

The Emergence, Consolidation and Significance of the AK Party in Turkey¹: Theoretical Framework and Methodological Approach

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Abstract: This paper aims to give the overall structure of my doctoral dissertation on the emergence, the consolidation and the significance of the current ruling political party in Turkey, the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi [AK Party]². This paper focuses firstly on the background to the research and motivating questions. Then, it tries to demonstrate the way that the Lipset-Rokkan cleavage structure and the centre-periphery approach form the theoretical framework and how they underpin the choice of the specified research methods. Thirdly, the paper explains the way that these research methods are currently being used in order to collect data. Finally, it explains the ongoing fieldwork and the way the data obtained from fieldwork will help to attain the objectives of the research, namely, to construct the socio-demographic profile of the AK Party's electoral base and to identify the factors that led to the AK Party's emergence and consolidation.

Key words: political parties; AK Party; Turkish politics; socio-economic factors; social cleavages.

¹ This paper constitutes only a part of my doctoral dissertation under the same title. This is still work in progress and some parts may be subject to revision upon completion of the data collection and analysis. Please do not cite without prior permission.

² Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi [AK Party]/Justice and Development Party

1. INTRODUCTION

My research focuses on the current ruling political party in Turkey, the AK Party. Before discussing the emergence of the AK Party, I will first present a brief history of the political environment in Turkey focusing on the rise of political Islam since the 1970s. Secondly, I will highlight the motivating questions that this doctoral dissertation aspires to address.

1.1 The Political Environment in Turkey from 1923-present

The Republic of Turkey was established in 1923 and religion was strictly separated from state affairs in 1937 (Berkeş 1998, 19). This constitutional principle prevails until nowadays and remains undisputable. However, due to the strict secular rules and praxis implemented within the single-party regime³, religious activities had to be undertaken in a silent and a subversive manner (Yavuz 2005, 88).

On 14th May 1950, following the shift to the multi-party system, the Demokrat Parti⁴ [DP] became a major political party. In contrast to the CHP's strict secular and statist economic policies, the DP adopted liberal economic policies and mildly conservative values, which created the traction for non-secular thinking, and later on, generated set of movements (Mert 2007, 22).

In the 1960s, the secular national identity began to compete with religious and historical motives through right-wing nationalism. This change of discourse had a great impact on the establishment of extreme right parties (nationalist and religious) at the end of 1960s (Ibid, 25). In addition, the development of the latter ones benefited from both the liberal constitution of 1961⁵ and the anti-communist stance of the State⁶ (Sunar and Toprak, 1983, 164 and Criss 2002, 482).

In 1970, the first indication of the politicization of Islam occurred with the establishment of the Milli Nizam Partisi [MNP]⁷ which was initiated by the leader of Nakşibendi İskenderpaşa cemaati⁸ (Yavuz 2007, 279).

In 1972, the first pro-Islamic party MNP, which was dissolved during the military intervention in 1971, was regrouped as the Milli Selamet Partisi [MSP]⁹. Its ideological stance was expressed in the National View¹⁰ (Çavdar 2008, 225 and 226). Even though the impact of the MSP on the politics of the 1970s was not significant, the post-1980 political, social and economic developments worked in favour of pro-Islam and conservative groups.

Firstly, the military government's adoption of the Turkish-Islam synthesis as the state ideology caused the country's politics to navigate closer to the right-wing (Mert 2007, 32). Secondly, the economic liberalization programme contributing to the development of the

³ The single-party regime was administrated by the political party called Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi [CHP]/Republican People's Party.

⁴ Demokrat Parti [DP]/Democrat Party

⁵ Before the beginning of the civil government, the Milli Birlik Komitesi [MBK]/National Union Committee introduced a new constitution which was limiting any government's attempts for radical transformation and was providing as well new guarantees for the basic rights and freedoms (Çavdar 2008, 110).

⁶ Turkey joined the NATO in 1952. As a result of this membership, during the Cold War period, Turkey emphasized on the anti-communist expression (Sever 1997, 99 and Criss 2002, 473 and 482).

⁷ Milli Nizam Partisi [MNP]/National Order Party

⁸ It is a religious order that belongs to the Sufi tradition of Islam (Yavuz 2003, 134).

