AKP'S LOCAL POLITICS: PERCEIVED DISCRIMINATION AS AN OBSTACLE TO ETHNIC MOBILIZATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper will be an attempt to explain changes in ethnic votes by focusing at local political activities of political parties and relating them to theories of ethnic solidarity. It will try to demonstrate how perceived discrimination and intergroup polarization affect the ability of the AKP to form permanent channels of communication among citizens of Kurdish origin, making their incorporation in the political network of the party more difficult. Within this respect, the study will mainly analyze whether AKP's local organization characteristics and activities changes across districts that are different in terms of the discrimination the Kurdish citizens faces. To test the hypothesis, field research has been effectuated in major neighborhoods of Beyoğlu and Sancaktepe which diverges in terms of perceived discrimination indicators among residents of Kurdish origin.

Keywords: Political parties, Ethnic mobilization, Ethnic solidarity, Elite incorporation, Political network, Local politics, Local organizations, Electoral strategy, AKP, Kurdish problem.

AK PARTİNİN YEREL DÜZEYDE SİYASETİ: AYRIMCILIK ALGISININ ETNİK MOBİLİZASYONA ETKİSİ

ÖZET

Bu çalışma siyasal partilerin yerel örgütleri ve etnik kimlik üzerine yapılan çalışmaları birleştirerek etnik kökenli oy davranışındaki farklılıkları anlama amacını gütmektedir. Ayrımcılık algısı ve farklı etnik gruplar arasındaki kutuplaşmanın, benzer göç geçmişleri olan Kürt kökenli vatandaşlar arasında AK Parti'nin kalıcı iletişim kanalları kurma ve bu yolla onları partinin siyasi ağına dahil etme kapasitesini nasıl etkilediğini inceleyecektir. Bu doğrultuda çalışma, kutuplaşması farklı olan ilçelerde, AKP'nin yerel örgüt yapısı ve faaliyetlerinin değişiklik gösterip göstermediğini inceleyecektir. Bu varsayımı test etmek amacıyla, kutuplaşma oranı farklı olan İstanbul'un Beyoğlu ve Sancaktepe ilçelerindeki mahallelerde araştırma gerçekleştirmiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Siyasal partiler, Etnik mobilizasyon, Etnik dayanışma, Siyasal katılım, Siyasi ağlar, Yerel siyaset, Yerel örgütler, Seçim stratejisi, AK parti, Kürt sorunu.

Introduction

In the aftermath of 2011 general elections and the wake of the formation of a new constitution, the Kurdish problem in Turkey is one of the most salient issues. The rise of ethnic parties and major factors contributing to this rise has been a major concern in Turkey as well as other countries who witness similar developments. The rising vote shares of BDP in 2011 general elections in the South East region of country have once more confirmed the importance of the ethnic dimension in the Turkish political realm. Furthermore, a parallel rise in large cities of the West and witnessed violence in several parts of these cities once more indicates the potential for the anti-systemic violent and changing nature of the ethnic problem in Turkey. The problem is no more limited to the South East region of the country as it was traditionally perceived but also has become a major concern in larger citizens of the West. The major cause of this change is the large waves of forced migration of citizens of Kurdish origin all over the country because of the policy adopted by the Turkish government during 1990's as the result of the ongoing war between the terrorist organization PKK and the Turkish military forces.

This recent widening of the Kurdish problem in large Western cities may provide suitable data in understanding how different experiences witnessed by immigrants affect the support for ethnic parties. When district level electoral outcomes in general elections since 2002 are analyzed different patterns can be observed among these new immigrants. Explaining such a difference among immigrants that share a common pre-migration experience will be the main aim of the study. Based on the general literature on the rise of ethnic parties, this divergence will be explained in terms of different patterns of relations between different ethnic categories. The study will suggest that these relations are one of the factors affecting the ability of the AKP to incorporate the citizens of Kurdish origin within the political network that acts as a mechanism through which support to the party is consolidated. The study suggests that polarized intergroup relations negatively affect the formation of positive channel of communication that would provide the multi-ethnic party information on the needs, demands of voters. Additionally, it expects activities of the local organizations to be less effective among voters since polarization prevents them to perform these activities publicly. Furthermore, these relations is expected to negatively affect the party's ability to

recruit citizens of Kurdish origin within its ranks since it makes their identification more difficult and increase the cost of participation.

Within this perspective, fieldwork has been effectuated in the districts of Beyoğlu and Sancaktepe as districts that witnessed large immigration flows of citizens of Kurdish origin after 1990's having similar pre-migration experiences but facing different experience after immigration which contributed to different degree of perceived discrimination. The next step will be to observe the change in the mobilization efforts of the district branches of AKP through the incorporation of the citizens of Kurdish origin within the political network of the party and the degree of their success.

The main data used in the study is collected from the participant observations on AKP district branch activities effectuated during the legal electoral campaigns and indebt interviews realized before and during the electoral campaigning period with a considerable large number of AKP and BDP activists. During the data collection period, main attention has been devoted to the understanding of the nature of the relations between different groups and how these relations relate to the diverging activities and recruitment strategies of AKP.

The first section will be a brief evaluation of the testing hypothesis in the light of existing studies on mobilization and rise of ethnic consciousness. The second section will consist of a brief evaluation of AKP's mobilization strategy. In the next section, the selection of the districts and the factors affecting perceived discrimination of each district will be highlighted. In the last section differences in AKP's mobilization strategy and its ability to incorporate citizens of Kurdish origin in its political network in each district will be evaluated.

Explaining Different Patterns in the Support for Ethnic Parties

Studies on the rise of ethnic parties mention the inability of multi-ethnic political parties to meet the demands, regardless of its content, of an ethnic group as the major cause for the rise of ethnic parties. Within this respect, perceived discrimination in the distribution of resources of major parties is expected to influence both political participation and electoral support of members of an ethnic group (Levy & Hetcher, 1985). From the point of view a multi-ethnic political party that has the objective to mobilize a certain ethnic group, the presence of a mechanism through which it can reach these voters is an important condition affecting its responsiveness on the diverse demands of the ethnic group in concern. At the local level, a party's ability to get informed on the basic needs of the members of an ethnic group is based on the formation of communication channels through which information on the demands of the ethnic group and success of the party to meet these demands are transmitted.

The study suggests that the ability of the party to incorporate members of an ethnic group within its political network is decisive in explaining the increase for the support of ethnic parties. In situations where the ethnic group is incorporated in the political network of the party, probability in the support of the party by ethnic groups increases. The ability of a multi-ethnic party to form these channels is influenced by the nature of the relations between actual elite/supporters of the party and the members of the specific ethnic group. The more conflictual is the nature of intergroup relations the more it will be difficult for the party to form this kind of a network with the members of an ethnic group. When ethnic solidarity is lower and inter-group relations are more peaceful, members of the ethnic group will be more open to these attempts of the political party. Within this respect, ethnic-group conflict is mentioned to be one of the factors that reinforce this process.

Indentifying the political access as a mean to attain economic ends, actual studies confirm our expectation. These studies see the rise of the support to ethnic parties as the exclusion of the rising elites of an ethnic category from the economic benefits as a result of their under-representation within the major parties. (Horowitz, 2000; Chandra, 2004, 2010; Hechter, 1978; Hechter & Levi, 1994). So incorporation of ethnic elites facilitates the formation of such a link between the party and members of an ethnic group (Chandra, 2010). The basic idea of the importance of ethnic representation derives from the fact it is the cheaper for political parties to incorporate the members of an ethnic group for support since information flows will be easier due to the presence of an ethnic network. Furthermore, ethnic representation further contributes to support since ethnicity is an objective, easily identifiable factor that acts as information that provides members of an ethnic group on whether their interest will be represented and met by a party (Chandra 2006, 2010). Nevertheless, Horowitz (2010) suggests that polarized intergroup relations will negatively affect the party's ability to incorporate elites of an ethnic group.

