Conservative Women in Contemporary Turkish Politics: Mobilization, Party Politics and Voting

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A dissertation presented to the

Atatürk Institute for Modern Turkish History
at Boğaziçi University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

October 2022

Declaration of Originality

The intellectual content of this dissertation, which has been written by me and for which I take full responsibility, is my own, original work, and it has not been previously or concurrently submitted elsewhere for any other examination or degree of higher education. The sources of all paraphrased and quoted materials, concepts, and ideas are fully cited, and the admissible contributions and assistance of others with respect to the conception of the work as well as to linguistic expression are explicitly acknowledged herein.

Abstract

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Professor M. Asım Karaömerlioğlu, Dissertation Advisor

This dissertation examines women's political participation process (a.k.a political feminization) in the case of Turkey's AKP. Therefore, it is built on a puzzle between the number of women in the party and the party's gender agenda. It focuses on the political participation process of women through qualitative research on the party's women's branches and party's women voters. By analyzing the relationship, the party's anti-feminist agenda deliberately specifies the limits of women's political involvement bolstering it with the party's Islamist-conservative ideology. Afterwards, without challenging the strict bounds of the party, women activists (actors in the party's women branches) rigorously navigate their political survival by polishing their mobilization abilities. The research findings suggest that AKP reaches out women without pledging to gender equality or feminist emancipation while rhetorically encouraging their participation into politics both as activist and voter. In return, women form their political style considering the limits and strategically pushing presumable opportunities, which stem from the limits. Moreover, women voters raise their political agency by routinizing the voting behavior and identifying themselves as the AKP's supporters.

146, 192 words

Özet

Günümüz Türkiye Siyasetinde Muhafazakar Kadınlar: Mobilizasyon, Parti Siyaseti ve Oy verme

Nur Sinem Kourou, Doktora Adayı, 2022
Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Atatürk İlkeleri ve İnkılap Tarihi Enstitüsü

Profesör M. Asım Karaömerlioğlu, Tez Danışmanı

Bu tez kadınların siyasal katılım sürecini (diğer adıyla siyasetin kadınlaşması) Türkiye'de Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi örneğinde incelemektedir. Bu sebeple, araştırma partinin kadın üye ve seçmen sayısı ile partinin toplumsal cinsiyet ajandası arasındaki ilişkiyi anlamayı amaçlamıştır. Parti, parti kadın kolları ve partinin kadın seçmenler üzerine yapılan nitel araştırma ile kadınların siyasal katılım sürecine odaklanmıştır. İlişkiyi incelerken öncelikle partinin İslami-muhafazakâr ideolojisi ile desteklenen feminizm karşıtı gündeminin kadınların siyasal katılım sürecinin sınırlarını belirlediği gösterilmiştir. Daha sonra ise kadın aktivistlerin (parti kadın kolları aktörlerinin), partinin belirlediği sınırlara meydan okumadan siyasal hayatlarını parti mobilizasyonundaki rollerini belirginleştirerek sürdürdüğüne dikkat çekilmiştir. Parti retorik olarak seçmen ve aktivist kadınların siyasal katılımını teşvik ederken bunu kadınlara yönelik toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği ya da feminist bir özgürleşme vaadiyle yapmıyor. Bununla birlikte kadın aktivistler partinin belirlediği sınırları dikkate alıyor ve oradan doğan fırsatları da stratejik bir biçimde fırsata dönüştürerek siyaset tarzlarını oluşturuyorlar. Kadın seçmenler de parti ile oluşturdukları siyasal aktörlüklerini rutinleştirdikleri oy davranışlarıyla partinin sadık destekçisi olduklarını gösteriyorlar.

146, 192 kelime

To my teacher who taught me to read and interpret life

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Glossary of Non-English Terms

AK Nokta   One of the political strategies of the AKP to reach out people in the public spheres (Party activists -overwhelmingly women open a table in the public squares with party's flag)

Altın Günü   A traditional way of women's gathering which is also known as *Kabul Günü*. Women are coming together to share food, talk and socialize.

Bananeci   This is a Turkish idiom to say I do not care or not my business.

Başkan(ım)   Leader. According the AKP's party organization, each level and units have their own leaders. Therefore, people in the party highly possible to have a leadership position in the party and they make them call each other as *başkanım* to underline their position.

Bayramlık	According to Islam, after people fast on the Ramadan, they celebrate their worship with a festive/bayram which is Şeker (Sugar) or Ramadan Festive. Two months after the Sugar/Ramadan Bayram, people are practicing other religious activities which is animal sacrificing called Kurban Bayramı. These two bayrams are culturally important to visit family members and neighbors. To this activity, people are wearing new clothes, and especially children get new clothes. Bayramlık is the name of the new clothes which are bought for generally children.
Cemaat	Religious Group
Çiğköfte	A traditional food which is generally prepared in the Eastern and Southeastern part of Turkey
Esnaf Ziyareti	One of the political strategies of the AKP to reach out people who run small business in the neighborhood/district
Dava	This is a term what party's activists are using to refer their motivation to be in politics. A kind of an ideal, aim.
Deniz Feneri	A charity organization
Diren Gezi	This was a hashtag and the motto during the Gezi Protest.
Elti	It is used to identify two or more women who are married with brothers
Eyvah	Alas!
Hazmetme	I translated the verb as internalization. Indeed, the exact meaning would be the process of internalization
Hafız	Refer the people who memorize the whole Quran
Hemhal olmak	I translated the verb as behave like them. However, it is more than behaving. It is about acting, being and understanding people in the same way as they do.
Hemşehri	People call each other as *hemşehri* who are coming from the same city, fellow citizen.
Hoca	Teaching staff in secular schools or religious teacher

İmam Hatip	Public vocational and religious schools for training imams or religiously well-educated individuals
Kemikleşmiş İdeolojiler	I translated the term as ossified ideologies. However, it means stable, consolidated ideologies.
Komşuluk Hukuku	I translated the term as neighborhood custom. It mainly uses by people to show their respect towards people who are living in the same neighborhood
Kuma	Name of women who are married with the same man at the same time
Kuran Kursu	Qur'an Learning Center
Kutlu Doğum Haftası	The birth of the Prophet Mohammed is celebrated throughout the week
Medrese	It is an educational institution
Mevlid	It is known as a celebration for Prophet Mohammed in Islamic World. However, in Turkey, women are gathering for specific reason such as celebrating a newborn, or mourning after death. Women are reading Quran or Mevlid, but they call this special events regardless the reason
Mukabele	Women are gathering during Ramadan to read Quran
Namaz	Salah. One of the pillars of Islam which is the name of pray for God five times in one day
Sarma	Stuffed leaves
Tarhana	Traditional Turkish soup
Teşkilat	Organization
Teşkilatçı	Member of Organization
Ümmet	Ummah

Abbreviations and Acronyms

AKDEM	Zeytinburnu Aile Kadın Destekleme ve Engelliler Merkezi (Family Women Support and Disabled Center)
AKP	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)
ANAP	Anavatan Partisi (Motherland Party)
ASYAM	Arnavutköy Sosyal Yardımlaşma Merkezi (Arnavutköy Social Assistance Center)
AP	Adalet Partisi (Justice Party)
AWBs	AKP's Women Branches (AKP Kadın Kolları)
CHP	Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People Party)
DP	Demokrat Parti (Democratic Party)
DSP	Demokratik Sol Parti (Democratic Leftist Party)
FP	Fazilet Partisi (Virtue Party)
İSKUR	Türkiye İş Kurumu (Turkish Employment Agency)
İYİP	İyi Parti (Good Party)
GONGO	Government Organized Non-Governmental Organization
KHF	Kadınlar Halk Fırkası
KADEM	Kadın ve Demokrasi Derneği (Women and Democracy Association)
MKYK	Merkez Karar Yönetim Kurulu (Central Administrative Council)
MNP	Milli Nizam Partisi (National Order Party)
MSP	Milli Selamet Partisi (National Salvation Party)
MPs	Members of Parliament
MYK	Merkez Karar Yürütme Kurulu (Central Executive Council)
Özgür-Der	Özgür Düşünce ve Eğitim Hakları Derneği (Freedom of Thought and Education Rights Association)
PKK	Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan (Kurdistan Workers' Party)
RP	Refah Partisi (Welfare Party)
SCP	Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası (Free Republican Party)

SHP	Sosyal Demokrat Halkçı Parti (Social Democratic People Party)
SP	Saadet Partisi (Felicity Party)
TKB	Türk Kadınlar Birliği (Turkish Women Union)
TOKİ	Toplu Konut İdaresi Başkanlığı (Housing Development Administration of Turkey)
TpCF	Terakkiperver Cumhuriyet Fırkası (Progressive Republican Party)
TÜRGEV	Türkiye Gençlik ve Eğitime Hizmet Vakfı
YSK	Yüksek Seçim Kurulu (Supreme Election Council)
WVS	World Value Survey

Acknowledgements

This dissertation is the output of long-term work. It would not have been emerged without incredible people in my life. My advisor Prof. M. Asım Karaömerlioğlu, he did not only help me to navigate the research, but thanks to his wisdom, support, and encouragement, I learned -and still learning- how to navigate myself in both academic and non-academic life. I am also grateful my dissertation committee members Prof. Cengiz Kırlı, Dr. Nurşen Gürboğa, Prof. Dr. Evren Balta and Prof. Dr. Pınar Uyan Semerci. Their comments improved every part of the dissertation and encouragements refreshed me after tiring PhD process.

I would also like to thank Dr. Hazal Papuççular, without her daily consultations and encouragement, I could not have found to energy to continue. I am deeply thankful to her to be an amazing role model in academia to me. As I understood in the very beginning of the academic life, it is not easy to create reasons to motivate yourself. For this, I would like to thank Dr. Özge Zihnioğlu, Dr. Özgen Felek and Dr. Paris Aslanidis to make me believe myself and support me to not give up.

It would not have been possible to complete my thesis without support of my friend. I feel myself lucky thanks to you, Zehra Atik, Orkun Darcan, Nihan Ergönül, Malika Zekhni, Martin Mejia, Chang Wang, Seda Türkoğlu.

I owe the greatest thank to my family. They did their best to support me in my way. I am grateful for their infinite confidence towards my choices.

I have to spare my grateful thanks to my husband Orhan Kourou. I am deeply thankful his existence in my life. His endless love, friendship and psychological support my emotional crisis during the PhD journey help me to overcome the challenges.

NOTE: The in-house editor of the Atatürk Institute has made detailed recommendations with regard to the format, grammar, spelling, usage, syntax, and style of this dissertation.

1

Introduction

The AKP's women's branches is the biggest and most unique political women's organization in the world. It would not be wrong to say that the AKP is also a women's movement.

-Ayşe Kesir, the head of AKP's Headquarter Women's Branches, Sözcü 2022

Our President is the greatest pioneers of women's active and determined presence in politics. The bigots who judge the AKP and the AKP women by rote have told us in the past, "You are keeping women in the house". However, it was they who confined women to their homes. They were the ones who kept us waiting at the school gate, prevented us from participating in business life because we could not go to school, and did not let us enter politics or parliament. As a result of this discrimination in their era, unfortunately, women were at home. But today, the prohibitive practices have been removed one by one.

-Ayşe Kesir, the head of AKP's Headquarter Women's Branches, Sabah 2021.

A woman who rejects motherhood is "deficient" and "incomplete", urging women to have at least three children

-Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, BBC News 2016.

You cannot put women and men on an equal footing. It is against nature

-Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, BBC News 2014.

Our religion regards motherhood very highly. Feminists do not understand that they reject motherhood

-Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Hürriyet 2008.

T his is a confusing picture. While Kesir's statements emphasize the existence of women in the AKP, three quotations from Erdoğan not only reveal his inner thoughts but also the party's view towards women. What puzzled me in this research was simply the dynamics between Kesir's two statements and Erdoğan's gender agenda. I argue that there is a coexistence between emphasizing the power and existence of women in the AKP and restricting it with the impact of the Erdoğan. This dialectic relation is the source of my research and theme of the analysis which I focused on in the following chapters. As I argue throughout the research, the politics of the AKP's women relies on a coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics, which is constructed by the party, women activists, and the voters in this process.

When I started my fieldwork in 2019 during the local election period in Turkey, I confronted the same dynamic in women's reflections that seems like a contradiction at first sight, but then is revealed to be in co-existence with its own nature. While digging into the party's gender agenda, focusing on the political presence of women actors in the party and tracing their activism until reaching the bottom and following back women voters' response to the party, the data examined opens a new line of inquiry about the politics of the AKP's women. The firsthand field data demonstrated the feminization process of the AKP despite the anti-feminist gender agenda of the party.

Additionally, the case complicates existing knowledge about women's political activism. Moreover, it is important to understand the feminization process in the AKP. The initiation of my curiosity was based on a basic proven statistical outcome which is that the AKP attracted female
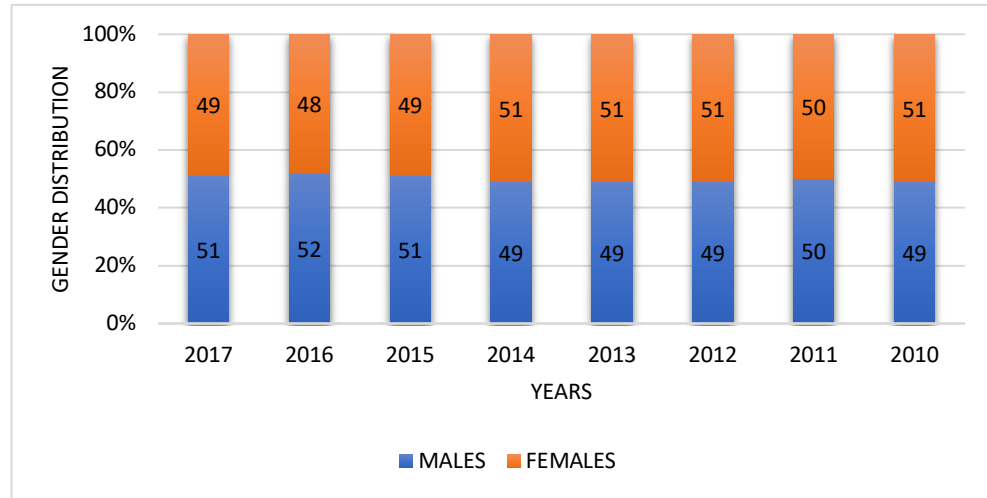
Figure 1.1 Gender Distribution of AKP's Voters

Source: KONDA Seçmen Kümeleri (Uncu 2018)

voters -sometimes more than males-, and it has managed to recruit women as members of the party's women's branches. Both the AKP's female voters and the AKP's female members point to the party being popular among women.

KONDA's[1] analysis of AKP voters demonstrates women's tendency toward the party openly. According to the KONDA's survey, women consist of more or less half of the party's voters. When it comes to the AKP's female members -I could not find official statistics but I collected data from speeches of the AKP politicians and newspapers–, their numbers have now reached more than 5.5 million (Taşcan 2021).

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[1] "KONDA, as a research and consultancy company, is fundamentally engaged with knowledge production with a specific purpose of providing insight for the specific needs of policy-makers, business leaders and academics". See: https://konda.com.tr/en/about-us/
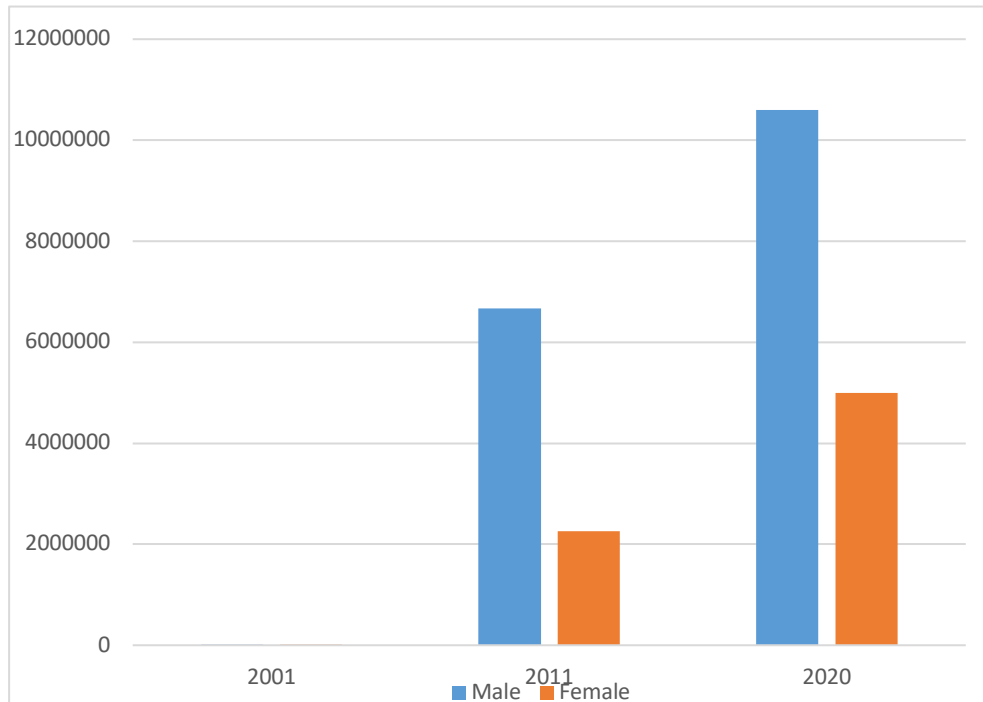
Figure 1.2 Numbers of the AKP's Member

While the numerical existence of women can be seen as a feminization process at the women's political participation level, where can Kesir's existential relationship with the President be placed? Put differently, in what ways and under which conditions is the feminization process achieved despite Erdoğan's obvious anti-feminist view? Drawing on these two broad and ambiguous questions, this dissertation examines how the feminization process functions in Turkey's AKP. On the one hand, the party's anti-feminist agenda deliberately specifies the limits of women's political involvement, bolstering it with the party's Islamist-conservative ideology. On the other hand, without challenging the strict bounds of the party, women activists rigorously navigate their political survival by polishing their mobilization abilities. My research findings suggest that the AKP reaches out to women without pledging feminist emancipation, but rhetorically encouraging their participation in politics both as activists and voters. In return, women form their activism considering the limits and pushing for presumable opportunities which stem

from anti-feminism. Moreover, women voters raise their political agency by routinizing their voting behavior and identifying themselves as the AKP's supporters.

As I argue, the party embedded in the persona of President Erdoğan, women activists and voters are the key components of the politics of the AKP's women, or what I call *vertical feminization,* and their way of participation in this process frames the coexistence among actors within a particular context. Repeatedly, this dissertation explores how feminizing and anti-feminizing politics exists together and make women's political participation possible while utilizing their participation as the source of coexistence and consolidation of anti-feminization. Women's political presence in the AKP has bidirectional, multi-level and multi-actor features which intersect in party politics. For example, feminizing and anti-feminizing processes are not only deployed by one actor-such as the party, the AKP women activists and women voters are the participants of the process not only as contributors, but also as recipients what the coexistence conveys to them. Within this environment, women actors act strategically considering the limits and possibilities.

§ 1.1 Why Women's Support to the AKP is a Case?

When it comes to why the case of the politics of the AKP women are important to be researched, my answer should refer to literature on the relationship between women and right-wing politics and women and Islam. Firstly, scholars argue that women and the anti-feminist agenda seems bizarre (Valenti 2014) and an unlikely match (Jain and Iyer 2021). It must be admitted that right-wing politics is mainly male dominated, leading to an overlooking of women's participation both on the demand and supply side. The agenda and structure of right-wing politics seems to be for the advantage of men and the disadvantage of women, that deepens inequalities for women in various aspects. As a result, women tend to participate and support the left-wing and progressive movements, called the "modern gender gap" (Inglehart and Norris 2002).

However, the existence of women in the right-wing politics should be an important case; the rise of female supporters and electorates in contemporary right-wing politics allows us to analyze women and right-wing politics as a popular topic. For instance, in the scope of right-wing populism, women's participation in politics has been interrogated on the one hand from the perspective of the gender-gap in terms of female electorates (Spierings and Zaslove 2017; 2015) and, on the other hand, from the perspective of the political perception and representation of women as female politicians (de Lange and Mügge 2015; Harteveld et al. 2015; Harteveld and Ivarsflaten 2018; Kampwirth 2010; Kostadinova and Mikulska 2017; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2015). The focus of the recent research leads us to ask what makes the right-wing an attractive choice for women? While the answer has changed depending on the context, it paves the way for increasing attention to the right-wing politics and women.

The concerns and questions about the relation between women and right-wing politics are not new. Yet, this field remains quite limited because "historically and currently studies of the right overwhelmingly focus on men" (Bacchetta and Power 2002:1). Another supporting view comes from Blee (2002), who clarifies why women are invisible in right-wing politics in the US -but which is applicable to other cases-, despite their meaningful existence. First, the top-down perspective of the existing studies towards the male-dominated authority in the right-wing, like analyzing public speeches and written propaganda or interviewing leaders, leads to an ignorance of women who are absent from leadership positions (p. 102). Second, even though women hold right-wing leadership positions, they seem like "proxies of powerful men" (p. 102). Third, the absence of women as subjects in studies of the extreme right is based on the understanding that right-wing movements are generally patriarchal in both their ideologies and practices (p.103). By referring to right-wing politics and women, Blee sums up the feminist claims of previous research as "women were active in far-right politics" and "the gender was deeply entwined in the ideologies, imaginaries, and operations of far-right politics" (Blee 2020: 429-430).

