

*Evaluating Turkish Media Coverage of Results for the
November 2015 Elections*

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Abstract

It is obviously seen that the Turkish general election of November 2015 will be a political phenomenon for the Turkish Political History to be discussed and studied in coming years. One of the most important factor that makes the November election important is that it is the result of a snap election period which is assumed as the repetition of the election in June. The second factor that makes the election in November important in terms of Turkish political history is the result of the election itself. Even though there were just four months between the elections, the results became significantly different.

In the election of June 2015, Justice and Development Party lost its 12 year long majority and power but after 4 months in November with the early general election AKP succeeded to gain its power and majority in the Turkish Grand National Assembly. The historic change between these two elections were highly discussed by the public.

In this study, the editorial and broadcasting policies of Turkish media during and after the two elections were analysed. Within the scope of the study, the Turkish newspapers "Cumhuriyet, Yeni Şafak and Hürriyet" which have different political ideology were examined. The news which were published in the first pages of the chosen newspapers were examined by content analysis method and the news headings and spots were analysed within the context of Turkish political history.

Keywords: Turkish general election of November 2015, Print Media, Ideology

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Introduction

The general elections held on the 1st of November 2015 was the 19th free political election after the first one held on the 21st of July in 1946 and demonstrated a large number of the first things to the public opinion. It was also the 25th election of all the elections held from the beginning of the history of Turkish Republic (Erođlu, 2003: 35-37). Both of these political elections caused a great deal of controversies.

In this context, the political election held on the 7th of June in 2015 should be remembered because it had forced the November elections. Those elections caused political balances in Turkey go astray and pushed the country into to a hard period. Turkey got stuck in troubling days of social, religious and ethnic segregations and a spiral of violence in the same period of time.

In this work, the contents of three Turkish newspapers from three different ideological background called Cumhuriyet, Hürriyet ve Yeni Şafak during the week just after the early general elections on the 1st of November were analyzed. In Turkey the printed media is of a great importance in terms of processes of political communication. It is also an important weapon since it is seen as a means of both educating and shaping the public opinion (Bektaş, 2013: 130). The periods of general political elections are so important from the angle of political communication and the newspapers gain a great deal of importance in those periods of time. So particularly the printed media was examined and analyzed in this study.

The headlines, the news and picked news photos on the front pages of newspapers introduce lots of data with regard to their ideological stance. Thereof the front pages of those newspapers were examined and a discourse analyses was done on the basis of data obtained from them. In this work, all of those elements were handled and analyzed through the method of content analysis.

The results of the analysis were turned into the quantitative data and then into the tables. The news contents of those newspapers were analyzed through a method of interpretation. Besides, some columnists who wrote in this respect in those newspapers during the election were included in the work.

The General Elections of June 7, 2015

The 24th Turkish government was established after the general elections held on the 12th June in 2011. It was declared on 22nd October in 2015 that 25th parliamentary elections would be held on June 7, that at the end of the four years' term of the government (Milliyet, 2014:) The same decision was affirmed by Higher Election Commission and was published in the Official Gazette (Resmi Gazete, 2015:).

None of the political parties gain enough number of seats of 276 to come to power at the end of the parliamentary elections at issue. The table of seats according to the political parties in parliament is as follows:

AKP: 40.87 %/258 seats, CHP: 24.95 %/132 seats, MHP: 16.29 %/80 seats, HDP: 13.12 %/80 seats.

In this case, it was clearly understood that Turkish people didn't give the power to a specific political party, on the contrary it wanted all of them to come to an agreement for a broad coalition government.

The most important political results of the parliamentary elections of June 7, 2015 can be summarized in a few sentences:

- AKP lost an election for the first time since 2002 in which it was established and came onto the political scene.
- The new distribution of seats in parliament made a broad-based coalition inevitable.
- Four different political parties surpassed the obligatory dam of 10 per cent vote throughout the country and came into parliament.
- HDP that had always come into parliament with independent candidates gained 80 seats in normal ways for the first time in Turkish political life.
- KONDA, a well-known opinion poll company in Turkey, made the following explanation after the elections:

“This parliamentary election has produced interesting results. For the beginning, the political inclination symbolized by AKP has not changed dramatically. The small political parties went on to get smaller. The surprise of the election was HDP, which is known as an ethnic Kurdish political party, became a part of the parliament gaining 80 seats in normal procedure. So, four political parties based on different ethnic or religious identities located in parliament (Konda, 2015:).