Then, what are the factors that increase polarized relations among different ethnic groups? From a political perspective, theories on ethnic solidarity mainly focus on the under-representation of rising new ethnic elites within the ranks of major parties as the main factor increasing ethnic consciousness and ethnic polarization in a given geography. Early studies effectuated on the rise of ethnic identities mostly explain the rise of ethnic parties as the outcome of the failure of the state to socially, economically and politically integrate these groups during the modernization process (Deutsch, 1954; Gellner, 1964; Lipset & Rokan, 1967). Alternatively, more recent studies explains the rise of the latter as the result of the modernization process which creates economic, social and political exclusion of the ethnic

groups (Hechter, 1978; Nielson, 1985; Hechter & Levi, 1994; Olzak 1983). Studies on immigration explain the rise of ethnic consciousness among a specific ethnic group to be based on the experiences faced after the process of immigration. Basing their perception on a more sociological approach studies on immigration mention intra-group solidarity and intergroup conflict and as a result, the failure of integration of the immigrant in the social, economic and political system in which they have migrated as the main factor contributing to perceived discrimination among immigrants of different ethnic identities. Independently from their previous experiences and ethnic identification, most of these studies mention that ethnic consciousness rises as perceived discrimination among the new comers increases. Within this respect, the literature has identified concentration of a specific ethnic group in a given geography, economic inequality between ethnic groups as factors that increases ethnic polarization (Lipset & Rokan, 1967; Hechter, 1975; Nielson, 1985; Olzak, 1983; Yavuz, 1998; Cornell 2001; Kirişçi & Winrow, 2008). Furthermore, immigration studies cite the perception of the host society on the immigrants as a threat to their identity as a factor that increases ethnic solidarity among the immigrants (Claassen, 2004; Olzak, 1983; Schildkraut, 2005; Leighley, 1996).

This study will take into consideration three factors of polarized inter-group relations, whether citizens of Kurdish origin are concentrated in certain neighborhoods or not, whether there is an economic inequality between neighborhoods or not and whether citizens of Kurdish origin are late comers to the district or are among the founders of the district. Next, it will investigate how factors that increase polarization act as an obstacle to the incorporation of citizens of Kurdish origin within the political network formed by AKP at the most local level. To perform this task, the differences in the problems AKP's organizational branches encounter and their diverging mobilization strategy across districts with different degree of polarization will be investigated. It will try to demonstrate how negative experiences after migration negatively affect the party's organizational capacity to reach and recruit citizens of Kurdish origin which in turns make the formation of permanent channels of contact that consolidate and increase the party's votes more difficult, further contributing to perceived discrimination.

Although most of studies on mobilization mainly focus on the nationwide dimension of electoral competition, this study will adopt an alternative approach by focusing on the importance of local organizations and their mobilization efforts in shaping this linkage by forming a permanent network between the party and the voters. This why before testing the

major hypotheses AKP's mobilization strategy at the local level will be briefly evaluated in the next section.

AKP Mobilization at the Local Level

The success of political parties in general and Turkish literature has mostly been evaluated in terms of the factors determining voting behavior. While some studies have focused on the role of ideological predispositions in shaping voters' preferences, other studies have focused on the tactical distribution of state resources for electoral purposes to understand electoral outcomes. In the Turkish context, the first body of literature has found the importance of major cleavages such as religion, ideology, left-right positioning and economic evaluations in explaining the party choice of the voters in general elections. Within this respect center-peripheral relations measured in terms of religion in defining voters' party choice have been measured to be decisive in explaining electoral behavior in Turkey (Ergüder, 1980-81; Esmer, 2002; Kalaycıoğlu, 1994, 1999; Çarkoğlu & Kalaycıoğlu, 2007, 2009). More recently Çarkoğlu has highligthed the growing importance of economic evaluations in understanding the support for AKP in 2007 general elections (Çarkoğlu, 2008). Another set of studies have focused on the tactical distribution of state resources as an alternative way of explaining political parties' electoral support (Auyero, 2001; Brusco V. at all, 2004; Calvo & Murillo, 2004, 2010; Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007). In the Turkish context most of these studies have found the existence of patronage or clientelism as a tool used by political parties to gain vote (Sayarı, 1977; Özbudun, 1981; Schuler, 1998; Sunar, 1990; Heper & Keyman, 1998; Günes-Ayata, 1994). Both set of studies that have mainly focused on the content of the voting process while leaving untouched the means through which political parties connect the voters for this end. Such a situation derives from the dominant perception of voter/party linkage to be indirect and on ad-hoc basis (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1992: 71; Kitschelt & Wilkinson 2007; Çarkoğlu, 2010). AKP's success among citizens of Kurdish origin is evaluated in a similar way and the mechanism through which the party reaches these voters has been unexplored. This study will adopt an alternative approach by focusing on the importance of local organizations and their mobilization efforts in shaping this linkage by forming a permanent network between the party and the voters that consolidates support to the party. This kind of an analysis is especially valuable under the present situation in Turkey where a AKP is consolidating its support, contributing the establishment of a stable pre-dominant party system.

This section will mainly focus on identifying the general mobilization strategy of AKP at district and neighborhood level. Within this realm, first, the importance of the composition and functions of the local organization for the party as part of the mobilization strategy that affect the success of the contact will be evaluated. Second it suggests that the factors affecting the success of this strategy are the ability of the party to access different communities, meet their demands and to publicly inform people on its activities performed.

As expressed by most of the AKP representative the party's mobilization strategy can be identified as "*descending to the public*".[1] The representatives insist on mentioning that this strategy is not limited to the election campaigning period but continues all the remaining periods. The party's main aim can be identified as consolidating its support by reaching different segments of the society at the lowest level as possible and incorporate them within its political network. Scholars such as Auyero (2001) and Kitschelt (2007), highlight the importance of such networks in the formation of a common identity and voluntary loyalty to the party. Within this respect, the larger the network and its reputation in providing aid, the larger is its consolidation effect on the party's support and incorporation of new elites. This is why the major aim of the party is to widen this network through the incorporation of new elites, to increase the activities it performs and to make it publicly known.

In order to perform this end, the party is represented by three branches: main, women and youth with an administration of at least 11 members for each branch in each neighborhood. Within this respect, the selection of the organizational branch is based on the members' ability to reach different segments of the citizens and successfully represent the party in daily community relations to increase its positive image and support. Who the activists are and how they are evaluated by different segments of the society seem to be an important criterion for the success of mobilization and as a result, the recruitment of the activists. Within this respect, the party's representatives are very delicate to represent the general demographic characteristics of the geography they function in their recruitment strategy. To increase the possibility of further contacts recruiting people that have time, are active, respected, dominant (mostly local elites) in their society, have good relations with the residents as a whole are further characteristics that the party pays attention. The district and neighborhood president pays attention to have members from respectively all the neighborhoods and streets so that he/she can be informed of all events taking place in its responsible geography. This provides the members the opportunity to increase both the amount and the quality of the contacts; and to participate actively in daily lives of the citizens as the representatives of the party.

When the daily activities of the local branches, which necessitate the acquirement of this kind of information, are taken into consideration being represented in the social networks and informed of all kind of event is vitally important to increase both the quantity and the quality of the party's image. The local activist act as the representative of the party contributing to the infiltration of AKP in the daily lives of citizens the most local level. Participating in social events taking place in the neighborhood such as marriages, funerals and visits of newborns, ills, elders, Koran readings or *Mevlüt* and organizing home visits and home talks in order to interpret the party's policies and get informed on citizens demands is also in widely effectuated activity. With these activities, the activists reinforce the positive image of the party since it is perceived as to be sensitive to all aspects of the citizens' personal life. Another important function of the local branches especially neighborhoods branches is providing aid to the helpless. This mostly takes the form of acting as a broker between the citizens and the municipality's services or private organizations. Incorporation of people from different communities in the political network of the party provides opportunity to the activists to enter in different communities and inform them by the intermediary of people known by these communities, increasing the positive effect. In all the neighborhoods observed, the neighborhood president was informed by its local administration on the events taking place among their hometown relatives or in the streets that they reside or prepared a home talk by their intermediary. This also increases the general perception that the party does not discriminate between different communities in these activities. Representation and these activities is not expected to be uniform in all districts or neighborhoods changing due to the polarization degree in the districts having high number of residents of Kurdish origin. Within this respect polarized nature of the relations between citizens of Kurdish origin and the party activists is expected to negatively influence the reputation of the party since it makes contact more difficult and force activists to form their activities more discreetly.