Second, it is difficult to situate the AKP in the right-wing political party genre without probing the impact of Islam on women's political activism in the party. It would be fair to start by saying that the politics of women in the AKP are not an example of Islamist feminism. However, in the Muslim context, the reconcilability of Islam and feminism is frequently questioned. The responses and approaches toward Islam and feminism vary by context, but reactions may be categorized according to opponents and supporters of the idea. Involving this debate is important for my research because researching in Turkey, where the population is overwhelmingly Muslim, makes religion certainly an element for analysis.

Among the growing literature on Islam and women, Mahmood's research (2005) as an outstanding work has involved ethnographic research to understand the motivation behind the women's mosque movement in Egypt. Her approach firmly represents a perspective on the relationship between Islam and women in a non-Western context. In other words, Mahmood warns us to see how women can show their agency or resistance without disruptive action. Before Mahmood researched women's participation in the Islamic movement, Fatima Mernissi, who was called one of the founders of Islamic Feminism, opened the discussion between Islam and women by referring to history, Islamic scriptures, and Hadiths. Many books and research by Mernissi argue that the restrictions on women and their rights in Islamic societies do not derive from Islam or the Prophet but the position of women is shaped by the male elite (Mernissi 1992). This argument reiterates that Islamic feminism today is associated with women's emancipation through an accurate reinterpretation of the Quran.

However, scholars ask whether or not the relationship between Islam and feminism can be compatible and provide twofold perspectives toward this. The first perspective emphasizes that it is incompatible and consolidates the claim by focusing on the restrictions on Islam in the case of its legal implications, particularly in Iran. While formulating their opposition toward the coupling of Islam and feminism, they underline that "Islamic theocracy reinforces the traditional patriarchal system. Thus, far

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from being an alternative to secular, radical, and socialist feminisms, "Islamic feminism" justifies unequal gender relations (Mojab 2001: 131). The second one shows that it is compatible because feminism should be considered from a different perspective of the Western experiences, to understand how religion and tradition are employed and how women's agency occurs in different settings. Since the 1990s, feminism has been deconstructed through "multiple critiques" (Cooke 2000) which reject the homogeneity of feminism (Moghissi 1999). Islamist feminism offers a perspective to understand and discover "spiritual and ethical equality between men and women" (Anwar 2020: 251) instead of seeing how Islam is a trap for women and reproduces gender inequality. Beyond many handicaps, Islamic feminism gives a chance to women to exist in Muslim society. However, more significantly, it provides a lens for researchers to look deeply at how a woman participates and exists as herself while transcending Islamic ideas that restrict women's visibility in public.

Beyond the meaning of Islamist feminism, its interpretation within women's lives and the perspective that sees female agency opens a new line to discuss and reconstruct the position of women in various domains by establishing a dialogue between feminism and Islam. In this sense, Mahmood brings our attention to historical moments by saying:

> Women's active support for a movement that seems to be inimical to their interests and agendas, at a historical moment when more emancipatory possibilities would appear to be available to women, raises new dilemmas for feminists (Mahmood 2001: 202).

In a similar vein, while Western scholars question the relationship between right-wing parties and women, the puzzle is redressed in the non-Western context by researching the relationship between Islam and women. This analogy guides my research to understand whether Islam and feminism can coexist or at least helps me to understand the role of Islam in women's activism in the AKP. By focusing on motivation, perception, and the existence of women in the Islamist movement generally, and in particular cases, we can develop insight into the relationship between

Islam and women (not, indeed, feminism). Beyond the many differences, there is also one critical similarity between these two research agendas: both are looking for women's agency by following the argument that they are participating intentionally, by their own will.

With religion and context-based possibilities or restrictions, women have developed various ways to show their agency, resistance, and capacity to exist where they are excluded. Although the analogy between secular right-wing movements and Islamist movements regarding women's participation can be odd, they have much in common. For instance, understanding the exclusion of women as being based on the patriarchal and male-dominated features of the movements and assuming a false consciousness in regard to women's existence and participation in these movements are similar approaches. Besides that, women find justifications and show their participation as a reasonable choice when analyzing their tendencies, strategies, and tactics within these cases. As Blee and Deutsch underline, Islamist feminism or Islamist ideas circulating within the Muslim world have politicized women (2012: 5). Moreover, the social organization of Islam enables different opportunities for women to be visible in the public sphere. Despite the potential threats and restrictions in the partnership of Islam and patriarchy, social reflections of Islam and basic conservative borders have their potential for helping women to be part of the Islamic everyday life. In other words, without accepting prejudices, it should be acknowledged that these movements provide opportunities for women from highly traditional families to be politically active in public life (Blee and Deutsch 2012:7).

By avoiding a western lens or assuming the borders of Islamist and conservative society, scholars provide a new perspective to ask what happens beyond what is seen. Therefore, my aim is to break the homogenous perspective by choosing between Western or non-Western literature both of which are complementary to each other in this research. By asking "why and how do women become supporters and participants of the parties," although they have an agenda which nourishes gender inequality in favor of women, I admit that there is not a single or straightforward answer to this question.

The AKP is a pro-Islamist, right-wing and conservative political party which fits into and at the same time clashes with the above literatures. Therefore, I situate my research in the conjunction of both approaches to understand how women exist politically, because the many points of the outlined literature fall into an analysis of the politics of women in the AKP. To avoid applying Western literature in a non-Western context and due to the AKP's multifaceted ideological features, I outlined the fundamental arguments from both sides. Throughout the research, I attempt to follow the dialogue between them by emphasizing the presented intersection in the case of the AKP within which I point to women's agency.

In the following sections, I will concisely present my research question, discuss the case selection, and then overview my chapters by answering their place in the puzzle of the research.

§ 1.2 Research Question

This research arises from my curiosity about a well-known saying which has been included in Turkish politics as a sort of political mobilization technique: "women are walking door to door" since the establishment of the Ladies' Commission (1989) in the Welfare Party (Arat 1999; White 2002). Subsequently, the AKP adopts similar political mobilization strategies by incorporating numerous women into the party's political organization within the women's branches. The participation of women in the party does not remain only at the politician level; the AKP has managed to harvest the majority of female voters since its first election triumph. However, when the AKP's anti-feminist gender agenda and right-wing masculinity are considered, the number of women on the party's demand and supply side creates a puzzle for the presented research.

In that regard, the aim of the research is to examine the coexistence between women's political participation (feminization) and the AKP's political agenda (anti-feminization) by focusing on women's political activism and women who watch their steps according to the limits and possibilities of the context of the AKP's politics. Therefore, my research is mainly asking how the feminization process functions in an anti-feminist

environment. My first concern is to seek an answer this question. Yet, it brings up other questions for better understanding the relationship between women and the AKP. Therefore, my second concern is to examine what the roles and contributions of the actors in this process are. While the research is concerned with answering the above questions, it also aims to explore (i) the AKP's party politics regarding women, (ii) the meaning and function of women's branches in politics, (iii) the ways the AKP women survive in politics by adjusting themselves according to emerging political constraints and opportunities (iv) and the political agency of women voters within a routinized voting pattern.

I focus on a single case study by employing multi-level analysis as well as macro-level, meso-level, and micro-level analysis. The research deepens and widens its questions to different extensions of the interaction between women and the party. At the macro-level, I focus on the party in terms of asking: "how does the party frame its gender agenda?" "How does the party involve populism as a political strategy to mobilize women?" "How do the party's gender agenda and populist action interplay and contribute to a coexistence between the feminizing and anti-feminizing process?"

At the meso-level, my unit of analysis is the AKP's women's branches, in order to understand, "how do they place themselves within the party?", "how do women contribute to the feminization process by participating in politics and mobilizing other women to take part in the party?, "how do they strategize their political existence and style to survive in politics?", and "how do they contribute to the abovementioned coexistence?"

When it comes to the micro-level, female electorates are the focus in order to understand, "how do the AKP's women voters construct their political agency?" "Why do they vote for the AKP from the beginning?", "why do they keep voting for the AKP without switching their preferences?" "What is the function of women voters in the coexistence between the feminization and anti-feminization process?". In this research design, accessibility to information from different levels and analysis of the interwoven nature of gender and politics provides more clarification

and theoretical investigation by pushing the limits of the existing literature with a new case.

As I emphasized, an important feature of the politics of the AKP women is that it involves bi-directional, multi-level and multi-actors, and the above points refer to these characteristics and help to design the chapters to build an answer to the central research question. Each chapter investigates the ways, roles and reflections of the actors within the nexus of the party, the women's branches and women voters, which I call "vertical feminization," and the establishment and sustainment of coexistence between the feminizing and anti-feminizing process.

§ 1.3 Organization of the Chapters

The following chapter (Chapter II) reviews the theoretical and methodological frame of the research. As I pointed out in this chapter, my analytical perspective has both a conceptual and empirical dimension. For this, the chapter draws a theoretical framework regarding the relevant literature and includes the methodology to show how I collected the data for my research.

The theoretical frame and literature background of this research raises the issue of gender and politics and party politics from the literature. Gender politics is the essential source for understanding women's political participation in my research while literature on party politics helps to frame the party and party's gender agenda and mobilization abilities. While this chapter draws attention to women's political participation instead of representation, it suggests a new concept, "vertical feminization," based on Lovenduski's feminizing politics. As discussed in Chapter II, feminizing politics has restricted the focus of women's political activism with their presence at the representation level. However, the suggestions and critiques from the gender and politics literature with regard to feminizing politics and emerging requirements to understand women's political presence in different levels help me to conceptualize the findings of my research. According to this concept, I offer an analytical tool to examine women's political participation.

Moreover, the chapter includes a specific part that emphasizes the importance of contextualization. Although the focus is on women's political participation, crucial concepts from gender politics literature are involved to illustrate a full-fledged analysis. This part is designed as a map to ensuing chapters by introducing the case of the AKP, the concepts of "gender regime", "feminizing politics" "anti-feminization", "family-mainstreaming", "populist political action", "intersectionality" and "routinized voting" and actors which are at the core of my research.

The last part of Chapter II is based on my narrative, experiences, and reflections regarding my fieldwork. Benefiting from different forms of qualitative methodology, I mixed in-depth interviews, social media and media coverage and participant observation through an ethnographic microscope. I started my research in January 2019, just before the 2019 local elections in Istanbul which ended in August 2021. Being in the field generally means collecting data. Yet, it is a process that sets up connections with interviewees or actors who provide critical information and other connections and can position the researcher within a relationship with the other side. The methodology part has important insights about my changing positionality in the research and writing process, as well.

Chapter III outlines the context by examining Turkey's AKP and at the same time furthers my analysis about the role of the party as an actor in the coexistence between the feminizing and anti-feminizing process. I argue that the AKP's two pillars, the conservative party ideology and populist mobilization techniques, are key factors to sustain the coexistence at the party-level. More specifically, I highlight in my party-level analysis how the AKP sees and appeals to women according to Erdoğan's statement that they are "more than half of the population". To unfold the gender regime of the AKP, I focus on the party's family-mainstreaming approach by arguing that it shapes the party's gender agenda. The concept of family-mainstreaming emerges from the intersection of the AKP's right-wing, conservative, and pro-Islamist ideological underpinnings and sees women in the familial sphere of the home, housewifery, and motherhood triangle. Then, I discuss the AKP's second pillar, populism, by asking how the AKP operates its conservative-pro-family gender regime in

the field. To answer this question, the chapter utilizes populism as the main feature of political mobilization/strategy. By focusing on the AKP's different forms of appeal towards women, I analyze the AKP's populist political action.

The party involves an interplay of the party's ideology and mobilization techniques, which pave the way for the initiation of coexistence in the feminization and anti-feminization processes. Therefore, this opens a space for women politicians within a restricted environment which is framed by the party's ideological/anti-feminist borders. Chapter IV and V investigate the roles, strategies, and performance of women activists in the AKP by using field data which was drawn from in-depth interviews with the heads of the women's branches in Istanbul and participant observation during the election period and afterwards. The main argument of these two chapters is that the main actors behind this coexistence are the women activists of the party (especially women branches), who link the party and women voters by redefining the boundaries of politics and establish a bargain with the patriarchy.

Chapter IV investigates the meaning of politics for the AKP women and focuses on the structure of the women's branches within the political party. Through the lens of the patriarchal bargain, I examine the strategies of the heads of the AKP's women branches (AWBs) to sustain women's political survival. Their contribution to this coexistence derives from strategies which is conceptualized as active submissive participation. While I construct an answer by combining the analysis of women's agency along with the restrictions of the partnership between Islamist-conservative and patriarchal limits, I utilize patriarchal bargains as an analytical tool to understand how the AWBs become the source of the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics.

Chapter V brings a more tangible approach to the previous chapter by analyzing the political style of the AWBs. By asking questions like, "how do women perform politics?", I plan to investigate women's impact on the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics through an analysis of the political style of the AKP's women and investigate instances and encounters of women politicians and voters. On the one

hand, this chapter approaches the AWBs' political style as a reason for the rising number of women in the party, both on the activist and voter sides. On the other hand, it focuses on the extent to which this style cultivates an anti-feminist understanding along with the party's gender agenda. As a result of the AWBs' political style, women activists find a political platform to reach out to women voters and vice versa, but again their political style keeps women in a limited area that is out of mainstream politics by causing a lack of substantive political existence.

Chapter VI focuses on women voters who are at the bottom of the vertical feminization process. By asking two sequential questions, the first opens up the question, "why do women vote for the AKP? and then build on this initial question by deepening the investigation into, "why do women continue to vote for the AKP?", through in-depth interviews with the AKP's women voters from different demographic backgrounds in Istanbul. The aim is to complete the analysis of the feminization process in Turkey's AKP by bringing in the voter's perspective. I argue that the repeating votes of women should be considered a well-established and consolidated mechanism, which I conceptualize as "routinized voting behavior". The concept is useful to understand how women's active decision-making process ends up again and again aligning with the AKP.

In concluding the research, I recap these chapters and show how they complete each other according to the concept of vertical feminization. Moreover, I evaluate the bi-directional process of actors from party members to voters and emphasize the role of women activists in this dialogue. I place the AKP's women activists in the center of the research to understand how they practice politics within the limits and possibilities of the dialect between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics. I also talk about the impact of politics on the AKP women and women's political activism in Turkey, and the feminization attempts of other political parties as a future research avenue.

2

Theoretical Framework and Methodology: Contextualizing Feminizing Politics in Turkey Through Qualitative Research on the AKP Women Local Politics in İstanbul

The research on women's presence in Turkish politics overwhelmingly concentrates on the underrepresentation of women in national (Tekeli 1982; Sancar 2008; Çakır; 2014) and local politics (Alkan 2009; Cindoğlu 2011; Lorasdağı & Sumbaş 2015; Drechselova 2020). Another common trend in gender and politics studies in Turkey is the focus on political parties, which are identified as the primary actors for inclusion and exclusion of women in Turkish politics. More specifically, they are referred to as "gatekeepers" both in Turkish and in a global context. While considering the topic of *Gender and Politics* as an emerging and enlarging research area in Turkey, women as party activists and actors in the political party organizations, especially in the women's branches, have not been analyzed to understand the meaning, function, and impact of their presence in politics. Along with the absence of women activists in literature, women voters are also missing in research agendas. Lately, women have been focused as the voters particularly (İlkkaracan 2019; Çavdar 2022).

This research, however, explores women's presence in the AKP's party politics by focusing on the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics. Moreover, it aims to establish an analysis by developing multi-level and multi-actor perspective through focusing on the women's political participation process. On the one hand, I will concentrate on the numerical existence of women in the AKP's party organization and the party's women voters as a reflection of feminizing politics (descriptive representation). On the other hand, I will cover the consequences of feminizing politics regarding the integration of women's issues into the party's agenda (substantive representation). In other words, the research will cover the dynamics behind the process of women's political participation. By linking the structural facts and actor-based navigations, my research provides a very timely explanation of women's political participation from two sides. On the one hand, the party's anti-feminist agenda deliberately specifies the limits of women's political involvement bolstering it with the party's Islamist-conservative ideology. On the other hand, without challenging the strict bounds of the party, women activists rigorously persevere their political survival by polishing their mobilization abilities. Moreover, women voters raise their political agency by routinizing the voting behavior and identifying themselves as the AKP's supporters.

To uncover the dynamics between feminizing and anti-feminizing features of Turkey's AKP, my analytical perspective has both a conceptual and empirical dimension. Therefore, I designed the chapter with two substantial sections (theoretical and methodological). For the conceptual level, I will combine a number of theoretical concepts and look at various actors which I will also utilize in the analysis of the ensuing chapters. Theoretically, the research includes a feminist (institutionalism) critique of established institutions (political parties) and attempts to understand the impact of their nature (male-domination and gendered features) on women's political presence. In the empirical sense, I conducted fieldwork to provide empirical insight regarding the Turkish context. Methodologically, I combined different tools of qualitative methods and applied multi-level and multi-scale analysis (Blee 2020). This combination allows

me to uncover the tension on different levels and to understand the contributions of different actors to the tension in different settings.

My research question is based on the claim that as the number of women in politics increases, women's issues will assume a broader place in the party agenda. Even if it is a valid statement for the AKP's case, the framework of integrating women's perspectives into the party agenda does not lead to the same results in every context, or not all of them have the same consequences. Childs (2008) categorizes the results according to the British context while comparing the different parties based on whether they are feminist, neutral and anti-feminist (p.44). However, by taking into consideration the Childs and Webb (2012) outcome which is "gender and politics scholars have no 'theory' that might explain the relationship between the descriptive and substantive representation of women by conservative women", I will reconceptualize and contextualize Lovenduski's feminizing process in Turkish politics to examine the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing dynamics in the AKP.

Locating this in the Turkish context and AKP women in terms of women's political participation processes provides a case to understand conservative women's political presence. By doing so, I attempt to offer an analytical tool that can help us to grasp conservative women's political presence in the scope of the relation between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics. In other words, the number of women activists and voters in the AKP reflects the party's feminizing feature, yet anti-feminizing has expanded significantly in terms of constant underrepresentation of women, lack of women's concerns in the political agenda -independently from the family related issues and sustaining gender inequality in every aspect of life. From this point, I will attempt to understand how the coexistence is sustained by the actors in the feminization process. This section will provide insight into the theoretical and empirical accumulation of women's political presence by highlighting *vertical feminization* as a process, and women's strategic acts as *active submission* and *routinized* voting behavior regarding the Turkish context to give guidelines for reading the rest of the research.

The following section will explore the theoretical framework of the research based on Lovenduski's feminizing politics (2002; 2005) in general. Indeed, her study has enabled distinctive and enlightening analysis from different contexts in terms of gender and politics (see: Mackay 2004; Childs 2008; Wängnerud 2009; Darhaour and Dahlerup 2013; Taşdemir 2013). Although the concept has linked the topic of women's political representation, the growing scholarship on gender and politics paves the way for rethinking the concept in terms of women's political participation as well (Childs and Murray 2014). By following the burgeoning interest in women's presence in politics together with their participation and representation, I will suggest a division within the concept to understand women's political participation and its difference from women's political representation. In assessing the different journeys behind women's political presence, both in terms of participation and representation, and based on the nature of the processes, I identify participation as vertical feminization and representation as horizontal feminization. Due to the context of the research, I will deal with *vertical feminization* first.

§ 2.1 Feminizing Politics and Ways of Women's Presence in Politics

The argument of the research leans on the basic assumption in gender and politics literature about the positive correlation between descriptive (numerical) representation and substantive (effective) representation (Dahlerup 1988; Beckwith 2007; Celis & Childs 2008; Cowell-Meyer & Langbein 2009; Reingod & Harell 2010). Moreover, the claim has an extensive place in different contexts based on an understanding of how women representatives *act for* women because they have similar motivations and gendered experiences (Mansbridge 1999; Childs and Webb 2012). In other words, women's presence in politics leads to the expectation of making differences in politics regarding (meaning) the integration of women's interest and concerns into the political agenda (Celis et al. 2008).

However, before the representation of women's interest and integration of women's concerns into the political agenda, women first must be elected. This starts with their political participation. I argue that feminizing politics has two stages which help to explain women's political presence on the representation and participation levels. However, the creator of the concept, Lovenduski, theorizes this through political representation. Based on the literature, first, I will introduce the original formulation of the concept. Second, I will explain the limitations of the concept. Third, I will analyze how feminizing politics works at the political participation level. Fourth, I will explain how it functions in the Turkish context by attempting to respond to Childs and Webb's abovementioned outcome by conceptualizing the experiences of the AKP women in local politics in terms of women's political participation.

