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AN ANALYSIS OF TWITTER MESSAGES SHARED BY TURKISH PARLIAMENTARIANS IN TERMS OF DEMOCRATIC CULTURE

Abstract:

Parliamentarians are one of the most important persons for the healthy running and well-being of democratic system. Democratic system naturally demands different points of views and it is nourished by political and cultural tolerance, pluralism and respect. For this reason, parliamentarians work as important actors in promoting democratic values and culture, especially, by representing different political perceptions, they make valuable contributions to modern democracies. With the participation of communication technologies and social media to political life, parliamentarians have become more visible and attainable to public opinions. Particularly, their intense usage of social media for reaching these public opinions turns social networking sites into an Agora which was a central spot in ancient Greek city-states and the center of spiritual and political life of the city. At this point, content of the messages written by parliamentarians become so important for formation of democratic values and culture among people following parliamentarians on social media environments. At that point, this study aims to analyze Twitter messages shared by Turkish parliamentarians during the voting process of Domestic Safety Packet in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey whether they promote democratic culture or not. 30 parliamentarians from different political parties were selected as sampling among 550 Turkish parliamentarians because of their intense usage of Twitter. As for the analysis of the messages, discourse analyze method of Teun Van Dijk will be used.

Keywords:

Democratic Culture, Parliamentarians, Twitter, Discourse Analyze.

Introduction

In modern societies, democracy and its elements have been accepted by political institutions and actors from all over the world. This situation caused so many different democracy definitions which came into picture but democratic culture is the set of cultural elements produced by members of the democratic movement as part of their effort to create democracy. The purpose of freedom of speech is to promote a democratic culture. A democratic culture is more than representative institutions of democracy, and it is more than deliberation about public issues. Rather, a democratic culture is culture in which individuals have a fair opportunity to participate in the forms of meaning making that constitute them as individuals (Balkin, 2004: 2).

As for the definition of democratic culture, it should be known that the term has a wide range of background and its dimensions are to be taken into account carefully. Democratic culture is about individual liberty as well as collective self-governance; it is about each individual's ability to participate in the production and distribution of culture (Dahl, 2001: 159). Beside this, a democratic culture necessarily implies plurality, with competing ideas and multiple forms of highly developed critical approaches. On the other hand, democratic culture is neither a determining item nor a production of democratic system. In fact, every culture and political system has suitable and non-suitable values to democratic culture in its cultural heritage. Contrary to this, experiences obtained by being governed with democracy can affect to develop and spread of attitudes and values suitable with democratic system (Turan, 1999: 142–143).

Today, the term “democratic culture” is generally used to define the necessities, which are essential to live in a democratic system, such as “knowledge”, “ability” and “value”(Lipset, 1959: 73). Each of these three main titles states so important necessities for democratic culture and its development in social conscious. In this context, “knowledge” dimension of democratic culture includes information about state system, constitution, election system and political parties of that state (Özcan, 2002: 52). “Ability” dimension of democratic culture includes the abilities which are essential for the active and meaningful participations of citizens to democratic social life. Anyway, a democratic system accepts that citizens know to select representatives who defend and represent citizens' socio-cultural, political values and beliefs. “Value” dimension of democratic culture is a process which includes so many different dimensions and details. Some of the basic values, determining how people use their information and experiences about democratic system, in this process are political equality, idea, religion, media freedom, being respectful, voluntary participation to political and social life, political ethic, responsibility and honesty. Short history of modern democracy shows that political morality, honesty and responsibility are the main conditions for a stabilized democracy because compared with other regimes, democracy are more open to abuse (Özcan, 2002: 53).

