

## *News Coverage of Municipal Elections 2014 In the Turkish Press*

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### **Abstract**

This study analyses how political advertisements on the Turkish press during the March 30 2014 municipal elections season reflected the ongoing political developments in Turkey and in particular the escalating relations after the December 17 process between the Community (the Hizmet) movement and the Ak Party. Seven newspapers with different political tendencies have been selected for the last thirty days prior to the elections for a comparative content analysis of political ads and visuals, including their degree of reflection of actual political events.

The obtained results showed that although there was an apparent harmony between the newspaper chosen by the parties for advertising and the target publics of the parties, it was also apparent that media outlets that have lost the harmony they presented in previous eras were vetoed. While the election campaign advertisements of the AKP focused mainly on the leader and also the accomplishments of the government and the municipalities, the theme that presented the December 17 operations as a coup against the government was also used frequently.

Keywords: Political advertisements, March 30 2014 elections, Gülen Movement, R. Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkish Press.

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## Introduction

The Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP*), or the White Party (Ak Parti) as preferred by her adherents, was founded in August 1, 2001. Among their founders were names like Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Abdullah Gül and Bülent Arınç.

Shortly after foundation, the AKP participated in the 2002 general elections and won a decisive victory with 34,63 % that allowed Abdullah Gül to form the 58th government without coalition. As the political restrictions and conviction of party leader Erdoğan ended he was able to return to his party as the new prime minister on March 1, 2003 (<http://tr.wikipedia.org>). This government resulted in a greater consolidation for the party and her leader with a 46,6 % vote and 341 deputies and lasted until the 2007 general elections. This increase of voter affirmation repeated itself in the 2011 general elections with 49,9 % for the 3th Erdoğan government.

Ak Party showed her election success also at municipal level. The 2004 municipal elections yielded a 41,67 %, which showed some decrease in the 2009 elections with 38,8 but only to increase again to a vote of 43,4 % in the March 2014 municipal elections.

R. Tayyip Erdoğan stood up as a presidential candidate in the August 2014 elections and was the first Turkish President who was elected by popular vote with 51,8 % of the votes.

The roots of the *Gülen movement* began with the appointment of its founder Fethullah Gülen as an imam to the city of İzmir. Gülen gave free courses in Quran seminars which included moral and ideological inspirations, to mediate his thoughts to the masses he gave sermons in a great many cities and it was the youth that attended his sermons during these years that formed the core of his movement in later years. During the 1970'ies, Gülen's conversation gatherings transformed into conference series, and he initiated "Noor camps- camps of light". These schools which were established by different Turkish entrepreneurs in various places in the world are called the Gülen/Hizmet Schools after their common source of inspiration and include pre-school up to university education. The actual number is estimated as more than 2000 in 160 countries in the world, all are legally/organisationlly independent from each other. The schools are enrolling students by exams, and they are known as preferred particularly in the Middle Asian Turcic countries by the children of elites and bureaucrats. Bright students who are without the sufficient means are given education grants.

Known as the Gülen Movement or the *Community*, the movement is also called in recent times as "Hizmet", (the Service). The movement excelled in Turkey and throughout the world particularly by its educational institutions at levels of preparatory courses, elementary schools, middle schools, high schools and universities. Other institutions that are known or rumored in relation with the movement include media outlets, private hospitals, and finance institutions, enterprises of various fields and also foundations and associations operating in different areas as dialogue between religions and cultures, charity and help organisations. As the Gülen movement started with preparatory courses and schools,

teachers, students, doctors, academics, journalists, businessmen and traders seem to be presented frequent throughout the movement (Toruk, İ.,Güran, S., 2014).

Another party subjected to our analysis is the main opposition party Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party). The party has been founded in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and had been at power uninterrupted from 1923 to 1950 as the first party (also the only one for the most part), thus assuming the honor of being the founder of the Turkish Republic. After this single party era, the party has been only for very scarce and short times at power. At the 1980 coup d'état, the party had been shut down by the military government along with all parties of the time, with the aim to interrupt ineffective politics and renew the political actors. The party was able to reopen in her inherited name in 1992. Nowadays, the party views and presents herself by leaders and supporters mostly as Atatürkist, social liberal and social democrat. After notable historical leaders were Atatürk, İnönü, Bülent Ecevit, the present leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu has assumed leadership from Deniz Baykal.

The Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Action Party) has been founded in 1969 by Alparslan Türkeş as a nationalist party that upholds conservative views. While the party has never been at power alone, it served many times as member of coalition governments. The party was closed together with the other parties by the September 12 military coup, yet resumed political activity under the names Muhafazakâr Parti (Nationalist Conservative Party) then Milliyetçi Çalışma Partisi (Nationalist Working Party) and took its original name in 1993. The leader of the party is at the present time Devlet Bahçeli.

The probes of December 17-25 against some ministers of the Erdoğan administration and some businessmen who were named in relation to the administration, have been regarded by Premier Erdoğan as a complot against the administration and in response, officers who had functions in those probes have been targeted in many investigative operations. During the March 30, 2014 elections campaign, *The Community of Service* which he believed as being behind these operations was coined by the Prime minister as “the parallel structure” –a condemnation that was used in all communications from campaign meetings, speeches and even advertisements. Erdoğan used many expressions during his election campaign that targeted the Community: “false prophets”, “false saints”, “hollow fake scholars with empty hearts, empty minds”, “they made a nasty plot against the national will”, “parallel construction”, “we will come into your den”, “organisation”, “assassins”, “leeches”, “virus”, “network of treason”, “agent”, “terror organisation”... (Toruk, İ.,Güran, S., 2014).

After a long and close cooperation era that lasted years on, the Community and the Administration had achieved together an important success particularly in the ending of the military tutelage (guardianship) by way of the judiciary. The Community has assumed important duties with all its sympathisants and its media in raising the votes of the AKP and passing over critical referendums. On the other hand, the administration had presented always a positive look on people close to The Community in means of assignments to significant posts in bureaucratic ranks. The Turkish Language Olympics organisations of the Community hosted ministers and even the Prime minister himself as guests. The children of many deputies have their children in schools related to the Community. The Community enjoyed much growth during the 12 years of AKP administration and became a big social and economical

power which incited uneasiness among other sections of the traditional base of the AKP. However, it must be remembered that it was only five months before their split that the Prime minister gave an example of their friendly relations with the Community by saying “we gave everything they wanted”. It can be said that in the last couple of years, the social and economical power which the Community gained nationally and internationally, associated political power and this caused a distance between the Community and the administration (Toruk, İ.,Güran, S., 2014).

The first incident that created some mischief between the movement and the government that was observable through the media agenda was the “The Gaza Flotilla raid” in 31 May 2010, where the movement took an oppositional stance towards the initiative which was organized by various groups and subsequently gained government support. On the other hand, 7 February 2012 marked a profound crisis, where the president of the Turkish Intelligence Organization (MİT) was invited for inquiry by the prosecutor. The Prime minister, who at the time was secretly hospitalized for a medical operation, resisted the procedure which for him was a police-judiciary complot that was targeting the MİT. The ensuing “fight” reached its top with the *December 17* operation of the police and judiciary against the government. The operation on alleged corruption made a big impact on the political agenda of the nation. Many people –included children of ministers got arrested. Four ministers, whose names were mentioned in the corruption probes, were forced to resign.

Turkey entered into election period under the most strained conditions and also one with the largest participation since years. Again the AKP emerged victorious with getting 43,4 % of the votes and also maintaining her dominance in the important municipalities of İstanbul and Ankara.

The Ak Party elaborated in campaign meetings the fight with “The Parallel Structure”, pledged to complete the so called Resolution Process, and to sustain the work-action-serve policy.

The timid attitude of *The Community* in the Kurdish issue, her role in the 2009-2010 KCK arrests, Kurdish political actors expressing discomfort of the Community, PKK leader Öcalan stating that *December 17* was a coup, this all contributed to the impression that attempts against the government were targeting *The Resolution Process* and thus prevented Kurdish politics from joining the anti-Ak Party front (Dalay, G.,2014).

