



**CANDIDATE SELECTION PROCESS AS A TOOL TO  
SHAPE A PARTY'S DOMINANT COALITION: THE  
CASE OF THE AKP IN TURKEY**

**BİR PARTİNİN EGEMEN KOALİSYONUNU  
ŞEKİLLENDİRMESİNDE BİR ARAÇ OLARAK ADAY  
BELİRLEME SÜRECİ: TÜRKİYE'DE ADALET VE  
KALKINMA PARTİSİ**

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**ABSTRACT**

Since its first incumbency after the 2002 general elections Turkish politics has witnessed considerable changes in the policies of the AKP in economic and political realms. Academics have tried to understand the nature and possible causes of these policy changes mostly focusing on the electoral concerns. This study provides a different dimension to the debate by focusing on the party organization as a possible dynamic preventing/enabling this kind of a policy change. As such, it relates the policy changes of the AKP to the changes in the inner structure of the party organization. This kind of change is tracked through the analysis of the social and political backgrounds of the members of the party's main decision organ-the Central Decision and Administrative Committee.

**Keywords: Dominant Coalition Party Organization, Policy Change, Turkish Politics, AKP.**

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## ÖZ

İktidara geldiği 2002 yılından beri, Türk siyaseti, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi'nin ekonomik ve siyasi alanda geliştirdiği birçok politikasının değişimine şahit olmuştur. Araştırmacılar çoğunlukla bu politik değişimlerin doğasını ve olası sebeplerini seçim perspektifi açısından anlamaya çalışmışlardır. Bu çalışma, bu tür bir politika değişimini/e destekleyen/engel olan bir dinamik olarak parti örgütüne odaklanarak tartışmalara farklı bir boyut kazandırma amacını gütmektedir. Bu bağlamda, çalışma, politika değişimlerini parti örgütünün içyapısındaki değişimle ilişkilendirmektedir. Bu değişim, partinin ana karar verme organı olan Merkez Karar ve Yönetim Kurulu üyelerinin sosyal ve siyasi geçmişlerinin incelenmesiyle ortaya konulmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Egemen Koalisyon, Parti Örgütü, Politika Değişimi, Türk Siyaseti, Akparti.

## INTRODUCTION

The reign of the AKP for more than 14 years in Turkey, has generated many debates in the Turkish politics literature. Lastly, the main debates revolve around understanding the nature and possible causes of the policy changes applied by the party from its arrival to power to its re-election in 2016. Among these changes are the attempts of the party to centralize the political power through the formation of a new constitution, intervene in the decisions taken by the autonomous economic institutions and resolve the Kurdish issue through hard power policies. Each of them seems to be contrasting with the policies defended and lounged by the party with its arrival to power in 2002. This tendency has mostly been evaluated as an attempt of the AKP leaders to consolidate their electoral support and political power through forcing the cornerstones of the liberal democratic regime they have previously established (Özbudun, 2014; Öniş, 2013, 2015). Unfortunately, the possible dynamics preventing/enabling this kind of a policy change has not been properly investigated. With its heterogeneous nature composing of different fractions with different ideological orientations, a party's internal decision making organ may act as a constrained to policy change. The criticisms apparent in the Media on the changing policies of the AKP by some founding members of the AKP signal the presence of such a constraint the party has faced. Given this fact, changing the members of internal decision making organs of the party may be a good

strategy for party leaders to increase compliance and support to policy changes designed to fulfill their electoral aims. Respectively, the candidate selection process may provide the party leaders an opportunity to reshape the party's inner decision making organs. This would especially be the case in centralized party organizations, such as the AKP.

Within this respect, this study aims to relate the policy changes of the AKP to the changes in the inner structure of the party organization; more precisely its main decision making organs. This kind of change is tracked through the analysis of the composition of the members of its main decision organ - the Central Decision and Administrative Committee. Literature argues that the socioeconomic as well as political backgrounds of the party members are expected to become vital in shaping their positions on the policy changes and as a result, important information for the leaders' decisions on who to select in the main decision making organs of the party. Based on this argument, this study uses the social and political backgrounds of the members of the decision making organ of the AKP, as proxies to track change in the organ's representative composition. Within this respect, based on the policy changes in the economic, political realms and the Kurdish problem, the study expects not only an increase in the turnover rates of the members but also a change in their regional, professional and political backgrounds.

This study mainly deviates from previous studies in two realms. Actual studies mostly provide a descriptive account of the social and political backgrounds of the political elites (Frey, 1965; Tachau & Good, 1973; Özbudun, 1978; Kalaycıoğlu, 1988; Tachau, 1988; Kalaycıoğlu, 1995; Turan, 2003; Sayarı & Hasanov, 2008). This study takes a step further and relates the social and political background of the political elites to policy change. Moreover, actual studies mainly concentrate on the parliamentary representatives as the central decision making organ of the party. Alternatively, this study concentrates on the party's central office, that is the Central Decision and Administrative Committee, which is expected to be the main organ responsible to formulate the strategies of the party.