To test this hypothesis, the next part of the analysis consists of the identification of the districts and measurement of polarization indicators in each selected district. The following part of the analysis will track diverging strategies of the party concerning elite recruitment and activities of the local branches due to polarization constraints.

Identifying the Districts and Neighborhoods

The major aim of the study is to understand the nature of the complex relationship between vote consolidation, polarization and the mobilization capacity of AKP among citizens of Kurdish origin at the district and neighborhood level. The main variables expected

to influence a flow from AKP votes to BDP votes among citizens of Kurdish origin, are the ability of the party to incorporate these voters within the permanent network of its local organizations. In return, this is expected to be influenced by the number of Kurdish citizens residing in the district, socio-economic indicators of the district, polarization degree of each district. This necessitates the selection of districts and neighborhoods similar in terms the residing number of Kurdish citizens and socio-economic indicators with different electoral patterns in terms of the electoral patterns and polarization factors[2]. The major difficulty in classifying the districts according to these variables is the unavailability of clear statistical data for most of the variables. So the study has sustained the available statistical data with semi-structured interview effectuated with AKP and BDP representative in the districts.

Table 1 show the data of the districts in Istanbul concerning the votes of AKP and BDP in 2002, 2007 and 2011 general elections, and the socio-economic status and estimated numbers of citizens of Kurdish origin. The district level electoral outcomes are the easily available data which can be found in the Turkish Statistical Institute website. The only data available at the district level for socio-economic indicators is the illiteracy rate of each district which has also been extracted from the Turkish Statistical Institute website. The most important difficulty has been to identify the approximate numbers of citizens of Kurdish origin in each district. The major difficulty in this calculation is the lack of this sort of data either at national, municipal or district level. Although there are some considerable studies that mostly use mathematic estimations, nearly all estimated the citizens of Kurdish origin at the national level ranging between 7-16 million people (Koç & Toros, 1992; Van Bruinessen, 1998; Sirkeci). Even if these studies merits attention they do not provide a useful framework for the purpose of this study since it is impossible to extract the number of citizens of Kurdish origin at the district level. The only useful data is from the research of Mutlu (1996) effectuated in 1995 which is based on an estimation of the Kurdish population living in each cities based on the 1935 and 1965 national census. The estimated Kurdish population of each district has been calculated based on the sum of the estimated Kurdish population in cities in Turkey which has been measured by Mutlu multiplied with the number of citizens registered to each city in each district. It is important to note that this calculation does not provide a precise number of the residents of Kurdish origin but at least it gives a statistical base for an accurate comparison of the districts in terms of population. Nevertheless the identified districts with higher number of citizens of Kurdish origin is sustained by the work of Çelik (2002) who identifies districts such as Ümraniye, Bağcılar, Sultanbeyli, Gaziosmanpaşa,

Küçükçekmece, Sarıyer and Beyoğlu as districts where large number of Kurdish citizens have immigrated after the 1990s.

The study aimed at selecting two districts which are different in terms of volatility rates of BDP but similar in terms of the estimated population of Kurdish origin and literacy rate. When data of electoral outcomes is examined two distinct groups can be observed. The first group consists of districts where BDP votes have been nearly constant in 2002 and 2007 elections but considerably rose in 2011 general elections, while the second group consists of districts where BDP votes decreased from 2002 to 2007 general election but was stable or slightly higher in 2011 general elections. Given the political environment of the 2011 general elections in which the Kurdish issue was highly salient and AKP openly distanced itself from the Kurdish demands, this outcome is interesting. For the purpose of this study, after detailed evaluations of the districts via indebt-interviews with party representatives, Beyoğlu and Sancaktepe have been selected from each group due to their clear differing characteristics in terms of volatility rates both at the district and neighborhood levels and similarity in terms of estimated numbers of residents of Kurdish origin and literacy rate. Furthermore, these two districts are similar in terms of other variables that may affect the mobilization strategy of AKP. Both districts are similar in terms of their amount of population, the vote shares of AKP in last 2007 general election is considerably close and both districts' municipal mayor is from AKP. Additionally, most of the citizens of Kurdish origin have migrated after 1990 as a result of the war between the Turkish Military force and PKK in the Southeast region of Turkey and have a similar pre-immigration experience. Respectively, these immigrant witness worse economic conditions and a harsher competition than the early immigrated citizens (Çelik, 2002: 118).

Identifying Polarization in Beyoğlu: Socio-economic and Demographic Characteristics

Beyoğlu is characterized by a drastic inequality across neighborhoods in terms of socio-economic indicators which is accompanied with a concentration of the residency of citizens of Kurdish origin in neighborhoods with poor economic and living conditions. Furthermore, there exist a great conflict between the citizens of Kurdish origin and the old residents of these neighborhoods due to the changing character of the neighborhoods after the immigration process. These processes reinforce perceived discrimination among citizens of Kurdish origin, reinforcing pre-migration experiences.

Table 1: Vote shares of AKP, BDP; estimated Kurdish population and illiteracy rate across of each district'

District	est. Kurd	Illiteracy	AKP (%)			BDP (%)		
			2011	2007	2002	2011	2007	2002
Çatalca	4,02	0,0367	38,28	27,13	16,43	0,87	0,48	1,63
Beykoz	4,33	0,0539	52,60	47,86	42,32	1,91	2,32	3,32
Şile	4,59	0,0565	52,17	43,33	33,48	1,83	6,88	1,96
Beşiktaş	5,66	0,0153	20,28	18,62	13,95	2,23	0,24	1,57
Kadıköy	6,54	0,0183	24,54	22,13	17,44	1,86	3,58	2,05
B.paşa	7,03	0,0439	54,31	50,37	43,42	1,87	1,58	2,21
Sarıyer	7,31	0,0372	40,32	36,97	32,81	2,48	0,98	3,91
B.çekmece	8,01	0,0342	45,19	41,46	31,44	2,15	1,73	4,84
Bakırköy	8,30	0,0169	26,13	22,56	15,82	1,67	1,32	1,74
Silivri	8,43	0,0350	41,35	31,29	18,93	3,03	1,73	3,51
Şişli	8,70	0,0380	35,77	32,05	25,20	3,91	1,34	2,62
Üsküdar	8,77	0,0358	49,93	46,26	39,10	1,97	3,06	3,51
Eyüp	9,35	0,0477	48,66	45,42	39,01	2,78	2,02	3,78
Ataşehir*	9,56	0,0479	45,59	43,22	37,22	2,91	4,86	6,10
Maltepe	9,59	0,0330	42,12	38,24	33,22	2,13	3,21	4,18
Pendik	9,80	0,0515	56,39	51,96	44,81	2,9	2,76	4,82
Adalar	9,87	0,0348	32,55	23,96	16,37	4,18	8,20	3,11
Çekmeköy*	10,18	0,0569	53,81	49,22	43,61	3,68	3,21	7,54
Beylikdüzü*	11,01	0,0229	43,78	40,70	30,80	2,59	1,90	4,09
Kağıthane	11,38	0,0483	55,08	52,96	43,62	3,82	2,63	4,89
Kartal	11,83	0,0498	45,51	41,82	35,20	3,11	4,13	5,37
Ist. Mean	**11,88**	**0,0507**		54,81	37,18		5,98	5,51
Ümraniye	12,19	0,0515	57,86	56,61	48,89	3,47	4,31	6,40
Tuzla	12,89	0,0471	51,55	45,92	37,50	3,57	4,23	6,58
Avcılar	13,12	0,0433	42,56	38,33	29,19	3,80	3,41	5,64
G.osmanpaşa	14,14	0,0622	57,07	53,30	43,50	5,43	3,91	6,04
Beyoğlu	14,38	0,0702	50,65	47,56	39,71	8,28	4,95	6,36
K.çekmece	14,73	0,0578	46,32	43,07	36,44	5,65	4,98	7,32
Arnavutköy*	15,34	0,0951	61,86	55,14	43,88	6,73	5,64	11,27
Sancaktepe*	15,58	0,0813	52,06	51,62	42,24	7,50	6,96	12,48
Bahçelievler	16,09	0,0499	51,75	48,47	39,40	5,13	4,64	6,58
Fatih	16,29	0,0529	51,71	46,93	37,81	4,94	3,00	4,31
Esenler	16,38	0,0730	64,71	60,53	53,72	6,09	4,99	6,87
Güngören	17,01	0,0483	55,63	50,90	43,04	4,66	3,90	5,20
Esenyurt*	17,17	0,0684	48,58	45,50	34,11	8,62	7,42	15,44
Bağcılar	18,21	0,0689	60,42	56,98	48,95	7,28	6,52	9,15
Sultangazi*	18,41	0,0748	59,76	57,11	47,72	6,81	4,83	8,11
Başakşehir*	18,47	0,0551	51,55	46,90	34,85	7,73	8,38	15,61
Z.burnu	18,54	0,0589	51,56	46,93	41,10	8,3	5,56	5,90
Sultanbeyli	20,01	0,1056	68,85	67,16	50,28	9,47	6,61	14,57