⁹ Milli Selamet Partisi [MSP]/National Salvation Party

¹⁰ It was expressed as an ideology, which was developed by those advocating independence from the West and focus on economic development with a moral emphasis referring to Islam (Mert 2007, 108).

Anatolian provincial entrepreneurs has fuelled ‘pro-Islamic’ political parties both economically and financially (Gümüşçü 2010, 11).

During the post-1980 period, the pro-Islamic ideology continued to be proselytized by the Refah Partisi [RP]¹¹ as the previous political parties including the MSP had been suppressed by the 1980 military intervention.

The political atmosphere of 1990s was marked by the success of the RP at the local elections of 1994 and at the parliamentary elections of 1995. Voting reflected both the conservative class’ economic and social ambitions and the losers of the economic liberalization which believed in the RP’s “Just Order program¹²” (Ibid, 11 and Öniş 2005, 135). However, it was considered that the RP’s radical policies and practices against secularism violated the secularism clause of the constitution and the party was subsequently disbanded (Akarca and Tansel 2007, 638).

Since the closure of the RP and until the establishment of the AK Party, the party members went through a learning period and acquired a more liberal approach and a more pro-EU stance. Their first attempt to re-enter to the political arena, with the establishment of the Fazilet Partisi [FP]¹³ shared the same fate as the RP. This second closure of the party resulted in a major division of the party members into two branches: the reformist one and the traditional one. In 2001, the former established the AK Party and the latter created the Saadet Partisi¹⁴ [SP].

The AK Party benefited from continuous coalition governments (1996-2002) and the severe economic crises of 2000 and 2001 (Çavdar 2008, 346 and 347). Therefore, both internal and external factors can explain the AK Party’s emergence as a major political party in 2002 and its consolidation in 2007. In the next section, the motivation for the analysis of the AK Party will be developed.

1.2. Motivating Questions

The emergence of the AK Party since 2002 has become an important issue for the West because the AK Party is the first party in Turkish political history, without Kemalist roots that came into power with such a high electoral score.

Furthermore, the AK Party has attempted to transform the core state-army relations; to amend the constitution of 1982 and has adopted a new approach to Turkish foreign policy¹⁵. For instance, the AK Party’s relatively less nationalist and more pragmatic foreign approach enhanced Turkey’s regional ties with its neighbours especially in the Middle East (Uzgel 2009, 358 and 380).

In addition, internal issues related to the AK Party’s pro-Islamic past and the AK Party’s hybrid¹⁶ discourse has resonated in Western European countries. For instance, in 2008, a lawsuit attempting to force the AK Party’s closure, focused mainly on its anti-secular

¹¹ Refah Partisi [RP]/Welfare Party

¹² The state-centered Islamic project intends to establish a larger state and extensive welfare programme (Yavuz 2003).

¹³ Fazilet Partisi [FP]/Virtue Party

¹⁴ Saadet Partisi [SP]/Felicity Party

¹⁵ The AK Party’s focus on foreign politics is based more on the political opening and taking initiative rather than on defensive reflexes (e.g. focus on the security) (Uzgel 2009, 358 and 380).

¹⁶ The hybrid character of the AK Party is mainly highlighted due to the AK Party’s both pro-Islamic past and its pro-EU stance.

activities¹⁷ which was being accused by the secular institutions (e.g. the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Turkey) of turning the country into an Islamic State by stealth.

Moreover, the rise of the AK Party has been examined both by Turkish scholars and English speaking academics since 2002. Scholars have looked into the relationship between the AK Party and democratization; the EU question; the state-army relations and political Islam.

Consequently, because of both the importance of the AK Party in internal and foreign arena as well as the increasing scholarly literature on the AK Party, through this doctoral research, I intend to contribute to the existing literature on Turkish politics and society by investigating the impact of both political developments and socio-economic factors on the emergence of the AK Party and its feed-back effect onto Turkish society and political development.

2. DISCUSSION ON THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

The doctoral dissertation has three main research questions as following:

- i. What changes in the structures of Turkish society explain the emergence and electoral success of the AK Party?
- ii. To what extent did long, medium and short term economic factors contribute to the rise of the AK Party?
- iii. To what extent did the political conjuncture up to the early 2000s help the AK Party to succeed electorally in 2002?