With the leadership change from Recep Tayip Erdoğan to Ahmet Davutoğlu, the AKP's candidate selection experience for its central administrative organization in September 2015 provides suitable data to investigate the magnitude of the change in the dominant coalition of the party. The data on the socio-economic and political backgrounds of the former and present Central Decision and Administrative Committee members has been collected from the members' CVs publicly available at the party's and members' web pages. These are used to track the difference in the socioeconomic and political background of the non-re-elected, re-elected and newly elected members

of Committee. For this end, the aim of the study is discussed through the literature on the nature of the party organization in the world and in Turkey. Then, the data collection process and methodology of the study is explained, followed by two parts where the findings are introduced and discussed within the actual literature.

## **1. LITERATURE: MONITORING CHANGE THROUGH CHANGING THE COMPOSITION OF THE MAIN DECISION ORGANS OF THE PARTY?**

Change in political parties has been extensively debated in the political science literature. The main focus has especially been on identifying major factors affecting political parties' positional or organizational changes. The literature offers two alternatives in explaining this change. First, the literature is dominated by studies testing the effectiveness of exogenous factors; mostly focusing on the nature of the electoral competition the parties face (Downs, 1957; Enelow and Hinich, 1984; Rabinowitz and Macdonald, 1989; Adams, Merrill, and Grofman, 2005). Another alternative, albeit less cited, explanation concentrates on change in the composition of the internal organization of political parties as a source of policy change (Panebianco, 1988; Wilson, 1989; Janda 1990; Katz & Mair 1990; Ignazi 1992; Deschouwer, 1992; Harmel et al, 1995; Harmel & Tan, 2003). Political parties are not monolithic entities; they are mostly formed of different fractions represented in the main decision making bodies of the parties. These fractions have different representative profiles and ideological orientations. Panebianco (1988) cites that each political party is formed by a dominant coalition whose composition is decisive in understanding how this political party performs. These coalitions are mostly expected to put constraints on the political parties' desire to formulate new strategies in their efforts to increase their electoral support. Yet, these coalitions may also be manipulated by leaders so as to be used as a tool for change. This may occur through a change in the composition of the political elites that are members of the main decision mechanisms of the political party. Given this relationship, selection of the candidates to the main decision making bodies of the party may be used by party elites to strengthen / reshape the dominant coalition of the party that could give control over the organization itself and its policy formulation. The socio-demographic and political backgrounds of the members of the central organs responsible in the formulation of the party's strategies become vital to understand these members' policy orientations and the possible constraints they may put on the leaders' attempts to change party strategies. In return, these backgrounds provide free cost information clues for the leaders in their decisions on which candidate to select.

For the ones who desire to control the party's organization and policies, the main debate revolves around identifying the main organs responsible for the important decisions taken in the party. Studies highlight the presence of a tension between different organs on the decision making process of important issues; such as candidate selection or policy formulation that may be defined within two dimensions. The first dimension, which is vertical, arises between the central organs of the party and the activists within the lower ranks of the party organization. In fact, the nature of the intra-party democracy within political parties has been widely studied in the literature (Gallagher and Marsh, 1988; Norris, 1997; Spies and Kaiser, 2014; Rahat & Hazan, 2001; Dalton et al, 2011; Janda et al, 1995; Rahat et al, 2008). Most of these studies, focusing on the diverging role of the internal power structures such as the central political elites versus party members in selecting the candidates, highlight the centralized nature of this process, where decision making is concentrated in the hands of a few; mostly comprised by a party's center organs, its leader and his/her close entourage (Gallager, 1988; Mair, 1994).

In the Turkish case, the oligarchic tendencies and centralized nature of the party organization among Turkish political parties has been widely mentioned by scholars (Heper & Landau, 1991; Esmer, 2002; Özbudun, 2000; Çarkoğlu et al, 2000; Rubin & Heper, 2002; Heper, 2002; Kabasakal, 2012; Arıkan Akdağ, 2014). The control of the party's leadership cadres is especially evident in the policy formulation and the candidate selection process for the members of the party organs of all ranks. Studies indicate that the candidate selection process is in the hands of the party leaders and is manipulated by leaders to control compliance and prevent opposition in the party (Kabasakal, 1991; Çarkoğlu et al, 2000; Rubin, 2002; Tuncer, 2003; Kabasakal, 2012).

Most of the recent studies focusing on the change in the party's decision making organs, takes for granted the party in the parliament as the main decision making of the body, especially when it concerns policy formulation. As a result, actual studies have mainly focused on the representational profiles of the parliamentary members in tracking party change over time (Frey, 1965; Tachau & Good, 1973; Özbudun, 1978; Kalaycıoğlu, 1988; Tachau, 1988; Kalaycıoğlu, 1995; Turan, 2003; Sayarı & Hasanov, 2008). The first attempt made on that realm is the study of Frey published in 1965 which gives detailed information on of the socio-demographic change of the Turkish political elites in the parliament across the first 4 periods of the Turkish democratic experience. In his analysis of the deputies elected after the 1980 military coup, Kalaycıoğlu (1988, 1995) indicates their changing composition characterized by lower political experiences, less loyalty to the party but deeper devotion to their leaders. Only after the 1987 general elections, where pre-coup leaders re-entered politics, did

the professionalization and institutionalization of the Turkish parliament re-increased. More recently, Sayarı and Hasanov (2008) reveals that the entering of the AKP in the Turkish parliament in 2002, resulted in a major change in the composition of the parliamentary elites, that find its peak in 2007 general elections. Their inexperience in parliamentary affairs with 80% of these new elites having no parliamentary experience and their religious orientations with a large proportion knowing the Arabic language was found as a major trend.