*these districts were not legally districts in 2002 and 2007 general elections. The votes shares of the district whose administrative border has changed for 2002 and 2007 have been re-calculated based on the act that determined the administrative borders of the district. Detailed data on 2007 and 2002 general elections results is available at the websides of YSK (High Electoral Board) and TUİK (Turkish Satistic Institute).

Based on the 2010 Census Beyoğlu has a population of 248.084[3] which 181.151[4] of them was a registered voters in the 2011 general elections. The District is composed of citizens that have migrated from very different regions of Turkey. The district's illiteracy rate is 7% according to the 2009 Census which is higher than the average of Istanbul. The district has an estimated Kurdish population of 38.174 which corresponds to nearly 16% of the total population (see table 1). This population consists of immigrants largely from provinces of Mardin, Batman and to a smaller extent other provinces such as Siirt, Diyarbakır, Bingöl, Ağrı (see table 2). In terms of electoral pattern, AKP is the first party in 2011, 2007 and 2002 general elections with a vote share of 50.65%, 47.6% and 39.72% respectively which is close to Istanbul mean. While CHP is the second party in these elections, BDP has a vote share of 8.28%, 4.97% and 6.36% in 2011, 2007 and 2002 general elections. The district is very old in terms of settlement and most of the Kurdish population has immigrated after 1990 due to the war between the military forces and PKK in the South East Region of Turkey. When the estimated shares of citizens of Kurdish origin and BDP votes shares are compared, the data confirms our expectations. Approximately nearly half of the residents of Kurdish origin do not vote for BDP. Given the nature of the electoral competition (which is mainly between AKP and BDP) in the province where citizens of Kurdish origin have migrated, it seems that AKP has a considerably high electoral support among these citizens. Furthermore, data indicates that there is a change in the electoral choice of citizens of Kurdish origin from AKP to BDP.[5]

Although, statistical data on the demographic, socio-economic dispersion across neighborhoods is not available, information extracted from interviews and observations confirms the diverging socio-economic conditions both in terms of literary rate and economic conditions and number of residing citizens of Kurdish origin among neighborhoods. The district may be divided into 3 sub-regions which have very different patterns of socio-economic development accompanied with different demographic characteristics, mode of life, political values and voting behavior. The district witness the concentration of citizens of Kurdish origin in a specific sub-region that is economically unequal compared to the rest of the district. The first sub-region consists of neighborhoods such as Gümüşsuyu, Cihangir which are prestigious residency places and have high socio-economic conditions with

residents constituting the elite population of Istanbul. In contrasts to other sub-regions, social organization on these neighborhoods is typical of the city life where strong neighborhood life or dense social networks mostly based on hometown origin are missing. In terms of electoral patterns CHP is the strongest obtaining approximately 40% of the votes and remaining votes are divided between AKP which is the second party with approximately %20 of the votes and MHP.

Table 2: Hometown origin and Estimated Numbers of Citizens of Kurdish Origin in Beyoğlu and Sancaktepe (2010)

City	% or Kurdish pop.	number of citizens registered		est. no. of Kurdish Population	
		Beyoğlu	Sancaktepe	Beyoğlu	Sancaktepe
Adana	10,50	1724	618	181	65
Adıyaman	43,90	720	390	316	171
Afyonkarahisar	0,02	418	705	0	0
Ağrı	70,45	2758	6240	1943	4396
Amasya	0,76	1635	3192	12	24
Ankara	6,74	992	559	67	38
Antalya	3,22	6507	172	210	6
Artvin	0,02	1084	1123	0	0
Aydın	4,02	349	182	14	7
Balıkesir	2,48	1775	414	44	10
Bilecik	3,93	266	178	10	7
Bingöl	76,63	2751	9404	2108	7206
Bitlis	64,03	1234	1801	790	1153
Bolu	0,61	724	652	4	4
Burdur	0,20	76	42	0	0
Bursa	4,47	2491	408	111	18
Çanakkale	0,13	1582	203	2	0
Çankırı	1,26	998	1895	13	24
Çorum	3,89	888	3805	35	148
Denizli	3,08	265	106	8	3
Diyarbakır	72,78	2253	789	1640	574
Edirne	0,14	1052	147	1	0
Elazığ	43,15	2083	2545	899	1098
Erzincan	19,74	9380	9741	1852	1923
Erzurum	16,22	4431	12312	719	1997
Eskişehir	3,10	521	219	16	7
Gaziantep	13,22	806	430	107	57
Giresun	0,26	29300	6065	76	16
Gümüşhane	2,27	2435	1517	55	34
Hakkari	89,47	58	53	52	47
Hatay	5,48	1372	568	75	31
Isparta	0,27	947	662	3	2
İçel	9,71	1264	451	123	44

İstanbul	8,16	38828	12316	3168	1005
İzmir	6,91	1173	336	81	23
Kars	19,02	909	15992	173	3042
Kastamonu	0,25	11531	10327	29	26
Kayseri	4,56	3313	1274	151	58
Kırklareli	0,24	608	219	1	1
Kırşehir	6,61	1016	399	67	26
Kocaeli	7,94	877	516	70	41
Konya	5,42	3624	898	196	49
Kütahya	0,03	181	234	0	0
Malatya	17,20	2005	2786	345	479
Manisa	3,48	664	376	23	13
Kahramanmaraş	15,37	1348	2006	207	308
Mardin	74,84	12522	618	9371	463
Muğla	2,06	188	77	4	2
Muş	67,75	696	2236	472	1515
Nevşehir	2,10	775	1834	16	39
Niğde	2,59	697	1562	18	40
Ordu	0,04	4148	20428	2	8
Rize	0,06	11776	5675	7	3
Sakarya	2,82	867	1101	24	31
Samsun	0,58	5947	5557	34	32
Siirt	78,78	3043	3051	2397	2404
Sinop	0,80	3186	8668	25	69
Sivas	11,72	20168	18241	2364	2138
Tekirdağ	3,30	1013	283	33	9
Tokat	1,71	4046	20383	69	349
Trabzon	0,04	2482	7258	1	3
Tunceli	55,90	2526	3715	1412	2077
Şanlıurfa	47,84	1242	508	594	243
Uşak	0,21	123	61	0	0
Van	70,70	1537	3013	1087	2130
Yozgat	2,25	664	2576	15	58
Zonguldak	0,13	1596	995	2	1
Aksaray	4,67	871	460	41	21
Bayburt	2,27	427	1370	10	31
Karaman	5,42	1070	119	58	6
Kırıkkale	6,74	288	236	19	16
Batman	76,81	4106	322	3154	247
Şırnak	79,03	740	240	585	190
Bartın	0,13	1397	1458	2	2
Ardahan	19,02	631	9214	120	1753
Iğdır	19,02	365	2299	69	437
Yalova	6,86	369	76	25	5
Karabük	0,70	1041	1274	7	9
Kilis	13,22	283	142	37	19
Osmaniye	10,50	922	272	97	29
Düzce	0,61	443	515	3	3
Total		243411	241104	38174	38565