After the elections in question, a lot of social, economic and political incidents happened and Turkey had to hold a new parliamentary election on November 01, 2015. At the end of the new election, political table has changed to a large extent in favour of the present government of AKP. Harsh controversies among the three political parties out of AKP in the following weeks of the previous election directed the public opinion to AKP and it came to power with a great majority again on 1 November of the same year.

The incidents of terror in five months' period of time between the two elections have increased a lot throughout the country. The process was summarized in Alican Uğurlu's article published in the daily newspaper Cumhuriyet in the following way:

11 June 2015: KCK ceasefire was blocked.

17 July 2015: The president R. T. Erdoğan declared that he didn't recognize Dolmabahçe Agreement.

20 July 2015: A live bomb exploded himself in Suruç, a township of Şanlıurfa and 33 people were killed.

22 July 2015: Two policeman were shot dead by PKK terrorists while they were sleeping in their home at night in Ceylanpınar, another township of Şanlıurfa.

23 July 2015: ISIS opened fire from the other side of Syria and killed a military officer in Kilis and PKK killed a police officer in Diyarbakır.

24 July 2015: War planes of Turkish Armed Forces bombed the ISIS's headquarters in Syria and PKK's headquarters in the mountain chains of Kandil. The police forces had an operation on the cells of the terrorist organizations such as ISIS, PKK and DHKP-C.

11 August 2015: President Erdoğan explained that the Process of Solution with regard to Kurdish problem was put in the fridge.

16 August 2015: Speaking at the funeral of a martyr, President Erdoğan said: “How happy is the one who became a martyr and how happy is his family!”

17 August 2015: People attacked the Kurdish citizen’s shops and workplaces in Alanya after the news of martyrs spread out in the mass media.

20 Ağustos 2015: The explosives which had been replaced under the high way were blasted while a military vehicle was passing nearby in Lice, a township of Diyarbakır. Eight soldiers were killed during the explosion.

22 August 2015: Lieutenant Ali Alkan was killed in a terrorist attack in Şırnak and his elder brother Lieutenant colonel Mehmet Alkan protested the government’s war policies at the funeral.

5 September 2015: A curfew was declared in Cizre, a township of another Kurdish populated city named Şırnak in the South-eastern Turkey.

6 September 2015: 16 soldiers were killed by an attack by PKK in Dağlıca on the border of Iraq.

8-9 September 2015: 13 policemen were killed in another attack by PKK in Iğdır.

20 September 2015: The prime minister Davutoğlu said in a meeting in the city centre of Van that terrorist mobs would start walking around in the south-eastern region of Turkey if AKP had to leave the government Office.

10 October 2015: Two suicide bomber attacks killed 102 people during a great meeting for peace in Ankara. (Uğurlu, 2015:).

All of those incidents dragged the whole society to an awful chaos of mind and atmosphere of fright. People who saw the horrible face of terror and political ambiguity because of the fact that the three other opponent political parties couldn’t come to an agreement for a broad-based coalition kept silent before the government decision for an early general election and the majority of the voters endorsed the government’s position to a great extent in the ballot box on 1 November 2015.

The results of the early general election on 1 November in 2015 are as follows: AKP 49.5 %/317 seats, CHP 25.3 %/134 seats, MHP 11.9 %/40 seats, HDP 10.8 %/59 seats (Seçim.haberler, 2015:).

According to the table available, AKP increased its rate of vote at the level of 8.6 points. So it gained 59 new seats. CHP increased its rate of vote at the level of 0,4, but it gained only two new seats. MHP lost 4.4 point of its previous vote and its 40 seats at the same time. On the other hand, HDP lost its previous vote of rate at the level of 2.4 and its 14 seats as well (ntv, 2015:).

This result was considered as a victory of president Erdoğan because he organized lots of meetings before the elections in favour of AKP.