The theoretical framework was mainly formed by taking into account the three research questions mentioned above. Therefore, my doctoral dissertation does not use a unique theoretical paradigm to lead the research due to differentiation among these research questions. Therefore, I have adopted two main theoretical approaches to guide my research and shape my choice of methods. These two theoretical approaches were deduced from the literature on the main political parties and the scholarly work on Turkish society and politics.

The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of both political evolution and socio-economic factors on the emergence of the AK Party. Therefore, the general theoretical framework will be based on both the cleavage structure (Lipset and Rokkan 1967) and the centre-periphery approach adapted, of course to the Turkish political context (Shils 1961; Mardin 1973 and Kahraman 2008). The former is driven from the Talcott Parsons' approach which was mostly influenced by Max Weber theory. The latter is the centre-periphery approach, initially developed by Shils (1961). Mardin (1973) was inspired by Shils's work on centre-periphery and adopted it as a tool to analyse Turkish politics and society. Recently, Kahraman (2008) further developed Mardin's centre-periphery approach by referring to both Gramsci and Gramscian class analysis.

In addition, he expanded the social groups related to the centre-periphery in order to incorporate the recent dynamics in Turkish society into the model. The centre-periphery approach can be applied in order to investigate the change in the socio-economic structures in Turkey and the socio-economic basis of AK Party's support.

¹⁷ Anti-secular activity can be illustrated with the AK Party's attempts for changing the constitutional law so that headscarved women can go to the university.

These two theoretical models (cleavage structure of Lipset-Rokkan and centre-periphery approach) will underpin the methodology of the research which will be qualitative. In the following section, I analyse them in greater detail.

2.1 Lipset and Rokkan's Cleavage Structure

Lipset and Rokkan's cleavage structure is highly suitable in order to analyse the research questions which investigate the impact of the political conjecture up to the early 2000 on the victory of the AK Party in 2002.

Political development up to the present has been shaped by the dynamics and the tension among many parties (e.g. left vs. right; Turkish nationalist vs. Kurdish nationalist; pro-Islamist vs. secular). Therefore, I argue that the theoretical framework to answer to these research questions must be derived from a theory demonstrating the evolution of the political party system, rather than a party theory which is just showing the analysis of a unique party.

In order to better support the choice of my theoretical framework, it is useful to first give some information on the main theories concerning the political party system. According to the existing literature, the main theories on the political party system are classified by Ware (1996) based on sociological, institutional and competition factors. Among these three universal theories on the development of political party system, Lipset and Rokkan argue that social conflict shapes the political parties rather than political institutions, and therefore they believe that the explanation of different political party systems and related electoral systems is possible only from a sociological approach (Ware 1996, 188 and 189).

The Lipset and Rokkan's theory on the importance of sociological approach suits the analysis of political developments in Turkey. In particular, as Turkey has not yet completed its economic and political development, and since it does not have sound institutions like in Western democracies, I believe that Turkish political developments have been mostly led by the dynamics of society or through the cleavages in terms of the Lipset-Rokkan cleavage structure. Therefore, I consider that the suitable theoretical framework for the analysis of political developments in Turkey is the Lipset-Rokkan's cleavage structure.

Furthermore, the Lipset-Rokkan cleavage structure is based on the four types of divisions which are: *centre-periphery*; *state-church*; *land-industry* and *owner-worker*. I argue that each of these four cleavages can frame the research process and thus political developments in Turkey. The way that these four cleavages are incorporated into the thesis will be mentioned in next section.

2.1.1 Lipset and Rokkan's Cleavage Structure and the Analysis of the AK Party's Emergence

▪ Centre-Periphery Cleavage

The conflict in terms of centre-periphery division is created in order to demonstrate the struggle between the centre of the society which favours the nation-state and ethnically, linguistically or religiously distinct groups which resist against the homogenization of the country (periphery).

Even though this cleavage is developed as a tool to explain the European political party system (Ware 1996, 186), it is possible to connect this conflict to the Turkish context. First of all, after the establishment of the Republic in 1923, Turkey's political system implemented many reforms aiming to standardize the language, religion and education in order to control sub-national units. The emphasis (exclusive emphasis) on Turkish as the

national language of the country, the unification of the schools and the state-controlled religion can illustrate the attempts for the homogenization of the country.

