Moreover, the representatives address the necessity for democratic values of equality and inclusion of diversities in political domains while criticizing the long-standing male-dominated system and demanding an end to its continuation. As it is seen in statements such as: “We know that **not only those who follow a religion, but also those who do not** are experiencing serious problems in this country.” (Sebahat Tuncel, DBP, 2013) and “As a whole, we have to create together a Turkey where there should no longer be any prohibitions on any subject, where people can express themselves freely and live freely on every issue.” (Pervil Buldan, BDP, 2013) the representatives demonstrate a dedication to democratizing places and promoting the rights and freedoms of all people, regardless of gender or identity, by focusing on the significance of uniting to solve harassment concerns and protect women's rights.

The MHP representative's statements illustrate a rhetoric that criticizes invasions of privacy and the imposition of societal norms, promoting a society in which people

are free to use their rights and make decisions based on their own moral principles. This discourse opposes politics centered in religion and supports greater liberties, reflecting a dedication to democratic values such as tolerance, freedom of expression, and individual rights. The moral evaluation strategy for legitimization is evident in following words Ruhsar Demirel: “if this is an extension of a belief, it is not anyone’s place” (Ruhsar Demirel, MHP, 2015), where she defends freedom of belief, arguing that individuals have an inherent moral right to practice their beliefs without external interference.

The representative supports a broader movement towards an inclusive and democratic society free from prejudice and condemnation by opposing discrimination based on gender and identity. As argued in following speech, the representative seems to be supporting a broader initiative to promote a society in which people are treated fairly and equitably:

In our opinion, mobbing is taking place here under the name of ‘freedom’. The lives of these ladies, who regulated their clothing based on their beliefs, were put under a microscope... Everyone should use the freedoms brought by their faith. Faith is a freedom. It is the responsibility of the state to expand people’s freedom. (Ruhsar Demirel, MHP, 2015)

In Demirel’s discourse, the aim seems to be the recognition and legitimization of women’s faith-based choices in the public sphere. What stands out is that she builds her argument not directly on religious references, but rather on concepts like freedom, citizenship, and the responsibility of the state. In this sense, Demirel is not just a conservative politician; she also appears as an actor who seeks to redefine women’s freedom within the framework of the state–citizen relationship.

Still, this approach has its limits. The notion of freedom she defends is mostly confined to the issue of the headscarf. It does not easily extend to the broader spectrum of women’s rights or to the diverse positions of women in society. Since religion is taken as the main basis for rights, the resulting understanding of representation is not pluralistic, but instead shaped around a faith-centered framework. However, while doing this, she adopts a traditionalist terminology by making religious references. Sample of such kind of speech is as follows:

May Allah accept those who fulfill the **obligation of Hajj**, may **Allah** grant it to all of us who want to go, but on behalf of my group, I reject politics based on faith, discrimination based on women's identity and mobbing based on gender, I offer my respects to all of you. (Ruhsar Demirel, MHP, 2015)

Invoking “Allah” and bringing up the “Hajj duty” are two examples of how religious allusions are used to give the conversation a deeper cultural and religious relevance. But the representative makes it clear that she opposes gender-based mobbing, discrimination against women based on their identity, and the politicization of religion. This refusal demonstrates a dedication to democratic values that support human rights, especially those of women, and equality, that indicates moral evaluation strategy of legitimization.

5.2.2.3.2 Findings of 26th Parliamentary Term

In the 26th legislative term, speeches by female HDP MPs regarding the headscarf offered two prominent behaviors. Firstly, they address democratic values and principles, especially freedom, justice, and human rights. This precisely shows the legitimization strategy of moral evaluation in their discourses. Secondly, they criticize the government's policies for undermining democratic principles. In order to give an example for the former, one can show this statement:

Freedom of dress is clearly stated in both national education legislation and international law. Distributing headscarves is a coercion, an imposition. This [a photograph of girls taken by a headmaster of school] is the product of a mentality that does not value the **individual's freedom of belief and usurps the right to education**. (Meral Daniş Beştaş, HDP, 2015)

In underlining the value of freedom of attire, the representative points out that it is recognized by both international and national education laws. One's freedom to dress whatever they desire is an essential component that ought to be supported and safeguarded.

In addition, the speech critiques the act of distributing headscarves in schools, portraying it as a manifestation of a mentality that disregards individual freedom of belief and usurps the right to education. This suggests that the imposition of religious attire in educational settings undermines the principles of democracy, which include respect for individual autonomy and the separation of religion from state institutions. Framing this issue of distributing headscarves as a violation of women's rights and

autonomy, the discourse aligns with feminist principles that advocate for women's empowerment and liberation from oppressive practices.

In another example, it is said that:

Were the winners **the head scarved ones or the Muslims? Headscarf freedom was achieved**, yes, but we were faced with losing our conscience, virtue, justice and many similar human values... The headscarf became free, but the principle of **'justice for all'** was forgotten. (Huda Kaya, HDP, 2016)

This speech was made on an incident that stated that the lifting of the headscarf ban was used as a method of oppression. By doing so, the MP demonstrates a dedication to maintaining the values of liberty and self-determination, stating that people ought to be able to wear however they like, free from outside pressure or intervention.

Moreover, the representatives of HDP also refers February 28 process in their speeches regarding the headscarf issue. However, AKP MPs portray the February 28th period as a blow to democratic values specifically concerning the rights of veiled women and the religiously conservative segment, while this parliamentarian from the HDP defines that period using terms such as racism and assimilation. In Huda Kaya's words: "Again, all our February martyrs; Metin Yüksel and Malcolm, who were martyred while fighting against racism, assimilation, uniformitarian and fascist governments. I remember X with respect." (Huda Kaya, HDP, 2017) The February 28th process intertwined the issue of headscarves, which is a women's issue, with different concepts such as racism, ultimately suggesting that it was a process that harmed democracy.

5.2.2.3.3 Findings of 27th Parliamentary Term

The findings show that HDP frequently stated that they supported the lifting of the headscarf ban from the very beginning, but that the post-ban period did not create the expected environment of freedom in the 27th legislative term. For one of the examples of this approach, the following speech by Huda Kaya can be given:

The headscarf has become liberated, but today, consciences have not been liberated; The headscarf became liberated, but living humanely and honorably and demanding it could not be liberated. The headscarf became liberated, but

the ability to express one's thoughts could not be liberated. We could not carry out the actions and activities that we could do even in those dark days of February 28, under the AKP government. (Hüda Kaya, HDP, 2019)

Huda Kaya's language contains more conservative, or rather Islamic, aspects than the language of other HDP female MPs. Therefore, feminist language is not used much. However, this can only be seen in the speeches of one representative. Considering the others, they do not have conservative tongue. In their speeches they regularly suggest implicit critique of the current government's democratic credentials or lack thereof. Their speeches indicate a desire for inclusive, participatory democracy where diverse voices of various ethnicities and faiths are heard in shaping the fundamental laws of the country. Such approach implies criticism of past constitutions that may not have adequately represented all segments of society. For example:

Turkish society should be sure that, with the climate of democracy that will emerge after this government, we will write a democratic constitution together with a broad social consensus. Conservatives in this country will live as they believe in a democratic country. We will never allow the headscarf to become a political symbol for different parties. This will never allow people to stay between two lines advocating being uncovered or covered [*açık veya kapalı*]. (Tülay Hatımoğulları Oruç, HDP, 2021)

The representative defends pluralism and tolerance within the democratic system, stating that conservatives will live as they believe in a democratic country. HDP MPs had already defended the lifting of the headscarf ban for the sake of democratic values from the very beginning. These behaviors show that the headscarf issue is reflected as a commitment to respect different ideologies in a democratic society.

When discussing these issues, of course, examples of people of Kurdish ethnicity are given among the issues of pluralism and inclusion. The issue is not about conservatism but rather about the representation of all groups, especially the Kurds. Moreover, HDP representatives puts forward is criticism that the headscarf issue is seen by the AKP only as its own achievements or used as a political tool. These criticisms, including the statement that the headscarf should not be allowed to become a political symbol for different parties, reflect concern about the politicization of cultural and religious symbols. More harshly, the rhetoric suggests a commitment to depoliticize identity markers and ensure they are not exploited for

political gain. Another example of this is when Meral Danış Beştaş was discussing Bar Association issues.

As someone who defends the headscarf, or rather, as someone who has participated in hundreds of conferences and marches that defend the right of every free person to dress as they wish, I say that yesterday I was against the headscarf ban, and today I am against the use of the headscarf as a tool of oppression. (Meral Danış Beştaş, HDP, 2018)

The representative proposes a critical approach to the complexities around the headscarf, acknowledging both the historical context of the ban and the current challenges surrounding its use. She is vehemently against the headscarf being used as an instrument of oppression. This raises questions about the manner in which customs from different cultures or religions can be used to impose restrictions on people's freedoms for political purposes.

Consequently, HDP representatives critique the AKP, alleging that it exploits the headscarf issue for its political objectives, and call on the Parliament to address other faith-related issues for diverse groups. Emphasis is placed on the notion that the headscarf matter is just one aspect, advocating for the removal of restrictions on women's clothing, such as the skirt requirement for female MPs. They express opposition to any constraints on freedom using a moral legitimization strategy. Previous discourses highlight that the headscarf issue is integral to a broader effort for women's rights and human rights (Tulay Hatimoğulları Oruç, 2021; Meral Danış Beştaş, 2018). Their speeches encompass the non-politicization of the headscarf and the importance of respecting women's choices based on their beliefs.

5.2.2.3.4 Summary of Findings

The findings show that HDP deputies brought something to the headscarf debate that other parties lacked: an intersectional perspective. In their speeches, they often tied the issue to broader struggles — bringing focus into the experiences of Kurdish and Alevi women, and framing the debate around rights and freedoms rather than a clash between Islam and secularism.

Through this lens, the headscarf became part of a larger story: one about democracy, visibility, and the fight for underrepresented groups to be heard. Like other parties, the HDP defended lifting the ban in the name of democracy and equal opportunity. But after the ban was removed, their focus shifted. They no longer stood alongside the AKP. Not because they opposed the lifting of the ban — but because they challenged the AKP's claim to own the victory. They criticized how the government framed the achievement as its sole success, sidelining the efforts of ordinary citizens and grassroots movements that had fought for change.

In this way, the HDP was fighting a deeper battle — not over the policy itself, but over who gets remembered in the story of democratic transformation. For them, representation was not just about legal rights. It was about whose voices shaped the narrative of democracy, and who history would choose to recognize.

5.2.2.4 Results

The headscarf debate in Turkey has long been more than a question of individual rights. It has been a mirror — reflecting the tensions between democracy, state governance, and the struggle for competing visions of the Republic.

Parliamentary discourses reveal deep ideological divides across parties, and show how shifting political priorities shaped the language of rights and freedoms over time.

The findings make it clear: the headscarf was never just about attire. It was bound up with competing ideas of what democracy should look like. In the CHP's view, lifting the ban posed a serious threat to secularism — and by extension, to the very stability of the democratic order. Women's rights, in their discourse, were framed through a lens of fear: the fear that freedoms hard-won could be rolled back by reactionary forces. Their opposition was pitched as a defense of secular democracy. Yet after the ban's removal, the CHP's voice on the issue grew quieter, suggesting a strategic withdrawal from an argument they no longer dominated.

AKP deputies offered a radically different story. In the 23rd and 24th legislative terms, they framed the headscarf issue through the language of constitutional democracy, human rights, and individual freedom. They argued that lifting the ban

was a step toward making Turkey “a more democratic country, one more respectful of human rights and liberties” (Alev Dedegil, 2008). For the AKP, the headscarf ban was above all a barrier to education — a barrier that needed to be dismantled in the name of justice and progress.

By 2013, the debate had shifted again. Female deputies returning from Hajj and attending parliamentary sessions while veiled symbolized a broader change: the headscarf had moved from the margins into the heart of political representation. It was no longer just about freedom. It was about visibility — about women stepping fully into public and political life.

Later, especially in the 26th and 27th terms, AKP narratives focused heavily on the injustices of the February 28 process. The headscarf issue became a story of redress: a symbol of historical wrongs finally being made right. Still, the opposition’s sharpest critiques targeted this framing, accusing the AKP of turning collective struggles into a singular party triumph.

HDP deputies brought yet another voice. Their approach grounded democracy not in top-down reforms but in pluralism and grassroots demands. They rejected the instrumentalization of the headscarf for political credit, and instead tied it to broader struggles for visibility, equality, and the defense of marginalized identities.

An early HDP speech put it simply: true democratization meant “seeing differences as wealth and defending the freedom of diverse identities and cultures.” For the HDP, the headscarf was never just about religious freedom; it stood alongside the Kurdish, Alevi, and other minority struggles as a test of how democracy treats its margins. Later, their discourse became sharper — challenging the AKP’s claim to singular authorship of the change and insisting that real democracy is built not by parties alone, but by the collective demands of people.

In the end, the headscarf debate did more than shape policy. It revealed how democracy in Turkey is imagined, fought over, and remade — sometimes as a defense of secularism, sometimes as a symbol of inclusion, and always as a struggle over who gets to define the soul of the Republic.

5.3 DISCUSSION

The findings shows that the headscarf debate in Turkey's parliament serves as a microcosm of broader struggles over identity, rights, and governance as well as a contested symbol that intersected with broader ideological, cultural, and institutional dynamics. Different perspectives on nationality have been expressed, disputed, and redefined using the argument as a lens.

While each party's discourse reflects distinct ideological underpinnings, common themes include the negotiation of women's agency, the role of religion, and the broader sociopolitical structures that shape these narratives. As the debates shifted, one thing became clear: representation is not a passive act. It is both substantive and constitutive. Political actors fight for their constituents but they also influence the frameworks that govern the understanding and application of rights, identities, and democratic values.

At one level, substantive representation was visible in how MPs fought for or against policies affecting headscarved women. Substantive representation focuses on representing the interests, needs, and concerns of a specific group, such as women, within the political decision-making process. It involves advocating for policies and measures that directly address the issues faced by that group. AKP MPs, for example, presented themselves as champions of women's rights by advocating for the lifting of the ban, while CHP MPs framed their opposition as a defense of secularism and gender equality.

Yet at another level, a deeper process unfolded. The constitutive dimension of representation emerged in the ways MPs reshaped societal narratives about womanhood through their discourses. The headscarf as taken a symbol of secularism, equality, oppression, or freedom, which implies that MPs from different parties actively constructed and reconstructed the meanings of these concepts. The representation, after all, is not merely about reflecting existing interests. It is also about shaping identities and redefining the terms of political and social inclusion.

5.3.1 Dynamic Reconstruction of Womanhood by Evolving Discourses on Headscarf

First of all, most prominent finding regarding the womanhood construction at the parliamentary debates on the headscarf issue is the significant changes in how womanhood has been constructed and redefined over different legislative terms. Across different legislative terms, the definition of womanhood shifted significantly, reflecting the ideological stances of political parties and the prevailing political climate. These shifts reveal the fluid and contested nature of womanhood as a socio-political construct.

In this sense, this study argues that the headscarf debate, in particular, serves as a focal point for this reconstitution of womanhood. The debate reflects the tensions between competing narratives of modernity, tradition, secularism, and religious freedom. In the early legislative terms (22nd, 23rd, 24th), the CHP's narratives framed womanhood through the lens of secular modernization. The headscarf was portrayed as antithetical to progress, freedom, and equality, with secularism upheld as the cornerstone of women's emancipation.

Looking back from the beginning, for much of the Republic's history, the official discourse portrayed the unveiled and educated woman as the embodiment of modern Turkish womanhood – a symbol of secularism and Western-oriented progress. This narrative, rooted in Kemalist ideology (White, 2003), implied that the Turkish woman ought to be emancipated from conservative religion, while veiled women were often seen as victims of ignorance or symbols of backwardness. Indeed, when newly elected MP Merve Kavakçı attempted to take her parliamentary oath wearing a headscarf in 1999, the public and political backlash vividly reflected this outlook: then-Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit shouted, “Put this woman in her place!” as members of parliament jeered Kavakçı out of the assembly (The Guardian, 31 October 2013). This infamous command starkly illustrated how the secular state's rhetoric othered the headscarved woman – positioning her as someone who had overstepped her bounds, and who did not fit the image of a “Turkish woman” or parliamentarian. Therefore, it can be argued that CHP MPs narratives on womanhood during headscarf debates until they started to stay silent was aligned with this

perspective of Kemalism as well as state feminism as White (2003) has discussed before. From the perspective of constitutive representation, such rhetoric positioned veiled women as outside the norm and sought to push them beyond the boundaries of political visibility.

By the 23rd term, this framing, however, was challenged by AKP. In subsequent terms, they redefined womanhood through a rhetoric centered on religious freedom, constitutional rights, and individual agency. The rise of the Islamist-rooted AKP introduced a counter-discourse that valorized the pious Muslim woman. The AKP and its female members framed the headscarved woman as both educated and capable of being active in public life – in other words, they redefined the category of “woman” to explicitly include (and even privilege) women who openly expressed their religious beliefs. They used the narrative of women’s empowerment through education and sought to integrate women into the public sphere while maintaining a commitment to conservative values.

This discursive shift was not simply about “adding” a new type of womanhood to the political imaginary; it directly challenged the previous hierarchy. AKP women and their allies framed the unveiled secular ideal as an oppressive, elitist construct, while elevating the headscarf as a symbol of virtue and authenticity. However, findings show their rhetoric changed right after the lifting of the ban. They started to repeat past victimizations of headscarved women, frequently mentioned 28 February and thanked Erdogan for his efforts for veil liberation. This means that while they used to approach to womanhood with belief freedom and equality in education, now they started to mention pious women with her political gains or losses.

In addition to that, the emergence of HDP’s intersectional discourse marked a significant departure from the binary narratives of the earlier terms by framing of the headscarf as a site of individual choice and resistance against patriarchal control offered another understanding of womanhood as well as consistently foregrounding the experiences of the multiplicity of identities, such as Kurdish and Alevi women. This inclusivity challenged the homogenized portrayals of women prevalent in both secularist and conservative discourses.

Institutionally, these debates reflect the shifting priorities and pressures of Turkish politics. While earlier terms invoked the principles of secularism and modernization as guiding frameworks, later periods saw a growing emphasis on the intersection of gender with religious and cultural identities. The headscarf issue thus evolved into a representational battleground: what one side defined as liberation, the other interpreted as repression. Secularists claimed that banning the headscarf freed women from religious coercion, whereas Islamists argued that lifting the ban freed women from state coercion. Each discourse constructed Turkish womanhood anew – either as secular and independent or pious and dignified – thereby delineating which characteristics and lifestyles were valorized or stigmatized in the political sphere. Moreover, rhetorical changes in the same parties in different times reflect a dynamic process in which womanhood is both a product of and a response to the socio-political environment. Such discourses demonstrate that representations of womanhood are not merely reflective of party ideologies but are also actively shaped by the individuals and institutions involved in the representation process. As a result, the findings bring to the forefront the inadequacy of static or unidimensional approaches to representation process. The headscarf issue illustrates how institutional structures, ideological shifts, and societal demands interact to redefine both the roles of women and the meanings of womanhood. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the constitutive dimensions of representation, where women MPs not only reflect societal norms and interests but actively reshape them. By situating the headscarf debate within this broader framework, the study provides a compelling case for the need to explore representation as a dynamic and contested process, deeply embedded in the political, cultural, and historical contexts that shape it.

5.3.2 Women's Citizenship as a Multifaceted Concept

Secondly, the debates reveal that women's citizenship is not a fixed status but a contested and evolving construct. It is shaped by various frameworks rooted in political ideologies, cultural norms, and historical legacies. Across all parties, deputies addressed policies that directly impacted women's rights, such as lifting the headscarf ban and ensuring access to education. These efforts can be argued as

reflections of the attempts to substantively represent women's interests by addressing barriers to equality.

Furthermore, going beyond substantive representation, the debates reveal how deputies actively shaped societal understandings of citizenship through reshaping identities and negotiating them. As it is seen in the discourses, deputies across parties contributed to redefining what it means to be a female citizen in Turkey. In the early legislative terms (22nd and 23rd terms), discourses on citizenship were dominated by secularist narratives emphasizing women's liberation through education and public participation free from religious constraints. These narratives, led by CHP deputies, were critical of the headscarf as a symbol of patriarchal oppression and a potential threat to secularism.

The constitutive rhetoric around these narratives portrayed it as upholding secular citizenship – the idea that in the public realm, religious symbols must be suppressed for the common good. However, this rhetoric also effectively denied agency to the women in question, casting them as passive subjects of religion or as threats to the secular order rather than individuals with their own convictions. As Siow (2023) argues, such an approach means women are merely spoken about, not truly represented: debates swirled around veiled women without giving weight to those women's own voices or choices.

While the party's reforms in the early Republican era—like granting voting rights and promoting women in education—were progressive, they often excluded rural and religious women, framing citizenship and equality through a narrow, urban-elite lens. This approach positioned women as symbols of the Republic's success but did not fully address patriarchal structures in the private sphere, leading to critiques of elitism and limited inclusivity. Despite these shortcomings, CHP's state feminism (White, 2003) set the foundation for women's public participation while leaving systemic gender inequalities unresolved, a legacy that continues to shape its discourse today.

From the 24th term onwards, the headscarf ban was lifted, and the debates shifted. AKP deputies increasingly emphasized the role of headscarved women as full

citizens, framing this inclusion as a step towards equality and justice. However, this framing often included references to party's moral values (e.g. addressing historical injustices faced by headscarved women, and praising the role of the leader), aligning citizenship with conservative ideals. They also perceived it as a symbol of a civilized nation that upholds and safeguards human rights and that ensures equal public service provision for everyone since AKP MPs framed the issue within the moral responsibilities of a state, defining it as part of its *raison d'être* (Guldal Akşit, AKP, 2008).

HDP deputies consistently referred the need for inclusive citizenship that recognizes intersecting identities, such as ethnicity and religion, while challenging patriarchal norms. Since the 26th parliamentary term, HDP's support for headscarf freedom has remained steadfast, but their rhetoric evolved to critique the AKP's appropriation of this issue. HDP female parliamentarians expressed discomfort with the AKP's portrayal of lifting the headscarf ban as their exclusive achievement, mentioning that many activists and citizens, including those from HDP, had also fought for this right. They emphasized the role of active citizenship and grassroots movements in achieving social change, reinforcing the importance of participatory democracy. As a result, the findings shows that women's citizenship in Turkey is a fluid and contested construct that is shaped by substantive claims (Squires,2008) during the representation process.

5.3.3 Reflections of Democracy, Authoritarianism and Feminism in the Discourses

The findings regarding the headscarf issue illustrate how both womanhood and citizenship are variably redefined and constructed within the representation process. However, the most prominent discourses and analyses found in MPs' statements are related to debates on the regime. The most striking and compelling aspect of the headscarf issue is how democracy is defined and reshaped in different ways through the headscarf debate. This redefinition of democracy, framed through discussions on the headscarf, stands out as a central and intriguing issue. Therefore, examining each party separately in this section provides a more structured and comprehensive approach.

5.3.3.1 Redefining Conservative Democracy and Equality

The basic argument of the AKP representatives for the headscarf was that the ban was a barrier to equal educational opportunities for women who wear the headscarf, thus linking religious freedom with the right to education. Their central to the discussion in the early legislative terms was the constitutional emphasis on equality before the law and the state obligated to ensure the realization of this equality. This argument resonates with studies on intersectionality that examine how various forms of discrimination—based on gender, religion, and other social categories—can converge to create unique barriers (Yuval-Davis, 2006; Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013). In the discourse thus far, it is evident that women are regarded as equal citizens to men, with the freedom to wear the headscarf and access to education considered essential components of democracy.

However, the language employed has undergone alterations in terms of content, and manner. AKP's female parliamentarians' shift in their approach to the headscarf issue to adopting a more conservative language and engaging in discussions appealing to conservative segments. They frequently mentioned the role of President Erdogan in removing the headscarf ban, acknowledging the transformative leadership that contributed to significant political reforms. They express gratitude for the political will that paved the way for headscarved women to exercise their rights fully. These victories were leveraged to legitimize various policy proposals by the AKP, including the drafting of a new constitution and the transition to a presidential system (Ugur-Cinar and Yol, 2023). The significance of democracy and national will in the context of headscarf freedom is a recurring theme in this Period. Furthermore, any condemn against or disparage of the headscarf is interpreted as opposing the national will (see Zeynep Yıldız, AKP). The MPs applaud the role of democracy in overcoming challenges and criticizes those who challenge the national will through legal avenues, arguing that such actions contribute to polarization.

5.3.3.2 Secularism and the Regime Discussions in the Headscarf Debate

CHP's discourse on the headscarf issue reflects a multifaceted approach shaped by secularism, gender politics, and societal norms. The party's opposition to lifting the headscarf ban in the 22-24th terms declares its commitment to secular principles, emphasizing the importance of separating religion from state affairs.

The findings show that CHP's female representatives opposed lifting the headscarf ban, often echoed the party line, framing the headscarf as a symbol of patriarchal oppression and religious conservatism. This approach can be seen as aligning with traditional feminist critiques of the headscarf as a tool of patriarchal control (Ahmed, 2011) in which women may face social pressure or even legal mandates restricting their autonomy and freedom of choice (Kandiyoti, 1991; Mahmood, 2005).

However, other spectrum of the literature argues that for some women, wearing the headscarf can be an act of empowerment and resistance against dominant social norms (see Göle, 2011; Moghadam, 2005).

However, as seen in the discourse analysis, while the headscarf issue is being discussed, CHP MPs do not specifically focus on women's concerns. They believed that lifting the headscarf ban would lead to more reactionary policies and argued that this threatened not only women's empowerment but also all republican values, especially secularism. This perception stems from the presentation of Kemalism, the founding ideology of Turkey, and secularism as a national issue that must be protected (Özbudun, 2009). Moreover, as Moghadam (2009) also claimed, the CHP did not view women as more than equal citizens of the republic. Therefore, as seen in this analysis, it is questionable whether the CHP is concerned only about representing women or the principles of the republic through the instrumentalization of the women's issue.

However, their anti-headscarf attitude, which continued until the 24th period, was replaced by silence with the freedom to wear the headscarf. CHP female MPs did not make any statements supporting or criticizing the headscarf. In this period, which coincided with the early 2010s, an important event took place within the CHP, Kılıçdaroğlu became the leader of the CHP. Thus, it can be argued that party's silence on the headscarf issue in the subsequent terms reflects a strategic shift under Kılıçdaroğlu's leadership (Özbudun, 2011; Kurban, 2015; Tekeli, 2017). However,

this shift also raises questions about the party's broader implications for women's substantive representation in Turkey.

5.3.3.3 Pluralism, Feminism, and Intersectionality in the Politics of the Headscarf

The HDP, along with its predecessors BDP and DTP, has consistently championed a pro-Kurdish ideological stance. Their discourse on the headscarf issue was heavily influenced by a broader human rights and inclusive democracy framework. From the 24th parliamentary term onwards, HDP's female parliamentarians started to emphasize on the intersectional nature of oppression. The concept of intersectionality is framed within feminism (Crenshaw, 1989), which examines how different forms of discrimination intersect and affect individuals' experiences. Their discourse on intersectionality is evident in their discussions about the rights and visibility of Kurdish women while demonstrating an understanding of the interconnectedness of various social injustices (Göksel, 2014). This approach clarifies their commitment to radical democracy (see Mouffe, 2009), which seeks to democratize all aspects of social life and empower all marginalized groups.

However, it is important to note that while the HDP promotes an inclusive, participatory, and active form of citizenship, but its focus predominantly remains on Kurds and Alevis, without any references to other ethnicities. This selective inclusivity raises questions about the extent to the party's broader political strategies and ideologies. Aligning their discourse with the party's core issues, they may be seen as reinforcing the party's primary agenda rather than advocating for a genuinely intersectional approach to all marginalized women.

As a result, it can be argued that the rhetoric of HDP's female parliamentarians exemplify substantive representation because they actively advocate for policies that address the needs and rights of women, religious and ethnic groups, going beyond mere symbolic gestures. Sure, their inclusivity is selective. But the HDP's strong feminist voice, especially on the headscarf issue, makes them stand out. Their focus on intersectionality and radical democracy fits right into modern feminist thinking about fighting layered injustices.

The trajectory of the headscarf issue in Turkey dramatically illustrates how changes in institutional norms and substantive representation impact constitutive representation. Once the formal ban was lifted and headscarved women gained entry to parliament, they did not sit quietly – they engaged, spoke, and reshaped debates. This new descriptive diversity meant that, for the first time, veiled women were speaking about veiled women (indeed, about themselves) in the legislature, rather than being spoken about by others. The presence of these women arguably made the discourse on women's rights and religious freedom more authentic and multi-dimensional. It also helped break down the monolithic stereotypes; Turks could see headscarved MPs participating competently in all matters, not just “women's or religious issues,” which constituted a more complex image of womanhood in the public eye. This outcome aligns with research suggesting that when a “critical mass” of women is present, women's issues and perspectives receive greater attention (McCallion, 2024).

In Turkey's case, even a small number of pioneering headscarved MPs had an outsized constitutive effect by normalizing the idea that devout Muslim women have a legitimate voice in governance. Moreover, the institution of parliament itself had to adapt its norms (e.g. dress codes, expectations of decorum) to be more inclusive – a process of institutional gender norm changes consistent with Mackay (2008)'s view that formal rules and informal norms evolve with pressure from actors.

Over roughly 15 years, what was once a shocking breach of protocol (a woman in a veil on the assembly floor) became an unremarkable occurrence. This highlights the iterative relationship between representation and norms: constitutive representation is not static. As new actors enter the scene, they bring new discourses. For example, today one can hear an AKP woman MP in a headscarf extolling women's role as mothers in a policy debate, immediately followed by a secular opposition woman MP championing women's individual freedoms – and both are accepted as legitimate perspectives within parliament. The range of “sayable” things about women has widened. While this doesn't mean power dynamics are erased (the ruling party's narrative still dominates agenda-setting), it does mean the parliamentary representation of Turkish womanhood is more pluralistic than before. In sum, the

headscarf saga shows how constitutive representation can shift over time, driven by institutional reforms and the agency of women representatives who redefine the symbolic boundaries of citizenship and gender in the republic.



CHAPTER 6. THE POLITICAL DISCOURSE ON ABORTION IN TURKEY

Studies on abortion often focus on the legal, ethical, and social implications of reproductive rights. Specifically in feminist theory, the issue of abortion is central to the concept of body politics, encompassing both a woman's right to make decisions about her own body at the individual level and the state's role in regulating or restricting these rights. In the literature, scholars have examined the political and ideological struggles surrounding abortion rights, pointing up the influence of feminist movements and religious groups on policymaking (e.g., Luker, 1984; Petchesky, 1990; Smyth, 2002). Over time, researchers have explored abortion policies in different national contexts, emphasizing the polarized perspectives within the pro-choice and pro-life dichotomy (e.g., Smyth, 2002; Saurette & Gordon, 2013; Munson, 2009).

In Turkey, the issue of abortion has generally been examined in academic literature through three main lenses: women's rights, body politics, and healthcare services. While recent scholarship analyzes how the state regulates and controls women's bodies (Ünal & Cindoğlu, 2013; Ekmekci, 2017), earlier studies have framed the issue within legal, medical, and religious contexts (Gürsoy, 1996; Huntington et al., 1996). Political and ideological analyses explore the polarization between secular and Islamic feminists, highlighting the challenges these divisions pose to feminist solidarity on issues like abortion, while also acknowledging the potential for strategic alliances (Ünal, 2019; Bora, 2012). In addition, MacFarlane et al. (2016) emphasize that access to abortion services in Turkey is increasingly shaped by political pronatalism and conservative discourses, limiting women's ability to exercise their reproductive rights despite the legal framework allowing abortion up to ten weeks. This aligns with broader critiques that frame abortion as not merely an individual right or a medical issue but as a contested arena for gender equality, state policies, and ideological struggles (Ünal, 2019; Ekmekci, 2017; MacFarlane et al., 2017).

Different from the existing literature, this study examines the issue of abortion as a matter of body politics within the framework of women's representation and the construction of their nationality. It critically analyzes the discourse of women representatives in Turkey and aims to reveal how their speeches reflect their approaches to womanhood, thereby offering new insights into their substantive representation on the issue of abortion. The findings delve into the discourse surrounding abortion as articulated by all women representatives in Turkey from 2002 to 2023. Demonstrating the findings aims to unravel the multifaceted narratives and ideological stances that women representatives adopt on the issue of abortion, which remains a contentious topic in Turkish politics.

When examined from a legal perspective, abortion is not prohibited in Turkey. Regardless of a woman's marital status, she has the right to terminate a pregnancy up to 10 weeks (Law No. 2827 on Population Planning). In cases where the woman is a victim of rape or similar circumstances, this period can extend up to 20 weeks (Article 99 of the Turkish Penal Code). Therefore, compared to issues such as the headscarf debate or violence against women, abortion has appeared far less frequently on the public and legislative agenda. The issue is usually taken into consideration within the family planning framework. A complete ban on abortion has never been proposed. Instead, rare discussions have centered on extending the 10-week limit to 14 weeks, or decreasing to 6 weeks. However, none of the proposals was enacted.

If no serious legislative proposal or amendment request was introduced, one may ask, why and in what context was this issue brought to the parliamentary agenda? Indeed, the primary event that brought abortion into the spotlight in the Turkish Parliament was a statement made by then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan during the International Conference on Population and Development held in Istanbul on May 25, 2012. He stated: "I am a prime minister who is against cesarean births. I consider abortion murder. No one should have the right to allow this. Whether you kill a child in the womb or after birth, there is no difference. We must oppose this together." (BBC, 2018). These remarks, made by Erdoğan during the 24th legislative term, quickly ignited parliamentary debates on abortion. Representatives in the parliament either criticized or supported Erdoğan's statement in their discourses on

abortion. Therefore, the findings in this dissertation are primarily concentrated on the 24th legislative term. Consequently, the structure and length of this chapter are shorter compared to those of other themes in this study, as there is a significant difference in the number of findings between the themes.

In this study, CDA employs qualitative research methods to examine the speeches and statements of Turkish female representatives on the topic of abortion. The primary sources of data include transcripts of parliamentary debates made by female representatives belonging to various political parties. These sources are systematically analyzed using thematic coding and content analysis techniques to identify recurring themes, rhetorical strategies, and underlying ideologies embedded within the discourse.

This chapter is structured around three main themes: how the discourses surrounding the abortion issue approach womanhood, how they engage with citizenship, and how they relate the matter to democracy. Each of these main themes is further divided into sub-sections specific to political parties, where the discourses of each party during various legislative periods are analyzed under their respective headings. At the end of each main theme, a concluding section evaluates and compares the findings across all parties, highlighting patterns and divergences in their approaches.

Once all main themes are discussed, the chapter concludes with a broader analytical section “Results” that examines the issue in relation to the concepts of womanhood, as well as citizenship, and democracy in which womanhood is embedded. This final section also reflects on the theoretical implications of these findings, offering a more comprehensive understanding of how abortion is framed within the context of womanhood. With the result section, this study aims to uncover how these representatives construct and negotiate the concept of womanhood, membership, nationhood, citizenship, and democracy through their speeches. The importance of this section lies in its ability to shed light on how women representatives engage with and challenge the dominant narratives surrounding reproductive rights in Turkey. Analysis of the various ways in which women from different political parties articulate their political positions to women issues enables this study to contribute to

the broader literature on women's substantive representation, demonstrating how gendered perspectives influence policy debates and legislative outcomes.

6.1 Diverging Notions of Womanhood in Abortion Debates

6.1.1 Defining Womanhood through Autonomy vs. Authority

This section delves into how the concept of womanhood is constructed, challenged, and redefined in the abortion discourses of different political parties in Turkey. Examining approaches to womanhood through the lens of the abortion issue holds critical importance for understanding the political, ideological, and cultural dimensions of topics such as gender equality, women's rights, and individual agency. Abortion plays a central role in advocating for women's subjectivity and individual rights, as it serves as an indicator of women's ability to make decisions about their own bodies (MacFarlane et al., 2017). This issue not only cover control over women's bodies but also sheds light on the structural dynamics that shape their visibility in the public sphere, social roles, and citizenship rights. In this context, analyzing approaches to womanhood through the abortion debate provides a powerful lens to understand how women's social, political, and individual existence is perceived and constructed during the representation process.

The analysis is structured around the abortion-related discourses of AKP, CHP, HDP, and MHP, exploring how each party's ideological stance influences their representation of women. Abortion, as both a deeply personal and politically charged issue, offers an exclusive lens through which the ideological and structural frameworks shaping parties' views on women can be analyzed. While some parties emphasize motherhood and women's societal roles within family structures, others critique these traditional narratives, advocating for a broader understanding of womanhood rooted in autonomy and equality. From the AKP's pro-life rhetoric and its prioritization of motherhood, to the CHP's emphasis on individual rights and the critique of state intervention in women's bodies, each party's approach reflects unique dimensions of womanhood. The HDP introduces a more intersectional perspective, incorporating feminist terminology and advocating for the inclusion of

marginalized groups such as Kurdish women, while the MHP frames womanhood through nationalist and collectivist ideals.

6.1.1.1.AKP: Womanhood as the Protector of Family and Morality

The discourses of AKP female deputies on abortion were shaped as part of the debates initiated during the 24th legislative period by Erdoğan's statements on abortion and cesarean sections. During this period, abortion was framed within the context of the belief that life begins in the womb, positioning the party on the pro-life side of the debate. Rather than prioritizing women's individual autonomy, the emphasis was placed on preserving family structures and maintaining social order. Womanhood was predominantly defined with a strong focus on the role of motherhood. However, these discourses are represented by a limited number of findings, as the discussions largely revolved around Erdoğan's statements and responses to the criticisms or remarks of other parties in parliament. This section analyzes AKP's approach to womanhood through the lens of abortion debates, evaluating how these discourses constructed the concept of womanhood.

From 2002 to 2012, AKP women MPs made the least, almost no, comments on abortion. In 2012, when abortion right was being harshly discussed in the parliament, ministry that enforces laws on the abortion subject was the Ministry of Family and Social Policies. The Minister was Fatma Şahin who was also an AKP's representative. Because Turkey used to have parliamentary system in those years, a representative could also be charged as a minister. Thus, her statements were useful to analyze in this case. In 2012, stating that there is a problem with the perception of abortion as a family planning method, Şahin said:

There is something seen in recent studies about abortion that abortion has increased in a serious sense as if it was a family planning method. However, **the right to life begins in the womb**. We will train our women. We will explain that abortion is not a family planning method. (Fatma Şahin, 2012, AKP)

The representative emphasizes the sanctity of life beginning in the womb and suggests that women should be educated about alternatives to abortion, framing it as

a matter of responsibility and moral duty. This view of womanhood aligns with traditional gender roles, where women are often seen as mothers, caretakers and nurturers, who priorities the “life in her womb”. Thus, the statement shows that abortion issue is not framed in terms of women’s rights or bodily autonomy but rather in the context of maintaining social order and strengthening family structures. In her discourse, abortion is not presented as a right or a medical service but as a “problem,” signaling a normative intervention by the state that extends beyond women’s individual decisions.

Moreover, her criticism of abortion being perceived as a “family planning method” reveals a paternalistic perspective that limits women’s control over their own bodies. In this context, the notion of “educating and guiding women” positions them not as autonomous individuals but as subjects in need of the state’s guidance. The assertion that “the right to life begins in the womb” accentuates how religious and conservative values shape the discourse and attempt to legitimize anti-abortion policies within a moral framework.

This statement clarifies the AKP’s effort to reinforce gender norms and women’s roles within the family through its abortion policies, linking reproductive rights not to individual choices but to social order and state ideology. Furthermore, the idea that women must be “educated” to make the “right” decisions reflect a tension between individual freedoms and state intervention, making this an important point of analysis in understanding the broader implications of AKP’s stance on women’s rights and reproductive autonomy. Supporting the Prime Minister’s statement, Şahin argued that whereas opposition parties’ representatives were supporting right to abortion due to protect the health of women and regulate the family planning, right to abortion was nothing about them.

Unfortunately, there is no other example of abortion discourse which directly refers the issue by any AKP female representatives. However, in 2016, when the representatives of HDP was making speeches regarding AKP’s negative views towards right to abortion, Ayşe Sula Köseoğlu, AKP’s representative of Trabzon, participated in the discussion. During the discussion, Meral Daniş Beştaş, HDP’s

MP, argued that abortion was about women's decision. By giving reference to feminist literature, Beştaş blamed AKP government not to believe in women-men equality and for perceiving abortion as a murder. In response to this, Köseoğlu said that: "We believe in the priority of women, we support positive discrimination and priority" and Beştaş responded as: "You can't see abortion as murder in positive discrimination". Right after her response, a male representative of AKP asked "why cannot we see?" but Köseoğlu had no reaction to the response of Beştaş.

Sometimes conclusions are drawn from the themes and categories present in the statements. However, I believe, interpreting silence must also be considered a part of critical analysis. Silence can be interpreted as a form of support, but it can also be seen as hesitation or reluctance to engage with the issue. On one hand, if their silence stems from direct support for the leader's stance, it could indicate alignment with the party's ideological and policy priorities. This possibility suggests that the deputies might choose not to elaborate on the issue because they view the leader's statements as sufficiently representative of their position. In this case, silence functions as a tacit endorsement, signaling agreement without the need for additional commentary. This approach might also reflect a strategic choice, avoiding unnecessary political exposure while maintaining solidarity with the party line. Such silence could be both a reflection of ideological conformity and a practical means of reinforcing the party's unified message on a contentious issue like abortion.

On the other hand, while being part of the same party and ideological perspective may make it difficult for female deputies to openly criticize their leader's statements. The near absence of discussions on the abortion issue among AKP female deputies can be seen as a reflection of the party's internal discipline and leader-focused political structure. Sharing the same ideological framework and the party's conservative stance might have discouraged deputies from openly contradicting their leader's statements. However, attributing this silence solely to party discipline may be insufficient.

Silence could signify implicit support for the leader's rhetoric, but it might also reflect a reluctance to engage with such a sensitive and polarizing issue. The highly contentious nature of abortion in the public sphere may have led deputies to adopt a

cautious approach, avoiding potential risks associated with taking a strong position. This hesitance could also indicate that the leader's statements dominate the party's discourse, leaving little room for individual perspectives to be expressed. Ultimately, this silence makes visible the interplay between party politics, ideological alignment, and the complexities of addressing socially and politically charged topics.

Ultimately, when we focus on the limited findings available, it can be inferred that the leader's statements were supported. This conclusion is drawn from the lack of explicit dissent and the alignment of the few available discourses with the party's broader ideological stance. Framing abortion as a violation of the right to life shows that the representative conducts a narrative that assigns inherent value to women's reproductive capacity within societal structures. This portrayal may result in reinforcement of traditional norms that restricts women's agency over their bodies and reproductive choices. Such norms naturally have gendered expectations from women to possess motherhood as a primary role in the society. These all leads us one conclusion that the representative indirectly defines womanhood by framing abortion as a moral issue tied to the sanctity of life. This framing suggests that a woman's primary role is that of a mother and caregiver, responsible for preserving life from the moment of conception. Being against abortion due to these reasons demonstrates that the speaker reinforces traditional gender norms that prioritize women's reproductive functions above her agency, choice and all else. In doing so, the speaker implicitly defines womanhood as inherently tied to the act of nurturing and sustaining life, perpetuating societal expectations that women should prioritize their roles as mothers above their own autonomy.

6.1.1.2.MHP: Womanhood Framed by Nationalist Values and Pragmatism

The abortion debate entered the Turkish parliamentary agenda during the 24th legislative term, driven primarily by the statements of then-Prime Minister Erdoğan, which sparked widespread political and societal discussions. As one of the key opposition parties during this period, the MHP contributed to these debates through the perspectives of its deputies, albeit in a limited capacity. Despite being brief, the party's views on abortion are indicative of its larger ideological commitments, which

blends conservative social norms and classic nationalist ideals with pro-choice stance.

In 2013, MHP's Ruhsar Demirel was the only woman MP who mentioned the key word "abortion" during the parliamentary discussions. Stemming from her words on the abortion issue, the representative of MHP challenges traditional gender roles and societal expectations regarding women's bodies and reproductive choices. She advocates for women's agency, rejecting attempts to dictate women's roles and behaviors based on gender stereotypes. In her words on the parliament:

Look, Mr. Prime Minister [R.T. Erdoğan] is not a doctor either, but he knows **abortion** and cesarean section very well... This head [mentality]... **considers women as crippled**, sees **women as incomplete and calls violence against women**. I would like to express here in the presence of everyone, as a **representative of the nation**, as a physician, **as a woman**... You have a problem with women and **equality**. (Ruhsar Demirel, 2013, MHP)

In the following of her speech, she focuses on the importance of Turkish nation's perspective towards women. She said: "If we really want equality for women, we must say 'like all children, all of the women in Turkey, all of the girls are ours'. This is **Turkish nationalism**..." And she blamed other representatives not to represent women arguing that "as representatives of the nation, and as an extension of our faith", their duty is to ensure that the rights of all women are upheld. While supporting the lifting of bans on women's headscarves, it has been expressed as inequality that women representatives refrain from commenting on issues such as abortion. In her following words: "**Equality** is meaningful **for all women**, for all people" (Ruhsar Demirel, 2013, MHP) As evident from this sentence, it can be observed that discrimination is being practiced among women as a concern, and this discrimination is believed to be explained by conservatism.