### **Political Advertising**

Political Advertising has developed together with the development of mass media and is a frequent approach in contemporary political life. After emerging and developing as theory and practice in the USA, political advertising spread throughout the world as a common practice.

Political advertising is one of the most important factors in political campaigns. Actually, political advertising has become a prevailing mode of communication between politicians and the publics they want to govern. While political advertising is used mainly as a means to influence election outcome, in other periods, political

advertising is also used frequently for influencing public opinion over issues of national interest by political parties, interest groups and individuals (Kaid, 1999:423).

The main objective of political advertising is to persuade electors who consist of various demographic and social origins to vote for their party and candidates. Rather than forming long standing attitudes, political parties and candidates aim more to entice undecided voters while on the other hand, they are concerned to enforce the party loyalty of their established adherents (Nimmo, 1970:166-167). A means to achieve this, is political advertising through newspapers.

*Negative advertising* targets a rival candidate either for his/her past record or his/her stance in political issues etc, or targets directly the image over personal characteristics and/or behavior (Johnson-Cartee and Copeland 1989). The most aggressive form of negative advertising is sometimes called “attack” advertising. Although some political (Garramone, 1984) advertising studies demonstrated that negative advertisings could backlash on their sponsors, the habit of mudslinging did not cease. Actually, other research were able to show that the perceived success of attack advertising was not unfounded, although it required the support of believable information (Ansolabehere et. al, 1994).

Many commentators and politicians (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995 ) in the US have reflected a general public discontent as they related negative campaigning with increased political cynicism and a resulting voter aversion from the polls, which would clearly undermine the fundament of the whole “democratic” system for all parts. *The Clean Campaign Act of 1985* sought to limit negative spots during campaigns.

On the other side, campaign professionals are convinced in the contrary: in hard-fought political fights, negative advertising may agitate strong feelings for the combatants and thus, increase voter involvement. The subsequent process sees more voters interested in the debates and issues which may lead to changes in attitude and voting behavior. A political polarization of the public is thereby intended (Garramone et al. 1990).

However, research on influence of negative advertisings on voting behavior was not able to produce conclusive findings, more, contradicting results continue to be a support to attack campaigns (Benoit, Leshner, & Chattopadhyay, 2007). The numerous factors that interact to yield a persuasion effect are studied in relation to known variables as source credibility, party identification, age, and also the special circumstances of each example. An important part of negative ads are associated with emotional appeals of fear, anger or related topics to agitate the voter and take arms (Brader, 2005).

On the other hand, political races in France and Britain seem not as emotional as in the US (Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 2006). We would suggest that Turkey is in this relation more similar to the US; political conflicts tend to be presented as fundamental.

Newspapers are one of the most used media in local elections. Party and candidate news and also advertisements on newspapers play an important role in election campaign communication (Powell and Cowart, 2003:119). Further, candidates who

aim to reach out to many minorities –be it ethnic or professional or otherwise- are achieving campaign effectivity by giving ads to–generally weekly- newspapers which are appealing to these publics (Trent and Friedenber, 2000:335). In Turkey, local newspapers in various regions give ads of locally known candidates for much more reasonable fees to a geographically limited audience.

Two most recalled newspaper advertisements for local elections were ads prepared for the Anavatan (Motherland) Party (ANAP) for the 1989 municipal elections. “Would you want a helpless mayor?” and “Would you want a mayor who speaks a different language than you?” were the slogans which made a great advantage for the municipal candidates of the government party since they implied that a mayor of the opposition would not be able to do much service. As the local administrations were dependent on the central government in means of income and budget, the municipal administrations could be partially affected from this circumstance. While this dependency has decreased today, in the minds of the voters –partially the lesser educated voters- this impression might still be of some effect. While this striking advertisement of the governing party ANAP had aimed to put pressure on the opposition, the voters had not acquiesced to this threat and the opposition party SHP had come out with a more successful election result.