Yet, main decisions in the political parties may not always be taken among parliamentary representatives. This brings us to the second dimension of this tension, which is horizontal, emerging between the organ in the highest level of the party, its central office and public office. Katz (2001) highlights that the historical evolution of political parties resulted in the strengthening of the later at the expense of the former. Yet, there is also sign in recent studies that the party in the parliament is subordinated by the party's central office in some countries (Van Biezen, 2000). It is also a known fact that, as in the case of most parliamentary systems characterized by centralized party organizations, candidate deputies are selected by the party leaders. Once they become deputies, in order to be re-elected, they hardly behave differently than their party leaders. As such parliamentary policy formulation process mostly emerges as an arena for confirmation of the proposed policies of the party leaders by their parties' deputies. So the parliament hardly becomes an arena of opposition to policies. Furthermore, Party leaders constrained by electoral concerns, may not always be free in their decision on the parliamentary candidates. As a result, representation of the electorate, instead of control may become the major motivation force in the parliamentary candidate selection process. In contrast, the party's central office, which is mostly responsible of the functioning of the party and formulation of the party's policies, is mostly free from such kind of constraints and can become a suitable organ for the competition of different fractions in the party. The AKP is not an exception. This dominance is also legally visible in the regulation of the party, which gives a relatively independent and powerful position to the Central Decision and Administration Committee. As such, an analysis of the members of the central office of the party organization may be an alternative indicator in understanding a party's change in its dominant coalition, enabling change in its policy position. This is why; this study will mainly focus on this organ to understand the changing characteristics of the dominant coalition in the AKP. The methodology of the study to fulfill this end is described in detail in the next section.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study is to use the differences of the social and political backgrounds of the members of the decision making organs of the AKP, so as to

be able to track the changing dominant coalition of the party that enables its leaders to formulate new policies. To fulfill this purpose, it mainly concentrates on the party's central office, that is, the Central Decision and Administrative Committee, which is expected to be the main organ responsible to formulate the strategies of the party. Specifically, the study compares the members of this committee before and after the party's 5<sup>th</sup> General Congress in September 2015 due to a leadership change from Erdoğan to Davutoğlu, as the former has been selected as the new president of the Turkish Republic.

The study expects to track a change in the dominant coalition for several reasons. Before the Congress, major criticisms have been addressed within the party to some leaders' attempts to change the party's position in the political and economic sphere. Since then, there has been a clear divergence in the party's policies concerning the distribution of the power within the political institutions, the liberalization of the economy and the resolution of the Kurdish issue. The party's proposal to change Turkey's political regime from parliamentarism to presidentialism through a new constitution, its leaders' attempt to politically intervene to the economic institutions, its decision to resolve the Kurdish issue through military means rather than political dialogue form the corner stones of these positional changes. Therefore, the study expects a change in the composition of the committee in terms of profession, place of birth and political experience so as to minimize any opposition to these policy changes.

The data consists of the socio-economic and political backgrounds of the 50 members of the two committees and the presidents of the party, comprising a total dataset of 84 units given the fact that 19 members have been elected to both committees. Each of the independent variables on the socio-economic and political backgrounds of these members has been collected from their CVs publicly available at the party's and members' own web pages. One major difficulty in the data collection process was the unavailability of a uniform data. Still, most of the necessary information was successfully extracted and crosschecked from different electronical resources.

The dependent variable, membership in the Central Decision and Administrative Committee, used in the analysis has been coded so as to have three categories. The first one comprises of the former members of the Committee who were not re-elected. The second category comprises of the former members re-elected in the new committee, while the third category covers members newly elected in the 2015 Congress. This categorization is believed to help to tract the conditions of being excluded from, re-elected or newly elected in the Committee.

The first group of independent variables consists of socio-economic variables such as gender, age, education, profession and place of birth. While profession and place of birth are used as proxies to understand opposition to the party's changing policies; gender, age and education are included in the study to provide a representational profile of the members. The profession of the members is expected to be effective in understanding the policy shifts of the party in the political and economic spheres. Two important changes can be traced in the economic policies of the party. First, we see a priority shift from economic to more political policies. With its formation, while the party's major strategy was based on increasing Turkey's economic performance through the liberalization of the economy, after 2012 the major focus has shifted to the formation of a new constitution to reshape the political sphere. Second, we also notice a change within the economic policies where some of the leaders support the intervention of the political institutions to the economic ones - a situation that contradicts with the former economic liberalization policies of the party. As a result of the decrease in economic priorities and attempts to politically intervene in the economic sphere, the study expects the shares of businessmen or economists to decrease within the committee. In contrast, since the party prioritizes the reorganization of political power through constitutional change the study expects an increase in share of lawyers, academics or state bureaucrats.