In addition, the introduction of reforms during the period from 1922 to 1937 was perceived as a threat both by the Kurdish minority with respect to its linguistic and cultural differences and at the same time by some religious circles with respect to their freedom in expression and practice of religion.

This conflict in terms of language and religion is a useful frame to explain the political developments in Turkey while taking into account the translation of problems related to the religion and ethnicity into political system. However, as the religion issue will be considered under the prism of the state-church cleavage, this one is mostly a useful tool to explain the impact of minority groups (e.g. Kurdish) on the AK Party's success.

▪ **State-Church Cleavage**

The conflict between State and Church which existed in many Western European countries can be interpreted as a parallelism to the confrontation between the centrist state and religious circles in Turkey.

Ware (1996) points out that after the National Revolution in France, the French state imposed the loyalty of the citizens to the state and therefore, it had spent an incredible amount of effort in educating the citizens in a way that fits the secular system. Similarly, the Turkish state imposed a secular education system through which it has aimed to control the relationship between the nation-state and the individual citizen (Ware 1996, 187 and Burdy and Marcou 1995, 13).

The state-church cleavage can structure the political developments in Turkey related to the tension rising between the secular and pro-Islamic groups, especially after the emergence of the AK Party in 2002. Therefore, this cleavage can frame the pro-Islamic past of the AK Party and its resonance on the electoral success of the AK Party.

▪ **Land-Industry Cleavage**

While relating this conflict to the Turkish context and its reflection on Turkish political party system, it is important to mention that Turkey has never had a post-industrialist period like the Western democracies. Nor has it ever had a stable political party system, as well. Therefore, it is pointed out that there is not a close correlation between economic development and formation of Turkish political party system (Ayata 2002, 138).

However, Ayata's argument cannot be entirely accepted since there seems to be a close mutual relationship between the Turkish political parties and the economic development (for instance, the burgeoning of small and medium enterprises during the Anavatan Partisi¹⁸). Therefore, it may be appropriate to connect the land-industry cleavage to the thesis as the impact of economic development on political parties in Turkey and as the political party system's contribution to industrialist or landed interest groups.

Furthermore, a recent revision of the Lipset-Rokkan cleavage structure by Gallagher et al. (2001) emphasizes the distinctiveness of the group, *common conscience* and *institutional existence*. Particularly, the last two concepts make clear the interest groups' awareness about their belonging to specific groups (e.g. in Turkish context, the economic pressure groups) and the expression of their belonging to this specific cleavage (e.g. land-industry) in institutional terms (e.g. translation of the interest groups into a political form).

As a result, the land-industry cleavage in its revised version of the traditional Lipset-Rokkan cleavage structure has a more sound meaning in the Turkish context, especially for the analysis of the impact of political and economic interest groups on the AK Party's electoral success and consolidation.

¹⁸ Anavatan Partisi [AP]/Mainland Party

▪ **Owner-Worker Cleavage**

Once more, in Turkey, the factors which have influenced the transformation of owner-worker cleavage into political parties are not similar to the ones pertaining in most European countries. First of all, the establishment of left-wing parties is not based on an industrial revolution and on a working class. Hence, it is not a class bottom up creation.

Besides, as Kongar points out (1999), in Turkish politics, the left was built up in a rather artificial way. Therefore, the declining path of the left parties and the shift of the votes from the left to the right parties after the military intervention of 1980 should not be surprising. As a matter of fact, the left had been previously built from a top-down approach through political efforts and ideological guidance (Kongar, 1999).

In addition to the top-down approach of Turkish left, both left and right political parties were influenced by a populist approach rather than a class-based discourse. For instance, the right politics used anti-bureaucratic views and religious motifs to obtain the votes of conservative, deprived groups, peasantry and petty bourgeoisie. The CHP used populist motifs mixed with some socialist values in order to attract the large electorates (Keyder 1989, 205 and 210).