Feminizing politics is a popular concept in gender and politics literature for tracing and uncovering the journey, factors, and experiences behind the facade of women's political presence, the result and impact of their existence in politics regarding women's concerns and achieving gender equality. Lovenduski defines feminizing politics as a process which is based on inclusion of women and then integration of women's perspectives and concerns into politics (2005). In other words, women's presence in politics according to Lovenduski is about raising numbers and the integration of women's interests into the political agenda. The feminizing process will impact the male-dominated environment by redefining and reshaping the existing borders. Lovenduski's approach leads the researchers' perspectives to focus on the complex and gendered nature of politics, institutions, and process. By doing so, first, it paves the way for future research to interrogate the correlation between descriptive representation and substantive representation at different levels of politics. Second, it leads scholars to question the consequences of women's presence in politics in terms of the context and nature of where it occurs. Therefore, Lovenduski's feminizing politics provides an analytical framework to trace the steps, consider the actors and factors in the process and question the missing points in different contexts instead of suggesting a clear-cut conceptualization. Rather than the question of

what feminizing politics is, scholars pay attention to questions such as: how feminizing politics is achieved, what are the consequences of the process, who are the actors, and how does it multiply in different contexts.

It is critical to start from Lovenduski's point of view because she opens multiple directions of feminizing politics by describing her attempt as "an exploration of how to think about the feminization of politics" (2005: 10). Rather than providing a sharp line analysis, her attempt paves the way for a proliferation of concepts across different settings. She defined feminizing politics as: "the insertion and integration of women, both in terms of numbers and ideas, into a process that is important but widely considered to be unappealing" (12-13). The definition is simple but does not provide any particular way to set the research agenda. Lovenduski supports the definition by building on two assumptions about feminizing politics. She explains that:

> First a significant element of the roles women and men play in politics depends not only on each other but also on the nature of institutions of political representation… Second, the way feminist think about political representation is at least as important as how the processes actually operate. It is feminist theory that illuminates the gendered nature of political representation (p. 14).

If I begin with the second assumption, it is necessary to underline that although the definition of feminizing politics and feminism is not the same (Childs and Kittilson 2016: 600; Campbell and Childs 2015), the former is required for the latter to be well-analyzed. Beyond its political standpoint, feminism is a lens to see and interpret the world in terms of gender relations. Put differently, feminism is both an analytical tool to uncover the gendered nature of politics and a criterion for measuring the party's agenda on the feminist scale which is utilized to deconstruct the power dynamics. However, the Lovenduski's first assumption clarifies why the research needs the second one, because as a process of feminization, it happens in a certain setting (parliament, government, political

party) where power relations between men and women or women and women shape and are shaped, that can be deconstructed through a feminist perspective. Indeed, the research on gender and politics in terms of feminizing politics follows both understandings by adopting them into their research contexts and methodology as I do. Before that, Lovenduski's approach requires more attention for a comprehensive understanding of the original meaning of feminizing politics.

Lovenduski's approach associates feminizing politics with the political representation of women. Political representation is another topic as complicated as women's political presence. She underlines that "in democratic societies the representation of a group's interests has two dimensions: the presence of its members in decision-making arenas and the consideration of its interest in the decision-making process" (Lovenduski 1993: 2). Even this definition brings a clear flow between descriptive and substantive descriptions when it is employed in any group's representation. The first one is understood as being in politics, which is also defined as *inclusion,* and the second one is being in politics effectively, which is defined as *integration*. However, the ways of being in politics for women go beyond these types of representation. Lovenduski brings two arguments derived from feminist perspectives to reason about the representation of women. These are discussions of equality and differences in terms of women's political existence in parliaments or simply in politics.

Briefly, on the one hand, the equality argument claims that women should be in politics under the same conditions and with the same numbers as men (2005: 29). On the other hand, the difference argument draws attention to the idea that women's discernible features (particular characteristics) should be represented in politics by women (2005:30). Both arguments include acceptance and criticism regarding the best way for women to go about their political presence. Therefore, scholars agree that the best way is a combination of these two practices, to provide equal representation with acceptance of women's difference by preventing transformation of women into political men. In other words, "equality is needed if difference is to be compensated and difference must be recognized if equality is to be achieved" (2005: 30).

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However, the concept of the original meaning remains limited, and impractible (Dean and Maiguashca 2018) for different contexts. Indeed, several significant developments regarding gender and politics and diverse characteristics of different contexts have led scholars to extend the limits of the concept instead of questioning only the correlation between descriptive and substantive representation. Beyond the correlation, scholars ask questions about feminizing politics in larger context (Childs and Kittilson 2016), in different ideological formation (Dean and Maiguashca 2018; Celis and Childs 2011; Campbell and Childs 2015; Childs and Webb 2012; O'Brien 2018; Evans 2013) from comparative perspective (Kittilson 2006; Young 2000; Gaunder and Wiliarty 2020), in individual case study (Cowell-Meyers 2021; Shin 2020; Wiliarty 2010; Dahlerup; Gwiazda 2019, Hinojosa 2009; Hinojosa, Fridkin and Kittilson 2017; Tan 2015, Nayemm and Bhat 2022; Wolak 2020; Wineinger 2022), in the actors level (Yaraş 2020; Barakso 2007; Taşdemir 2019). Despite the intensity of the European-based studies, research on feminizing politics progressively increases out of a European context. The scope of feminizing politics, by sticking to the main line of the Lovenduski's theorization, spreads out, containing multi-level and multi-actor directions.

Contemporary literature approaches Lovenduski's term "feminizing politics" from different angles by widening the actors, contextualizing the factors, and deepening the processes. First, in terms of actors, feminizing politics includes women voters, women party activists and party leaders (Childs 2008) along with the women's representatives (MPs or local conciliar) in the national parliaments and local assemblies. Second, depending on the cultural, political and historical determinants, feminizing politics appears in different forms and is derived from diverse reasons. Third, the process is shaped by women's experiences and shapes women's strategies, which depend on their position in politics and the context where they operate. Based on new developments in the literature (see Celis et al. 2013) and the requirements derived from my empirical research, I will underline the limitation of feminizing politics. To be more comprehensive, I will suggest a new conceptualization by defending the importance

of women's presence on a participation level, regarding actors, local politics, and political space.

First, feminizing politics refers both to women's political participation and representation. However, Lovenduski overwhelmingly emphasizes that representation is a process which is also mirrored by the research. However, while rethinking and revisiting the context to understand beyond representation, Childs and Murray's essay "Feminizing Political Parties" in the Deeds and Words: Gendering Politics (2014) develops a different perspective on the meaning of women's political participation before representation. While I was examining the case of the AKP's women's branches through the lens of Lovenduski's feminizing politics, they emphasized the importance of women's participation in politics as women activists within the political parties and women voters (75). They criticize the early analysis regarding its focus on women's presence and roles within the political parties to understand women's parliamentary recruitment and representation instead of exploring the meaning of women's existence in party politics (74-75). Therefore, the political presence of women is not separated from their political participation and the analysis of feminization should involve women's political participation as activists and voters as well.

Second, while analyzing women's political participation in the beginning, we must ask who the actors are. These include MPs and government members, along with the men who support feminization in politics (Cameron especially in the case of British Conservative Party). Very few mentions political parties' women organizations and women activists of the party who are part of the critical operation of party politics. However, women have salient characteristics in political parties "as rank-and-file members, volunteers in election campaigns, and mobilized voters" (Shin 2020: 81-82). Indeed, at the party politics level, feminizing politics function in two ways. One involves women's political participation as party activists and the other involves women voters who are generally mobilized by the party's women's actors. While feminization is actively working at the party politics level, literature derived from feminizing politics does not provide a clear and convincing approach to women's political

existence at every level. However, the gender and politics scholars discern the limits of the concept and are aware of the multi-dimensional feature of political feminization which started to include the voter level (Childs 2008) and intra-party dynamics (Childs and Kittilson 2016) into their research agenda.

Third, feminizing politics also does not refer to local-level politics. Its scope remains limited to the national level. It even includes the political parties and their local existence; it still analyzes the consequences at the national level. It is quite understandable because the concern in Lovenduski's work is framed through the representation dimension. Understanding local politics as women's entrance point for the political process, the impact of their local experiences, obstacles, and challenges that they face and facilities that they achieve are critical to understand feminizing politics. In other words, extending the limits of feminizing politics from the national to the local level and redefining the concept in the feminization process of local politics will provide insights with respect to the experiences of women at the local level.

Fourth, Lovenduski's work suggests deconstructing the male-dominated nature of political settings such as parliaments and political parties. From the feminist institutionalist perspective, these institutions have gendered features and should be examined through feminist lens. By doing so, the impact of the structure on feminizing politics, together with the voice and experience of women during the process, can be uncovered. However, constraining political spaces to parliaments and political parties restricts the research on feminization in two ways. First, women's political spaces go beyond the parliaments and political parties if considering the "personal is political". Second, defining the border of politics within the formal rules, which uncover the obstacles and strategies of women that are engendered through permeated informal rules of politics. Indeed, together with redesigning and deconstructing the patriarchal limits and nature of politics, Lovenduski's concept stays in the borders of the male-dominated understanding of politics and provides a narrow perspective for examining women's political existence across different settings. Therefore, Lovendsuski's definition of feminizing

politics does not mirror the diverse forms and understandings of women's political spaces, where women operate as political actors.

To this extent, focusing on women's political participation instead of representation illustrates more corners to examine regarding women's journey in politics. Even though Lovenduski emphasizes the multi-dimensional features of feminizing politics, which contains diverse forms of institutions, actors, and processes, it concentrates on the conclusion--simply put, the representation. Moreover, framing feminizing politics within representation leads to ignoring women's political presence and agency at the party politics level. If the picture is shaped by the women's responses, acts, strategies, and positions towards the rule of the game, before their representation, political participation would be considered. Therefore, if feminizing politics is redefined as a bi-directional process, I am suggesting a division in the concept of feminizing politics to extend its limits to analyze women's political participation as well. This requires a separation of "horizontal feminization" and "vertical feminization" by taking into consideration its different directions in women's representation and participation in politics.

Vertical feminization, which is the early stage of feminizing politics, the process includes critical steps in participation level before achieving descriptive representation. It is more related with women's political participation than representation. Political mobilization of women's actors, political entrances, role-learning and strategizing political survival are the components of vertical feminization. Moreover, women's branches in the political parties together with their political understanding, functions, and style in terms of party politics are primary processes for understanding vertical feminization. Basically, vertical feminization broadly occurs through women's inclusion into party politics as party activists and voters.

Although they are different processes, they share some similarities and are influenced by the same structure. For instance, ideological formation of the political parties, patriarchal structure of politics, regime type of the state, religion and historical backdrop affect both femininization processes equally. Put differently, despite the scale and actor-based

differences and the level of influence on politics, the basic components of the political structure are vital to shaping them. Moreover, they are inter-related processes. As Kittilson points out, dual pressure is critical for women's political inclusion in terms of bi-directional efforts from bottom and top (Kittilson 2006; 2015). While the effectiveness and indispensable position of women increase in party politics (vertical feminization), women's representation will increase. While women's representation increases, depending on the nature of the gender agenda, women's substantive representation at the national level will increase. Therefore, in terms of feminizing politics, women's effective representation will reflect its impact on women at a party-level. Indeed, vertical feminization embraces horizontal feminization by adding to its cumulation of women's acts, experiences, and strategies of representation while horizontal feminization provides top-down agenda setting and experience transfer and contributes to politically unexperienced women's role-learning processes. The table 2.1 illustrates the shared and distinguished components of these in terms of institutions, actors, political purposes, strategies, obstacles, and forms.

	Vertical Feminization	Horizontal Feminization
Dimension	Political Participation	Political Representation
Political Space	Political Parties, Political Meetings, Political Events Where Women Meet	Parliament, Government
Actors	Women's voters, Women's Activists, Head of Women's Branches/Organization, Party Leader	Women's MPs, Women's Ministers, Party Leader

Forms	Symbolic, Rhetorical, Descriptive and Substantive	Symbolic, Descriptive and Substantive
Strategy	Submissive, active submissive and active (Politician Level)	Submissive, active submissive and active
	Rational, Interest-oriented, Party Affiliated, Value-based, Leader-based, Facility-based, Routine-Based (Voter Level)	
Activity	Mobilization women votes and infiltration of party agenda into the society, performing party politics and adjusting political activities into women's everyday lives (political actors)	Policy proposing Redressing government gender agenda for conveying to society Communicating with women party activists
	Navigating votes (women voters)	
Purpose	Political survival and being elected (political actors)	Re-elected
	Raise the value of vote (women's vote)	

Table 2.1 Domains and Dynamics of Vertical and Horizontal Feminization

In short, the concept of feminizing politics from Lovenduski's perspective leads researchers to understand the dynamics behind women's representation, but mainly it asks questions about the consequences of women's representation. However, feminizing politics has meanings beyond women's representation. Transforming the concept into an analytical toolkit uncovers the layers within these concepts. As mentioned above, Childs and Murray remind us that the literature focuses on women in parliament. Yet they point out that, "the role of women qua women within parties invites greater investigation" (75). As they emphasize, research on women and party politics has also been conducted regarding the impact of party rules and processes (Kittilson 2013), women's organizations in the party (Young 2000) on women's political participation. However, it remains an understudied topic because of the limits of the concept.

While I discuss the limitations of Lovenduski's feminizing politics, and engendered new concepts, I utilize the imperatives of the combination of existing literature based on a conceptualization of feminizing politics and the empirical findings of my fieldwork. Moreover, as an umbrella concept, feminizing politics opens a new line of investigation, while developing different conceptual tools and mechanisms to explain women in politics. Thanks to the perspective of feminist institutionalism and extensive understanding regarding women's presence in politics we can adopt different research directions and contexts. Still, this requires customization by division into the horizontal and the vertical. Based on my research context, I will tackle vertical *feminization* to reflect the high number of women participants in the AKP party organization -particularly women's branches- and women voters while the number of women representatives remains in the minority level despite an increase compared to before (See the Figure 2.1). Second, while considering the lack of analysis on the topic of women and party politics in Turkey, I will direct the research basis of vertical feminization without underestimating its impact on horizontal feminization.
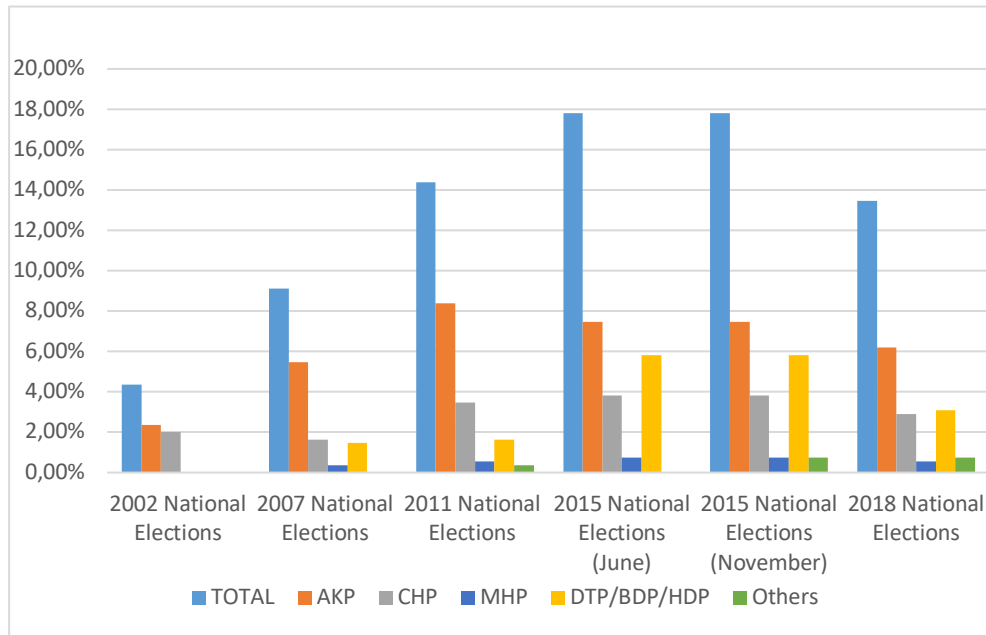
Figure 2.1 Percentage of Women Representation in TBMM

Source: TBMM

§ 2.2 Vertical Feminization: A Concept for Analysis

Feminizing politics inspired this research to explain the relation between women and the AKP. Even though exploring feminizing politics from the point of view of political representation -as its original form- does not fit neatly with the AKP case, women's presence in party politics and at the electorate level asks the analysis to understand feminizing politics regarding political participation. Moreover, the abovementioned limits of the concept, new developments in gender and politics literature and politics itself, and finally my research findings in the Turkish context have showed the necessity for a new conceptualization. As Dean and Maiguashca argue, conceptual and analytical tools are critical to notice "the presence of its core features (or absence therefore) in an array of empirical cases and to map and assess its changing shape and vitality in each" (2018: 388). They underline the presence and absence of the concept of feminization- in the context of the British left—and they suggest a new

one: *feministization*. In a similar vein, but for a different context where women's presence is critical, this proves the requirement of a new conceptualization for providing an analytical framework on the feminization of the AKP. For this, I am suggesting a division for feminizing politics to extend its limits beyond women's representation to women's participation.

By reframing, reconstructing, and dividing the concept of feminizing politics into what I refer to as vertical feminization and (horizontal feminization), I offer a research map from the scope of vertical feminization to examine women's presence in party politics in voter and activist levels. Without rejecting existing literature on gender and politics, I am crystallizing burgeoning attention to women's political participation within the concept of feminizing politics. Indeed, scholars emphasize the lack of comprehensive research on this level (Childs and Murray 2014:75). For this, I will suggest an analytical framework by referring to vertical feminization by incorporating women -voter and political activists- as actors and the political party - where women party activists and voters meet through political party activities- as the context. In other words, by following the interaction between institutions and critical actors (Childs and Krook 2009), I will draw up a framework using women's strategies as critical actors and political parties as the institutions. To do that, I utilize Childs and Murray's five points for the role of the political party when it comes to women and politics and Lovenduski's four components, which indicate how women's strategies are shaped. Redefinitions and adoptions of these concepts for the process of women's political participation (vertical feminization) provide an alternative to develop clear understandings and insights to capture multiple forms of the feminization process in party politics. Through an empirical analysis of the relationship between the AKP and women, the conceptualization process will be clarified throughout the thesis.

Repeatedly, I will outline how the vertical feminization process is based on its multi-dimensional features, which pave the way for a comprehensive map to examine women's presence in party politics. Lovenduski defines feminizing politics as a process. Indeed, clarification of

vertical feminization, as a concept born out of feminizing politics, requires a process analysis that adds new dimensions, redefining political spaces, actors, forms and contextualizing the strategies, actions, and purpose as seen in Table 2.1. These categories are derived from the interaction between the nature of institutions and (critical) actors that appear in different forms in horizontal and vertical feminization. In other words, as a gendered institution, political parties present opportunities and barriers to women's political life (Gauja and Cross 2015; Kenny and Mackay 2014; Taflaga and Beauregard 2020) and women build their experiences by producing strategies and navigating the rules of the game. By using vertical feminization, I will investigate political interactions in the Turkey's AKP throughout the thesis.

I will start with a summary of Childs and Murray's five points regarding gender and politics research on political parties and will structure them using the vertical feminization process, before focusing on Lovenduski's four components formulation regarding women's strategies by reconsidering them in the process of women's political participation. Put differently, the analysis of women's political participation requires additional analytical toolkit to deconstruct their complex and intertwined structure. Indeed, the perspective developed from interactions between the structure and the agent, which is built on the existing literature, illustrates how women's political trajectories are shaped and shapes when they locate themselves within political processes with a strategy for navigating the rules of the game. Therefore, from the point of view of what makes women's political participation possible or restricted and how women engage with the process are the questions which help to outline the process of vertical feminization. As a part of this, it opens avenues to understand the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics.

2.2.1 Political Parties as Gendered Institutions

Analyzing a political party as a space for women's political participation requires a deconstruction to uncover gendered relations within the structure. Indeed, gender and politics scholarship includes a number of

gendered analyses of political parties (Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Cross and Katz 2013; Rahat and Shapira 2013; Child 2013) generally from a feminist institutionalist perspective. The reason why women and men experience political processes—both participation and representation— differently is because of their sex differences and gendered divisions of labor. The research agenda generally derives from the question of how gender shapes the parties by focusing on its "form, function and activities in respect of the electorate, party ideologies, patterns of political recruitment and women's and men's political careers once elected" (Celis, Childs and Kantola 2016:572). Along with the organization of the political party, its ideological formation, context, and historical backdrops are also decisive in the structure. Together with formal and informal norms and practices of the political game, the rules are shaped through gendered experiences. In other words, considering the impact of internal and external dimensions on political parties and inequality between men and women in politics and women's repeated exclusion from politics makes the political parties critical units of gendered analysis.

The introduction of the Oxford handbook of Gender and Politics (2013) starts by saying that, "politics as a real-world phenomenon and political science as an academic discipline are gendered" (1). Throughout the collected essays, the book discusses diverse forms of the gendered nature of politics, which are directly and indirectly related with the gendered nature of political parties. The overall result is that the male-dominated nature of politics affects women's political trajectory, yet women are not passive receivers of the structure, because they navigate the patriarchal norms with strategies which are anchored in contextual particularities. Politics, with all its processes and institutions, is defined as a gendered phenomenon. However, this phenomenon is overwhelmingly researched regarding the impact of its gendered nature on women's political representation. While women's representation/underrepresentation is a clear signal for the gendered nature of politics and political parties, women's political participation provides a more complex experience if analyzed regarding the differences between men and women within the same process.