Source: *Turkish Statistical institute web site http: www.tuik.gov.tr (Accessed 27 May2011)

The second sub-Region consists of neighborhoods such as Kaptanpaşa, Piyalepaşa, Sütlüce, Fetihtepe, Kulaksız where socio-economic conditions and illiteracy rate is considerable in the middle. The resident of these neighborhoods are old immigrant that have immigrated to Istanbul for economic reasons from different regions of Turkey, mostly Black Sea and Central Anatolia. In some neighborhoods low amount of Kurdish population is settled. Neighborhood life can be identified with dense social networks which are mainly based on hometown origin. Hometown Associations and coffee houses are among important socialization places in the neighborhoods. Relations between residents are considerably peaceful, except a few streets in some neighborhoods such as Şark Sofrası in Kaptanpaşa where illegal organizational activities occurs. AKP's vote shares are high in these neighborhood and they constitute the electoral base of the party. In these neighborhoods both CHP and BDP are relatively weak, but other right wing parties such as MHP, SP are relatively strong.

The third sub-region consists of neighborhoods such as Çukur, Bülbül, Hacıahmet that constitute the region known as Dolapdere, have remarkably low socio-economic conditions and form the periphery of Beyoğlu. High illiteracy rate, poverty and unemployment accompanied with low infrastructural investment are the basic characteristics of these neighborhoods which socio-economic situation has gradually decreased as a result of migration flows. The demographic characteristics of these neighborhoods have drastically changed after 1990 due to the settlement of large numbers of citizens of Kurdish origin that have immigrated to Istanbul due to security reasons from cities like Mardin, Batman and Diyarbakır and are member of the *Sunni* Islamic sect.

Most the citizens of Kurdish origin living in this sub-region have very bad working conditions with no insurance and are very poorly paid. The main activities of these citizens that are unqualified due to poor education is making and selling moles which is an activity effectuated by the family as whole and has a very difficult production process where especially women spend hours in cleaning the moles in water or textile production. This situation is reinforced by the lack of demand for unqualified labor force in the district where the main economic sector is based on tourism and services that necessitate an educated, qualified labor force. Interviewed citizens of Kurdish origin mostly complain that they can not find a job because of their ethnicity, that people see them as '*thieves*'[6]. The inability to find a

job and perceived discrimination by these citizens in the job application process makes integration even more difficult, reinforcing ethnic consciousness and violence.

Furthermore, these neighborhoods, which were once prestigious residency places of Beyoğlu are identified as neighborhoods that must urgently, been included in the urban transformation program, due to the poor conditions of the building. This situation also makes it more difficult for infrastructural investment. This is a fact that increases tension and conflict between the state representatives and the residents increasing the perceived discrimination by its residents and making integration more difficult especially for neighborhoods such as Çukur or Bülbül. Most of the interviewed citizens have proclaimed that the services of the municipality in the neighborhood such as collecting the trash, making parks, infrastructure investments are inadequate.

Conflictual Inter-group relations are reinforced by the daily relations in the neighborhoods. These neighborhoods are very old settlements that had once a higher profile in terms of socio-economic conditions. In most of these neighborhoods, this is especially the case for Hacıahmet, where citizens of Kurdish origin reside in the down side of the neighborhood; the old and new migrants were not very integrated in residential terms and in social activities. Economic and social inequality between the citizens of Kurdish origin and other residents is also apparent within each neighborhood. As one walks from the top of the neighborhood which is populated by the old residents to the down side the deterioration of the living conditions can be observed.

The deterioration of these conditions and the changing social environment due to the migration of Kurdish citizens with different life styles and experiences seems to create reaction and discrimination by the part of the old immigrants. During the interviews effectuated with AKP local branches the conflict between the old residents and the new ones and the reaction of the former could be felt. The citizens of Kurdish origin are seen as citizens that could not adapt themselves to city-life and have to be educated to become more modernized. Although most of them expressed that they did not wanted them in their neighborhood at first but have no problem to live with them together; they mostly saw them as the main reason of the bad conditions of their neighborhood and violence occurring in the district. The support of BDP, which is perceived as an illegitimate party and mostly identified with the terrorist organization PKK, is seen as a proof of their closeness to violence. Violence seems to be a habituated event in these neighborhoods, which especially increases during the electoral campaigning periods. Activists mostly expressed that even if these do not create

violence in the neighborhood due to the fear to be recognized it is these citizens that participate to violent events in the district.

Signs of conflictual inter-group relations can also be observed form the discourse used by the activists. One of them expressed that these citizens would do everything to acquire money even if he/she does not need it. Another one recommended me not to go the side of the neighborhood resided by Kurdish citizens alone due to security reasons. Most of them complained that they do not know how to live together, that they consciously throw their trash from their windows on the street or that they damage the parks or store on purpose. These citizens are mostly not interpreted as an equal member of the neighborhood society but as new comers that have to be educated to get civilized and learn the basic rules of living together in a city.

Identifying Polarization in Sancaktepe: Socio-economic and Demographic Characteristics

In contrast to Beyoğlu, Sancaktepe is characterized by a considerable equality across neighborhoods in terms of socio-economic indicators and more or less equal dispersion of the residency of citizens of Kurdish origin across neighborhoods. Furthermore, the citizens of Kurdish origin are among the creators of the district which is a new settlement place formed by immigrant of different regions and that economically and socially developed within 10 past years. Within this respect, discrimination factors are lower in Sancaktepe than in Beyoğlu.

Based on the 2010 Census Sancaktepe has a population of 256.442[7] which 169.839[8] of them was a registered voters in the 2011 general elections. The District is composed of citizens that have migrated from very different regions of Turkey. The district's illiteracy rate is 8% according to the 2009 Census which is higher than the average of Istanbul. The district has an estimated Kurdish population of 38.595 which corresponds to nearly 16 % (see table 1) of the total population and consists of immigrants from divergent provinces where Bingöl, Tunceli, Van, Ağrı and Siirt are among the largest in quantity (see table 2). In terms of electoral pattern, AKP was the first party in 2011, 2007, 2002 general elections with vote shares of 52.06%, 51.44% and 42.24% respectively, which close to Istanbul mean. While CHP is the second party in these elections, BDP has a vote share of 7.50%, 6.81% and 12.48% in 2011, 2007 and 2002 general elections. The district is a new settlement area and most of the Kurdish population has immigrated after 1990 and is among the first residents of the district. When the estimated shares of citizens of Kurdish origin and BDP votes shares are compared, the data confirms our expectations. Approximately nearly half of the residents of

Kurdish origin do not vote for BDP. Given the nature of the electoral competition (which is mainly between AKP and BDP) in the province where citizens of Kurdish origin have migrated, it seems that AKP has a considerably high electoral support among these citizens.

Although, statistical data on the demographic, socio-economic dispersion across neighborhoods is not available, information extracted from interviews and observation confirms the similarity of the socio-economic conditions in terms of both literary rate and economic situation within the district. All neighborhoods in the district have a neighborhood consciousness where social networks are mostly based on hometown origin. The district has been formed in 2008 by the unification of 3 sub-districts (*belde*), namely Samandıra (from Kartal), Sarıgazi (from Ümraniye), Yenidoğan (from Ümraniye). The district can be divided in two sub-regions in terms of socioeconomic indicators that are slightly different from each other. In contrast to Beyoğlu, although citizens of Kurdish origin are more concentrated in some neighborhoods, socio-economic inequality is not accompanied by a similar distribution pattern of citizens of Kurdish origin. Citizens of Kurdish origin are dispersed among neighborhoods with different socio-economic conditions. As an example, among neighborhoods with high number of Kurdish citizens, while neighborhoods such as Veysel karani and Akpınar where AKP is electorally strong, have lower economic conditions due to its peripheral characteristics; Neighborhoods such as Merkez or İnönü where opposition to AKP is high, economic conditions of the citizens are higher. Most of the citizens of Kurdish origin immigrated from cities such as Bingöl, Kars,Van and Tunceli. Except the later ones who are mostly from the *Alevi* sect, the majority of these citizens are from the *Sunni* Islamic sect. The district may be divided into three sub-regions with different demographic compositions and electoral pattern.