In consequence, as it is pointed out earlier, the class of workers and peasants in the Turkish society has never had a great impact on the economic system which was originally dominated by the bureaucrats and the corporatist bourgeoisie (Keyder 1989, 107). In addition, left has been structured through political orientation and not through a labour/class movement. Therefore, the owner-worker cleavage does not fit well to the Turkish context as an explanatory factor of the development of the political party system in Turkey.

However, the cleavage between owners and workers can be explained by another theory, Lipset's relative deprivation theory. As this theory illustrates, there is the tendency of voters towards extreme right-wing parties due to the voters' unfavourable socio-economic conditions. Even though the AK Party does not belong to the extreme-right wing political party category, Lipset's relative deprivation theory (1960) can explain effectively the voting behaviour of unfavoured masses (e.g. groups who live at the shanty towns of the big cities) that have had a drastic impact on the victory of the AK Party at the big cities.

2.1.2 Link between Lipset-Rokkan Structure and the Choice of Research Methods

Led by the Lipset-Rokkan cleavage structure, as adapted to the Turkish context, I employ qualitative research methods in order to collect data. Qualitative methods are based on both in-depth interviews and archival research methods in order to investigate two main issues. Firstly, the roles of the political conjecture up to 2000s and secondly, the potential impact of political and economic interest groups on the electoral success of the AK Party and its consolidation on the party system of Turkey. The Lipset-Rokkan cleavage structure guides the research methods through four cleavages. In addition, a revision of the Lipset-Rokkan cleavage structure by Gallagher et al. (2001) and Lipset's relative deprivation theory (1960) are used as supportive approaches to the original Lipset-Rokkan's structure.

The four cleavage-structures are incorporated into the research process in the following way:

- The centre-periphery is used as a tool to explain the impact of minorities (Kurdish in Turkish context) on the AK Party's emergence.
- The state-church is incorporated in order to investigate the pro-Islamic past of the AK Party and its resonance on its electoral success.

- The land-industry cleavage is incorporated through revision of the Lipset-Rokkan framework by Gallagher et al. (2001) which can explain the potential impact of political and economic interest groups on the emergence and consolidation of the AK Party.
- The owner-worker cleavage which is illustrated mostly through the relative deprivation theory of Lipset is used in order to explain deprived masses' voting tendency towards the AK Party (e.g. unfavoured masses which are living at the shanty towns of the big cities).

This four-cleavage structure guides my qualitative research method. It directs the creation of a sample and the recruitment of interviewees. For instance, under the guidance of the centre-periphery cleavage, I have selected representatives of political party members from the South-Eastern region in order to examine political developments related to ethnicity and their reflection on the AK Party. In addition, under the owner-worker cleavage and Lipset's deprivation theory, I have chosen interviewees from pressure groups at those shanty towns so that I can analyse the impact of the voting behaviour of masses on the electoral victory of the AK Party, as well as their perception of the AK Party.

Furthermore, the cleavage structure guides another stage of qualitative research method which is archival research method. For instance, while looking at the state-church cleavage (in the Turkish context, secular vs. 'pro-Islamic' cleavage), I will be taking into consideration the electoral programmes of the centre-right, left and 'pro-Islamic' political parties from 1983 to the present.

2.2 Centre-Periphery Approach

2.2.1 Centre-Periphery Approach and the Analysis of the AK Party

The aim of using the centre-periphery approach is to investigate the research questions related to the impact that changes in the structures of Turkish society and also short-term and long-term economic factors have had on the emergence and consolidation of the AK Party.

The centre-periphery approach and similar dual models have been thoroughly used in order to analyse the Turkish politics and Turkish society. The centre-periphery and especially the revised version of the centre-periphery approach (Kahraman 2008) are suitable for the analysis of the change in socio-economic structures and its reflection on the electoral success of the AK Party.

Kahraman (2008) expands both centre and periphery concepts by taking into account socio-economic dynamics in Turkey since 1980s. Two new concepts he develops are *periphery at the centre* and *centre at the periphery*. The former refers to masses living at the unprivileged suburbs of the big cities whereas the latter refers to devout bourgeoisie in the Anatolian provincial cities. In addition, the latter which is mainly constituted by merchants, tradesmen and craftsmen, has benefited from the liberal economic policies of the 1980s.