In this long speech of her, she referred to Turkish nationality and customs when she argues equal rights for women should be maintained. Being against AKP's perspectives against abortion right, she criticized AKP representatives to be ambivalent when they mentioned equality. Stemming from her words: "I would like to express here in the presence of everyone, as a representative of the nation, as a physician, as a woman..." (Ruhsar Demirel, 2013, MHP) it can be argued that the

inclusion of both her roles as a representative of the nation and as a woman while speaking in a professional capacity as a physician illustrates Ruhsar Demirel's speech offers a unique perspective within the MHP on issues related to abortion, equality, nationalism and women's rights. Her critique begins with a sharp denunciation of a mindset that she perceives as treating women as incomplete or incapable. She links this mentality to systemic violence against women.

One of the most striking elements is Ruhsar Demirel's framing her argument as both a representative of the nation, as a physician, and a woman. Demirel combines professional expertise, a sense of national duty to challenge prevailing narratives surrounding women's concerns and, of course, substantive representation of woman. Her reference to "everyone" suggests a commitment to inclusivity and addressing concerns that affect society as a whole, reinforcing the idea of nationalism. She stresses that true equality can only be achieved when every woman and girl in Turkey is considered an integral part of the national identity. In this context, her statement embodies both the principles of substantive representation, where she advocates for the interests of women, and nationalism, by asserting her role as a representative of the nation.

In addition, the acknowledgement of this kind of womanhood approach is given in the framework of Turkish nationalism. Her statement, "Equality is meaningful for all women, for all people," reveals her broader vision of equality, which transcends partisan divides and makes explicit the importance of addressing discrimination against women as a collective issue. Her criticism of other representatives for remaining silent on critical issues like abortion, despite supporting the lifting of headscarf bans, shows what she perceives as selective advocacy. Through her remarks, Demirel not only critiques the existing gaps in representation but also calls for a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to women's rights within the framework of Turkish nationalism and social justice. It demonstrates the need for a holistic approach to equality, one that addresses not just symbolic gestures but also substantial issues affecting women's lives. This perspective reflects MHP's ideological emphasis on national unity while incorporating a more inclusive vision of gender equality.

Moreover, the representative critiques the government's approach to abortion by challenging gendered expectations around women's reproductive health. In that means, she also challenges gendered expectations surrounding women's reproductive health, particularly in relation to abortion and cesarean sections. Criticizing societal norms and expectations that equate women's worth with their ability to bear children, the representative confronts traditional notions of womanhood that prioritize motherhood and familial roles. Instead, she implies that womanhood encompasses a broader range of experiences and identities beyond reproduction, emphasizing women's autonomy and agency over their own bodies. In doing so, the representative indirectly redefines womanhood as a multifaceted identity that extends beyond traditional gender roles and expectations.

This approach reflects a perspective that advocates for women's autonomy over their bodies. While rejecting restrictive gender norms that subsist the notion that motherhood defines women's worth, the representative seems promoting gender equality since her discourse underscores societal pressures on women to conform to traditional gender roles. The representative's emphasis on her identity as "a representative of the nation, a physician, and a woman" is particularly noteworthy as it reflects an intentional effort to frame her critique through multiple lenses of authority and identity. It allows her to underline the interconnectedness of these roles and underline that women's issues are not isolated concerns but central to the nation's integrity and progress.

6.1.1.3. CHP: Womanhood as Individual Freedom and Equality

Turkey's main opposition party, CHP addressed the abortion issue exclusively during the 24th legislative term, focusing primarily on critiquing the statements and policies of the ruling AKP. The topic is approached through the lens of protecting constitutional principles, secularism, and gender equality. In the discourses of CHP female deputies, womanhood is primarily shaped by their criticisms of other parties, particularly the AKP's direct statements and views on abortion. These critiques bring key concerns, including the state's involvement in politicizing women's bodies, the adoption of interventionist attitudes toward women's autonomy, and the prioritization of motherhood as a defining role for women. Through these points of

contention, CHP deputies articulate a perspective on womanhood that challenges conservative narratives while advocating for women's rights and individual agency. Sedef Küçük's speech made in 2012 provides a striking example of CHP's approach to womanhood within the abortion debate. Accordingly:

In this process, we have learned as a whole that 'abortion is not just murder, but that **women who had to have an abortion for compulsory reasons are actually murderers**, even women who have been raped should give birth and that women who have abortion should kill themselves'... **The female body and its preferences should not be made the subject of politics.** It should not be forgotten that the state does not have the right to **interfere in the private life of individuals**... Dear deputies, the Government, expressing that the **twelve-week fetus is sensitive to the right to life**, does not show the same sensitivity to the basic human rights of its citizens who are still living. (Sedef Küçük, CHP, 2012)

The findings show that Küçük had both a pro-choice perspective towards to the right of abortion issue. Her statement provides a striking example of CHP's approach to womanhood within the abortion debate. Accordingly, abortion is not merely a matter of individual rights but also an area where political interventions in women's bodies must be critically examined. Her statement strongly opposes turning women's bodies and their choices into a subject of political discourse. Her assertion that the state has no right to interfere in individuals' private lives demonstrates CHP's construction of womanhood through the lens of individual rights and agency.

Moreover, the discourse underlines the contradiction of valuing the "right to life" of a fetus while disregarding the basic human rights of living women. This framing not only critiques the government's policies but also reflects CHP's commitment to secular and egalitarian principles, positioning the individual—especially women—as central to the discourse on rights and freedoms. All in all, what Küçük says shows two things about the CHP. They push back against the state stepping into personal choices, but they also fight the stories society tells that push women aside. And somewhere in between, you can feel a perspective taking shape — one that sees women as full, autonomous individuals.

Same attitude was also showed by Canan Yüceer in 2015 when she was talking about a law proposal about the abortion. Her words precisely tell how she and other CHP representatives define womanhood. According to her, the proposal "says to women:

‘Your main job is **motherhood**. Your main job is to take care of spouses, children, elderly people, and patients. If you want to work outside the home, you can work in flexible, insecure and part-time jobs.’ (Canan Yüceer, 2015) The debate questions the restricted notion of femininity that identifies it primarily with domestic tasks by emphasizing the cultural pressure imposed on women to prioritize home duties above personal and professional goals.

Her following statements support such standing: “In other words, **women are reminded of their proper role and place in society. The male breadwinner family model is re-blessed**. In other words, it is said that the main career and main task of women is motherhood” (Canan Yüceer, 2015, CHP) supports her standing. Furthermore, the discourse critiques the control exerted over women’s reproductive choices and labor. By framing motherhood and caregiving as women’s “main job,” the representative argues that the societal expectation for women to prioritize these roles at the expense of their autonomy and self-determination. Womanhood, in this context, is defined by the subjugation of women’s agency to patriarchal norms that dictate their roles and responsibilities.

In her following words, feminist terminology was being used by mentioning “elimination of gender inequality”, “societal family roles”, and challenging the belief that “womanhood is motherhood”. Criticizing the patriarchal society and focusing on the elimination of gender inequality were focal points of her speech when discussing right to abortion.

In short, The CHP saw AKP’s effort to lower weeks of abortion right as the state’s method of establishing a control mechanism over the female body.

The representatives of CHP vehemently oppose the government’s abortion policy because they argue that it reflects the politicization of women’s bodies and reproductive choices. Asserting women’s right to autonomy over their body and bodily integrity, they reject the notion that the state or any authority figure should dictate women’s decisions regarding their own bodies. For instance, Nazlıaka stated in her words that “The Prime Minister needs to stop making politics over the woman’s body, in short, I say that the Prime Minister should stop being the guardian

of the vagina.” (Aylin Nazlıaka 2012, CHP) Here, the representative condemns government interference in women’s reproductive choices, framing it as an infringement on women’s bodily autonomy. The discourse rejects traditional gender norms that dictate women’s roles and behaviors, advocating for women’s right to make decisions about their bodies without state intervention. Her following words show this stance clearly:

The totalitarian regime has brought Turkey to the point of interfering with people’s private lives... **The female body and its preferences should not be made the subject of politics.** (Aylin Nazlıaka, 2012, CHP)

The representatives of CHP often critique societal expectations that limit women to roles as mothers and caregivers, advocating for gender equality and empowerment. They challenge the notion that motherhood should be a woman’s primary identity or duty.

If we say [women must have] at least three or five children, if we say that the main duty of women is motherhood... women continue to be killed. (Canan Yüceer 2015, CHP)

In these words, the representative expresses concern on government proposals that reinforce traditional gender roles and limit women’s agency with motherhood. It has been believed that the notion that women are inherently delicate contributes to gender inequality and victimizes women. Similarly, Küçük (2012)’s focus on the notion that “the state does not have the right to interfere in the private life of individuals.” (Sedef Küçük 2012, CHP) shows that the representatives indirectly define womanhood by condemning government interference in women’s reproductive choices. By framing abortion as a matter of bodily autonomy and fundamental rights, the representatives oppose the definition of womanhood made by any governmental dictates and regulations. Instead, the representatives imply that womanhood is linked to women’s ability to make decisions about their own bodies and lives, free from external control or coercion. In doing so, the womanhood is indirectly redefined as a state of self-determination and agency, in which women have the power to shape their own destinies.

In conclusion, the findings of CHP female deputies' discourses on abortion reveals a distinct approach to womanhood that contrasts sharply with the narratives of other political parties, particularly the AKP. CHP deputies critiqued the state's intervention in women's bodies, emphasizing individual autonomy and gender equality. The dangers of reducing women to their biological roles and prioritizing motherhood as the defining aspect of womanhood are repeatedly underlined in their discourses, by positioning these practices as incompatible with the principles of secularism and democratic rights.

Moreover, CHP's approach to womanhood, as reflected in the abortion debate, centers on resisting patriarchal and interventionist policies that limit women's agency. The discourses criticize the politicization of women's bodies and the imposition of traditional gender roles. The party's female deputies articulated a vision of womanhood that is rooted in individual rights and equality before the law. However, the focus of their narratives often remained reactive, primarily addressing the shortcomings of AKP's policies rather than presenting a proactive or comprehensive framework for women's rights. Yet, CHP's engagement with the abortion debate articulates its ideological commitment to secularism and its role as a counterbalance to conservative policies. While the party's critiques effectively challenge patriarchal narratives, they also reflect a broader struggle to redefine womanhood in a way that upholds women's autonomy, dignity, and equality in both the public and private spheres.

6.1.1.4.HDP: Womanhood as Intersectional Justice and Resistance

Among all these parties, there is one whose deputies did not limit their discourse to the 24th legislative term: the BDP/HDP. The findings indicate that the female deputies of this party generally approach womanhood with a radical feminist terminology while adopting a more inclusive and critical stance. They acknowledge the complexities surrounding within the context of reproductive rights. They contradict traditional notions of womanhood, which often tether women's identities to their roles as mothers by addressing the coercion and societal pressures women face regarding reproductive choices. It is seen in this statement of Züleyha Gülüm in 2018:

You are not in favor of **women's independence**; you **do not see women as individuals**. **You see the woman as a person in the family**. (Züleyha Gülüm, 2018, HDP)

This statement defines womanhood by contrasting two perspectives: one that values women's independence and individuality, and another that perceives women primarily within the context of the family unit. The assertion suggests that the former perspective, which advocates for women's independence, views women as autonomous individuals with agency and rights outside of familial roles. In contrast, the latter perspective reduces women to their roles within the family, implying that their worth and identity are primarily defined by their relationships to others rather than their individual aspirations or capabilities. Therefore, womanhood, according to this statement, encompasses the recognition of women as individuals with inherent rights and autonomy, rather than merely as members of a familial unit.

In addition, BDP/HDP representatives are among the ones harshly criticized AKP's policies on women concerns. One of these includes a strong critique of how the concepts of womanhood and family are reproduced within the framework of state policies. This statement, made by Selma Irmak in a speech in 2014, specifically criticizes the AKP's policies aimed at preserving and perpetuating the family structure, while exposing an understanding that marginalizes women's individual agency and rights. In her words:

The sanctification of the family **and the recognition of women through their roles within the family is certainly not new**; it is a stance adopted by every government. However, the AKP's interventionist attitudes, such as promoting the idea of having three children and banning abortion, demonstrate that the government is no longer merely holding this view but actively implementing policies in this direction. (Selma Irmak, HDP, 2014)

Before addressing the critique of the AKP, it is useful to analyze the deputy's statement from the perspective of approaches to womanhood. The findings suggest that the statement critiques the notion of recognizing women solely through their roles within the family, rather than as individuals. This framework reduces women to the roles of wife and mother, disregarding their individual rights. Additionally, the phrase "the sanctification of the family" indicates that the perception of womanhood is shaped through an ideology of family constructed by societal norms.

Based on this critical tone, it can be concluded that the statement adopts a perspective that defends women's individual agency and rights. For HDP, body politics-related policies instrumentalize women within the social structure and threaten equality. Other examples will be discussed shortly, but first, it is also worth examining the critique of the ruling power within this statement.

The statement explicitly criticizes the AKP's policies aimed at preserving and perpetuating the family structure, while revealing an understanding that sidelines women's individual agency and rights. Accordingly, AKP's policies, such as the "three children" recommendation and the abortion ban, turn women's fertility into a societal issue because they frame women as tools serving the family. This is interpreted as a mechanism of intervention and control over women's bodies by the representative.

Furthermore, the statement emphasizes that these policies are not merely suggestions or ideological positions but that the state actively develops policies in this direction. This implies a system in which women's individual choices and bodily autonomy are restricted. In addition to that, some female representatives linked governments' attitude toward abortion with creating a polarization within the country. According to Filiz Kerestecioğlu of HDP in 2015:

It's my body, it's my decision... We know that when women do not adopt the role of the **acceptable woman determined by conservative policies**.
(Filiz Kerestecioğlu, HDP, 2015)

The first thing that stands out in this statement is the slogan that is being used. The representatives of BDP/HDP usually raises "It's my body, it's my decision" slogan during the discussions on the abortion issue. In this way, the speakers confront traditional notions of womanhood, advocating instead for women's individual sovereignty and freedom of choice. Women's right to autonomy and self-determination over their bodies and reproductive choices are asserted with this slogan in their speeches. The slogan challenges patriarchal norms that seek to control and restrict women's agency. Therefore, it can be argued that the representatives emphasize on the domination over women's bodies and fertility by focusing on a feminist critique of patriarchal structures that limit women's autonomy and agency.

Moreover, the statement critiques **“the role of the acceptable woman determined by conservative policies,”** (Filiz Kerestecioğlu, HDP, 2015) pointing to the societal expectations that dictate women’s behavior and choices. This reveals a broader critique of how conservative ideologies impose restrictive gender roles, where women’s autonomy is subordinated to traditional notions of femininity and motherhood. Women who deviate from these norms, such as those seeking abortions, are stigmatized and marginalized. It demonstrates that the deputy holds a completely opposite perspective, approaching womanhood as autonomous agents.

Meanwhile, one can see that from the very beginning until recent period, women representatives of HDP handled with abortion discussions by using a feminist discourse. For example, Oya Ersoy argued the government has sexist and misogynistic policies, which reduce women to their biological characteristics and limit their rights and freedoms in these words:

Yes, the **sexist, reactionary, male-dominated, misogynistic policies** implemented by the political power itself; **reducing the role of women in the society** to their **biological characteristics**. (Oya Erson, 2021, HDP)

Oya Erson’s words strongly criticize the reduction of women to purely biological roles. She argues how traditional roles such as motherhood and caregiving limit women’s societal value and how these patriarchal expectations overshadow women’s individuality and contributions to society. Erson opposes this definition of womanhood, advocating for a vision of equality where women are free to define their identities and roles on their own terms. Her statement is a powerful call for a social order in which women are not merely seen as biological beings but as individuals whose rights and freedoms are fully recognized.

Statements that express approaches to women’s roles through criticism are frequently observed within the HDP. Of course, there are instances where such matters are explained directly using feminist terminology, but these are relatively rare. As mentioned above, how the party’s deputies define womanhood is often explained through such critiques. Another example includes the following expressions:

Since 2008, Mr. President has made statements about women and **the social role of women at every point**, starting from 3 children, to the question of

abortion, how to marry, how to take place in society, how to dress. With these statements, we see what is actually desired as a standardization of the society, **a move to create an acceptable woman in Turkey**. (Mizgin Irgat, 2016, HDP)

These critiques by Mizgin Irgat reflect feminist perspective that emphasizes women's agency, rejecting attempts to dictate women's identities and behaviors based on patriarchal norms. The reference to "standardization" implies a desire to homogenize women's experiences and behaviors, aligning them with a specific, state-sanctioned model of womanhood. This "acceptable woman" offered in such model, for the representative, is likely one who adheres to traditional gender roles and complies with the government's vision of womanhood, which includes specific expectations about motherhood, marriage, and modesty. In addition to the discussion of the roles of women, this discourse illustrates how gender and power overlap in current political environments.

Ultimately, the representative's examination of womanhood highlights the pervasive discriminatory behaviors and gender prejudices in society and calls for a redefined definition of womanhood that upholds the autonomy, rights, and dignity of women while also transcending traditional gender roles. Generally, representatives of BDP/HDP are likely to offer speeches on intersectionality of women and ethnicity by giving examples of some Kurdish women who were imposed to violence against women (e.g. Mülkiye Birtane, 2013, BDP). In her speech about abortion, for instance, Mülkiye Birtane (2013, BDP) starts her arguments by focusing on violence against women first. Then, she mentions some Kurdish women who were murdered in Paris. It is important to touch on this speech because recognizing the participation of women from different ethnic backgrounds in parliament emphasizes how diversity must be embraced when defining womanhood. This particular behavior is exclusive to members of this political party.

As a result, findings show that the HDP's discourses on abortion are primarily constructed as critiques of other parties' narratives, utilizing feminist terminology to challenge the reduction of women's biological characteristics to societal roles. These discourses also emphasize the inclusion of Kurdish women, rejecting attempts to create a homogenized or standardized understanding of womanhood and advocating

for a more nuanced and intersectional approach to women's rights and representation.

6.1.1.5.Results

The findings of the CDA of women MPs' speeches on abortion in Turkey provides significant insights into how the concept of womanhood is constructed and contested across different political parties.

Findings show that, there are various approaches to the concept of womanhood. These approaches can essentially be analyzed under four main headings. According to this study, these headings clearly reflect how each party defines womanhood in their discourse and their stance on abortion. This also demonstrates the concept is constructed and these constructions are deeply tied to ideological, cultural, and socio-political frameworks that influence both substantive and constitutive representation.

This approach to womanhood is most prominently observed in the discourses of AKP deputies. AKP women MPs frame womanhood primarily through motherhood and familial roles. The emphasis on "the right to life begins in the womb" and critiques of abortion as a family planning method reflect a moralistic and religious perspective. Womanhood is thus presented as a responsibility tied to the preservation of family and societal values. This framing positions women as guardians of the family and society, with their primary role being reproduction and the nurturing of future generations.

Furthermore, AKP's discourse heavily emphasizes educating women to change their perceptions of abortion. For example, Şahin's statement, "We will train our women. We will explain that abortion is not a family planning method," reflects the party's belief in guiding women's reproductive choices through moral instruction. However, this approach sidelines the individual autonomy of women, reinforcing a narrative where women's decisions are subordinate to societal and familial needs.

Unlike liberal feminist perspectives, AKP's stance on abortion rarely acknowledges women's rights as individuals. Instead, it constructs womanhood around motherhood and moral obligations. While aligning closely with global pro-life rhetoric, AKP's

approach is intertwined with its broader political agenda — one that often merges women's roles with the preservation of conservative social norms.

In sharp contrast, for CHP, womanhood is constructed around personal freedom and equality. Specifically, CHP women MPs challenge traditionalist framing by advocating for bodily autonomy and individual rights and consistently criticizing state intervention in women's reproductive decisions, framing abortion as a fundamental right tied to individual freedom. Statements such as “The Prime Minister should stop making politics over women's bodies” (Aylin Nazlıaka) critique patriarchal control and emphasize women's autonomy in reproductive decisions. Therefore, it can be argued that CHP representatives adopt a liberal feminist approach, defining womanhood through principles of equality and personal autonomy.

Furthermore, CHP critiques the societal norms that perpetuate gender inequality. Through its liberal feminist framework, the party consistently argues for the dismantling of patriarchal structures that limit women's roles to familial duties. This approach places the CHP at the forefront of advocating for women's individual freedoms within the parliament.

HDP women MPs offer an intersectional and feminist critique of abortion policies, framing them as tools of demographic and militaristic control. For example, Mülkiye Birtane linked abortion restrictions to systemic violence and Kurdish women's struggles, presenting womanhood as diverse and intertwined with broader social justice movements.

Moreover, HDP's discourse connects abortion to broader struggles for justice and equality. Kurdish women's experiences, as discussed in parliamentary speeches, are used to illustrate the intersectionality of oppression faced by women based on ethnicity and gender. By critiquing militaristic and authoritarian policies, HDP frames abortion restrictions as part of a larger strategy to marginalize women and reinforce patriarchal power structures.

Unlike other parties, HDP goes beyond the binary of pro-choice and pro-life. Its feminist discourse emphasizes structural change rather than individual autonomy alone, linking women's reproductive rights to broader societal transformations. This approach positions HDP as a progressive force advocating for justice and equality on multiple fronts.

MHP women MPs contribute a unique perspective to the abortion debate by adopting a nationalist yet pragmatic lens. Their emphasis on professional expertise and critique of patriarchal norms, while maintaining a commitment to traditional values, sets them apart from both AKP's moralistic approach and CHP's liberal feminist stance. This duality positions MHP as a bridge between conservative and progressive narratives, reflecting the complexity of reproductive politics in Turkey.

Womanhood is often framed as a duty to preserve Turkish cultural and national identity. For instance, Ruhsar Demirel emphasized that equality must apply to all women, tying this principle to the broader ideals of Turkish nationalism. This perspective shows the role of women as cultural and familial anchors, ensuring the continuity of the nation, as well as the necessity of equality in practice.

MHP's discourse differs from the moralistic pro-life framing of AKP in its emphasis on scientific and professional knowledge. Demirel's critique of then-Prime Minister Erdoğan's abortion policies, stating that he lacked the medical expertise to dictate such matters, exemplifies a pragmatic approach. This reliance on professional expertise contrasts with AKP's moral and religious justifications, positioning MHP as more grounded in societal and medical realities. Furthermore, MHP acknowledges the complex socio-political factors contributing to abortion, such as violence against women and limited access to healthcare, and critiques simplistic solutions like reducing abortion limits.

While MHP shares some conservative ideals with AKP, it challenges patriarchal norms selectively. For example, Demirel pointed societal expectations that disproportionately burden women while overlooking men's reproductive roles, subtly critiquing the gender imbalance embedded in conservative narratives. This approach balances the party's traditional values with an acknowledgment of systemic

inequalities, presenting womanhood as both a cultural responsibility and a domain requiring equitable treatment. From this, one can see that MHP positions itself somewhere in the middle ground between the pro-life and pro-choice camps. While it does not explicitly advocate for bodily autonomy like CHP or HDP, it incorporates elements of both camps through its nationalist emphasis on societal harmony and pragmatic acknowledgment of women's challenges. As a result, women MPs engage with the concept of womanhood and abortion in multiple ways in accordance with differentiating factors.

6.2 Womanhood in Broader Political Debates on Abortion

6.2.1 Whose Citizenship Matters? The Politics of Prioritizing Lives

The literature has explored the issue of abortion through the lens of pro-choice and pro-life frameworks, focusing on its moral, legal, and ideological dimensions. The abortion debate is often framed around a “woman’s right to choose” versus “the fetus’s right to life” (e.g., Petchesky, 1984; Ginsburg, 1998; Munson, 2009; Halfmann, 2011; Rocca et al., 2020; Foster, 2021). This dichotomy shows the competing narratives of agency and protection since it sheds a light on how political actors and societal structures define and rank the value of different lives within the framework of citizenship. However, the question of whose citizenship is prioritized within this context has not been a focal point of discussion. This study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing how abortion discourses reflect and construct hierarchies of citizenship, revealing which identities, rights, and lives are given precedence in the political narratives.

Therefore, the overarching aim of this analysis is to elucidate the diverse range of perspectives and approaches adopted by female representatives in Turkey towards abortion rights and their implications for citizenship. By closely examining the language, arguments, and narratives employed by these representatives, this study seeks to uncover how their discourse reflects broader conceptions of citizenship, gender equality, autonomy, and reproductive rights within the Turkish political context. In this chapter, the findings for each party are firstly presented individually, pointing their approaches and perspectives. Following these party-specific analyses, a comprehensive results section will provide an overarching synthesis of the

findings, comparing and contrasting the discourses of all parties to offer a broader perspective.

6.2.1.1 AKP: Maternal Citizenship and the Moral Primacy of the Fetus

AKP has produced limited discourse on the issue of abortion, with most of it revolving around Erdoğan's anti-abortion and anti-cesarean statements during the 24th legislative term. Notably, female representatives within the party have remained almost entirely silent on the matter, with very few taking any public stance.

One of the rare speeches of an AKP representative on the abortion issue, Fatma Şahin (2012) said the following words during a Parliament discussion:

“However, **the right to life begins in the womb**. We will train our women. We will explain that abortion is not a family planning method.” (Fatma Şahin 2012, AKP)

This single available statement reflects an ongoing narrative that frames womanhood predominantly through motherhood and reproductive roles. In this context, the abortion debate is approached not as an issue of women's rights or individual freedoms, but as one concerning the preservation of societal order and family structure. This approach can be interpreted as a tendency to reduce women's citizenship rights to their biological roles and identities as mothers.

In addition, the representative's focus on educating women about alternatives to abortion can be interpreted as an attempt to promote responsible citizenship, advocating for choices that align with societal norms and values regarding family and reproduction. Şahin's statement, “We will train our women,” implies a mission by the state to reshape women as individuals aligned with societal norms, sidelining their personal choices and agency. In this context, citizenship is constructed not as women having autonomy over their own bodies, but as fulfilling societal needs and adhering to moral standards defined by the state. It implies that women's citizenship involves adherence to societal norms and values regarding fertility. Within the discourse of citizenship, the speech implies a responsibility to educate women about the perceived morality of abortion, suggesting a paternalistic approach to women's reproductive choices.

This context of citizenship, where the representative's discourse reflects an approach suggesting that women need to be guided on the moral implications of abortion, implies a hierarchical relationship between the state and its female citizens, wherein the state assumes the role of moral authority over women's bodies and reproductive choices. Such discourse raises questions about the extent to which women are afforded full citizenship rights, including autonomy and agency over their reproductive health decisions. In conclusion, this discourse points to a paternalistic approach that frames women's citizenship more in terms of social responsibilities than individual rights. Within this framework, women are evaluated not as active citizens, but through roles and duties assigned to them by the state.

6.2.1.2 MHP: Nationalist but Pragmatic Citizenship

The issue of abortion is often framed as a matter of family planning. However, the MHP adopts a different stance, opposing this perspective. The party's discourse reflects a strong emphasis on traditional values and societal structures, viewing abortion not merely as a personal or health-related issue. The speech of Demirel (2013) emphasizes the importance of recognizing women's rights as human rights and asserts women's autonomy in decision-making about their bodies. This perspective aligns with the principles of inclusive citizenship, where all individuals have equal rights and freedoms.

The goal is not trying to make families have children. You have a problem with women and **equality**... If we really want equality for women, we must say '**like all children, all women in Turkey**, all girls are ours'. This is Turkish nationalism. (Ruhsar Demirel, 2013, MHP)

Ruhsar Demirel's statement reflects significant insight into MHP's understanding of womanhood and citizenship. The critique of the abortion issue is reshaped not only through the lens of control over women's bodies but also by framing women as equal and integral parts of the nation. Indeed, this is done precisely, referring nationalism without any subtlety. This manner makes easy to analyze Demirel's ideological inclination. She explicitly links women's equality to Turkish nationalism with the phrase "This is Turkish nationalism" where she demonstrates MHP's nationalist approach to women's rights. Erdoğan's opposition to abortion and cesarean sections

intertwines women's rights and equality with concepts of national unity and belonging.

In addition, by defining equality as a national matter with the phrase “You have a problem with women and equality,” Demirel highlights that existing policies violate the principle of equality. The statement “All women in Turkey, all girls are ours” presents a narrative that positions women not as individual subjects but as collective elements of national identity. This discourse approaches women's rights and equality not through individual autonomy but in the context of social solidarity and national allegiance. In this sense, Demirel's statement reproduces MHP's understanding of womanhood and its approach to the abortion issue through national values and societal norms. The abortion issue is addressed in the context of gender equality, and beyond that, it frames this equality not through individual autonomy but within the bounds of social solidarity and national allegiance. In this regard, it can be said that the MHP representative's discourse stands out as distinctly exclusive compared to other parties.

In conclusion, the findings show that the abortion issue is framed within the context of gender equality, but it extends beyond individual autonomy, positioning this equality within the framework of social solidarity and national allegiance. By linking Turkish nationalism to discussions on abortion and women's rights, the MHP representative implies a stance that women's citizenship is contingent upon adherence to certain societal norms and expectations, without regarding reproduction and motherhood. Such a manner reveals an idea of nationality which women are afforded full citizenship rights, including autonomy and agency over their reproductive health decisions, within the Turkish context.

6.2.1.3 CHP: Autonomous Citizenship and the Assertion of Individual Rights

The CHP largely voiced its position on abortion during the 24th legislative term. This period was heavily influenced by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's controversial remarks about abortion and cesarean sections, creating a political climate where CHP's female representatives openly expressed their views on the issue. Much of

their discourse revolved around criticizing the AKP policies, but these critiques went beyond simple opposition. They reflected a broader commitment to defending women's individual rights, bodily autonomy, and pushing back against what they saw as the state's overreach into personal decisions.

CHP's female deputies frequently draw attention the dangers of restricting abortion, arguing that such efforts threatened women's freedoms and undermined their individual rights. They focused on key concerns like the state's use of women's bodies as political tools, the reduction of women's identities to their roles as mothers, and the disregard for gender equality. Their stance was not just about protecting women's choices; it was also tied to broader values like secularism, human rights, and social equality, showing how deeply these principles shaped the party's approach to abortion.

Thus, it can be argued that the CHP representatives' speech on abortion emphasizes the fundamental rights of citizens, particularly women, to make choices about their bodies without any interference from the state. It demonstrates the importance of protecting individual liberties and human rights within the framework of citizenship. As Küçük stated in 2012;

The female body and its preferences should not be made the subject of politics. It should not be forgotten that the state does not have the right to interfere in the private life of individuals... Dear deputies, the Government, expressing that the twelve-week fetus is sensitive to the right to life, **does not show the same sensitivity to the basic human rights of its citizens who are still living.** (Sedef Küçük, CHP, 2012)

From a broader perspective, what is criticized here is actually about who is prioritized as a citizen: is it women or a child that may be born? According to this criticism, while government policies focus on the right to life of a fetus, they actually ignore the right of women, who are living citizens, over their own bodies. The underlying conflicting views on the abortion issue actually lie in which citizen is more of a citizen. If a woman is seen as a citizen who produces citizens, her agency is pushed in the background. Therefore, it is a better approach for this CHP MP to protect the basic rights of this woman who is already a citizen.

Moreover, the discourses of CHP representatives call for social and legal reforms to eliminate gender inequality and empower women to participate fully in society. They sign the need for social and legal reforms to eliminate gender inequality and empower women to participate fully in society. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing women as individuals with rights and freedoms equal to those of men, promoting inclusive citizenship by critiquing government policies that restrict women's access to reproductive healthcare. For instance, in following words, the representative argues the intersectionality of gender, citizenship, and social justice, advocating for policies that promote gender equality and respect women's autonomy;

Now, the population policy that the government is implementing, particularly targeting women, is built on these foundations. Unfortunately, through discussions on abortion and cesarean sections, women's bodies are being made the number one political tool. If we say 'at least three to five children,' if we point to the so-called 'natural delicacy' of women, and then claim that a woman's primary duty is motherhood, and within a justice system that confines women to the limits of family life, say 'You are not equal,' then women will continue to be killed. Some people come out and say, 'Equality policies are disrupting our family unity and cohesion,' or when women complain about unemployment, they are met with the response, 'Aren't the household chores enough?' (Canan Yüceer 2015, CHP)

Canan Yüceer's extensively quoted statement sharply criticizes the use of women's bodies and roles as political tools. She highlights how debates around abortion and cesarean sections disregard women's subjectivity and individual rights, placing them at the center of political and ideological conflict. Her remarks challenge the framing of women not as individuals, but primarily through their roles as mothers and within the family. Furthermore, she advocates for women to fight for social equality, labor force participation, and individual rights, while pointing out that statements like "You are not equal" portray women as second-class citizens and contribute to a problem that extends as far as femicides.

Yüceer sheds light on how approaches that view gender equality as a threat undermine women's rights and opportunities. She criticizes the mindset reflected in remarks such as "Aren't the household chores enough?" when women complain about unemployment, seeing them as a dismissal of women's societal contributions and an attempt to confine them to domestic labor. This statement illustrates CHP's approach to the abortion issue as one shaped by a perspective that prioritizes

women's individual subjectivity and rights. It rejects the reduction of women to their biological roles and their definition through family ideology. In short, Yüceer's words can be understood as a clear example of a stance that redefines women's citizenship on the basis of individual rights, gender equality, and subjectivity.

All things considered, this analysis pulls back the curtain on just how complicated things get when it comes to women's citizenship and the way their bodies are politicized. It reminds us how vital it is to protect women's agency and freedom — not just in politics, but in every part of life. CHP representatives believed that abortion should be considered as a choice of women and it reflects women citizens' preferences over their bodies which should not be interfered by policies. This approach lays bare the complicated ways women's citizenship and their bodies get pulled into politics. And just how important it is to protect women's agency and autonomy — not only in the political arena, but in their private lives too, it makes clear. Here, citizenship is understood not only as legal rights and responsibilities but also as the preservation of personal freedoms and privacy.

When one looks closer, it can be seen that CHP representatives' discourses can easily be read through a gendered lens. They are really about the struggles women face in trying to claim control over their own bodies, in a world where patriarchal politics and social pressures keep trying to pull that control away. Thus, the analysis brings out the intersectionality between gender and citizenship. It implies that women's rights are never shaped in isolation, but through broader power dynamics and deeply rooted social norms.

6.2.1.4 HDP: Demographic Control and Resistance to Structural Oppression

The findings of the BDP/HDP representatives' discourse on abortion consists of variety of criticisms in which government policies are frequently accused to be restricting access to reproductive healthcare and perpetuating gender inequality, calling for greater recognition of women's rights as integral to citizenship by the representatives of BDP/HDP.

A central theme in HDP's discourse is its critique of the state's instrumentalization of women through family-centered policies. These policies, which include promoting the sanctity of the family, discouraging abortion, and encouraging high birth rates, are framed as mechanisms that subordinate women's rights to societal and political goals. The party's representatives argue that such approaches not only undermine women's agency but also reinforce gendered inequalities by confining women to domestic roles and diminishing their presence in public life. For example:

Yes, the **sexist, reactionary, male-dominated, misogynistic policies** implemented by the political power itself; **reducing the role of women in the society to their biological characteristics and making them second-class citizens, confining women to the family and burdening them with domestic labor**, the sick, the elderly, and child care; giving men the right to decide on **a woman's life, body, and labor**. (Oya Erson, 2021, HDP)

In fact, the inclusion of this statement among the findings is highly significant because it directly critiques how women are treated as second-class citizens by the state, expressed through the issue of abortion. It claims that the policies implemented by the political power are patriarchal and sexist. The confinement of women to the family and their relegation to domestic labor not only reinforce societal norms but also diminish women's visibility in public life. These policies disregard women's agency and establish a structure that grants men authority over women's lives, bodies, and labor. This approach limits women to their familial and domestic roles, rather than recognizing them as individuals with equal rights and agency. As a result, women are pushed into the position of second-class citizens.

Erson also criticizes the idea that men have the right to decide over women's lives, bodies, and labor. This reflects a distorted concept of citizenship, where women's autonomy and equality are sidelined in favor of enforcing social norms. Instead of promoting equality, this view reinforces patriarchal structures that control and constrain women. In this sense, Erson emphasizes that the pressures on women's bodies and labor are not merely social issues but also political matters.

To sum up, what Erson is essentially saying is that citizenship is not just about holding a national identity. It is also about having the ability to make decisions about

one's own life, being recognized as an equal in public spaces, and having access to the same rights and opportunities as others

Moreover, HDP representatives imply that citizenship rights, particularly regarding reproductive health and bodily autonomy, are not equally granted to women.

Abortion is operationalized through invasive and discriminatory policies. As Mülkiye Birtane (2013) stated:

Considering that the government poses various difficulties to women who want to have an abortion, that birth control pills are not covered by the SGK, that high school and university women are forced to have a virginity test and their families are informed, that women who have had abortions are tagged and that successive marriage incentives are considered, the policies carried out over the woman's body. (Mülkiye Birtane, BDP, 2013)

The representative expresses that women have difficulty executing their abortion right. Pointing out the barriers and injustices faced by women in accessing abortion services and birth control, the speaker critiques the government's failure to uphold fundamental rights and freedoms for all citizens, particularly women. Moreover, the representative emphasizes on how the government creates obstacles for women, how birth control pills are not covered by insurance, and how intrusive procedures like virginity exams limit and control women's agency. These practices are not just invasive; they strip women of their privacy, autonomy, and dignity. In addition, the tagging of women who have had abortions and incentivizing successive marriages further shows that state policies treat women as instruments of social engineering rather than autonomous individuals.

This discourse considers women's citizenship rights not only as individual rights but also based on the state's obligation to provide fundamental services fairly. Women's equal position in society can only be ensured if these services are organized with gender equality in mind. Birtane's statement frames gender equality as a state policy and a public responsibility.

Another prominent feature of the discourses of HDP representatives is that they bring attention to the intersectionality dimension of citizenship. According to them, Kurdish women, already navigating systemic inequalities and state surveillance due

to their ethnicity, face additional pressures as their roles are reframed within state-driven narratives of morality and family. This raises concerns about the unequal treatment of women from different ethnic and regional backgrounds, exposing how the state's policies are often used to reinforce control rather than foster inclusivity in the discourses. For example:

What are you doing to change this perception, and to fight against perceptions that try to divide **and turn women into enemies by classifying them** as wearing headscarves, uncovered, chaste and lewd? What are the holy families that you want to protect in **Kurdish provinces**? (Filiz Kerestecioğlu, 2015, HDP)

Here, the representative asks for a more inclusive and egalitarian conception of citizenship that respects women's diverse identities and choices, also by interrogating the divisive tactics that classify women based on their clothing and behavior. Moreover, the mention of "holy families" in Kurdish provinces prompts reflection on traditional gender roles and patriarchal norms, urging a reexamination of whose interests these families represent and whose rights they seek to protect. In addressing these issues, the MP reinforces the intersectional dynamics of gender and ethnicity, highlighting the unique challenges faced by Kurdish women in their quest for equality and recognition within society.

Moreover, the abortion issue and women's citizenship are further illustrated in the representatives' critiques of policies promoting population growth and standardization of the society. One area of concern is the government policies aimed at encouraging women to give birth to multiple, at least three, children. While framed as measures to support families, these policies are critiqued for their impact on women's autonomy and perpetuation of traditional gender roles. Accordingly, instead of empowering women, these policies reinforce stereotypes and limit their agency in reproductive decision-making (see Mülkiye Birtane's speech regarding Ministry of Family and Social Policies, HDP, 2013).

To illustrate, HDP saw abortion policy of the current government as a population strategy. In order to gain benefit by using the female body in the engineering of creating a uniform society by increasing birth rate. Same argument was also put forward by Meral Daniş Beştaş of PDP in 2016. Accordingly:

The struggle for the right to abortion started with the need for women all over the world to decide for themselves the **right to have a say over their own bodies**, when and how many children they will have, by advocating the right of every woman who gets pregnant despite not wanting a child to have an abortion in order to end her pregnancy. This right, which exists in Turkey, albeit limited, is sabotaged by the Government officials, especially the President, as a core of the policy of **increasing the young population**, which is the only remedy they have found for economic inadequacies, and the expression of the slogan of at least 3 children. (Meral Daniş Beştaş, HDP, 2016)

This speech can be further analyzed by considering the government's demographic strategy in relation to women's citizenship rights. In this context, the government's policy of increasing the young population can be seen as not only undermining women's reproductive autonomy but also instrumentalizing women's bodies for demographic purposes. Another example when representative links approaches to abortion with patriarchal attitudes towards women's reproductive choices, Züleyha Gülüm argued that "your mind is male-dominated, because you want women within four walls... We know this very well from your words: 'We do not believe in equality between men and women.' We know very well from your words, in the abortion discussions, 'Instead of the child will die, the raped mother should die.'" (Züleyha Gülüm, 2018, HDP). With the focus on instrumentalization of women's bodies for political and demographic purposes, the representatives of BDP/HDP again disrupt traditional gender norms that equate womanhood with motherhood.

By prioritizing the promotion of larger families, often articulated through slogans such as "at least 3 children," the government seeks to address perceived economic inadequacies and bolster the country's demographic profile. This critique has been frequently used by many HDP deputies (e.g. Mülkiye Birtane, HDP, 2013; Sibel Yiğitalp, HDP, 2018; Mizgin Irgat, 2016, HDP; Selma Irmak, HDP, 2014; etc.) However, this strategy overlooks the individual agency and rights of women, reducing them to mere vehicles for demographic growth rather than recognizing their full citizenship and autonomy. Thus, the government's demographic agenda intersects with broader gender dynamics, perpetuating inequalities and limiting women's citizenship rights by prioritizing demographic goals over individual freedoms and rights.

Overall, the findings show that the HDP representatives conduct a radical feminist framework in their discourses. It can be understood from repeating key words such as “masculinity”, “male dominance”, “gender inequality”, having control over female body, “motherhood role of women”. However, there is another prominent aspect that stands out in this discourse analysis. That is abortion policy was linked with militarism, authoritarianism and conservative ideology. Taking a close look at the speeches of these representatives, the representatives of BDP/HDP claimed that authoritarian and military motivations are driving government measures that push women to have several children. The example is as follows:

The government’s desire for women to give birth to many children cannot be evaluated only in the axis of conservative policies. At the same time, this is a way that governments that **adopt a militaristic approach follow as a population policy to increase their military power.** The Ministry of Family and Social Policies is also the biggest implementer of the government’s policies that encourage women to give birth to many children. (Mülkiye Birtane, 2013, HDP)

Birtane’s argument that regulations regarding abortion and women’s productivity are not simply the consequence of conservative ideology but also have a militarist attitude to demographic policy is another significant issue that is expressed in her speech. For instance, a representative addresses abortion policies as “a way that governments that adopt a militaristic approach follow as a population policy to increase their military power” (Mülkiye Birtane 2013, HDP) before criticizing President Erdogan on shaping societal norms and expectations regarding women’s roles and behaviors. Recently, having a radical feminist and third wave feminist perspective prevailed all speeches of HDP’s women deputies in the parliament.

In conclusion, the findings show that the discourse of HDP representatives on abortion brings to light several significant themes that distinguish their approach from other parties. First and foremost, HDP critiques the patriarchal underpinnings of current policies. They frame them as not only perpetuating gender inequality but also as actively contributing to its institutionalization. A second notable aspect of HDP’s discourse is its inclusion of Kurdish identity within the framework of citizenship. Unlike other parties, HDP explicitly addresses the intersectionality of ethnicity and gender. They emphasize on the systemic exclusion of Kurdish women from broader

definitions of citizenship. Thirdly, HDP critiques abortion policies as being driven by demographic objectives. Representatives argue that these policies are not designed to prioritize women's health or autonomy but instead aim to control population dynamics in ways that disproportionately impact marginalized groups, including Kurdish women. This perspective sheds light on the broader socio-political implications of reproductive policies and their role in demographic engineering.

Finally, HDP introduces an assertive dimension by asserting that the abortion debate in Turkey has militaristic undertones. Representatives argue that the state's emphasis on population growth and demographic control serves as an extension of nationalist and militaristic agendas, further marginalizing women's rights and autonomy in the process. Therefore, it can be argued that HDP's approach to abortion reflects a multifaceted critique that goes beyond gender to include ethnicity, militarism, and demographic objectives. They challenge traditional notions of citizenship and advocates for a model that is inclusive, equitable, and grounded in the recognition of intersectional identities. This viewpoint makes the party's rhetoric on abortion particularly radical by highlighting its dedication to tackling the larger socio-political systems that influence women's citizenship.

6.2.1.5 Results

In contemporary Turkish politics, discourse surrounding abortion rights has emerged as a contentious and polarizing issue (Ünal, 2019; Cindoğlu & Sayan-Cengiz, 2010; MacFarlane et al., 2016; Ekmekci, 2017; Altınok & Kalkan, 2021). The debate is shaped not only by legal and medical considerations but also by competing political and moral narratives, which influence policy decisions and public discourse. Within this context, the study reveal that the female representatives examined in this study have played a pivotal role in shaping these debates and influencing legislative outcomes related to reproductive rights.

Citizenship, in this context, transcends its legal definition (e.g. Marshall, 1950). It encompasses women's access to rights, their place in public life, and their agency over their own bodies. Thus, this study raises a critical question: Whose citizenship matters? In the abortion debate, this question becomes particularly poignant, as different political parties and their representatives prioritize certain lives, rights, and

identities over others, revealing underlying ideological and cultural biases in their conceptualization of citizenship.

The analysis of women MPs' discourses on abortion uncovers diverse and ideologically driven approaches to the concept of citizenship as it pertains to women and the fetus. These narratives, rooted in distinct party ideologies, reveal varying priorities regarding women's rights, freedoms, and societal roles. Moreover, the discourse exposes a central tension between prioritizing women's citizenship as autonomous agents and advancing the presumed citizenship of the fetus. This section provides a detailed examination of these party-based approaches, pointing their implications for how citizenship and representation are conceptualized.