Moreover, the gendered features of political participation do not have a certain checklist to be uncovered through statistical results, or affirmative or restrictive policies of political parties, as in women's representation. To overcome this, vertical feminization provides both a conceptual and methodological map to examine the gendered features of political participation as well. To capture the gendered feature of women's political participation, both the existing literature and my fieldwork equip me to develop a more comprehensive understanding.

Childs and Murray bring together focuses on gender and politics research on political parties through five points which provide more detailed reasoning for the importance of political parties. After I cite directly from them, I will evaluate and reformulate their analysis regarding vertical feminization. The departure point of the first article is associated with women's political participation and representation, which is "the level of women's participation in party structure, including, but importantly not limited to, the parliamentary party, with such enquiries exploring whether parties employ specific mechanisms in both party structure and the parliamentary party to guarantee women's descriptive representation" (75-76). This point provides a justification for why political parties and their mechanisms, in terms of women's participation, must be researched to understand women's descriptive representation – in other words, their numerical existence.

Reframing the first point as "*level of women's political participation*" by emphasizing the multi-actor and multi-layer dimensions helps to examine the extent of vertical feminization and its impact on the horizontal one. First, the level of women's political participation in this vein refers to the features of the multi-actor, which includes women voters and activists together with women who are in a high rank of the political party -as heads of women's branches or women members of the mother party's executive body. Each of these actors have their own roles and functions while shaping the points where they politicize. The process and relation between women actors at the party politics level, especially between women voters and politicians, are decisive for women's political representation. Derived from the conventional and patriarchal nature of

political parties, women are recruited as "mobilizers rather than as agenda setters and party leaders" (Shin 2020: 81), yet women actors can turn this into an opportunity and a source of empowerment. The empowerment cuts across the women voters and activists in terms of the voting mechanism. As half of the universal and national vote, both women voters and women activists empower themselves when it comes to the importance of voting enabling them to strike a bargain with their parties. Under the circumstances of the party's ideological formation and the limits of its patriarchal nature, the political actions of women's political activists and interactions between them and women voters provide opportunities for women's political representation.

Despite the literature emphasizing representation, women's political representation is built itself on political participation which is the beginning of women's political journey. While women actors at different levels of party politics construct ways through women's political representation, their efforts/labor, level of empowerment and certainly the party's ideological underpinnings are critical for understanding the form of women's existence in the party. Without underestimating the impact of women's political participation on representation, the second point suggests analyzing the forms of women's existence within the party organization from different angles by asking "whether women's participation is substantive across the party's various structures and activities or symbolic and limited to certain forms or places" (76).

I will refer to the second point briefly as "*the forms of women's existence*" which is directly related to the established or flexible nature of the patriarchy. Regarding its ideology, the party and party's women members position themselves in the party, yet this does not specify the forms of women's existence. However, the volume of the patriarchy is more critical than any other elements which affect women's existence in the party as descriptive, substantive, symbolic or rhetorical. These forms are shared between vertical and horizontal feminizations with specific differences but critically affect each other.

In vertical feminization, women started to encounter the limits of patriarchy before their entrance to the political party. Under the patriarchal

concerns of everyday life, women have been coded as unfit for politics or more dramatically evaluated as immature for taking political decisions. However, the early stage of women's learning process (Drechselova 2020: 181) within vertical feminization provides the ability to manage patriarchal limits by challenging and reproducing it. This way, women construct their political activities or decide the destination of political preferences. In other words, these are the components of the women's strategy to maximize their interest in the political party.

There are certain criteria to measure forms of women's representation, such as number of women or policy outcomes. But when it comes to forms of vertical feminization, women's actions should be taken into consideration. Their reactions against patriarchal limits are important to evaluate the forms of their existence. Due to the complex structure of vertical feminization, the forms do not affect each other as they do in horizontal feminization. At the vertical level, they can coexist both in the action of women and discourse of the leader.

After the level and form of women's existence in the political party, Childs and Murray draw scholarly attention to concrete space, which is the existence of women's organization in the party. Despite the scarce focus on the women's sections in the literature, the third point takes into account women's organization within the political party. According to them, "the nature of the role, remit and ideology of any women's organizations and, in particular, whether these are integrated formally into the wider party structure and policy making bodies, and to whom they are accountable, both upwards and downwards" (76). I will summarize the third point as *"concrete existence of women"* by referring to women's organization as an organizational unit within the party.

The existence of women's organizations is discussed regarding their conformity to intra party democracy (Cross and Katz 2013) and function for women's representation (Allen and Childs 2014; Childs and Webb 2012; Williarty 2010). Despite the skepticism about their existence, they are still important parts of party politics in terms of women's political participation (Childs and Kittilson 2016). Additionally, the significance of women's organizations depends on the country or political party, yet

their functions, presence, and impact are vital for women's political participation. During the vertical feminization process, the political inclusion of women into the women's organization does not threaten the male-dominated and established nature of politics, as women's inclusion into the mother party does. Therefore, men do not develop barriers against women's political inclusion into women's organization, but they tend to keep them when it comes to the "women-only" environment. Even though women's organizations are not the ideal and desirable form of women's political integration (substantive), they are the most possible form of women's inclusion in many cases.

When it comes to the nature of the party's women organizations, which depends on diverse factors it is overwhelmingly framed within the volume of the patriarchy and formation of political ideology. These two identifiers are decisive when it comes to lose or strong ties between women's organizations and the party. Based on the level of dependency or autonomy, both the party and women establish their agendas and strategies while negotiating with each other. The literature discusses women's organization's position in the political party in terms of locating their strategies as separating or integrative actions, or acting individually or collectively, which stems from the rules of the game. By following Childs' identification of the distinction as an unnecessary one when considering women's political achievement (p. 47), I claim that the level of connection - dependency or autonomy- should be considered, because it helps women to choose one of the binary strategies or combine the dual strategy (Sainbury 1995) in vertical feminization.

The existence of women's organization provides a "women-only" environment for actors in vertical feminization. When women are reluctant to face and struggle with institutionalized masculinity in politics, it negatively affects the feminization process (Brechenmcher & Hubbard 2020). The existing structure "empowers men and disempowers women" (Verge and de la Fuente 2014), but women can empower themselves within the women-only environment by accepting and reshaping certain limits. In terms of the vertical feminization process, women's organization are critical for attracting women into politics. After achieving their entrance, the

party's women conduct a negotiation with men in the party and other women in the vertical feminization process, which also shapes their acts and strategy. They have to set their strategy as moderate and cautious, because as their power increases, they will be more vulnerable to masculine limits and be perceived as a threat- this is patriarchal backlash. Under these circumstances, women are becoming *political acrobats* in the lines between empowering themselves and conforming to the limits. However, their achievement or political direction in vertical feminization will shape the level and forms of representation at the horizontal level.

Defining the volume of the patriarchy and ideological formation of the political party remains at an abstract level. The fourth point clarifies their abstract meaning by pointing out the gender regime of the political party regarding the party's understanding of women's political presence. Indeed, the explanation is helpful for understanding the nature of the political party in terms of the women issue:

> Whether a party regards women as a corporate entity capable of being represented (both descriptively and substantively) and if so, whether the party is susceptible to feminist arguments for this. This might be included whether the party makes gender based and /or feminist claims rather non-gendered, neutral or anti-feminist claims.

Proposing "*gender regime*" for the fourth point shortens the definition, but still reflects its extensive meaning. The gender regime is shaped by the party's political ideology and vice versa. Briefly, based on Connell's (1987: 120) conceptualization of the 'gender regime' means a specific gender order that is present in all institutions of society, such as the family, the state or labor and production system. In terms of party politics, the gender regime reflects itself as a framework via the party's attitudes towards women in the party regarding vertical feminization. While this fashion is transferred to horizontal feminization, at that level, the party's gender regime affects women depending on the party's power in parliament or government.

Before examining the function of the gender regime, it is important to highlight the possible forms of the gender regime. As mentioned above, the gender regime is characterized by the ideological formation of the political party. However, it is not a conservative, socialist, or liberal gender regime. Based on this ideological formation but also the party's position towards women, the gender regime can be regarded as feminist, neutral or anti-feminist. Even though feminizing politics does not mean feminization of politics, the party's claims in the forms of feminist, neutral and anti-feminist understandings affect women's political participation and their journey into political representation.

Gender regimes in vertical feminization are revealed in the division of labor between women and men regarding party politics. If the division is based on a gendered role, it is characterized as "women's and men's duties." Analyzing the different forms of gendered division of labor in party politics mirror the traditional gendered division of labor in the home. Women's responsibilities are shaped as caretakers of their families while men are identified as breadwinners, and this binary position is replicated in the roles of women and men in party politics. Regardless of the party ideology, patriarchal norms and practices are repeated in every aspect of life. While this process represents itself overwhelmingly in the anti-feminist fashion of the gender regime, feminist and neutral cases are more prone to support equality in the division of labor.

Basically, the type of the gender regime shows itself in the party's political agenda which is more obvious and effective if it is in the government. In other words, identifying the gender regime at the horizontal level is easier when considering its wider impact compared to the vertical one. However, the party starts to construct its gender regime at the vertical level which is uncovered in the gendered division of labor in the distribution of political works and political offices (Jennings and Farah 1981). As the replication of traditional gendered division of labor and asymmetric visibility rises, the gender regime can be diagnosed as anti-feminist. Yet, if the division of labor and office distribution is made without considering gender, the gender regime can be defined as feminist.

Similar to the fourth, the fifth point suggests examining "the extent to which party policies are gendered and/or feminist". This is briefly framed as *"party agenda"* which affects all feminization processes as horizontal and vertical, besides other processes in the party. Considering the party agenda in the level of vertical feminizations leads us to examine the political aim of the party. Based on the political aim, the party agenda shapes its party policies. For instance, if the political aim attempts to represent diverse interests and win elections, the party agenda attempts to mobilize as many voters as possible. Depending on the context and party ideology, in terms of mobilizing women voters, the party agenda will be designed according to women's interests and concerns in each society.

This brings the discussion to the descriptive and substantive representation/participation of women in politics. Regardless of the form of the gender regime -feminist, neutral, anti-feminist--the level of integration of women's issue in the political agenda illustrates the forms of women's existence at both levels. In other words, feminized parties are not the same as feminist political parties, as parties do not have to respond in a feminist fashion at either dimension of feminization. Identifying the anti-feminist gender agenda as a lack of substantive characteristics on both levels is tempting for researchers, yet this causes us to underestimate its impact on women's issues. Emphasizing the party agenda and political aim are vital to uncover the impact of forms of gender regimes in both levels without limiting ourselves to a certain policy direction.

I attempted to clarify the gendered nature of political parties in terms of vertical feminization by combining existing literature with the frame of Childs and Murray's five points. As outlined above, the analysis includes both party and actors' perspectives to represent a clear and comprehensive map. By doing so, I pointed out how political parties are decisive in women's political journeys and how women utilize the limits and opportunities of the party's agenda by seeking their own political trajectories. However, the section is more broadly about the political party structure in terms of women's political participation. Referring to the initial aim, I will continue to create an analytical map which contains

structures and agent dynamics as well. The next section will continue to address this interaction by focusing on women's political activists as agents.

2.2.2 *Acting Strategically: How Women Navigate Vertical Feminization*

Regardless of the political position and ideology of women, the existing literature emphasizes that women are acting strategically based on their agency (Wineinger & Nugent 2020). However, there is limited research on women's strategies and political actions in the political party level. By re-visiting Lovenduski's formulation, which identifies women's strategy in politics as containing diverse forms (1993:4), I attempt to clarify women's strategies in vertical feminization. Indeed, these strategies are valid for both vertical and horizontal feminization, because they are general outlines of women's political survival. Before starting, it is important to underline two things. One is that women's agency does not have to reflect itself in an active form, because, as Dulong argues, political parties tend to reward obedience (cited in Drecshlova 205; Dulong 2010). For that, every covered and hidden coping mechanism will be assumed as a reflection of women's political agency. It is also important to keep in mind that the mechanism of women's representation is not independent from women's activities and strategies in party politics. Thus, although the analysis will be limited to vertical feminization, it will refer to horizontal feminization in specific points where the processes touch upon each other.

Lovenduski's first argument is that "women's issues were brought to the political agenda. Prominent party women, supported by women's organization and networks raised issues of sex equality in the parties" (p.4). While she emphasizes the importance of women's inclusion into politics along with their concerns and issues, she offers a linear direction to this by concluding that the process establishes sex (gender) equality in parties. However, Lovenduski comes to this conclusion very quickly, because before establishing gender equality in the party, women have to guarantee their *political survival*. Political survival is the central concern in the

vertical feminization process. Within patriarchal borders, women as political actors generate diverse forms of strategies to sustain their political survival and after they strategize their political career. Reconsidering Lovenduski's argument in terms of vertical feminization allows us to think about the strategies of women in political participation by asking how women exist in politics.

For that, by referring to the voting mechanism, women activists construct their strategies through their efforts and party works in terms of their ability in vote-harvesting and mobilizing women. Depending on their utility within the party, they become a critical asset regarding party politics. Women's political participation does not have to entail a strategy to achieve gender-equality. The limits of masculine intraparty institutionalization are important to consider, and also this is not always a part of women's political agenda-as seen with regards to conservative women. Therefore, to better understand the reflection of this strategy in vertical feminization, I suggest a categorization for defining women's existence which shapes women's strategies and acts. First, symbolic existence is about the support of the party's leadership for feminization to illustrate the party's modern and women-friendly face (Childs 2008: 49). Second, the rhetorical existence, which is related to the symbolic existence of women as well, essentially aims to mobilize women's vote. Third, the substantive existence which occurs in political parties that emphasize the quota for women's representation both in parliaments and party organization and seek for gender equality in their party agenda. Based on these categories, women shape their strategies and style of existence in terms of acting as "submissive, active submissive and active" participants in the political party.

Having said that, women's political participation is followed by the strategy of women's political survival in politics. To determine their strategies, their forms of existence in the party are critical to shape their way of acting-- in other words the embodiment of the strategy in three ways. Based on the forms of existence, symbolic existence makes the women's strategy *submissive*. In this strategy women follow the rules of the game without challenging the limits of the patriarchal order. Moreover, under

the conditions of state feminism, women are involved in politics to symbolize the state's modernism. Both at a society and political level, women are shaped depending on the requirements and designs of the regime.

Rhetorical existence -which I take from Lovdenduski's rhetorical strategy" (p.8) is quite tricky for women's strategies because on the one hand, it encourages women's political participation, but on the other hand, it restricts women's existence within patriarchal limits. In other words, the leader or prominent politicians of the party emphasize the importance of women's participation in politics without making any effective or convincing regulations. This environment leads women to shape their strategic positions as *active submission*. Therefore, women still consider the limits of patriarchal norms and structure, but they establish their strategies to maximize their interest through reproducing, redefining and sometimes consolidating the existing limitations.

Lastly, substantive existence is an effective way for women to participate in politics. In this case, women are active and equal participants in the political participation process. Both political systems in general and party structures in particular support women's participation in politics via positive/affirmative actions in the scope of intraparty democracy, gender equality or positive discrimination -if it is found to be necessary. Women's substantive existence also accepts women as *active* participants in the process. Put differently, women frame their strategy as active agents without considering their political survival.

By drawing attention to the women in party politics, I aimed to show how diverse existences lead to diverse strategies for women. Lovenduski's second dimension helps to further the analysis by asking what makes women participate in politics. Related to the previous one, the second point suggests strategizing the presentation of women's issues. Louvenduski argues that "seeking to avoid accusations of sectionalism, they sought to transform women's issues into universal issues (p. 4)." At the representational level, Lovenduski's argument seems appropriate, yet, in terms of women's participation, it has to be reframed. In terms of women's existence in politics beyond the strategies derived from these forms, I ask what makes women's numerical existence meaningful.

The existence of women in politics without active and incorporated strategies with different sectors, regardless of the number, remains dysfunctional. This strategy gains another perspective with the rise of the significance of the intersectional perspective. Through the intersectionality perspective, women's issues are accepted as multi-dimensional, unfixed, heterogenous and context-based rather than a clear-cut formulation. While women develop their strategy on the basis of intersectionality, they increase their interaction with the dominant environment and other underrepresented groups to escape from sectionalism/isolation and extend their opportunities. Put differently, this is a reciprocal process. While women make their numerical existence more functional and effective by extending their political agenda, they increase their mobilizing ability, which raises the number of members and voters.

While women political activists can overcome the sectionalism within a party by applying an intersectional perspective to their political style, they are still dependent on the limits of the political party. In other words, the nature of women's issues and how they are represented in the party agenda is associated with the party's political ideology and gender regime. Women's issues can be understood broadly to include maternity leave/pay, equal pay, equal opportunities, domestic violence, women's health, pensions, childcare, politics, and sexuality (Childs 46). While all of them are indisputable topics for women's action, their strategies vary depending on the party's political ideology. Based on the ideological underpinnings of the party, women's point of view and strategies are shaped in response to these topics. Therefore, even though women's actions engage with the same concerns and issues, the strategy can lead to different outcomes. In other words, the extent and direction of the strategy is generated in a feminist, neutral or anti-feminist fashion. Between the party's ideological and patriarchal limits and women's own existence, the meanings of their existence in terms of agenda setting are shaped. It should be underlined again that the identity of the agenda includes feminist, neutral or anti-feminist, but is not related with the number of women in party politics; it is about the gender regime, women's strategy, and the process of vertical feminization among the actors.

The second point is critical to understand the meaning of women's existence in the party in terms of the distance or alliance of women activists in vertical feminization with other actors and the party. The third point associates this positionality in terms of a dual strategy. Lovenduski claims that "women used a dual strategy of working within women's networks and in male-dominated areas of the party" (p. 4). Indeed, this strategy also brings a dual characteristic to women's political presence or required production of multiple strategies based on the different nature of the two settings. Despite the differences, women's presence should be balanced regarding their way of acting and ability to conduct interactions between two spheres. Questioning the place of women in party politics is important to understand the way women are "doing politics" in terms of women, which is more complicated than women's representation. In a way, women's representation is one of the consequences of women's strategies in the vertical feminization level. A dual strategy, or a way that women are doing politics, has multiple characteristics which are reshaped for various reasons (political survival, pursuing individual interest, aiming overall or partial gender equality and having a seat in local or national government), actors (from higher to lower-level women actors), results (representation, intra-party power among women, consolidating party's gender regime and indispensable part of party politics to voter mobilization).

Ways of doing politics are changing based on the position of women in party politics. Indeed, without underestimating the equality dimension, women's political presence is constantly investigated from a differentially perspective that shows difference between men and women in politics. Both the concerns of women voters, the tendency or strategies of women politicians and the expectations of the political party lead women to define them as a way of "doing politics in a female way" which has quite a gendered feature. However, within the diverse and intertwined picture of the feminizing process, especially at the vertical level, the position of women activists in party politics is more decisive and critical to understanding the political trajectories of women.

Relatedly, women are rational actors in politics, and they follow crucial steps to survive and strategize their action to maximize their own interest. Throughout the analysis of the vertical process, I underline women's agency as the primary engine. Yet they activate their agencies under the circumstances of "the rules of the game", which is the male-dominated nature of power relations: politics. Regarding the fourth component of women's strategy in politics, Lovenduski defines this by saying that "women paid close attention to the rules of the game. They sought to transform gender relations in politics from within, hence they were careful to affirm their commitment to their parties" (p.4). Adopting or challenging the rules of the game is critical to establish the position of women within the political settings which can be in parliament or more commonly in the political party. Women's position towards the rules of the game in terms of the political party is shaped by the party's ideology and their level within the party's organization. Indeed, the rule of the game has an extensive meaning and depends on diverse factors which range from the patriarchal dynamics of the society to entrance into the political party, from obtaining a position within the party to being a representative at the local or national level and navigating political survival at every level. Considering the environment and political aims, the rules of the game are changed but continue to impact women's political strategies.

Lovenduski's four dimensions of women's strategies have been scholarly discussed since the 1970s, and all of them are still useful for understanding the contemporary situation in gender and politics. Together with a consideration of women's political participation, I re-examine them under the terms of vertical feminization by highlighting women's activities in the party organization and asking question like how women exist, what leads to this existence, where do they exist and what shapes their existence. While emphasizing the context-based diversities among women's strategies, this part aims to show women's agency in navigating their political survival.

At the empirical level, women's activities, and strategies for achieving representation start at the party politics level which has a multi-dimensional feature. For this, women's strategies within the party organization

and activities through politics are critical to understand the dynamics behind the representation of women. However, before going there, especially to understand the lack of women's descriptive and substantive representation, the gendered nature of politics should be analyzed regarding women's presence in political parties. Lovenduski's model on women's strategy is inspired by women's representation in the context of British politics. The concept of feminization politics widespread application in the literature stimulates the research to discover new aspects of the issue. Exploring women's strategies through Lovenduski's four components model opens an opportunity to investigate women's participation in party politics. Each of the strategies brings a different casual pathway and its alternative is based on the nature of the political party, actors, and process. Combining them with Childs and Murray's five points allows the research to extend the map for analysis on vertical feminization by bringing an opportunity for party-level analysis. To be more specific or clear about the options and conditions, I outlined with *vertical feminization process* in terms of women's party politics by underlining how women strategize their political participation and how party structure contributes to the process.