As Kahraman (2008) develops a class scheme which takes into account dynamic structures specific to Turkish society, the application of the revised version of the centre-periphery approach will be adequate in order to analyse the change in socio-economic structures in Turkish society and its resonance on the AK Party.

2.2.2 Incorporation of Centre-Periphery Approach into the Thesis

Kahraman's (2008) centre-periphery approach reflects three main categories of Turkish society: Centre; centre at the periphery and periphery at the centre. The centre represents the bureaucrats, the intellectuals, the army officials who guided the modernization and secularization. In addition, Kahraman (2008) called this coalition between intellectuals, bureaucrats and army officials as the historical bloc. The centre at the periphery is the devout Anatolian bourgeoisie and the masses which are living at the shanty towns of the big cities are the periphery at the centre.

This three-fold class picture can be used in order to find out the change in socio-economic structure in Turkey and its reflection on the AK Party's electoral success. First of all, Kahraman argues that even though the centre at the periphery and the periphery at the centre differ in terms of sociological positions, both of them come from the same cultural tradition. Before the changes in socio-economic structures, they used to form the classical periphery which was isolated from the Republican centre or, to put it differently the historical bloc. Through the analysis of these new social groups (centre at the periphery and periphery at the centre), the change in the structures of Turkish society and the contribution of economic factors on the AK Party's emergence and consolidation can be investigated. Furthermore, Kahraman (2008) points out that both centre at the periphery and periphery at the centre have been the main supporters of the AK Party. Hence, the choice of this theoretical approach seems to be making even more sense for the analysis of the AK Party.

As a result, the centre-periphery approach fits into my research process while taking into account changes in social structures and the contribution of economic factors on the emergence of the AK Party. Firstly, I aim to analyse the change in social structures and the economy and secondly, I will look at the impact of these changes on both the AK Party's emergence and also on its voters.

3. METHODS: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS

The main research method is the qualitative research method. This method is based on three stages: first, the analysis of quantitative data; second, in-depth interviews and third, archival research. The qualitative methods are suitable for my project especially since they can allow me to obtain data which exists in an implicit way. While investigating this tacit body of knowledge, more details on the subject can be thoroughly examined as they come into surface.

3.1 Stage One: Analysis of Quantitative Data

Through the analysis of quantitative material, I aim to look first, at the social and economic bases of the AK Party and second, at the emergence of the party.

Firstly, I aim to analyse the change in social structures and the economy since 1980s. For this first part, so far, I have collected the available data on socio-demographic and economic indicators from various institutions. Secondly, I will analyse the reflection of this change on the AK Party's socio-economic basis. In order to do the latter, I will look at the surveys, both pre-election and post-election ones which give detailed information on voter profiles by income; age; education; occupational category and place of residence (urban vs. rural). Furthermore, through the aggregate data on elections, it is possible to obtain information on the regional distribution of the AK Party's voters. The data that I use for the

analysis of voters' profile will be obtained by various research companies, in order to increase the robustness of my findings.

3.2 Stage Two: In-Depth Interviews

Through the use of in-depth interviews, I intend to answer two main issues: firstly, the impact of political developments up to 2002 to the AK Party's emergence and secondly, the contribution and the perception of political and economic pressure groups on the AK Party's emergence and consolidation. With an in-depth interview, researchers aim to obtain information in order to reach a broad understanding of the interviewee's ideas through which the information can be used "to explore interesting areas for further investigation" (Berry, 1999).

The interview sample is formed by the political parties (local, regional, parliamentary level, ruling political party, opposition political parties, youth branch, woman branch and main rank); economic institutions and non-governmental organizations. I have intended to carry out thirty in-depth interviews which are divided between three main sub-samples 1) economic organizations and non-governmental organizations; 2) political groups; 3) Civic society pressure groups and pressure groups at the shanty towns.

The rationale behind the choice of this sample is related to the scope of the research questions and the theoretical framework as well. Through the economic institutions and non-governmental organizations, I intend to answer research questions related to the contribution of economic and political pressure groups on the emergence of the AK Party. Through the sample of the political groups, I aim to answer research questions related to the impact of political developments up to 2000 on the emergence and consolidation of the AK Party. Thirdly, through the pressure groups of civic society, I aim to obtain data which is related to the grass roots movement.