Findings show that AKP representatives position women's citizenship as fundamentally tied to their roles as mothers and moral stewards of society. Women's access to rights and freedoms is constructed within the framework of collective familial and societal obligations rather than individual autonomy. For AKP women MPs, the concept of citizenship extends to the unborn child. They show that they prioritize its "moral" and social protection over the mother's agency. This is exemplified in Fatma Şahin's assertion that "the right to life begins in the womb," a statement that frames the fetus as a potential citizen whose rights demand safeguarding.

Although it is not easy to say they are exactly the same, AKP's discourse is more likely to be underpinned by a pro-life ideology that intertwines moral and religious values with political narratives. Women's reproductive choices are framed as responsibilities toward the family and society, with little room for personal decision-making. The fetus's presumed citizenship becomes central to these narratives, effectively subordinating the mother's autonomy to collective moral imperatives. This, in fact, proves the existence of a mentality that assumes the primacy of the fetus's right to life rather than prioritizing the woman's decision-making autonomy. Also, such framing reinforces traditional gender roles, positioning women as the moral anchors of the family while marginalizing their ability to exercise citizenship rights independently.

In stark contrast, CHP discourses construct citizenship as a realm of individual autonomy and equality. They frequently challenge patriarchal narratives that seek to regulate women's reproductive rights, framing abortion as an essential component of personal freedom. The criticism in their speeches – such as Aylin Nazlıaka's critique of AKP policies—"The Prime Minister should stop making politics over women's bodies"—reflects a rejection of state control over women's reproductive decisions and a commitment to safeguarding bodily autonomy.

Thus, the findings show that CHP's discourse prioritizes women's ability to access and exercise their rights as independent citizens. Unlike AKP, CHP de-emphasizes the fetus's citizenship, instead framing reproductive decisions as a private matter between a woman and her own values. This approach aligns closely with global pro-choice narratives, positioning women as autonomous agents entitled to equal participation in societal, political, and personal domains. It shows that CHP promotes a reinterpretation of citizenship that combats conservative and patriarchal traditions by emphasizing individual liberties. The clearest example of this is Sedef Küçük's 2012 demand for the same sensitivity shown towards the right to life of the fetus to be extended to defending the rights of living citizens. Here, the deputy explicitly offers the issue of whose citizenship is being prioritized and clearly advocates for a woman's right over her own body.

As with other issues, HDP adopts an intersectional and systemic approach to citizenship, situating abortion within the broader struggles for justice and ethnic equality. First and foremost, perhaps the most interesting aspect of their speeches is that they conduct completely different lens that critique the state's abortion policies as tools of demographic control and systemic oppression, particularly targeting marginalized groups such as Kurdish women. For example, Mülkiye Birtane's argument that the government's reproductive policies reflect militaristic goals showing the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and political subjugation.

Despite the literature on abortion usually being centered around the pro-life and pro-choice dilemma, HDP's female representatives' claims that link reproductive policies with demographic control is a great contribution to the literature on constitutive representation because they argue that state policies do not only regulate women's

bodies but also shape societal structures and power dynamics. They broaden the discussion beyond individual rights by presenting abortion as an instrument of oppression and demographic engineering. In this way, they provide a prism through which to view how reproductive policies construct and sustain larger structures of control and inequality.

The findings show that HDP positions women as citizens whose identities and rights are shaped by overlapping systems of oppression, including ethnicity, class, and gender. Another prominent proof of this approach can be found in the multiple discourses challenging the prioritization of the fetus's citizenship, framing it as a mechanism for reinforcing authoritarian and patriarchal structures. Instead, HDP advocates for women's full participation as citizens with the right to reproductive autonomy. HDP women MPs critique patriarchy through their abortion speeches, which include arguments on how discourses focusing solely on women's reproductive rights reduce women to the status of second-class citizens. This narrative transcends the binary of pro-choice and pro-life, linking women's rights to structural transformations that address systemic inequalities and social justice.

MHP often combines nationalist values with pragmatic approaches in shaping the concept of citizenship, particularly reflecting its oppositional stance and strong ideological emphasis during the period in question. MHP women MPs, or one representative in general, highlight women's roles in preserving national and cultural identity while advocating for equitable policies that recognize individual rights. Unlike AKP's approach, which prioritizes the citizenship of the fetus, or CHP's stance, which centers on individual autonomy, MHP strives to strike a balance by addressing the societal significance of both the mother and the child. This indicates that MHP adopts a discourse that is as pragmatic as it is nationalist.

Clearly, Ruhsar Demirel's critiques of policy inconsistencies offer MHP's emphasis on practical and professional solutions to reproductive issues. These critiques essentially acknowledge the citizenship of the fetus, but without prioritizing it over that of the mother. Instead, MHP aims to reconcile women's rights with societal harmony, positioning itself between conservative and liberal narratives. This

suggests that in redefining women's citizenship, a combination of external and personal factors plays a significant role.

6.2.2 Democratic Dilemmas: Balancing Rights and Moral Debates

The language surrounding abortion has become a key topic of controversy in the context of Turkish politics, reflecting broader contradictions between traditional beliefs and modern democratic norms. This analysis's main goal is to expose the many viewpoints and methods Turkish female politicians use in relation to abortion rights and the ways in which they affect democracy. This study aims to clarify how these representatives' discourse reflects larger ideas of democracy, human rights, gender equality, and civic engagement within the Turkish political context by thoroughly examining the language, arguments, and narratives they use.

6.2.2.1 AKP: Balancing Women's Rights and Fetal Rights

While the speeches of AKP representatives do not explicitly address democracy, the emphasis on educating women and guiding their choices suggests a paternalistic approach, potentially limiting individual autonomy and agency in decision-making. The only statement made by a female AKP representative regarding the issue of abortion, as mentioned earlier, was Fatma Şahin's 2012 remark emphasizing the education of women. While this statement does not directly establish a connection between the issue and democracy, it still provides insights that allow us to draw relevant inferences. Let me remind you what she said:

“However, the right to life begins in the womb. We will train our women. We will explain that abortion is not a family planning method.” (Fatma Şahin, AKP, 2012)

Fatma Şahin's statement provides a key insight into how the AKP approaches the issue of abortion within the framework of democracy and rights. From her remarks, it is evident that the emphasis lies more on preserving social order and the state's educative role over women, rather than on individual rights. Particularly, the phrase “*The right to life begins in the womb*” clearly demonstrates the AKP's pro-life

stance in this debate. As previously discussed in the citizenship section, this marks out the prioritization of the fetus's right to life over a woman's individual choices. This frames abortion as a conflict of rights: should the priority be a woman's right to make decisions about her own body, or the fetus's right to life? In this context, Şahin's statement redefines abortion not as an individual decision but as a societal and moral issue.

Another noteworthy element of her statement is the phrase, "We will train our women." (Fatma Şahin, AKP, 2012) This reveals a paternalistic approach by the state, which assumes the role of guiding women toward the "right" path rather than supporting their individual agency and democratic rights. From one perspective, this suggests that women are seen less as autonomous decision-makers and more as individuals expected to conform to the moral and societal norms defined by the state.

From a democratic perspective, this statement frames citizenship rights within the boundaries of social responsibilities and state-defined norms. The issue of abortion is presented not as a matter of women's democratic rights but as part of the state's mission to preserve the moral and biological order of society. The debate itself often revolves around family planning, with Şahin expressing her view that abortion should not be considered a family planning method in the extended version of this statement (Fatma Şahin, 2012, AKP). This suggests a preference for the state's ideological position shaping policy, rather than prioritizing individual rights in a democratic society. It presents abortion as a moral issue rather than a matter of individual rights and this can be concluded in reflecting a conservative stance that prioritizes moral values when dealing with abortion issue. This approach shows that there are various ways of approaching democratic principles and reshaping them accordingly. In this discourse, the fetus's right to life is considered being more significant than a woman's right to make decisions about her own body. In this perspective, the rights of the fetus are not only prioritized but also actively defended and integrated into the political discourse. This creates a narrative where the fetus is given moral and political representation, while the woman's choice is secondary. Moral considerations can redefine the balance of rights in the democratic process.

In conclusion, the speech implies a top-down approach to decision-making, with an emphasis on educating women rather than promoting open dialogue and respecting diverse perspectives. This paternalistic stance raises questions about the representative's commitment to democratic principles of individual autonomy and freedom of choice. The framing of abortion as a matter of moral right versus wrong suggests a tension between individual autonomy and state regulation within democratic societies. Moreover, the suggestion of women's education on abortion as a means to discourage its practice can be argued as an approach that may infringe upon women's rights to bodily autonomy and reproductive freedom. This tension might open broader debates within democratic societies regarding the balance between individual rights and moral governance, particularly in matters concerning reproductive rights and women's autonomy.

6.2.2.2 MHP: Equality as Contesting Gendered Power Dynamics

When the abortion issue was put in the agenda of the parliamentary discussions, the MHP was in the opposition and brought its nationalist ideology into discussions on abortion. Interestingly, there is only one statement from an MHP female representative on this topic, but it stands out for directly addressing Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's controversial remarks about abortion and cesarean sections. What makes this statement notable is how it ties the abortion debate to democratic values, framing it not just as a personal issue but as one with broader societal and national implications.

In the statement, provided below, the association of a women's issue—particularly one as directly tied to women's bodies and decisions as abortion—with the state regime is a particularly striking finding. This shows that the representative views women's rights as integral to the broader struggle for democracy and social justice. In Demirel's words on abortion: "The totalitarian regime has brought Turkey to the point **of interfering with people's private lives.**" (Ruhsar Demirel, 2013, MHP)

Coming from the MHP, a nationalist party traditionally focused on issues of state sovereignty and national integrity, this statement uniquely ties the abortion debate to democratic principles and individual autonomy. In this context, Demirel's words are notable for framing the issue of abortion as more than just a policy or health matter.

Instead, she emphasizes the broader implications of government interference in private lives, hinting at a threat to democratic freedoms. As a member of the opposition during that era, her critique shows concerns about authoritarian tendencies and their impact on personal rights. By doing so, she positions the debate within a democratic framework, where individual freedoms are seen as essential to national identity. The discourse critiques government policies that reinforce gender stereotypes and restrict women's reproductive rights, thus, the speech positions reproductive rights as integral to the broader struggle for democracy and human rights.

The importance of protecting reproductive rights within democratic societies given with references to the impact of such policies on women's autonomy and bodily integrity. This is also linked with the matter of equality. In Demirel's following words: "Because aim is not trying to make families have children. You have a problem with women and you call it '**equality**'." (Ruhsar Demirel 2013, MHP)

These remarks suggest that the policies in question prioritize societal goals—such as increasing birth rates or emphasizing family roles—over the rights and autonomy of women. In a democracy, true equality implies that individuals have agency and are not reduced to tools for achieving broader state objectives. Her emphasis on the contradiction between declared equality and the actual treatment of women shows the potential disconnect between democratic ideals and their execution in practice. Additionally, this statement also indirectly calls for a more inclusive democratic framework, one that genuinely considers women as equal citizens, not solely in terms of their biological or familial roles but as individuals with rights and agency. Such questioning the alignment of these policies with democratic values offers a deeper reflection on whether the existing system supports or undermines women's equal participation in society.

As a result, despite being singular, the finding reflects the party's approach to integrating its nationalist vision with democratic ideals, presenting an alternative narrative to policies perceived as patriarchal or overly interventionist. This lone voice from the MHP opens an important window into how abortion can be discussed within a nationalist yet democratic framework. The analogy to a totalitarian regime

discusses how far-reaching and potentially dangerous state interventions into individuals' private lives can be. This is particularly evident in policies targeting women's bodies, which not only challenge gender equality but also pose a threat to fundamental democratic rights. Policies that disregard women's agency are perceived not merely as restrictions on individual freedoms but also as an erosion of democratic principles. This analogy serves as a powerful critique, not only of government policies but also of the broader systemic issue of infringing on women's individual rights.

6.2.2.3 CHP: Abortion as a Reflection of Totalitarian Regimes

The CHP's discourse on abortion emphasizes state control over women's bodies and its impact on individual freedoms. Their statements point to concerns about private life, autonomy, and democratic values. CHP representatives often address how government policies interfere with women's decision-making and reinforce traditional gender roles. Through these critiques, they position themselves as advocates for gender equality and personal rights. This section examines how the CHP links abortion debates to democracy, equality, and women's rights.

The speeches of AKP, specifically Erdoğan, on abortion is approached as the government's attempts to control women's bodies as indicative of a totalitarian regime in the discourses of CHP representatives. They associate the erosion of democratic principles and personal freedoms with these policies. They advocate for a democratic society where individuals, the women, have the right to make decisions about their own bodies without fear of state intervention or punishment. For example:

The Prime Minister needs to stop **making politics over the woman's body**, in short, I say that the Prime Minister should stop being the guardian of the vagina. **The totalitarian regime** has brought Turkey to the point of interfering with **people's private lives**. (Aylin Nazlıaka, CHP, 2012)

Aylin Nazlıaka's statement above criticizes the intrusion of state power into women's private lives through discourses on the issue of abortion. By describing the

Prime Minister's approach as the "guardian of the vagina," she sharply emphasizes the excessive interference of political authority in personal and bodily autonomy. This critique suggests that such policies weaken the principle of individual freedom and reflects a broader questioning of authoritarian tendencies. The invocation of totalitarianism emphasizes on the gravity of these interventions and their broader implications for democratic principles and governance. Thus, it can be concluded that state control over women's bodies undermines individual freedoms, a cornerstone of democratic governance.

As previously discussed in the literature review, the issue of abortion has sparked the same ongoing debates worldwide, revolving around the woman's choice and the humanity of the fetus. In Turkey, CHP representatives stand out as advocates prioritizing women's choices. While considering abortion issue as a private life matter of women, the representatives also criticized the party of power being not democratic.

Debates between the fetus's right to life and the mother's right to life have always been a focal point in the abortion issue. A similar situation exists in Turkey, of course. It is seen that CHP MPs prioritize women's right to life in this dichotomy. Sedef Küçük extends this critique by pointing to the broader implications of policies that prioritize fetal rights over women's autonomy. According to a speech of Sedef Küçük, "we have learned as a whole that abortion is not just murder, but that **women who had to have an abortion for compulsory reasons are actually murderer**" in addition, she said:

In this process, we have learned as a whole that 'abortion is not just murder, but that **women who had to have an abortion for compulsory reasons are actually murderers**, even women who have been raped should give birth and that women who have abortion should kill themselves'... **The female body and its preferences should not be made the subject of politics.** It should not be forgotten that the state does not have the right to **interfere in the private life of individuals...** Dear deputies, the Government, expressing that the **twelve-week fetus is sensitive to the right to life**, does not show the same sensitivity to the basic human rights of its citizens who are still living. (Sedef Küçük, CHP, 2012)

Her remarks given above discuss the selective application of rights, contrasting the government's concern for the fetus's right to life with its disregard for the human rights of living citizens. This juxtaposition draws attention to the inconsistent application of democratic principles and the marginalization of women as equal citizens. The emphasis on the state's role in interfering with private life underscores the erosion of personal freedoms in the name of ideological goals.

The contradiction to abortion policies that reinforce gender stereotypes and restrict women's autonomy, argues for a more democratic society where all individuals, regardless of gender, have equal rights and opportunities. It also emphasizes the importance of challenging patriarchal structures to uphold democratic principles. As Yüceer argued **“women are reminded of their proper role and place in society. The male breadwinner family model is re-blessed.”** (Canan Yüceer, 2015, CHP). With these lines, she argues that the government's rhetoric and actions seek to reassert conservative gender roles. Additionally, women are confined to domestic spaces and subordinated their societal contributions. For her, this framing portrays the policies as part of a broader agenda to limit women's roles in public and economic life, thereby undermining gender equality.

In terms of abortion, the representatives generally criticize government policies that restrict women's autonomy and access to abortion, arguing for a more democratic society where all individuals have equal rights and opportunities. Therefore, it is argued that government policies perpetuate gender inequalities and limits women's rights and freedoms.

In conclusion, the findings indicate that CHP's discourse on abortion positions the issue as a critical intersection of women's rights, bodily autonomy, and democratic values. Through sharp critiques of state overreach and paternalistic policies, CHP representatives emphasize the erosion of individual freedoms and negotiate the dangers of reducing women to societal roles centered around reproduction and family. We arrive at this conclusion from the observation that the discourse consistently critiques state's intervention in women's personal decisions has been perceived as undermining their autonomy. This has been interpreted as emphasizing that, otherwise, safeguarding individual freedoms requires policies that respect bodily rights and personal choices. Their statements frame abortion not merely as a

moral debate but as a democratic concern, where the state's interference in women's private decisions is seen as indicative of broader authoritarian tendencies. As a result, discourses can be explained as summary of the party's commitments to protecting personal freedoms and gender equality, while simultaneously challenging policies that compromise democratic principles and reinforce patriarchal structures.

6.2.2.4 HDP: Militarism, Authoritarianism and Democracy in Abortion Debate

In Turkey, the BDP/HDP is the party that has most frequently addressed the issue of abortion and, aligning with the pro-choice stance, has most prominently linked the matter to democratic rights and freedoms. Unlike other parties, they have not limited their engagement with the issue to the 24th legislative term but have addressed it in almost every term. However, similar to other parties, BDP/HDP representatives have primarily focused on the issue when responding to anti-abortion statements made by significant political figures. This section examines the findings derived from the statements of BDP/HDP representatives on abortion, focusing on how the issue is addressed within a broader regime-level framework.

The findings show that they see anti-abortion speeches as an attack to democratic rights of women. They usually refer government's policies undemocratic, arguing that such policies undermine the principles of individual autonomy and freedom of choice. In addition to that, most of the representatives repeated that government's approach to abortion is directly related with population policies which are claimed as authoritarian and even militaristic, arguing that such policies undermine democratic principles by prioritizing state interests over individual freedoms. To begin with references to authoritarianism, one of the examples is as follows:

We are talking about a Presidency that... tries to shape the women and the society in Turkey, and to dictate its own ideas like a Constitutional article, by getting ahead of the judiciary, the legislature and the executive. (Mizgit Irgat, 2016, HDP)

The speech critiques conservative approaches that undermine women's rights and freedoms, arguing that such policies erode democratic principles by restricting individual liberties and perpetuating gender-based discrimination that ignores women's rights. However, another critique emerges more prominently here: the

government's authoritarian attitude, acting as if its rhetoric were a constitutional principle, is explicitly criticized through the issue of abortion. Pro-choice support is clearly articulated, as this discourse suggests that approaches to issues like abortion shape and influence the national conception of womanhood as if it were written into a constitution. While abortion is only briefly referenced as an example in this statement, the critique quickly shifts to authoritarianism without delving into specifics. This might be because no legislative change was on the agenda during the time of this speech. However, the key point remains: any "restrictive," "regulatory," or "interventionist" action targeting women's bodies is directly linked to democracy. The continuation of this statement is as follows:

This statement implies that every intervention concerning women's bodies is evolving into an authoritarian system, where women face a threat so significant that they may no longer have a place within it. It can be said that this reflects the use of feminist language. The reference to "standardization" implies a desire to homogenize women's experiences and behaviors, aligning them with a specific, state-sanctioned model of womanhood. This "acceptable woman" offered in such model, for the representative, is likely one who adheres to traditional gender roles and complies with the government's vision of womanhood. The approach to womanhood was already discussed in the section addressing this topic. However, this statement is not only about womanhood but also a speech that can be associated with democracy, because in addition to the discussion of the roles of women, this discourse illustrates how gender and power overlap in current political environments. Accordingly, government's stance on women's roles in society and its maternalist thinking are evaluated as evidents of a larger plan to uphold authoritarian rule. Therefore, the representative does not only encourage critical thinking on the ways that rhetoric and policies of the state affect women but also urge a reevaluation of the woman ideals and ideas for that ought to guide a democratic and inclusive society.

A similar message is conveyed in even harsher terms by Züleyha Gülüm, who places greater emphasis on the issue of abortion, stating: "We know very well from your words during the abortion debates: 'Instead of the child dying, the raped mother

should die.” (Züleyha Gülüm, 2018, HDP). This statement is another criticism of oppressive speeches of HDP that attack women’s bodily integrity. It goes far beyond the pro-choice and pro-life dichotomy, implying that even women’s right to live, not just their right to choose, is under threat. It subtly implies how secondary women’s status has become, as this representative refers a statement made by a political figure in power to point the absurdity of such a perspective while conveying her own stance.

Therefore, it can be argued that the discourse is not limited to abortion; it actually critiques a broader perspective on women’s bodies, societal roles, and subjectivities. This is not merely a critique of a specific practice or policy but of a larger mindset—patriarchal, interventionist, and controlling. In this context, the discourse reveals how this mindset is shaped through the issue of abortion and how it threatens women’s rights. In a sense, it frames the issue not just as a policy but as a systematic power dynamic and an ideological framework. There are also those who address the issue using a more feminist terminology. For instance:

Yes, the sexist, reactionary, male-dominated, misogynistic policies implemented by the political power itself; reducing the role of women in the society to their biological characteristics and making them second-class citizens. (Oya Ersoy, 2021, HDP)

This speech also accuses conservative policies that undermine women’s rights and freedoms, arguing that such policies erode democratic principles by restricting individual liberties and promoting gender-based discrimination, but it does so with a stronger grasp of feminist terminology and a critical stance toward patriarchy. The focus here is not just on the erosion of women’s rights but on how these policies construct a version of citizenship that systematically excludes women as autonomous individuals. The phrase “making them second-class citizens” suggests a broader critique of a state apparatus that prioritizes control and conformity over diversity and freedom. This discourse reframes the issue, suggesting that the state’s patriarchal governance is not only a threat to women’s equality but a distortion of democratic principles, as it privileges a singular, male-centered narrative of societal roles.

In another example when HDP representative positions reproductive rights as central to the larger struggle for democracy and human rights, Beştaş argued that “We see that the laws that are effective in the fight against violence, the right to abortion, the right to alimony, **and the libertarian mechanisms of women are also attacked.**” (Meral Daniş Beştaş, 2020, HDP) The use of terms like “oppressive governments” reflects an ideological stance that views women’s rights as under threat from oppressive systems. Also, the mention of “attacks “on these rights implies not only legislative or policy shifts but also a cultural or ideological resistance to the advancement of women’s liberties. By listing these specific areas, the representative seems drawing attention to the cumulative impact of these challenges, signaling that these are not isolated issues but part of a larger pattern of encroaching control over women’s rights. This language positions women as victims of systemic oppression, reinforcing the narrative of gender inequality and the need for resistance.

Moreover, she also stated that: “In particular, we would like to reiterate our opinion that the common stance of women deputies on this issue will be a serious gain **against masculinity** and against the **masculine approach of parliaments** in the world in general.” (Meral Daniş Beştaş, 2020, HDP) Her statements offer power dynamics between men and women, framing the issue as a struggle against masculinity and the masculine approach of parliaments worldwide. This suggests an underlying power imbalance where men, or masculinity as a societal construct, are seen as dominant forces shaping legislation and policy. Furthermore, the statement suggests that a unified voice among women deputies could serve as a broader model for addressing gender-based disparities in politics, demonstrating that collaborative efforts can yield tangible gains in dismantling patriarchal norms. It acknowledges the pervasive nature of male dominance in legislative bodies and frames the unity among women representatives as a transformative force against this “systemic” issue. From this, it is possible to infer an understanding that women’s representation actively reshapes the culture and priorities of legislative institutions.

As a result, the findings show that HDP’s discourse on abortion and democracy does not merely critique specific policies or speeches; it seeks to unravel the intentions behind them. HDP frames these actions as state interventions into women’s bodies which is a part of a broader, systematic attempt to control society under the guise of

morality and tradition. HDP's representatives seem to argue that these measures are not accidental or isolated but deliberate efforts to standardize societal roles, particularly for women, in a way that serves a more centralized, undemocratic vision of power. The repeated emphasis on the authoritarian undertones and feminist terminology also supports this inference. For them, these policies are less about protecting life and more about reinforcing patriarchal power structures and limiting individual freedoms.

Consequently, the HDP's feminist and pro-choice stance positions abortion as a focal point for contesting oppressive systems and advocating for a more inclusive democracy. This perspective not only critiques existing policies but also redefines the conversation around women's citizenship and democratic participation. Moreover, this critique extends beyond gender politics, questioning the broader democratic mechanisms and their responsiveness to individual rights. Unlike other parties, HDP incorporates marginalized groups into its discourse, broadening the democratic conversation to include perspectives often excluded from mainstream narratives. Through its focus on inclusivity, equality, and systemic critique, HDP provides a lens to examine how gender and democracy intersect in Turkey's political context.

6.2.2.5 Results

Parliamentary debates on abortion in Turkey reveal that the issue transcends reproductive health and becomes a site where competing visions of rights, equality, and governance collide. Rather than being framed solely as a matter of choice, abortion is constructed at the intersection of personal autonomy and state authority, making it a critical lens through which to examine both substantive and constitutive representation.

AKP women MPs typically frame abortion through a moral lens, emphasizing the fetus's right to life as a human right. Fatma Şahin's assertion that "life begins in the womb" reflects this pro-life, state-centered stance. In contrast, CHP and HDP women MPs defend abortion as a fundamental human right tied to bodily autonomy. While CHP focuses on reproductive freedom, HDP adds an intersectional dimension, linking restrictions to the oppression of marginalized groups, especially Kurdish

women. These contrasting frames illustrate how representation involves not just advocating for interests but also constructing the meaning of rights. Debates also center on equality, albeit through divergent lenses. CHP women criticize patriarchal norms and argue that restricting abortion enforces traditional gender roles. HDP pushes further, framing abortion policy as a tool of both patriarchy and ethnic domination. AKP, however, defines equality in terms of complementary gender roles, prioritizing family integrity over individual rights—thus narrowing the scope of gender equality to fit conservative ideals.

Strikingly, abortion is also framed as a regime issue. CHP and HDP MPs depict restrictions as authoritarian overreach, with Aylin Nazlıaka describing it as a “totalitarian politics over women’s bodies.” HDP emphasizes the use of pro-natalist policies for demographic control, especially over Kurdish populations. Meanwhile, AKP MPs defend restrictions as necessary for national morality and stability, reinforcing the party’s broader conservative-nationalist discourse. MHP women present a mixed stance, showing discomfort with both liberal and authoritarian extremes, while largely echoing national values.

These findings show that abortion is not only a policy issue—it is a battleground where gender, power, and political identity are negotiated. The variation across party lines illustrates that female MPs do not speak with one voice, and their discourses actively shape what is seen as legitimate representation. This reaffirms the need to go beyond outcome-based evaluations of representation and attend to the meanings, framings, and ideological underpinnings that define how gender and governance are imagined in parliamentary discourse.

6.3 DISCUSSION

The analysis of abortion discourse in Turkish parliamentary debates provides a revealing lens through which to examine how political actors articulate competing visions of womanhood and embed them within broader frameworks of citizenship and democracy. Rather than being a standalone policy matter, abortion emerges as a site where divergent ideological positions converge and conflict—shaping how rights, identity, and belonging are defined, negotiated, and contested. The

perspectives of the AKP, MHP, CHP, and HDP reveal not only their positions on reproductive rights but also their broader stances on the role of the state, the individual, and democratic values. The findings show that discussions on abortion often transcend the boundaries of health or individual autonomy, touching on systemic questions about the role of women in society, their agency, and their inclusion in the democratic process.

This chapter examines how these narratives construct womanhood through maternal and biological roles, define citizenship in terms of societal obligations versus individual freedoms, and link democracy to state paternalism or grassroots inclusivity. These discussions are not confined to policy; they reveal how gendered norms and ideologies are continuously reshaped and contested within political arenas. Thus, the findings have significant theoretical implications, as they bridge the frameworks of substantive representation and constitutive representation

5.3.4 Womanhood Between Biological Essentialism and Feminist Resistance

Abortion debates frequently center on the definition of womanhood. The findings reveal that each party approaches womanhood through different contexts and reshapes the issue of abortion based on these perspectives. AKP-era rhetoric has strongly emphasized women's roles as mothers, effectively constituting an ideal of womanhood in which motherhood is the ultimate fulfillment of a woman's identity. Top officials (including President Erdoğan) frequently urge women to have at least "three children," describing motherhood as a sacred duty to nation and faith. This discourse reduces women to their reproductive function, sending the message that a "woman" is one who bears and raises children for the country. In representation terms, women are being constituted as a means to an end (population growth, national vitality) rather than as ends in themselves – an instrumentalization of women's bodies that Siow (2023) identifies as a hallmark of merely speaking about a group, not for it.

Besides, in their speeches, they tend to align with pro-life narratives and prioritize societal stability over individual rights. They frame women's agency as rooted in their role as societal contributors, with primary value placed on their reproductive capacities. Women's roles, in this framing, are subordinated to state-defined moral

and societal norms. This view reduces women's identities to their biological functions, positioning them as guardians of familial and societal continuity.

According to Htun (2005, 162), family laws that keep women in a subordinate position while ensuring the authority of men are one of the various ways the state maintains the gender-based division of labor. Laws regarding abortion and birth control serve a similar function. Many restrictions on abortion can be seen around the world and legitimize biologically deterministic views of gender. As discussed earlier, there are two competing views on abortion: the pro-choice view, which sees motherhood as elective, and the pro-life view, which insists that there is a 'humanity of the fetus' that begins with pregnancy. According to Htun, the state, by criminalizing abortion or limiting its availability, prevents women to have a choice over their bodies (Htun, 2005: 163). By doing so, women's autonomy and agency is pushed into the background by the law of state.

MHP representatives, on the other hand, approach the issue of abortion within a nationalist framework when relating it to womanhood. Women are viewed as integral parts of the nation and carriers of cultural values. However, rather than emphasizing individual rights, the focus is placed on social solidarity and national allegiance. In the discourses, women are not seen as autonomous individuals but as integral elements of a unified national identity. While this perspective critiques state overreach, it still confines women to roles that serve collective goals, blurring the line between individual rights and national interests.

In contrast, the CHP challenges these narratives by emphasizing women's autonomy and their right to make decisions about their own bodies. The statements of CHP representatives advocate for defining womanhood based on individual rights and freedoms. According to them, this is a matter established by the constitution and should not be subject to government intervention. The findings also demonstrate that the politicization of women's bodies has been criticized, and the statements of key political figures in the government regarding abortion have been perceived as a threat to women's agency. Their criticisms directly oppose the instrumentalization of women and frames their bodily autonomy as a fundamental democratic right.

The HDP takes this critique further by adopting a feminist and intersectional approach. Its representatives reject the reduction of women to biological roles and focus on systemic critiques of patriarchal norms. Using feminist terminology, the HDP criticized the reduction of women to their biological roles and adopted an approach centered on women's rights, gender equality, and individual agency. This aligns with Htun's (2005, 162) argument that family laws and abortion restrictions serve to sustain the gender-based division of labor, legitimizing biologically deterministic views on gender. By advocating for reproductive rights, these MPs attempt to push back against the state's historical role in limiting women's autonomy.

One of their most frequently criticized issues was the "standardization" of women (Mezgin Irgat, 2016) and the imposition of the government's perspective on womanhood through its discourse. The HDP's approach to womanhood has been notably inclusive, especially bringing Kurdish women into the conversation at every opportunity. This, of course, aligns with their ideological stance. Additionally, they argued that policies limiting women's agency are incompatible with democratic values. The HDP framed abortion as a reflection of women's agency.

In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that approaches to womanhood in the context of abortion, while often positioned along the pro-life and pro-choice spectrum, reveal varying dimensions within these frameworks. Definitions of womanhood have been shaped by the ideological orientations of political parties and their respective stances on abortion, offering distinct visions concerning women's individual autonomy, social roles, and citizenship rights. This diversity clearly indicates that abortion in Turkey occupies a critical intersection of womanhood, national belonging, and citizenship. In the following sections, the findings concerning its connections to citizenship and democracy will be further examined.

5.3.5 Inclusion, Exclusion, and the Boundaries of Being a Member of a State

The findings illustrate that abortion raises fundamental questions about whose citizenship is prioritized, how the citizenship is defined and constructed in the

parliament. By focusing on how abortion has sparked discussions about women being perceived as second-class citizens or about the state's role in shaping whose rights matter most, the study highlights the deeper ideological tensions embedded in such debates and reflected during the representation process.

As it is discussed earlier, substantive representation refers to how effectively women MPs advocate for women's interests in their political roles. Constitutive representation, on the other hand, involves how political discourses shape public understandings of citizenship and gender roles. The analysis reveals that each party constructs a distinct narrative about what it means to be a citizen- i.e. who is included or excluded from citizenship, and who are defines as a member of the state. The findings of this study examine it all.

First, AKP reinforces traditional gender roles, prioritizing the fetus as a potential citizen and framing women primarily within familial and moral frameworks. For the AKP, citizenship is collective rather than individual. It shows a perspective where women's roles are subordinate to societal needs and moral obligations. This aligns with the party's broader emphasis on family and societal harmony over individual freedoms. In the speeches of the representatives, women are presented as key contributors to the moral and demographic fabric of the nation. Women are seen as key to maintaining social order and family values. Their role is tied to fulfilling moral and societal duties: making babies and breeding them. Therefore, it can be argued that The AKP's view of women's citizenship centers around responsibilities rather than rights.

The MHP also adopts a collective approach to citizenship, but unlike the AKP, it does not frame this entirely through moral or religious obligations. Instead, the MHP emphasizes national solidarity and cultural preservation, positioning women as integral to the nation's collective identity while simultaneously criticizing the state's overreach into private lives. Indeed, this is linked with inequality. Ruhsar Demirel's assertion, "You have a problem with women and call it equality," critiques the dissonance between state rhetoric and its treatment of women but still situates women's roles within a nationalist framework. Thus, it can be said that MHP has preference for collective values that strengthen national solidarity while simultaneously expressing concern over state policies that might excessively

interfere with individual lives. Women's citizenship is approached within the context of national unity, where women's contributions to the family and society are praised but not prioritized over their individual autonomy. Nonetheless, due to not supporting the argument based on the sanctity of motherhood in nationalism (see Kandiyoti 1997, Pateman 1988, Yuval-Davis 1997, Moghadam 1999), the representative seems to have taken a pro-choice stance in the abortion debate.

Third, taking this analysis a step further: The CHP's approach frames citizenship as centered on the prioritization of individual rights. However, these rights are not solely tied to personal choices but are also anchored in constitutional and societal norms. The critique of authoritarian state policies constitutes the party's commitment to democratic values. In this sense, the CHP's rhetoric positions women's rights and citizenship not only as a matter of individual-state relations but also as a broader ideal of rule of law and democratic society. It shows that the party's representatives argue that citizenship requires safeguarding individual freedoms and ensuring that women are treated as autonomous agents rather than as instruments of state policies or societal expectations.

As is evident in the literature (see Pateman 1988, Nossiff 2007, Mouffe 2009, Htun and Weldon 2010 etc.), the approach to womanhood is the most significant factor in shaping policies that affect women's citizenship and equality. As Nossiff (2007, 61) stated, defining women primarily as mothers creates inequality between men and women and constitutes an "anti-thesis" (Mouffe, 2009, 322) to achieving equal citizenship for women. This perspective is reflected in CHP deputies', as well as other opposition parties', discourses criticizing the AKP's maternalistic approach and they believed would undermine women's full citizenship. As Moghadam (2009, 140) noted, based on Kemalist ideology, CHP generally view women as the republic's productive—not in a sexual sense—and fully equal to men citizens, constituting the other half of society. The analysis of their discourses reveals that CHP female deputies exhibit a similar stance on abortion issue. As a result, their approach to abortion is more closely related to their understandings of citizenship and democracy rather than their definition of womanhood, although these concepts are directly connected.

Finally, the findings of HDP's discourses reveal that some female MPs actively challenge restrictive abortion laws, framing them as a means of controlling women's bodies and reinforcing male authority. By criminalizing or limiting abortion, the state denies women control over their bodies, diminishing their autonomy and agency (Htun, 2005: 163). Moreover, HDP's representatives approach to abortion and citizenship in a distinctly intersectional and systemic perspective. It critiques state policies not merely for restricting individual freedoms but for enforcing a singular moral framework that stifles pluralism and democratic inclusivity. Their framing of abortion as central to resisting authoritarianism underscores their commitment to agency and self-determination. HDP's vision of citizenship is active, participatory, and inclusive, challenging traditional narratives that reduce women to biological or cultural symbols. Women's autonomy is frequently pointed out and the multifaceted identities they hold within the nation are recognized. Moreover, the party's focus extends beyond the immediate issue of abortion, addressing how systemic controls over women's bodies reflect broader structures of inequality and oppression. This perspective calls for a reimagining of citizenship—one that values diversity, empowers marginalized voices, and embraces equality at its core.

These varied approaches shows that abortion in Turkey is not merely a matter of individual choice or reproductive health but a battleground for competing visions of citizenship. The discourse surrounding abortion reveals how political parties navigate the balance between individual rights and collective responsibilities, demonstrating that the issue is deeply embedded in the socio-political dynamics of the country. This diversity indicates the importance of examining abortion through the lens of citizenship to understand the representation process. Citizenship, in this context, goes beyond its legal definition and becomes a contested concept influenced by gendered hierarchies and systemic inequalities.

5.3.6 Contesting Authoritarianism and Advocating for Inclusivity

The abortion debate also serves as a litmus test for democratic values in Turkey. How parties' approach to reproductive rights reveals their broader visions of governance and the balance between state power and individual freedoms. From a theoretical perspective, the findings of the abortion debates offer valuable insights into both substantive and constitutive representation. Substantive representation is

evident every time when any women MPs advocate for women's rights and interests, but these efforts are deeply shaped by their party ideologies. For instance, AKP women MPs align closely with their party's conservative stance, advocating for policies that uphold moral and familial values.

Constitutive representation, on the other hand, is visible in how these discourses shape societal understandings of gender, power, and democracy. First, The AKP's discourse reflects a conservative interpretation of democracy, where state authority is used to enforce moral and societal norms. Abortion is framed not as a personal decision but as a collective ethical issue, reinforcing the state's paternalistic role. Prioritizing the fetus's rights over the woman's autonomy by claiming that "the right to life begins in the womb" encapsulates this perspective. This suggests a model of democracy where the state's role is seen as guiding and protecting societal harmony, even at the expense of individual choice. AKP's rhetoric often reflects a top-down, paternalistic model of governance. It suggests a vision of democracy where decisions are aligned with collective values determined by the state that positions moral frameworks as the cornerstone of democratic practice. As a result, women's agency and decision-making over their own bodies are deprioritized, and democracy is redefined through the lens of moral guardianship rather than participatory inclusivity.

Second, the findings show that the MHP's approach to democracy in the context of abortion is both critical and cautious. While the party often emphasizes collective values and societal cohesion, its representatives also highlight the overreach of state authority in private matters, particularly in decisions about women's bodies. This dual perspective is evident in critiques of the then-Prime Minister's involvement in issues like abortion and cesarean sections, framing these interventions as not only authoritarian but also misaligned with true equality. Statements like "you call this equality, but your problem is with women" directly challenge the incongruence between the government's proclaimed values and its policies. Here, the MHP critiques these authoritarian tendencies but the findings show that it stops short of advocating for individual freedoms solely. Instead, it emphasizes collective values and national identity, positioning women's rights within a framework that aligns with its nationalist ideology. The representatives assert that women's contributions to society are vital but should not be reduced to biological or familial roles. This

suggests that, for the MHP, democracy involves a respect for personal boundaries and a rejection of state-imposed moral frameworks. Their stance shows the tension between advocating for societal harmony and pushing back against authoritarian tendencies.

The CHP, on the other hand, frames abortion as a democratic issue, through their arguments regarding how state interference erodes individual freedoms and undermines equality. Aylin Nazlıaka's provocative statement, "The Prime Minister should stop being the guardian of the vagina," reflects a broader critique of authoritarianism and calls for a democracy that respects personal liberties. For them, democratic governance should prioritize individual liberties over moralistic or authoritarian interventions. For example, they reject the idea of the state using women's bodies as political tools and advocate for policies that safeguard personal freedoms. This approach positions women not merely as contributors to societal roles or familial structures but as autonomous individuals whose rights and decisions are central to a functioning democracy. In this framing, democracy is tied to the notion of accountability and inclusivity, where government actions must align with constitutional principles and human rights, specifically the non-negotiable right to personal choice.

Lastly, HDP's representatives further expand the scope of their criticism to regime discussion that claims government's tendency towards authoritarianism. Their approach aligns with the view that authoritarian states reject progressive women's policies (Waylen 2008, Dovi 2007). They extend this critique by linking abortion debates to systemic inequalities and the state's patriarchal foundations. Abortion is framed as part of broader concerns, such as demographic engineering, militarism, and mechanisms of social control. By addressing how such policies shape not only women but society as a whole, the party openly claims that state's increasingly being authoritarian in structure. Thus, in the context of democracy, HDP's rhetoric is rooted in the defense of individual freedoms and the recognition of diversity. The party views state control over women's bodies as a threat to both democratic values and human rights. In this regard, HDP contends that the control over women's bodies impacts not only their rights but also the democratic fabric of society as a whole. It

views democracy not just as a governance system but as a process of resisting oppression and fostering inclusivity.

In the end, abortion has really become a kind of litmus test — showing just how much the state is willing to stand by democratic values and respect individual freedoms. Some parties framed the restriction of abortion rights as an erosion of democratic values, underscoring bodily autonomy as a cornerstone of a free society and further expanded the discussion by criticizing the authoritarian tendencies embedded in state policies, portraying them as mechanisms for controlling not only women's bodies but also societal narratives and dissent. Others, while not explicitly rejecting democratic principles, often prioritized moral and societal norms over individual liberties, reflecting a more conservative and collectivist interpretation of democracy. This demonstrates the significant variation in perspectives on democracy and how a body politics issue can be linked in the discussions.

Beyond the pro-life and pro-choice dichotomy, abortion debate in Turkey serves as a platform for deeper debates on whose citizenship is prioritized, whose voice is represented, and how democratic values are enacted. The findings show that the issue is not solely about physical or personal interventions but are intrinsically linked to broader systemic and ideological discussions. Even within the pro-life and pro-choice camps, diverging perspectives have surfaced, revealing the constitutive nature of the representation process in shaping the concepts that form womanhood.

Within these debates, the role of women MPs as representative voices is again significant – and again, constrained by context. It has often fallen to opposition women lawmakers to articulate the pro-choice viewpoint in parliamentary sessions, given that AKP women MPs seldom break ranks on this contentious topic. Turkey's stringent party discipline (see Ayata 2008) means that even women who might privately sympathize with nuanced positions have largely towed the party line publicly, echoing or at least not contradicting the anti-abortion stance. This reflects Mackay et al. (2010)'s observation that institutional norms (like party loyalty expectations) strongly shape legislators' willingness to voice certain perspectives.

In practice, the AKP's top-down messaging on abortion has led to a fairly unified conservative constitutive narrative from its members, with little internal dissent visible. Opposition women, freed from such constraints, have used their parliamentary platform to keep a dissenting discourse alive – citing women's testimonies, medical evidence, and comparative examples to counter the dominant framing. The presence of these dissenting voices is crucial: as Siow (2023) notes, speaking up for a group's perspective is essential for substantive representation, and without it, we would only hear the majority's "about women" talk with no challenge. By intervening in debates, opposition women MPs ensure that the constitutive representation of women on this issue is not one-dimensional.

However, the imbalance of power means their impact is limited – they often face accusations of immorality or Westernization, and their bills to expand reproductive rights go nowhere. This means that descriptive representation alone (having women present) does not automatically guarantee feminist outcomes, especially under an illiberal majority (Siow, 2023). The case of abortion in Turkey reveals a poignant dynamic: women representatives are present on both sides of the aisle, yet their capacity to collectively advance women's autonomy is curbed by ideological polarization and hierarchy. Still, these women's speeches and advocacy serve an important constitutive function by broadening the public dialogue. They introduce alternate representations of Turkish womanhood (as independent, not just maternal), and keep alive a vision of Turkey as a country where women's choices are respected. Over time, such discursive efforts can chip away at monolithic narratives. Indeed, even within the AKP's supporter base, the harshest anti-abortion rhetoric of the early 2010s has softened, arguably because women in society (including some in the party) pushed back.

In conclusion, the constitutive representation in abortion debates – heavily influenced by who gets to speak and in what political context – has tangible implications. It shapes whether policies will treat women as subjects or objects, and it reflects the ongoing contest over Turkey's soul as either a truly inclusive democracy or a patriarchal authoritarian order. Each speech by a woman MP challenging the status quo is, in effect, expanding the normative boundaries of what it means to be a

woman and a citizen in Turkey, aligning with the idea that claims-making can gradually transform the very regime of representation (Squires, 2008).



CHAPTER 7. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

This chapter presents a CDA of how violence against women is addressed by female MPs in Turkey between 2002 and 2023. Moving beyond a policy-centered approach, the analysis examines how discourses around violence serve as a site for constructing competing definitions of womanhood. At the same time, it explores how these definitions are embedded in broader political narratives—ranging from notions of national belonging and citizenship to debates about regime, secularism, and democratic governance. In doing so, the chapter highlights the dual nature of political representation, where substantive claims about women’s interests are deeply intertwined with constitutive processes that shape political identities and ideological boundaries. Before turning to the empirical analysis, the chapter begins with a brief contextual overview of the issue of violence against women, both globally and within Turkey.

Violence against women stands as one of Turkey’s most addressed social issues, reflecting not only individual acts of violence but also the deep-rooted gender inequalities and patriarchal structures embedded within society. The findings demonstrates that violence against women is discussed more frequently and extensively in Turkey’s social and political agenda compared to other body politics issues. While other topics addressed in parliament, such as abortion or the headscarf, are more likely to intensify during specific periods or political crises, the issue of violence against women has remained a consistent subject of debate across all eras. Notably, March 8th, International Women’s Day, and November 25th, International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, Istanbul Convention debates, stand out as critical dates when this issue is addressed more comprehensively in both parliament and the public sphere. Speeches delivered on these dates not only show the ongoing problems concerning women’s rights but also provide a platform for critiquing the shortcomings of state policies on this matter.