In the 1994 local administrations elections, the İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality waterworks director Ergun Göknel of the SHP was subject to bribery and defraudation allegations which was reflected in an advertisement with the slogan “this bribery and defraudation has become a TV show” –the serial İSKİ on the Star Tv channel. In these elections, the Refah Party had won the İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality and introduced the mayor Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to Turkish Politics (Toruk, 2005:65).

Another interesting developmental point of political advertising in Turkey was a DYP advertisement with the slogan “Stability requires courage! A signature will suffice”. A visual which featured a contract prepared by the notary and featuring the signature of the DYP leader Tansu Çiller challenged the leader of the rival – because both parties were contending for the same political space- ANAP leader Mesut Yılmaz to sign too: “Who gets the fewer votes and at the same time gets the fewer places in the parliament should resign”. This challenge never materialised since both parties of the middle right shared their political lot in the elections. While ANAP got more votes DYP managed to get more seats in the parliament and thus both leaders appeared unchallenged (Toruk, 2005:130).

## **Methodology**

The right to advertise for the political parties allowed the parties in the municipal elections of March 30, 2014 to call out to the voters in various media like the press, open air media and particularly on Tv. For this study, we choose advertisements for election campaigns that were printed in the national press during March 1-30, 2014 as subject for content analysis. Frequencies and chi square analysis have been done on SPSS 15.0 software.

Although methods of text analysis have been applied since history as a means of literary critics, an effective scientific method based on objective standards did not emerge until WW2, when a government project was directed by Harold Laswell with

the aim to evaluate propaganda texts that were used by the axis powers. Laswell et. al. harnessed in the 1940'ies some of the outcome of their research in their book *Language of Politics* which laid the way for the application of content analysis in various disciplines (Prasad, 2008). Berelson made content analysis famous with his *Content analysis in Communication Research* which illustrated its versatility and also reliability which are based on sound and clear scientific rules.

Content analysis enables objective observation and drawing conclusions of communication. Berelson defined content analysis as a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the measurable content of a communication (Prasad, 2008). Although Weber (1985) understands the communication means explicitly as *text*, which undoubtedly is the usual application subject of most content analysis -also everything from visual cues that frame and accompany the text and even visuals and symbols up to audiovisual cues and characteristics of Radio and TV and similar communication can be related to the content of a communication (Prasad, 2008). Krippendorff (1980) embraces all communication content with the term *data* and formulates content analysis as the research technique for making inferences from this data about their context that can be verified as valid and are replicable.

### **Newspaper Presentation of Political Advertisements**

Under the course of the tension environment that began with the December 17 events, the elections had developed into almost a referendum for the administration. Political advertisements printed between March 1-30, 2014 on the newspapers Bugün, Hürriyet, Milliyet, Sözcü, Star, Y.Şafak and Zaman have been content analyzed.

Table 1. Distribution of Advertisements to the Newspapers

<i>Newspaper Name</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Aggregate Percentage</i>
Bugün	4	3,0	3,0
Hürriyet	40	30,1	33,1
Milliyet	7	5,3	38,4
Sözcü	10	7,5	45,9
Star	30	22,6	68,5
Yeni Şafak	31	23,3	91,8
Zaman	11	8,2	100,0
<i>Total</i>	<i>133</i>	<i>100,0</i>	<i>100,0</i>

A total of 133 advertisements were distributed among the newspapers with 40 ads on the Hürriyet, 31 ads on Yeni Şafak, 30 ads on the Star, 11 ads on the Zaman, 10 ads on the Sözcü, 7 ads on the Milliyet and 4 ads on the Bugün.

53,4 % of the advertisements were printed on the last page of the newspapers, 20,3 % on the third page, 10,5 on the fifth page. 78,2 % of the ads were full page.