The in-depth interviews have been divided among these three sub-samples. Therefore, I have recruited representatives from economic institutions and non-governmental organizations. Among these economic institutions and non-governmental organizations, I have tried to include both pro-AK Party groups and groups which are sceptical of the AK Party's policies in order to have an unbiased and balanced sample. In addition, I have recruited members of the political parties. I have arranged interviews not only with the representatives of the ruling political party but also with the members of the opposition parties. Among the opposition political parties, I have taken into account political parties which have been represented at the parliament since 2002. However, I have not only chosen representatives from the main rank of political parties but I have also tried to conduct interviews with women branches and youth branches of the political parties. In addition, I have added the members from the local branches of the political parties which have had a substantial impact on the formation and success of the political parties. Lastly, among pressure groups, I have made interviews with members of the main minority communities in order to understand their perception of the AK Party and the AK Party's policies.

3.3 Stage Three: Archival Research Method

The archival research method is useful for answering the research questions related to impact of the political developments up to 2002 on the AK Party's emergence as well its consolidation. In addition, the archival method is thoroughly used in order to collect data on

socio-economic indicators, the economy, the aggregate data and the data from surveys which were conducted by research companies.

The main sources which are useful during the data collection are the body of academic literature of empirical work on elections and on voting behaviour; the minutes of the parliamentary debates; the political party programmes; any brochure, leaflet related to the political parties; the archives of various news papers, the archives of the Supreme Court of Turkey and the archives of the European Court of Human Rights [ECHR].

4. ONGOING FIELDWORK, ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

Since the end of November 2010, I have conducted two thirds of my fieldwork related to the doctoral research. However, I have not yet finalized my fieldwork with respect to the interviews and archival research. So far, my research plan evolves as initially designed. However, while taking into account the fieldwork, I have focused mainly on the representatives of the political parties and the economic institutions. Therefore, I have to emphasize more on the representatives of civic society institutions and other grass roots groups such as unions, organizations and associations which are less affiliated to political parties.

In addition, during the data collection, my research process has been conducted according to the highest standards of confidentiality in social research set by the University of Warwick's statement on the ethical conduct of research. As part of my research, before the beginning of the interviews, the informed consent which states the aim of the research and the care shown for the data storage and the usage of the data has been distributed to the subjects of my interviews. In addition, the anonymity and privacy of research participants were taken into account and the data obtained from them was kept with extra care and the confidentiality of the participants has been protected.

Currently, I am at the stage of data collection and analysis. Once the analysis of the full set of collected data is completed, I will be able to give more concrete and more substantial results regarding the research. However, I can argue that by the end of this research, my main objectives are to construct a socio-demographic profile (disaggregation of electorate according to gender, age, occupational category and geographical distribution) of the AK Party's electoral base; secondly, to investigate how the evolution of Turkey's economy, in relation to the on-going sociological changes in the Turkish society, have materialized into support for the AK Party; thirdly, to assess the role and the perception of special interest groups in the rise and electoral consolidation of the AK Party and finally, to provide an evaluation of the impact of specific economic and political developments on the success of the AK Party in the 2002 and 2007 legislative elections. Hence, this thesis provides a comprehensive account on the significance of AK Party's feed-back effect on the socio-economic and political life of Turkey, from 2002 to the present.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper attempted to give an overall view of my doctoral dissertation on the emergence, the consolidation and the significance of the current ruling political party in Turkey. Firstly, I tried to explain the background of the Turkish political history by

emphasizing on the history related to my research and I gave my motivating hypotheses for the choice of this doctoral topic. Secondly, I explained how the theoretical framework has been chosen and how two different theoretical approaches namely Lipset-Rokkan cleavage structure (1967) and the centre periphery approach (Mardin 1973; Kahraman 2008) have been incorporated into the thesis. Then, I explained the choice of research methods (in-depth interviews and archival research through surveys, post-election and pre-election surveys) and how they are currently used in order to collect the data. Finally, the paper explains the ongoing fieldwork, ethical considerations and defines the objectives which will be attained by the end of the investigation. Through this paper, general information on the doctoral dissertation on the “Emergence, Consolidation and Significance of the AK Party in Turkey” was aimed to be given.

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