Turkey’s signing of the Istanbul Convention in 2011 marked a significant milestone in the fight against violence against women. However, parliamentary debates on the

issue have fallen short of addressing the true scale of the problem. The number of femicide victims has steadily increased over the years. One notable example is the brutal murder of Özgecan Aslan in 2015, which caused an outcry not only in Turkey but also internationally. This tragic event significantly amplified the discourses of women MPs on violence against women and created a platform for harsher critiques of the state's responsibilities regarding this issue. The Özgecan Aslan case became a turning point, as many MPs, particularly women representatives, harshly criticized individual and institutional failures in addressing violence while also emphasizing the importance of gender equality.

However, despite the increased frequency and visibility of these discussions, data on femicides and domestic violence remains alarmingly high. According to the “Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu (We Will Stop Femicide Platform),” annual femicide numbers have been recorded in the hundreds each year since 2015. This stark reality shows the failure of parliamentary discourses to translate into practical solutions and systematic reforms. Notably, Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention in 2021 exposed the state's inconsistent approach to combating violence against women and pointed the fragility of its policies on gender equality.

When examining the evolving intensity and content of parliamentary discourses over time, it becomes evident that the issue of violence against women has remained consistently debated, unlike other topics that often fluctuate in prominence. These discussions reveal that women MPs' approaches to the issue of violence not only reflect societal demands but also have the potential to reconstruct gender norms and perceptions of women's citizenship. For instance, Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention in 2021 was widely regarded as a significant setback for women's rights (Üçler & Büyükçelikok, 2023; Çelikkol, 2022). The withdrawal deepened political and social debates on violence against women and brought Turkey's international commitments to women's rights under scrutiny. According to this study, such actions and discourses—including the withdrawal from the convention—are not merely political decisions but also reflect broader ideological divides over family structure, gender roles, and women's citizenship rights. This dynamic once again shows that violence against women is not solely an individual issue but also a societal and political battleground.

The general literature, however, has progressed on a somewhat different trajectory. Research on violence against women has predominantly focused on its prevalence, causes, and legislative frameworks (e.g., Kandiyoti, 1996; Acar & Altunok, 2013). This body of work has significantly contributed to understanding the links between violence against women and broader gender inequalities, as well as how state mechanisms address—or fail to address—this pervasive issue. For instance, scholars such as Heise and Kotsadam (2015) and Kelly (2003) have emphasized the structural and cultural factors that sustain violence against women, advocating for comprehensive policy interventions and societal transformation. In the Turkish context, researchers like Kandiyoti (2016) and Ertürk (2006) have explored both the prevalence of violence against women and the sociopolitical dynamics surrounding it, with a particular focus on legislative measures and societal responses.

However, a significant portion of existing studies does not address parliamentary discourses or how these discourses frame the issue of violence against women. In particular, the speeches of female MPs, which reveal how they advocate for the interests of the groups they represent and simultaneously reshape these groups' identities, remain an underexplored area in the literature.

Aiming to fill this gap, this dissertation examines how the discourses of female MPs influence both substantive and constitutive representation processes. While existing research often evaluates representation through the actions of individual political actors, this study emphasizes the interaction between these actions and broader societal and political contexts. It frames violence against women not merely as a social issue but as an integral part of political representation and identity construction processes. With its criticism regarding the limitations of substantive representation theory, this dissertation argues that representation is not confined to the advocacy of interests but also encompasses the creation of new social and political identities through discourse. In doing so, it incorporates the concept of constitutive representation to demonstrate that representation is a dynamic and bidirectional process, shaped by and shaping societal and institutional contexts.

7.1 Diverging Notions of Womanhood in VAW Debates

7.1.1 Narratives of Protection and Agency

In the Turkish context, where cultural, religious, and political ideologies heavily influence perceptions of gender, the concept of womanhood becomes a contested site of representation. The act of defining womanhood in parliamentary discourse holds profound importance for achieving substantive representation, as Fraser's (2003) concept of misrecognition highlights how the failure to adequately recognize women's identities and roles reinforces systemic inequalities. Thus, this section starts with a focus on how female MPs in Turkey articulate their perspectives on womanhood, revealing the ways they construct, contest, and redefine the roles and identities of women within society. These narratives navigate between traditional expectations, such as motherhood and moral guardianship, and more progressive notions of equality and autonomy.

With the usage of CDA, this section uncovers how MPs frame womanhood in relation to violence, exploring themes of gender roles, morality, and societal responsibilities. Analyzing these narratives across different political parties and legislative periods, the section argues ideological divergences and temporal shifts, ultimately contributing to an understanding of how womanhood is shaped within the broader frameworks of substantive and constitutive representation.

7.1.1.1 AKP: A Moralized and Familial Framing of Womanhood

Throughout the legislative terms, the AKP has consistently framed the issue of violence against women within the narrower context of domestic violence, reflecting an understanding of womanhood primarily as individuals occupying roles within the household. This approach largely adhered to traditional gender roles until the 26th legislative term, steering clear of explicit religious references. However, there were occasional instances, particularly during the 22nd and 23rd terms, where some MPs linked violence against women to broader issues of gender inequality (e.g. Selma Aliye Kavaf, 2009). Starting with the 26th term, however, there has been a noticeable shift, with religious references becoming more prominent in parliamentary discourses. This trend intensified during the 27th term, marking a significant

departure from earlier narratives and reinforcing the party's evolving emphasis on religion in framing gender roles and societal norms. This section examines AKP's female representatives' approach to womanhood in their discourses on violence against women.

7.1.1.1.1 Findings of 22nd Parliamentary Term

The most prominent feature of AKP representatives' definition of womanhood the emphasis on family and motherhood. There are deputies of AKP, who deal with the issue of violence against women with the subject of "domestic violence" and see the family as vital traditional aspects of Turkish society. According to this view, the protection of the family is the most important element in solving the problem of violence against women. For example;

A woman in our country is an honorable, supreme being who struggles with countless problems, who is the guarantee of our future, who raises our children, who does not hesitate to make any sacrifices as a housewife, as a working woman, **as a wife, as a mother; is the most important element of the family.** (Remziye Öztoprak, AKP, 2004)

The discourse on womanhood in Turkish society is framed by reverence and significance in a 2004 speech ascribed to Remziye Öztoprak of the AK Parti. It is emphasized that women living in Turkey are the most important members of their families, especially when it comes to raising children or contributing to the household. She praises the virtues of women in the roles of housewife, mother, and wife, presenting these as intrinsically noble and essential to the stability and continuity of families. The definition of womanhood does not go beyond this. Therefore, it can be said that Öztoprak strategically employs a narrative of moral evaluation to validate traditional gender roles. Through the lens of moral judgment, she accentuates the virtues embedded in women's sacrifices and their pivotal position within the family unit.

Moreover, The AKP frequently emphasizes the importance of the family for both society and the state, and this perspective is particularly evident in discussions on violence against women. When addressing the issue, AKP MPs often frame it as "domestic violence", occasionally avoiding the use of the term "women" altogether. Instead, they advocate for the idea that everyone, "regardless of gender", should feel

safe within the family structure. This framing not only aligns with their broader emphasis on the centrality of the family but also reflects a traditional perspective on gender roles, where the family is prioritized over the individual autonomy of women.

As a result, there are variety of speeches found in the data collection in which AKP MPs address violence against women directly as domestic violence. According to them, ending this violence is important not solely for women's safety but it is for the social and political stability. The use of the term "protection of the mother" instead of "woman" is important because it shows how womanhood is framed. The issue of violence against women did not witness a different definition of femininity in this period.

7.1.1.1.2 Findings of 23rd Parliamentary Term

A recurring subject throughout the 23rd legislative term is the definition of womanhood in relation to conventional gender roles and family structures. But the terminology is becoming increasingly conservative. Similar to the preceding era, the emphasis is still on the role of women in the household, but this time, it includes religious references especially after 2010s. For instance:

In our religion, women are defined as a noble and decent who should be shown compassion, mercy, respect and kindness. That's why woman is special, that's why woman is respected. Woman is the one who gives life, woman who makes rich, woman who multiplies. The first teacher to give basic education in the female family hearth is an excellent educator. **The woman is the breeder** (Öznur Calık, AKP, 2011)

Here, the AKP MP portrays womanhood through the lens of cultural values. In this respect, the subject matter centers on the idea that women are naturally worthy of love, mercy, compassion, and kindness. This understanding of womanhood is legitimized through moral evaluation in which morality is rooted in religious and cultural authority. Using references to Islamic teachings justify the perceived value and significance of women perpetuating traditional notions of gender roles. This might help reinforcing the idea that women's primary domain is within the domestic, that is, private sphere.

Moreover, womanhood is continued to be defined as “**precious, loyal, self-sufficient, veteran, magnanimous women of this land**” (Öznur Çalık, AKP, 2011) in her following words. In the similar vein that is discussed above, this discourse emphasizes qualities traditionally associated with women, but this time, women’s value to nation is also marked out by focusing on their loyalty, self-sufficiency, and resilience. In this way, gender norms and power dynamics that perpetuate the idea that women are dependent on male authority figures for support are reinforced. Just because in her following words, she stated that; “I am calling out to you: **Know that we are behind you. Trust yourself to take a step because behind our women, is my esteemed Prime Minister.**” (Öznur Çalık, AKP, 2011). By saying so, the representative wants to give legitimacy to their support of women by standing with the Prime Minister. This is intended to provide women the assurance that the government is on their side and would support them when they take action.

However, the underlying message suggests that women cannot fully claim their rights alone; they require the backing of powerful male figures to do so. As a result, the Prime Minister’s authority and support are used throughout this debate to legitimize it, portraying him not only as a champion of women’s rights and empowerment but also as an essential figure without whom progress cannot be achieved. The presence of female MPs advocating for these issues appears insufficient—reinforcing the notion that real change is only possible when endorsed by strong male leaders like Erdoğan.

7.1.1.1.3 Findings of 24th Parliamentary Term

Similar to previous terms, in the 24th Term, AKP MPs’ definition of ‘women’ is expressed in the same line with ‘motherhood’. Instead of acknowledging women’s autonomy and varied contributions in a variety of domains beyond the home, this definition embodies the notion that a woman’s worth is decided by her capacity to carry out conventional caregiving tasks within the family.

“**A hand to a woman is a hand to a mother.** I probably do not need to ask you **what your mothers meant to you.**” (Özlem Yemişçi, AKP, 2012) Deriving from this quotation, it can be argued that the representative’s speech perpetuates the traditional societal belief that a woman’s vital identity and worth are connected to her

duty as a mother by equating a hand with a woman and a mother. This suggests a hierarchical relationship in which mothers are placed in a submissive position and are dependent on the assistance and attention of others, especially men. What follows of this statement that:

We, as the AK Party Government... We will train them, we will teach them who the woman is. **We women are the first and last educators of children raised in societies.** We have great compassion for our children. (Özlem Yemişçi, AKP, 2012)

The statement, “*we women are the first and last educators of children*,” highlights the influence of mothers on the morals and upbringing of subsequent generations, so reflecting an ideology that places an emphasis on women caring for and educating the children they raise. However, the representative’s mention of teaching them “*who the woman is*” implies a predefined definition or understanding of womanhood that they are expected to adhere to. Indeed, the representative does not define womanhood beyond the instructive maternal role which raises and educates children. Thus, the representative legitimizes this conservative perspective through moral evaluation. At this point, it is possible to say that the morality the representative resorts to determines traditional gender roles.

Moreover, the combination of “we women” and “we AK Party” highlights the representative’s dual identities as a woman and an AK Party member. She establishes her place in a certain political framework and shows her support for the goals, values, and ideals of the AK Party by associating with it. This alignment shows that, in the context of gender issues, the representative believes she is speaking for the AK Party’s interests and viewpoints in addition to those of women. It acknowledges her gender identification and the significance of women’s concerns regarding the party’s agenda.

Conservatism is already present in the official ideology of the AKP, so it can be said that these MPs reflect their party policies. This conservative language, which is used, is repeatedly employed within the framework of morality by incorporating religious references. Below speech poses an example to it:

Because the values we adhere to require that there is no tolerance for violence in our own country. **Our Prophet’s attitude towards violence**, which does

not excuse violence in any way, should be known by everyone and he says: 'God's power over you is much greater than his power over your slave.' These are the words he said to a Companion who beat his slave. (Öznur Calık, AKP, 2013)

The representative defends her views on inequality between men and women and non-violence by referring to religious teachings. In this context, the reference to the Prophet Muhammad's teachings on violence shows that the representative uses moral evaluation including religious authority to condemn violence against women. However, at this point it is necessary to take into account the power dynamics present in religious interpretations and their potential effects on women's rights and gender roles.

In 2015, a femicide occurred, bringing the issue of violence against women to the forefront of both parliament and society. The murder of a young woman named Özgecan Aslan opened the discussion on violence against women, prompting representatives to express their thoughts on the matter. As previously discussed, AKP representatives generally addressed the issue of violence against women within the context of domestic violence. However, Özgecan had not been subjected to domestic violence. At this point, it makes us wonder whether there is still a reference to womanhood in terms of the mother role. Of course, it is challenging to frame the issue in that context since Özgecan was not a mother. Yet, if we look for an interpretation of womanhood beyond the traditional roles, we come up empty-handed because his time, Özgecan, the woman exposed to violence, was considered as a daughter and/or a sister.

Özgecan is also my sister and my relative is murdered... Men's voices should be heard louder and louder. **Men should be trained to be men by their fathers, not by their mothers.** We should all be able to turn a total opposition against all forms of violence and all perpetrators into a lifestyle. (Semiha Öyüş, AKP, 2015)

In this speech, the woman who is a victim of violence is again associated with a role within the family. There is an attempt to empathize by seeing the victim of violence as a sister or a daughter (e.g. Çiğdem Münevver Ökten, AKP, 2015). This indicates that the woman is defined with a role within the family even in a violence experienced outside of domestic violence.

Moreover, one can observe that even a redefinition of roles might perpetuate gender roles. The quotation that referred men to be educated by men rather than women raises questions about the gender roles adopted by the female members of parliament. On one hand, this claim can be argued as suggesting a departure from the notion that women should be the primary caregivers, instilling morals and behavior in their children. Instead, one might argue, it calls a redefinition of masculinity that prioritizes non-violence and respect for women. On the other hand, because the statement “to be men (*adam olmak*)” reflects traditional understanding that praise “manhood”, the language that the representative has can be discussed as underlying conventional gender roles and power dynamics that perpetuate violence against women.

7.1.1.1.4 Findings of 26th Parliamentary Term

During the 26th legislative term in Turkey, the issue of violence against women became a critical point of discussion, particularly among female deputies of the AKP. These deputies often framed the combat against violence within the broader context of family and motherhood, aligning their discourse with conservative values that prioritize the protection of women through the preservation of the family structure. Rather than focusing on individual rights and autonomy, their approach emphasized women’s role in maintaining social order through their familial responsibilities. This section examines the discourses of AKP female deputies from this legislative term, exploring how their statements conceptualize and construct the notion of womanhood and how these discourses impact the substantive representation of women in Turkey, particularly in relation to gender equality and individual empowerment.

Among the many AK Party deputies who address this issue, Sema Ramazanoğlu stands out as one who particularly highlights the government’s role in combating violence against women, while framing her arguments within the context of traditional values. In her discourse, she argues that the protection of women must be in line with religious and social values. She addresses the role of women by strengthening their position within the family structure and defends the AK Party’s conservative policies in this context:

The greatest legacy of our ancient civilization to us is the family. The protection and strengthening of the family, which is the cornerstone of society, is our fundamental policy. With the understanding of ‘Strong family, strong Turkey,’ we have accelerated our work in family and social services. (Sema Ramazanoğlu, AKP, 2016)

In this discourse, it is noteworthy that violence against women is addressed based on conventional and moral values. Ramazanoğlu’s “Strong family, strong Turkey” discourse demonstrates that women are seen as a tool for maintaining social order. Women are defined not by their individual rights and freedoms but by their role within the family for the health of society, which presents a perspective that limits the autonomy of women as individuals. The protection of women is justified by social values and traditional references, showing how the AK Party’s conservative policies shape their approach to violence against women.

In Çam’s speech from the same year, she supports policies that combat violence against women but also relates the social role of women to their position within the family. The protection of women is not approached solely based on individual rights but rather within the framework of the family, which is considered a fundamental part of the social structure. It is emphasized that protecting the family also means protecting the rights of women.

The protection of the family and family values is our priority. While aiming to protect the integrity of the family and increase the family’s capacity to solve problems, on the other hand, preventing all kinds of discrimination against women and eliminating violence and abuse against women constitute the foundation of the ministry’s policies. (Lütfiye Selma Çam, AKP, 2016)

The place of women in society is evaluated based on their role within the family, which supports the AK Party’s family-centered women’s policies. In the discourses of these two AK Party deputies, the protection of women is generally associated with the protection of the family structure. These discourses define women not by their individual rights and autonomy but solely through their role within the family. This limits women’s position in other areas of social life as individuals and narrows their space to act as social subjects.

However, these discourses are just examples of the general stance. It is noteworthy that, while many other AK Party deputies (e.g., Gökçen Özdoğan Enç, 2016; Sema

Ramazanoğlu, 2016; Fatma Benli, 2016; Ayşe Keşir, 2018; Belgin Uygur, 2019; Jülide Sarıeroğlu, 2017; Ravza Kavakçı Kan, 2017; Emine Nur Günay, 2018; Lütfiye Selva Çam, 2019; Öznur Çalık, 2016; Canan Kalsın, 2017; Alev Dedegil, 2016) directly relate the issue of violence against women to the protection of the family, no voices have emerged beyond this connection. The similarity of these discourses raises the question of how much AK Party female deputies align with party policies and to what extent their individual voices come to the forefront within the ideological framework of the AK Party.

The priority is the protection of social order, not women's individual rights, as part of the family. Furthermore, it is often emphasized that the protection of women must align with social values through traditional references. Under the leadership of President Erdoğan, the AK Party government's policies to combat violence against women are highlighted, and this struggle is grounded in family values and conservative policies.

In conclusion, during this period, the discourses of AK Party female deputies emerge as an important tool used to legitimize party policies in the social sphere. Family-centered approaches reinforce social support by elevating conservative values, but these discourses, while focusing on women's roles within the family, raise questions about how effective they are in terms of gender equality and women's empowerment as individuals.

7.1.1.1.5 Findings of 27th Parliamentary Term

Physical violence against women and female murders in particular are one of the major debate topics related to women's concerns in the parliament. AKP representatives in this term frequently offers how proud they are of developments that AKP government made to end violence against women, such as the law of Protection of Family and improvements of Penal Code. In those regulations, family matters and domestic violence are written even in the title, thus, one could argue that they give priority to family and women's positions in the family. Just as it has always addressed in their speeches, womanhood is linked with motherhood. This morality is framed within traditional aspects including customs, Islam religion and national values.

For instance, female representatives of AKP, M. Pervin Tuba Turgut (2019) linked womanhood to ideas of loyalty, love, and respect as well as civilizational ideals and tradition in one of her speeches in the general meeting. It does this by portraying womanhood within the framework of the family and conventional social structures. The family is portrayed in the speech as a key institution where people show affection, loyalty, and respect for one another. Such behaviors resemble traditional gender norms and expectations within society by positioning womanhood as a result of cultural legacy and collective identity, while also considering the significance of civilizational values and tradition.

Moreover, Islamic references, which had begun to emerge subtly in the previous legislative term, became more pronounced in the discourses of AKP female representatives during this period. The role of women within the family started to be articulated with a distinct religious emphasis. In addition to her words that are referred in previous quotation, Gözgeç pursued her speech with following statements:

Remembering that we love the **Creature** because of **the Creator**, calling all people to his lodge without any discrimination. Perhaps we need to understand once more about **Yunus Emre** who said, **Hacı Bektaş Veli, Hacı Bayram Veli**. (Emine Yavuz Gözgeç, AKP, 2019)

In the end of her speech, she regarded President Erdoğan's words stresses on a need to strengthen ties with ancient civilization.

The use of religious language and references to traditional symbols and personalities situates the discourse on womanhood within a specific cultural and historical context. It utilizes sacred terminology, like references to "the Creator," and praises spiritual leaders such as Yunus Emre, Hacı Bektaş Veli, and Hacı Bayram Veli and their teachings as a means of establishing the legitimacy of its discussion of womanhood. By making reference to these figures and cultural legacies, the representative situates its definition of women within the larger framework of Turkish spiritual and cultural traditions.

In the same line, Zehra Taşkesenlioğlu Ban showed her opposition to violence against women by ending her speech with following sentence:

Distinguished parliamentarians, and finally, as our Honorable President has stated, we know that violence against women is also to protect the rights, law and honor of our mothers, sisters and daughters. I greet you all with respect. (Zehra Taşkesenlioğlu Ban, AKP, 2021).

Despite she did not focus on Islamic reasons, she perceives women as mothers and she mentioned ‘honor’ (*namus*) of women as something to be protected. All these demonstrate that she has a conservative perspective which accepts traditional meanings regarding societal issues.

In the 27th legislative term, as in previous periods, violence against women continued to be framed primarily as a matter of domestic violence rather than a broader gender issue. Direct definitions and discussions of womanhood became less prominent, with the discourse shifting toward reinforcing party policies, praising Erdoğan’s leadership, and adopting a more overtly conservative and religiously framed narrative.

7.1.1.1.6 The Summary of Findings

The AKP’s narrative consistently places women at the heart of the family, emphasizing their roles as mothers and moral anchors. Across different legislative terms, female MPs frame womanhood as a cornerstone of family unity, often invoking cultural and religious values to reinforce traditional gender roles. Thus, the womanhood is constructed as integral to the preservation of family unity and cultural values, often emphasizing motherhood as a sacred duty. While this approach points the importance of protecting women, it tends to sideline their autonomy by tying their worth to familial responsibilities.

In later terms, Islamic references become more and more prominent in the AKP’s rhetoric. Female MPs frequently highlight the sanctity of motherhood and the moral duties of women, aligning their narratives with Islamic principles and religious morality. This shift might be a reflection not only the party’s ideological evolution but also can be argued as an attempt to consolidate support among conservative

voters. Whatever the reason, this framing often leaves little room for discussions about women's individuality or systemic gender inequalities.

While the AKP's discourse on violence against women occasionally includes narratives that emphasize women's autonomy—such as Selma Aliye Kavaf's acknowledgment of gender inequality as a root cause of violence or Semiha Öyüş's criticism for patriarchy in 2008—these moments are exceptions rather than the norm. Even when condemning violence against women, the framing often reinforces traditional gender roles. The party's rhetoric predominantly situates violence within the context of “domestic violence,” reflecting a conservative lens that ties womanhood closely to familial responsibilities.

As a result, while AKP MPs frequently denounce violence against women, their criticism tends to focus on the harm such violence inflicts on family cohesion and societal morality. By emphasizing the sanctity of motherhood and the family, they implicitly frame women as indispensable for maintaining familial and societal order, rather than as autonomous individuals. Violence is not only seen as a violation of women's rights but also as a threat to the moral and structural integrity of the family and, by extension, society itself. This dual framing, though ostensibly protective of women, ultimately serves to uphold traditional roles by equating womanhood with motherhood and familial duties. Therefore, it is possible to see how gender roles could be maintained even if they are redefined.

7.1.1.2 CHP: From Secular Modernization to Feminist Advocacy

CHP, as Turkey's main opposition party, has historically positioned itself as a defender of secularism, modernity, and republican values (Aydın, 2005). These principles form the foundation of the party's approach to social and political issues, including its stance on gender equality and violence against women. CHP's discourse frequently emphasizes the importance of individual rights, equality before the law, and the rejection of traditional patriarchal norms that subordinate women. This ideological framework reflects the party's vision of womanhood as grounded in autonomy, agency, and equality, rejecting the notion of women as confined to familial or reproductive roles.

Findings from 2002 until 2023 in this section briefly show that the CHP's approach to violence against women consistently critiques the traditional patriarchal norms that subordinate women and confine them to limited roles within the family structure. This portrayal of womanhood, as depicted in many parliamentary speeches, reflects deeply entrenched gender stereotypes that CHP MPs actively oppose. Their discourse often includes two interconnected dimensions: on the one hand, a critique of traditional norms and gender roles; on the other, republican and statist arguments advocating for policies aimed at empowering women. However, when it comes to redefining womanhood, the proposed solutions primarily emphasize the need for a shift in societal mentality rather than structural or legislative reforms.

7.1.1.2.1 Findings of 22nd Parliamentary Term

In the 22nd parliamentary term, the CHP's discourse on violence against women reflected a strong emphasis on universal human rights and gender equality, framing women primarily as individual rights-holders rather than being confined to familial or traditional roles. Some discourses of AKP MPs equate the issue of 'violence against women' specifically with 'domestic violence,' treating the two as interchangeable concepts. However, CHP MPs criticize this approach by emphasizing that violence is not only confined to the family but is also a structural issue that women face in the public sphere. In Erbatur's definition, violence against women is **"physical, verbal and emotional abuse of one individual in the family towards another individual, is more dangerous for the society."** (N. Gaye Erbatur, CHP, 2007) This approach seeks to recognize women not merely within their familial roles but as individuals with autonomous rights. In CHP's discourse, the need to acknowledge women as independent individuals is highlighted, framing violence as a matter intrinsically linked to gender inequality.

While defining womanhood, CHP representatives adopted a progressive and untraditional, universal approach based on the principles of human rights and equality. This perspective is exemplified in Güldal Okuducu's 2005 speech, where she defines womanhood in its most fundamental terms: as human, simply human.

My dear friends, the fundamental perspective we need is this: **Who is the woman?** What is the woman? The answer is clear: **a woman is a human being, simply a human being.** If you grant women the rights

that you have and should give to all human beings—the most sacred right of all, the right to life. (Güldal Okuducu, CHP, 2005)

The CHP MP stresses in her speech a fundamental reinterpretation of womanhood that is based on the idea of human equality. By advocating for women to be granted the same rights as all human beings—most notably the sacred right to life—Okuducu argues the necessity of perceiving women as autonomous individuals, free from reductive societal labels. This approach, which calls for equality at the level of human dignity, aligns with the CHP's broader ideological commitment during this period to promoting secularism, justice, and the rule of law as frameworks for addressing violence against women.

Moreover, she argues that it is critical to see women as fundamentally human and worthy of the same respect and rights as men. In her following words:

My dear friends, **women are not an element that should be kept at home, kept behind the veil**, humiliated, protected as inferior, and this dimension should be carried with all the elements of the system, my dear friends. (Güldal Okuducu, CHP, 2005)

In these words, it can be said that the representative gives importance on women's agency and gender equality while defining womanhood. She opposes the deeply ingrained social conventions that limit women's liberties.

The core of these discourses involves removing inherent patriarchal practices and ideas that support the subordination of women. The existing power structures sustain gender inequality by framing women's liberation as a moral imperative while simultaneously reinforcing their subordinate position through discourses that criticize the perception of women as inferior. Very similar approach is shown below:

This understanding [patriarchal mentality], which does not accept women as the subject of its own adventure of existence, falls into the understanding of perceiving and **coding her as a second gender and inferior to men** since her birth...The honor is in such a place that the victim is always the woman. (Türkan Miçooğulları, CHP, 2005)

Although this quotation is somewhat lengthy, it encapsulates a key aspect of the CHP MPs' approach to womanhood and violence against women, as similar sentiments

are echoed in other speeches, which can be found in these findings of 22nd period. Many CHP MPs also discussed the role of patriarchal values, such as tradition, custom, morality, and honor, in perpetuating violence against women, agreeing with Türkan Miçooğulları's critique. She rejects the notion of women as passive objects subject to the control and dictates of patriarchal structures. Instead, her speech affirms women's status as autonomous individuals, emphasizing their unique experiences and identities. However, her argument does not directly prescribe an approach to womanhood. Rather, it reflects empathy towards women who have experienced violence, acknowledging the structural barriers that may prevent them from actively pursuing their rights.

This perspective refuses to fall into the old habit of victim blaming. Instead, it dares to confront the deep-rooted, tradition-bound inequalities that continue to feed that violence. It reminds us that protecting women's dignity and humanity should never depend on their circumstances. Stepping back, it becomes clear that both CHP MPs consistently place women's individual rights and empowerment at the center of their discourse. They challenge patriarchal structures not as an abstract ideal, but as a lived necessity — insisting that gender equality must move beyond slogans and become part of the everyday political fabric.

7.1.1.2.2 Findings of 23rd Parliamentary Term

During the 23rd legislative period, CHP deputies addressed violence against women with less intensity compared to their AKP counterparts. The biggest criticism of CHP female MPs is that they only emphasize the traditional role of women, as well as motherhood. This definition, or more precisely, this approach towards womanhood, has been shown as one of the leading causes of violence against women. For instance;

Unfortunately... the **family** is a system in which **women do not take place as equal individuals**, but mostly **dominated by men**... Violence against women, which is a subject at the very center of **gender inequality discussions**, still continues as the most common family problem in our country. (Nevin Gaye Erbatur, CHP, 2010)

This quotation shows that Nevin Gaye Erbatur's speech challenges traditional gender roles by pointing the unequal power dynamics within family structures, where

women are often positioned as subordinate to men rather than equal partners. She sees violence against women as a serious problem rooted in gender inequality. It is not just something that happens at home or in private life. It is part of a bigger, deeper issue. In her speech, she shows why women should not be limited to homes or fixed roles. Instead, she argues that women should have the freedom to make their own choices and live their own lives. This way of thinking shows that CHP's women representatives focus more on fighting patriarchal norms. For them, real equality is not just an idea — it is a necessary step to create a fairer and better society.

Moreover, the way womanhood is perceived is closely tied to the societal expectations imposed on women, particularly in relation to their roles within the family and society. These expectations are often reflected and reinforced through political discourse, as seen in the remarks made by the Prime Minister. Critiques of such rhetoric by CHP female representatives discuss how these statements perpetuate traditional gender roles which limit women's autonomy. For instance, Canan Aritman, in her 2011 speech, directly addresses the Prime Minister's controversial assertion: "I don't believe in gender equality. Let women give birth to at least three children." Aritman interprets this statement as a directive for women to retreat into the private sphere, conforming to traditional and sexist roles. She argues that such remarks push women into traditional and sexist roles, reducing their existence to the private sphere and prioritizing their reproductive duties over their individuality. According to her, this perspective not only diminishes women's value but also reinforces harmful power dynamics that contribute to violence against women. Thus, emphasizing women's reproductive duties, she argues, diminishes women's value and positions them as secondary to men in both public and private life. In her following words:

[Prime Minister] says 'I don't believe in **gender equality**. Let women give birth to at least 3 children.' So, let's women march home, into the traditional sexist role ... 'Why are women being killed so often?' Here is the answer to the question. This understanding, this point of view, which **sees women as the property and slave of men**, is very dangerous. (Canan Aritman, CHP, 2011)

It is also important to note that this speech does not solely address an approach to violence against women but also offers a broader critique that subtly incorporates

other issues under the umbrella of body politics. Aritman challenges a deeply ingrained patriarchal system that limits women's autonomy and agency by bringing into focus the expectations society places on women to prioritize their reproductive responsibilities and adhere to traditional roles in the domestic sphere. Her focus on the Prime Minister's remarks points how political discourse can perpetuate the perception of women as primarily defined by their familial and reproductive roles, reinforcing systemic inequalities.

While this critique aligns with CHP's secular and institutional stance, it also reflects a feminist perspective that challenges these patriarchal norms at their core. The manner in the discourses changes to call for structural accountability and systemic change when violence against women is framed as a societal and structural problem as opposed to a personal or individual one. This dual emphasis shows how the CHP's body politics strategy combines a more progressive commitment to gender equality with its more conventional focus on constitutional equality or justice.

7.1.1.2.3 Findings of 24th Parliamentary Term

CHP deputies have approached the issue of violence against women in a similar way as in previous terms in 24th parliamentary term. The violence against women, which is claimed to originate from the traditional roles imposed on women in society, is handled in the context of gender inequality. For them conservative perspective on gender roles fails to recognize the agency, autonomy, and diverse identities of women. Some statements of CHP MPs took place as follows;

Within the framework of the **traditional roles that society imposes** on individuals, while women have a role that raises children at home, organizes the house, does the **cooking and housework, waiting for the husband to make a living**, and has no say in the name of the family. (Ayşe Nedret Akova, CHP, 2012)

This portrayal of womanhood reflects deeply entrenched gender stereotypes and reinforces traditional patriarchal norms. Criticisms toward traditional norms constitutes one dimension of CHP MPs' speeches. The other dimension reflects republican and statist arguments placed on the need for policies aimed at empowering women. However, if the issue is the definition of the womanhood, then only a change in the mentality is offered for the solution.

One of the important concepts used by CHP MPs in the context of violence against women in this period is femicide. Femicide is a type of murder that women are subjected to simply because they are women. The use of this concept shows that there is a feminist approach conducted in the speeches. In Yılmaz's words:

In our country, where the **male-dominant understanding** is fueled and not questioned; the reasons for violence against women are the weak that the strong oppress. **Women are seen as a commodity belonging to men**, and women are seen by men as an entity on which all kinds of rights can be claimed and should be protected as much as they need to be protected... As a result of these approaches, violence against women and femicide has become unavoidable. (Dilek Akgün Yılmaz, CHP, 2013)

This speech from CHP, the discourse on womanhood, revolves around the pervasive influence of a male-dominant understanding within Turkish society. Seeing women as male-owned commodities has drawn criticism for objectifying women within patriarchal systems and dehumanizing them as a result. The structural power disparities underpin violence against women, in particular the femicide. Moreover, not only the distinction between men and women, but also the concept of gender has begun to be used by CHP MPs. "Adopting the concepts of '**gender**', '**women's human rights**' and '**equality between men and women**' and educating our children in this direction" (Ayşe Eser Danişoğlu, CHP, 2012) states the conceptual importance of using "gender" in order to understand violence against women that is believed to be based on gender inequality.

7.1.1.2.4 Findings of 26th Parliamentary Term

During the 26th legislative term, CHP female deputies redefined womanhood within the context of individual rights, gender equality, and human rights, challenging approaches that defined women solely through their family and motherhood roles. Each of these statements draws on CHP's secular and social democratic ideology, presenting a feminist and progressive perspective and emphasizing the need for women to be positioned as more individualistic, equal, and independent in social life.

For example, in a 2015 speech by Nurhayat Altaca Kayıoğlu, while implying that violence against women could be solved through education, she argued that the

education system should raise children as individuals rather than perpetuating gender roles:

In the education system, children should be raised as individuals, beyond gender roles, and we believe that policies should be changed in this direction. (Nurhayat Altaca Kayışoğlu, CHP, 2015)

In examining this statement, it becomes clear that there is a critical stance questioning traditional gender roles concerning womanhood. While emphasizing that children should be raised as individuals, not merely as women or men, Kayışoğlu highlights that this is crucial for achieving gender equality. This approach opposes confining women to family and motherhood roles, advocating for women's empowerment as individuals. This view aligns with CHP's policies of societal modernization.

Similarly, in a speech by Şenal Sarihan, she emphasizes that women are first and foremost human beings, declaring that the fight against violence against women is a human rights issue:

Women are human beings, and women have human rights, and foremost among these human rights are the right not to face violence and the right to live. (Şenal Sarihan, CHP, 2016)

Sarihan's statement, while respecting the role of women as mothers, criticizes approaches that prioritize this role over women's rights. She highlights the importance of women's right to live, to be free from violence, and to be valued as individuals. This rhetoric reflects CHP's feminist approach that advocates for women's rights based on human rights and addresses violence against women as a social issue. Womanhood is defined here by the right to live free from violence, and CHP advocates for strong state intervention on this issue.

These three statements demonstrate that CHP's understanding of womanhood is based on individual rights, equality, and human rights. CHP female deputies oppose confining women solely to family and motherhood roles, stressing that women should have individual and equal rights through education, state policies, and the fight against violence. Womanhood is redefined here as a concept that transcends

traditional gender roles, grounded in human rights and individual freedoms, free from violence.

7.1.1.2.5 Findings of 27th Parliamentary Term

In the 27th parliamentary term, CHP representatives' feminist language started to adopt a much more radical tone in their discourses on violence against women. Their focus shifted from simply addressing the issue to questioning the societal structures and gender norms that perpetuate it. Sera Kadıgil's 2020 speech is a striking example for this incidence. She does not just describe femicide as the killing of women; she frames it as a symptom of deep-rooted inequalities and selective societal empathy. Her point about how Ayşe Hanım and Cansu are perceived differently by society is a powerful critique of the moral biases that underlie these attitudes. Kadıgil's words reflect a growing frustration within CHP's discourse—a demand not just for change but for a complete rethinking of how society views and values women.

What is (femicide)?... It is a term used for murder of women who are killed because of their **female identity and gender role**... Ayşe Hanım, housewife, killed by her husband due to coldness of the dinner. It's a **femicide**. Cansu, 21 years old, killed in a hotel by a man she met at the bar she went. It's a **femicide**, too. If you do not feel the same for Cansu, this is the reason why we cannot fight against violence. Same scenario is valid for man, Emre, who is killed by a woman he met at the bar. In order to struggle violence against women you need to feel the same sympathy to Cansu that you feel for Ayşe Hanım and Emre. Otherwise, you cannot say that you try to cope with violence. (Sera Kadıgil, CHP, 2020)

Here, Kadıgil described the concept of femicide by giving several examples from the society. When she deals with violence against women, thus, she includes every femininity. Despite she does not mention 'gender' concept in this statement, the examples she gives from Ayşe Hanım – who has a conservative look, to Emre – a male victim, leads one to see that she talks about gender rather than sex. Moreover, she tries to emphasize on gender biases within the society as well by arguing that violence comes from those biases. Therefore, one can argue that Kadıgil also has radical feminist discourse in her speeches.

CHP MPs define violence against women as violence committed by men against women and draw attention to the power dynamics inherent in this form of violence. Violence against women is framed as a manifestation of unequal power relations

between men and women. Gender inequality is seen by MPs as the main source of violence against women, underlining its impact on women's lives. Similarly, Jale Nur Süllü argued that:

Violence against women is the violence of men against women, which contains countless sad stories. The **power relationship between** the representatives of these **two different sexes**, the only difference between men and women at birth, is shaped **by social conditions**. The fate of a woman's biological difference turns into a social fate, and the power provided by *learned gender roles disrupts the balance of equality in favor of men*. **Gender inequality** shaped by the **male-dominated order** is also the main source of violence against women. (Jale Nur Süllü, CHP, 2020)

In feminist discourse, there are huge emphasis on gender inequality, masculinity, femininity, sisterhood and patriarchy. From Süllü's speech, one can see that she believes violence against women is about masculinity and it is a product of gender inequality within the society. She also has a stand against traditional judgments about women. In closing, this MP makes the case that combating gender inequality is critical to the battle against violence against women. Her speech emphasizes the necessity of taking revolutionary steps to confront and demolish the current power systems that support violence against women. RPP deputies are away from being a conservative but have a feminist discourse in which, sometimes, conservativity is being criticized.

In this term, the CHP's discourse on womanhood demonstrated a noticeable shift toward an even more radical perspective by moving beyond their statist feminist language which started around 24th parliamentary term. Female MPs began addressing systemic issues of gender inequality more explicitly, framing violence against women as both a societal crisis and a reflection of deeply rooted patriarchal norms. This period marked a departure from earlier terms, where women's rights were often discussed within the framework of modernization and state-driven initiatives. Instead, the 27th term saw a stronger focus on dismantling the structural barriers that perpetuate inequality and violence. Under this light, in the discourse of the CHP, womanhood has been redefined in a more radical manner, challenging patriarchal norms and traditional gender roles.

7.1.1.2.6 The Summary of Findings

CHP female MPs demonstrate a significant shift over the examined periods, evolving from a state-centric modernization perspective to a more feminist and individual-centered advocacy. Early debates framed women as symbols of modernization and progress, often tying their roles to the state's secular values, aligning their rhetoric with Turkey's republican ideals. For example, in the 22nd legislative term, Güldal Okuducu (2005)'s remark "a woman is a human, nothing more and nothing less." emphasizes the universality of women's humanity but stops short of directly addressing systemic inequalities or patriarchal structures. However, by the 27th term, CHP representatives increasingly challenged systemic inequalities and patriarchal norms, portraying women as autonomous individuals deserving of full equality. This transition shows the party's growing alignment with feminist principles and its critique of traditional gender roles when they discuss violence against women. Sera Kadıgil (2020), for instance, explicitly tied violence against women to societal biases, stating: "If you do not feel the same for a young woman killed at a bar as you do for a housewife killed by her husband, this is why we cannot fight violence effectively."

This shift reflects the CHP's growing alignment with feminist principles, where womanhood is increasingly framed through autonomy, equality, and resistance to patriarchal norms. While secular ideals continue to shape their discourse, the focus on structural critiques of gender inequality marks a significant evolution. This emphasis on both human rights and systemic change suggests that the CHP's narrative on womanhood has moved beyond symbolic representation to a more substantive engagement with women's lived realities.

7.1.1.3 MHP: Womanhood as National Virtue and Family Guardian

The speeches of female MPs from MHP addressing violence against women first appeared during the 24th legislative term. While some speeches explicitly reflect an approach to womanhood, in many cases, interpretations have been drawn from the content of their discourse, as discussed in the findings section below. Compared to other parties, MHP's female representatives have spoken far less frequently on this issue. When they did contribute, their speeches occasionally rejected traditional

notions of womanhood, while at other times, they exhibited a manner that blended traditional, particularly ethnic and national, perspectives with a more egalitarian approach. In other words, they sometimes critique traditional gender roles, yet at other times, they adopt a new approach by referencing traditional, or more specifically, ethnic or nationalist elements, offering their redefinitions accordingly.

This analysis, therefore, seeks to unpack the implicit and explicit narratives within MHP's discourse to better understand their conceptualization of womanhood and its relation to violence against women with the findings which are offered in following sections.

7.1.1.3.1 Findings of 24th Parliamentary Term

When the compiled findings of the speeches are examined, one of the most notable observations is that, within the MHP, there is one MP who stands out the most in discussions on issues related to women: Ruhsar Demirel. In her speeches on violence against women, she subtly describes womanhood as a socially constructed identity formed by cultural norms, expectations, and treatment. She said that although there appears to be a biological difference between men and women, gender norms shape how women interpret womanhood. She criticizes the understanding of womanhood by saying “even in our dictionaries today, the woman is ‘beautiful, elegant, pretty’ while the man is described as trustworthy, virtuous” (Ruhsar Demirel, MHP, 2011). She offers a criticism about how language reflects gender norms, with women often described in terms of physical appearance and men in terms of character traits.

This critique suggests that societal perceptions of womanhood are often limited to superficial qualities such as beauty and elegance, reinforcing traditional gender roles and expectations. In this sense, the representative rejects the traditional notion of womanhood and further broaden her definition including the equality between genders. By depicting women as carrying the burden of social expectations and judgments, the representative implies that women do not embrace traditional gender roles and expectations that limit their autonomy and agency. Defining womanhood in this way signals first wave feminism.

According to her speech, the conventional perceptions toward womanhood, which are based on gender norms and stereotypes, results in violence against women. It further molds the identities and experiences of women in society, as well. In this sense, Demirel implies that womanhood is not just about sex or identity, but also about access to rights and opportunities in society.

Additionally, when discussing the issue of violence against women, the names of victims of violence were mentioned. These names belong not only to women but also to a man.

Remember the kid who was **raped** and thrown into the well at the age of 2? Did you forget about **Mert**, who left his house to bring food to his father? Have we all forgotten Gizem, who was killed because her sister refused to marry the man who wanted her sister? (Ruhsar Demirel, MHP, 2015)

Mentioning cases of violence against both women and men shows that the representative adopts a gender-neutral framing of violence. Conventional narratives may only show women as victims of violence while ignoring the stories of men who are also victims of violence against women. This speech shows that the representative views womanhood within a broader framework that includes the experiences of individuals of all genders. This approach proves that the representative refers focusing on ‘gender’ rather than ‘sex’ because the interconnection of violence against women by addressing violence as a social issue that affects people of all genders is given in the speech by providing examples of violence against males.

As she stated in another sentence of her, the violence is “seen in our society in a proliferation directed from the strong to the weak, from the man to the woman, from the young to the old, from mother to child.” (Ruhsar Demirel, MHP, 2011). This statement addresses the gendered nature of the violence. In a nutshell, gender inequality occurs as the superiority of the masculine over the feminine. It is the root cause of the power imbalances between femininity and masculinity, that is beyond the inequality between men and women. Those power imbalances within society, where those with greater power exert control over those who are more vulnerable or marginalized. In that means, violence against women is not only exposed to

womanhood but also all femininity. Giving examples from ‘strong to weak, man to woman, young to old’, the representative implicitly reflects her approach to violence against woman as in terms of violence against women.

Additionally, as seen in other parties in this period, it is seen that MHP MPs specifically included victims of violence in their speeches. This brings to mind the nature of the substantive representation that is about representative’s representation for the represented. This poses an example of using emotional authority for the legitimization of the discourse.