Table 2. Size of Advertisements by Coverage Area

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Aggregate Percentage</i>
Full Page	104	78,2	78,2
Half Page	15	11,3	89,5
Quarter Page	14	10,5	100,0
<i>Total</i>	<i>183</i>	<i>100,0</i>	<i>100,0</i>

All 133 advertisements were printed in color; all of them also featured graphics like picture or logo alongside the text. The most used single graphic element of all ads was the picture of the AKP leader. No one of the advertisements made by the AKP was issued without the portrait of the party leader. Background color of the advertisements was 68,4 % white and 17,3 % red. Preferred color for advertisement headlines was red with 36,8 %, followed by blue-red-white with 22,6, white with 18 % and blue with 9 %. Combinations of red-white was chosen most frequently with 39,8 %, followed by red-blue with 18 %. Most used slogan in the ads was “always the nation – always duty” with 26,4 %, followed by “always forwards on the way of becoming a great civilization” with 24,2 % and “always forwards on the way of new Turkey” with 19,8 %.

The most used (93,4 %) portrait of the party leader in the advertisements by the AKP was a close-up, the less used picture (6,6 %) featured a middle shot of the walking leader looking left that possibly made reference to the classical campaign song of the party “together walked we on these roads” and the slogan “don’t stop, let’s continue”. All of the AKP advertisements featured a left hand pressing the “yes” seal on the party logo as featured at the ballot accompanied by party name and leader. AKP advertisements always emphasized the leader Erdoğan which was unusual for municipal elections. AKP advertisement headlines emphasized the nation, the society and civil administration with the color blue was used in relation to the state and Turkey and the color red was used in relation to national (cultural) values.

Table 3. Distribution of the Advertisements according to the Parties

<i>Parties</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Aggregate Percentage</i>
AKP	90	67,7	67,7
CHP	17	12,8	80,5
MHP	14	10,5	91,0
Others	12	9,0	100,0
<i>Total</i>	<i>133</i>	<i>100,0</i>	<i>100,0</i>

All AKP ads were printed as full page and 90 % on the last page on the chosen newspapers Hürriyet, Yeni Şafak and Star. The newspaper with the largest circulation, Zaman of The Hizmet-Service Movement which had obtained an important share from the AKP ads in the past elections, went away empty handed. The CHP choose the dailies Sözcü, Hürriyet, Zaman and Milliyet for printing their ads. The right-wing MHP elected to print on the Zaman, Yeni Şafak and Bugün while The Worker’s Party



choose Sözcü, Hürriyet and Milliyet. 58,8 % of the CHP ads were full page, 35,3 % were half page, and 5,9 % were quarter page. 64,2 % of MHP ads were quarter page, 28,6 % were full page, 7,1 % were half page. While the ads of the AKP were printed balanced on three newspapers, the Hürriyet obtained a slightly bigger share with 34,4 %. The newspaper of choice for the MHP was the Zaman with 78,6 %. The CHP choose mostly the Milliyet with 35,3 % and at the very least the Bugün –known also as related to *The Community*.

The AKP published a total of 90 full page ads on three newspapers. The CHP published 17, the MHP 11 and the other parties published a total of 15 advertisements. As seen on Table 2.1.3. the AKP ads were nearly 6-fold bigger as their closest adversary and the occupied space was almost 9 times larger. The most frequently used headline of the AKP ads was with 4,4 % “no passage to treason” followed by “let the stability continue” and “Turkey everywhere”. Other themes were with 3,3 % each: “Always Unity, always brotherhood”, “choose action, not empty talk”, “always forward”, “esthetical cities”, “we are leading in Europe in agriculture”, “participative municipalities, strong democracy”, “Great Cities of Great Turkey”, “we are carrying the youth to the future”, “The Nation won’t bend, Turkey won’t break”, “it’s past now”, “builders of firsts-the Ak (white) municipalities”, “our job is serving the human”, “Ak municipalities-green cities”, “the cities are producing, Turkey is growing stronger”, “serving is our job”, “our difference is in our work”, “New Turkey New Cities”, “Strong Women”, “from local to global: Brand Cities”, “education first, education always”, “We speeded up Turkey”, (A reference to the National Anthem): “Don’t fear, the banner flying on this dawn will never die”, “Great civilization, strong nation”, “Turkey: A model in healthcare”, “We are removing the obstacles”, “Turkey’s choice”.