The place of birth of the members is anticipated to be an effective variable in understanding the party's positional change in the resolution of the Kurdish issue. The party's attempt to fight against the Kurdish terrorist organization, the PKK, through military means in the Kurdish populated cities, after the PKK's assassination attacks, is in sharp contrast with its early attempts to resolve the issue through democratic means, incorporating the deputies of the pro-Kurdish party the HDP (Halkların Demokratik Partisi- Peoples' Democratic Party) and the jailed leader of the PKK Abdullah Öcalan in the process. The party's actual policy which resulted in severe material and immaterial damages and undermined the living conditions of the citizens in the Kurdish speaking cities, is hardly expected to be supported by the Kurdish speaking politicians. As such, since the Kurdish speaking citizens are concentrated in the South East of Turkey, the study expects a decrease in the representative profile of this region within the committee that would enable the party to change its policies in that realm. In contrast, given the nationalist nature of the Central Anatolia, an increase in the representation of this region seems to be a natural result as the nationalist tone of the party increases.

Another important dimension of possible opposition to these positional changes is related to the power conflict between different members of the founding dominant coalition of the party. In fact, conflict between the founding

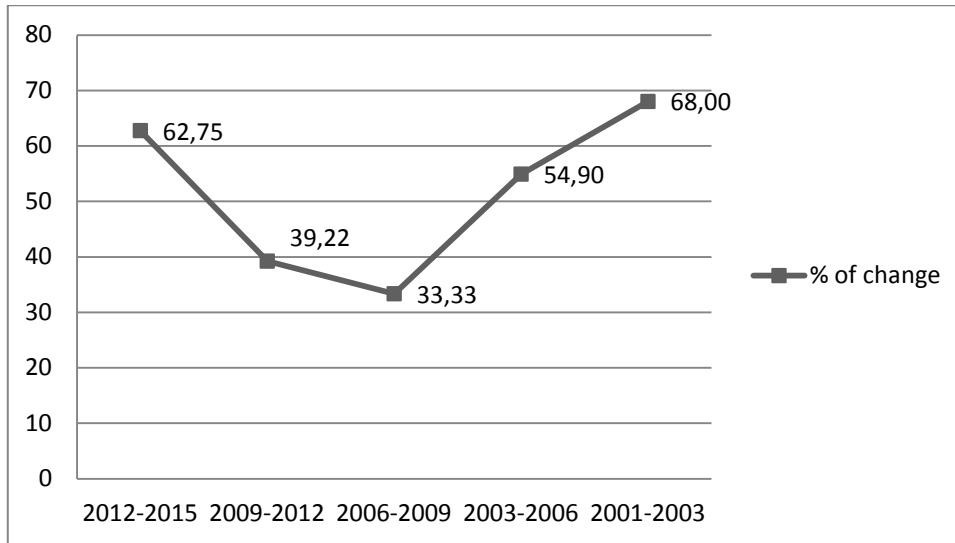


members of the party to these positional changes and criticism against increasing power of Erdoğan within the party has publicly found place in the Media. Similarly, the replacement of old party elites by newly incorporated elites that strengthens Erdoğan's relative position within the party has been increasingly witnessed. The study believes that the political experiences of the committee members, such as the year of entry in politics, in the AKP and other party experience are valid variables that would enable to track such possible changes. The study expects the members of the new committee to have less political experience and have lately entered to the party. The next section consists of a detailed discussion of the findings of the research.

### 3. FINDINGS

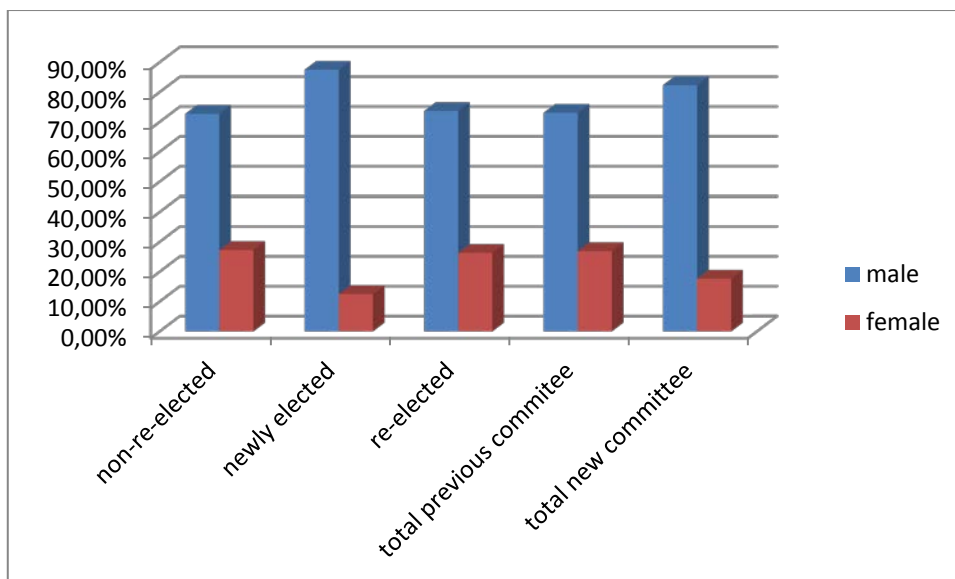
Since its foundation in 2001, the AKP has experienced 5 Ordinary General Congress in 2003, 2006, 2009, 2012, 2015 and an Extraordinary Congress in 2014, all resulting with a considerable change in the composition of the members of the CDAC. Graph 1 reveals the percentage of change in the members of the CDACs for each of these congresses. While there are high turnover rates in 2003, 2006 and 2015 Congress with 68%, 54, 90% and 62.74%, the turnover rate in 2009 and 2012 are relatively low with 33,33% and 39.21%. The turnover rates in 2003, 2006, 2009 and 2012 are expected outcomes that are in conformity with the characteristics of the electoral support base of the party. The high turnover rate in 2003 is probably due to the incorporation of the founding leaders of the party who could not join the party in its founding phase due to their duties in the SP (Saadet Partisi) - the AKP's predecessor. The high turnover rate in 2006 seems to be the reflection of the enlarging support base of the AKP, which increased its votes from 34.43% in 2002 to 46.58% in 2007 General Elections. Similarly, the low turnover rate in 2009 and 2012 is probably due to the consolidation of the support for the party in 2007 and 2011 general elections. Yet, it is difficult to interpret the high turnover rate in the 2015 Congress in terms of the change in the electoral base of the party, which pushes to investigate the possible effect of the competition in the leadership cadres of the party. If so the finding should indicate differences in the representative profiles of the members of the CDAC from 2012 to 2015 General Congress.