Different from this approach, Meral Akşener said the following while starting her 8 March speech:

Our male friends also tell us, ‘Heaven is under the feet of our mothers.’ I wish that our friends who say, insult each other - I am not speaking for the deputies, I am speaking for all men - not insulting women over women. I wish for a Turkey where there is no violence and no harassment against women. (Meral Akşener, MHP, 2012)

Despite being delivered on the International Women’s Day, violence against women was also very briefly mentioned in this speech and therefore I included this quote. In this speech, Akşener addresses the issue of violence and harassment against women while criticizing how men talk about and represent women. She particularly questions the contradiction in men who use positive phrases like “Heaven is under the feet of our mothers” but then insult women or demean each other through women. By directing her remarks not only to deputies but to men in general, she expresses a wish for a Turkey where women are neither subjected to insults nor violence. This statement simultaneously critiques superficial positive rhetoric about women and advocates for a broader commitment to gender equality.

However, still it can be observed that Akşener has a positive stance to the statement of “heaven is under the feet of our mothers”. In her speech regarding violence against women, Akşener seems to associate women with motherhood, again. Nevertheless, it is challenging to draw a definitive conclusion, as the rest of the speech is unavailable, nor are there additional statements from the MP on this matter. However, based on her reference to a sentence praising motherhood without offering

any critique of traditional gender roles, it can be inferred that a more traditional stance is being exhibited.

7.1.1.3.2 Findings of 26th Parliamentary Term

In the 26th legislative term, the concept of womanhood presented by MHP female deputies closely aligns with nationalist values, historical continuity, and traditional roles within the family. MHP's ideological stance emphasizes the role of women as integral to the preservation of Turkish national identity, family structure, and the nation as a whole. Women are seen as central figures not only in family life but also as defenders of the nation, drawing on historical narratives of their participation in politics, warfare, and leadership roles.

For instance, in her speech during the 26th legislative term, Deniz Depboylu highlights the historical significance of women in Turkish society, particularly emphasizing their equal standing with men in ancient Turkish civilizations. She states:

Women were not only the pillars of the family but also held an equal position to men in political and legal spheres...They even participated in wars together. (Deniz Depboylu, MHP, 2017)

This speech presents women as active agents in Turkish nation-building and political decision-making in historical contexts. However, Depboylu also suggests that women have lost their privileged status over time, with a return to these traditional values being necessary. The emphasis on Atatürk's reforms as a turning point for women's rights reflects MHP's nationalist conservatism, connecting womanhood to family and state-building.

Depboylu's speech critiques the failure of contemporary society to punish violence against women as harshly as in historical periods, urging a reconnection with traditional Turkish values, which she claims once provided stronger protections for women.

Arzu Erdem, also during the 26th legislative term, speaks of Turkish women as heroes of the nation, underscoring their role in the defense of the country. She draws

on historical figures like Kara Fatma, a symbol of women's contribution to Turkey's war of independence:

Every Turkish woman is a hero of this country. In the event of any future troubles in our country, know that women will be at the forefront. (Arzu Erdem, MHP, 2017)

Erdem's narrative reflects MHP's nationalist ideology, in which women are seen as the protectors of the nation. Though their role is framed through a heroic lens, it also reinforces traditional patriarchal values, with women's contributions being tied to defense of the homeland. This aligns with MHP's conservative emphasis on family and national duty, where women's value is not solely based on their individual freedoms but on their role in defending national sovereignty.

Throughout the 26th legislative term, MHP female deputies presented a vision of womanhood that intertwines national identity, historical significance, and moral values. The findings that consist of certain speeches show that womanhood fit more into an ethnic nationalist framework, yet female representatives criticized violence against women by asserting that gender equality is inherently a national value. These speeches portrayed women as sacred beings, warriors, and heroes, condemning violence against them from the perspective of their elevated status and significant contributions to the nation. Unlike traditional portrayals of women solely as caretakers, these narratives emphasized women's roles as warriors and key figures in historical struggles, symbolizing strength and resilience.

This perspective positioned women as integral to the nation's identity and moral fabric, with their equality framed not just as a social necessity but as a core component of national pride and values. By tying women's rights and protection to their contributions to the preservation of Turkish culture and the nation's defense, MHP female deputies constructed a unique narrative that blended traditional, nationalist, and egalitarian elements. This approach critiques violence against women not merely as a social issue but as an affront to the values and ideals that women are seen to represent within the national framework.

7.1.1.3.3 Findings of 27th Parliamentary Term

During the 27th parliamentary term, female MPs from the MHP approached womanhood with a discourse that combined both critical and traditional elements. On the one hand, MHP female representatives suggest that Turkish identity is built in ideals of justice, equality, and respect for all individuals by fusing nationalist beliefs with criticisms of violence against women. They support nationalist ideas of harmony, development, and moral rectitude by opposing repressive beliefs and promoting social reform. It also points the significance of creating a society that protects the rights and dignity of all people.

Living in such a deep culture and separating women from men, seeing women as a commodity belonging to men, is deeply painful... Language reflects thought, and in Turkish, there is no division of words as masculine or feminine. Yet, our cultural practices fall far behind these values. (Nevin Taşlıcaý, MHP, 2020)

Nevin Taşlıcaý's speech conducts a perspective by connecting language, culture, and gender equality. She emphasizes that the Turkish language, unlike many others, does not distinguish between masculine and feminine, framing this as a reflection of Turkey's deep cultural heritage. This connection between language and thought implies that gender equality is inherently rooted in Turkish cultural values. Taşlıcaý critiques the perception of women as commodities belonging to men, identifying this as both a societal flaw and a wound on the collective conscience. By framing violence against women as a violation of national and moral values, she situates her critique within a broader nationalist framework. This approach aligns with MHP's ideological stance, blending traditional values with a call for greater gender equality, while rooting her argument in the cultural and historical significance of the Turkish identity.

On the other hand, the conservative approach is also handled by representative of MHP to a degree not observed in previous terms. One can see that she gives references from ancient and cultural teachings. Yet, it is different from AKP's deputies because this time there is a huge emphasize on nationalist aspects such as ethnicity, language and Turkish custom rather than only religion. For instance, the speech suggests that Turkish culture has distinctive features that set it apart from other cultures. A sense of national pride and identity is promoted by highlighting the linguistic features of the Turkish language.

She attributes her opposition to violence against women to these nationalist ideas. In keeping with nationalist ideas of equality and unification, the representative criticizes cultural norms that subjugate womanhood. She makes the case that the foundation of a true Turkish identity is fairness, equality, and respect for every person, regardless of gender, using the Turkish language as an example. Taşlıçay sees that protecting women's body integrity comes from Turkish tradition and discrimination cannot be found in Turkish nationality. Also, she approaches to end violence against women as a duty of being a citizen and her statement encompasses every woman living in the borders of the Republic.

During a discussion of Istanbul Contract, which is an important supranational agreement to end violence against women, Nevin Taşlıçay offers her speech in KEFEK meeting. According to her:

Istanbul Convention is wide in scope. Therefore, conducting the impact analysis of 6284 and supervising its implementation within the scope of the contract will mean touching many areas... If there is a grievance in alimony, it will be evaluated on both sides, and if the law harms the concept of 'family', necessary reforms should be made. (Nevin Taşlıçay, MHP, 2020)

The representative promotes a support for the changes that are required to fix any damage done to the idea of "family" in Istanbul Convention. She emphasizes how crucial it is to maintain social structures and familial ties. This may be an indication of a conservative stance on social policy and family law that places a premium on the stability and cohesiveness of family groupings.

7.1.1.3.4 The Summary of Findings

Findings show that The MHP's female representatives' take on womanhood is an interesting blend of tradition and nationalism. On the one hand, women are portrayed as the backbone of family and cultural values, but on the other, there's an attempt to elevate their role as integral to the nation's identity. Women are portrayed as vital to the preservation of national and cultural identity, blending their familial responsibilities with heroic and moral attributes. It is a balancing act between embracing conservative ideals and acknowledging, at least to some extent, the need for equality.

Take Nevin Taşlıcay, for example, who called out the gap between Turkey's cultural richness and the way women are treated. On the one hand, by referencing the Turkish language's lack of gendered words, Taşlıcay is essentially saying, "We're better than this." But at the same time, her critique does not push as far as questioning the structural roots of patriarchy—it stays within a traditional framework. On the other hand, her words that criticize the Istanbul Convention are also noteworthy to understand her approach: pragmatic.

Then, there is Ruhsar Demirel, whose words are deeply rooted in nationalist pride. Women are not just individuals; they are the glue that holds society together. At first, this statement can be seen as an egalitarian sentiment on the surface, but it also ties women's worth to their role in preserving family and national honor. This shows how MHP's approach both celebrates women and confines them within traditional expectations.

So, what does all these tell us? MHP's narrative does not reject equality outright, but it seems that their vision of womanhood is shaped by a strong sense of duty—duty to the family, to culture, and to the nation. It seems respectful, yes, but also restrictive, keeping women in a role that feels more collective than individual. This approach simultaneously continues to define women's roles within traditional contexts, such as cultural values and national identity, while not entirely disregarding the importance of women's rights. While emphasizing the role women play in upholding national values and identity, it also largely acknowledges their equality. For instance, when equality is advocated in the discourse, it is framed as stemming from the egalitarian tradition of the Turkish people. The reference to the lack of gendered pronouns in the Turkish language show their perspective on gender equality. Or, to put it in the context of this analysis's issue at hand: when they support the idea that violence against women must end, it is because women are the heroes of this nation. As a result, MHP's female representatives strike a balance with a more cautious approach, carefully positioning itself against more radical feminist narratives.

7.1.1.4 HDP: A Radical and Intersectional Perspective to Womanhood

This section analyzes the findings related to the HDP and its predecessor parties, such as the DTP and BDP, which are rooted in a pro-Kurdish and leftist ideological

framework. These parties have consistently championed gender equality and women's rights through an intersectional perspective. As the successor to parties, the HDP carries forward a legacy of addressing women's rights not only as isolated issues but as part of broader struggles against systemic oppression and inequality. Unlike other parties, HDP's discourse on violence against women, as well as on issues like abortion and the headscarf, reflects a more radical and consistent stance across legislative terms. Their approach integrates feminist and intersectional critiques, linking women's rights to broader themes of ethnic, class-based, and systemic justice. This continuity and coherence in their position set the HDP apart, marking them as one of the most progressive voices in Turkey's political spectrum on matters of womanhood and equality.

7.1.1.4.1 Findings of 23rd Parliamentary Term

In this period, with the entrance of the DTP into the parliament, voices regarding the issue of violence against women increased. The rights and interests of Kurdish people and other ethnic minorities are usually given priority by this party. The topic of their discussion frequently centers on questions of autonomy, cultural identity, and equal representation for underrepresented groups by generally using the feminist references in their statements. Those feminist references are given with the conceptions of sexism, intersectionality, gender inequality, and criticisms towards patriarchy and male-dominant system. Therefore, womanhood is defined with feminist framework in which the need for the equality among genders is frequently highlighted. For instance,

The root of violence today is actually **social inequality**. Where there is inequality there is violence. This is not just violence against women, it's **violence against children, violence against minorities, violence against people of different faiths...**It is necessary to treat **women as equal citizens** and to fight together on violence against women. (Sebahat Tuncel, BDP, 2010)

The idea of womanhood is viewed critically, taking into account the difficulties that women encounter in a variety of spheres of life. Ensuring gender equality is shown as the main way to end this violence. Moreover, violence against women is not only limited with one sex. More precisely, it has multidimensional implications. In this sense, the representative draws attention to the intersections of gender, race, and

belief, showing how these elements increase the difficulties faced by women of different backgrounds.

When it comes to womanhood, the representatives of DTP/BDP approach it in an inclusive manner. Women are the other half of the population and they can be of various ethnicities and faiths. For instance, it is stated that:

Women, who make up half of the world's population, are faced with many difficulties in **political, economic and social fields due to their gender, ethnic identity and belief**. (Pervin Buldan, DTP, 2009)

This portrayal positions womanhood not only as a gender identity but also as a social construct shaped by intersecting factors such as ethnicity and belief systems. These intersecting forms of discrimination and oppression faced by women need to be recognized to solve the problem of violence against women. This constitutes a political stance based on feminist ideals, supporting social justice, gender equality, and the empowerment of disadvantaged people, especially women. In Buldan's following words:

It is necessary to clearly see the underlying factor of this situation, namely the view of the society structure shaped by the **male-dominated culture** towards women. (Pervin Buldan, DTP, 2009)

The discourse positions itself against persistent patriarchal notions that uphold gender inequality and analyzes the societal institutions that are currently in place that have been established by cultures that are controlled by men. The focus on how male-dominated cultures have built society structures suggests that patriarchal norms and beliefs, which support inequality and impede women's growth in a variety of fields, are the filter through which womanhood is viewed.

7.1.1.4.2 Findings of 24th Parliamentary Term

The party's deputies maintained the same stance against violence against women as the DTP/BDP did during the 23rd term. Thus, in this period, BDP/HDP MPs defined womanhood from a feminist perspective. They criticize existing patriarchal understanding of womanhood which is limited to women's familial role. For example:

We, as a daughter, as a sister, as a mother, as a wife, are unfortunately seen as **second in society, as secondary in society**... Today, we have to foresee the source of violence in the society and discuss how that violence is reflected in the family and how that violence is reflected on the woman who expresses herself in the **public arena**. (Ayla Akat Ata, BDP, 2012)

This speech shows how women play a variety of responsibilities in society and that they are more than just mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters. It is stated that women are typically viewed as second-class or inferior in society as a result of these duties. It is underlined that the prevalence of violence against women and its primary cause stem from this historical interpretation of the family. It also illustrates the difficulties and barriers that women have when attempting to exercise their agency and voice in larger social contexts. To put it briefly, she believes that the definition of womanhood must go beyond the context of societal injustices and inequities that have an impact on women's lives.

Just like CHP, BDP/HDP also criticizes AKP's policies. CHP was making its criticisms mostly in the context of AKP's discourses. However, the speeches of BDP/HDP MPs mostly include policies criticized from a socialist and feminist point of view. To give an example,

Women, feminist women, socialist women, religious women who are disturbed by violence against women call this Parliament to duty every day in the streets. (Sebahat Tuncel, BDP, 2013).

The phrase "feminist women, socialist women, religious women" brings emphasis on the intersectionality of the womanhood by pointing the fact that women from different social and ideological backgrounds needs to be taken into consideration in the Parliament. In order to stop violence against women, it is argued that women should be addressed with a holistic approach and take part together to render Parliamentarians to combat violence against women. Tuncel emphasized that the existence of laws such as the Istanbul Convention is insufficient, and women's mobilization of the TGNA has been shown as an important step to be taken regarding the ongoing problem of violence against women. This shows that womanhood is also defined as representing themselves as active citizens.

7.1.1.4.3 Findings of 26th Parliamentary Term

During the 26th parliamentary term, the discourses of HDP female deputies played a significant role in discussions on violence against women and gender equality in Turkey. These discourses approach the concept of womanhood not merely through individual rights but within a broader social and political context. These deputies, who particularly emphasize the dual victimization of Kurdish women and the feminist struggle for freedom, marks out women's potential to transform social structures while voicing their criticisms of the state. In this study, the discourses of HDP female deputies on violence against women and womanhood will be analyzed through CDA, evaluating the strategies they employ within the context of party policies, ideological approaches, and the struggle for gender equality.

An exemplary speech from this period, which best illustrates the approach of HDP female deputies toward womanhood, is as follows:

We cannot ignore this new concept of violence directed at all women, as seen in the case of Ekin Van. Instead of implementing legal mechanisms like the Istanbul Convention, which exists to prevent violence against women, the hate speech and practices targeting all women, from our politicians to laborers, must end immediately. Yes, when it comes to Kurdish women, they are selected as the primary target. (Çağlar Demirel, HDP, 2015)

The emphasis that Çağlar Demirel places on Ekin Van serves as a powerful argument for the HDP's perspective that Kurdish women are specifically targeted. HDP generally views the violence faced by Kurdish women as a form of dual victimization, within the framework of the state's oppression of the Kurdish population in Turkey. Demirel stresses that Kurdish women are targeted not only because they are women but also due to their Kurdish identity (e.g. Filiz Kerestecioğlu's speech in 2015). This reflects a recurring theme in HDP's discourse, highlighting the intersectionality of ethnic identity and gender. Additionally, by criticizing the failure to implement legal mechanisms like the Istanbul Convention, the violence women face is framed not merely as an individual issue but as an institutional and systemic problem. This is a discourse that directly underscores the responsibility of the state.

The discourse can be seen as part of HDP's ideology centered around 'resistance to the state,' 'defense of women's rights,' and the 'freedom struggle of Kurdish women.' Violence against women is not framed solely as a societal problem but also as an extension of the state's oppressive policies. While this discourse, which aligns

with HDP's policies supporting a pluralistic women's movement, presents violence against women not as an individual issue but as a problem nurtured by family and societal structures. This reflects the party's stance that women's demands for freedom and equality are not merely a political discourse but part of a radical feminist and libertarian approach. It also supports the party's ideological stance on fighting against patriarchal structures. HDP deputies, in general, when discussing womanhood, often advocate for liberated individuals and egalitarian relationships instead of traditional structures.

7.1.1.4.4 Findings of 27th Parliamentary Term

Women representatives of HDP discuss the root causes and the consequences of femicide in their speeches on violence against women. They challenge the structural basis of violence against women by presenting femicides as a product of the patriarchal system that upholds violence against women. The representatives offer a critical perspective that connects femicide not only to individual actions but also to broader social structures and power dynamics that marginalize women. In this context, the main problem causing the violence is defined as the masculine mentality.

The situation that makes **femicides political** is **this masculine mentality** in which law and politics are involved. The **male dominated mindset**, which attacks women who fight against this male mentality in the streets, against harassment, rape, and massacres of women, and who defend their gains and lives, encourages the murderers of women even more. (Muazzez Orhan Işık, HDP, 2021)

Furthermore, whilst the speech criticizes the politicization of femicides, it is argued that the situation is made worse by the involvement of politicians and the legal system. This critique looks at the idea that femicides should be viewed as signs of more serious social issues that call for structural reform rather than as isolated occurrences. This advocacy of female agency challenges traditional gender roles and stereotypes that portray women as passive victims, instead emphasizing their resilience and determination in demanding justice and equality.

7.1.1.4.5 The Summary of Findings

HDP female MPs consistently adopt a radical and intersectional approach to womanhood, linking violence against women to broader systemic oppressions. The HDP's approach to womanhood is refreshingly radical and intersectional, focusing on the struggles of women within the broader framework of societal and systemic inequalities. In contrast to other parties that primarily emphasize traditional roles or national duty, HDP MPs frame womanhood as a dynamic, evolving identity, linked to activism, resistance, and empowerment. One can observe the connections in their rhetoric often linking women's rights to larger struggles for justice, including ethnic, class, and gender equality.

Moreover, the HDP's feminist rhetoric often intersects with its pro-Kurdish stance, where women's rights are framed as a fundamental part of the Kurdish liberation struggle. The findings constitute an example of rejecting the simplistic view that violence is just an individual problem. The representatives of HDP links it to a systemic issue, which is a hallmark of the HDP's broader political discourse. This intersectional approach to womanhood recognizes that violence against women cannot be separated from other forms of oppression and that women's struggles are inherently connected to the struggles of other marginalized groups, especially Kurds.

Thus, HDP's womanhood is not passive or confined to traditional roles. Rather, it's portrayed as active and rebellious. Their vision of womanhood emphasizes empowerment and agency. For HDP, women are not merely victims of violence—they are central to the fight against the systems that perpetuate that violence. This is why HDP consistently ties issues of violence to broader systemic critiques, demanding a reimagining of not just gender relations but societal structures as a whole.

In summary, the HDP's discourse on womanhood represents an ongoing challenge to the dominant patriarchal norms in Turkish society. Their discourse critiques patriarchy, ethnic inequality, and class-based injustices, portraying women as agents of resistance and collective struggle. Through this intersectional, feminist approach, HDP MPs redefine womanhood as a space of resistance and empowerment, not limited to family roles or national pride. They frame gender equality as a struggle

that intersects with broader societal issues, positioning women as agents of social change, justice, and liberation.

7.1.1.5 Results

The analysis of parliamentary discourses on violence against women reveals significant diversity in how womanhood is framed across different political parties. According to the findings, womanhood, as constructed in parliamentary debates on violence against women, is neither fixed nor homogenous. Instead, it is a fluid and contested concept shaped by ideological, cultural, and political factors. These results emphasize the interplay between substantive and constitutive representation, showing how MPs simultaneously advocate for women's rights and contribute to the reproduction of societal norms. The diversity of approaches points the complexity of representing womanhood within a dynamic political context, offering valuable insights into the relationship between gender and political representation in Turkey.

The findings reveal a multifaceted approach to defining womanhood across the parliamentary debates on violence against women. It is almost impossible to ignore the stark contrasts in how parties approach the issue of womanhood. Each political party's discourse reflects not only its ideological and cultural priorities but also its evolving strategies to address societal concerns. While some parties emphasize traditional roles tied to family and morality, others advocate for systemic critiques and feminist redefinitions of gender dynamics.

For AKP, womanhood was predominantly framed around traditional roles in the family, with an emphasis on motherhood and the preservation of social order. CHP advocated for a more progressive view, focusing on individual freedoms, gender equality, and women's rights. HDP offered an intersectional feminist approach, linking womanhood with both gender and ethnic struggles, particularly for Kurdish women. Meanwhile, MHP approached womanhood through the lens of nationalism, highlighting the historical roles of women in defending and preserving the nation. These varied discourses mark out the significant role political ideology plays in shaping narratives around gender, with each party framing womanhood according to its broader vision for society and the state.

Moreover, these discourses do not merely address violence; they also offer a window into how parties define, interpret, and contest the role of women in Turkish society. As a result, these narratives collectively demonstrate how womanhood is both constituted and contested within Turkey's political landscape.

7.2 Womanhood Embedded in Broader Political Debates on VAW

7.2.1 Protecting Citizens in the Private Spheres

Citizenship, as both a legal status and a broader socio-political construct, defines individuals' rights, responsibilities, and inclusion within a political community (Marshall, 1950; Lister, 2003). In the Turkish context, the concept of citizenship has historically been shaped by tensions between secularism, nationalism, and conservatism, which continue to influence how women's rights are framed. Studies such as Kandiyoti (1987) and Yuval-Davis (1997) emphasize that citizenship is often gendered, with women's roles frequently tied to familial and moral responsibilities rather than individual autonomy. Against this backdrop, female MPs' parliamentary speeches provide valuable insight into how women's citizenship is negotiated and redefined in relation to violence. Themes such as equality, autonomy, inclusion, and societal belonging recur across these narratives, offering a lens through which to examine ideological differences and the evolving definitions of citizenship over time.

In parliamentary debates on violence against women, citizenship emerges as a critical framework for understanding how female MPs advocate for women's rights and societal roles. Through their discourses, female MPs address not only legal and institutional mechanisms but also cultural and ideological dimensions of citizenship, reflecting diverse political and social priorities. This section explores how shifting political contexts, legislative priorities, and ideological tensions have shaped narratives around women's citizenship, highlighting both continuities and transformations over time.

All things considered, this section shows how the discourses of female MPs actively shape the positions of women in Turkish politics. Their stories go beyond simple lobbying to reinterpret citizenship via the prisms of gender and representation,

emphasizing the complex relationship among institutional norms, societal expectations, and political identity.

7.2.1.1 AKP: Citizenship Based on Societal Roles and Identities

In parliamentary debates, how citizenship is framed often reveals deeper ideological underpinnings, especially regarding gender. This section analyses how the discourse on violence against women provides a lens to examine how different political parties in Turkey approach the idea of women's citizenship starting with AKP from the 22nd until the 27th parliamentary terms. Through their rhetoric, MPs not only address legal protections but also engage with broader societal values, cultural norms, and the role of women in the nation's fabric. The findings examined in this section shows how evolving narrative on violence against women sheds light on how women's citizenship is not only about their legal and social rights but also about how their identities and roles are shaped to align with broader ideological and cultural frameworks.

7.2.1.1.1 Findings of 22nd Parliamentary Term

In this dissertation, violence against women raises as the theme that receives the most attention in understanding approaches to women's citizenship. Women's citizenship is discussed in direct relation to the definition of womanhood. Particularly from the viewpoint of AK Party MPs, it is evident that their perspectives on women's citizenship are largely influenced by women's roles within the family. This is because safeguarding women as citizens from violence is perceived as preventing 'mothers' from experiencing 'domestic abuse'.

“Family is the basis of social assistance and service policies; because the family is the basic unit of life.” (Semiha Öyüş, AKP, 2004) This is the beginning of Öyüş's discourse that include statements of violence against women. This discourse indirectly touches upon women's citizenship by positioning the family as the center of social assistance policies. Rather than specifically addressing women's individual civic rights, her speech focuses on elevating the family as an institution. In her following words:

Disputes, fights, oppression **and violence that occur in family relations** negatively affect the personal safety and personal rights of **family members...For example, parents' desire for divorce, the disintegration of family unity is an important problem area in terms of the rights of spouses and children.** (Semiha Öyüş, AKP, 2004)

This statement shows various types of violence that women can be subjected to. However, the issue is not taken as a “women’s issue”, but a “family’s issue” into consideration. Given discourse of Semiha Öyüş, for instance, indirectly addresses women’s citizenship by acknowledging the negative consequences of familial conflicts on the personal safety and rights of family members, not solely of women. Her discourse prioritizes addressing disputes, fights, and violence within family dynamics. Moreover, as a result of this violence that women were subjected to, decisions such as divorce were considered within the framework of family unity, and the rights of spouses and children were prioritized. In the example of divorce resulting from violence, the outcome is framed not in terms of the woman’s safety or rights but rather as the dissolution of the family. This indicates that the approach to women’s citizenship is primarily constructed around their significance within the family.

Almost all AKP MPs take a same stance. Eliminating violence against women has been deemed crucial to promote family unity. What can be concluded from this is that women’s rights as agencies or autonomous citizens are not upheld specifically. Another example is as follows:

The state takes the necessary measures to ensure the peace and welfare of the family, especially the **protection of the mother and children**, and the teaching and implementation of family planning. (Gülseren Topuz, AKP, 2007)

While the discourse mentions the protection of “mothers” and “children”, it does not explicitly address women’s rights or agency outside of their familial roles. This indicates a prioritization of familial welfare over women’s individual rights and citizenship. Thus, the representative did not frame the responsibility of the state in order to prevent violence against women, but rather as the responsibility of family planning. Here, it is observed that the emphasis is placed on the women not focusing on their civic rights or being a part of a nation or country as a citizen; instead,

women in the speeches are emerging as a component of their family. Although the concept of “violence against women” is used in the discourse, the main focus is on domestic violence. This demonstrates the difference in AKP MPs approaches to violence against women. For sure, the violence that women are exposed to might occur within the family, but for AKP MPs, the problem with this violence is the harm it gives to the unity of the family, not the bodily integrity of women. Therefore, the issue is not the woman experiencing violence, but rather the disruption of the family’s integrity.

Moreover, by citing legal commitments, rules and the Constitution are also observed in the findings. The emphasis on educational activities in regions where such problems are common demonstrates the need for social change and the elimination of harmful cultural practices. An example of speeches is as follows:

Educational activities should be started as soon as possible in regions where **women’s suicides, custom and honor killings are common. Social mindset needs to change** and superstitions need to disappear. (Serpil Yildiz, AKP, 2003)

It presents education as a tool to support societal advancement and development in order to eliminate violence against women. The issue that this education should be given to families was also discussed in the context of protecting girls. For another example:

Giving priority to lifelong education can **cause guiding mothers and fathers** to act sensitively for the education **of their daughters**, eliminating poverty and ignorance among women by supporting **women’s education**, skill development and employment potentials, improving women’s ability to **earn income outside of traditional professions**, providing self-confidence in economic fields, providing labor and employment opportunities. (İnci Özdemir, AKP, 2004)

Despite it is drawn in the framework of the family, discourse adopts an inclusive and progressive approach to women’s citizenship, recognizing women as active agents of change and advocating for policies and initiatives that promote their rights and opportunities. It discusses how education has the power to fundamentally alter structural obstacles to women’s empowerment, like poverty, gender inequity, and restricted access to opportunities.

However, when we consider the period in general, it is seen that female MPs from the AK Party mostly addressed the issue of violence against women as violence suffered by mothers. At this point, it can be argued that the issue of women's existence as citizens remains in the background. Because stopping violence against women is important in order not to disrupt family unity. This may explain why "she" is referred to as "mother" rather than "woman" throughout the discussion.

7.2.1.1.2 Findings of 23rd Parliamentary Term

There have been noticeable variations in the AKP MPs' perspectives on citizenship throughout this time between pre- and post-2010 periods. Discussions on the state's responsibility to protect victims of violence against women is closely linked to various approaches to women's citizenship. It is necessary to decide if or how to eradicate inequality and safeguard women as citizens of a nation. After all, elimination of the violence against women is aimed by all of the representative but the legitimization of the discourses that includes ideas on the emergence, process and the elimination of the violence has differences.

On the one hand, women's citizenship is brought up in the light of the problem of domestic violence against women. On the other hand, some MPs focus on "gender" with its relation to violence and state policies. For instance, gender-sensitive policies and budgeting practices are supported in some speeches, in order to combat violence against women and to ensure women's full participation in society (Azize Sibel Gönül, AKP, 2008). Same attitude is shown by another AKP MP in 2009. Selma Aliye Kavaf asked for a change in the understanding of genders in order to eliminate violence against women. In her words:

These data on violence against women and participation in the workforce, despite everything, are an indication that the education process does not provide enough **change and transformation in individuals' values, attitudes and behaviors regarding gender**. (Selma Aliye Kavaf, AKP, 2009)

In order to legitimize efforts to advance gender equality and enhance education as vital elements of citizenship, Kavaf acknowledges the need for more change and transformation in cultural attitudes around gender. In this case, a current approach to

end violence against woman is deemed insufficient. For instance, inadequacies like the women's lack of participation in the workforce, as well as, in education are shown as insufficient to create any change in people's mindsets. Unlike other AKP MPs, this criticism is free of any conservative connotations. On the contrary, the traditional point of view is disregarded and scientific evidence was employed to legitimize the claims on violence against women. This demonstrates how the representatives go above and beyond cultural norms, moralities, and somehow party politics to enhance the representation of women.

However, in the 2010s, it is seen that a more conservative and traditionalist language is encountered in AKP deputies. Such discourses are more likely to use masculine languages. For example, in a day when assembly was having discussions on violence against women, a representative of AKP said: "Every person's work can create anger, every person can create a fight, but it is him (*man/ 'er kiři*) who stops it, him." (Halide Incekar, AKP, 2010). This brings the promotion of personal agency of manhood and accountability in conflict resolution.

7.2.1.1.3 Findings of 24th Parliamentary Term

The 24th legislative term marks the first time that the case of a victim of violence, Özgecan Aslan, has come to the agenda of the parliament. Although violence against women has been discussed in previous terms, there was no specific individual addressed. The brutality experienced by Özgecan had been on the parliamentary agenda since the day it occurred. Female AKP parliamentarians also expressed their stance on violence against women through this murder.

In the speeches made prior to Özgecan's murder, there was a similar approach to the citizenship of womanhood as in previous periods. The issue of violence against women, which is not confined to a single dimension but encompasses all forms of economic, social, and physical violence, emphasized the need for women to be protected by the state. For instance, the subtext of the following speech indicates a language understandable to someone who adheres to conservative ideology or someone who wants to be understood by conservative audience:

Violence against women can be seen in different ways, **economically, socially, verbally, psychologically and sexually, as well as physically**. In any case, violence is a concept that evokes the **age of ignorance [*cahiliye devri*]**, and all forms of violence are ignorance. (Tülay Kaynarca, AKP, 2011)

The representative emphasizes the complexity of violence and makes the case that protecting women's rights as citizens requires addressing violence against them. It seems that her approach to violence is not limited to the physical realm; for instance, inequality is also thought to be a contributing factor in violence in the economic sphere. Furthermore, the phrase “age of ignorance” defines violence as the antithesis of societal advancement and enlightenment and suggests a moral position against it. This evaluation positions the defense of women from assault as a crucial component of societal progress and enlightenment, serving to validate the debate on women's citizenship with religious allusions.

7.2.1.1.4 Findings of 26th Parliamentary Term

In the 26th legislative term, the concept of citizenship, as framed by female deputies from Turkey's major political parties—AK Party, CHP, HDP, and MHP—revealed how deeply political ideology influences the rights and responsibilities of women as citizens. For AK Party, citizenship was closely tied to women's roles within the family and society, emphasizing their contributions to social order and national stability. The statements of AK Party female deputies reveal that women's rights are defined within the framework of social responsibilities, the preservation of the family structure, and contributions to societal order. Citizenship is shaped not through individual freedoms and rights, but as a subject contributing to the maintenance of social order. In this context, the concept of citizenship is redefined through the woman's responsibility to society and her duty to protect the family structure.

Women are portrayed as the “lifeblood of life” (Nursel Reyhanlıoğlu, AKP, 2016), and citizenship is not based on individual rights but rather on women's responsibilities within the family and society. In this context, citizenship is framed as women's contribution to the foundation of society and family, and their role is seen as essential for sustaining societal stability. Women are positioned as key players in creating “happy families and a happy society” (Nursel Reyhanlıoğlu, AKP, 2016). Thus, citizenship for women is tied to their duties within the family rather than their

individual rights. In the same regards, one representative states “strong women for a strong society” (Ayşe Sula Köşeoğlu, AKP, 2016) rhetoric which presents citizenship as something that women achieve by contributing to the strength and stability of society. This means that their status as citizens is validated through their roles as supporters of a healthy and thriving community.

Women are thus seen as contributors to the nation’s welfare but are not afforded full citizenship as individuals independent of their familial duties. Therefore, the concept of citizenship in this context is also defined as a person contributing to society and bearing the responsibility of maintaining the family structure. The woman is seen as part of society through the harmony and trust she brings to the family; this reveals a conception of citizenship that is based on social responsibilities rather than individual rights.

Moreover, the citizenship in the speeches is also heavily linked to women’s access to roles within the public sector and government achievements in integrating women into various fields. Citizenship is presented not simply as a legal status but as an active participation in the public sphere, made possible by government -particularly AKP policies. For example,

As someone who personally experienced the psychological violence both in 1987 and during the February 28 [post-modern coup] period, I extend my gratitude to our President, Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and our AK PARTY, who ended the oppression of this mindset that has been trying to suppress women for years, on behalf of all our women deputies and all women.
(Hüsnüye Erdoğan, AKP, 2016)

However, women’s citizenship is portrayed as being enabled by the state, specifically the AK Party, and their place in society is legitimated through their integration into state institutions. By referring to the February 28 period—a time when conservative Muslim women were particularly targeted due to restrictions on wearing the headscarf in public institutions—she positions herself as a representative of women who have been oppressed because of their conservative identity.

This historical reference is significant since it frames conservative women not just as passive victims but as a group whose womanhood and identity were actively

suppressed. The gratitude expressed toward President Erdoğan and the AK Party for “ending the oppression of this mindset”. Her gratitude serves as a portraying Erdoğan’s leadership as morally superior for correcting historical wrongs that affected pious Muslim women.

Nevertheless, it can be argued that women’s citizenship is thus conditional on the state’s recognition and facilitation of their roles. Their ability to participate in society is not framed as a right but as a privilege granted by the party’s policies. The statement reflects an understanding of citizenship where recognition by the state and political loyalty are integral components. This approach is embraced by nearly all AK Party female deputies who have spoken on this issue (e.g. Ayşe Sula Köseoğlu, 2016; Nursel Reyhanlı, 2016; Ayşe Kesir, 2016; Tülay Kaynarca, 2016; Fatma Betül Sayan Kaya, 2017) and no contrary approach has been encountered in this study. This presents a hierarchical model of citizenship where women’s participation in public life is facilitated by the state rather than being an intrinsic right. This conditional citizenship reinforces the idea that women’s rights and freedoms are privileges granted by the government, not inherent entitlements.

In addition, one of the most prominent aspects during the 26th Legislative Term is the frequent mention in the statements of female deputies of the argument that the AK Party government has produced many policies on a legal level to address and end the issue of violence against women through the Istanbul Convention. Mentioning this is important because the Istanbul Convention was an agreement from which the AK Party withdrew its signature in the following legislative term. More precisely, the withdrawal of the signature was achieved through the efforts of the AK Party. The law, which was once praised for being championed by the party as a solution to end violence against women, was later criticized by the same party, resulting in Turkey’s withdrawal from the agreement. As will be seen in the following term, it is not very common to come across statements from female deputies directly denouncing the Istanbul Convention; but, their silence on the matter is also noteworthy. However, since this debate is not the focus of this section, I will now only mention a few examples from this term where the Istanbul Convention was praised.

Continuing from the same day, as the November 25 transcripts seem to be the most relevant for discussing violence against women, the following remarks by Ayşe Keşir can be given as an example:

Since we came to power in 2002, combating violence against women has been one of our priority policies... Turkish Parliament is the first and only Parliament to sign the Istanbul Convention without reservation, and Law No. 6284, the compliance law with the Istanbul Convention, was also passed by this Parliament. (Ayşe Keşir, AKP, 2016)

This excerpt shows how the AK Party positions itself as a champion in the fight against violence, particularly against women, and how the Istanbul Convention (Ayşe Keşir, 2016; Fatma Benli, 2016; Ayşe Keşir, 2017), as well as Law no 6284 (e.g. İlknur İnceöz, 2015; Fatma Benli, 2016), is referenced as a key achievement. The AK Party's initial praise of the Istanbul Convention stands in stark contrast to its later decision to withdraw, reflecting a deeper tension within the party's ideological approach to women's rights. While the party initially framed its fight against violence as being aligned with international standards, such as the Istanbul Convention, its eventual withdrawal suggests a shift toward a more insular, traditionalist approach to women's rights. This tension between the international and domestic framing of women's rights reflects the ongoing struggle within the party to balance conservative values with modern legal frameworks.

In summary, the AK Party's discourse on women and citizenship is marked by an emphasis on familial and societal responsibilities, where women's rights are framed not through individual autonomy but through their contributions to the nation's stability. This conception of citizenship is further legitimized through political loyalty, particularly to the AK Party and President Erdoğan, making women's participation in public life conditional on their alignment with government policies. While the party initially positioned itself as a champion of women's rights through instruments like the Istanbul Convention, its later withdrawal reflects a deeper ideological shift toward more conservative values. This approach reinforces a limited, duty-based model of citizenship, where women are primarily valued for their roles within the family and their support of the political status quo.

7.2.1.1.5 Findings of 27th Parliamentary Term

Similar to previous legislative terms, the 27th legislative term witnessed discussions on violence against women in terms of citizenship in variety of dimensions. In the speeches of AKP MPs, the issue of women's citizenship is discussed in direct relation to the definition of motherhood. Zeynep Gül Yılmaz showed that she also believed the mother role of women should be protected for future generations and violence against women must be end due to its damage on family members. In her words:

Violence against women, which causes poisoning of the **family and social fabric**, leads to the growth of **mentally unhealthy generations...** There is an increase in the tendency to violence against women throughout the world and we **develop social policies against the global factors that are the reasons for this.** (Zeynep Gül Yılmaz, AKP, 2020)

In this speech the role of violence against women in poisoning interpersonal relationships within the family and contributing to the development of mentally unhealthy generations is emphasized. It links violence against women to broader social problems such as mental health problems and social dysfunction. The issue of violence against women is addressed beyond womanhood and the consequences of violence are underlined in this way.

This recognition of the impact of violence against women on family dynamics and social well-being suggests a holistic approach to addressing this issue, recognizing the interconnectedness of familial and social levels of intervention rather than focusing on citizenship at the level of womanhood. In this statement, she asks to improve policies to stop violence against women. Having a conservative perspective, she considers only mothers who raise future generations, rather than all women. This perspective is held by every woman representative in the parliament who is making speeches regarding violence against women in Turkey.

7.2.1.1.6 Summary of Findings

The AKP's approach to women's citizenship is deeply tied to its conservative ideology and its emphasis on the family as the cornerstone of Turkish society.

Throughout the legislative terms analyzed, women MPs from the AKP consistently framed women's roles within the context of family, morality, and societal cohesion.

In the earlier periods, particularly before 2010, there were instances where AKP representatives acknowledged systemic issues such as gender inequality and the need for educational reforms to address violence against women. However, such remarks were the exception rather than the general view. The predominant narrative centered on women as mothers and caregivers, with their value often tied to their roles within the domestic sphere. After 2010, the AKP's discourse increasingly incorporated Islamic references, framing women's citizenship through religious and moral lenses. This shift can be observed in statements that critique violence against women as being contrary to Islamic teachings while simultaneously reinforcing traditional gender roles.

This duality reveals a tension in the AKP's discourse: while advocating for protections against violence, the framing often upheld patriarchal norms. Women's citizenship under the AKP is thus constructed as both a moral responsibility and a duty tied to their roles within the family and society, rather than an autonomous right.

7.2.1.2 CHP: Protecting the Civil Rights of the Republic with Kemalist Heritage

CHP holds a significant place in Turkish political history as the founding party of the Republic, deeply rooted in principles of secularism, statism, and modernization (Ahmad, 2003; Akman 2004). These foundational ideals have shaped the party's approach to gender equality, framing womanhood and citizenship as key components of the nation-building project (Ahmad, 2003; Kandiyoti, 1987). Women's roles have historically been positioned within the boundaries of state-centered narratives, emphasizing their contributions to Turkey's progress while advocating for equality as both a moral and legal necessity

This section examines the findings show how the CHP's approach to womanhood and citizenship has developed across legislative terms, particularly in the context of violence against women. By analyzing parliamentary speeches from the 22nd to the 27th terms, this analysis shows how the CHP balances its Kemalist heritage with

emerging feminist perspectives, offering the process of evolving stance on women's rights and citizenship in Turkey.

7.2.1.2.1 Findings of 22nd Parliamentary Term

During the 22nd legislative term, the CHP's approach to women's citizenship reflects its deep-rooted commitment to Republican ideals while also hinting at an evolving first wave feminist perspective. Women's roles are framed not just through legal rights but as active participants in the nation's social and political life. Drawing heavily from Atatürk's reforms, the party emphasizes the transformative nature of the Republic in elevating women's status and granting them equality.

At the same time, there's a notable tension in how citizenship is defined. On one hand, women are celebrated as equal members of society, essential to the nation's modernization. On the other, this equality is often tied to their contributions to the state and public life rather than their intrinsic rights as individuals. This duality in the CHP's rhetoric sets the stage for both its strengths and its limitations in addressing gender equality. While CHP MPs were talking about violence against women, they discussed the fact that the victimized woman is subjected to various obstacles in public domain due to her victimization. As a result, she is left behind as a citizen. In this speech of Erbatur:

Violence against women is one of the most important factors preventing women's **participation in social, economic and political life** as conscious, active, self-confident and productive **individuals**. (N. Gaye Erbatur, CHP, 2004)

The discussion surrounding violence against women is evidence of a citizenship approach to women that acknowledges the damaging effects of violence against women on women's capacity to fully exercise their rights and engage in society. Accordingly, violence against women does not only affects their physical and mental well-being but it also hinders their ability to engage meaningfully in social, economic, and political activities. Therefore, their rights as citizens are jeopardized since violence against them reduces their agency and participation in public sphere.

Research shows that the woman who was subjected to violence has experienced a great trauma, withdrawn and lost her self-esteem. **Such**

an individual cannot be expected to be an active seeker of rights.
(N. Gaye Erbatur, CHP, 2004)

Addresses the profound impact of violence against women on their psychological well-being and agency, it can be argued that the representative wishes women to have high self-esteem and confident individuals who recognize and defend their rights and freedoms.

When CHP MPs offer their speeches that embed their approach to citizenship, they usually give reference to personal authority of Atatürk, as well as Constitution and law.

The initiatives in the **Ottoman Empire** were not aimed at making women equal in all areas of life; they aimed to make it a little more possible in the **status of second class, dependent on men**. However, the movement for equality between men and women, initiated under the **leadership of Atatürk**, aimed at absolute equality between the sexes and brought with it an unnamed **positive discrimination** practice in the founding years of the republic, **in the form of a state policy**. (Oya Arasli, CHP, 2006)

Here, the speech's contextualization of the gender equality movement within the Republic of Turkey's historical trajectory and comparison to the little efforts made during the Ottoman Empire make it remarkable. The representative so upholds the notion of citizenship as inclusive and equitable for all people by praising the adoption of positive discrimination policies in the early years of the republic as a means of improving gender equality.

The speech was made in a Kemalist manner which praises the developments of early republican period and leadership of Atatürk. Solution is once again showed as a state policy. It portrays the republican movement as pursuing complete equality between men and women while criticizing the Ottoman Empire's efforts as inadequate and intended to preserve women's subordinate role.

The **woman who was imprisoned at home for six hundred years** had to be elevated to an equal position with men, and she had to be reminded that she was at least as valuable as men. **The Great Leader Atatürk** would once again point the way to his nation. With the reforms carried out under his leadership, women gained the status of equal citizens. Unification Education Law, Civil Code, dress code,

Turkish Penal Code were important steps taken in this reform process.
(N. Gaye Erbatur, CHP, 2003)

Here, Erbatur focuses on how important it is to give women the same status as men. Through this contextualization of women's rights within the larger framework of national reforms, gender equality is framed as a necessary component of Turkey's modernization and advancement. Moreover, drawing on Atatürk's legacy and pointing particular changes implemented during his tenure, she legitimizes her approach to ensure gender equality and promote inclusive citizenship for all people, irrespective of gender. In the same manner, the representative argued that it is state's responsibility to guarantee equality by elimination of violence against women. In Erbatur's words in another speech:

Preventing violence against women **is no longer a domestic issue**. I respectfully greet the supreme delegation, wishing that this fact be taken into account and that Turkey fulfills its responsibilities towards **its citizens**. (N. Gaye Erbatur, CHP, 2007)

The term "supreme delegation" alludes to a request for higher authority or decision-making authorities to acknowledge the pressing need to address violence against women. It is said that the problem genuinely has a worldwide reach rather than a traditional or local one. This manner of recasting violence against women as an issue of both national and international concern emphasizes how important it is for governments to respect women's rights as citizens and carry out their duty to keep everyone safe.