The first, region consists of some neighborhood from Sarıgazi such as Inönü, Atatürk, Merkez where the main residents are divided between immigrants from the Black Sea regions and East and South East Anatolia. The peculiarity of these neighborhoods which have large numbers of citizens of Kurdish origin is the considerable amount of *Alevi* citizens. As a result CHP is relatively strong vis-à-vis AKP, BDP has a considerable amount of vote. Although all segments are socially and economically integrated there is great ideological polarization between the Sunnis, *Alevis* and Kurds resulting in low volatility rates. The second sub-region consists of neighborhoods where citizens of Kurdish origin are lower and immigrants from Black sea region are high in numbers and AKP has a strong electoral base and BDP votes are low such as Eyüpsultan, Fatih, Osmangazi,Yendoğan, Merve and Safa. The last sub-region consists of neighborhoods that have a large amount of citizens of Kurdish origin and AKP is

the first party with high amount of vote shares. The vote shares of BDP are also considerably high in this neighborhood. Except in the neighborhood of İnönü where radical leftist groups are historically active, all segments of the society seem to be socially and economically integrated. There is not much discrimination towards the citizens of Kurdish origin who are perceived by the other immigrants as the integrated part of the neighborhoods.

The district is a newly developing area where huge factories from different sectors provide employment opportunities for the residents. The changing face of the district due to the construction of private residencies reinforce this economic development by providing more job opportunities, activating the daily economic activities of the small business as new residents with higher income move to these private residencies . As a result including the citizens of Kurdish origin most of the residents work in jobs that they can benefit from insurance rights. Municipal investment is effectuated nearly equally in all neighborhoods of the district diverging according to the basic needs and demands.

Most of the AKP activists expressed that violence and reaction of the citizens of Kurdish origin has considerably decreased due to the economic development in the region. Although violent events happen in the district especially during the electoral campaigning periods, these remain marginal and most of the residents do not take them seriously. Most of them see their Kurdish neighbors as their friends who they play cards on the evenings in coffee houses of the neighborhoods, participate at wedding or make home visits. The responsible of the violent acts is seen as a few teenagers that should not be taken seriously. One AKP activist proclaims that the BDP supporters that are normally tolerant resort to violence when they meet in large number for specific events. No major discrimination has been observed in either the attitude or discourse of the activists. Empathy to the experiences that the citizens of Kurdish origin have faced during Turkish Republican history in general and in their hometown before migration in particular dominates the discourse of the activists. As it will be analyzed in detail in the next part, this may be due to high numbers of activists of Kurdish origin working within the organizational branches of the party at different levels. An important observation is the delicacy of the activists to differentiate the citizens of Kurdish origin from the BDP voters. Most of the activists expressed that it would be misleading to automatically identify all Kurdish citizens as BDP supporters and that it can be seen from the election results that a great number among them give their support to AKP.

Diverging Mobilization Efforts of AKP across Districts:

AKP's Mobilization Strategy in Beyoğlu

Due cosmopolitan characteristic of the district, the central organizations of Beyoğlu branches consist of activists from different segment of society having different value and way of life. Representing approximately 15% of the residents of the district the citizens of Kurdish origin are under-represented. During the field research I have been able to meet only 2 activists coming from Kurdish origin. Conflict and polarization clearly act as an obstacle to the party's recruitment and mobilization strategy. One of them who rose to its position from the local branches, works in the municipally as field personnel responsible of distributing aid packages and is from older immigrants, expressed she was not exposed to discrimination personally but witnessed a lot of instances where attitudinal discrimination towards citizens of Kurdish origin was expressed during her duty at work. The AKP activists were more suspicious to the entry of the other activist who resided in the neighborhood of Hacıahmet and came from the Kurdish community who is ethnically more conscious. The district president was aware of the underrepresentation problem and expressed that they try to incorporate citizens of Kurdish origin among their organization but the lack of trust of these citizens due to the experience they have faced was a major obstacle.[9] When the neighborhood branches in the Kurdish populated neighborhoods is observed underrepresentation and lack of trust still seems the main problem. Within the branches of the neighborhoods such as Hacıahmet and Çukur there is only limited numbers of citizens of Kurdish origin who are active in women or youth organizations and who have newly been recruited. None of the less, forming the neighborhood organization seems to be very difficult in these neighborhoods. Given the concentration of each community in specific part of the neighborhoods and the conflictual nature of their relations, the inability to contact and reach voters make it difficult to find and incorporate AKP supporters and potential activists for the party. Most activists highlighted that their main problem was their inability to enter in the households of citizen of citizens of Kurdish origin and form close relations. This was especially been expressed to be difficult for male residents.

The main branch president of Hacıahmet, expressed that they should have activists in all street but they are not very successful in achieving this.[10] This fact affects the functions and activities performed in the neighborhoods. The party mostly relies on the youth and women organizations since they can work more discreetly more easily contact and enter in the households. In contrast with other neighborhoods where all branches work in coordination but separately, especially women and main organizations works together in these neighborhoods

in order to be able to reach more people. Even in that situation, all activists mention that there are a number of streets where they can not enter. Given the fact that AKP's local branches strategy was to make as more member as possible before the general election, the difficulty the activist in these neighborhoods face is sustained by the low number of party members in the neighborhood, which consist less than 10% of the population in Hacıahment and Çukur in contrast to nearly 20% on the whole of Beyoğlu.[11]

As a consequence, since recruiting citizens from Kurdish origin is difficult, basing its strategy on street representation, the party prefers to incorporate active people that have good relations with them and reside in the same street and use all kind of means to contact citizens of Kurdish origin. This is why they try to use the channels of the municipally or participate in activities of other civil organizations to meet and get informed about the events and demands of citizens of Kurdish origin. Furthermore, the activists try to detect the voters in need and communicate with them with the intermediary of the lists provided from the municipality that gives contacting information on the residents applying to municipality social aid and benefit from them. Determining these people is so important for the party that in one of the neighborhoods, the neighborhood president distributed questionnaires to be filled by citizens via people he knows in order to be able to detect these people more easily. During my interview with the woman branch president, she expressed that the organization became stronger in Hacıahmet due to the new neighborhood president who could "*enter everywhere in the neighborhood*".[12] The administrative board district responsible of the women branch in Hacıahmet is very old resident in the neighborhood who is respected by the residents and knows every one very well. Similarly, administrative board district responsibles of the Çukur neighborhoods are activists that works in the neighborhood's *Semt konağı* where the municipally provide social and economic aid, giving its worker the opportunity to enter in every households. Still the activists have difficulty in forming permanent channels of contact with the citizens of Kurdish origin.

Furthermore, all neighborhood presidents that I have been able to meet where newly recruited people that mostly joined the party after 2008. The main cause was expressed to be the failure of the former president to contact residents. Whatever its cause this is an important obstacle to the formation of permanent channels of communication required for the development of solid relations of mutual trust and commitment.