Political polarization for decades rose again between those two elections. The pivot of that polarization has been the well-known segregation and clash between secularists and Islamists from the last decades of Ottoman Empire to the beginning of the Republic. (Findley, 2011:5-8). When the election success of the Kurdish separatists” is added to those problems, the elections of 1 November gained a greater importance in terms of the recent history of Turkish Republic.

The well-known journalist Murat Yetkin's article entitled "Erdoğan-Davutoğlu Stratejisi Kazandı" (Erdoğan and Davutoğlu's strategy has won) published in the daily newspaper called Radikal explained some important facts in this matter:

"Prime minister Davutoğlu had said "We took the message." at the night of 1 June. In other words, both Erdoğan and Davutoğlu had begun to believe that the voters of AKP wanted the party to return to its roots. Hence Erdoğan decided to push his chance to take the country to an early election so as to reach at his dream of presidential system by getting enough seats in parliament through his former party. Now it is understood that voters of AKP really took the message. They gave the prime minister Davutoğlu not only enough power to establish the government alone but also endorsed his way of working in harmony with president Erdoğan. (Yetkin, 2015:)."

Another journalist Serpil Çevikcan wrote in her article entitled "AKP's victory" in the newspaper Milliyet that AKP won a brilliant victory in the last elections. It is the only winner of the last election because it gathered nearly half of the voters in Turkey again. On the other hand, it should be confessed that MHP and HDP are the losers of the election. CHP stayed at the place where it was and it can't be considered as a success (Çevikcan, 2015:).

As Murat Yetkin wrote, the winner was the AKP after the period between June 7th and November 1st. However, Serpil Çevikcan from the Milliyet newspaper draws attention to this issue in her article entitled "AK Party's victory". The AK Party gained a great victory in the November 1st elections. As in the 2011 elections, it put back again what he lost on June 7th taking the vote from one of two voters. It would not be wrong to say that the AK Party is the only winning party of November 1st. That the losers are MHP and HDP is very clear... Since it is not possible to evaluate CHP's going around in circles as "success", it will not be constraining to write that the main opposition party is making no progress and it is not an alternative of the government.. Alone. The analysis made for the AK Party went between coming to power alone by a narrow margin or forming a coalition by a narrow margin again. The result: it came to power by a wide margin. What has changed compared to June 7th and the AK Party got back its 10-point vote it lost? One of the important factors is that a coalition government couldn't be formed after June 7th. (Çevikcan, 2015)

The evaluation of election period and political results emerging after November 1st by the author, renders us important data from the viewpoint of Turkish media. Hurriyet columnist Ahmet Hakan, one of the widely read and discussed columnist of the Turkish media, writes in his article entitled 'How did the AKP win' he wrote after November 1st :

"- Our community voting for the opposition with 60 percent in June 7th tended towards the AKP by saying " We've voted with 60 percent , you've messed up, you haven't set up a government."—The feeling of "The government cannot be established, everything is getting worse, a chaotic atmosphere has occurred," prevailed among our society. Therefore, they tended towards the AKP. – The MHP voters were affected by nationalist discourse of the AKP and the MHP's not being able to explain itself properly. Votes passed from the MHP to the AKP . -The votes of alliance between the Saadet Party and the Büyük Birlik Party flowed towards the AK Party. AK Party's religious campaign having been committed clandestinely was very effective. "(Hakan, 2015)

While the three authors from whose articles we've cited have been evaluating the election results as a political victory for the AKP, it has been interpreted especially for the opposition parties as a failure occurred after the success of June 7th. The main idea of the article entitled 'Keep going whatever the election results are' written by Nuray Mert, columnist of the Cumhuriyet newspaper, who says the political tension and polarisation experience in our country will not end regardless of election results, is briefly as follows: "I had written an article entitled 'Whatever the election results are' before the election results became clear. In summary; I said that we wouldn't get rid of the political crisis whatever the result of the election was. I tried to explain my reasons saying "Because, before anything else, we are talking about a community living on both sides of a large power line. Moreover, there are other power lines behind them. The people meeting within this line almost hate each other. It is a kind of polarization in which they won't be full up even if they eat each other. Moreover, since the conservative-Islamic wing that is holding the power currently is at the point of being "the state party" beyond being an ordinary democratic government, they aren't full up even if they eat the people against themselves. Furthermore, the part holding all state power opportunities in their hands uses all the opportunities unconditionally to offend the other party. Then, they are astonished at the situation saying that everyone was united in 'hostility' in front of President Erdogan who is at the top of this pyramid. Even the AK Party members were probably surprised by the election results. Actually, I thought the AK party would come to power alone but I didn't expect this vote rate. "(Mert, 2015)