Moreover, handling the issue from its traditional perspective is criticized by other CHP MPs. They call for a reevaluation of societal attitudes and legal frameworks surrounding violence against women. An example is as follows:

Where are the **equality, modernity and human rights** in this? If an act is a **crime outside the home**, it must be a **crime inside the home** as well. **Contemporary legal norm** can only be realized in this way. (Canan Aritman, CHP, 2006)

As it is seen in the speech, the representative pushes for equal treatment under the law both within and outside the home, that rejects private and public divisions. For her, there is a need for contemporary legal norms to be applied universally. Through

references to equality, modernity, and human rights, the discourse aligns itself with progressive values and principles, there is an understanding of a more inclusive and rights-based approach to women's citizenship.

CHP deputies generally use similar language to each other. While this language mostly includes Kemalist discourse, it can be said that it has been influenced by feminist literature by touching gender issues. In other words, the explanation of the concepts and the expansion of the scope areas appear more and more in time. CHP deputies objected both to the fact that the word violence does not only have a physical dimension, and that violence only exists in the family. Woman was not only seen as an individual who suffered violence in the family, but also as a citizen, and the CHP representatives presented the state's legal arrangements to protect its citizens as a solution to violence against women.

7.2.1.2.2 Findings of 23rd Parliamentary Term

During the 23rd legislative term, the CHP's discourse on violence against women continued to draw heavily from its Kemalist roots. Female MPs frequently invoked the foundational ideals of the Republic, emphasizing Atatürk's reforms as a cornerstone of gender equality. This framing positioned the protection of women as both a constitutional necessity and a fundamental duty of the state. Through these references, CHP MPs reinforced the idea that the Republic had established a framework for women's citizenship that guarantees their rights and safety.

Although the CHP MPs' statements during this time had similar content to those from the previous one, criticism of the AKP's policies gained traction. Only one speech is worth analyzing in the context of women's citizenship. This speech (of Aritman 2011) shows how violence against women makes it difficult for women to participate in public life as citizens. In Aritman's words: "Now, we women are fighting for life, not for rights, in this country" (Canan Aritman, CHP, 2011). This is an important approach, as it not only expresses that women cannot exercise their rights as citizens but also that it is necessary for the state to take steps to protect its own citizens. In her following words:

The right to life is also the **primary human right of women**. While the **constitutional duty of governments** is to protect the right to life of their **citizens**, the right **to life of female citizens** is not protected in our country. (Canan Aritman, CHP, 2011)

Aritman argues in this speech that government fails to uphold women's, its citizens', rights to life. She touches upon fundamental human right to life. In this respect, it is government's constitutional obligation to protect the lives of all citizens, including women. This criticism exposes a part of citizenship that is yet unmet for women in the nation by pointing out a discrepancy between constitutional ideals and their application in defending women's rights.

As a result, the findings show that in the 23rd legislative term, the CHP's discourse on women's citizenship maintained a strong emphasis on constitutionalism and state responsibility, like it was before. By repeatedly referencing Atatürk and the Republic's founding principles, CHP MPs positioned women as equal citizens whose rights are protected under the rule of law. This view emphasized the state's role as the primary guarantor of women's safety. At the same time, CHP MPs used this narrative to critique the AKP's increasingly conservative rhetoric, which they perceived as undermining women's rights and equality. By contrasting their vision of citizenship with what they saw as AKP's family-centered and patriarchal approach, CHP MPs framed violence against women not just as a social issue but as a political failure tied to the erosion of secular and egalitarian principles. This chapter examines how these critiques, alongside the party's reliance on Kemalist ideals, shaped CHP's approach to women's citizenship during this period.

7.2.1.2.3 Findings of 24th Parliamentary Term

The CHP MPs have taken a similar stance to earlier periods when it comes to addressing the issue of violence against women. Gender inequality is considered while discussing violence against women, which is said to have its roots in the conventional roles that are placed on women in society. From a statist stance, the state's responsibility to provide equal opportunities to both men and women is as the solution. A few remarks were made in the following ways:

In addition to creating a legal basis for women to find a place for themselves in every field, to have equal opportunities and to solve the problem [violence against woman], **social mentality change and education are mandatory**. (Ayşe Nedret Akova, CHP, 2012)

Ensuring that women have equal access to rights, resources, and opportunities as men, the discourses enhance women's citizenship status. Equal opportunities in citizenship encompass various aspects, including access to education, employment, healthcare, political participation, and legal protections. This is further discussed in the following way:

How can equality of opportunity be provided to a woman whose body has been forgotten, whose own judgment has been taken away, **family planning** has been shelved, and cannot be an individual in **family and social policies**, and therefore cannot be equal? (Sena Kaleli, CHP, 2012)

The reference to restricted autonomy draws attention to the widespread impact of patriarchal structures and practices, which restrict women's agency and participation in a variety of spheres of life. For instance, limitations on family planning not only hinder women's ability to make decisions about their own reproductive health and size of family, but they also help to maintain cycles of poverty and inequality by preventing women from exercising their right to reproductive autonomy. This discourse holds that it is not surprising that violence against women occurs, particularly when equal opportunities are not offered. Inequality of opportunity and women's marginalization in most public areas contribute to the problem of violence against women. Thus, it has been demonstrated that the best method to stop violence is to guarantee equality through policies.

While all these are defended, a statist perspective is presented. A closer look at the data from CHP female representatives' speeches reveals repeated references to Atatürk and the founding principles of the Republic. This shows that these CHP female MPs do not go beyond party policies while delivering their own discourse.

At this point, **Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's** words 'Save your soul and freedom from oppression.' His word should be our guide, and policies should be developed for the **economic, social and cultural empowerment of women**. (Sena Kaleli, CHP, 2012)

The reference to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's principles points the importance of freedom from oppression, as well as having his personal authority for legitimization of the discourse. The focus on cultural, social, and economic empowerment points to a comprehensive strategy for women's rights that goes beyond merely enacting new laws. It suggests the necessity of laws that guarantee women's equal chances while also addressing structural injustices and advancing inclusive development.

To sum up, CHP's approach to women's rights during this period is deeply tied to its Republican roots, consistently framing equality as both a societal and a national imperative. The party frequently references Atatürk's vision, using it as a foundation to advocate for systemic change and state-driven solutions. For the CHP, achieving gender equality is not limited to creating legal protections; it involves addressing the cultural and social norms that perpetuate inequality. This framing positions the state as a central actor, responsible not only for safeguarding women's rights but also for fostering a cultural transformation that aligns with the principles of equality and justice.

7.2.1.2.4 Findings of 26th Parliamentary Term

During the 26th parliamentary term, CHP female deputies shape their understanding of citizenship through women's access to social and political rights and gender equality. The CHP's rhetoric during this period is both inspiring and revealing. On one hand, it celebrates the strides made by the Republic in securing women's rights, portraying citizenship as a shared ideal of equality. On the other, the framing often positions women's rights within a state-centered narrative, where their value is linked to their contributions to the nation's progress.

What stands out, however, is the party's willingness to challenge patriarchal norms and push for a more inclusive vision of citizenship. By calling out systemic gender discrimination and linking violence against women to broader issues of equality and justice, CHP MPs show that their vision of citizenship goes beyond legal definitions—it is about creating a society where women are truly equal participants. While the approach is still anchored in the legacy of the Republic, there's an emerging feminist critique that points to a more inclusive and dynamic understanding of what citizenship could mean for women in Turkey. Their statements argue that

women should be recognized as equal individuals in society and that citizenship rights should be restructured not through traditional roles and family but through individual rights and social justice. These statements reflect CHP's progressive, feminist, and equality-driven ideology.

CHP female deputies primarily address the inequalities women face in social life, emphasizing that their citizenship rights are insufficient:

Girls grow up in the shadow of inequality that has lasted for generations [...] There is no single country in the world that has managed to stand or sustain itself **by ignoring half of its population**. (Canan Yüceer, CHP, 2017)

In this statement, Yüceer highlights that women are excluded from social life for traditional and religious reasons and that their citizenship rights are not fully realized. Yüceer's critique centers on the need for women to be recognized as equal citizens in society. Issues such as the right to education, inheritance, and the prevention of child marriages are emphasized as necessary for women to achieve a more equal position in social life. Yüceer argues that women are unable to fully access their individual rights based on gender equality, suggesting that the concept of citizenship is narrowly defined.

Moreover, Yüceer's emphasis on divorce also demonstrates that women's citizenship rights are limited by societal norms and the family institution. She stresses that even when women try to escape violent and abusive marriages, the state does not effectively intervene in the process: "When women try to escape from violence or an unhappy marriage and want to divorce, as you know, they are killed." (Canan Yüceer, CHP, 2015) Here, the divorce is considered part of women's citizenship rights, while the state's failure to protect these rights is criticized. CHP's understanding of citizenship is based on the idea that women should be recognized not just as individuals with legal status but as equal citizens who have full access to their social and political rights.

During this period, the Istanbul Convention, which was frequently on the agenda, was also praised by CHP deputies. For instance, in a speech, Şenal Sarihan emphasized the Istanbul Convention as a significant achievement for Turkey,

highlighting the importance of international standards in women's gender equality struggles: "The Istanbul Convention was essentially conceived on Turkish soil, with Turkish intellect and the minds of the people of Turkey." (Şenal Sarihan, CHP, 2016)

Sarihan argues that the Istanbul Convention provides a guarantee for Turkish women and that this convention is a national responsibility in the fight against violence against women. In this context, women's citizenship rights are addressed through international agreements and the state's responsibility to protect women. Women should benefit from the state's social policies as individuals who can exercise their social and political rights. In essence, CHP deputies also associate the concept of citizenship with social progress, justice, and social rights the state must provide to its citizens. For example:

Our sensitivity and actions toward our children, youth, women, disabled individuals, animals, all living beings, and nature are indicators of our societal development and wealth. (Didem Engin, CHP, 2018)

Engin's statement emphasizes that citizenship is not merely a legal status but also gains meaning through the social rights and security mechanisms the state provides to disadvantaged groups in society. In this discourse, the protection and strengthening of the social rights of women and other disadvantaged groups are considered critical to fully realizing the concept of citizenship. CHP's ideological stance combines citizenship with a social state approach, advocating for the strengthening of women's social rights.

In summary, when examining the statements of CHP female deputies, it is clear that the concept of citizenship is addressed not only through legal rights but also through social rights, gender equality, and state responsibility. Women's recognition as equal citizens is possible not just through their legal status but through access to fundamental social rights such as education, inheritance, and divorce, as well as the provision of gender equality. CHP's understanding of women's citizenship is shaped by social justice, societal progress, and equality-based policies.

7.2.1.2.5 Findings of 27th Parliamentary Term

The Istanbul Convention was one of the most frequently discussed topics in relation to violence against women during this period. The discussion on Istanbul Convention has two sides. Regarding the cessation of violence against women, some advocate for ratifying the Istanbul Convention; nevertheless, others advocate for the contract's withdrawal because they fear it could disrupt the traditional familial structure. In this legal context, whether the continuation of the family structure is more important than the protection of women raises some questions for citizenship. For instance, Nurhayat Altaca Kayışoğlu argued in general meeting that:

Withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention means encouraging the murderers of women...Withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention means denying women's right to life, and women will never give up these rights. (Nurhayat Altaca Kayışoğlu, CHP, 2021)

Istanbul Convention is important in terms of violence against women because the Convention provides the violence against women issue to be addressed on a legal level. This statement demonstrates an acknowledgment that the Istanbul Convention is an essential tool for promoting women's rights and preventing violence against women by bolstering women's legal protections. From this statement, one can see that she does not only cover mothers or Turkish women, but every woman who can be exposed to violence. She saw Istanbul Convention vital to solve the problem of violence against women. In minutes, she has many speeches similar to this one but in addition, she reads letters from violence victims on parliament chairs. Such behavior is made by other representatives of CHP as well, such as Lale Karabıyık. Therefore, these representatives are representing women directly by giving voices to them.

Through their speeches, CHP MPs positioned the Istanbul Convention as not only a legal safeguard but also as a symbol of the state's responsibility to protect women. The withdrawal was critiqued as a failure to uphold the principles of equality and justice that the Republic had once championed. This change in tone highlights two perspectives on women's citizenship: as active contributors to the country's democratic future and as persons with constitutionally guaranteed rights and safeguards. This framing, while still rooted in the CHP's Kemalist and statist

ideology, adopted a more direct and critical approach to addressing systemic gender inequalities.

By the 27th legislative term, the CHP's discourse on violence against women had evolved into a more radical and feminist tone, marking a noticeable shift from earlier periods. It renders a growing awareness within the CHP of the systemic nature of violence against women. Female MPs argued that the state's failure to address this issue effectively was not just a neglect of women's rights but a broader undermining of democratic principles. This critique ties the concept of citizenship to both individual freedoms and collective justice, highlighting the interdependence of gender equality and democratic governance. The use of a more radical feminist tone indicates a departure from earlier periods, signaling a willingness to challenge patriarchal norms more directly while still upholding the party's commitment to Republican ideals. This balance between radical critique and traditional Kemalist values reflects the CHP's evolving stance on women's citizenship in contemporary Turkey.

7.2.1.2.6 The Summary of Findings

The CHP offers a contrasting narrative, rooted in its Kemalist and secular foundations. The party's discourse on women's citizenship emphasizes constitutional rights, state responsibility, and the legacy of Atatürk's reforms. In the early terms, the CHP's discourse often intertwines constitutional obligations with moral imperatives, presenting gender equality as fundamental to the nation's progress. This perspective reinforces the idea that women's citizenship is not only about their rights as individuals but also about their roles as active and equal members of a modern and democratic society. Through this lens, the CHP's rhetoric advocates its belief that the combatting against violence against women is inseparable from the broader struggle for justice and social equality.

Over time, however, the CHP's discourse evolved to include a more feminist critique of systemic gender inequalities. By the 26th and 27th terms, this shift became more pronounced, with women MPs addressing issues such as patriarchal norms, violence against women, and the state's failure to uphold women's rights. The party's opposition to Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention reflects its broader critique of the government's regression on gender equality. This evolving discourse

highlights the CHP's move from a state-centric view of citizenship to a more rights-based, feminist approach.

7.2.1.3 HDP: Intersectionality and Diversity in Citizenship

The HDP and its predecessors, DTP and BDP, have stood out in Turkish politics for their consistent and radical stance on women's rights and social equality. The speeches of female representatives from these parties take a broad and inclusive approach to the concept of citizenship. For them, women's rights are not limited to demands for individual freedoms and equality; they are also deeply tied to societal, cultural, and ethnic identities.

In the following sections, this study explores how HDP and its predecessor parties have approached the concept of citizenship through the lens of violence against women during different legislative terms. Drawing on examples from each period, how these discourses evolved and how they align with the party's broader ideological framework are examined.

7.2.1.3.1 Findings of 23rd Parliamentary Term

During the 23rd legislative term, DTP (and its successor BDP) female MPs brought an exclusive perspective to the issue of violence against women in the parliament. Unlike other parties, they framed violence not merely as a domestic or cultural problem but as a complex phenomenon rooted in intersecting forms of oppression, including ethnicity, class, and sexual identity. DTP/BDP MPs' speeches, aligning with an intersectional feminist perspective, frame violence against women as an infringement on women's right to citizenship. They put forward a number of various violations of women's rights as citizens such as discrimination, governmental violence, domestic violence, and militarism. In this way, they broaden the concept of citizenship to include ideas of social inclusion, as well as women's legal and political rights. For instance,

While violence against women is universal, many women are chosen as a target because of her **ethnicity, class, culture and sexual identity**...In short, they [women] struggle against **physical, sexual, psychological, economic** violence against women... Violence against

women derives from the patriarchal mentality. (Sevahir Bayındır, DTP, 2007)

This viewpoint is consistent with an intersectional feminism that acknowledges the variety of ways in which women experience violence, shaped as they are by their different identities and social contexts. Those ways avoid women in asserting their citizenship rights. These rights also have variety depending on women's social situations.

The differential exposure of women with various social backgrounds to different types of violence results in their deprivation of diverse citizenship rights. For them, the definition of women and their existence as citizens cannot be considered independently from the structural and personal violence they are subjected to. As shown above, while factors such as ethnicity, identity, and class were expressed as indicators of violence against women, violence against women was expressed as a situation that derives its source from the patriarchal mentality. Violence against women is defined not only as physical violence but also as structural and psychological violence. The speeches of other DTP deputies similar to Bayındır's speech in 2007 are as follows:

We are living in an age where the **gender problem...** is not resolved and the **male-dominated system** continues with all its cruelty. Two biggest violence produced by this system, **war and poverty**, as deep as possible. **We are the women who are most affected by these two violence... this system enslaves not only women but also all humanity** and renders it **identity less.** (Sebahat Tuncel, DTP, 2009)

Similar to other quotation, in this speech, the male-dominated society is referred as the main cause of women's exposure to injustice and oppression, especially resulting from poverty and war. Citizenship requires exercising existing rights as well as being a member of a country and existing both economically, politically and socially in public life. In this speech, Tuncel highlights how economic reasons contribute to gender inequality and restrict women's access to opportunities and resources. She claims that poverty and unemployment are kinds of violence against women. Such systemic barriers hinder women's full participation in society and deny them exercise their citizenship.

Moreover, as can be seen, identity politics has begun to be used in the context of violence against women. DTP deputies especially raised their voices against violence against female citizens of Kurdish ethnicity. For example:

Violence against women has gained legitimacy within the **patriarchal culture** and has been socially adopted in many parts of the world. **Militarist policies** are produced in order to protect the order through violence... **Kurdish women** have been exposed to a great deal of violence. (Pervin Buldan, BDP, 2010)

This depiction raises questions about larger structural frameworks that, especially in areas afflicted by conflict, uphold gender inequality and restrict women's, especially Kurdish women's, rights as citizens. Not only feminist discourses, but also socialist discourses, such as classism, and the structural violence are included in the speeches. In addition, the trials against women's bodies were also seen as one of the elements of violence. In addition, the fact that different ethnic and belief groups are discussed and minorities are mentioned shows that they are influenced by third wave feminism.

To sum up, The DTP/BDP's emphasis on systemic critique and intersectionality redefined the responsibilities of the state toward its female citizens. Their discourse called for a shift in how women's rights are understood, urging recognition of the ways in which cultural, social, and political factors overlap to create structural barriers for women. This approach moved beyond traditional narratives of protection, positioning women as active agents deserving of full citizenship rights rather than passive recipients of state intervention. Their approach during this term demonstrates a commitment to addressing the root causes of violence against women, redefining citizenship to include an intersectional and inclusive perspective. This stance sets the party apart, emphasizing not only the protection of women but also the transformation of societal and state structures that perpetuate inequality.

7.2.1.3.2 Findings of 24th Parliamentary Term

BDP/HDP female MPs' criticism of the power dynamics that assign women to a secondary status and cause violence against women can be considered in the context of citizenship. When discussing unequal power relations and dynamics within a society, the representatives are primarily addressing issues related to citizenship. Citizenship encompasses the rights, duties, and participation of individuals within a

political community, including how power is distributed and exercised among different groups. Below speech, for instance, questions the traditional definition of honor and emphasizes its negative effects, especially on women who fall prey to this kind of abuse.

Statistical data show that domestic violence is predominantly **male violence; that men turn to violence as a way of exercising their** domination and control over women; reveals that physical violence can only be understood within the framework of this power contradiction and relationship. (Pervin Buldan, BDP, 2011)

Being a citizen entails having certain rights and protections that the government provides for people. In her address, Buldan draws attention to the state's inadequate protection of women's rights, particularly when it comes to honor killings and domestic abuse. She subtly raises doubts about the state's ability to uphold everyone's right to citizenship, regardless of gender, by challenging patriarchal norms—all of which are central to the realization of full and equal citizenship for women within society.

The inadequacy of the currently used policies against violence against women has been frequently expressed being “sexist policies” (Pervin Buldan BDP, 2011; Ayla Akat Ata, BDP, 2012; Sebahat Tuncel, BDP, 2013; Pervin Buldan, HDP, 2015). It has been suggested that these sexist policies should be abolished and new road maps should be determined. For instance:

Dear [female] friends, **as women**, we have to catch a new language [that does not fall into the language of male-dominated system]. While catching a new language against **discriminatory, racist, nationalist and sexist policies**, we should not talk about other oppressions. (Sebahat Tuncel, BDP, 2013)

In this speech, several points are underlined by the representative such as empowerment through language, intersectionality, identity, and agency of women. Here, it's critical to note that Tuncel makes reference to sexist, racist, nationalist, and discriminatory policies in order to acknowledge the intersectionality of oppression. As a result, it is suggested that in order to fully achieve civic rights, it is necessary to address the interconnectedness of different forms of oppression. In this respect, being

a citizen means acknowledging and addressing the various experiences that marginalized groups face in society.

Moreover, Tuncel's includes her criticism of the fact that the presence of male politicians in the parliament is a result of gender inequality and that parliament established in this way reproduces inequality. Therefore, while existing laws are deemed inadequate, the decisions of the courts following femicides are also criticized by BDP/HDP MPs. In addition, there are some speeches that express concern about how women are handled by the legal system in cases of femicide and violence against women. For example: "The attitude of the judiciary in the massacres of women and the impunity of the perpetrators deepen the violence against women." (Ayla Akat Ata, BDP, 2012) Here, the focus on the judiciary's responsibility in the continuation of violence against women points to a criticism of the state's disregard for women's civil rights in terms of their ability to access the legal system and legal protections. In a similar vein, it has been asserted that certain laws shield those who commit violent crimes rather than the women who are attacked. For instance, Birtane stated that:

It is time to pass laws that protect the **abuser and rapist**, reject the understanding that blames the victimized woman, and that do not exploit the labor of women. (Mülkiye Birtane, HDP, 2015)

In this speech, Birtane claims that men, who are the perpetrators of violence, benefit more from the law than women, who are victims of violence. This claim shows that even if the woman is a victim and the man is guilty, the law's support for the man deepens inequality. As it is already discussed in other themes, inequality is demonstrated as the main reason for violence against women by BDP/HDP MPs. At this point, the claim that those who benefit from the law are men points to the inequality that the MP finds in the context of citizenship.

7.2.1.3.3 Findings of 26th Parliamentary Term

In the 26th legislative term, the discourses of HDP female deputies contain critiques aimed at reshaping the concept of citizenship through the lens of women's social roles, participation in working life, and social rights. These deputies argue that women's citizenship rights have been limited by state policies and neoliberal

economic approaches, and they address citizenship through the protection and strengthening of women's social rights. Citizenship is not just a legal status but is defined as a concept where women can participate equally in public life and actively contribute to the transformation of social structures.

Meral Daniş Beştaş's statement criticizes the state's policies toward women, arguing that these policies limit women's rights under the pretext of strengthening the family institution:

Women will continue to die, women will continue to be excluded from politics, women will continue to struggle with unemployment, and women will continue to face violence. (Meral Daniş Beştaş, HDP, 2017)

Beştaş's statement ties the inability of women to be full citizens in society to the state's ideological approach and policies that exclude women from politics, job security, and social rights. Citizenship here is directly related to women's political and economic participation. The exclusion of women from public spaces and their exposure to violence reveals that the state is seen as a force that weakens women's social status (e.g., Çağlar Demirel, HDP, 2015; Filiz Kerestecioğlu, HDP, 2017). In this sense, Beştaş argues that women are unable to fully exercise their citizenship rights because the state pursues policies that limit these rights.

Another example comes from Filiz Kerestecioğlu, who connects women's citizenship to social and economic rights, arguing that economic equality and women's empowerment are possible through political will:

One of the most important conditions for preventing femicides and empowering women is a political will determined to fight against sexism, the economic empowerment of women, equal employment policies, and special measures for ensuring political participation equality. (Filiz Kerestecioğlu, HDP, 2015)

In this statement, Kerestecioğlu directly addresses the issue of women's citizenship in terms of economic independence, equal employment policies, and political participation. According to her, citizenship is not just the legal status of women but is also linked to their ability to participate equally in social and economic life. In this context, she argues that the state has the duty to ensure women's empowerment,

showing that citizenship is not only a legal status but a concept that can be expanded through active participation and political will (e.g., Burcu Çelik, HDP, 2017).

HDP female deputies' discourses on citizenship focus on access to social and economic rights, resistance to patriarchal structures, and the strengthening of women's participation in society. Women's citizenship is shaped not only by the legal rights granted by the state but also by the struggle for equality in social and economic domains (e.g., Çağlar Demirel, HDP, 2015). HDP's egalitarian and libertarian policies define citizenship as a concept beyond individual rights, focusing on its potential to transform social structures (e.g., Dirayet Taşdemir, HDP, 2017).

The discourses of HDP female deputies revolve around the idea that women's citizenship rights need to be expanded and strengthened. Women are seen not only as individuals with legal rights but as active agents in the reconstruction of society. Citizenship begins with securing women's economic and social security, but it gains meaning through resistance to the pressures of the patriarchal order. HDP defines women as active citizens, and this citizenship is reinterpreted through demands for state responsibility and social justice.

7.2.1.3.4 Findings of 27th Parliamentary Term

In the 27th legislative term, the speeches of HDP female representatives strongly reflect the influence of third-wave feminism. Their focus on ensuring equal treatment for women from diverse ethnic backgrounds as full citizens stands out as a defining feature of their approach. This perspective brings an intersectional lens to the forefront, recognizing that the struggles faced by marginalized women are deeply intertwined with broader issues of gender equality. In one of her speeches about violence against women, Başaran criticized some official applications as being discriminatory to Kurdish women. According to her:

The KADES application ignores the complaints of millions of women in this country and ignores their language. There is no **Kurdish**, there are 6 languages, but this country does not have the second most spoken language. **Kurdish women** were murdered precisely because they could not access these mechanisms in their mother tongue. (Ayşe Acar Başaran, HDP, 2021)

The speech emphasizes how crucial it is for women to have access to the legal system and how language difficulties affect underprivileged groups, especially Kurdish-speaking women. It demands that the KADES applications accommodate the Kurdish language as well as other underrepresented languages. It highlights the necessity of inclusive and responsive systems that give equal weight to the needs and experiences of all women, irrespective of their cultural or linguistic background.

The argument acknowledges the intersectionality of gender, identity and legal accessibility, emphasizing the manner in which language-based prejudice intensifies existing disparities and vulnerabilities encountered by women from underrepresented communities. HDP representatives harshly critique state responses to violence against Kurdish women in terms of broader patterns of discrimination and oppression. They call systemic reforms to address inequalities which are claimed as perpetrators of violence. In addition, Kurdish women and their problems are namely mentioned by many of the deputies of HDP (Salihe Aydeniz, Filiz Kerestecioğlu, etc.).

Furthermore, Ayşe Acar Başaran, who is one of the deputies who started discussions about Istanbul Convention, is one of the most active female deputies in the parliament. In one of the speeches about violence against women in the parliament, she had following statements:

We say ‘**violence against women is political**’... Because men kill women because they are women with the power that **male domination** is established and this provides it. It is not an issue to compare with male deaths, because it is actually the result of the **sexist, misogynist policies** of the power; precisely as a result of this **male domination** women are being killed. (Ayşe Acar Başaran, HDP, 2020)

From this statement, one can see that Başaran believes the source violence within the country comes from male domination and sexist policies. She highlights and transcribes a radical feminist slogan –personal is political, in the context of violence against women. In a radical feminist manner, the speech suggests that violence against women is political in nature. In this sense, it suggests that violence against women is not just a matter of individual actions but is a reflection of broader power dynamics and systemic inequalities. In addition, the representative argues that violence against women is a result of sexist and misogynistic policies and attitudes.

She criticizes violence against women within the context of broader patterns of discrimination and oppression against women. As a result, it underlines the importance of addressing structural inequalities in efforts to prevent violence and promote gender equality.

In the 27th parliamentary term, the female representatives of the HDP brought a perspective on citizenship that aligned closely with their party's policies while presenting a radical approach rarely seen in other parties. In addressing violence against women, they went beyond simply calling for equality; they emphasized that citizenship is fundamentally about belonging and demanded a rethinking of its scope to ensure inclusivity. They stressed that women from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds must be recognized and treated as full citizens. Their speeches disrupted the silence, shedding light on how systemic inequalities and violence uniquely affect marginalized groups. This was not just about critiquing patriarchy; through their discourse on violence against women, they called for a redefinition of citizenship—one that encompasses and uplifts these marginalized groups.

7.2.1.3.5 The Summary of the Findings

The HDP stands out for its intersectional and inclusive approach to women's citizenship. Rooted in a pro-Kurdish and leftist ideology, the party consistently advocates for marginalized groups, addressing issues such as ethnic discrimination, systemic inequality, and patriarchal oppression. Women MPs from the HDP critique the state's failure to protect women's rights, linking this to broader systemic issues of authoritarianism and militarism.

Their discourse challenges traditional notions of citizenship by emphasizing the need for a redefinition that includes all women, regardless of ethnicity, class, or sexual orientation. This framing positions citizenship not just as individuals entitled to rights but as active agents of societal transformation. The HDP's approach to women's citizenship is the most radical among the parties analyzed, pushing for systemic change that goes beyond incremental reforms.

7.2.1.4 MHP: Citizenship as the Membership of a Nation

The discourse of female representatives from the MHP on the issue of violence against women, particularly in relation to women's citizenship, begins to emerge from the 24th legislative term onwards. The number of female MPs in this party is notably low, and in the 24th term, the analysis focusses primarily on a single representative. However, for those familiar with the previous discourse analyses conducted in this dissertation, this is hardly a surprising observation.

Although the party's discourse on women and violence against women has been less prominent compared to other parties, the speeches of female MPs from the MHP reveal an approach that blends national values with pragmatic considerations. In this section, findings that indicate MHP's female MPs approach to citizenship in their speeches on violence against women are examined.

7.2.1.4.1 Findings of 24th Parliamentary Term

In MHP, Demirel attributes the inequality of access to rights and opportunities that women are exposed to in the public sphere. She argues that the unequal situation of women in education, health, work and political participation is based on gender inequality, thus results in violence against women. Provided statement of this representative reveals an understanding of citizenship that emphasizes equality, inclusivity, and belonging within the nation-state of Turkey.

As human beings, we have **equalities**... We are **citizens of the Republic of Türkiye** and we are equal **citizens of this nation**. Your personal opinions are none of our business. (Ruhsar Demirel, MHP, 2014)

Emphasizing that "we are equal citizens of this nation," the representative points out the importance of national citizenship in establishing a sense of belonging and identity within the Turkish context. It has been said, quite bluntly, that one's personal opinions cannot change a written equality issue. The legal provisions are definitive and cannot be changed at this time. This manner aligns with the representative's nationalist perspective.

In a democratic society, citizenship entails not only legal status but also active participation in political processes, respect for individual rights, and recognition of diverse voices and opinions.

“Women are victims in **Syria**, women are victims in **East Turkestan**, women are victims in **Turkmenistan**, women are victims in **Crimea**, and it was the same in **Bosnia and Herzegovina**. Therefore, making a policy by defining and separating women on the basis of **sect, ethnicity and identity** is not valid today.” (Ruhsar Demirel, MHP, 2014)

Suggesting policies that prioritize the rights and well-being of all women, regardless of their background or identity shows that the representative has a universal approach to citizenship rights. In this speech the representative highlights the universality of women’s victimization and citizenship struggles by referencing specific regions such as Syria, East Turkestan, Turkmenistan, Crimea, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The statement implicitly refers to democratic citizenship focusing on equality and inclusivity. However, it is important to note that the ethnicities she mentions are actually considered as relative nations (*akraba topluluklar*) of Turkish Republic. Nevertheless, the critique that the representative implies a vision of citizenship that is inclusive, emphasizing equality and solidarity among all citizens regardless of their backgrounds or affiliation.

First of all, once again, I wish God’s mercy on Özgecan. But besides Özgecan’s family, I wish patience to all families who feel themselves part of the **Turkish nation**. (Ruhsar Demirel, MHP, 2014)

The representative expresses solidarity with Özgecan’s family and extends this sentiment to all families who identify with the Turkish nation. This shows that it is aimed to foster a sense of national cohesion and belonging among citizens through collective grief. In order to legitimize the speech, this is an example of the use of emotional authority. Such view of citizenship emphasizes the significance of communal bonds and shared identity in forming people’s sense of citizenship and belonging in the Turkish people. Thus, citizenship is implicitly defined as membership of the Turkish nation, with individuals feeling part of a larger collective identity. The speaker addresses families who identify with the Turkish nation. This highlights the social and emotional ties that unite citizens within the nation-state, showing that the representative emphasizes the importance of common experiences, values, and identity in shaping citizenship.

These two speeches of Ruhsar Demirel emphasize on Turkish nationalism and citizenship. Since she is a member of a nationalist party, she bears traces of his own party politics. The fact that other countries of Turkish ethnicity, such as Turkmenistan and Crimea, are mentioned, and the emphasis on Turkish culture has enabled violence against women to be expressed from a nationalist perspective. Unlike other opposition parties, the existence of a society and the preservation of culture as a whole is a factor that will solve the problem of violence against women, rather than a legal law change by the state, strengthens this point of view.

7.2.1.4.2 Findings of 26th Parliamentary Term

During the 26th legislative term, MHP female deputies' discourses on women's citizenship present a perspective shaped by nationalism, traditional values, and social responsibility. In line with MHP's ideological stance, the concept of citizenship is not limited to legal rights or individual freedoms but is closely tied to duty to the nation, family structure, and cultural preservation. Women are seen as key figures in upholding national unity and moral values, and their citizenship is defined by their role in supporting and strengthening the Turkish state and family.

In her speeches, Deniz Depboylu (2015;2017;2016) connects women's citizenship with their roles in nation-building and family leadership throughout Turkish history. She mentions that in early Turkish civilizations, women held positions of power and decision-making alongside men, exercising authority in both political and legal realms:

Women were not only the pillars of the family but also held an equal position to men in political and legal spheres...They even participated in wars together. (Deniz Depboylu, MHP, 2017)

In this context, citizenship for women is not portrayed as a matter of individual rights or legal protections, but rather as a role that women play in maintaining societal order and national strength. Deniz Depboylu's statement provides a clear insight into MHP's approach to women and citizenship. On one hand, she highlights the importance of women as the foundation of the family, emphasizing their traditional roles. On the other hand, she acknowledges women's equality with men in political

and legal spheres, even referencing their participation in wars to underline their strength and historical contributions.

This perspective aligns closely with MHP's nationalist ideology, where citizenship is tied to both preserving traditional values and contributing to the nation. Women are seen not only as essential to family life but also as vital participants in shaping and defending the national identity. Depboylu's words suggest that women's citizenship is defined by their dual roles—both as protectors of cultural values within the family and as active, equal members of the broader political and social framework. This approach blends equality with tradition, offering a view of women's place within the Turkish nation.

It can be also argued that Depboylu's speech critiques contemporary society for failing to adequately protect women, implying that women's citizenship rights are best realized when they align with nationalistic and patriarchal values, such as family unity and moral responsibility.

Arzu Erdem, another female representative of MHP, also frames women's citizenship as tied to heroism and national duty, particularly in times of national crisis. She emphasizes that Turkish women have historically played a key role in defending the nation and that their value as citizens is reflected in their readiness to lead in the defense of the homeland:

“Every Turkish woman is a hero of this country. In the event of any future troubles in our country, know that women will be at the forefront.” (Arzu Erdem, MHP, 2017)

This statement aligns with MHP's view of citizenship as active participation in national defense. Women's citizenship is not defined by legal protections or social benefits but by their contributions to the nation's security and moral fabric. Erdem's (MHP, 2017) reference to historical figures like Kara Fatma implies that women's citizenship is linked to nationalistic duty, where their primary role is to support and defend the state.

In the MHP's vision, women's citizenship is shaped by a sense of social responsibility and national unity. Women are seen as moral guardians who preserve

family structures and uphold traditional values. This vision of citizenship is less focused on women's individual rights and more on their duty to the nation and family. The emphasis on moral values and national identity in MHP's discourse suggests that women's full participation in society is conditional on their ability to uphold these values. Citizenship, in this sense, is defined not just by legal status but by one's contribution to the greater good of the nation. For example, Arzu Erdem's emphasis on the importance of instilling national values in education reflects the belief that women's citizenship is closely tied to their role in shaping future generations to continue Turkish traditions and moral principles.

As a result, in the 26th legislative term, the discourses of MHP female deputies emphasize women's citizenship as an extension of their national duties, family responsibilities, and moral leadership. Citizenship is framed not as a set of individual rights but as a collective duty to the nation and society. This perspective reflects MHP's nationalist and conservative ideology, which values women's roles in preserving national identity and family structures, making them integral to the strength of the Turkish state.

7.2.1.4.3 Findings of 27th Parliamentary Term

The MHP's discourse on women and citizenship began to take shape in the 24th legislative term, gradually adopting an increasingly nationalist stance. This approach became particularly pronounced during the 26th term, most notably through the speeches of Deniz Depboylu, whose statements epitomized this nationalist perspective. Considering all her speeches, she does not have a religious standing but a nationalist one which gives importance on family as the main component of the nation. However, by the 27th term, a noticeable decline in such rhetoric was observed, marked by a more subdued and less vocal engagement with these issues.

In the 27th legislative term, there are four female representatives of MHP in the parliament. However, only one of them suggests her arguments about violence against women. In general meeting on Women's Day, Nevin Taşlıçay stated that:

We consider it our duty to strive for them to live their lives in peace and security, without the need to think about measures to **protect their [women's] bodily integrity, including psychological health**. We take this

task directly **from our sacred culture and the essence of the Turkish nationalism** movement to which we belong. (Nevin Taşlıca, MHP, 2020)

The representative expresses his commitment to addressing the issue of violence against women, ensuring that women can live their lives without worrying about their physical or psychological safety, and protecting the physical integrity of women. This commitment to peace and security reflects recognition of the importance of creating enabling environments that enable women to exercise their rights without fear of violence or discrimination.

The speech draws on sacred, cultural and nationalist values to justify his commitment to violence against women. This method of legitimization, which refers to sacred culture and the essence of the Turkish nationalism movement, places the struggle against violence against women in a broader cultural and national context. Moreover, this appeal to sacred culture and nationalism reveals a belief in the inherent connection between women's rights and national identity. It frames the protection of women's lives and dignity as an integral part of the preservation of cultural and national values.

7.2.1.4.4 The Summary of Findings

The MHP's discourse blends nationalist values with pragmatic considerations, framing women's citizenship through the lens of cultural heritage and national identity. Women MPs from the MHP often emphasize women's roles as protectors of family values and contributors to national unity. For instance, Deniz Depboylu's 2017 speech women are portrayed as warriors and pillars of morality because of their value to their historical and cultural contributions.

However, the MHP's approach is not purely traditional. There are instances where women MPs critique patriarchal norms, advocating for a more equitable treatment of women. This duality creates a nuanced narrative where women's rights are acknowledged but consistently framed within the broader context of national priorities and cultural preservation. This approach demonstrates the party's attempt to balance traditional gender roles with modern demands for equality.

7.2.1.5 İYİ PARTİ: Belonging to a Nation

The İYİ Party, founded in 2017, emerged as a center-right political movement with a nationalist-conservative ideology. Positioned as an alternative to existing nationalist parties like the MHP, the İYİ Party seeks to combine traditional values with a more inclusive and reformist outlook. Under the leadership of Meral Akşener, one of Turkey's most prominent female political figures, the party has emphasized issues such as democracy, economic development, and the rule of law, appealing to a broad voter base.

However, when it comes to analyzing the İYİ Party's approach to women's citizenship, the available findings are notably limited. While the party's discourse occasionally touches upon women's roles in society, there is insufficient data to draw substantial conclusions about their views on women as citizens, particularly regarding rights, responsibilities, and participation in public life. This absence makes it difficult to fully assess how the party frames women's citizenship within its broader political agenda.

In addition, despite there are two women representatives of İYİ Party, they little mention to violence against women in their speeches in the parliament. For instance, Aylin Cesur once argued that:

Yes, violence against women is our biggest problem. It is not clear why you do not implement 6284. Your National Action Plan to Combat Violence Against Women has failed and **we are complaining on behalf of motherless children. For those children, our children, to be well, their family had to be well.** (Aylin Cesur, İYİ Parti, 2020)

With these short sentences she criticized violence against women and governments reluctance to implement particular laws which are made to protect women. However, in the last phrases of her, one can clearly see that she gave importance of motherhood and she pities on children who were left behind after their mother's femicide. Such approach has a conservative view because she focused on the motherhood feature of women and she thought it is important to protect them to raise healthy generations.

In general, this framing presents women's citizenship not only as individuals deserving of rights and protections but also as pivotal figures within the family

structure, whose well-being directly impacts broader societal stability. While Cesur's approach advocates for policy improvements, it also suggests the traditional notion that women's roles as mothers and caregivers are central to societal harmony. This two-way focus—on individual rights and familial roles—demonstrates the İYİ Party's attempt to navigate between modern gender equality discourses and more conservative family-oriented values.

As a relatively new party, the İYİ Party's discourse on women's citizenship is limited but notable. Women MPs like Aylin Cesur critique the government's failure to implement effective policies against violence while framing women's rights within the context of family stability. This duality reflects the party's ideological positioning, balancing conservative values with modern policy critiques. While advocating for women's protection, the party's discourse often ties this to the preservation of the family. It demonstrates a cautious approach to gender equality.

7.2.1.6 Results

The analysis of parliamentary discourses from 2002 to 2023 reveals that women's citizenship in Turkey is conceptualized and contested along ideological lines. Of course, with significant variation across political parties. Women MPs across parties have addressed violence against women and related issues, yet their framing of women's rights, roles, and responsibilities reflects their party's broader ideological commitments. These discourses not only shed light on how women are positioned as citizens but also highlight the ways in which these positions are influenced by the intersection of nationalism, conservatism, feminism, and secularism.

The discourses of female deputies throughout these legislative terms illustrate the concept of citizenship was shaped by party ideologies and gendered expectations. AK Party framed citizenship around women's contributions to the family and society, often prioritizing social responsibilities over individual rights. CHP, in contrast, emphasized a more egalitarian view, where women's citizenship was linked to equal rights and social justice, advocating for full participation in public and political life. HDP introduced a critical intersectional lens, where women's citizenship was viewed as incomplete without addressing both gender and ethnic inequalities, particularly in the Kurdish context. MHP integrated nationalist rhetoric

into their understanding of citizenship, viewing women as essential to the nation's defense and cultural preservation, while upholding traditional gender roles. Together, these perspectives demonstrate the contested nature of citizenship in Turkey.

7.2.2 Violence as a Measure of Democracy's Commitment to Women's Rights

The prevalence and persistence of violence against women provide a critical lens through which the quality of democracy and its commitment to gender equality can be evaluated. In democratic systems, the protection of women's rights is not just a moral imperative but a fundamental indicator of justice and equality (Moghadam, 2003; Walby, 2009). However, when violence against women increases and state responses remain inadequate, this often signals deeper systemic issues tied to governance and power structures. Scholars and activists have increasingly linked the rise in violence against women to authoritarian tendencies, where the erosion of democratic principles—such as accountability, transparency, and the rule of law—exacerbates existing inequalities and leaves women more vulnerable (Krook, 2017; True, 2012).

This CDA, spanning 21 years of parliamentary representation from 2002 to 2023, reveals that in Turkey, the discourse on violence against women reflects these dynamics. Female MPs frequently connected between state policies, societal norms, and growing authoritarian trends. Parliamentary debates expose how policies that fail to address violence—or prioritize traditional family values over individual rights—reinforce patriarchal structures, ultimately undermining women's safety and autonomy. The findings show how Female MPs stress the connection between gender, governance, and justice by criticizing the state's democratic promises by portraying violence against women as a social catastrophe as well as a political failure.

The following sections offers the findings of the critical discursive analysis of female MPs focusing on how violence against women issue is connected to democracy and how this connection is articulated through their language. The sections emphasize the constitutive importance of language in the representation process by examining these discourses. Consequently, the speeches of all female MPs in parliament have been reviewed; however, only select examples are directly included in the findings for

illustrative purposes. The following sections are organized by political party, reflecting the findings for each legislative term where relevant data was available.

7.2.2.1 The AKP: Guardians of Family in Moral Framework

Rooted in a democratic conservative ideological framework, AKP has significantly shaped Turkey's political landscape since its inception. Its approach to governance often intertwines traditional values with modern political rhetoric, balancing appeals to democracy and human rights with a strong emphasis on family, morality, and cultural identity. This duality is also evident in how AKP female representatives address the issue of violence against women. Their discourse has evolved noticeably over the years, reflecting shifts in the party's ideological priorities and political strategy. In this section, AKP female MPs speeches on violence against women and its relation with democracy is discussed within the findings from 2002 to 2023.

7.2.2.1.1 Findings of 22nd Parliamentary Term

The issue of violence against women is addressed in such a way that it is the biggest opportunity to address all women's issues in the assembly. Many of the conversations started with violence against women and ended with discussing women's problems in general. This chapter analyzes how AKP female MPs handled violence against women in the context of democracy during the 22nd legislative term. There are many areas where the democracy theme is compatible with issues of citizenship and womanhood but there is difference in the language used. For instance, there is no dominant stance on placing the family at the center of the arguments. In this democracy theme, issues of constitutional rights, equality, and freedom of women manifested themselves in discussions of violence against women. For example;

We women have serious problems. However, our most fundamental problem is **underrepresentation in decision-making processes**. We know that in societies where women cannot participate effectively in the public sphere and represent their population ratios, we cannot talk about **human rights or real democracy** in a meaningful way. (Serpil Yildiz, AKP, 2003)

The representative describes herself as ‘woman’ during her speech. It means that she positions herself in the place of what she represents. This self-identification as a “woman” in her speech is more than a personal statement—it is a direct acknowledgment of her role as a substantive representative. She is not just speaking about women; she is speaking as one of them. It is a way of saying, “I am part of this. This is my reality, too.” This kind of connection goes straight to the heart of substantive representation—it is not just about standing up for others but standing with them.