Democratic culture is an indispensable necessity in order to healthy development and well running of democracy(Yılmaz, 2000: 158). Especially, so many political scientists accept that democratic culture is a prerequisite for healthy and well running of democratic system (Hadenius and Teorell, 2005: 89). Other elements of democratic culture include being respectful against different identities, minorities, ideas and political actors. Because of this, it can support the formation of social coherence, moderation and prevent people from feeding their political partisanship (Diamond, 1995: 136). To summarize, social and cultural phenomenon are necessary for the development and stability of democracy (Kalaycıoğlu, 1995: 44). Consequently, only political parties and

parliament are not enough for democratic system which is suitable with international canons. The most important thing for that is the formation of democratic culture (Tuna, 2000: 208). On top of all this, parliamentarians are the most important actors of any form of democracy because the interests of the greatest possible number of citizens should be represented by parliamentarians. They all vote not only for the individuals who support them in elections, they also represent democratic expectations and levels of their supporters. In general, they represent democracy perception of the society.

In terms of democratic culture, parliamentarians can be taken in hand because they give opportunity to measure or estimate democracy perception and democratic culture level of societies. When it is focused on the parliamentarians represent not only ideas or demands of the citizens in parliament, but also they represent the level of democratic culture in that society. For this reason, this study aims to measure the democratic culture level of Turkish Parliamentarians by analyzing their twitter messages.

Social Media, Politicians and Democratic Culture

The creation of new forms of digital social media during the first decade of the 21st century has transformed the ways in which many people communicate and share information. The concept of social media can be defined as web-based applications and mobile technologies that allow to creating and exchanging user-generated content for communications through interactive dialogues. The content can be either uni-modal (i.e. SMS) or multimedia-based (i.e. video clip). Enabled by ubiquitously and directly accessible communication techniques, social media have substantially changed the way communities, groups, and individuals interact with each other (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 201: 244). However, the effects that the emergence of social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter or YouTube as well as blogging environments and online discussion for, have had on political processes remain controversial and not well understood. Indeed, much discourse in this field seems to be driven as much by political ideology itself, as it does by rigorous academic enquiry. There is a strong will to believe that these social media are indeed making political processes more democratic, and yet the evidence is not always there to support such assertions.

Social media have changed how people involve in communication in many ways. People are not just consumers of media anymore. With social media users can make, change, and distribute information. One of the assumptions of social media is that you cannot control your message; you can only participate in the conversation. You may initiate communication but you never know where it will go or when and how it will end. It is generally accepted that “the loudest and most opinionated” will lead the conversations and those who have a “fear of missing out” will attend or contribute at best (Şimşek, 2012: 27).

Social media is one of the most important global leaps forward in recent human history. It provides for self-expression and promotes mutual understanding. It enables rapid formation of networks and demonstrates our common humanity across cultural differences. It connects people, their ideas and values, like never before. Now the use of social media is not limited to discussing family events, and sharing photos and videos, it can actually create history and make difference in the real world. Today; the use of social media is becoming a feature of political and civic engagement for many countries and people. Especially, politicians have started to use social media tools in order to increase their political effectiveness and get in touch regularly and directly with citizens.

Although it is thought that new media makes simpler the running of politics, it cannot be seen that politics provides a huge amount of material and contents for media. Furthermore, the lines between politics and media have become unobstructed and nature of politics has experienced compulsory media-oriented transformations. Especially, after rising of new media, politics left behind a professionalizing process which runs on with using image makers, press consultants, life coaches and routine meetings among politicians and journalists (Bennett and Entman, 2005: 16). Politicians need to reach communication channels which are controlled media organizations and they must adapt their messages for visual and formal features which were designed in media organizations anymore (Gurevitch and Blumler, 1997: 210). As the result of mediated politics, today politics cannot escape from being an activity which must be done compatibly according to media and its nature. This also caused that media has gained popularity among politicians and it has expanded its influence over politics, also a political mentality which is strongly connected media were embraced by societies.

A number of politicians are now using different social networking sites to make their online presence strong. Twitter and Facebook are the two most internationally used social sites, and different politicians use these two to stay in touch with the public. Through their official pages, they share their recent activities, stance on different matters, and encourage people to share their point of views with them. In this way, they remain active and alive in front of their followers and they can create a stable contact not only their supporters but also their opponents.