What draws attention in the assessments of some columnists writing in Turkish Media after November 1st early elections is that especially the result arising from the 5-month period is quite different from the result on June 7th. This result is both surprising and confusing in terms of Turkish political history. This political picture changing in 5 months will lead to important debates in many different areas out of the political arena. In this study, the news concerning the election and its results after November 1st elections in the Hurriyet, the Cumhuriyet and the Yeni Şafak newspapers were examined in a weekly period with the content analysis method. The Cumhuriyet newspaper, among the selected newspapers, is Turkey's oldest daily newspaper which began to be published by Yunus Nadi on May 7, 1924 in accordance with the personal request of Mustafa Kemal (Karaca, 1994: 33). It is an Atatürkist newspaper publishing the most powerful anti-AKP articles. The Hurriyet is known as the 'flagship' of Turkish media. It is the first newspaper which carried out mass journalism in Turkish media. It started its publication life by Sedat Simavi in Cağaloğlu, Istanbul on May 1st, 1946. The newspaper (Hurriyet) taking part in the centre represents a liberal line. The Yeni Şafak newspaper has been publishing in an Islamist-liberal line close to the AKP government. It is an Istanbul-based national newspaper published by Albayrak Group in 1995. (Albayrak)

Examination of the publications the Cumhuriyet, the Hurriyet and the Yeni Safak newspapers made after November 1st Early Elections

Total number of news in the newspaper and the number of relevant news	Nov.1 2015	Nov.2 2015	Nov.3 2015	Nov.4 2015	Nov.5 2015	Nov.6 2015	Nov.7 2015	TOTAL
Cumhuriyet								
Total number of news in the newspaper	15	10	14	13	16	17	13	98
Relevant number of news	2	10	14	8	6	3	1	44
Hürriyet								
Total number of news in the newspaper	14	10	14	17	13	19	15	102
Relevant number of news	1	10	10	6	5	4	1	36
Yeni Şafak								
Total number of news in the newspaper	16	10	13	15	16	20	15	105
Relevant number of news	4	10	13	4	6	3	2	42
Total number of news in the newspapers TOTAL	45	30	41	45	45	56	43	305
Relevant number of news in the newspapers TOTAL	7	30	37	18	17	10	4	122

Table 1: Showing the Total number of News used on the First Pages of the Cumhuriyet, Hurriyet and Yeni Şafak newspapers and News related to November

1st Early General Elections between the dates of November 1st, 2015-November 7th, 2015

Between the November 1st - November 7th, 2015, the total number of news on the first pages in three newspapers examined is 305. The total number of news related to the subject of the study is 122. Especially November the 2nd, the first day after the election, covers all the news of all three newspapers. It appears to be a decrease of the news related to the subject in numerical terms in the process that took place from November 1st towards November 7th. For example, on November 7th, the number of news about the subject in all three newspapers is only 4. This number points to the lowest figure of the week.

The positions of the relevant news in the pages	Cumhuriyet	Hürriyet	Yeni Şafak	TOTAL
Subheading	10	5	5	20
Headline	5	5	4	14
Top left	2	1	0	3
Bottom left	8	6	8	22
Top right	3	2	3	8
Bottom right	6	8	8	22
Left center	0	0	2	2
Right center	3	3	1	7
Center	4	4	0	8
Bottom center	4	3	9	16

Table 2: Showing the page positions of the News related to November 1st Early General Elections on the First Pages of the Cumhuriyet, the Hurriyet and the Yeni Şafak newspapers between the dates of November 1st, 2015 - November 7th, 2015

After November 1st ,the newspaper using the most subheadings in one week is the Cumhuriyet newspaper. The newspaper has used 10 subheadings. The total number of subheadings in three newspapers is 20. News about the subject in all three newspapers are located at the bottom left and bottom right of the page mostly with the number 22.