All the activists in Hacıahmet and Çukur that I have interviewed mentions that they prefer to work discreetly in their activities due to their fear of security. The president of Çukur says: "*they know that there are AKP representative but they don't know who they are. We*

work as intermediaries that know that representative. We don't want our car to be burn when violence occurs in our neighborhood".[13] They only expose themselves in home talks where only a small number of "*trusted*" people that are defined as more moderate towards the party participate, but these instances are reported to be low. Hacıahmet central branch responsible of the woman branch says that she is an activist of AKP and that they mostly ask her to quit this position, or they would behave very differently if they did not respected her.[14] During my studies with BDP activists, it was very apparent that they did not know AKP representatives in the neighborhood, which is an indication of the party's inability to form strong channel of contact. This in turn negatively affect the success of the party efforts since, people are not publicly informed on the activities of the party's activists, preventing the formation of loyalty towards the party.

The main aim of the party is to socially and economically integrate Kurdish citizens via the neighborhood branches activities and services of the municipality in order to decrease perceived discrimination, polarization and contribute to integration. A great number of the activists highlighted that their major motivation to enter AKP was to help people in their neighborhoods. One activist said, "*nothing can be more valuable than giving your hand to someone who is in need*".[15] The main activities rely on social assistance based on identifying the citizens in need and providing aid to them.

These clearly show both the importance role of local activists in forming contacting channels with the voters, the difficulty AKP Beyoğlu branch faces in these neighborhoods and the use of different means by the party to form these channels. It also confirms the expectation that the party tries to mobilize voters through the distribution of selective incentive especially for the aim to decrease polarization. The party's strategy may be identified as a long run attempt to first create positive relations between the activists and the residents of Kurdish origin independently of their party identity via social assistance, then to present themselves as the party's representative after they have built enough trust. It is clearly visible that the main problem of the party in these neighborhoods is the lack of permanent channels where the party can contact its supporters, get informed on their basic needs and provide them assistance which would reinforce party identification.

Relatively poor control of the party resources by the activists reinforces this situation which also decreases motivation for joining the party. In fact, the main difference between Hacıahmet and Çukur neighborhoods is at this point. Activists in the Çukur neighborhood have control over both the channel of communication and distributed resources through the activists that work at the *Semt Konağı*. This provides them the opportunity to both personally

contact these citizens, identify them, provides them their needs which reinforces party identification among supporters of AKP. In the Hacıahmet neighborhood the activist are deprived of such advantages making more difficult to consolidate party identification.

The district's electoral campaign at the neighborhood level for 2011 general elections also confirms the difficulty of the party to provide permanent channel and to work publicly. Both the party's districts and neighborhood organization did not organize any activities in these neighborhoods due to the increasing polarization at national level during the elections. The activists expressed that their aim was not to provoke people and they were afraid of the possible rising violence. The only activities at the neighborhood level were the distribution of the brochures and gifts of the party. Even in these activities they were obliged to retreat when violence occurred in other parts of the district. Nevertheless, the party still entered the commercial areas of the Çukur neighborhood and visited artisans where as Hacıahmet neighborhood which is larger in terms of population have been totally untouched by the electoral campaigning activities. In the latter neighborhood, the party preferred to enter the neighborhood through the activities of the municipality, which is composed of cultural visits, activities and a breakfast meeting with the residents of the neighborhood to introduce municipal work in which the construction of Hacıahmet Neighborhood house is the most important.

AKP's Mobilization Strategy in Sancaktepe

As in Beyoğlu, hometown origin and geographical representation is one of the main factors affecting Sancaktepe district recruitment strategy. Kurdish citizens that compose nearly 15% of the population are represented in higher numbers than Beyoğlu in both central boards and neighborhood branches. A great number of citizens of Kurdish origin occupy important posts. The district president, one of the vice president responsible of the organization and the man executive board member responsible of social affairs are among activists of Kurdish origin.[16] The high number of representation can also be found in the youth organizations. According to the district president representation could have been even higher but the low level of education works as an obstacle. This seems to be true especially for the citizens of Kurdish origin residing in the district given the fact that both the president and vice president are not from the district. None of the less, this situation can be observed for all residents given the low educational level of the district as a whole. When neighborhood organizations are taken into consideration representation seems to be higher than Beyoğlu given the moderate percentage of citizens of Kurdish origin residing in each neighborhood.

This situation is clearly an advantage for Sancaktepe neighborhood branches that more easily organize in the neighborhood with recruiting members of other communities and as a result, strengthens its organization. The high amount of resources in the district and strong control of the activists over both communication channels through their solid organizations and material resources, as they mostly work in the municipality, reinforce party identification among citizens of Kurdish origin that supports AKP. In creasing the reputation of the party.

Furthermore, access to these resources through the party also seems to act as a motivation tool for the recruitment of new activists. In lots of neighborhoods, presidents highlighted that citizens of Kurdish origin that are known to be closer to BDP have a desire to enter to the party. Still fluctuation exists among the neighborhoods where the party's organizational and electoral strength is lower in few neighborhoods like İnönü in which ideological polarization is considerably higher than the rest of the district. In these neighborhoods the party relies on street representation in order to reach these citizens and neighborhood branches activities are more similar to their counterparts in Beyoğlu. The woman branch neighborhood representative of İnönü was very aware of this fact and mentioned that she purposefully recruited new activists from the part of the neighborhood that she was weaker to be aware of the major events.[17] The activists mention that they routinely were informed by the events taking place in Kurdish families or their needs by their Kurdish and street activists and they could contact them in the daily activities, which mostly takes the form of Koran reading for women branches and Coffee-house or hometown associations' gathering for the main and youth organizations.

Although there are a great number of activists from Kurdish origin, it is interesting that most of these activists come from families that are traditionally closer to rightist parties. The incorporation of elites from pro-Kurdish families is a recent phenomenon that can cause reaction in the local branches. Still, there are active members from this segment of the Kurdish community, especially in main and youth branches who helps the party's branches to reach these citizens and incorporate them in party's activities. The difference between the women and main organization attitudes in Veysel Karani is a good example. While the representative of woman branches expressed that she made a detailed investigation on the ideological orientation of the family of the newly recruited Kurdish activist, the main and youth branches representatives very proud of the new recruited activist whose families were traditionally close to BDP.[18] None of the less, street representation is still an important criterion that informs the branches of the activities taking place in these communities. As an example the woman branch of Veysel Karani is informed by its activists of non-Kurdish

origin who are neighbors to Kurdish households. The mixed nature of the dispersion of different communities within the neighborhoods facilitates this kind of contact. Participation becomes easier due to the non-conflictual nature of daily relations. Although discrimination can not be observed and relations between activists are peaceful, competition between them can be observed especially in neighborhoods where AKP has a strong electoral support. The main doubt is not due to ethnic but ideological difference. I have been able to observe this situation especially among the women neighborhood branches that stated their doubts on the intention of the incorporated activists whose families are closer to BDP. Still this seems to be the result of individual attitudes rather than the party's strategy.

The non-conflictual relation among residents permits the activists to publicly perform their activities increasing their reputation. The activists' considerable success in meeting the demands of the citizens due to their access to resources reinforces this situation. Within this realm, different from Beyoğlu one can observe an increased desire to enter AKP's branches by the citizens of Kurdish origin whatever is the nature of their intention.

Recruitment of activists of Kurdish origin within AKP's local branch seems to further contributes to the normalization of the relations between different communities, decreasing the potential for conflict in the district. This also provides ground for the development of relations between AKP and BDP activists as a whole. After the AKP activists were exposed to a violent incident that I have also witnessed in the neighborhood of İnönü by BDP activists, the representative of Sarıgazi youth branch contacted BDP district president who proclaimed that this was an individual incident and not part of the party's strategy. Similarly, Activists that joined the party in its early years highlighted that before they were expose to great reaction from the citizens of Kurdish origin during their activities but that this has considerably changed due to decrease in prejudice as a result of non-discrimination in their activities. Now the party activists can function quite openly. Their activities are not different than in Beyoğlu, but in Sancaktepe they participate in all kind of activities as the representative of the party. This in turns reinforces the positive image of the party among citizens of Kurdish origin.