**Graph 1: Percentage of Change in the Members of Each CDAC**



When gender, as the first socio-economic variable, is analyzed; the data indicates the under-representation of the women in the party cadres in both committees. Furthermore, the data also reveal a sharp difference between the two committees where under-representation is even more evident in the 2015 vis-à-vis the 2012 Committee with 17.65% vis-à-vis 26.92%, respectively. With 12,5%, the under-representation is especially higher among the members newly entering to the committee in 2015. The data signifies the poor and decreasing representation of women in the main decision making organ of the party which is mainly dominated by males.

**Graph 2: Gender Representation of the CDACs**



The two committees seem not to differentiate in terms of the ages of its member where each groups' mean is 52.24 and 52.36 respectively (table 1). A similar observation is also visible when we compare the means of the non-re-elected and newly elected members which are respectively 53,25 and 53,45. Yet, the median of these two groups with 52 as opposed to 56 reveals that the latter group is composed of older members. In fact, when we observe the dispersion of the members in 5 years clusters, we see a clear difference among the groups for members aged between 50-54 and 55-59. While the first group has more members aged between 50-54 with 32%, the second group has more members aged between 55-59 and 60-64 with 23% each. The data signifies that the largest group among the new members of the 2015 Committee is older than the largest group in the previous committee. There seems to be also an increasing under-representation of the younger people in the main decision organ of the AKP. An interesting observation is the absence of members younger than 34 in both groups. This may be due to the presentation of young party members in the Youth Organization designed as an auxiliary organ.

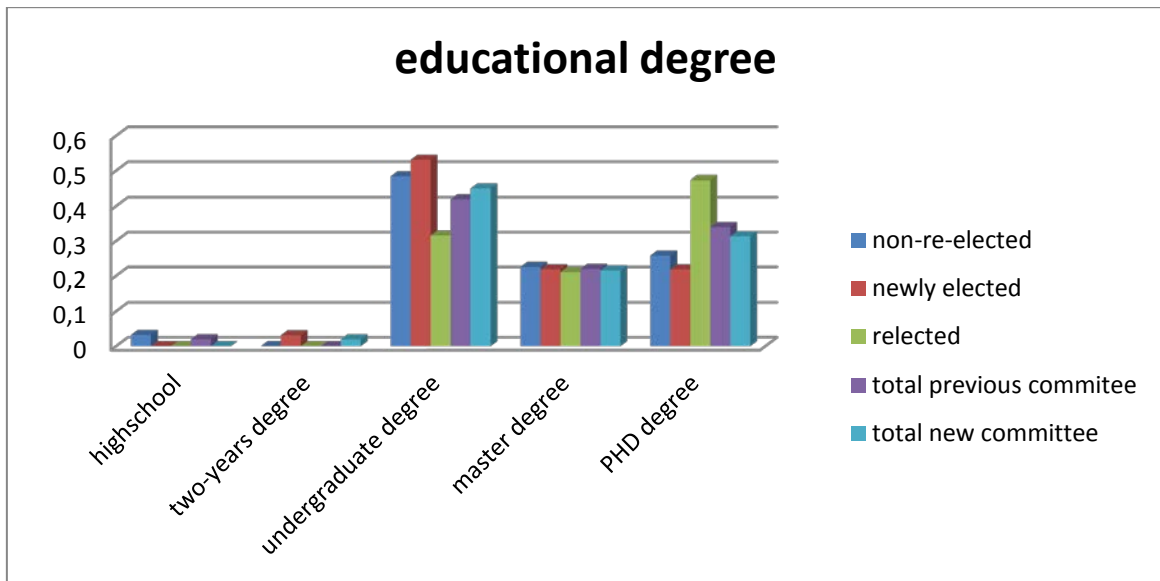
**Table 1: Age of the Members of the CDACs**