Although regularly contact with citizens provides politicians to increase their activity on society, feedbacks from the followers do not create the same effects on politicians because they can make any kind of comment and discussion even if insult or swearing about politicians. Overall, there are mixed partisan and ideological patterns among social media users when it comes to using social media like social networking sites and Twitter. The social media users who talk about politics on a regular basis are the most likely to use social media for civic or political purposes.

By noticing the power of social media, politicians have started to spend most of their time for joining conversations or discussions on social networking sites or to answer questions or demands of their followers. In this process democratic culture and its elements generally determine the function and dimensions of the conversations on dialogues between politicians and citizens on social networking tolls. Especially messages shared by politicians and language used by politicians drawn the borders of discussion or dialogue in terms of democratic values.

In fact, politicians in democratic systems are the representatives of democracy, its cultural heritage and norms. Elaborately, politicians make so many contributions to democratic system by internalizing and representing democratic norms and values. For example, in a democratic system politicians afford citizens an opportunity to communicate and give information to government officials about their concerns and preferences and to put pressure on them to respond. It means that in any democratic system politician has the right to express citizens' views and attitudes towards almost everything happening in the public sphere or concerning citizens' interests in a way that governmental officials know this and respond. However, politicians are also good or bad examples for the citizens to learn the running of democratic system and internalize democratic values.

That is, politicians in democratic system should produce and develop some attitudes contributing to democratic culture of society and indirectly these attitudes

encourage people to embrace or internalize democratic values and democratic culture (Dahl, 1993; Schmitter and Karl, 1995; Sartori, 1996; Tourine, 1998; Beetham and Boyle, 2005). According to Kalaycıoğlu (1995: 50–52), democracy can only develop in a special and specific cultural environment which is shaped by social and political actor such as politicians. Consequently, democratic culture is wanted to be spread in every stage of social life and minorities, others, even the smallest units should take their place in governing process (Selçuk, 2010: 360). Politicians undertake this responsibility with their behaviors and attitudes as the representative of democratic culture.

Method

In this study, Twitter messages shared by Turkish parliamentarians will be analyzed in terms of whether promoting the formation of democratic culture in social conscious or not. In order to do that, Twitter messages shared by Turkish parliamentarians during the voting process of Domestic Safety Packet in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey were taken in the sampling part of the study. Why the voting process of Domestic Safety Packet was selected for the period of the study is that; this period was taken in hand by Turkish Government and its opponent as a democracy and democratic culture example. Every political unit charged other political groups or ideas with not being a real democrat and also this packet was discussed by public opinion intensively in terms of democracy and its values. That is why; messages and explanations of politicians became so important for this process to create a suitable image with democratic norms. 25 parliamentarians from different political parties were selected as sampling among 550 Turkish parliamentarians because of their intense usage of Twitter. As for the analysis of the messages, discourse analyze method of Teun van Dijk will be used.

Findings

Parliamentarians from Justice and Development Party (AK Party)

The AK Party's founding philosophy and the party's program have been a mirror reflecting its keen perspective of democratization. The Party program is the most comprehensive manifesto for democratization in the history of the Turkish Republic. Since November 3rd 2002, the electorate has favored the AK Party in three general elections, two local elections, and two referenda. This overwhelming endorsement is because of the AK Party's steadfast adherence to this democratization program. In the last eleven years, parliament has legislated about 2000 laws in accordance with the EU acquis. With yet another referendum on 12 September 2010, and through the wide consent of the people, we have introduced a package of constitutional amendments that profoundly emboldened the spirit of this reformist wind. This latest package, as a whole, should be seen as yet another proof that we are keeping our promise to our people in accordance with the AK Party's program. The latest reform package is a reflection of our determination for an advanced democracy. The democratization package provides Turkey with the remedies that will heal many wounds. It is comprised of measures that are not only legislative but also practical and structural arrangements and reforms that are revolutionary, embracing all 76 million citizens.

In the content of the study, tweets of 7 parliamentarians from government party (AK Party) were taken in hand for the analysis of their tweets. For the analysis of tweets

shared by parliamentarians from AK Party; Burhan Kuzu, Abdülhamit Gül, Şamiş Tayyar, Emrullah İşler, Mustafa Şentop and Mihrimah Belma Şatır were selected because these parliamentarians used Twitter and tweets frequently in this process and they also shared so many tweets in this process compared with other parliamentarians from AK Party.