Continue pages	Cumhuriyet	Continue pages	Hürriyet	Continue pages	Yeni Şafak
Page 2	1	Page 8	2	Page 2	1
Page 4	11	Page 9	3	Page 3	1
Page 5	9	Page 10	1	Page 4	2
Page 6	6	Page 15	2	Page 5	1
Page 7	4	Page 16	3	Page 6	2
Page 9	3	Page 17	1	Page 10	2
Page 10	1	Page 18	3	Page	2
				11	
Page 12	3	Page 19	2	Page	2
				12	
Page 13	10	Page 20	9	Page 13	1
Page 14	1	Page 21	3	Page 14	6
TOTAL	49	Page 22	4	Page 15	11
		Page 23	1	Page 16	5
		Page 26	1	Page 17	4
		TOTAL	35	Page 18	2
				Page 19	2
				Page 20	1
				TOTAL	45

Table 3: Showing the continuation pages of the News related to November 1st Early General Elections on the First Pages of the Cumhuriyet, the Hurriyet and the Yeni Şafak newspapers between the dates of November 1st, 2015-November 7th , 2015

The Cumhuriyet newspaper has given the most continuation pages with 11 news on the 4th page. The Hurriyet newspaper has given the continuation of 22 news on the 20th page, the Yeni Safak newspaper has given the continuation of 11 news on the 15th page.

	The number of relevant photos used in Newspapers
Cumhuriyet	41
Hürriyet	33
Yeni Şafak	35
TOTAL	109

Table 4: Showing the News Photographs related to November 1st Early General Elections used on the First Pages of the Cumhuriyet, Hürriyet and Yeni Şafak newspapers between the dates of November 1st , 2015-November 7th , 2015

The number of photographs used in the relevant pages of the newspapers is 109. While 41 of those have been used by the Cumhuriyet newspaper, 33 of those have been used

by the Hurriyet newspaper and 35 of those have been used by the Yeni Safak newspaper.

	Cumhuriyet	Hürriyet	Yeni Şafak
AKP	22	2	1
CHP	16	17	15
MHP	13	21	11
HDP	20	15	14
AKP	0	30	30
President	2	6	10
Primeminister	5	4	12
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	0	0	0
Erdoğan	23	9	22
Ahmet Davutoğlu	1	3	0
Davutoğlu	14	8	22
Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu	3	1	1
Kılıçdaroğlu	7	6	5
Devlet Bahçeli	1	1	1
Bahçeli	1	4	5
Selahattin Demirtaş	1	0	0
Demirtaş	1	1	0
Government	5	4	7
June 7	12	21	7

Table 5: Showing the digital data of the featured words in the News related to November 1st Early General Elections used on the First Pages of the Cumhuriyet, Hürriyet and Yeni Şafak newspapers between the dates of November 1st, 2015- November 7th, 2015

The Cumhuriyet newspaper has used the word ‘Erdoğan’ most. The Newspaper has used the word ‘Erdoğan’ 23 times. We see the word ‘AKP’ 30 times in the Hurriyet newspaper. ‘AKP’ is the word the Hurriyet newspaper used most. Like the Hurriyet, the Yeni Safak newspaper has also used the word ‘AKP’ 30 times in its news.

Conclusion

- November 1st Early General Elections held after June 7th General Election led Turkey to meet a different political picture compared to five months before. The most important result of this different picture is that the AKP who lost the ruling majority on June 7th elections emerged as a power again. News and comments in Turkish media are primarily related to this changing picture.
- The words ‘Erdoğan’ and the ‘AKP’ have been involved most in news contents of the weekly publication of the Cumhuriyet, the Hurriyet and the Yeni Şafak newspapers after November 1st. While the Cumhuriyet has used the word ‘Erdoğan’ 23 times, the

Hurriyet and the Yeni Şafak have used the word 'Erdogan'30 times. If the election results are considered, Tayyip Erdogan and the AKP are seen to have set the agenda after November 1st

- While all the news in each of the three newspapers was related to the election results on the first day after November 1st ; as the time went by, election news in all three newspapers was seen to decrease. The change of the agenda along with the election results over time has also designated the news contents of the newspapers.
- All three newspapers have formed and published the news about elections in accordance with the newspaper ideologies. Their ideological attitudes towards elections have been decisive in the news presentation.

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