In contrast to Beyoğlu, the major objective of the activities is to consolidate the party's votes, make citizens more sensitive and increase support to the party rather than contributing to social and economic integration. Visits to residents for birth, funerals, and important events are routine activities of especially women branches. The activists kept an account of the visits to be performed in the neighborhood and organized the dates of these visits so as to participate with as many activists as possible. Furthermore activists mostly act as brokers

between the citizens and higher authorities to resolve the formers' demands and problems. Provision of economic aid and control of the economic situation of the citizens that benefit from the aid programs of the municipality is also a major function. The fact that a great number of activists works in the municipality reinforces their capacity to resolve these demands, further contributing to the positive image of the party. The presence of a permanent channel of contact between the activists and the citizens of Kurdish origin contribute to their incorporation in the network formed by the activists via their routine activities, consolidating the votes of the party.

The electoral campaigning activities for 2011 general elections show how the low polarization indicators and presence of permanent channels with residents of Kurdish origin affect the ability of the party to function openly nearly in all neighborhoods. Opposed to Beyoğlu, Sancaktepe was able to organize activities in all neighborhoods in which the party could contact citizens of Kurdish origin. Even in polarized neighborhoods such as İnönü, these citizens were more or less moderate towards the candidate deputies that salute them, listens their demands and problems in the artisan or coffee house visits. The individual characteristics of the activists who participated in the activities was also very effective to overcome violent acts, since most of them were respected and known people of the neighborhood having good relations with citizens of Kurdish origin. Visits to Kurdish associations, Kurdish coffees and households of Kurdish elite were effectuated without problem. It was clear that especially the participating activists were purposefully selected for each district based on their hometown origin so as to act as decrease the risk of violence and increase sympathy towards the party. Although most of the contacting offices of the party was stoned and burned at nights, a few act of violence occurred during the activities, these events were not taken seriously. None of the less, activists were careful in not provoking people and built an image of the party which is inclusive and against violence. As an example during their presence in the neighborhoods, the drivers of the election cars were careful not to open the elections song too loudly. When reaction was high or tension rose between different groups, the activists, even the younger one, were very calm and tried continue to their activities without giving any aggressive reaction.

Nevertheless, there is clear indication that the AKP activists in Sancaktepe was able to form permanent contact channels with citizens of Kurdish origin which enable them to be informed on daily events taking place in the community, to contact and detect the citizens that are close to the party. During the elections home visits for condolence or providing social aid and home visits to ill, aged citizens of Kurdish origin both close to AKP and BDP were

routinely effectuated without any problem. Furthermore, the activists were very well aware of who the residents they contacted were and their political orientation. It is clear that these permanent contacting channels contributed to the consolidation of votes among the citizens of Kurdish origin preventing BDP to re-gain its previous votes. These activities were both performed in neighborhoods such as İnönü, Merkez where support for AKP was lower and polarization was higher as well as neighborhoods such Veysel Karani or Akpınar where the party was stronger.

Conclusion

The study had the purpose to understand how perceived discrimination and inter-group polarization affects AKP's deferring recruitment and mobilization strategy at district level among citizens of Kurdish citizens. In order to do that participant observation during the 2011 general election campaigns and interviews with activists have been effectuated in the districts of Beyoğlu and Sancaktepe that differed in terms of polarization indicators. Within this respect, economic and social characteristic of the citizens of Kurdish origin in each district has been identified. Then the ability of the party to form permanent channels of contact via recruitment and mobilization strategies of AKP districts and neighborhood branches have been observed.

The study confirms the expectations that first, the degree of conflict in inter-group relations affects the party's ability to reach citizens of Kurdish origin and the nature of its mobilization activities. Second, access to material resources and channel of communications are influential in decreasing the affect of polarization and consolidating support of AKP among citizens of Kurdish origin. The case of Beyoğlu confirms that, when ethnic background is accompanied with high economic inequality and conflict between the old residents and new comers in the neighborhood, felt discrimination and potential for violence is high. In case of high polarization between different communities, developing permanent contacting channels via representation in the party's organizational ranks is very difficult. Although the party uses aid and assistance to mobilize the citizens of Kurdish origin the fact that the organizations works as discreetly as possible and have not been able to reach these voters decreases efficiency and contributed to the increasing support for BDP in 2011 general elections. It is also apparent that the major objective of the party is to strengthen its organization to overcome these constraints in these neighborhoods. Within this respect, control over the channels communication and material resources through the activists working in the municipality does act as a tool to overcome the negative effects of conflictual group

relations. In the case of Sancaktepe the low number of Kurdish citizens in each district, relative equality in economic terms contributing to peaceful inter-group relations has made it easier to form a strong local organization that has formed permanent contacting channels among citizens of Kurdish origin. Furthermore, new formation of the district, organic links between the party and the municipality, control over material resources seems to have contributed to this situation. As a result, recruitment based on representation and mobilization is performed more easily and openly by the party, which in turn contributes to the consolidation of the party's vote vis-à-vis BDP in 2011 general elections.

END NOTES

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[1] For more information on AKP's stategy at local level consult 'An Alternative Explanation to AKP's Electoral Success: Structure and Functions of the Local Branches', *Alternative Politics,* Vol: 3 Number: 4, February 2012

[2] Since it impossible to identify the change in the support of citizens of Kurdish origin to AKP across elections, based on the nature of the electoral competition in the South East region of Turkey highly populated by citizens of Kurdish origin the paper assumes that the major competing parties for the votes of these citizens is AKP and BDP. So, the study has mainly focused on the electoral volatility of BDP votes in order to understand the changing support for AKP.

[3] http://report.tuik.gov.tr/reports/rwservlet?adnksdb2=&ENVID=adnksdb2Env&report=turkiye_ilce_koy_ sehir.RDF&p_il1=34&p_kod=1&p_yil=2010&p_dil=1&desformat=htmlthe (Accessed 27 June 2011).

[4] http://www.ysk.gov.tr/ysk/docs/2011MilletvekiliSecimi/SecmenSandik2011.htm (Accessed 27 June 2011).

[5] Although increase in BDP electoral vote shares is not accompained by an equal decrease in AKP's vote share this situation is probably due to the spits in support to AKP from other right wing parties in the region such as Saadet Party, Genç Party. Such a situation may also be due to changes in the demographic patterns due to migration but change in population of Beyoğlu between 2007 to 2011 do not confirms such a large flow.

[6] BDP organization of Beyoğlu district, Istanbul, 20 december 2010, Personal Interview.

[7] http://report.tuik.gov.tr/reports/rwservlet?adnksdb2=&ENVID=adnksdb2Env&report=turkiye_ilce_koy_ sehir.RDF&p_il1=34&p_kod=1&p_yil=2010&p_dil=1&desformat=html (Accessed 27 June 2011).

[8] http://www.ysk.gov.tr/ysk/docs/2011MilletvekiliSecimi/SecmenSandik2011.htm(Accessed 27 June 2011).

[9] AKP Beyoğlu district president, İstanbul, 09 December 2010, Personal Interview.

[10] AKP Hacıahmet Main branch neighborhood representative, Istanbul, 07 June 2011, personal Interview.

[11] These are the numbers announced for march 2011 by AKP local branches. The Satistical information was provided by the Beyoğlu and İstanbul AKP Branches.

[12] AKP Beyoğlu woman branch districts president, Istanbul, 05 April 2011, Personal Interview.

[13] AKP Çukur Main branch neighborhood representative, Istanbul, 03 April 2001, Personal Interview.

[14] AKP Beyoğlu woman branch districts president, Istanbul, 05 April 2011, Personal Interview.

[15] AKP Hacıahmet Woman Branch organization, Istanbul, 07 May 2011 ,Personal Interview.

[16] AKP Sancaktepe district president, Istanbul, 12 March 2011, Personal Interview , AKP Sancaktepe vice president, Istanbul 31 March 2011, Personal Interview; AKP Sancaktepe social affairs responsible, Istanbul, 12 April 2011, Personal Interview.

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[17] AKP İnönü woman branch representative, İstanbul, 21 May 2001, Personal Interview.

[18] AKP Veysel Karani main, woman and youth organizations, İstanbul, 10 June 2011, Personal Interview.

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