Along with an acceptance of women's strategic participation in politics and its two basic triggers, the political aims of women (critical actors) and the nature of the party (institution) are critical. While the political aims have obvious motivations and outcomes, the nature of the political party provides more complicated understandings and requires more concentration. It has a vital position, which is broadly examined in the literature, because political parties are the essential actors in politics and the institutions of gendered relations. In terms of women's political participation and trajectories, they set the borders and rules of the game for women regarding the components (ideology and political power) of the nature.

With the new concept of *vertical feminization*, I concentrate on the determinants of women's strategies together with the impact of the nature of the political party. The subjectivity of women, gendered borders, and patriarchal nature of the political party are equally important in

shaping women's political trajectories both at the participation and representation level. I emphasize feminization at the participation level because its multi-layered and multi-faceted condition brings new openings and causalities to understand women's pathways in politics by depicting the process and interaction between women and the patriarchy in politics. Moreover, the analysis of women in party politics provides an opportunity to analyze the other side of the coin which is the political mobilization of women voters by women politicians. Within the framework of women's political participation, the concept of vertical feminization develops an analytical triangle by locating women as political party activists in one corner, and the party's gender regime and women voters in the other corners. All these are interconnected while shaping each other's positions, behaviors, strategies, and agenda. By establishing this frame, I suggest looking beyond the universal understanding of women's issues, which has contextual particularity, and question the validity of women's efforts to achieve gender equality or substantive reflections in every context in terms of feminist outcomes.

Until now, I have introduced broad coverage of feminizing politics by suggesting a new concept to uncover particular characteristics of women's political participation. Lovenduski's concept of feminizing politics is important to build on an analysis of the topic of women and politics. Our ability to adapt the concept of *vertical feminization* to women's existence in politics paves the way to employ it in different contexts as well. I use the concept as a guideline for researchers to comprehend the existence of women in politics. The guideline focuses on two processes in women's political journeys, those being before (political participation) and after (political representation). Examining the first stage of the process in women's political presence requires us to depict the subjective motivation, socio-cultural and socio-economic imperatives by offering to concentrate on contexts where women's experiences occur in politics through gendered institutions such as political parties or the places where women operate politically. When it comes to an analysis of after, it is critical to measure and assess the meaning of women's existence in politics by what makes women participate in politics. Nevertheless, both

processes have commonalities regarding the production of women's strategies by adopting or challenging the rules of the game. Lovenduski's concept of feminizing politics views it as a process and the process includes diverse actors, factors, and time periods in terms of women's political presence within the environment of full interaction.

The primary aim of the research is to examine the relation between the feminizing features of the AKP and the anti-feminizing gender agenda of the party. Due to the lack of analysis and therefore, analytical perspectives, I develop the concept of vertical feminization to understand women in party politics, which helps us to question women's political presence beyond the representational level. After dealing with the existing literature, my next step will be to explore vertical feminization in the Turkish context by focusing on the AKP.

§ 2.3 Contextual Analysis: Vertical Feminization in the Case of AKP

Collecting data and analyzing it alongside theory is an intertwined and reciprocal process. Especially while conducting qualitative research in a particular setting, the process entails the use of diverse tools to broaden the findings and analysis. Therefore, the task of qualitative research requires an in-depth view to research concern. The microscopic envisioning of qualitative research leads to a constant conversation between data and theory. However, this occurs in a concrete setting called "context". Based on the context, and data drawn from the context, the research provides a conceptualization within the theoretical framework. Therefore, in this section I suggest an in-dept investigation into the research context: Turkey. After reviewing the literature and trends about women in Turkish politics, I will concentrate on the contemporary situation by illustrating how vertical feminization occurs in the case of AKP.

2.3.1 *Women in Turkish Politics*

Women's presence in Turkish politics has minor reflection when women's history in Turkish politics is considered. Women's struggle for political rights in Turkey started before the declaration of the Republic (Zihnioğlu 2003). As Çakır indicates, women's political demands can be traced back to the declaration of II. *Meşrutiyet* (Constitutionalism) which asked to have women participate in parliament as an audience (2019: 98). However, their political demands regarding political participation had to wait until the 1920s, because first, women had to achieve inclusion into the public sphere through civil society organizations and publications.

By 1923, women had yielded their political demands *-right to vote and to be elected-* by establishing a political party: Women People Party/*Kadınlar Halk Fırkası* (KHF). The party was never approved by the newly established state, and they sustained their existence as a women's association: Women's Association/*Türk Kadınlar Birliği* (TKB). However, TKB was a political organization rather than a women's civil association. It proved its function as an organization because the TKB operated as a women's branch of political parties[1] until the parties established their own women's branches (Ediz 1994).

Women's political activism was restricted within the borders of the TKB, yet the history of women's political activism in Turkey reveals that women did have a strong interest in politics. Interestingly, this interest still repeats itself through women's political participation from the voter level to the level of women MPs. Despite women's political activism, gender equality in politics has still not been achieved in Turkey. As seen in Figure 2.1, women have been underrepresented in politics. To better understand the conditions of women in Turkish politics, I will introduce dominant approaches in the literature. In this way, I will show the

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[1]   According to Ediz (1994), TKB functioned as a women's branches during the single party period. After the transition of power from CHP to DP, the union became a field for conflict for women from CHP and DP and after a while it turned as a women's branches for DP. Under the multi-party condition, and requirement of political mobilization of voters, the parties started to establish their own women's branches as actors of appealing women voters.

existing and ongoing pattern of women's attempts to participate in Turkish politics, which is extended and reframed in the current political environment.

Scholarly interest towards women's presence in politics has not halted despite the underrepresentation of women. Whether or not they questioned the reasons behind women's underrepresentation, scholars attempted to uncover the position and role of existing women actors within the existing patriarchal structure. Initially, scholars concentrated on women's political presence in the early republican period by emphasizing that it symbolized the ideological underpinnings of the newly Kemalist state: modern, secular and even democratic (Tekeli 1982; 1996; Arat 1997). This period is an illustrative case for state feminism and women's symbolic existence in the early republican period.

Despite the general agreement about women's symbolic existence in politics in the beginning, scholars attempted to understand the backstage of politics and women actors who were subjected to the patriarchal structure. I categorize three approaches towards women in Turkish politics. The first group is focusing on the multi-level embeddedness of patriarchy, as Arat describes in *The Patriarchal Paradox*. The second group is highlighting the gendered feature of politics, which combines with the family-oriented gender regime, as Sancar shows in *Türk Modernleşmesinin Cinsiyeti-Erkekler Devlet, Kadınlar Aile Kurar*. The last group is revealing the actor face of politics by scrutinizing women's agency in politics; for example, Zihnioğlu draws attention to this in *Kadınsız İnkılap*. By sharing the arguments of important books on gender and Turkish politics, I aim to emphasize patterns of feminization in Turkish politics. In this way, I posit that women's political strategies have been shaped through the heritage of patterns of feminization in Turkish politics.

Arat (1989) is one of the first scholars to focus on women in Turkish politics. Her approach was based on how patriarchy was anchored in Turkish society and how it affects women's representation. She develops her argument by underlining that those women benefit from "patriarchal backing" when it comes to being in the political arena (118). She furthered the idea that "women enter politics not merely on men's terms, but also

because men motivate them" (120). To describe the process, she refers to the "patriarchal deal", or "patriarchal bind", even though she does not clarify women's political trajectory after their interaction with patriarchy.

Sancar (2012) provides a historical backdrop for the gender regime in Turkish politics. She claims that the gender regime in Turkey has a long history starting with late Ottoman modernization. Since then, it consolidated itself -even the ideological frame has changed- around the "family-oriented gender regime". She uses the example of the political parties in the period between 1945-1965. By doing so, she claims that political parties do not profoundly aim to improvement women's rights. Instead, she shows that the family-oriented gender regime is obvious in the junction of the political regime and the established values in society and institutional practices. Indeed, Sancar's point of view clarifies the importance of dimensions of the context, which both shapes and is shaped by the gender regime.

With the historical evidence of Zihnioğlu (2003), scholarly interest changed its axis from *given rights* to *gained rights* in women's journeys. In other words, without denying the existence of male domination in Turkish politics, scholars started to centralize the agency of women who struggled for their political rights, as was the case with *Nezihe Muhiddin*. After the agreement on the emergence of women's political agency, studies started to centralize or at least recognize women's political agency.

In light of these studies, drawing conclusions about women in Turkish politics is not easy but we can provide enough information to frame the pattern. From the literature, we can understand that women's symbolic assets (Tekeli 1991) or *tokenism* in Turkish politics remains a historical stigma in politics. The reason for this is that, despite social and political changes, the gender regime remains constant and prioritizes the family, pushes women to secondary positions, and leaves them with the burden of both being public and private actors. While the meaning of what women symbolize has changed over time and is diverse based on the party's ideology in the government, the interaction between women's agency and structure of Turkish politics uncovers another ongoing

stigma. As highlighted above, women have an interest in politics, and it shows itself in their enthusiasm to participate. Even though women's interests do not follow a normative or westernized pattern in Turkey -for example, women's political interests do not address directly feminist outcomes-, women have been always enthusiastic about participating in politics.

In the contemporary research agenda, the attention is overwhelmingly prone to party-level analysis due to the AKP's top-down intervention into the women's rights. However, women in politics have been started to scrutinize through intersectional perspective by including ethnic and class dynamics into the research. As part of this, actor-based studies enlarge their existence in the research agenda. Closer to the present, with the participation of new political actors in Turkish politics, the nature of politics has also changed for women as well. Arat (1999) demonstrates women's political involvement in RP, Taşdemir (2013) depicts Kurdish women's political journey and Çavdar (2022) develops an understanding of women in the AKP. Beyond the ideological diversification, academic interest widens towards women in local politics and women in national politics as well.

Looking at these studies and their findings across time leads me to think about patterns of Turkish politics for women. The progress of women in Turkish politics does not have a linear feature. It gives a clear, but not an easy conclusion. Both embedded patriarchy and women's political navigation interact in the battle for the rules of the game and women's coping mechanisms at the same time. Women have long been excluded from politics in Turkey or included for tokenism, which makes them submissive actors. This is an expected outcome of women's marginalization in politics, even after getting the "right to vote and run for office" (Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer 2012: 11).

However, women in Turkish politics are navigating their political career within the limits and possibilities of the nature of embedded patriarchy. In this way, I posit that women are active submissive agents in Turkish politics who strike a patriarchal bargain. As a result, women in Turkey have participated in politics to pursue their own political survival

and maximize their interest, which helps to consolidate the existing gender agenda and patriarchal feature of politics. As Arat argues, "in this male-dominated society, women representatives benefited from men's power until they competed for office" (p.118). This is true and still valid.

The brief historical and current literature overview shows how women's political journey has started and how it has continued in Turkish politics. However, something is still missing regarding women and party politics. This is critical to understand the Turkish context where political parties are the main drivers of political representation and participation. In the rest of the section, I will further the contextualization with respect to the AKP. While doing so, I will examine how *vertical feminization* is built in the AKP. For this, first, I will concentrate on the role of the party's ideology, the party's gender agenda, the political system, political culture and finally the party's own context. I argue that these contextual components shape the rule of the game regarding women. After that, I will extend the analysis to actors and their strategies. This part will provide a guideline and dictionary for the concepts that I utilize in the ensuing chapters, which deeply analyze the components and processes of vertical feminization in the AKP's party politics based on fieldwork data.

2.3.2 *AKP's Vertical Feminization: Contextualization and Conceptualization*

After analyzing the existing literature, women's participation in Turkish politics can be framed within the interaction of the nature of multi-level patriarchy and individual/collective women's efforts. In terms of the nature of patriarchy, this research limits itself by focusing on a political party (AKP) which is critical to understand the Turkish context where political parties are the main drivers of political representation and participation.[2] By limiting the research, according to Kittilson's suggestion that "the nexus of party and gender can be examined at multiple sites

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[2] Indeed, political parties are essentials for women's political participation in many democracy (Lovenduski and Randal 1993). This is also valid argument for Turkey.

with party politics" (2013:537), this research concentrates on the nature of the party and women actors (at different levels). By doing so, the research provides a map for vertical feminization and how it operates in the case of the Turkey's AKP.

The AKP's ideology and gender agenda are crucial components for describing the nature of embedded patriarchy in the AKP, yet the party is not independent from the overall political system and political culture regarding gender in Turkey as well. I examine the AKP's party ideology and gender agenda in Chapter III. However, to better understand this, we must consider their meaning in research and role in vertical feminization.

Before starting analysis on the party-level, I will focus on regime type, which has been discussed in the literature to understand how and why regime type matters (Htun and Weldon 2010) regarding gender equality in politics. The studies are overwhelmingly conducted in democratic countries, which also requires a reconsideration when applying it to the Turkish context. The reason why the research agenda on gender and politics generally consists of women's political participation in democratic countries and shows successful cases from Scandinavia. However, the explanation for advance democracy is not valid for the cases like Turkey. Turkey is a case that hybrid regime in charged which combines authoritarian tendency with selective democratic practices.

On the surface, the governments in the hybrid regime acts for women's progress in politics. Tripp (2013) uses the example of Uganda which is one of the first countries in Africa to seriously increase women's presence in politics. By this attempt, the regime aims to get approval from women (525). However, the hybrid regime brings restrictions as well, which occur because of the conflicts between women's progressive demands and governments' undemocratic responses. Tripp interprets the situation by noting that, "both the progress and limitations on improving women's status speak to the priorities of a hybrid regime" (526) which fits the case of AKP and Turkey as well.

At the outset, women's rights and women's presence symbolize the democratic feature of the party-or are so interpreted- which intends to frame the hybrid regime. With the strategy for remaining in the power

for longer time, the parties in the government of hybrid regimes can undermine democratic practices and limit the activities of women even within the party. In the case of AKP, two cases are important to understand changing attitudes regarding responses to women's demands: the headscarf issue and the Istanbul Convention.

The importance of the cases is associated with women's reactions against the party's agenda. In the case of the headscarf, women organized to demand inclusion of veiled representatives in the parliament. Even though the AKP was in power for a decade, veiled women's demands regarding participation in the public sphere with their headscarf had not been responded to. Women unified around the motto "If there is no veiled candidate, there is no vote" (CNN Türk 2011). This campaign started before the 2012 general election, yet their demands were not responded to until 2013. After the election, the AKP declared a democratization package which involved the new regulation about the dress code in the public sphere. Therefore, the headscarf issue has been solved by lifting the restrictive rules. Even though veiled women were not elected in the 2012 elections, four women MPs started to use a headscarf after the new regulation in 2013.

It was a progressive attempt to advocate for women's political and social rights in Turkey, because until 2013, they were subject to exclusion from the secularly coded republic. While it is open to discussion whether the AKP did this as a progressive move towards women's rights, it gained approval from women voters. Since the beginning, veiled women have been the most loyal supporters of the AKP (see chapter IV-VI). Due to the nature of the hybrid regime, the party constructs restrictive regulations in time as well. With the motivation of remaining in power, the AKP restricts democratic practices which were finally applied in regard to the women's issue. To better understand the changing attitude of the AKP regarding women's issues, I will focus on the new demands of the same group of women. AKP's women and veiled women gained their rights by demanding the lifting of the ban in 2013. After the "If there is no veiled candidate, there is no vote" campaign, they appeared again during debates on Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention. Indeed, until

that time, the AKP's women's public appearance had been limited to party activities. In this case, women in the AKP, in the representative level, criticized the AKP regarding the latest debate on the Istanbul Convention (Sayın 2020). Their voice was negated by several groups, but the most sonorous one came from the famous columnist Dilipak who referred to women who support the Istanbul Convention as "whores" (Yeni Akit 2020). After that the AKP's head of women branches from 81 cities in Turkey sued Dilipak. Despite the debates and conflict between the party and the party's women supporters, Turkey stopped being part of the convention with the Erdoğan's decision. Pressure from the Islamist-conservative male camp and anxiety about remaining in the power led the party to ignore the voice of women.[3]

These cases prove how and why the AKP has changed its attitude towards women over time, which is an expected result of the hybrid regime in Turkey. However, based on the cases, the relationship between gender and the hybrid regime can be observed. I argue that the hybrid regime motivates vertical feminization rather than a horizontal one. As seen in the AKP's case, women are welcomed into political participation at the party politics level. Even women's limited demands about representation (they are not demanding equal representation; they are asking for veiled women's representation) is acceptable to the party and provides opportunities to extend its electorate base as well. Under the hybrid regime, the AKP increases vertical feminization which enables it to remain in the power. Moreover, the heritage of the symbolic existence of women in Turkish politics is sustained and consolidated by the AKP to justify the party's democratic tendencies. However, the AKP strategizes it through

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[3]   In these two cases, I attempted to show women's demand from the party's own camp. However, the party acted similarly in terms of the demand from feminist women's organization. At the beginning, party was welcoming and consulting the feminist women organizations, but when it comes to current situation, the party ignored and sometimes oppressed them. Contrary to existing literature, it does not prove a "periodization" in AKP's gender regime. It uncovers the party's strategy to remain in the power in a hybrid regime.

rhetorical feminization[4] which emphasizes the role of women in the party without achieving any affirmative action and gender equality.

This brings the research focus to the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics in the AKP. While the AKP's feminization is an obvious reality according to numbers, the results of the gender agenda draw the attention to the anti-feminist trend in the party in terms of the degradation of women's rights. As Childs argues, the feminized political party may produce an anti-feminist response to women's concerns. She describes it by saying that "such a party integrates women as elected representatives and party members. It also integrates women's concerns into their policy agenda, but it does so in an anti-feminist fashion" (2008:23). To analyze the relationship between the feminized party and anti-feminized gender agenda, Childs suggests an extension at the actors-level from voters to women's representative and in-depth analysis of the party's women's organization. Yet, before examining the actors, she also directs the focus to party policies.

I posit that the AKP is numerically feminized party, yet it produces anti-feminist outcomes which are framed as an anti-feminist gender agenda. For conceptual ground clearing, I will define what the research means by saying that the AKP has an anti-feminist gender agenda. I am using gender agenda and gender regime interchangeably in this research to refer to the logic behind the AKP's policy making process and policies toward women. As defined above, the gender regime referred to by Connell is also a valid definition for the AKP as well. More specifically, the gender regime is the platform for meeting women in society, politics, and party in the government.

The AKP's gender agenda builds itself on the legacy of the gender regime in Turkish politics, which was defined as family oriented by Sancar. The first part of Chapter III denotes the ideological underpinnings of the

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[4]   This is different from the rhetoric of feminization what Childs refers to conceptualize Cameron's feminization attempt in Conservative Party. In this fashion, AKP emphasizes the role and place of women in the party rhetorically which is also sustaining by women's actors in the party. The Özlem Zengin's statement is an excellent case by she refers AKP as a women party.

AKP's gender regime as conservatism and Islam[5] regarding how they define and frame women within the family. Instead of Sancar's family-oriented gender regime, I prefer to use the term family-mainstreaming gender regime in terms of the AKP. By doing so, the concept refers both to its frame and function, because the AKP's gender regime produces polices and also furthers the agenda by infiltration into the society.

I address the anti-gender and anti-feminist agenda repeatedly throughout my thesis, but I also use these terms in the same manner. There is not a concrete definition of anti-feminism in the literature, but it is broadly defined as anything that is against feminism. When the diverse meaning of feminism is considered, the lack of a comprehensive definition of anti-feminism seems reasonable. For this, I will attempt to define anti-feminism in the AKP context. The meaning of anti-feminism or anti-gender in the case of the AKP addresses many things. These include the AKP's gender justice argument instead of gender equality, restrictive regulations regarding women's rights, duties imposed on women deriving from traditional gender roles, and defining women within the familial sphere. These attitudes are revealed in the particular cases and discourse, such as the withdrawal from the Istanbul convention and Erdoğan's rhetoric on the "three children policy". Based on existing literature and the findings of first-hand research, anti-feminism means not only gender inequality and lack of affirmative action to improve women's existing situation, but also refers to a lens for political agents regarding how to see women, frame the relations with the party and women and set an agenda in the manner of consolidating the ongoing disadvantages for women.

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[5]   Conservatism and Islam in the case of Turkey interact with each other by determining the values in the society, policies in the government (with AKP) and norms in general. It does not have an easy explanation to see how do they affect and shape each other or where is one starting and other is ending. Moreover, the relation is shaped in the Turkish context as well, because Islam and conservatism become the component of the Turkish Right and also social tradition. In this complicated nature, the AKP does not fit any form of party family and women's politicization does not appear the same with the Western or Middle Eastern context.

The above discussion aims to provide a conceptual ground for the ensuing chapters and contextual clarification for vertical feminization. To do that, I carry out the structural components by focusing on the political system and the legacy of the gender regime in Turkey and its reflection in the AKP and the party's gender regime. These are decisive for the current nature of the gender aura in Turkish politics, which is championed by the AKP. I define the relationship between the AKP and women as a coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics. While the role of the party in this feminization represents "rhetorical feminization", it has a more active part in the anti-feminization process through improving Turkey's family-oriented gender regime within a conservative-Islamist frame and infiltrating it into the society via populist political actions.