The AKP elaborated excessively the achievements in their 12 year-long government, in particular the economical achievements, the achievements of the municipalities with party affiliated administrations, the progress in transportation, agriculture, healthcare, collective housing and urbanization. Also the legal regulations for women, affirmative action and rights allowed to the youth and in particular to the disabled were addressed frequently in the advertisements. The AKP ads addressed the ineffective municipal administrations of the past terms and appealed to the voter to choose right. After reminding the political stability and economical success of the last 12 years, in order to maintain the stability and avoiding adventure, a vote for service and not for adventure was suggested. Alongside frequent references to national unity and brotherhood, the National Anthem was cited too. The most frequent theme referenced in the AKP ads with three whole ads and with 10,7 % was an approach stressing strong democracy and national will and citing the slogans “no passage to treason”-“The Nation won’t bend, Turkey won’t break”. The December 17 inquiry process against the government was countered with catchphrases which addressed the Gülen movement: “They’re plotting and ambushing”, “They’re threatening the national security!”, “They are marketing the most confidential secrets of the state to foreigners!”, “They are attacking our unity and brotherhood!”, “Again, the banner will win, brotherhood and union will win again!”, “We are again fighting for national independence!”, the Gülen movement has been accused for being against the *opening* process.

Other slogans were “Always the Nation, always duty”, “Always forward New Turkey!”, “Always forward for Brand Cities!”, “Always forward towards becoming a great civilization!”, “Always forward for removing the obstacles!”, “You are Turkey, show your power!”, “The Nation won’t bend, Turkey won’t break”.

Themes used by the CHP were “The Consciousness of Turkey”, “We will make the poor homeowners”, “Put your heart into it”, “Turkey’s unifying force”, “İstanbul is not helpless”, “An End to Polarization: Values of the Republic”. Slogans of the MHP were “Enough said: MHP will speak!”, “The model to Turkey is MHP!”, “Unifying Politics”, “Everything for us is MHP”.

The percentage of themes used in AKP advertisements were with 14,4 % “domestic and foreign powers plotting against the government (the parallel structure)”, followed by “the successful urban administration of AKP affiliated municipal administrations” with 10 %, “denigration of past national administrations and municipal administrations” with 7,8 %, “a municipal administration understanding that respects nature and environment” with 6,7 %. Other themes of significance were “social state and social municipal administration”, “Municipality of the Metropolis”, “The strengthening economy and industrialization”, “The strengthening local administrations”, “economical aids to foreign countries”, “the emphasis on history and culture”

## **Conclusion**

The March 30 municipal elections were held under the impact of the December 17 operations and this gave the election more a nature of a general election which found its reflection on the presentation of the advertisements. Party achievements on both national administration level and municipal level were emphasized, party programs were communicated and in particular the picture of the leader was on the forefront on all advertisements. In comparison to the advertisements of the other parties, AKP ads were prevailing by frequency and area used. The most frequent used theme in AKP advertisements was “*the community of service* plotting against the party and the will of the nation”.

Also confidence and stability were frequently stressed in conjunction with the accomplishments of the administration and the municipalities. The relatively very scarce advertisements of the two opposition parties CHP and MHP emphasized (national) unity in their advertisement strategy in contrast to the polarizing strategy of Erdoğan. It can be concluded that the constitutional identities of the parties produced compatible campaign strategies. Political advertisements during the campaign period consisted cultural texts which reflected many aspects of the problems and the conflicts of the era.

We can conclude that the AKP ad strategy employed a mix of positive and negative strategies that proved ultimately successful. The positive messages referred to the past achievements of a long administration, to progress, to political stability, national dignity, leading to promises of a better future, peace, unity, brotherhood. These positive messages of hope referring to fundamental national worries were frequently linked to negative emotional appeals of fear and anger. The positive ads were in hard

contrast with the negative attack ads that portrayed an evil complot targeting the whole nation.

The election success evidences the conviction and confidence which the messages of the incumbent party was met within her own electorate and also shows the failure of the rival communication strategies. It can be said that; electorate faith, long prevalence in the news agenda, inflexible leadership found a convincing help by the preceding negative attack campaign which targeted the party and her leader.

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