At this process, it was seen that government party members shared 389 tweets for one month and almost all of them included sentences or words referring democracy or democratic values. Especially, content of tweets depends on formation of a specific discourse which tries to legitimize Justice and Development Party as the presenter of democracy. As for democratic culture, members of government party (AK Party) used a general language legitimizing and defining their explanations as democratic. They generally tried to explain some details about Domestic Safety Packet in terms of democracy and this efforts situated them as democratic. On the other hand, dialectically their defense for democracy on Twitter with tweets strengthened their situation in terms of democratic culture level. For example; parliamentarians from AK Party used so many adjectives and adverbs referring good influence on democracy discourse. Correspondingly, these parliamentarians situated themselves as defender of democratic values with their tweets. In order to do this, parliamentarians used historical examples to criticize opponent parties in terms of democracy and democratic value historically.

Parliamentarians from Republican People's Party (CHP)

The enthusiasm for democracy itself shows the long way the party has come. Ironically, just a few years ago, CHP voters were the most resistant to the EU-related democratic reforms and freedoms carried out by AK Party government. Interestingly, the AK Party's ending of the Kemalist supervisory regime pushed CHP towards defending and embracing democratic freedoms and rights. With no supervisory regime to rely on, CHP has begun to learn how to compete for power in Turkey's political scene.

At this process, it was seen that parliamentarians from CHP shared 324 tweets for one month and almost all of them included sentences or words referring democracy or democratic values. For the analysis of tweets shared by parliamentarians from CHP; Aylin Nazlıaka, Akif Hamza Çebi, Şafak Pavey, Sezgin Tanrıkulu, Gürsel Tekin, Hüseyin Aygün and Umut Oran were selected because these parliamentarians used Twitter and tweets frequently in this process and they also shared so many tweets in this process compared with other parliamentarians from CHP.

Parliamentarians from CHP generally shared tweets blaming government party with not being real democrat. At this point tweets produced and legitimized a general discourse implying government party and its implementations as undemocratic. For example; adjectives, adverbs or words used in tweets had negative meaning about democracy perception and implementations of AK Party and its members. For this reason, discourses legitimized in tweets of parliamentarians from CHP proved that parliamentarians tried to form an democratic perception about themselves as defender of democracy. These efforts situated them in a high democratic level in the eyes of their supporters but some explanations or allegations in tweets have damaged the democratic level tried to form by parliamentarians. Although these explanations or allegations were shared in order to criticize the democratic level and democratic culture of government, they damaged the democratic image of parliamentarians from CHP and they also damaged the democratic culture depending on general politics of CHP.

Parliamentarians from CHP preferred to use some kind of stereotypes which have negative meaning and blame government party with being antidemocratic. For example; definitions or statements such as "coalition of violence", "mutuality of stupidity", "Quisling", "Unblushing", "Dictator", "Supporter of terrorism" were shared by parliamentarians from CHP. However, although these meanings or statements were used to criticize government party, they also were affected the general discourse produced by CHP to represent its situation as democratic.

In terms of promotion and legitimization of democratic culture, tweets shared by parliamentarians from CHP made some contributions for internalization of democratic culture and democratic values in the eyes of society. However, some tweets included antidemocratic explanations and definitions and this situation created a dilemma in terms of general democracy discourse produced by parliamentarians.

Parliamentarians from Nationalists Action Party (MHP)

The Nationalist Movement Party sees and accepts democracy, a regime in which the nation is best represented in the administration of a state, as a system where the rule of law, human rights and liberties, and the freedom of thought, enterprise and conscience are secured. The establishment of social peace, comfort and security within a unity and integrity in Turkey depends mainly on the proper working of the democratic regime with its institutions and rules and also on the efforts of political and social actors and intellectuals who absorb democracy and are in good relationship with the national and moral values of people. MHP's pluralistic democracy ideal, in which the nation is best represented in the administration of a state, proposes the protection of the rights and interests of each member of the society, providing their political and social participation, equal opportunities and securing their share from the economic wealth, regardless of the number and power norms.