Having set out the context for the party and party's gender agenda, I will turn attention to the actors who are located in the vertical feminization process and characterize the process as the basis of the multi-level and multi-actor. As seen in Table 2.1, vertical feminization involves a wide range of figures, from women voters to active party members. To customize it in the case of the AKP, the actors involved in my research are women voters (Chapter VI), women's branches and particularly the head of women's branches (Chapter IV-V) and party leader.

The structural setting of vertical feminization in the AKP is shaped by the nature of the AKP's patriarchy, the legacy of the gender regime and the current political system in Turkey: a hybrid regime. In this environment, vertical feminization provides opportunities for the party by increasing the number of electorates and activists. However, the feminizing process brings anti-feminist outcomes in this structure because of the combination of the anxiety of needing to remain in power and rhetorical feminization. The AKP has another mechanism to boost vertical feminization, which is the party's populist political action. Populism in the Turkish context has different meanings. With the AKP, it becomes a source of mobilization of voters. In the case of vertical feminization, it has been observed that the AKP establishes populism as a gendered tool to reach women both at the actor and voter level.

Under these circumstances, the actors' efforts can be underestimated, because the party, regime and the leaders seem to emerge as the main drivers of the process. Indeed, the influences of women MPs and ministers on the integration of women's concerns into the political agenda remain limited. However, the effort and strategies at the political party level are multiple and more flexible than at the representation level. Put differently, despite the recent raising of the number of women representatives in Turkish Parliament, they are still underrepresented. Indeed, feminization is not valid at the representation level. However, the case differs at the party level, especially in the AKP, because from voter to active membership, the party represents a sort of numerical feminization.

In terms of vertical feminization, the actors emerge as women voters, activists, and women in the top positions -especially heads of women's branches at the district or provincial level-. The party leader is also a critical actor in vertical feminization for the AKP, which is defined as a leader-oriented party.

The leader, in the case of Erdoğan, is the most critical and decisive component of the AKP's between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics. First, Erdoğan is a dominant figure in the party, not only when it comes to the decision-making process in general, but also in terms of women's discourse. In vertical feminization, the existence of a leader as an actor shows itself in the narrative and discourse of women actors. As Yaraş (2018) underlines, Erdoğan is represented as a male ally for women in the imagination of women actors in the AKP. I found that it is an undeniable reality in my research as well, but I also noticed that it might be extended from women political actors to the voter level. Erdoğan as a leader provides a generally discursive motivation for vertical feminization. The impact of Erdoğan in the process is consolidated by thematic support from populism which shapes him as "one of them". By both representing and envisioning leadership, Erdoğan is located at the top of the vertical feminization process. In a leader-centered party like the AKP, it should be admitted and considered that Erdoğan appears at every level. He represents the embodiment of the patriarchy and the rules of the game in the

feminization process and the imagination of women. In other words, he represents an interplay between structure and agents.

When it comes to women actors, the inclusion of women voters and women activists in the party politics shows the multi-level and multi-scale attribution of the process as well. In terms of women activist and politicians, in the case of the AKP, women activists are overwhelmingly understood as the members of the party's women's branches. Due to the rule in the party's constitution, women members are automatically considered to be the members of the women's branches. Even though women have a minority presence in the party, there is not any official restriction for their participation in the main party. Not only automatic membership, but also women's political navigation, keeps them in the women's branches (See in chapter V).

Women's organization/branch/unit is a significant place for women's political participation. Especially in countries like Turkey where women's existence in politics has a symbolic meaning, the women's branches provide a concrete meaning and verify the existence of women in politics. In this dissertation, I discuss the limits and opportunities of women's branches in the case of the AKP, but another crucial question remains: do women's branches symbolically exist? It depends on the function and role description of the AKP's women's branches.

The statement which I discuss in Chapter IV clarifies that women's branches act for mobilizing women's votes and verify the party's policies about women based on the party's regulation. While the party defines women's role at the descriptive level and in the sense of political participation, it does not give substantive responsibility to women actors. Instead, the party assigns women to carry the party's gender agenda into the field. In this sense, the women's branches become critical actors in the vertical feminization process, which operates as an intermediary position between the leadership-level and voter-level.

Based on the women's branches intermediary position and multi-faceted features, they act actively in the vertical feminization process. The meaning of being active contains three dimensions. First, women's branches work for mobilizing and consolidating women voters, which

include their roles in the party and strengthens the party's power. Second, women's branches are a domain for women to exist by themselves in politics especially in the context of Turkey and within the frame of Islamist-conservative constrains. Doubling the limits of politics and the male-domination of politics with the obstacles derived from the Islamist-conservative definition of women in the AKP-- which defines women in the familial space by minimizing the contact between men and women who are not coming from the same family-- increases the importance of women's branches' functions in the party. The function includes the political participation of women in the party as activists. Third, the importance of women's branches in women's political participation as voters and activists emerges as an irrefutable fact, yet it does not occur without resistance, which shapes it from outside. The resistance comes from male-domination and the AKP's conservative-Islamist patriarchy as I underline repeatedly. While the women's branches seem like an opportunity for women to exist in the same structure as men, they are also a source of oppression and limitation which lead women to act strategically for their survival in politics.

While the thesis focuses on the roles of the party, women voters and women's branches in the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics, it puts the major emphasis on women's branches while considering their bi-directionality, strategy base and multi-faceted characteristics. In terms of vertical feminization, they play the major role in the process while mobilizing voters, consolidating and continuing the party and strategizing their own existence in politics. So, while women's branches pave the way for processing vertical feminization, they are also "active submissive" participants who require a survival mechanism as well. On the one hand, women act for mobilizing women voters and strategizing their existence quite actively. On the other hand, they obey and reproduce the party's anti-feminist agenda, which comes from the combination of patriarchy and Islamist-conservative formation.

However, when I refer to the women's branches as the vital actors in the process, I should underline that they do not represent a homogenous group of women even in the same party. Beyond the women's branches'

multi-level existence in the party's organizational structure -from the neighborhood to the headquarter level- the actors have differences even in the same position Indeed, women's political style also deserves a closer look. While I identify them as "active submissive" participants of political mobilization, I refer both to how they navigate their political trajectory in the party and how they mobilize women through framing the political appeal based on the party's agenda and voter characteristics. In this sense, chapter V provides an analysis of the tools of women's political style. Here, one of them is critical to introduce, which I use differently from its original meaning: "intersectionality". The concept of intersectionality was defined by Crenshaw to show how women are under pressure because of the intersection of diverse identities such as race, class, and gender. While I utilize the concept in chapter V, I apply it to how the AKP's women mobilize women's votes by using their intersectional identities, which include ethnicity, motherhood, age, and religion.

While women are counted as women's branches members, not all of them have positions in women's branches within the organization. Therefore, I name women who are working in the branches as activist. In other words, activists are the connection point for the party and society. At the same time, they are the voters, but it needs to be underlined there is no evidence or research about all the members of the AKP who are voting for the party. Even in this research, all my interviewees at the voter level expressed that they have a party membership, but it does not represent the nation-wide tendency.

However, women voters -those who have membership or not- are at the bottom of the vertical feminization process and are participating in the process through their votes massively. Again, the women voter's category should not be understood homogenously, but based on the quantitative reality, the AKP's women votes rely on housewives. While chapter VI focuses on the women's motivation to vote for the AKP because of critical themes, certain questions remain how women navigate their votes, identify the voting preferences, and strategize them. Even though the field data provides insight about the unanswered question, it does not allow me to offer comprehensive answers.

The interviews with women voters and my field notes from party meetings illuminate the voter perspective in many ways. However, the one and the most salient outcome is that women are not following their male-relatives' voting preferences as outlined in the literature to justify conservative and Islamist women who do not have agency. In the research, I am locating women voters as actors who are rationally following their own interest depending on their party affiliation, value formation, leader imagination, facility benefits, and gender identity. Even though women voters seem to be the less effective part of the feminization process, they are -numerically- the major part of the process. The research analyzes the gendered formation of preferences for women by showing how women's votes are *routinized* within the feminization process. These are two different explanations/situations in the women's voting behavior; the first one could be researched quantitatively while the second requires an in-depth study. Based on my methodology, I show how women give meaning to their votes and how they relate their political understanding with the AKP and with their femininity, which makes them loyal voters even after 20 years. The literature supports this by underlying the division of labor between men and women. Situating men and women in different parts of life makes voting behavior a gendered outcome because women and men link themselves with the world over these experiences. Therefore, as Childs notes, "women might vote differently from men" (2008:14), but how could the AKP and women votes meet?

Focusing on the gendered mechanism behind women's voting behavior leads me to analyze women's political participation at the voter level. By keeping my eye on the interaction among the different levels of the vertical feminization process, the voter level provides an explanation for how they conform with the anti-feminist agenda of the party by highlighting it as a feminized party. Put differently, while questioning the women's preferences for the AKP, focusing on voters and their function in the vertical feminization will clarify the confusion in terms of what is "feminine" and what is "feminist".

Feminizing politics in the context of Turkey, and the case of the AKP is powerful and salient at the party politics level, which is what I call

vertical feminization. The verticalization reflects the diverse positioning among the actors, yet in terms of a relational base, they emerge as a circle effect in the case of the AKP. This section is an introduction and justification for the ensuing chapters. The concepts were clarified, and the structure and actors were introduced by referring to their function in the vertical feminization process. By analyzing the research data, I will show how the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics is sustained, and how the actors in vertical feminization contribute to it.

While Lovenduski describes *feminizing politics*, she underlines the existence and effectiveness of women at the representation level. Even though the concept is critical for understanding women in parliament, it does not say much about women in the political party, which is a salient case in the Turkish context. While Lovenduski's concept crosses different contexts, Childs and Webb asks for further analysis regarding women's actors at different levels. However, applying the concept in the case of the AKP brings more questions, which also do not clarify the situation. Therefore, utilizing the existing literature and empirical findings, I offer a new conceptualization based on Lovenduski's concept.

Reconceptualizing and contextualizing the concept of feminizing politics provides opportunities and limitation at the same time. In terms of opportunities, the AKP's feminizing features challenge the idea behind "feminist outcomes". It helps to understand the feminizing politics in conservative (Islamist) parties with anti-feminist outcomes. To widen and deepen the feminizing process in the AKP, I needed to move the focus out of the party and shift it to the women activists and voters to examine their contribution. By keeping the interaction among the actors in mind, I approach each of them individually except the women's branches. In the case of the AKP, the women's branches are in the middle of the process that provide sustainability to the feminizing and bridging process between the actors around the anti-feminist agenda.

The AKP's party politics in terms of mobilization relies on the women's branches. At the same time, feminizing politics is also directly related to the women's branches because the unit is the entrance point of women into politics. In the case of Turkey, particularly the AKP, before

focusing on the representation level, the participation level requires an analysis to understand what leads women out of their homes. I also argue that analysis of the AKP's feminized and anti-feminized features, the navigation of women actors and the party's gender agenda will fill the gap in terms of the relationship between women and the conservative party. The discussion in the literature does not falsify the existence of feminizing politics at the political participation level or in conservative parties, yet it also does not provide a ground for analysis.

When it comes to the limitation side, my research is Istanbul-based, which focuses on diverse districts. Even though Istanbul is used as a small sample of Turkey as a whole, it has its own dynamics which derive from being a metropolitan city. It is important to underline that the conceptualization of vertical feminization comes from my long-term, election-experienced fieldwork. During my field research, I interviewed MPs and higher profile women and women from other cities, both activists and voters, but I did not use them while analyzing the actors in feminizing politics. Vertical feminization keeps the research focus on specific actors. Indeed, the limitations open a line for further questions to develop a comparative perspective among parties and cities and to measure the relationship between vertical and horizontal feminization. Before moving on to the empirical chapters, I will share my fieldwork process to demonstrate how I conducted research and collected data.

§ 2.4 Methodology: How Did I Conduct the Research?

The first chapter of Yael Navaro-Yashin's book is titled, "Prophecies of Culture: Rumor, Humor, and Secularist Projection about "Islamic Public Life." I was a master's student when I read the book, and then I re-read it several times. The book presents ethnographic research about the 1990s public life in Istanbul. Almost 30 years later, I conducted my field research in Istanbul with a curiosity stemming from a part of a chapter of this book that reminds me of a childhood memory. The part is titled, "Rumor and Reality?" and the author begins to explain the spreading rumors about the victory of the Welfare Party in the Istanbul Municipality in 1994.

Many people returned home with stories, either experienced in person or heard from someone else, of street confrontation. On March 29, 1994, two days after the day of election, I heard, via word-of mouth, that "some men approached women without headscarves as they were walking in a central district of the city and told me women that they would no longer be able to promenade in that fashion." One middle-aged man said that "a woman who went to a children park was told by some covered women that she could not enter that place without covering her head.

Yashin shares more examples about the rumors before and after the election. I remembered one of them from my childhood, from when I was around 5 years old. We had some relatives as guests in our home. It was a usual women's gathering. My mom was knitting lace, as were other women in the gathering. Other women were admiring my mom's lace, which was a tablecloth for my cousin's dowry. I remembered the television was on, and the images of two-party leaders, the RP's Erbakan and the DSP's Ecevit (Democratic Leftist Party, *Demokratik Sol Parti*), were on the screen. Women in the room were saying that, "this time Ecevit will lose." Then, my mom made a triangle from the square tablecloth and covered my cousin's head and said, "now, you can use it as a headscarf instead of keeping it for your dowry." Then they started to laugh. I was laughing with them but did not understand why they were laughing. Yashin's book paved the way for the revival of my childhood memory along with curiosity. After they stopped laughing, my grandmother told us that, "women are knocking on every door." This statement echoed again in my mind when I remembered my childhood memory while I was reading the book. Indeed, the statement echoed for me after every election since 2002, the year of the AKP's first victory. I kept wondering, "who were the aforementioned women?"

My curiosity was not forgotten but maybe was buried while I was struggling with life, and both shaping and shaped by my academic and political interests. When the day came to choose a question to investigate

for my PhD, I was miserable because I was tired of reading the literature and waiting for a miracle to help me fit Turkey's AKP into the literature that I read. After several emotional crises and blood and tears, I finally realized that it would not happen, I would not manage to finish my PhD. I was asking questions that even I did not know how to answer in the project. My advisor was trying to bring my attention to more specific topics. However, as a PhD student, I was thinking of these issues were limitations for me and, unrealistically, I was devoted to doing something huge-but how? In the second meeting of my thesis monitoring committee, at the end of 2018, I handed in a literature review about right-wing populism, which associated the AKP with the rising European right-wing populism, but I listened to my advisor, and I started to look for more specific topics. I was asked by the jury, after they read my literature review, "what are you bringing that is new? What are you going to say that we do not know? Everything you submitted to us are things we already know. What are you curious about?"

It was the moment I experienced while reading Yashin's book which reminded me of my childhood memory. What was I curious about? It was "women", it has always been "women in politics." I could say, "Indeed, I am wondering about women's activism and mobilization in the party." The jury encouraged me to go back through the field and think more about what I wonder about, and they advised, "you can go to local municipalities." I understood why they suggested that I go to the municipality, because, since the Welfare Party experience, the AKP has had a significant impact on municipalities. There are myriad interactions between actors and structures, gendered features and "money issues" in the local governments. However, I wanted to make the invisible visible (!), focusing on actors who are not at the front stage of politics or even the focus of academic concerns, and who are not represented but are participants in politics.

To investigate women's political participation process in the AKP, I conducted interviews, participant observations, used original data from AKP's politicians' speeches and surveyed weekly publication AKP's

İstanbul organization AK Bülten to uncover women's inclusion in politics and examine the process of emerging political agents.

2.4.1 *Why İstanbul is a case?*

Before starting how I conducted my research, I needed to clarify why I conducted my research in Istanbul, which is for four reasons. First, Istanbul is the most populated city, and because of the population diversity in the city, it provides multiple perspectives to understand general patterns in Turkey. President Erdoğan and other AKP politicians also prove this perspective: "If İstanbul stands up, Turkey stands up" (Erdoğan). Second, İstanbul has an important place both in the discourse and politics of the AKP. For instance, the AKP organizes more events and puts in more effort to mobilize voters for election triumph, particularly in local elections. Erdoğan describes İstanbul as "the city that is the apple of our eyes." Women have also shared similar views, such as outstanding female politicians in the AKP. Güldal Akşit underlines that, "the capital of the AKP is Istanbul" (AK Bülten 2013a). The previous head of Istanbul Women's Branches, Özlem Zengin -she is currently in the parliament – brings our attention to this issue in her speech by summarizing the value of Istanbul for the party:

> İstanbul is the symbol city of the AK Party's *dava*. Istanbul, where the light of the AK Party was born, is the locomotive power of this political movement. Therefore, being in Istanbul means being a pioneer; this is a great responsibility. İstanbul is not the only city of obtaining power, but also sustaining the power (AK Bülten 2015).

Third, the AKP links the party's neo-Ottomanist (Tokdoğan 2018) and Islam-oriented formation with the role of Istanbul in Islamic history, which is based on one of the hadiths of the Prophet Mohammed: "Istanbul will certainly be conquered, what a great commander is a commander who conquered it. What a beautiful army was the army that conquered it" (AA, 2019). From this phrase, the AKP's election triumphs represent the

conquest of Istanbul under the leadership of Erdoğan (commander) and the efforts of the AKP's Istanbul organization (army).

The fourth and last reason is associated with Erdoğan's personal history, which involved getting started in politics in Istanbul, and he was the first Islamist mayor of Istanbul after the 1994 elections. The relationship between İstanbul and Erdoğan captures the attention of all party members, which makes Erdoğan's personal tie a common phenomenon shared by others. Istanbul is both a meaningful and representative case for the AKP and my research.

2.4.2 *A Preliminary Research in Two Districts in İstanbul: January 2019*

After my committee meeting, I had a relatively good idea of what I would do. However, I realized that I did not know how I would do it and who I would contact. I felt relief about the clarification of my research subject, but it brought me another puzzle to solve: "how would I get into the field?" Considering the current polarized circumstances in Turkey, people are usually only friends with those who vote the same as them. I was concerned about finding a connection between me and the party, but one of my colleagues from the university where I worked at that time asked me, "do you know that one of our graduating students knows someone from the party?" I desperately needed a tiny grain of hope to start my field work, and thanks to my colleague, I got in contact with the student and learned that his mother and grandmother were the founding members of the AKP's organization in one of the districts in İstanbul-which I called Aynalı in this research. He put me in contact with his mother, Merve[6]. She was not active in politics at that time, and when I shared my project, she provided a connection for me with the head of women's branches in the district she had founded. In two days, I was sitting in a room with the

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[6]   Merve is a middle age, unveiled, upper class women and she was close to finish her MA when we were in contact. Recently, she started to run a civil society organization that she jointly organizes events with Emine Erdoğan and the AKP's female representative.

head of Aynalı district women's branches, Ruhsar[7]. Until that point, I'd never met a woman activist from the AKP. I prepared an interview guide to understand how she started, how she describes politics and why she is in the AKP. Based on the guide-which will be defined as an open-ended questionnaire-, during the interview, I started to ask follow-up questions for further clarification. However, sometimes it was unnecessary to ask further questions because she was describing politics, her political activities, and the party constantly. She was enriching her narrative with examples, specific cases and activities while involving a wide range of actors from the party setting and women voters.

I spent more than 4 hours in the Aynalı party building that day. I went to the building around 11 am and left around 3 pm. The interview was about 90 minutes long. However, Ruhsar arranged our interview before the women's branches executive council weekly meeting. Their meeting was at 3 pm, and towards the end of our interview women started to come to the room. Then Ruhsar ended the interview by directing me to other women in the room who were the heads of particular units of the party. They started to share their political participation processes and duties in the party. Like Ruhsar, they were also describing political activism from a relational perspective by including the party at the top and voters at the bottom.

Ruhsar's approach eased my first encounter with the women. This was surprising to me because I assumed that, as political actors in the party, they would be more close-lipped or reluctant to open themselves up to a researcher who they do not know. However, she approached me very openly. Taking courage from this, I asked her whether I could participate in their political activities and could observe their activism to understand how they interact with voters and other party members, which she had talked about during the interview. It was the election period and they had more than two events each day. She took note of my request and promised to invite me to different activities, from home-visits to market

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[7]   Ruhsar was in her mid 50s during my fieldwork. Before her political life, she was a well known person in her neighborhood where is one of the upper class and old neighborhood in Istanbul.

activities, and added proudly, "you should see with your own eyes how we are doing politics."

After I had interviewed Ruhsar and talked with her team, I felt that it was a good start, but something was still missing. The missing part did not pertain to the data that I had collected but rather where I had collected it. Ruhsar was the head of the Aynalı district, where the AKP is the opposition party, and the CHP (Republican People Party, *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*) has the majority of the votes. In other words, Aynalı was a good case for helping me to understand the AKP's women when they are in an opposition and minority position; however, as the AKP has been the ruling party in the government since 2002 and holds the majority of the municipalities in İstanbul (and in Turkey), I needed to enter another district in Istanbul where the AKP is in power. I opened up about my concerns to Ruhsar by inquiring if she could connect me to any of the heads of women's branches where the AKP is in power. This is the way to start snowball sampling[8] in qualitative research. Ruhsar asked me where I am living, and I told her I was from Sefercik. She smiled and said, "that is great, Aygül[9] –the head of the Sefercik district- is one of the most experienced and hard-working women in the party. I will ask her to speak with you."