	membership to committees				
	Non-re-elected	Newly elected	Re-elected	Total previous committee	Total new committee
30-34	0,00	0,00	0,05	0,02	0,02
35-39	0,06	0,10	0,16	0,10	0,12
40-44	0,10	0,06	0,00	0,06	0,04
45-49	0,16	0,16	0,21	0,18	0,18
50-54	0,32	0,16	0,16	0,26	0,16
55-59	0,06	0,23	0,26	0,14	0,24
60-64	0,13	0,23	0,11	0,12	0,18
65-69	0,13	0,03	0,05	0,10	0,04
70-74	0,03	0,03	0,00	0,02	0,02
Mean	53,25	53,45	50,58	52,24	52,36
Median	52	56	51	51,50	52

High educational degree has been an important characteristic of the political elites in Turkey. This is also significant for the members of the CDACs of the AKP. The percentage of the ones who owns a high school or two years degree is very low within both committees. The largest group comprise of the ones who own a university degree with 48,4% and 53,1% followed by the ones who own a PHD degree with 34% and 31,4% and the ones who own a master degree with 22% and 31,6% for the 2012 and 2015 CDACs. When we compare the three groups, we can observe that the group comprising of members in both

committees is the most educated one. As such, education seems to be positively effective in remaining in the committee. Yet, it seems to be negatively related with the new members, since the share of university graduates are higher while the shares of master or PHD graduates are lower than the other two groups. In the light of these observations, the study can conclude that the members of the 2015 committee are less educated than the members of the previous committee.

**Graph 3: Educational Degrees of the Members of the CDACs**



The composition of the professional profiles, of both committees, revealed in table 2, is in conformity with the study’s expectation. Although the businessmen are still the largest group represented within the party in the previous committee with 22.92%, one can observe a large decrease in the new committee which falls to 11.76%. This decrease is even more evident when the non-re-elected and newly elected members are compared. The shares fall from 27.59% to 9.38%. An important observation is the high shares of academics, lawyers and former bureaucrat in both committees, with their slightly higher representation in the last committee. While academics comprise 20.83% of the previous committee, they comprise 21.57% of the new committee. Similarly, the shares of lawyers are 18.75% compared to 21.57%; while the shares of bureaucrats are 14.58% compared to 15.69% respectively. A greater difference occurs when the three groups are compared. We see a higher representation of accountants and lawyers among the ones who remained or newly entered in the committee. In terms of policy sensitivity and expertise the professional representation, signals the decreasing sensitivity and expertise of the committees in economic issues and a growing sensitivity and expertise in governmental affairs such as academic, legal and bureaucratic issues. The data signals the

disengagement of the AKP from the business circles and its rapprochement to the state.

**Table 2: Professional Profiles of the Members of the CDACs**

	membership to committees				
	Non-re-elected	Newly elected	Re-elected	Total previous committee	Total new committee
accountant	0,00	6,25	5,26	2,08	5,88
doctor	3,45	0,00	5,26	4,17	1,96
education	6,90	6,25	5,26	6,25	5,88
engineer	10,34	9,38	0,00	6,25	5,88
lawyer	17,24	21,88	21,05	18,75	21,57
pharmacist	0,00	3,13	5,26	2,08	3,92
academic	17,24	18,75	26,32	20,83	21,57
bureaucrat	17,24	18,75	10,53	14,58	15,69
economic/business	27,59	9,38	15,79	22,92	11,76
manager	0,00	3,13	5,26	2,08	3,92
other	0,00	3,13	0,00	0,00	1,96
total	100,00	100,00	100,0	100,00%	100,00

The representation of the CDACs in regional terms extracted from the place of birth of the members indicates important shifts which are in conformity with the study's expectations. The least represented regions in both Committees are the Mediterranean and Aegean regions where the party has its lowest electoral support; while the Black Sea, Central Anatolia and Marmara region with high electoral support are the most represented ones. Yet, there is a clear difference in the committees concerning the representation of the South Eastern region, where most of the Kurdish speaking population resides. These results are not in conformity with the electoral base of the party, which has still an important electoral support in the region. The share of the members from this region decreases from 16% to 6% within the two committees. This decrease is even sharper when the non-re-elected members are compared with the re-elected and the newly elected ones. While members from this region comprise 23% of the first group, they comprise only 5% and 6% of the two other groups.

In contrasts, the representation of the Central Anatolian region increases from 18% to 24%, as anticipated. An interesting observation is the increase in the representativeness the Marmara region in the new committee which rises from 18% to 22%. The increase of these two regions representativeness is even more visible when the non-re-elected and newly elected members are compared. While these regions have the highest share among the newly elected members comprising each 26%, their representation among the non-re-elected is

considerably low with 16% and 19%. The data reveals the under-representation of the Kurdish speaking region in the new committee in favor of the Central Anatolia and Marmara regions. As such, these regions become the highest represented ones in this committee.