In the content of the study, tweets of 7 parliamentarians from MHP were taken in hand for the analysis of their tweets. For the analysis of tweets shared by parliamentarians from MHP; Devlet Bahçeli, Oktay Vural, Faruk Bal, Sinan Oğan, Özcan Yeniçeri and Meral Akşener were selected because these parliamentarians used Twitter and tweets frequently in this process and they also shared so many tweets in this process compared with other parliamentarians from MHP. At this process, it was seen that parliamentarians from MHP shared 303 tweets for one month and almost all of them included sentences or words referring democracy or democratic values.

Similarly parliamentarians from CHP, parliamentarians from MHP generally shared tweets blaming government party with not being real democrat and also these parliamentarians blamed government party with using democracy to hide their secret plans which aims to damage united structure of Turkey. At this point tweets produced and legitimized a general discourse implying government party and its implementations as undemocratic and ulterior motives. For example; adjectives, adverbs or words used in tweets generally implies these kinds of statements and this situation caused the formation of harmful discourse which damaged democratic discourse of MHP. Consequently, this situation made tweets harmful to democratic culture of the society. For this reason, discourses legitimized in tweets of parliamentarians from MHP proved that parliamentarians tried to form a perception about government party as evil-minded user of democracy and democratic culture. Dialectically these efforts situated them in a high democratic level in the eyes of their supporters but some explanations or allegations in tweets have damaged the democratic level tried to form by parliamentarians. Especially adjectives and words used in tweets by parliamentarians

from MHP have negative and offensive meanings and this situation caused some difficulties for parliamentarians to form a discourse in their tweets which can promote democratic culture. There are so many different and attractive word or adjective usage such as "coalition of violence", "mutuality of stupidity", "quisling", "unblushing", "dictator", "supporter of terrorism", "this is an oligarchy", "racist", "vicious", "shameless", "Tiran", "despotism of Tiran", "despot prime minister", "three monkeys", "double-crossing". Although these adjectives and words were shared in order to criticize the democratic level and democratic culture of government, they damaged the democratic image of parliamentarians from MHP and they also damaged the democratic culture depending on general politics of MHP.

Conclusion and Discussion

30 parliamentarians shared 1016 tweets at this process and 465 tweets includes nouns, words or adjectives which have negative meanings. Other tweets generally used some definitions or explaining some situations. This means that approximately % 46 of the tweets shared by parliamentarians do not promote democratic values and democratic culture in the conscious of society. Blaming, abusing, insulting, humiliating became so normal for Turkish parliamentarians in the voting process of Domestic Safety Packet and this situation proved that parliamentarians have not internalized the democratic values and democratic culture. Interestingly, these kinds of tweets or messages were Retweeted by followers and they commend this messages frequently. To some up, although it is theoretically accepted that parliamentarians or politicians are the representative of democratic values and they promote the formation of democratic culture in social conscious; almost half of the tweets shared by parliamentarians support and legitimize antidemocratic discourses in social context and conscious. Because of this, democratic culture in Turkish political life have not developed effectively yet, but this situation and analysis proved something that for a qualified democratic culture, at first politicians should be educated. Moreover, democratic culture should be accepted and implemented in political parties because political parties are the beginning of democratic culture for society. If a political

This state of affairs adds to the existing instability of Turkish politics, and prevents the healthy exchange of ideas within and between parties. With leader-centered parties, confrontation wins over compromise, and power-seeking over policy. Yet remarkably, the EU seems not to have identified the weakness of the Turkish political parties system in its push for reform. It has stressed the need to liberalize the law on political parties to make it harder to close parties down; but has not seriously grappled with the much more fundamental issue of democratizing the political parties themselves. While it will take a long time for Turkey's political parties and political culture to move toward a culture of compromise and intra-party democracy, this is the logical place to start. If legislation is amended to force political parties to have delegates appointed through primaries rather than by the central leadership, intra-party debate and democracy will get a fighting chance.

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