I headed home after my first, intense day in the field. I was thinking about the last four hours. When I arrived home, I immediately opened a blank page to reflect on what I had experienced and observed in Aynalı. I postponed listening or transcribing my audio record after the tiring day. I had a one-page long memo written from my first day, which included first impressions about buildings, people, the women's branches room and the flow of conversation.

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[8] However, snowball sampling was not a well-functioning method in my research, as I conducted interviews among women who lack a solidarity and friendship network with one another.

[9] Aygül is a relatively young (in her late 30s) female politician, and she was coming from a conservative Kurdish family. She is married with two children and have university graduation.

The next day, Ruhsar called me to report that Aygül agreed to be interviewed, and she added, "we have fieldwork next Tuesday, do you want to join?" I was in the field, and I felt besieged by research concerns from all sides. After we hung up the phone, Ruhsar messaged me Aygül's number. Without wasting time, I messaged Aygül to introduce myself and ask her: "may I call you about my research?" She answered me in two hours, and she invited me to the Sefercik AKP building the next day around 6 pm. The next day was Friday and after the chaotic Friday traffic of Istanbul-because I was heading back to work, I arrived at the building around 6 p.m. At first glance, the differences between the Aynalı and Sefercik buildings were apparent. There were more people and a more busy atmosphere in Sefercik despite the time. At the entrance there was a woman at the desk, I walked up to her to introduce myself. She told me that Aygül was not there yet, but that I could wait for her in the women's branches room. Then she led me to the room. I was sitting in the room with a member of the women's branches. At the same time, I was observing and talking with a woman whose name was Esra[10]. They offered me tea, which is very normal way of welcoming a guest in Turkey. Even though I do not like to drink tea, I forced myself to drink so as not to be awkward or rude. It was almost 7 pm but I drank three cups of tea, because they kept serving tea. I was talking with Esra about how she got started in politics. Then she started to talk about how they are busy because the upcoming election would be in March. Women were going in and out, printing something, talking about the schedule for the week and submitting the end of day reports. Men did not go into the room, which was the same in Aynalı as well. While I was focusing on observing the daily routine of the women's section in the party building, suddenly Esra stood up to greet someone. I noticed it was Aygül, and she entered the room with three more women. She greeted me with a smile on her face and hugged me to apologize for making me wait. Indeed, I was very happy with the situation because I had a chance to observe routines in the

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[10]   Esra was one of the youngest women who I have met. She was veiled, university student and majored in Architecture in a private university.

building. She explained that they were coming from a home visit and then they stopped by to visit a sick person in the same neighborhood. Then, everyone started to come up to Aygül to talk about their daily tasks, before the head of the main party entered the room; he was the only man who entered the room to talk about what the women did and what they will do tomorrow. He did not notice me; I was one of the women in the room. Indeed, despite the majority of women in the party being veiled-in general and at the local level, being an unveiled women made it easier for me to get less attention or sometimes it was a challenge to be invisible during the participant observation.

When 8 p.m. arrived, finally I was alone with Aygül in the room, but she seemed very tired. I did not want to force her to talk with me. Instead, I briefly asked her whether I could participate in some events before asking when she would have free time for an interview, which I understood was impossible in the current election environment. She accepted my request and started to propose events like the home-visit, market-visit, streetwalking, AK *Nokta*, and crowded events like dinners, picnics and so on. I left the building around 9 pm and planned to see her at the next event. When I arrived home, I was quite tired but did not want to miss any details, so I opened another blank page to reflect on my Sefercik experience.

After I met with Ruhsar and Aygül, two heads of the women's branches, and conducted informal and unstructured "interviews" with several other women in the party organization as well as observations in two different districts, my fieldwork finally led to some sense of clarity. Aynalı and Sefercik were where I did my preliminary fieldwork which provided insight for deciding the extent of my research and salient actors for comprehending women's political participation in Turkey's AKP. The preliminary fieldwork provided twofold outcomes for my research. First, it informed me about the field and trained me for my position(s) during the research process. Indeed, I have to say here, it is a never-ending process. Second, it clarified my focus by helping me find the critical domains and periods that I would use for my ethnographic research. The party's women's branches section in the building, the party's women's branches

social media pages, places where women have met and conduct their party works—the home, parks, squares, and marketplaces— are all important domains for seeing the relationship between the party and women occur on a different level. Considering preliminary fieldwork and extensive notes, I prepared a plan for fieldwork over the weekend because I wanted to be equipped before participating in canvassing with Ruhsar on Tuesday.

2.4.3 *Participant Observation During and After the Election Period: February-March 2019/April-June 2019*

That first afternoon in the Sefercik district showed me that conducting in-depth interviews during the election period was not a good idea. Interlocutors might be too overwhelmed to find time for me after or during their busy days. I decided to postpone the interview process to the end of the election period and gave all my attention to participant observation and beginning participating in the party's election work and meetings. Since the beginning of February 2019 to the election day of 31 March, I participated in more than 15 events and spent more than 50 hours in the field. After the decision to cancel the election by YSK[11] (see: Demiralp and Balta 2021), there was only the election rerun in the Istanbul municipality, which was required for another campaign period by party activists. In the rerun period, I participated in 10 events and spent more than 30 hours in the field.

I participated in small- or large-scale events that women activists organized. The audiences or participants in the events also varied, from the party's women activists to voters. My participation in these events provided me with insight into the function of women activists in the party and their interactions with women voters, which paved the way for better understanding their political style. The local election(s) campaign period was a chance for me to observe women's activism in the political participation process at both the activist and voter levels. Moreover,

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[11]   Supreme Election Council (Yüksek Seçim Kurulu, henceforth YSK).

participating in these meetings and events provided me with insight into the gender dynamics of the party setting as well.

Based on what I witnessed in the field, I adopted a multi-level and multi-scalar analysis (Blee 2020) by carefully locating this lens to better comprehend the dynamics between the AKP and women. While I determined the levels as including the party, the party's women's branches, and the party's female voters, I also conducted multi-scale analysis by focusing on the international, national, local, and neighborhood -even home- contexts to generate answers from various angles. In other words, I attempted to trace each moment where the party and women interact. Additionally, the research is based on "grounded empirical theory," which, "is a method of understanding the empirical dimensions of a complex problem" (Ackerly and True 2020: 191). Grounded theory enables me to analyze the data I have collected as a participant in the party's events, interviews with women, surveying the party's publications and program, and tracing the discourse of the leader, outstanding female, and male party members. Moreover, the empirical data collection and analysis creates categories and concepts that are a concise reflection of my research. As Corbin and Strauss argue, "One does not begin with a theory, [and] then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge" (1990: 23 cited in Ackerly and True 2020: 192), grounded theory enables me to analyze original data and generate new concepts.

I participated in 25 party events during the election period between February to June 2019, and after that I participated in 7 more events during 2021 that were outdoors, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The events that I participated in were generally organized by the district level WBs in Istanbul's different districts, yet some of them were organized by the headquarters or provincial level WBs. However, they were women-only events and participants were primarily women. Rarely, I had a chance to observe male party members within these events, such as the mayor of the district/candidate for the mayorship, head of the party's main unit, or head of the Youth branch. To diversify my observations, I chose different scales, different locales, and themes for the events. From the party's

table in the Sultanahmet square to breakfast in Hisarköy, 8th of March celebration in Sefercik to 5 p.m. Tea in Taşlıdere, street market point from Kozluca to Seminar on Financial Literacy in Aynalı, *Esnaf Ziyareti* in Aynalı to Candidate Promotion dinner in Sefercik.

In the first half of 2019, I was running from one event to another in different districts of Istanbul. Even though I was born and grew up in Istanbul, this was my first time going to certain neighborhoods or districts. My way of participating in these events depended on their scale and agenda. If it was organized to reach a large number of women, I was able to participate in the event without any invitation or connection. I was following the women's branches Instagram pages, where they advertised their upcoming events. In these events, women's branches generally offered food and also invited outstanding women politicians of the party or candidates from the municipality. These events helped me to better understand the general landscape of women's political participation. For more detailed observations, I needed an invitation from the head of the women branches, as I got from Ruhsar and Aygül. With them I participated in small-scale events, which were primarily in-person visits, home-gatherings, or women member-only events. These events provided more in-depth data for my research because interactions among the party-women activists-women voters were more fleshed out.

I needed to remind Ruhsar or Aygül frequently about my research because they had very tight schedules. I was generally texting them and they were calling me back when they had time. If they did not find a chance to talk with me, they texted me back to invite me somewhere. Sometimes, they sent a private invitation, sometimes they asked me to come to a party building at a specific time. One day I was in Aygül's car with two other women from the party- one of them was Aygül's assistant and the other was the coordinator from the province. They were talking about the upcoming organizations and the coordinator asked Aygül about her plan for the 8th of March. She seemed upset while sharing that she was still waiting for approval from the party headquarters for her plan. She was planning a dinner with a large number of women participants, but the uncertainty of the election works and their economic

dependency on the party's main body presented limits for her. Then she and her assistant laughed like they had a plan, and she said, "we are going to do *diren gezi[12]* to the party". She was smiling at me through the rear mirror while driving the car. I was silent in the back of the car, but they were aware I was listening to them. Maybe she was testing me by referring to the Gezi movement, or maybe she would have liked to show me how women are actively in charge their political activism, or maybe both. However, being tested by these women was a helpful process for me to understand and set my positionality throughout the research (I will explain more at the end of the chapter).

Until the end of the election period(s), I endeavored to not miss any chance to be with these women. Even though the spontaneity of my participation sometimes overlapped with the working schedule of my full-time job, diverse feature and locations of events paved the way for my frequent participation. Beyond observing events, as I indicated above, I found a chance to witness in-group conversations and contact other women. Especially, crowded events brought unexpected opportunities for me to contact women voters. Sometimes, I was talking with women who were sitting with me at the same table, and sometimes the conversation started based on a speech that was given by a politician on stage or about the food that was served at the event. Even though the interviews provided in-dept data for my research, these events and the participants' observations also allowed to me to understand the entire atmosphere of politics in which the AKP women functioned.

After the election and the certainty of defeating the AKP for a second time, a period of silence started across the AKP's organizations. Then I decided to stop my fieldwork until they galvanized, and decided it was a proper period for conducting interviews. Indeed, I felt that I had enough observations from the field, but I wondered about the women's activism in the "election-less" period. To learn more about that, I had to wait more than a year. While I was waiting to participate in women's events, in 2020,

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[12] Diren gezi is a reference to Gezi movement which was an uprising in 2013. The Gezi was the biggest reaction and a range of demonstration against the AKP's government across Turkey.

just after the AKP organizations started to galvanize, the Covid-19 Pandemic started. Like other people across the whole world, the AKP women had to put a stop to much of their activities. To continue my fieldwork, I had to wait until summer of 2021. Yet, they were still not organizing home-gatherings or other indoor meetings even then. However, the AKP was working to energize the activists who still felt upset about the election results, and the party started a new campaign to increase the party's members. By doing so, the party gave motivation to activists to perform more party works. During this period, I visited 5 *AK Nokta* in different locales. I was observing their approach to people, and more generally that of women to other women. Moreover, the AKP organized highly discussed in-party congress as in-door and with the participation of the party's member across Turkey. I wanted to participate in some of these events in Istanbul, but I was warned that they were "member-only" events, and I was not allowed to participate.

At the end of my volatile fieldwork, from January 2019-August 2021, I spent more than 100 hours on the participant observation process. Beyond data collection, my commuting experiences in İstanbul from one district to another were extensive, since sometimes from an event to other I spent almost 50 hours on public transportation or the party's bus or the heads of WB's cars. I wrote several memos after each fieldwork experience, and also had some photos from the events. While I was re-reading my memos, I felt lucky that I was able to conduct my field work during the election period and before the pandemic.

2.4.4 *Interviews*[13]

After I had noticed the heads of women branches have tight schedules, I mentioned my decision to postpone the interview process to the end of the election period. However, with the defeat of the AKP in Istanbul in the

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[13]   See Appendix B: Interview Guidelines. I conducted my interviews with semi-structured questions. Instead of adding the interview questions, I listed them under the particular groups by showing the reason why I asked and what I aimed to learn. Due to the two-levels of women's participation, I formulated two guidelines.

rerun election in June, AKP's İstanbul Organization lapsed into silence until September. There were not any new posts on the social media accounts of the local branches, and even the AKP's Istanbul's weekly publication, AK *Bülten*, was not published for a while.

After the AKP's 25 years of domination in İstanbul (the party was willing to emphasize continuity between the RP and AKP in the Istanbul municipality) and 19 years of domination in Turkey, this was the first experience of defeat for these activists. Therefore, I waited until they had recovered to control for the impact of this new experience in my research. In September, with the beginning of the new academic year, the party also started to organize mobilizing activities, which I came across through their photos and posts on social media. These photos showed that women were visiting schools in their districts to celebrate the new academic year.

Then I decided to call Aygül to remind her of my project and ask for an interview. Therefore, my 2 year-long interview process started in the middle of September.[14] Between 2019 September-2020 November, I conducted interviews on the activist level. Between 2020 November- 2021 August, I conducted interviews on the voter level. In total, I conducted 52[15] in-depth interviews and I used pseudo name except three well-known female politicians. By adding unstructured and informal conversations, I encountered more than 100 women both at the activist and voter levels.

After my first interview with Ruhsar, I revised my questions before visiting Aygül and I decided to reword some questions because of the differences between the two women and their two districts. The first one, Ruhsar, was unveiled while Aygül was a veiled woman. This fact requires particular attention due to the ways it can change women's experiences.

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[14] When I arrived at the Sefercik district building to meet with Aygül for interview, she seemed really upset. The difference in her mode between the election and post-election period was a salient indication for notice how the AKP's activists reflected on the election defeat. I visited her on mid-September -almost 3 months later than elections- and when I asked her how are you?, she responded as "I am so sad, we lost you know. It was our baby, Istanbul municipality was our baby and we lost it."

[15] See Appendix A for the Interview List.

The second one, Ruhsar was working in a district where the AKP is in the minority and Aygül was working where the AKP is in power. Considering the power dynamics, opportunities and limitation of their settings, these differences have to be underlined during the interviews as well.

Despite these differences, my interview guidelines aimed to understand women's political participation in three ways. First, the motivation behind their political participation; how did women participate in the AKP and why? Second, what is their understanding of politics and how do they situate the AKP in their political landscape? Third, how do they perform in politics as political actors in the party and in the field?

The interest of my research and my intention to bring women into the core of the research led me to ask open-ended questions. This would have allowed these women to narrate their understandings and experiences more clearly and without any intervention from my side. The open-ended question design and flexibility in my interview process caused me to spend a long time on the interviews. Therefore, interviews with women activists lasted more than sixty minutes, and even the shortest one took about seventy-five minutes while the longest went a hundred fifty minutes.

I was hoping to apply snow-ball methods to reach the interviewees, yet this did not go as I anticipated. Ruhsar put me in contact with Aygül and Aygül linked me with Emine[16], the head of Taşlıdere. However, after Emine, my snowball would not grow. My interlocutors kindly said, "it would not be proper to ask others to talk to you," when I asked them to put me contact with another head of the women's branches. I thought about the meaning behind the statement. Maybe it was related to my interview style. Were my questions offending them? Actually, they were very welcoming to me both before and during the interview. As an interviewer, I was always careful to assess the feeling and mood of my interlocutors. I decided that it was not about me. Then I realized that the party's district organizations are isolated from each other, and the heads

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[16] Emine is unveiled local politician in her early 50s, married with two children. She was living in the same district since she got married. She has a university degree and work experience as a bank employee. After her political life, she quited her job.

of women's branches do not have connections to each other. The party's agenda and setting meetings where the only things bringing them together. In other words, their connection is specified by the party's borders and party's order. As I drew in the AKP's women organizational diagram (Chapter IV), women are connected from the top-down. The loose connections among women at the same level (as in the case of the head of the district level women's branches) are established and limited by the higher-level party unit based on a specific agenda or regular based meetings.

The top-down flow and loose connection among the AKP's women's branches affected my snow-ball attempts. Fortunately, Ruhsar knew Aygül from her previous position, where she was member of the administrative council of Istanbul women's branches. Namely, despite the current equality between Ruhsar and Aygül, Ruhsar was in a higher position relative to Aygül in her previous duty in the party. This made Ruhsar more confident about providing a connection with Aygül to me. Aygül knew Emine from one of the Ankara visits of the WBs, during which they were roommates. Even this minor experience established a friendship, and Aygül did not hesitate to put us in a contact.

Indeed, I never lost hope for a snow-ball effect. After each interview, I asked the women kindly if they could put me in touch with someone else. Despite the lack of connection between the women in the party, I learned that the AKP's districts are paired with another district by the party. These couples are called siblings. The siblings are chosen based on where the AKP is in power in the municipality, and where the AKP is in the opposition. The essential function of this relationship is to provide infrastructure and economic support to the district where the AKP is in the opposition. Coupling districts opened a line for me to ask them directly which one is their sibling. Then, I asked if they could provide a connection between me and them. However, again, this was not the case. On the one hand, the districts which receive help from another feel that they lack power to ask something more from their providers. On the other hand, the provider districts do not want to demand something from receivers and worry it might be misperceived as a command. The dynamics

throughout the AKP's organizational structure were revealed during my interview process, and especially those at the women's branches level. The pre-interview process and way of reaching out to interviewees were as significant as the interview itself in terms of collecting data.

After I observed this situation, I started to contact the heads of the women's branches directly. I listed the Istanbul districts and categorized them according to *power of the AKP* (opposition or ruling party in the municipality), *location* (Anatolian or European sides), *demography* (I was sure that in Istanbul, as a cosmopolitan city, it would be impossible to find homogenous demographics, yet some districts were more hetero-genous than others and some districts are well known for being domi-nated by Islamist groups, a Kurdish population, and so on). Then I orga-nized the districts into these categories and created clusters based on their similarities. The clusters provided options for me in case I could not reach anyone from the districts, so I could replace districts within the same category. My aim was to reach 1/3 of the districts of Istanbul. Out of 39 districts, I needed to reach 12-15 districts. I started to call the AKP's building in every district and found their phone numbers on their web-sites. Generally, men were picking up to phone and directing me to the women's branch section. However, women were not regular participants in the building if it was not an election period. After calling on random days and at random times, I decided to call the party during the Friday prayer when men were absent from the building. Having someone in the party building at all times is very important for the party and during the Friday prayer women take on this role. I selected the Friday prayer time to reach a woman in the building. After I reached a member of the women's branches, she took notes about me or directed my phone to the head of the women's branches if she was at the building at that time. Dur-ing these attempts, two of the party members gave me the phone number of the head of the women's branches, three of them helped me to reach out to their heads by giving their own phone number, one of them advised me to send an e-mail to the head's official e-mail, three of them promised to convey my phone number to their heads—but only one of them

returned my call. For others, I asked help from women from other parties or municipal workers whom I knew personally.

Thanks to my initial clusters for the districts, I did not lose hope after several failed attempts. Indeed, I did not get any rejections for my interview demands, but I was forgotten easily by possible interviewees. I reminded them of my request a few times but at the same time I did not want to bother them much. At the end of the interview process, I visited 12 districts in Istanbul to interview heads of the AKP's district level women's branches. I conducted all the interviews in the party buildings' women's sections. Two of the buildings did not have a women's section or room for the heads of the women's branches and because of that we met in the conference room. I also conducted two in-depth interviews with women who were in the party's different levels -one was a parliamentarian and the other was working in the İstanbul headquarter. I also conducted interview with Sibel Erarslan and Hüda Kaya to develop an -historical and contemporary- insight towards the headscarf issue and Islamist-conservative women's political journey in Turkey.

As I indicated above, my interview process included women activists and voters. After I finished the activist level interviews, I started to reach out to women voters in Istanbul. With the new restrictions because of the pandemic in the beginning of 2021, conducting interviews in-person was not possible, as I had done in summer of 2020 with the heads of women's branches. Therefore, I followed a mixed process and conducted some of my interviews online and some of them in person. At the voter level, my snow-ball attempt worked better than previously, but it became multiple snowballs thanks to multiple initiators. I prepared an online flyer and sent it through to people who were in my phone list. Then they started to send the flyer to their lists, and it continued that way for a while to generate responses. The flyer found nine women who started snowballs of various sizes. At the end of the process, I was able to interview forty women of different age, districts, and backgrounds, yet many of them were housewives, which became a dominant group in my interviews due to the demographic characteristics of the majority of the AKP's women voters.

My interview guideline for the voter level was designed to help me understand what motivates women to vote for the AKP. Due to the open-ended nature of my questions, the women's narratives showed the process of women's political attitudes as it begins and how it continues. This was an inevitable situation when considering the AKP's 20 years in power.