Now, let’s go back to our issue: Here, violence against women was presented as a human rights and democracy issue. This representative argued that the solution to the issue of violence against women can be achieved by increasing the representation of women and by training that provide a cognitive transformation towards the understanding of ‘womanhood’ in the society. Similar approach was shown by another AKP representative in the following year:

Turkey is one of the first states to have **woman-men equality** in its Constitution and laws. Equality between men and women is guaranteed in **all Constitutions and laws prepared in the Republican era**, with the provision that everyone living in the country is **equal before the law**, regardless of language, religion, race, color, gender and political opinion; however, the **disadvantaged position of women in decision-making mechanisms** and power sharing, which is a universal phenomenon, causes these developments in the legal field to not be fully reflected in social and political life.(İnci Özdemir, AKP, 2004)

The speech examines Turkey’s legal framework for gender equality, emphasizing the legislation and constitutional protections that seek to ensure equality for men and women. It does, however, also recognize the discrepancy that exists between the real representation and involvement of women in decision-making processes and power structures and the legal rules. Democratic principles show themselves in a more global sense; the traditionalist perspective in other themes is absent here. In her words:

Necessary measures should be taken to ensure that they benefit equally from the social security system, to prevent violence against women, and to **ensure effective participation of women in decision-making mechanisms**. (İnci Özdemir, AKP, 2004)

Focusing on the appearance of women in public sphere - such as in political, economic and social life-, lack of representation, and the importance of education, in the following of this speech, Özdemir briefly touched upon the issues that fall under the duties and powers of the General Directorate on the Status of Women. The important issue here is to praise the activities of some institutions established by the government for the issue of violence against women. This behavior was also carried out by other AKP lawmakers. For instance:

As in the whole world, gender inequality in our country is experienced in almost every field. In the **first years of the Republic, Great Atatürk** gave Turkish women many rights with the Civil Code, and the right to vote and be elected was given before many developed countries women.” (Remziye Öztoprak, AKP, 2004)

This statement is also important because it constitutes an example of the use of personal authority for legitimization. The use of Atatürk’s name by an AKP MP in her discourse reflects a complex interplay of historical, political, and symbolic factors that can serve as a tool for legitimization. In addition to her words, she stated that:

As the AK Party, since our establishment, **we have given great importance to women’s problems in our country** and included their solutions in party programs. (Remziye Öztoprak, AKP, 2004)

It is not surprising for a deputy to talk about the activities of her party politics but it is striking that in comparison with her colleagues in the AKP, Öztoprak recognized herself within her party. However, she also highlighted the important developments of early Republican era and Atatürk and showed her appreciation to opposition parties’ representatives. This shows that she conducted personal authority as a legitimization strategy for her discourses on violence against women.

So far, it can be seen that the issue of violence against women and the representation of women is mentioned together. However, there are other speeches that emphasize violence against women in a way that includes familial aspects. An example is as follows:

It is also very important to establish a democratic structure in family and extra-familial relations, in terms of the **survival of democracy** throughout the country. (Semiha Öyüş, AKP, 2004)

The focus on developing a democratic structure within families suggests a shift away from the hierarchical family models of the past and toward more egalitarian and participative structures. The MP proposes a restructuring of power dynamics and decision-making processes within homes by promoting democratic ideals within family dynamics. This method emphasizes the connection between family dynamics and the general democratic fabric of society, signifying an understanding of the influence of family structures in forming wider societal norms and values.

7.2.2.1.2 Findings of 23rd Parliamentary Term

Whenever the issue of violence against women comes to the fore, women's democratic rights and freedoms have also been raised in the same context. Human rights, social justice, and gender equality are all major concerns in democracies, which reflects the dedication to inclusive and democratic decision-making procedures. Therefore, analyzing discourses in relation to democracy offers important insights into how representatives view and handle issues like gender equality and violence against women.

As evidenced by numerous issues, AKP MPs stress gender equality and republican values when it comes to democracy. Many of them reference Atatürk's actions as examples and invoke his personal authority as a means of legitimacy. In a nutshell they claim that the disparity between men and women is the primary cause of violence against women. Egalitarianism provided by the state in the public domain is firmly believed as the key to solving this issue.

With the reforms carried out under the **leadership of Atatürk** in the first ten years following the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, they aimed to create a **modern, civilized social** order and a **democratic rule of law** in the country, and with the thought that this could only be achieved together, men and women, in all fields, especially in education. They have paid attention to the enactment of laws that give equal rights and to their implementation. (Azize Sibel GÖNÜL, AKP, 2008)

The AKP MP bases the establishment of the democratic rule of law in Turkey and the advancement of a contemporary, civilized society on Atatürk's reforms, according to his speech. The MP highlights the significance of equal rights for men

and women and suggests a commitment to gender equality within the parameters of democracy. This representation aligns with democratic ideals that support equal rights and opportunities for all people, regardless of gender.

However, it is essential to look closer at how the party's policies and actions reflect these ideals. It should also align with the notion of womanhood and the perspective on women's citizenship. Thus, even while MPs stress the value of equal rights, it's critical to assess how well the AKP's policies and practices actually uphold these ideals.

In addition, while defining the concept of violence against women offering a quotation of the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women definition of violence against women's definition of violence against women as **“any gender-based act, practice, or threat of such acts that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological pain or suffering to women, whether occurring in public or private life.”**, Türkmenoğlu added reproductive health to the issues covered within the concept of violence against women;

Acts of violence against women deprive women of their most **basic human rights and fundamental freedoms**, seriously harm **women's physical and reproductive health**, and in some cases cause death. After the **AK Party** came to power in our country, many firsts were signed for women and many steps were taken to prevent **discrimination based on gender**. (Ayşe Türkmenoğlu, AKP, 2010)

Invoking this global structure, the MP underlines how violence against women is universally acknowledged as a violation of human rights and an impediment to women's liberties and welfare. The emergence of violence in any area, regardless of its type or public or private, has been problematized. This shows that violence against women is not only addressed at the familial level.

Moreover, the concept of preventing gender discrimination was also used in the discourse. This demonstrates the use of universal language on violence against women, drawing a more pro-women directive. While doing this, the representative also takes the opportunity to praise her party's efforts on the issue. Of course, it's entirely natural for an MP to spotlight their party's contributions—it's part of their role. However, while measuring the quality of substantive representation, this

approach raises some questions. As it risks prioritizing party loyalty over the broader, more complex needs of the group she is meant to represent, potentially limiting the depth and authenticity of substantive representation.

For instance, even while the MP highlights the “firsts” and actions made by the AKP, it is critical to evaluate how well these policies are working to advance gender equality and lessen violence against women. This means keeping a close eye on how laws, regulations, and resources are applied in order to prevent and address violence against women. However, the definitive conclusion we can reach here shows that this MP has adopted the AKP policies, that is, her own party’s policy, and that she is not in a separate position from them. In this way, it can even be argued that how representation is not just about advocating for existing concerns but also about constructing the very categories and narratives that define those concerns.

Another prominent finding is the frequent mention and praise of Erdoğan in speeches addressing the fight against violence against women. In this sense, MPs align the issue of combating violence with his persona and leadership style, which serves to centralize authority and potentially shifting the focus from systemic solutions to individual achievements and leadership narratives. An example of this are as follows:

Again, I would like to quote our **Prime Minister’s statement** on this subject [violence against women]: ‘We see that women and men have fundamental rights, that they should be absolutely **equal in terms of rights, as a matter of humanity** far beyond being a requirement of **democracy and modernity**, and we always have to see it as such. We say it everywhere.’ We show this with our actions. (Selma Aliye Kavaf, AKP, 2010)

The given speech shows that the MP references a statement made by the Prime Minister regarding the fundamental rights of women and men and the importance of gender equality. When we look at the quote, we can see that Erdoğan makes a definition that adheres to universal principles, is away from traditional roles, and that he addresses violence against women in the context of human rights. By quoting the Prime Minister, the MP seeks to legitimize her discourse underscoring personal authority of the Erdoğan who upheld the principle of gender equality as a fundamental aspect of humanity, democracy, and modernity in his quotation. This

shows the discourse is not only shaped by the party's policies, universal principles or women's shared concerns but it is also strongly influenced by his leadership.

7.2.2.1.3 Findings of 24th Parliamentary Term

AKP deputies approached the issue of violence against women in the context of equality between men and women referring democratic principles in the previous periods. This term, they merged conventional values with democratic principles in their discourses. Therefore, the moral evaluation strategy that they conducted started to have not only universal values but also traditional ones. Especially, in the beginning of the term, universal values of democracy were predominantly used in order to discuss violence against women. To give an example:

Democracy relies on the power of coming together, the power of forming common ideas, not brute force, **and only women can strengthen and increase this approach...** The invisible but strongly felt influence of women in this field is very clear. (Ilknur Denizli, AKP, 2012)

The discourse offers the significance of women in enhancing democracy, depicting them as indispensable agents in the establishment of shared concepts and the progression of civilization. Elimination of violence against women, in this sense, is essential for democratic progress because women are presented as vital agents. Moreover, there are other samples of speeches, such as the one below, arguing women's rights are fundamental human rights that are essential for the functioning of democratic societies.

Violence against women deprives women of their most basic human rights, is a social problem that results from **unequal power relations between women and men**, and is an important public health problem. The most important result of considering violence against women as a **human rights violation in the international public opinion** is to make the state responsible for this issue." (Nurdan Sanlı, AKP, 2011)

The MP indicates here that gender inequality exists in society by presenting violence against women as a social issue resulting from unequal power relations between genders. The government is shown as the responsible in resolving this issue, implying that government action should be relied upon rather than supporting civil society or grassroots movements. This may indicate a paternalistic vision of governance since it represents a top-down method of government in which the state is supposed to handle social issues first. Rather than advocating for a more

decentralized strategy to solve social concerns, this phrase can serve to further strengthen the idea that the state is the primary force for change.

In the following of her words, the representative stated that the violence against women is no longer just a women's issue, it needs to be taken as an issue that all human rights defenders should work on. This reflects her suggestion to have a holistic approach to the issue of violence against women together with the cooperation of all sectors both public and private.

Moreover, phrases like “basic human rights” and “social problem,” are frequently utilized in discussions on human rights. It shows that the MP links the problem with universal moral principles by presenting violence against women in the framework of human rights and making reference to global norms and standards. But the speech primarily emphasizes the state's role in combating violence against women, which may undermine the ability of NGOs, civil society, and grassroots movements to advocate for change. By doing this, there is a reference made to the party policy and the party leader. Accordingly, “I would like to point out that concrete and clear laws against violence against women are the actions of us as the AK PARTY Group under the **leadership of our Prime Minister**” (Nurdan Sanlı, AKP, 2011) This reference shows another use of personal authority.

Moral evaluations also include traditional aspects in this term. For instance, in order to show how women's empowerment is consistent with Islamic and democratic ideals, an MP emphasizes the exceptional achievements of women in a variety of spheres of life.

The women of Turkey show the whole world concretely today that **Islam and democracy, tradition and modernity can coexist and create a beautiful synthesis...** While Turkey increases its regional influence as a **democratic, secular and social state**, Turkish women show the whole world their roles with their outstanding performance in all areas of life. (Tülay Kaynarca, AKP, 2011)

The MP links Turkey's norms with democratic principles coexisting with Islamic values by presenting Turkey as a democratic, secular, and social state. This suggests an ideology that encourages inclusivity and integration which reminds AKP's core ideological premise, which is the party's vision of a modern, progressive Turkey based in Islamic principles. The value of women is discussed in this context of

synthesis and it is suggested that the issue of violence against women should be evaluated from this perspective.

This pain rising from Mersin grew like an avalanche and burned our hearts. This is a **murder, a brutal and barbaric murder** that cannot be accepted by the conscience and values of humanity. (Çiğdem Münevver Ökten, AKP, 2015)

As it can be seen from the provided speech, the womanhood is portrayed in the framework of motherhood along with the references to democracy, secularism and human rights are mentioned. The use of traditionalism in the context of democracy and the acceptance of this diversity within the framework of human rights are implied. This traditionalist language has increased more in the post-2012 period and gained a conservative dimension. Simultaneously, references to democratic principles such as human rights and gender equality decreased in number.

7.2.2.1.4 Findings of 27th Parliamentary Term

In the 27th legislative period, AKP's female MPs addressed the issue of violence against women within the framework of democratic principles. The issue of women's political representation, human rights and equality between men and women have come to the fore in this context.

When we look at the **Dede Korkut stories, old sources and Turkish epics**, which reflect the values of the social life of the first **Muslim Turkish communities**, we see a woman figure **who teaches, inspires**, is at least as effective in government affairs, makes political decisions, and implements the decisions she has made. (M. Pervin Tuba Turgut, AKP, 2020)

The representative implicitly emphasizes the importance of recognizing and empowering women in Turkish society, acknowledging their historical contributions and ensuring their full participation in decision-making. She utilizes the historical presence of powerful and prominent female figures in Muslim Turkish tradition by drawing analogies between Dede Korkut legends and Turkish epics in order to legitimize her statements. This approach results in the argument that women have actively and significantly shaped social and political life throughout history by drawing on these cultural stories. Taken together, the speech is linked to violence against women in following additional statement:

Social problems that require multi-dimensional interventions such as violence against women can only be solved with a strong political will, political leadership and stance. That is why the possessive and decisive attitude of **our President** in this area is very valuable. (M. Pervin Tuba Turgut, AKP, 2020)

The representative emphasizes the importance of political will, leadership and determined action in the fight against violence against women. At this point, the role of political leaders is also emphasized. It argues that political leaders play an important role in setting the agenda, mobilizing resources, and implementing policies and programs to combat violence against women. In addition, the representative praises the President's involvement and calls for collaborative efforts to prioritize and address violence against women effectively. The President's personal authority in combating violence against women is referred in the speech. It is suggested that his leadership is valuable in combating this problem. This depiction of the president's involvement demonstrates that political leaders have significant influence in shaping government responses to violence against women. This implies that strong leadership at the highest level can mobilize action and lead to positive change in solving the problem. This shows that Erdoğan's authority is once again invoked as a method of legitimization.

Most of the female representatives in the parliament in 27th term is participated in AKP. However, only a small portion of them mentions women's concerns during general meetings, and most of them are members of KEFEK. A representative of Bursa, Emine Yavuz Gözgeç, has an important speech which can constitute a summary to a common stand of AKP representative's perspective and approach to violence against women. In her speech in 25 November Day of Violence Against women, she said that:

O people!" (of *Farewell Seremon*) It appeals to all humanity without discrimination between men, women, sex, race, and five hundred and eighty-three years before Magna Carta and one thousand four hundred years before the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is emphasized that women are entrusted to **Allah**. (Emine Yavuz Gözgeç, AKP, 2019)

In this statement, she demonstrates that she is against violence against women and by mentioning this, she represents women but the language that she conducts is also

religio-conservative. First of all, one can see that she gives references to religious texts and she argues that those texts are the sources which lead to end violence against women. Secondly, she emphasizes on being a devoted mother who is responsible of her children but other women –e.g. single or non-Muslim, are not mentioned in her statement. Third, she focuses on the importance of the ancient civilization and Muslim Turkish philosophers of the past. Fourth, she is supporter of Erdogan, his stand toward women and past developments made for the favor of women.

These findings reveal a transformation in AKP's discourse over time, marked by three distinct phases. The initial emphasis on universal principles of human rights and equality positioned the party within a broader democratic framework. However, as the discourse progressed, a strong focus on the party's and Erdoğan's leadership emerged, shifting the narrative from systemic solutions to personalized achievements.

By the later periods, the inclusion of religious references added another layer. They framed violence against women within a moral and spiritual context rather than a purely legal or democratic one. The constitutive nature of representation can be found here, as the language and priorities of AKP female representatives not only reflected but also actively shaped the understanding of women's roles, rights, and identities in Turkey. Ultimately, the transition to a more religiously infused rhetoric shows how political discourse can extend the framing of women's issues—like violence against women—beyond the typical parameters of democracy and equality. Instead, these concerns are connected to broader cultural and ideological contexts, such as moral and religious values. It implies that the discourse is not just about addressing women's rights within a democratic framework but also about embedding these rights within a narrative that reflects the party's cultural and religious ideologies. This could signal both an expansion and a limitation of the discussion, depending on how inclusive and flexible these narratives are.

7.2.2.1.5 The Summary of Findings

For the AKP, the discourse evolves from a focus on family and morality to integrating religious references as a framework for addressing the violence. In earlier

legislative terms, AKP representatives often framed violence against women as a human rights issue, emphasizing the importance of equality and democratic reforms. This was evident in calls for legal changes, improved education, and societal awareness to combat violence.

However, by the 24th legislative term, a shift in tone became apparent. Female representatives increasingly linked women's citizenship to family roles, highlighting their responsibilities as mothers and protectors of familial harmony. For example, speeches frequently emphasized that protecting women was critical for preserving the sanctity of the family. Over time, religious references, including quotes from Islamic texts and the Prophet, became more prominent. This shift marked a move toward framing democracy through a cultural and moral lens, where women's rights were often subordinated to family and societal stability.

7.2.2.2 CHP: Bridging Kemalist Ideals with Feminism

The examination of the CHP's rhetoric on violence against women across legislative terms provides a perspective on how the party's changing tactics and ideological position have influenced its stance on women's rights and citizenship. CHP has continuously presented violence against women as both a social problem and a symptom of larger democratic shortcomings, all while adhering to its core values of secularism, equality, and state-driven reform. CHP's discourse throughout its parliamentary history has been based on this alignment with the Republic's basic values, especially Atatürk's emphasis on gender equality. In order to understand how violence against women has been portrayed via the prisms of democracy, human rights, and systematic inequity, this section examines how CHP female representatives have handled these changes by looking at the findings from 22nd to 27th legislative terms.

7.2.2.2.1 Findings of 22nd Parliamentary Term

CHP MPs interconnected gender equality, violence against women, and democracy in their speeches on violence against women during the 22nd legislative term. Generally, they argue that combatting violence against women is essential for upholding democratic values and principles, and they usually call for action to empower women and promote their rights as integral components of democratic

governance and progress. This statement is an obvious evident of this: “**Gender equality is a fundamental principle of democracy** as well as a prerequisite for sustainable development.” (N. Gaye Erbatur, CHP, 2004)

In their speeches, as discussed earlier in other themes, CHP MPs point out that women cannot exist in the public sphere as a result of violence against women, and said that gender inequality lies at the root of the issue. Gender inequality they used is shaped in the context of democratic principles and human rights. The following conversation reflects this:

According to the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, all human beings are equal according to law and written documents. In this framework, all people, men and women, **have equal rights because they are human**. Culture or tradition cannot be a justification for the violation of **women’s basic human right**. (Türkan Miçooğulları, CHP, 2005)

CHP MPs use moral evaluation as a legitimization method. They reject cultural explanations for the violation of women’s rights. However, they promote a universal norm of equality before the law. For them, upholding women’s rights is both a legal obligation, as enshrined in international human rights instruments, and a moral imperative.

The Grand National Assembly of Turkey, since the **establishment of the republic**, enacted the Civil Code, established a **secular, democratic republic**, signed many conventions based on **human rights**, and updated the legal dimensions of human rights violations in our country and tried to find a solution to this problem [honor killings] in a legal way, it has produced many solutions against **women’s rights** and injustices perpetrated against women. (Türkan Miçooğulları, CHP, 2005)

Miçooğulları’s very comprehensive speech sums up her approach very well as a whole. While traditional values are evaluated to cause violence against women, violence against women is considered as a human rights violation. Afterwards, the Kemalist language seen in most of the CHP deputies was used, and it was stated that the principles of secularism, democracy and the rule of law were the main elements to be resorted to in finding a solution. In addition, while the concept of honor, which is presented as the basis in the issue of violence against women in Turkey, was

criticized, the importance of education of women was emphasized. Similar approaches can be found in the following examples of CHP deputies' speeches:

The most important steps on women's rights were taken in the **first years of the Republic**. [Because] Rulers of that period saw the **participation of women**, the half of the society, in every part of the society in a project of **modernity**. We need the same courage today. How can we destroy the **crime against humanity** called **honor killing** in our country; we should think about it. (Ayşe Gülsün Bilgehan, CHP, 2005)

One of the important points Bilgehan touched on is that, by taking the issue of violence against women in the context of modernity. The discourse positions gender equality as a cornerstone of modernity and progress. She notes that human rights and gender equality are intertwined, arguing that crimes against women—like honor killings—violate fundamental human rights precepts. She takes a forward-looking stance, stressing the necessity for modern society to uphold the progressive principles of the past and deal with persistent issues pertaining to women's rights. Like other CHP MPs, she emphasizes the issue's universality.

Moreover, she criticizes the approach of some public institutions (in this case, the police department) to the issue as a family and private space. Accordingly, “how should we guide those working in our security and judicial institutions? Because the woman goes to the police, she goes to the police out of fear of death, the police forces... say ‘**this is a family matter, you go home**’. The woman is killed two days later.” (Ayşe Gülsün Bilgehan, CHP, 2005)

The findings of CHP's discourse during the 22nd legislative term reveals a consistent reliance on the party's foundational principles and the legacy of the Republic's early reforms. One of the common approaches of other CHP deputies, especially Bilgehan, is to ensure that the problem is resolved by the state. By emphasizing milestones such as women's suffrage and the Civil Code, CHP female representatives frame the fight against violence against women as a continuation of the Republic's modernization and secularization projects. This narrative not only covers the party's commitment to legal and institutional approaches but also highlights their belief in the transformative power of state-driven reforms.

At the same time, their framing of violence against women connects the issue to broader democratic deficits and human rights violations. By positioning the persistence of such violence as a symptom of weakened democratic structures and inadequate human rights protections, CHP MPs underline the need for systemic legal solutions. Traditional problems like honor killings are acknowledged, yet the proposed solutions remain firmly rooted in constitutional principles and the rule of law.

As a result, this period reflects the CHP's approach to women's citizenship as one deeply intertwined with state responsibility and institutional reform. Women are presented as equal members of the nation, whose rights and safety are a measure of the state's commitment to its democratic ideals. However, this emphasis on state-centered solutions leaves little room for a more grassroots or intersectional understanding of violence against women, illustrating both the strengths and limitations of CHP's perspective during this term.

7.2.2.2.2 Findings of 23rd Parliamentary Term

Compared to other periods, CHP deputies showed less activity on violence against women in this period compared to other parties in the parliament. In this period, while the content of the speeches of the CHP deputies was parallel to the previous period, criticism of the AKP's policies gained weight. For example; Aritman stated that "It is not without reason that the number of women killed due to domestic violence has increased by 1,400 percent under the AKP Government." (Canan Aritman, CHP, 2010) The representative emphasizes the relationship between democracy and women's rights, focusing on the concerning rise in fatalities from domestic abuse during the current administration. She makes the case—supported by statistics—that the government has not done enough to safeguard women's rights and keep them secure, which is a failing of democratic governance.

The increase in violence against women has been addressed in connection with a departure from democratic principles. In this regard, the issue of violence against women is portrayed as directly relevant to democracy. In her following words:

The goal of contemporary democracy and development cannot be achieved without ensuring gender equality and ensuring fair and **equal participation of women**, who make up half of the population and voters, in politics. It is not just equality that women demand today. This is a demand for **democracy**. All this is just a huge scam. In any case, those who see democracy as a means, not an end, are not the target of democracy. (Canan Aritman, CHP, 2010)

In order to achieve modern democracy and development, the complementary role of gender equality and women's active participation in politics is underlined. In this sense, women's demands for equality are seen as synonymous with demands for democracy itself. The mere instrumental use of any concept of democracy has been criticized. It can be said that the issue of violence against women is shown as an example of women not being included in the context of democracy. Moreover, Aritman stated that:

While Turkish women took all their **legal rights** eighty years ago, before and as an example to many European countries at the beginning of the republic, today, while advanced democracy speeches are being made in our country, we women are preoccupied with protecting our primary **human right**, our right to life. (Canan Aritman, CHP, 2011)

As can be understood from here, the morale of this MP is shaped within the framework of universal democratic principles. According to her, violence against women is related to women's right to life. Women's right to life is also related to human rights. Therefore, the reason for lagging behind democratic countries reveals itself here. Although Turkish women were granted legal rights early in the history of the republic, they now find themselves largely focused on defending their fundamental right to life in a period of supposedly evolved democracy. As a result, the backwardness or inability of democratic ideals causes problems in protecting women's safety and security.

During the 23rd legislative term, the discourse of CHP female representatives takes a sharp turn toward a more oppositional tone, with a pronounced focus on critiquing the AKP's policies and rhetoric. Their speeches frequently juxtapose the AKP's approach to gender and violence against women with CHP's vision of a modern, rights-based, and state-driven solution. By framing the persistence of violence against women as a failure of governance, CHP MPs tie the issue to broader critiques

of AKP's leadership, often using the language of democracy, human rights, and constitutional responsibility to challenge the ruling party's narrative.

At the same time, their emphasis on the legacy of the Republic and Atatürk's reforms serves as a rhetorical anchor, reinforcing their commitment to equality and secularism. This shift reflects not only the increasing polarization in Turkish politics but also CHP's evolving strategy to position itself as a defender of democratic principles and secular values in the face of what they perceive as the AKP's authoritarian and conservative agenda.

7.2.2.2.3 Findings of 24th Parliamentary Term

CHP MPs in 24th legislation term framed violence against women with a violation of human rights. While the fact that women were treated only as mothers or as part of the family continued to be criticized in this period, the discourse on human rights, especially women's human rights, and the need for a mental change in society increased to be included in CHP MPs' speeches.

It is not possible to combat violence against women by compromising the principles of '**equality between men and women**'... Although we do not expect anyone to be a **feminist**, it will be an important step towards solving the problem if everyone is **humanist**. In addition to being protective, understanding based on rights and freedom should be the dominant philosophy. (Sena Kaleli, CHP, 2012)

Kaleli's this speech reflects a democratic perspective that prioritizes gender equality, humanism, and a rights-based approach to addressing violence against women. First of all, the principle of equality between men and women is foundational in combating violence against women. Secondly, Kaleli suggests that while not everyone may identify as a feminist, it is crucial for everyone to adopt a humanist perspective. This shows that she suggests focusing on universal human values rather than specific ideological labels. Afterall, for her combating violence against women in a democratic society requires an approach, which is marked by the idea of understanding based on freedom and rights. Same approach is also shown by another CHP MP who discussed:

In our country, where we hear the news of a **femicide** every day, the protection of the most basic human right, the right to life, is the primary problem for women (Dilek Akgün Yılmaz, CHP, 2013).

The mention of femicide, the killing of women because of their gender, shows a criticism of a failure in upholding the democratic principles of equality, justice, and human rights. Femicide is demonstrated directly in a relation to women's right to life which is a basic human right. Addressing femicide and ensuring the protection of women's rights are taking central to democratic governance. In this sense, the representative suggests that the country's democracy is failing to protect the fundamental human rights of its female residents by highlighting the protection of the right to life as the main issue for women.

In addition, Kemalist discourses remained in place and the government's measures against violence against women were criticized. Feminism was emphasized on together with mentioning international regulations for elimination of violence against women. For example;

Women now understand and see that the attack on **republican revolutions, on Atatürk's principles**, which means being on the side of modernity and science, and on the revolutionary laws guaranteed by the Constitution, is a direct attack on women's rights under the AKP government. This situation hurts and revolts all women as much as experiencing physical violence. (Dilek Akgün Yılmaz, CHP, 2013)

This poses another example of using Atatürk's personal authority in order to legitimize the discourse provided by the representative herself. Touching upon modernity and science as well as the Constitution also reflects impersonal authority of republican principles of Turkey, which also constitutes the basis of CHP's political standing. In this way, the representative's speech implies that women's rights preservation and the health of democracy are linked by characterizing the attack on republican ideals and revolutionary legislation as an assault on women's rights. This viewpoint suggests that women's empowerment and gender equality decline in parallel with a retreat in democratic norms.

Finally, in a comment on Özgecan Aslan's murder, an CHP deputy said:

Do we promise to give up language that targets women? Yes, this is a **supra-political issue** but let's never forget that **femicide is political**. The language of politics, rather than society, solves these murders. If

we are not going to **change this language**, if the language is not going to change, then everyone should shut up. (Melda Onur, CHP, 2015)

Melda Onur draws attention to the importance of the language used in solving problems related to women, especially femicide. This MP criticized the traditional understanding of womanhood and the language used with this understanding. According to her, the language used in political discourse plays an important role in addressing and preventing femicide. In this sense, femicide is a political issue and they need to be mindful of its potential impact on women's lives and safety. In this way, it can be said that a reference is made to the social and cultural changes regarding the issue of violence against women.

7.2.2.2.4 Findings of 27th Parliamentary Term

In AKP's discourses, cultural elements were used together with human rights terminology, and the relevance of the issue of violence against women to democracy was discussed. CHP MPs, on the other hand, criticized this relationship in the context of gender inequality. The common characteristic of their speech derives from the feminist discourse that they had. For example, in her speech in general meeting, Bankoğlu stated that:

We object to your mentality that ignores equality by saying '**Fitrat**' and your judgments based on your political interests. We object to the exploitation of your job: gender inequality. We object to your failure to keep your promises and to implement the laws effectively. We object to you tearing off at least one sister from life every day. We are rebelling that you legitimize the violence that you have not stopped with the discourses of masculinity (Aysu Bankoğlu, CHP, 2020).

The representative particularly denounces the use of conservative terms such as "Fitrat," which refers to a natural or innate difference between men and women, as they perpetuate gender inequality. There is more of an oppositional discourse aimed at the government here. For CHP representatives, traditional norms and beliefs are argued to be used for legitimization of unequal treatment based on gender which results in violence against women. Moreover, the representative emphasizes her commitment to gender equality and her rejection of discriminatory practices that

undermine women's rights and opportunities conducting a feminist discourse which blames masculinity for perpetuating violence against women.

Whenever we do not openly talk about the basis of these problems, this discrimination and all the violence we experience will continue to increase exponentially... one thing that lies behind all the problems women face...that is that we are not able to go a long way in terms of **gender equality**. Especially recently, the futile war waged by a group of reactionary men, who are supposedly conservative, who cannot digest **women's emancipation**, and who do not want to compromise their power, over the concept of '**gender equality**', that is, society itself, has become embarrassing. (Sera Kadıgil, CHP, 2020)

As it is already mentioned above, feminist discourse has several versions, such as liberal, social, and radical. Because of her focus on masculinity which legitimizes –as she said, the violence, one may argue that she more likely has a radical feminist discourse. A more robust attitude on women's rights and a greater awareness of systematic gender inequality are reflected in the CHP's language, which starts to take on a decidedly feminist tone from the 24th legislative term onward. As more CHP MPs question patriarchal norms and push for radical responses to violence against women, this change represents a break from the previous, primarily state-centered rhetoric. A major subject is feminist criticism of conventional gender roles and social norms, indicating a more comprehensive shift in the party's strategy for combating violence against women.

In conclusion, due in part to the backlash against Turkey's decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention, this feminist discourse becomes noticeably more extreme by the 27th term. In addition to criticizing the AKP's policies, CHP female lawmakers also take aim at the ideological and systemic underpinnings of violence against women. Their remarks, which emphasize equality, autonomy, and the overthrow of patriarchal structures, demonstrate a stronger involvement with feminist ideals. While maintaining its dedication to secularism and state-driven reform, this transition demonstrates the party's growing connection with international feminist movements.

The trajectory from a moderate feminist tone to a more radical one suggests CHP's responsiveness to the shifting socio-political landscape and the growing urgency of addressing violence against women. This progression demonstrates how the party's

female representatives navigate the intersection of feminism, politics, and democracy, reframing violence against women not only as a societal crisis but also as a litmus test for the nation's commitment to justice and equality. Through this lens, CHP's discourse evolves into a powerful critique of patriarchal systems and a call for comprehensive change.

7.2.2.2.5 The Summary of the Findings

The CHP, in contrast, emphasizes the structural roots of violence against women, linking it directly to deficits in democracy, human rights, and state accountability. Their repeated references to the Republic's foundational ideals and fundamental protections indicate their faith in institutional solutions. In the 22nd and 23rd terms, for instance, CHP MPs frequently invoked historical achievements, such as the Civil Code and women's suffrage, as evidence of the Republic's commitment to gender equality. In this sense, violence against women was framed as a failure of democratic institutions to uphold constitutional guarantees. Besides, criticism of the AKP's perceived erosion of democratic values was a recurring theme, with MPs contrasting the Republic's foundational principles with what they saw as regressive policies.

Over time, and perhaps unsurprisingly given broader political developments, their rhetoric incorporates feminist critiques, reflecting a shift toward a more systemic and rights-oriented approach. From the 24th term onward, the CHP began to adopt a more feminist tone, particularly in their critiques of patriarchal norms and systemic gender inequalities. Their rhetoric had become more radical, explicitly addressing the Istanbul Convention's withdrawal as a significant step backward for women's rights and democracy. This framing of democracy consistently ties women's rights to institutional accountability and systemic reforms, making their approach one of the most state-centered among the parties.

7.2.2.3 MHP: Preserving Identity Through Tradition and Equality

This section explores how MHP's female representatives discuss violence against women in relation to democracy and citizenship. The aim here is not only to trace their arguments but also to grasp how the party's distinct ideological positioning colors their rhetoric. Notably, nationalism, cultural heritage, and legal principles emerge as key frameworks through which women's roles in society are constructed.

The findings from the 22nd to the 27th legislative terms illustrate an interesting pattern: despite having fewer female representatives than other parties, the MHP tends to frame violence against women not merely as a gender-specific issue, but as a broader violation of humanity and law. This framing aligns with the party's broader inclination to elevate discussions to universal standards of justice and social order. At the same time, it also draws on deeply rooted narratives of Turkish cultural history, emphasizing a national legacy of gender equality — a tension that adds a layer to their discourse.

7.2.2.3.1 Findings of 24th Parliamentary Term

The 24th term is important for women MPs of the MHP to begin to comment on violence against women. In this period, a total of 4 entries were found on the subject. These entries were made by one female politician: Ruhsar Demirel and the participation of MHP in the discussions regarding violence against women is very low compared to its other counterparts in terms of numbers.

To begin with a speech made in 2011:

However, it is not correct to define some of these incidents as just violence against women. For example, the case of the girl who was sentenced to have persuaded 26 adult men in her province when she was thirteen to have sex with her own consent. This is neither violence to children, nor violence to women, nor child abuse. This is a crime against humanity and a violation of law (Ruhsar Demirel, MHP, 2011)

The MP started her speech by acknowledging that the issue of violence against women is a global problem. In this regard, it emphasized broader ethical and legal considerations rather than traditional definitions of violence. She did not find it appropriate to label certain incidents of violence against women simply as “violence against women” and stated that these incidents actually developed against human rights. In this context, while the speech primarily focuses on violence against women, it indirectly touches on broader themes such as democracy and human rights. Demirel’s claim that the violence against women is “crime against humanity and a violation of law” emphasizes how crucial the legal and judicial systems are to a democracy. For example, while the speech focuses on violence against women, it indirectly raises questions about some concepts such as gender norms, consent, and human rights.

Her call for universality implies a commitment to principles of equality and human rights that underpin citizenship and nationality in a democratic society. She implicitly discusses the values of nondiscrimination and equality in a democratic society, recognizing democracy as a political structure that places a high priority on defending basic human rights, such as the freedom from exploitation and violence. She emphasizes the importance of treating all individuals equally under the law, regardless of gender. In conclusion, violence against women has been handled in the context of a human rights violation and gender inequality is shown as the fundamental source of violence.

7.2.2.3.2 Findings of 27th Parliamentary Term

MHP representatives' speeches on violence against women also focus on its implications for gender equality and democracy. They suggest that the recognition of gender equality in Turkish tradition reflects a commitment to democratic values of inclusivity and justice. The need to ensure equality between men and women, according to both Turkish traditions and democratic and humanitarian principles, is pointed out as the basic method to end violence against women. According to Nevin Taşlıçay;

We know from **ancient teachings and cultural experiences** that there is no distinction between men and women in **Turkish tradition**. In every stage **of our culture**, men and women have been the essential elements of society with a **human-based perspective**. (Nevin Taşlıçay, MHP, 2020)

The speech refers to democratic principles through the issue of equality between men and women. It is emphasized that there is no discrimination between men and women in the Turkish tradition and equality is the basic principle in the national custom. In this way, her speech indicates that promoting gender equality is not only compatible with Turkish cultural legacy but also essential to preserving democratic values of human rights and equality. Her reference to historical absence of gender distinctions in Turkish culture legitimizes the her aim to end gender inequality and discrimination.

As a result, although all parties agree that gender equality is important within the context of democracy, their analyses may differ with regard to framework, policy

priorities, and scope of concentration. In order to combat gender inequality and advance women's rights, CHP and HDP may place a higher priority on social justice programs and legal reforms than do the AKP and MHP, who might be more interested in national identity and cultural values. Of course, there are various differences between seemingly similar approaches, as mentioned above. All this will be detailed in the discussion section.

7.2.2.3.3 The Summary of Findings

For MHP, citizenship is framed within nationalistic and moral contexts, with women's roles tied to their contributions to family and cultural preservation. While some speeches — albeit relatively few — challenge patriarchal norms, many continue to reinforce traditional gender expectations.

In the 26th term, for instance, MHP representatives began to articulate gender roles. In their discourses, women were portrayed as equal partners in Turkish tradition, a perspective that suggests traditional gender norms with calls for equality. However, this equality was often framed within the boundaries of national identity rather than universal democratic principles.

With fewer statements addressing violence against women, the party's discourse waned by the 27th term. This drop in language points to a waning interest in the matter, leaving the MHP's prior emphasis on striking a balance between equality and tradition largely unexplored in more recent times.

7.2.2.4 HDP: Intersectionality in the Fight Against Patriarchy

HDP stands out in Turkish politics for its unflinching commitment to addressing gender issues through a lens that is as inclusive as it is critical. Unlike many other parties, HDP's approach to violence against women is not confined to a narrow understanding of the problem; instead, it frames the issue within a larger system of interconnected oppressions. By tying violence against women to broader struggles against ethnic discrimination, state-sanctioned violence, and entrenched societal inequalities, the HDP reimagines the fight for women's rights as an essential pillar of democratic reform.

In the following sections, the findings explore the speeches of HDP's female MPs across legislative terms to understand how their critiques of patriarchal violence intersect with their vision of a more just and inclusive democracy. Through their words, one can see a party that not only identifies systemic failings but also dares to imagine what democracy could look like.

7.2.2.4.1 Findings of 23rd Parliamentary Term

DTP/BDP MPs' discourse on violence against women democracy underlines the intersectionality of violence, regarding the importance of gender equality in citizenship rights, and the necessity of collective action in advancing democratic principles. Also, the representatives offer that the root causes of violence within democratic framework and broader discussions on social justice and human rights within democratic societies. For example, the speech below identifies social inequality as the root cause of violence in society where inequality exists, violence persists.

The root of violence today is actually **social inequality**. Where there is inequality there is violence. This is not just violence against women, it's **violence against children, violence against minorities, violence against people of different faiths...**It is necessary to treat **women as equal citizens** and to fight together on violence against women (Sebahat Tuncel, BDP, 2010)

The violence and its pervasive impact on various marginalized groups, including women, children, minorities, and individuals of different faiths that signals principle of democratic inclusivity requires underlying structural inequalities in order to achieve a more democratic society. Furthermore, representative's call to "fight together" on violence against women implies a collective responsibility to address violence against women. This viewpoint emphasizes the fundamental connection between gender equality and democracy, stressing that genuine democracy necessitates the equitable treatment and active involvement of all citizens, regardless of gender.

Women, who make up half of the world's population, are faced with many difficulties in **political, economic and social fields due to their gender, ethnic identity and belief**. Although we are among the first countries to establish the legal framework of **women's rights**,

necessary developments have not been achieved in the practical field. It is necessary to clearly see the underlying factor of this situation, namely the view of the social structure shaped by the **male-dominated culture** towards women. (Pervin Buldan, DTP, 2009)

Once again, traditional gender roles and societal norms challenged because they are believed to perpetuate inequality and violence. The approach to violence against women reflects itself by situating gender equality within the larger context of social justice and human rights. The interconnectedness of various forms of oppression offers a holistic approach to addressing violence against women. Furthermore, stating that women constitute half of the world's population, Buldan discusses the significance of their representation and voices in society.

7.2.2.4.2 Findings of 26th Parliamentary Term

In the 26th legislative term, HDP female deputies view the issue of violence against women as intertwined with women's participation in politics, the struggle for regime change, and democracy. First and foremost, the inclusion of women in the political sphere is considered a critical factor not only for addressing violence against women but also for strengthening democratization processes. For example, Çağlar Demirel's defense of the co-chairmanship system is a step toward institutionalizing gender equality in politics. The participation of women in political mechanisms is seen as essential for gender equality in politics:

A government [...] waging a war against the co-chairmanship system, which ensures gender equality in local administrations [...], is the biggest indication that the government is not sincere on this matter. (Çağlar Demirel, HDP, 2015)

Demirel's statement argues that gender equality in politics is not only a goal but also a necessity for the functioning of democracy. Women's participation in political mechanisms strengthens the impact of gender in politics, and women's political representation plays a critical role in the effective functioning of democracy. Political participation provides a platform for women to fully realize their citizenship rights. The obstacles to women's participation in politics are directly related to the oppressive nature of the regime. HDP deputies emphasize that authoritarian regimes systematically exclude women and weaken their political representation. Meral Daniş Beştaş's statement is striking in this regard. Beştaş argues that the state's

policies, which perpetuate violence and discrimination against women, are part of the ideological framework of the authoritarian regime:

Women will continue to be excluded from politics, women will continue to struggle with unemployment, and women will continue to face violence. (Meral Danış Beştaş, HDP, 2017)

Beştaş's statement shows that the regime's policies, which marginalize and exclude women, aim to systematically limit women's power in political and social spheres. The exclusion of women's political representation by authoritarian regimes halts the development of gender equality and democratization processes. In this context, regime change and democratization are seen as necessary to ensure women's full participation in politics.

HDP female deputies argue that democracy can only function properly when women have full representation and gender equality is ensured. The presence of women in politics and the public sphere is considered a prerequisite for democratization. The political presence of women not only protects their rights but also increases participation in democracy and strengthens social justice. Filiz Kerestecioğlu links democracy with gender equality in this regard:

One of the most important conditions for preventing femicides and empowering women is a political will determined to fight against sexism, the economic empowerment of women, and equal employment policies." (Filiz Kerestecioğlu, HDP, 2015)

Kerestecioğlu's statement emphasizes the need to empower women and ensure equal political participation for democracy to function. Women must be active participants not only as voters but also in decision-making processes. This participation is one of the cornerstones of democracy, and gender equality is seen as an inseparable part of democratization.

HDP female deputies view women's participation in politics as closely linked with the struggle for regime change and democracy. Full participation of women in politics is not only a matter of rights but is also seen as a tool for social and political transformation. While authoritarian regimes' exclusion of women directly harms the functioning of democracy, women's political representation and gender equality

deepen democracy. In this context, HDP female deputies advocate for women's active participation in politics as citizens, seeing it as a necessity for regime change and democratization processes.

Moreover, Çağlar Demirel's statement reflects a clear alignment between her personal stance and the broader HDP party policies. In her remarks, she emphasizes the party's commitment to fighting male and state violence, identifying these forms of oppression as central to HDP's political agenda. Her statement, "We are a party that fights against male and state violence," (HDP, 2016) highlights the party's focus on violence against women and the intersection between state power and patriarchal structures, both of which are consistent with HDP's pro-women, pro-equality, and anti-authoritarian ideology.

Additionally, her criticism that women MPs who fight against violence are not able to speak freely within the Parliament underscores HDP's emphasis on democratic rights and freedom of speech, especially regarding women's issues. Demirel's assertion that her female colleagues are unable to express themselves fully within the legislative environment reinforces HDP's critique of the current state of democratic practices in Turkey, where they argue that marginalized voices, particularly those advocating for women's rights, are often silenced.

This statement, therefore, not only mirrors HDP's core policies of defending women's rights and challenging violence, but also marks out the party's broader critique of the current political system and its limited inclusivity when it comes to women's voices in policy-making spaces.

7.2.2.4.3 Findings of 27th Parliamentary Term

In the 27th parliamentary term, the representatives of HDP dealt with violence against women with feminist terminology, again. Similar to previous terms, A strong critique of patriarchal structures and their part in sustaining violence against women can be found in their discourses. For instance, Dirayet Dilan Taşdemir, like Kadıgil of CHP (2020), described femicide in daily language in the parliament. Accordingly:

Men are killing women just because of **their female identity**. This is a relationship of domination, and it must be defined correctly. These men do not murder women because they are so sick; they are psychopaths,

but normal men commit this because they are men. This question [violence against women] has historical contexts; it has aspects that are fed **by male-dominated codes**. Therefore, it is necessary to consider this entirety. (Dirayet Dilan Taşdemir, HDP, 2020)

While the speech defines femicide, it also criticizes the normalization of violence. By asserting that “normal men commit this because they are men,” Taşdemir challenges the prevalent narrative that portrays offenders as abnormal or mentally ill. Rather, she places this violence in a larger “relationship of domination,” directly connecting it to systems of society that are governed by men. Instead of minimizing violence against women to isolated instances of deviance, this viewpoint forces the audience to address the systemic causes of this problem.