**Table 3: Regional Representation of the Members of the CDACs**

	Membership to committees				
	Non-re-elected	Newly elected	Re-elected	Total previous committee	Total new committee
Mediterranean	0,06	0,03	0,11	0,08	0,06
Eastern Anatolia	0,13	0,16	0,11	0,12	0,14
Aegean	0,03	0,06	0,05	0,04	0,06
Southeastern Anatolia	0,23	0,06	0,05	0,16	0,06
central Anatolia	0,16	0,26	0,21	0,18	0,24
Black sea	0,16	0,16	0,26	0,20	0,20
Marmara	0,19	0,26	0,16	0,18	0,22
Abroad	0,03	0,00	0,05	0,04	0,02

The last variables that would indicate the change in the dominant coalition of the party are the members' year of entry in politics and in the AKP. Table 4 indicates the mean of each group's entry in politics. The findings shows a difference in each group, which is especially significant between the non-re-elected and new elected members with means of 1999,3 and 2002,6. When we re-group the members newly entering politics into clusters, each representing the period between two consecutive General Congresses, the difference is more visible. While the members who entered politics before the foundation of the AKP are the highest in the previous committee comprising 36%, they decrease to the second largest group in the new committee comprising 27% of the members. The pre-AKP experience seems to be even higher among non-re-elected members with 38% while it is lower among newly elected members with 23%. Given the fact that these members mostly come from the Islamist RP tradition, we can conclude that their representation decreases within the CDAC, while representation of members beginning their political career with the AKP increases in percentages. For example, the members entering to politics between 2001 and 2003 are the second largest group in the previous committee with 32% rising to the largest group in the new committee with 31%. An important observation is the considerably high percentage of the members entering politics between 2013 and 2015 that constitutes 13% of the new committee and 17% of the newly elected members. Similar trends are visible when we analyze the year of entry of the members in the AKP, with slight differences signaling a passage of elites from other political parties to the AKP especially between 2010 and 2015

among the newly elected members of the new committee. While %66 percent of the previous members entered the AKP between 2001 and 2003, this percentage decreases to 50% among newly elected members. 22% of the newly elected members of the last committee have entered the AKP between 2013 and 2015. The data clearly indicates a change in the composition of the committees in terms of years of political experience.

**Table 4: Years of Entry in Politics of the Members of the CDACs**

year of entry in politics	Membership to committees				
	Non-re-elected	Newly elected	Re-elected	Total previous committee	Total new committee
1977-2000	0,38	0,23	0,33	0,36	0,27
2001-2003	0,34	0,33	0,28	0,32	0,31
2004-2006	0,09	0,03	0,22	0,14	0,10
2007-2009	0,06	0,10	0,11	0,08	0,10
2010-2012	0,13	0,13	0,00	0,08	0,08
2013-2015	0,00	0,17	0,06	0,02	0,13
Mean	1999,3	2002,6	2001,5	2000,1	2002,2
Median	2001	2002	2001,5	2001	2002

**Table 5: Years of Entry in the AKP of the Members of the CDACs**

year of entry in the AKP	Membership to committees				
	Non-re-elected	Newly elected	Re-elected	Total previous committee	Total new committee
2001-2003	0,69	0,50	0,47	0,61	0,49
2004-2006	0,09	0,03	0,21	0,14	0,10
2007-2009	0,06	0,13	0,11	0,08	0,12
2010-2012	0,16	0,13	0,16	0,16	0,14
2013-2015	0,00	0,22	0,00	0,02	0,16
mean	2003,7	2006,7	2005,2	2004,3	2005,1
median	2002	2003	2004	2002	2004

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The analysis above on the characteristics of the members of the AKP's main decision making organ, the CDAC, reveals important information on the linkage between the party organization and policy formulation. Within the case of the AKP, the findings sustain the study's expectation on the possible use of candidate selection by the party's leadership cadres as a tool to decrease opposition to and increase support for policy changes. Specifically, the findings indicate a change in the socioeconomic and political characteristics of the new

members of the CDAC in accordance with the policy shifts of the party. The new characteristics of the members also signal possible opportunities and risks the party may face in terms of policy formulation.

The socioeconomic indicators such as gender, age and education signals the dominance of male, elder and highly educated members within the party's main decision making organ. These results are in conformity with previous studies on the parliamentary representatives, showing that the AKP does not differ from the general political tradition in Turkey (Sayarı & Hasanov, 2008). Moreover, the decreasing representation of these groups within the last CDAC signals the growing trend of underrepresentation within the party. In policy terms, the decreasing representation of these groups is expected to have decreased the sensitivity of the party to issues concerning gender and youth problems such as sexual harassment, household violence, high unemployment rate etc. Especially in the case of the youth who comprises a large share of actual and new electors, this situation may have returned as a disadvantage for the party in electoral terms.