The representative’s rejection of excuses or justifications for violence against women and her claim that it stems from social norms and codes of masculinity. Additionally, the representative underlines the importance of taking historical and cultural factors into account in understanding violence against women. These historical and cultural factors include entrenched patriarchal structures and suggest that efforts to combat violence against women must challenge social norms that perpetuate gender inequality and discrimination. There are various speeches of HDP deputies focusing on the correlation between male domination, gender inequality, and violence against women (e.g. Ayşe Acar Başaran, Meral Bektaş, Pero Dünder, Züleyha Gülüm).

So, what does this have to do with democracy? The perspective expressed here reflects the broader stance of the HDP, which consistently links violence against women to systemic failures in democracy. The party views such violence not as isolated acts committed by individuals but as the outcome of deeply ingrained patriarchal structures that are fundamentally at odds with the principles of equality and justice. HDP critiques the state’s inability to provide equal protection and rights for women, exposing a significant flaw in democratic accountability. This approach illustrates the need for a democracy that goes beyond surface-level equality and actively confronts the societal norms and codes that perpetuate inequality and violence. For the HDP, achieving true democracy means rethinking and reconstructing the very systems that allow such injustices to persist.

In addition to this, HDP's women deputies (e.g. Meral Daniş Beştaş, Ayşe Acar Başaran etc.) sometimes talks about the importance of the representation of women in the parliament. For instance, according to Başaran:

Dear friends, the fundamental solution to this issue [violence against women] is to increase the **representation of women in this Assembly...** If we can ensure the presence of women in politics with their own will and **women's perspective**, we can solve the problem, but the government cannot solve violence against women and these sexist approaches by targeting women every day in the **representation of women**. (Ayşe Acar Başaran, HDP, 2020)

In the speech, the importance of increasing the representation of women in political institutions is emphasized as the main solution in combating violence against women. With her words, Başaran argues that women's participation in decision-making processes can lead to more effective policies in combating violence. Additionally, one can see the speaker's dissatisfaction with the government's response to violence against women and its broader stance on gender equality. Her speech implies that empowering women through representation can serve as a catalyst for social change and the elimination of sexist attitudes and practices. Increasing female representation is seen as a means of advancing gender equality agendas. She argues that by elevating women's voices and leadership, society can move towards more inclusive and egalitarian governance structures that prioritize the rights and well-being of all individuals, regardless of gender.

This argument emphasizes the transformative potential of women's participation in democracy, suggesting that it enhances democratic governance by bringing new perspectives and goals to the forefront, in addition to advancing gender equality. This suggests that increasing women's representation is a calculated investment in the long-term viability of democratic institutions as well as a democratic imperative.

7.2.2.4.4 The Summary of Findings

Finally, the HDP offers a distinctly intersectional approach, framing violence against women as symptomatic of broader systemic inequalities. Their critique includes state failures, militarism, and patriarchal oppression, challenging both nationalistic and traditionalist narratives. Unlike other parties, the HDP does not limit its discussion to

domestic violence but extends it to systemic forms of violence affecting marginalized groups, including Kurdish women.

Throughout all legislative terms, HDP MPs emphasized the link between gender equality and inclusive democratic practices. Their speeches called attention to how systemic inequalities disproportionately affect women from different ethnic, cultural, and class backgrounds. However, in the 27th term, the HDP's discourse became more radical, reflecting third-wave feminist influences. They positioned violence against women as a failure of the state to uphold democratic and human rights, advocating for systemic change. It shows the active sites of contestation and redefinition, a dynamic that lies at the heart of this dissertation's broader theoretical inquiry.

7.2.2.5 Results

At first glance, violence against women might appear as a separate policy concern; however, as this section demonstrates, it is intricately tied to broader debates about democracy within Turkey's parliamentary discourse. Distinct patterns in how female MPs connect violence against women to broader discussions of democracy, exploring themes such as accountability, human rights, and institutional integrity are revealed by examining speeches from the AKP, CHP, MHP, and HDP. It analyzes how parliamentary discourses challenge authoritarian tendencies while advocating for a more inclusive and equitable democratic framework. Through their substantive representation, female MPs articulate claims that expose the state's failure to protect women's rights and address systemic inequalities, using these critiques to evaluate democratic principles.

Simultaneously, their discourses engage in constitutive representation, reshaping the meanings of citizenship, justice, and governance to reflect women's experiences and demands. By doing so, this section demonstrates that violence against women is not only a measure of the state's commitment to women's rights but also a reflection of its broader democratic or authoritarian trajectory, drawing attention to the role of female MPs as both advocates and agents of constitutive representation.

The relationship between violence against women and democracy is articulated in diverse ways across the political spectrum. Each party's discourse not only reflects its ideological stance but also contributes to the ongoing redefinition of women's concerns as evident in violence against women. What stands out from the findings the most is how these female MPs link violence against women to the health of democracy itself, particularly by opposition parties. On one hand, the issue of violence against women is assessed as a matter of democratic practice and the safety of women. On the other hand, the ruling party and its allies address this problem through the lens of their ideological perspectives. However, starting from the 23rd legislative term, opposition parties increasingly draw a correlation between the erosion of democratic principles and the prevalence of violence against women. This correlation suggests that discourses on violence against women have become powerful lenses through which broader anxieties about democratic decline are articulated — reaffirming the political significance of gender issues in understanding the nature of governance itself.

7.3 DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings of violence against women debates within the framework of substantive and constitutive representation. Violence against women, unlike the issues of abortion and the headscarf, has emerged as the most extensively debated women's policy area among female members of the Turkish parliament.

Numerous speeches spanning the 22nd to the 27th legislative terms spotlight the centrality of this issue, with representatives from all parties expressing their views.

Particularly, the brutal murder of Özgecan Aslan by a minibuss driver in 2015 triggered a profound reaction in parliament, momentarily bringing different political perspectives into sharper relief. However, the ways in which violence against women was defined, problematized, and approached varied considerably across female representatives.

While a significant portion of MPs continued to frame violence against women predominantly as a matter of domestic violence, the Özgecan incident painfully revealed the broader and more pervasive nature of gender-based violence —

demanding a wider, systemic lens of analysis. Against this backdrop, this section discusses the findings of parliamentary debates on violence against women through the frameworks of substantive and constitutive representation, emphasizing how female MPs both advocate for women's rights and participate in the redefinition of political and social norms.

7.3.1 Political Construction of Womanhood in Violence Against Women Debates

The findings show that parliamentary debates on violence against women invariably shape the concept of woman in Turkish politics. Often, women are constituted primarily as vulnerable victims in need of protection – a framing that (from a constitutive representation perspective) carries a “Foucauldian” (Squires, 2008) imprint of power, reinforcing women's dependency and passivity in discourse. This paternalistic narrative (predominant in conservative rhetoric) portrays the woman as someone who should be kept safe by male guardians or the state. On the other hand, some women MPs – especially from opposition ranks – attempt to reconstitute women as rights-bearing agents, emphasizing women's strength and autonomy (for example, by celebrating survivors who speak out or by asserting women's right to live free from fear). Such claims challenge the passive victim trope and seek to empower women's agency in the national imagination, rather than just eliciting sympathy. The very act of female MPs speaking about violence in parliament is itself constitutive – it symbolically transforms women from voiceless subjects into political actors, though this transformation can be partial and contested.

From the 22nd to the 27th legislative terms, parliamentary discourses exhibit both significant continuities and notable shifts. For some parties, such as the HDP, a consistent ideological stance on gender equality and systemic critique emerges as a defining characteristic. In contrast, parties like the CHP demonstrate a marked transformation, transitioning from a republican and state-centric perspective to a more feminist and individual-centered rhetoric. Meanwhile, the AKP's discourse shows a growing reliance on religious framing over time, reinforcing traditional roles for women but also reflecting shifting political priorities. Aligning with “maternalist thinking” (Ruddick, 1989) they focus on the identity of women as “mothers” and the private realm of the family rather than individual rights. In this approach, the

importance of the family's influence on the public sphere is emphasized, suggesting that new ethical foundations can be established through regulations in the private sphere. But what stands out is not just the diversity of these narratives—it is how these discussions reveal deeper insights about the dynamics of representation itself. These shifts demonstrate how parliamentary discussions are sensitive to larger sociopolitical forces and how political representation is an evolving process.

At the heart of the debates on violence against women lies the question of substantive representation: how effectively female MPs address and advocate for the needs and rights of women. The speeches that are analyzed in this chapter reveal how female MPs fulfill the mandate of substantive representation by advocating for women's rights and addressing the structural issues that perpetuate violence against women. For instance, HDP MPs articulate systemic critiques that tie violence against women to broader issues of oppression, offering a comprehensive intersectional perspective that includes the recognition of Kurdish women. Moreover, CHP MPs emphasize individual autonomy and equality, focusing on structural inequalities and societal change. These examples illustrate how substantive representation involves advocating for the rights and interests of women through policy critiques and solutions.

These all result in the conclusion that representation is not just about speaking for women—it's about shaping what it means to be a woman beyond advocacy. The findings make the constitutive dimension of representation visible, where MPs actively shape societal understandings of womanhood. For example, The AKP reinforces traditional gender norms through its moral and family-centered framing, constructing womanhood as integral to familial and cultural stability. The HDP, by contrast, challenges patriarchal norms and redefines womanhood as a site of resistance and empowerment. This dual role of representation demonstrates how MPs not only reflect structural values but also actively participate in constructing and reshaping them. The interplay between these two dimensions demonstrates the transformative potential of political representation.

As a result, these findings reveal that representation is not a static or one-dimensional process but a dynamic and multifaceted interaction between societal values, political ideologies, and gender norms. The dual roles of substantive and constitutive

representation demonstrate the importance of understanding how political actors both respond to and shape societal expectations. In the context of violence against women, this interplay becomes particularly significant, as it highlights the potential of parliamentary discourse to challenge systemic inequalities and redefine womanhood in transformative ways.

7.3.2 Beyond Protection: Women's Representation and the Politics of Citizenship

The findings of this dissertation offer significant contributions to the theories of substantive and constitutive representation, as well as broader discussions on gender, citizenship, and political discourse. It does not merely aim to affirm what we already know but challenges us to rethink the nuances of representation itself arguing that citizenship is not a static identity—it is continuously shaped by political, cultural, and social forces. The findings of this section show how women MPs navigate and redefine citizenship, from framing women as guardians of tradition to envisioning them as agents of systemic change.

Substantive representation is often framed as straightforward advocacy for women's rights. But the findings here suggest it is far from simple. Women MPs' approaches are layered, shaped as much by ideology as by the political and cultural environment they operate in. For instance, AKP women MPs advocate for women's protection but often through the lens of morality and family. Specifically, from the 26th term onwards, AKP's approach to combating violence against women has changed, and it has started to use more religious references in their discourses. The importance of preventing violence has been emphasized by presenting examples from religious teachings and authorities. This change can be explained by changes in AKP's ideological or political stance (Kandiyoti, 2016; White, 2003). Increasing conservatism has become more pronounced in AKP's women policies. Their substantive claims reflect a worldview where women are primarily tied to their roles within the home, a perspective that aligns with the party's broader ideological framework. Whereas, CHP MPs, with their roots in Republican ideals, initially emphasize state-driven solutions and constitutional rights.

Over time, however, their discourse shifts to a more feminist tone, tackling systemic issues like patriarchy and violence against women. Under the leadership of Kılıçdaroğlu, CHP has begun to adopt a more moderate tone towards conservative segments while remaining firmly committed to the principles of secularism and modernity. The party has adopted a more conciliatory tone to address conservative societal segments and understand their concerns (Özbudun, 2014). However, when it comes to the issue of violence against women, a contrary approach is observed within CHP during the same period. Violence against women was addressed in a radical feminist tone by female MPs, and policies were criticized in this context. They offer the term “femicide” to define in the parliament and they believed the root cause of VAW is the patriarchal structure of the society which results in gender inequality. Feminist terminology is found in their word choices. As a result, it can be argued that the changes in CHP’s women policies and the feminist approaches of its MPs contribute significantly to the debates on the nature of women’s representation.

Nevertheless, the feminist tongue is mainly upheld by HDP MPs. They radically expand the scope of substantive representation by addressing not just gender but also intersections with ethnicity, class, and sexuality. Their approach critiques not just patriarchy but the entire system that perpetuates inequality. On the contrary, MHP MPs, while fewer in number, walk a fine line between tradition and pragmatism. They uphold women’s roles within the national framework while occasionally challenging patriarchal norms, creating their own mixture of conservatism and progressivism.

These findings reveal that substantive representation is not just about advocating for women’s issues; it is about how those issues are framed, who they are framed for, and what broader ideologies they serve. However, this study moves beyond substantive representation to explore its often-overlooked sibling: constitutive representation. As it has been discussed several times, constitutive representation is not just about reflecting societal values; it is about actively shaping them. Women MPs in Turkey are not just participants in political discourse; they are architects of new definitions of womanhood and citizenship. Here, women MPs do more than address existing gender issues—they actively reshape what it means to be a woman, a citizen, and a member of the nation.

Let us take AKP as an example. The MPs construct womanhood within a moral and familial framework, tying citizenship to traditional roles and Islamic principles. Their discourse reinforces a vision of women as the guardians of cultural and family values. Besides, CHP MPs, drawing from Republican values, reframe citizenship around equality and modernization. Over time, they adopt a more critical stance, advocating for systemic change and challenging entrenched patriarchal norms.

In this sense, HDP MPs push boundaries further, advocating for an intersectional and inclusive redefinition of citizenship. Their discourse challenges traditional narratives, placing marginalized women at the center of political and societal debates. Yet, MHP MPs, meanwhile, construct a vision of womanhood that blends nationalism with equality, portraying women as both protectors of cultural identity and vital contributors to the nation's moral fabric.

It all shows that representation is not a one-way street. The shifts in CHP's feminist critiques, AKP's increasing reliance on religious framing, and the MHP's blending of nationalism and equality all point to the fluidity of political discourse. Therefore, One can observe through this study that women MPs are both shaped by and shapers of the environments they inhabit.

7.3.3 Authoritarianism, Democracy, and Violence Against Women

Theoretically, these findings accentuate how substantive representation varies across ideological lines, shaping how women's rights are articulated and pursued. They also demonstrate the constitutive role of representation, where MPs actively reshape concepts of citizenship and democracy through their discourse.

The notion of substantive representation traditionally focuses on the extent to which representatives act in the interest of the groups they represent. Across the political spectrum in Turkey, female MPs from various parties have engaged in this type of representation by advocating for legislative reforms, addressing systemic inequalities, and marking the plight of women affected by violence.

AKP MPs, for example, advocate for protecting women from violence, but they frame this within the boundaries of conservative values. When they address violence against women, they usually reinforce traditional gender roles and prioritize family

stability over individual autonomy. While this is still a form of advocacy, it sidesteps individual autonomy and equality, prioritizing family-centric narratives. This is already an example of the initial idea that representation itself is inherently constitutive. Women may represent women, yes, but this does not mean that they represent them without any ‘interruption’. There can be various ways to represent women by being affected by other factors. Those factors can be structural, as well as personal. Yet, the example of AKP shows that ideological and party-political influences can be found in the representation process of the female representatives.

CHP MPs, in contrast, leverage Republican ideals of gender equality and constitutional rights, often framing violence against women as an affront to democratic principles and human rights. They frequently frame violence against women as a failure of democracy and human rights. Becoming more feminist, directly challenging systemic patriarchy, and demanding accountability from the state, their discourses evolve over time. This approach exemplifies a broader interpretation of substantive representation, incorporating feminist critiques and systemic challenges to patriarchy.

HDP’s approach to violence against women is not different from its stance on other policy areas. The party works to protect women and defend their rights within the context of an inclusive participatory democracy. Ultimately, discussions of direct violence against women, explanations delving into the multifaceted origins of violence, and criticisms of patriarchy demonstrate the radical feminist stance of HDP female MPs.

HDP MPs take this a step further, using an intersectional lens to critique structural inequalities and challenge the state’s failure to protect marginalized women. For them, addressing violence is not just about fixing one issue—it is about dismantling the entire patriarchal system and rethinking what justice and equality ‘should’ look like. So, they redefine the concepts, by criticizing the other. It shows that they go beyond advocating for women’s rights, but they also shape how concerns are perceived. This is where constitutive representation comes into play. It is not just about protecting rights but defining what those rights mean and who gets to claim them.

As a result, these findings contribute to theoretical discussions on representation by demonstrating that substantive and constitutive processes are deeply interwoven. When they discuss violence against women, the representatives' speeches shape public understanding of these issues, showing that representation is a two-way street. Thus, women MPs do not just reflect societal values; they help create and challenge them.

While much of the existing literature focuses on representation as a function of individual political actions, this study highlights the interplay between these actions and the broader political and societal landscape. It positions VAW not simply as a social concern but as a fundamental aspect of political representation and identity formation. By critically engaging with the limitations of substantive representation theory, this dissertation asserts that representation extends beyond the mere articulation of interests. Instead, it involves the discursive construction of new social and political identities. To capture this dynamic and reciprocal nature of representation, the study adopts the framework of constitutive representation, illustrating how political discourse both reflects and actively reshapes societal and institutional realities.

Besides, it is important to note that Turkish women MPs themselves have been key in pushing VAW onto the agenda, which aligns with broader findings that descriptive representation can foster constitutive representation (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008; McCallion, 2024; Mackay et al., 2010). Even in Turkey's adversarial setting, the growing number of women deputies (though still under 20%) has meant more frequent and more nuanced discussions of issues like domestic violence and honor killings than in decades past. Early empirical studies show that women legislators are more likely than their male colleagues to bring up women's concerns (Phillips, 1995), and Turkey is no exception – female MPs across party lines have made emotional speeches about slain women and questioned ministers on enforcement of laws. This critical presence helps constitute a political reality where VAW is recognized as a public matter, not just a private tragedy —an outcome that reflects Mansbridge's (2003) view of representation as a process that includes the symbolic and discursive dimensions of political engagement, not merely decision-making power. However, as Siow (2023)'s framework reminds us, mere presence does not

guarantee substantive advocacy. In Turkey, the impact of women's voices on VAW has been uneven: opposition women often act as "critical actors" (Celis et al., 2008) pressing for accountability, whereas some ruling-party women have at times echoed dismissive attitudes or remained silent to avoid contradicting the party's image of social harmony. Thus, the constitutive effect of women's representation on VAW discourse is conditioned by partisan context. Still, the very fact that "women" as a group are being talked about in parliament – their security, their rights – represents a shift in the normative boundaries of Turkish politics. It signals that the definition of a responsible state now increasingly includes being responsive to women's issues, a shift that women MPs have helped drive (even if the depth of change remains contested).

This research demonstrates that political representation—both substantive and constitutive—is a dynamic and multidimensional process. In the Turkish context, women MPs do not simply advocate for women's issues; they play an active role in constructing divergent definitions of womanhood, shaped by various macro-level factors such as, ideological, cultural, and partisan lines. At the same time, these definitions are embedded in broader political debates surrounding citizenship, equality, and governance. Their discourses do more than reflect existing norms; they challenge, reshape, and negotiate them. Therefore, representation emerges not as a static outcome, but as an ongoing discursive field where meanings of gender, identity, and power are continuously produced and contested.

CHAPTER 8. CONCLUSION

8.1 Restating the Main Argument

This dissertation argues that womanhood is not a standalone category but is constantly constructed and reconstructed through broader political frameworks—including debates over citizenship, national belonging, and political authority—within which women’s issues such as the headscarf, abortion, and violence against women are embedded. This understanding requires moving beyond a narrow conception of substantive representation, which emphasizes acting on behalf of women’s interests, toward a more nuanced account of constitutive representation, in which representation involves actively shaping the very meanings of those interests. In this view, female MPs are not only agents advocating for women (representation), but also actors who participate in the re-presentation of what it means to be a woman, a citizen, or a rights-bearing subject in a given political context. Through their discourses, they reproduce, challenge, or reconfigure dominant political norms.

This study offers a critical contribution to the literature on substantive representation by comparatively analyzing the discourses of female MPs in Turkey between 2002 and 2023, particularly on issues such as the headscarf, abortion, and violence against women. Substantive representation approaches often assume that female MPs form a cohesive political group. They are thought to focus on women’s issues and related legislation due to an inherent inclination (Childs, 2006; Schwindt-Bayer, 2006; Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008). However, the findings of this study reveal that the representational practices of women MPs diverge significantly depending on their party affiliations, ideological orientations, and historical contexts.

This divergence is not confined to inter-party differences. The shifting discourses of women MPs reveal how definitions of womanhood evolve even within the same political tradition. In this sense, the study shows that women’s representation cannot be understood solely through the lens of “being a woman”. Rather, questions such as what representation means, how it is constructed, and on whose behalf, it is enacted can only be meaningfully addressed through discourse. For this reason, the study

critically interrogates the substantive approaches that treat women as a uniform group. Representation is not merely a matter of identity, parliamentary presence, or participation in legislative outcomes—it is also a process of construction, a form of meaning-making. And this process often carries the power to disrupt silent assumptions, challenge or reproduce familiar narratives, and reconstruct established discourses (Wodak & Meyer, 2009; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Fairclough, 2002; Fairclough, 2013).

This study argues that discourse constitutes one of the most fundamental arenas in which the content and direction of representation are shaped. Representation is thus examined through questions about how the identity of ‘woman’ is discursively reconstructed, what is deemed defensible, and on whose behalf, speech is produced. In this respect, this study challenges the monolithic narratives embedded in essentialist accounts of substantive representation and instead calls attention to the plural, contested, and often contextually grounded nature of representational practices.

In this sense, this dissertation fundamentally argues the following: being a woman may be the starting point of women’s representation, but the core of representational politics lies in the questions of which woman speaks, on whose behalf, and in defense of what. Here, discourse is not simply a tool of communication; it is a constitutive element that determines the boundaries, direction, and audience of representation. Women’s representation should therefore not be treated as a static or uniform category, but rather as a multi-layered, ideologically shaped, and discursively constructed field. In this regard, the study aims to bring a critical perspective to prevailing assumptions within the literature on substantive representation and to offer a theoretical contribution through the case of Turkey.

On top of that, what this dissertation sets out to demonstrate is that political representation is far from a one-dimensional process. While the literature on substantive representation has rightfully emphasized the importance of whether women MPs advocate for women’s interests (Celis 2009), it has often overlooked a crucial question: how are those interests defined in the first place? In most cases, women’s presence in parliament is assessed by their support for gender-equal policies or measurable outcomes, but this approach risks reducing representation to

policy alignment, rather than exploring the deeper ideological and discursive work that representation entails.

This is where a constitutive understanding of representation becomes essential. Representation is not only about voicing demands but also about constructing the meanings of those demands (Orly, 2008). Who gets to define what “women’s issues” are? Who decides what womanhood, citizenship, or equality should mean in a given political context? These questions become even more pressing when the topics at hand—abortion, violence against women, or the headscarf—are deeply tied to body politics and national identity. Yet, these are precisely the kinds of questions that have remained underexplored in most studies on women’s political representation.

This dissertation addresses that gap by arguing that body politics is not a peripheral concern but a central site where representation unfolds. Through the discourses of female MPs, this study shows not only how political interests are articulated but also how gender, citizenship, and even democracy itself is defined, contested, and reimagined. In doing so, it challenges traditional approaches to political representation by arguing that representation is not solely about policy outcomes but also involves the discursive construction of key concepts of womanhood. It takes a step further by exploring how constitutive representation contributes to shaping political narratives around body politics and nationality. It reveals that female MPs are not simply speaking for women, but speaking about what it means to be a woman, a citizen, and a political subject within their party lines and ideological settings. By doing so, this study shows that women are not a monolithic group and shows how discourses of female MPs differ across political parties and throughout time. Therefore, this study argues that the discourses of female MPs are not static but rather evolving in response to shifting political agendas, demonstrating how political actors adapt their narratives to align with changing socio-political contexts, party priorities, and public sentiments.

By integrating insights from both substantive and constitutive representation, this research proposes a new analytical framework that views this evolving nature of the women’s representation as a dynamic and contested process of conceptual negotiation and discursive construction. Through this lens, the study not only contributes to gender and politics literature but also offers fresh insights into the

complex realities of political representation in Turkey. With its compelling context for this analysis—where secular and religious ideologies, democratic and authoritarian currents, and feminist and nationalist discourses intersect and compete—Turkey serves as an excellent example to test these theoretical assumptions.

Unlike many other studies, examining Turkey within this framework captures the complexities of a political landscape. Examining the political debates on headscarf, abortion and violence against women in this complex environment uniquely bridges nationality, body politics, and representation literatures, demonstrating how these frameworks can enrich our understanding of women's political representation. In this sense, the findings contribute to both gender and politics studies by illustrating how discourses in parliament do not just reflect social realities but actively construct them. To further explore these dynamics, the next section offers an overview of the empirical findings.

8.2 Summary of the Findings

When formulating this dissertation, I assumed that framing the study within substantive representation would ultimately lead me to the conclusion that conservative representatives represent conservative women, secularists represent secular women, pro-Kurdish representatives represent Kurdish women, and so on. After all, whatever the gender, these politicians are first and foremost the members of their parties, representing specific voter bases. Especially from a substantive representation perspective, it would make sense for them to act and speak in line with their party's ideological stance and the expectations of their constituents. However, the shifts in their discourses over time, the sudden silence of representatives on issues they once vehemently defended (for instance, CHP representatives not speaking on the headscarf issue after the law was passed or AKP representatives no longer mentioning the Istanbul Convention after its withdrawal, despite previously showcasing it as a success), and the way changing political conditions or agendas are reflected in their discourses (e.g. change in the discourses of MHP after they started alliance with AKP) raise significant doubts about whether the represented group shapes the discourse, or whether the constructed discourse sets the agenda.

In this context, the analysis was structured around three key questions: 1) How did female MPs from different parties shape or adjust their discourses when these issues were debated in parliament? Here, party-based differences in narrative construction, particularly shaped by ideological alignments, stood out. However, variations were observed not only between parties but also within them. Yet, these intra-party differences did not emerge simultaneously but rather across different periods.

This led to the second question: Were these shifts in intra-party discourse linked to specific political crises or contemporary events? Finally, it became evident that certain issues remained unaffected by discursive change, with some MPs consistently maintaining stable arguments. However, each party exhibited this discursive stability on different issues. This raised the last question: When were female MPs in different parties more flexible or rigid in their positions?

To address these questions and summarize the findings effectively, it is useful to analyze the three thematic issues separately as follows:

Headscarf Issue: how does women's representation intersect with regime debates?

One of the most striking conclusions of this study is that women's representation is not solely about women's rights but is deeply embedded in broader political struggles. The headscarf issue, among the three thematic topics analyzed in this dissertation, is the one most closely tied to regime debates. It has served as a lens through which the positioning of political parties on the state, secularism, and democracy becomes visible. Female MPs' discourses have varied significantly along ideological lines, but perhaps the most intriguing finding is how certain parties have undergone drastic shifts in their rhetoric over time, while others have fallen completely silent on the issue.

For some parties, the headscarf was at the heart of their political agenda for years, yet the moment the ban was lifted, the issue all but disappeared from their discourse. For others, it remained a topic that was carefully handled but never fully embraced. What stands out most is that female MPs' engagement with the headscarf debate was not framed as an individual rights issue but as a question of the party's broader ideological and strategic positioning.

Analyzing the party-specific differences in discourse:

AKP's discourse on the headscarf underwent a significant transformation over time. Before the ban was lifted, AKP's female MPs framed headscarf freedom within the language of secular values, democracy, and even Atatürk's legacy. Their arguments revolved around the idea that lifting the ban was not just for religious women but was a broader victory for all women's freedoms.

However, after the ban was lifted, AKP's rhetoric shifted drastically. The discourse moved away from democratic principles and instead became tied to narratives of victimhood under the February 28 process and Erdoğan's leadership. The headscarf was no longer framed as a question of individual rights but as a symbol of Erdoğan's political triumph and the restoration of a conservative national identity.

Before the ban was lifted, CHP's female MPs positioned the headscarf as a direct threat to secularism, framing their discourse around the defense of republican values. However, once the ban was abolished, a noticeable silence emerged within the party.

This silence is particularly striking given that in the earliest legislative term analyzed (22nd term), CHP devoted substantial attention to the headscarf issue, treating it as a central political battleground. The abrupt disappearance of this discourse suggests that CHP no longer saw the headscarf as a site of ideological struggle. Did CHP view the lifting of the ban as a definitive loss in the secularism debate? Or did the party recognize that continuing to engage in the debate would no longer yield political returns? Either way, the party's silence speaks volumes about the shifting boundaries of political discourse.

Among all the parties analyzed, MHP was by far the most silent on the headscarf issue. Whether in opposition or as a coalition partner, the party never fully engaged with the topic or developed a strong discourse around it. This raises a critical question: Did MHP's silence reflect a lack of ideological investment in the issue, or was it a deliberate strategy to avoid taking a definitive stance? Unlike AKP and CHP, MHP did not have a clear ideological framework that necessitated engagement with the headscarf. As a nationalist party, it had little incentive to align itself with either

secularist or Islamist narratives. Instead, it adopted a pragmatic stance, maintaining flexibility by not committing to any strong position.

HDP remained the most consistent in its approach to the headscarf, both before and after the ban was lifted. The party maintained a critical stance, arguing that headscarf freedom should be understood within the broader context of women's rights rather than as an achievement of AKP. One of HDP's most striking rhetorical moves was its attempt to reframe the headscarf debate. Rather than attributing the lifting of the ban to AKP's policies, HDP's female MPs emphasized that it was the struggle of veiled women themselves that had secured their right to wear the headscarf. However, an important nuance here is that while HDP's discourse was framed in terms of women's freedoms, it was also deeply tied to an anti-AKP position. The party used the headscarf debate not only to advocate for women's rights but also as a way to critique AKP's broader approach to gender and governance.

Abortion issue: how do women's bodily rights clash with the state's definition of citizenship? In Turkey, the abortion debate extends beyond the conventional pro-choice vs. pro-life divide; it is deeply intertwined with questions of women's citizenship, state reproductive policies, and broader processes of authoritarianism. This suggests that abortion is not merely framed as an issue of individual rights but is instead embedded in discourses of national identity, citizenship, and state-society relations. The tension between women's rights over their own bodies and the state's population policies and moral regulations has been one of the most defining elements shaping abortion narratives. One of the most striking findings of this study is the gradual silencing of abortion discourse across political parties—except for the HDP, whose stance has remained consistent.

Examining the differences among parties, what surprised me the most was that the AKP, which is discursively the most active party on other women's issues, was the most silent on abortion. Particularly after Erdoğan's 2012 statement equating abortion with murder, AKP female MPs either remained entirely silent or framed their discourse within the confines of family values and motherhood. The party did not introduce explicit legislative restrictions on abortion, but at a discursive level, it employed rhetoric that directly undermined women's bodily autonomy.

CHP female MPs, on the other hand, gradually adopted a more feminist discourse on abortion. Especially after 2012, their rhetoric increasingly centered on women's rights, bodily autonomy, and individual freedoms against state intervention. However, abortion never became as central to CHP's feminist-leaning discourse as other gender issues, and over time, it faded as a priority in the party's political agenda.

MHP's pragmatism on other issues played out differently in the case of abortion. While the party occasionally framed abortion within its nationalist agenda—emphasizing birth rates and population growth—it refrained from taking a strong stance against abortion itself. In fact, it was notable that MHP at times sharply criticized Erdoğan's 2012 remarks on abortion, signaling a certain discursive flexibility. What is particularly interesting is that, despite the expectation that MHP's only female MP at the time would reflect the party's nationalist stance, her framing of the abortion issue deviated significantly from the anticipated party line. This divergence suggests that MHP's strategy regarding women's bodily autonomy aimed at maintaining ideological flexibility rather than enforcing rigid nationalist dogma.

In contrast, HDP has been the only party to maintain a consistent and unwavering stance on abortion. HDP female MPs framed abortion as a citizenship issue, openly adopting a feminist and pro-choice position. Rather than interpreting abortion through the lens of demographic control, they presented it not just as an individual choice but as an essential component of women's democratic rights. Moreover, even as other parties gradually abandoned the issue, HDP continued to advocate for abortion rights in a persistent and unwavering manner.

Violence against women: how do narratives of womanhood shift according to political priorities? Of the three thematic issues examined in this study, violence against women stands out as the most frequently discussed in parliamentary debates. Peaks in discourse, particularly following high-profile femicides such as the murder of Özgecan Aslan in 2015, illustrate how female MPs engaged with this issue. However, after 2020, parliamentary debates on violence against women noticeably declined, coinciding with economic crises, the COVID-19 pandemic, and election cycles. This shift raises a crucial question: When does violence against women become a political priority, and when does it fade into the background? More

importantly, how do different parties define “womanhood” in these debates, and how do their ideological commitments shape their responses to the issue?

At the heart of this discussion is the question of how female MPs frame violence against women—not just as an issue of policy but as a reflection of their party’s broader ideological stance. The way violence against women is discussed is deeply tied to how parties define womanhood itself. Is a woman primarily a mother whose safety is important for the preservation of the family? Is she an individual citizen whose rights must be protected by the state? Or is she part of a broader struggle against systemic oppression? The way parties answer these questions significantly influences their approach to violence against women.

AKP female MPs have largely approached violence against women through a family-centered framework. Their discourse frequently linked violence against women to the preservation of family unity, the sanctity of motherhood, and women’s societal roles. Rather than emphasizing women’s individual rights, AKP’s narrative positioned women primarily as figures to be protected within the family structure. The state’s role, according to this narrative, was not to empower women as individuals but to ensure that families remained stable and intact.

This framing became particularly visible during Turkey’s withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention. Initially, there was an uptick in discourse among AKP female MPs, who attempted to justify the move. However, shortly after the withdrawal, AKP female MPs largely went silent on the issue. This abrupt retreat suggests internal tensions within the party regarding women’s rights and a deliberate suppression of discourse that might challenge state policies. In a way, AKP’s shifting stance on violence against women reflects its broader approach to women’s issues—rhetorically recognizing women’s rights but ultimately prioritizing party and state interests.

CHP, in contrast, positioned violence against women within a broader human rights and equality framework. CHP female MPs consistently framed the issue in terms of femicides, state responsibility, and the need for legal reforms. Unlike AKP, whose discourse was often reactive, CHP built a more consistent and structured narrative

around violence against women, emphasizing concepts such as bodily autonomy, gender equality, and legal accountability.

Over time, CHP's discourse on violence against women became increasingly feminist in tone. Particularly after 2012, CHP female MPs began advocating more openly for gender equality, using language that aligned with feminist movements and civil society organizations. However, compared to issues like headscarf debates or abortion, violence against women never became as central to CHP's ideological struggle. Instead, it remained one of several human rights issues that the party addressed, rather than a defining feature of its political identity.

MHP's discourse on violence against women took a different path, shaped primarily by nationalist rhetoric. While other parties often discussed women's rights in legal or social terms, MHP frequently invoked historical female figures, positioning women as symbols of national strength and resilience. Their discourse blended concerns about violence against women with broader themes of national unity and social stability.

Rather than framing women as victims, MHP female MPs often emphasized the role of "strong Turkish women" in the nation's history, from warrior women in Turkish mythology to female figures in the War of Independence. This narrative reinforced the idea that Turkish women had always been integral to the nation's survival and that their protection was a matter of national pride, not just individual rights.

However, this approach also had limitations. By prioritizing nationalist symbolism over concrete policy discussions, MHP's stance on violence against women often lacked substantive engagement with legal protections or institutional reforms. The party's pragmatic political positioning also meant that its approach to women's issues fluctuated over time, particularly as it moved from opposition to becoming an ally of the ruling AKP. This shift was reflected in MHP's increasing alignment with conservative rhetoric, particularly regarding family values and traditional gender roles.

HDP presented the most radical and explicitly feminist perspective on violence against women, but its framing of the issue was distinct in another way—it was

inseparable from Kurdish identity politics. Unlike other parties, which discussed violence against women primarily as an issue of individual rights or societal stability, HDP female MPs linked the struggle against violence against women to broader structures of state oppression.

A key feature of HDP's discourse was its consistent reference to "Kurdish women" rather than women in general. Violence against women, in their view, was not just about male perpetrators or societal attitudes but was deeply tied to the state's broader system of control over Kurdish communities. This framing positioned the fight against violence against women as part of the Kurdish political struggle, rather than a standalone feminist issue.

HDP's discourse included terms such as "state-sponsored violence," "patriarchal oppression," and "women's resistance," making it clear that they saw violence against women as a structural issue rather than just a legal or moral problem. Unlike other parties, whose rhetoric on violence against women fluctuated with political shifts, HDP maintained a consistent and unwavering stance, advocating for women's rights as part of a broader vision of social justice and political transformation.

This analysis of the three issues demonstrates that the discourses of female MPs are not solely centered around women's rights but also play a crucial role in reconstructing the fundamental dynamics of politics. The headscarf debate is not merely about individual freedoms; rather, it serves as a battleground for defining the boundaries of the regime and shaping the state's approach to secularism and democracy. The abortion issue reveals how women's bodily autonomy intersects with the state's citizenship policies, while the discussion on gender-based violence bring into focus the conditions under which women's rights are politically addressed and how female MPs redefine womanhood in the political sphere.

Of course, the definition of womanhood is closely tied to citizenship, and approaches to citizenship are inherently linked to regime dynamics. These concepts are deeply interconnected. However, if we are to analyze these three issues through the lens of three distinct concepts, this categorization becomes useful. Ultimately, these findings show that female MPs are not merely representatives of women's voices but also key actors in shaping the boundaries of politics and constructing ideological narratives.

From the findings, it is observable that the discourses of women representatives not only reflect the interests of social groups and political parties but are also shaped and transformed by political conjunctures and changing policies. The ways in which women MPs adapt or shift their discourses over time, and the influence of changing political contexts all point to the limitations of viewing representation as a straightforward, one-way process. As a result, the discourses of female representatives are neither static nor entirely homogeneous. Instead, they are flexible, adapting to political actors and processes, illustrating the complex and evolving nature of political representation. This indicates that representation is a more dynamic and reciprocal process than the existing substantive representation literature has suggested.

8.3 Further Research Avenues

However, as with any research, this study has its limitations, which in turn offer opportunities for further exploration. One notable limitation is its reliance on parliamentary speeches as the primary source of data. While these speeches are a rich resource for analyzing how women MPs articulate and construct their discourses, they provide only a partial view of their representative activities. Other significant dimensions, such as constituency work, media engagements, and informal negotiations, are not captured, potentially leaving out key aspects of how women MPs navigate the representation process. Additionally, the focus on the period between 2002 and 2023, while capturing critical developments in Turkish politics, limits the scope to a specific timeframe, leaving room for future research to explore the evolution of women's representation over a longer historical arc.

In addition to that, the scope of the empirical data presents certain constraints. While this research has analyzed parliamentary debates spanning from 2002 to 2023, focusing on female MPs' discourses due to its primary focus on substantive representation of women, it does not comprehensively account for the voices of male representatives. Given that men continue to dominate political institutions, their engagement in debates on women's rights and their role in shaping parliamentary discourse could provide additional insights into the broader dynamics of gendered representation. Moreover, while this study identifies variations across different legislative terms, future research could expand on how individual MPs' positions

evolve over time in response to shifting political climates and ideological realignments.

Second, there are theoretical limitations regarding the framework of substantive and constitutive representation. While this study extends the literature by arguing that substantive representation is inherently constitutive—meaning that political discourse does not merely reflect existing gender norms but actively constructs them—it does not extensively engage with other feminist political theories. This limitation specifically lies in the study’s approach to intersectionality and institutional contexts. The successful realization of substantive representation for women is enhanced by institutional reforms and mechanisms that promote gender equality norms; this is achieved not only through representative actors but also through the construction of gender codes within their institutions. While the analysis marks out the importance of intersectional dynamics, especially in the case of HDP women MPs, it does not fully examine how factors like class, ethnicity, and regional differences intersect with gender to shape representation. Similarly, the focus on parliamentary institutions may inadvertently underplay the influence of grassroots movements and civil society, which are crucial in shaping political discourse. Moreover, while CDA proved effective in uncovering hidden dynamics in language, it is inherently interpretative and may be shaped by the researcher’s perspective. Despite these limitations, the findings provide a solid foundation for future studies to expand on, particularly by incorporating broader forms of representation, intersectional analyses, and comparative contexts to deepen our understanding of the complex nature of women’s representation.

Another conceptual challenge is the assumption that female MPs represent “women’s interests” in a monolithic way. This research has demonstrated that female representatives do not always act as a unified group but rather align their discourses with their party’s ideological position and broader political strategies. While this reinforces the argument that women’s representation is shaped by institutional and political structures, it also raises the question of who defines women’s interests in policymaking. Future studies could further interrogate how political ideology intersects with gender representation in shaping legislative priorities.

Finally, the context-specific focus on Turkey limits the generalizability of the findings to other political systems. While Turkey provides a compelling case for studying gender, nationalism, and democracy in a hybrid political regime, comparative research with other contexts could enrich our understanding of how these dynamics play out across different socio-political environments. For example, analyzing how female MPs engage with similar issues in other countries with strong religious-secular tensions or populist leaderships could further situate the findings within global feminist political studies.

8.4 Final Remarks

Women's issues are not confined solely to the realm of women's rights; they are also central to broader debates on citizenship, regime stability, and political ideology. Analyzing female MPs' discourses exclusively through the lens of "women's rights" risks overlooking how these narratives actively reproduce the regime and delineate the boundaries of the political system.

In this context, female MPs are not only advocates for women's rights; they are also key figures in shaping the state's ideological boundaries, the nature of the regime, and the political positions of their respective parties. This raises a fundamental question: Is the greatest limitation of women's representation in Turkey the fact that it has never truly belonged to women? Are women being instrumentalized in political discourse while remaining excluded as active agents in shaping political processes?

These findings provoke further questions: When CHP defended the headscarf ban in the name of secularism, was it truly fighting for women's rights, or was it reinforcing its own regime discourse? When AKP lifted the ban, was it an effort to advance women's rights, or a move to consolidate Erdoğan's political power? Did MHP's pragmatism and selective silence on certain debates serve its strategic political interests? When HDP championed women's rights, was it doing so from a feminist perspective, or as part of the broader Kurdish identity struggle?

At this point, one might ask, So what? The fact that female MPs' discourses are closely aligned with party lines may not seem like a surprising finding at first glance. After all, MPs are elected to represent their parties' policies and are expected to operate within that framework. However, it is crucial to question why this alignment

poses a problem for women's representation. As many studies—particularly those within the framework of substantive representation—suggest, an increase in the number of female MPs does not automatically translate into progress for women's rights. On the contrary, this dissertation argues that the boundaries and functions of representation are shaped within the broader political landscape, and their impact on gender representation cannot be assumed but must be critically examined. Female MPs, rather than being actors who challenge the boundaries of the political system, become figures that contribute to the reproduction of these very boundaries.

Here, the key argument of constitutive representation emerges: female MPs may be inclined to advocate for women's rights, but this is never guaranteed. This is precisely where the concept of constitutive representation becomes significant. For instance, Mackay (2008) and Squires (2008) emphasize that female MPs are not merely agents advancing feminist gains; rather, representation processes are shaped by the internal dynamics of the political system. This study reaches a similar conclusion in the Turkish context, demonstrating that female MPs' discourses are determined more by party positions than by their individual agendas, thus offering a fresh perspective to the literature.

In Turkey, the institutional and discursive boundaries of women's representation appear to be sharply defined. The presence of female MPs in parliament is not merely a mechanism for advocating women's interests; rather, it functions as a tool for reinforcing party ideologies and reproducing political legitimacy. This calls for a reconsideration of what women's representation truly means.

Nonetheless, these findings demonstrate that female MPs are not merely advocates of women's rights. They act as political agents who actively construct the boundaries of womanhood and determine whose experiences and identities count as politically representable. Their presence in parliament is not solely about voicing women's interests, but about shaping the normative frameworks through which womanhood is defined and embedded within broader debates on citizenship, national identity, and democratic legitimacy. In doing so, they engage in a politics of inclusion and exclusion, revealing the constitutive nature of representation.

Thus, female MPs do not only act as the voice of women; they also function as agents of their parties. Their discursive shifts align with party strategies, and their rhetoric is shaped less by feminist convictions and more by party agendas. This suggests that women's representation should not be analyzed solely through individual agency but must also be understood within the broader context of party dynamics and the reproduction of the political regime. This raises the question: do female MPs represent women only to the extent that their party agendas allow them to?

And finally, I would like to return to the question I posed within the context of the Turkish literature: Despite having granted women the right to vote and be elected as early as the 1930s, and despite the increasing number of female MPs over the past two decades, why does women's representation in Turkey continue to be a persistent issue? While previous studies have explored and answered this question in various ways, this dissertation offers the following response: Understanding the function of women's representation requires a more comprehensive and critical perspective. The increasing presence of female MPs does not simply or necessarily mean the feminization of politics; rather, it demonstrates how politics is continually reshaped through women.

In conclusion, by analyzing the discourses of female representatives across different parties, political contexts and conjunctures allowed me to shed light on the evolving and contested nature of political representation. It underscores how gendered narratives are not only reflective of broader ideological struggles but are also instrumental in reshaping political discourse, citizenship, and democratic participation. In doing so, this research contributes to both representation and nationality studies since it demonstrates how key concepts are continuously constructed and renegotiated within different political frameworks. The findings make it clear that representation is not merely about championing gendered interests; it is also about shaping the contours of national and political identity. Female MPs, through their discourses, do not simply mirror political realities—they actively constitute them.

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