The change in the professional profiles of the members is in conformity with the study's expectation. The present profile significantly deviates from the professional profiles of the AKP parliamentarians after the 2001 and 2007 general elections (Sayarı & Hasanow, 2008). The decrease in economic elite in favor of bureaucrats, academics and lawyers within the new CDCA, reveals important information on the opposition to/support for the party's economic and political policies. In fact, the data signifies a change in the professional profile of the members in accordance with the policy changes the party has undergone. First, the decrease in the economic elites such as businessmen is in parallel with the attempts of the party leaders to politically intervene to the economic institutions. Second, the increase in bureaucrats, academics and lawyers at the expense of economic elites is in conformity with AKP's two policy changes – the priority given to political issues vis-à-vis economic ones and the attempt to prepare a new constitution. In terms of policy sensitivity and expertise the professional representation, signals the decreasing sensitivity and expertise of the committees in economic issues and a growing sensitivity and expertise in governmental affairs such as academic, legal and bureaucratic issues. More generally, the data signals the disengagement of the AKP from the business circles and its rapprochement to the state, which will probably affect its future policies. These changes has probably decreased potential opposition to the decreasing importance given by the party to economic issues or the politically intervene to economic institutions, they have provided higher expertise in the re-organization of the state through a constitutional change. Yet, given the



vulnerability of Turkey's present economy, such a change may have hindered a potential risk for the AKP's economic policies.

In terms of the regional dispersion of the members, the data reveals, as expected, the under-representation of the Kurdish speaking region in the new committee in favor of the Central Anatolia and Marmara regions. In fact, the AKP's decision to finish the peace process and launch a military campaign against the terrorist organization the PKK is expected to have found strong support and strengthen its unified position on the issue within the new committee. The increase of the representation of the Central Anatolian and Marmara Regions is in accordance with the party's nationalist policies. On the other hand, the composition of the new committee has probably prevented the policies that would support the peaceful resolution of the Kurdish problem.

The data clearly indicates a change in the composition of the committees in terms of political experience. On one hand, the decrease of the members entering to the party in its founding phase sustains the argument on the dissolution the founding coalition and the leave of the party's Islamist elites from the RP tradition. More specifically, this trend is in accordance with the decreasing power of former leaders such as Abdullah Gül, Cemil Çiçek and Bülent Arınç, each of them having been important figures for the party. On one hand, the incorporation of elites newly entering to politics or transferred from different parties during Erdoğan reign at the expense of the Islamist elites who probably have loyalty to him, signals the increasing power of Erdoğan within the party. This translates into a less organized opposition to Erdoğan's policy among these elites – a situation that explains the party's uniform position in all political agendas set by the party in that period. Although the lack of experience of the new elites seems to increase Erdoğan's power, their inexperience has probably negatively affected the formulation of policies.

More generally, the findings indicates an overall change of the dominant coalition of AKP within the main decision making organ of the party in a way to decrease opposition and increase support to the positional changes the party has adopted since 2015. This seems to be attained not only by changing the professional and regional profiles of the political elites but also through the elimination of the founding elites and the incorporation of the new ones whose political careers are strongly related to their future position in the party which is tightly controlled by Erdoğan.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The study has aimed to investigate the possible use of the candidate selection process in the main decision organs of the parties by leaders as a tool to

enable policy changes. Within this respect, it has tried to reveal the change in the dominant coalition of the AKP that would help the party leaders to decrease potential criticism to and increase support for its changing positions on economic and political policies and the resolution of the Kurdish issue. This has been conducted through the analysis of the socio-economic characteristics and political experiences of the members of the CDAC of the party from 2012 to 2015 General Congress. Within this respect, major focus has been given to the professional profiles, regional representations and political experiences in terms year of entry in politics and the AKP of the CDAC members.

The study finds evidence of change in both the representative profiles and political experiences of the members from 2012 to 2015 that can be interpreted as a change in the dominant coalition. The first important finding is the great change in the turnover rate of the members of the CDAC that cannot be explained through electoral concerns. Within the socio-economic characteristics important results of the study concerns the change in the geographical and professional characteristics of the CDAC members. The sharp decrease of the members born in the Kurdish-speaking region of South Eastern Anatolia in favor of Marmara and Central Anatolian Region help to explain decreased opposition and increased support for the new Kurdish policy of the party. Similarly, the large representation of academics, bureaucrats and the decreasing representation of the businessmen in favor of the lawyers are in parallel with the existing focus of the party to change the legal political system and decreased concern on liberal economic policies that would favor the economic sphere. The political experience of the members of both committees also signifies a change. The decreasing percentages of members entering politics before the foundation of the AKP in favor of newly entering members support the expected shift in the party at the expense of founding elites that may resist to the leaders' new policies and at the favor of new elites with different orientations that are closer to the actual leaders. This trend is also supported when the year of entry of the committee members to the AKP is analyzed. When the overall political experience of the committee members are taken into consideration, we observe that the new committee members have less experience in politics and are later comers to the AKP.

This study has been a first attempt to analyze change in the political elites of the AKP by analyzing the CDAC of the party from 2012 to 2015. The enlargement of the study to the members of the former CDAC elected in 2003, 2006, 2009 and 2016 may provide a more detailed analysis on the party's trajectory in terms of its composition as an organization. Yet, the major shortcoming of the study derives from the limited number of cases incorporated in the data, which is unfortunately insufficient to conduct more statistically

sophisticated analysis. Perhaps this shortcoming may be overcome by the enlargement of the data so as to include other decision-making organs of the party at different organizational levels. Such an analysis may be a productive further step in the inquiry of the political elites in Turkey.

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