I conducted 10 interviews in-person and 20 interviews online. The average length was ninety minutes but the longest one lasted 2 hours and 50 minutes. I did not want to stop women when they were expressing their political understanding. Sometimes, it took time to start interviews because of women's excitement about the process. I expected this, because when I reached out to them to ask for their participation in my research, they were usually answering me by saying, "you should talk my husband, he is better than me about political issues." Before I started asking the questions in my guidelines, I had to prepare the women to give their own opinions. Sometimes, they were trying to find the right answer to please me instead of saying what they really think. I was aware of that and usually I asked the same question in different ways to get women to use their own words. Their real words generally came out when they personalized their answers. For instance, if they shared a memory from their lives or associated something personal within the answer, I could hear their own words. Not all the interlocutors had the same attitude; some of them expressed themselves easily, as they had waited for such an opportunity for years.

I conducted my last interview in August 2021. Then I started to analyze and write up the process. Each of the interviewees left their marks on my research. I was amazed after the interviews about how women shared similar paths despite the diversity of their experiences. The analysis of the collected data drove me to make the voices of women the primary sources of the research.

2.4.5 *Between the Participant Observation and Interviews: Collecting Original Data during the Pandemic*

Between two lived experiences of the research, the pandemic restrictions forced me to stay at home and find a way to reach and collect data from there. The pandemic led to several uncertainties in every area but led to particular challenges regarding researchers' agendas by preventing in-person contact. Sustaining the interview process was very unlikely option in the beginning and I decided to collect data from written sources. Therefore, I started to dig in the newspaper achieves. This led to a general newspaper survey about the AKP in general, and the AKP's discourse on women.

At this stage, I endeavored to understand how the AKP created its gender politics during its political odyssey. The speeches and statements of Erdoğan and prominent male and female politicians of the AKP were the main sources in this stage. After that, I started to search the AKP's websites by concentrating on women's branches section and Istanbul. I collected data about the party's agenda, program and projects based on the past and present. Moreover, I created a file of women's biographies based on the AKP's website.

In the last stage of the website survey, I decided to survey the AKP's Istanbul's weekly publication *AK BÜLTEN*. The publication includes the AKP's Istanbul weekly activities, meetings, and speeches of politicians at party events. It has been published since 2009. I decided to limit my research to 2009-2020 (until the end of the election period). Therefore, I surveyed more than 400 volumes. I was covering all the pages, yet my focus was on the pages involving women's branches activities. In the first volumes women did not have a separate section, but beginning in 2015, *AK Bülten* advertised the women's branches in the last three pages of the publication as *AK KADIN*.

Data collection from the *AK Bülten* was a very informative process and provided very significant insights about the AKP's presence in Istanbul. Especially when I came across news about women's activities that I participated in during my fieldwork, which paved the way for my analysis of

the event through a combination of what I observed and how it was represented.

I also utilized the social media accounts of the districts women's branches in Istanbul. The accounts are run by a member of the executive council in the districts women branches and post photos from an event, weekly intra-party meetings or an announcement from headquarters. Announcements from headquarters are posted at the same time, which I came across because I noticed the same posts on different accounts.

Even though I utilized mostly the collected data from my participant observation and interviews, surveying the original data from AKP's politicians' speeches and weekly publication AKP's İstanbul organization AK Bülten provide an established background information. Indeed, this process put me in a confident position regarding my basic knowledge of the party.

While I collected data with several forms of qualitative research, when I was equipped with data on women's political participation in the AKP I was well-positioned to start coding, analyzing, and writing them down. However, the data collection and representation/writing processes do not function as extractions of raw material from the field. As a researcher, my positionality and reflexivity in research went inevitably hand-in-hand with these two processes.

2.4.6 *Positionality and Reflexivity*

In the introduction of her reflexive ethnography, Daviess (1999) says that, "we cannot research something with which we have no contact, from which we are completely isolated. All researchers are to some degree connected to, a part of, the object of their research (p.3)." Put differently, how could I isolate myself from research that is coming from my own interest? As they develop their curiosity, researchers construct their own interest by thinking from her/his own perspective. With the contact of the researched subject (s) and area, the researcher enhances the construction of their interest by adding first-hand knowledge.

I went into the field armed with my curiosity and concerns about my research subjects as well as my own intersectional identity. I was

thinking of myself as a young woman who comes from a minority group in Turkey and is married to another minority member from Greece, a student in a well-known and prestigious public university and junior academic in a private university. I also come from a working-class family still living in an outskirt neighborhood of Istanbul. I am relating this because I noticed, after each experience, day and interview in the field, how the positionality of the researcher is established by her/his lived experiences and identities. In other words, the research process made me cognizant about the extension of the dynamics between me and the research subject.

It was a bidirectional process which involved both me as a researcher and the participants of the research. Moreover, our bodily existence in a room, sitting across from each other at a two-sided table or being with someone in crowded events, were not the only sources of the bidirectional process. The perception of my existence in the minds of the research subjects and impact of my intersectional background were the primary sources of my positionality in the field. From the beginning of the research till its end, the positionality, data collection and analysis of the collected data shaped and established each other.

Due to the multi-level and multi-scale perspective of my research, my positionality has been re-established continuously regarding the research subject and area. For instance, I was "a young-girl" in the eyes of women who are above 50, and I was "an academic/*hoca*" for the women who are around the same age as me. Both of these positions helped me to collect very rich data but with different participant concerns. The first group approached me as "protectors" of a young girl and, in their mind were there to help with her "homework". With their maternal instinct, they tried to do their best for my research. The second group approached as "helper/supporters" to the *hoca* with a lot of respect. They were excited about being part of a project and tried to reflect their own understanding when answering the questions.

In one way or another, there was always a hierarchal interaction between me and participants which they themselves constructed. Beyond all the identities at the table, we were in the same sex category, but

obviously we did not recognize that we were also in the same gender category. While I was thinking about my positionality in this research, I thought about the lack of solidarity, similarity and understanding of our gender identities. By accepting diversity within the gender category, I was disappointed about the invisibility of connection among women in Turkish society.

Other differences emerged during the data analysis process as well. During my fieldwork, I realized that I controlled my subjectivity and reactions while listening to women or observing events. My positionality was not absent but quite passive at that stage. I was calm and prepared while they asked about my ideological position, the party which I voted for in the previous election and my personal life. They were testing me to understand why I am doing the research about women in a specific party. Do I have a hidden agenda? Who asked me to do this research? It was challenging to explain my aim to the participants. However, it would have been more challenging if I conducted my research after the government top-down intervention into Boğaziçi University and the resistance after that. Even before that, some of the interviewees were skeptical about my affiliation and accused me of being a member of an ungrateful (!) institution. These attacks were generally coming from the AKP women in the activists' level, but I have to underline they were not numerous.

When it comes to the analysis and writing process, I needed to decide how am I going to reflect the data? I am politically in a different position from the women who I interviewed, and I interpret Islam in a more Sufi-oriented way than them, but most importantly we do not share the same aspiration about women in Turkey. The research data is conveyed on the page through my own lenses. However, I was careful about creating space for women to represent their voices and experiences without showing them according to my ideal world.

I thought that my recognition of my positionality and transparency about my reflexivity were my ways of repaying participants. They exist in this research as they narrate themselves. I did not want to make them invisible, as they are already assumed to be in society, by covering their

existence. My primary positionality throughout the research reflects this concern.

3

AKP's Gender Regime and Gendered Populist Mobilization: More than Half of the Population

Almost twenty years in power, the Justice and Development Party (here after AKP) in Turkey has achieved the majority vote in sixteen elections (6 national, 4 local, 3 referendums, 3 presidential). Since 2002, AKP's first election triumph, scholars read Turkey's AKP and its success at the ballot box in different ways. Çınar (2011) argues how AKP's organizational power can mobilize votes along with the party's self-identification as the only "capable and reliable political brand" (122) in Turkish politics. Esen and Gümüşçü (2016) explore Turkey's journey toward competitive authoritarianism by examining how AKP's electoral power—which is based on extensive alliance between diverse actors in Turkey—and the attempts on institutional transformation support each other. Öniş (2015) identifies the AKP case as a "unique achievement" within the right-wing party tradition while underlying the party's gradual authoritarian turn. He offers the notion of "bounded communities" (36) to clarify the dilemma regarding why Erdoğan's and the party's popular support continues despite the rising democratic deficit and even allegations of corruption. Moreover, Çarkoğlu (2011) analyzes how AKP turns as a dominant party in Turkish politics by sustaining to increase party's electoral support across the country.

Scholars have focused on AKP's first three phases to understand 1) the reason for the party's continued electoral triumphs, 2) rising authoritarianism in government, and 3) the interplay between these two issues. However, with the AKP's June 2015 failure—the first time AKP lost majority in the parliament—both academic focus and Turkey's political climate have pushed to change. While this new political environment shrinks the last freedom avenues from the deteriorating regime, scholars have deepened their perspective to find the hidden sources of a contemporary political situation. Many explanations culminated in the concept of *Erdoğanism* as the new name of the emerging political context in Turkey (Akyol 2016; Cağaptay & Aktaş 2017; Yılmaz & Bashirov 2018). On the other hand, new ways have begun to be discussed by scholars and the opposition party after AKP's magical invincibility was broken. Demiralp and Balta (2021) provide insight toward the last local election by underscoring the election triumph of the opposition alliance in the metropolitan municipalities, in particular İstanbul. Svolik's (2022) forthcoming research also focuses on how voters decide to switch their votes in the last local elections.

Despite the extensive range of analyses to understand success and failure of AKP since 2002, the role and place of women in the party's political journey and Turkish politics, more generally, remain a barely touched topic. Put differently, the party's gender regime and the activities of women activists and voters are overshadowed by the AKP's leader-based and hyper-masculine emphasis, and scholarly interest has underestimated the distinctive story of the other half of the population. However, women, especially housewives, are the major support group of the AKP (KONDA 2018) both as voters and political activists in the party organization. Indeed, women have been increasingly mobilized and included in the Islamist-conservative parties, especially since the establishment of the Welfare Party's Ladies Commission (1989). It was the first time when women were discovered as the source of political mobilization and the actors of the election achievement. Since then, the AKP has sustained this political innovation by adopting a slightly more moderate

discourse towards women while preserving the party's organizational structure. This has developed a numerical feminization process to AKP.

Beyond the quantitative feminization of AKP party politics, recently, the scholars started to point out AKP's anti-feminist gender regime (Arat 2021; Ünal 2021; Kandiyoti 2020; Özkazanç; 2020; Çağatay 2019; Aksoy 2018). Interestingly, while the AKP consolidates the party's anti-feminist gender regime, the feminization process continues. This dissertation asks what the sources of the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics Turkey's AKP are. In this chapter, I examine party-level sources by focusing on the AKP's anti-feminist gender regime and populist political actions. This chapter argues that the AKP's party politics and gender agenda has contributed and reproduced the dynamic relationship between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics. In other words, with this party-level analysis, I aim to reveal that the AKP's anti-feminist gender regime is built from the party's conservative-Islamist ideological vision while allying with the party's achievement on populist mobilization toward women. These two factors show the combination of the AKP's pragmatic and ideological perspectives toward women which are repeated in the discourses, policies and mobilization strategies by the AKP.

The following sections analyze the party's anti-feminist gender regime while developing an argument regarding the AKP's conservative recognition of women from a family-mainstreaming perspective. To elaborate, the concept of "family mainstreaming" is located in the party's anti-feminist gender agenda through the linking of the use of "home, housewife, and motherhood." I then examine the convergence of women and the AKP's populist political strategies in the notions of *the headscarf, sublimated mass*, *building support*, and *leadership*. The primary sources for my analysis of party-level dynamic are party programs and regulations and politicians' discourses and public comments. Moreover, I also utilize ethnographic observations and interviews to support the analysis from my fieldwork. Developing the analysis toward the AKP's anti-feminist gender agenda provides contextualization for the relationship between women and the AKP and is the first step to understand the coexistence

between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics. Put differently, the AKP's pragmatic and ideological framework toward women's issue enable the party to consolidate its conservative agenda by mobilizing women's support and vice versa.

§ 3.1 AKP's Anti-Feminist Gender Politics

3.1.1 *The Question of Periodization or Continuation: Historical Backdrops of the AKP*

The AKP has been in Turkish politics since 2002, occupying different positions throughout. Both politicians' discourses and governments' policies show the transformation of the AKP in various aspects. Scholars periodize the AKP's political experience in foreign policy (Balta 2018), economics (Yeldan & Ünivar 2016), politics (Taş 2020; Esen and Gumuscu 2016), and societal (Mutluer 2018; Kaya 2015; Kalaycıoğlu 2007; Çarkoğlu & Toprak 2007) realms. Critical turning points are remarkable in these periodization efforts such as AKP's 3rd election triumph which consolidated the party's self-esteem (Nas 2016), the Gezi Uprising which created a fear for AKP to lose the power (Verney et al. 2020), and systemic changes from a parliamentary system to a presidential one (Kirişçi and Toygür 2019) which is identified as the embodiment of AKP's authoritarianism (Babacan et al. 2021).

Gender and politics scholars in Turkey also use a similar periodization while describing the AKP's gender regime. The literature claims that AKP's authoritarian turn impacted the party's gender regime while gradually consolidating the anti-feminist tone (Arat 2021). This approach has been supported by two tendencies analyzing this from two different periods. One focuses on the post-2011 period when AKP has started authoritarian turn, and the other dates the transformation from 2007.

First, Özkazanç separates the AKP into two phases. According to her, between 2002-2011 was the first phase of the AKP when the party combined both Islamic-conservative and pro-Western agendas. The authoritarian shift started between 2010 and 2015, what she calls the post-2011

period, and was the second phase of the AKP rule that reshaped gender politics with the patchwork of neo-liberalism, neo-conservatism, militarism, and authoritarianism (Özkazanç 2020). Ünal (2021) supports the approach on the transformation in the gender politics through the analysis of the AKP's authoritarian turn in the post-2011 period while she referred to Norris and Inglehart's (2019) concept of "authoritarian populism". Moreover, Cindoğlu and Ünal also characterize the post-2011 period as the most severe period of the AKP's gender regime both in policy and discourse level. According to them, the AKP rule initiated a control mechanism to regulate women's sexualities and reproductive rights (Cindoğlu and Ünal 2017). This perspective suggests understanding the AKP's gender regime as part of the party's authoritarian turn which has impact on every aspect of party's governmentality.

Second, Acar and Altunok point out an earlier transformation. According to them the party started to emphasize "patriarchal and moral notions and values often framed by religion" (2013:14) from 2007. Additionally, Mutluer (2019) brings a supportive approach to this periodization, claiming that the AKP started to move away from a democratic perspective after the 2007 presidential election by increasing the Islamist tone in the discourse. She also adds that "one of the issue areas in which this shift became manifest was the area of women's rights" (p. 10). The second perspective locates the AKP's anti-gender agenda earlier because it associates the Islamization of AKP with the party's gender agenda. On the other hand, the first approach examines the AKP's anti-gender regime from a governmentality perspective by combining diverse concepts such as neoliberalism, neo-conservatism, and authoritarianism.

Beyond these periodization approaches, some scholars point out the anti-feminist continuity in the AKP's gender regime which explicitly shows up after AKP's anti-Western turn. Güneş-Ayata and Doğangün bring a convincing justification by asking as "why more egalitarian changes have not taken place and why women are not necessarily empowered despite a successful process of legal reform" (2017:2) in their research. This question raises the critiques toward the approach that claims AKP had a democratic agenda in its first period. The AKP

government chased the pro-Western standpoint under the EU accession talk and women's issues were one of the salient points between the AKP's government and EU.

Within this framework, Turkey, under the rule of the AKP, achieved various legal reforms in the Labor Law (2003) and Penal Code (2004) for supporting gender equality, and with the constitutional change in 2004, the state has become responsible to ensure the equality between men and women (Aksoy 2018). Moreover, Turkey is the first parliamentary signing (2011) and ratification (2012) of the Istanbul Convention, and then "the law to protect family and prevent violence against women has been accepted in Turkey on 8 March 2012" (LawsTurkey). Additionally, women's representation in politics has risen from 14% in the 2011 general elections to 17% in the 2015 elections. A similar trend can be observed in local politics as well. Yet, women's status in society, the economy, and politics have not changed. In other words, legal reforms and increases in political representation do not represent substantive change for women. The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report (2021) supports this claim by ranking Turkey as:

> 133rd among 156 countries in gender equality, 101st in educational attainment for women, 114th in their political empowerment, 140th in economic participation and opportunity, and 105th in health and survival.

The lack of substantive changes "i.e., the expression of women's interests in policies and institutions" (Aksoy 2018:105) is evidence of the AKP's anti-feminist gender regime. Güneş-Ayata and Tütüncü (2008) discuss the AKP's intersectional gender regime at the junction of Westernist, Islamist and Feminist stances in the AKP's first government. With the loss of an appetite toward EU accession, the AKP has continued its way with Islamism by combining it with, first, conservativism, and then authoritarian populism. Indeed, gradually emergent factors affect the periodization of the AKP's gender regime. In other words, the AKP's religion-sensitive gender regime has existed since the beginning but was softer on women's

issues because of the pro-Western stance of the party. When the AKP's pro-Western stance shifted, the party's original concerns started to change its perspective on gender issues.

Arat's (2021) underscores how the AKP, from the beginning, has instrumentalized women's rights in connection between the shift of the AKP's gender regime and the context of democratic backsliding in Turkey. By doing so, she highlights the dynamic relationship between the gender regime and political regime and shows how the AKP's maneuvers on women's rights in order to establish and consolidate both an authoritarian political system and a conservative gender regime.

In the light of the literature, the AKP's gender regime mirrors what the party covers ideologically which is named as "patchwork politics" (Coşar and Özcan 2021; Cindoğlu and Ünal 2017; Korkman 2015). While this feature requires a complex analysis of neoliberalism, Islamism, conservatism, authoritarianism, and populism in relation to gender regimes, it explores what has shaped and reshaped the AKP's anti-feminist gender regime and what are the components of it. Therefore, hyper-masculinity and family-mainstreaming, focus on women's bodies and reproduction, disavowing the existence of LGBTQI individuals, and emphasizing traditional gender roles are salient characteristics of the AKP's gender regime.

When it comes to this research, I claim that the AKP's anti-feminist gender regime has been a constant feature since the beginning and has been supported by the party's Islamist-conservative standpoint. The periodization of this research follows an opposite argument from the literature by questioning the AKP's democratic attitude in its first government. Indeed, the latest development on gender politics such as Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention questions the AKP's democratic sincerity during its first period. Moreover, I begin the analysis not only pre-2011 or pre-2007 but beginning with the "*Milli Görüş*" [National Outlook] tradition where Erdoğan's and other AKP politicians' political career started. For this reason, I describe it as a historical continuation instead of a rupture.

The AKP is a continuation of a political tradition which began in 1970 with the National Order Party *(Milli Nizam Partisi/MNP)*. Despite the

changes in the names of the parties such as National Salvation *(Milli Selamet)*, Refah *(Welfare)*, Fazilet *(Virtue)*, the tradition calls itself "*Milli Görüş*"[1] [National Outlook]. Understanding the relationship between the AKP and "*Milli Görüş*" provides an understanding as to why the AKP had a pro-Western attitude at the beginning; this was for pragmatic reasons rather than ideological stances. The AKP was determined to distance itself from political Islam during its first phase because it was searching for a legitimate base to sustain itself in mainstream Turkish politics rather than be short-lived as observed in other cases of *Milli Görüş.* Since then, secular concerns in the Turkish military and bureaucracy resulted in a closure and prohibition of political representatives from "*Milli Görüş*" several times. First, MNP ended with the decision of the Constitutional Court in 1971, finding that party was against the principles of protecting the secularism and the revolution of Atatürk (Akkır 2020; Kıvrak 2020; Anaz and Özşahin 2017). Second, the MSP (1972-1981) had a longer political life than the MNP, but it had the same end like its predecessor. Indeed, the MSP and other political parties were closed after the 1980 coup d'état. However, before that, state prosecutors asked to start an investigation of the MSP because of the party's anti-secular attitudes.

Political parties returned to Turkish politics after 1983. With the emergence of new political parties from center-right and center-left, the "*Milli Görüş*" tradition was also revived with a new party: *Refah Partisi* (Welfare). The RP party was the most electorally successful party within the "*Milli Görüş*" until that time. However, the party was banned from politics in 1998 with the decision of Constitutional Court for the similar reason its predecessors. The AKP and Virtue Party were established after RP. While the AKP represented the moderate wing of the RP, FP sustained its traditional wing. When FP faced the same result with the other cases of *Milli Görüş*, the AKP managed to escape the same trap. Indeed, a public prosecutor brought a case to Constitutional Court to disband the AKP on

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[1] The National Outlook Movement is the ideology and tradition behind the Islamist parties in Turkey which were closed one by one. The National Outlook provides a continuity for the challenges The idea of National Outlook was promotion of Islam, economic development, and establishment a "just order" *(Adil Düzen)* in the society.

the basis of the party's anti-secular agenda, but the court decision differed from previous examples. It found the AKP guilty but did not ban it from politics (Aksoy 2015).

Indeed, the political experience of the RP party is an illustrative case to understand the AKP's political agenda. As outstanding members of RP, Erdoğan, Abdullah Gül, Cemil Çiçek, Bülent Arınç and Melih Gökçek created the AKP's pathways by selecting successful innovations of RP such as the party organization structure and keeping distance with the party's Islamist stance. To have longevity in politics, the AKP had to show how it is different from the Islamist parties, while protecting the voters and politicians who the AKP inherited from RP. The AKP was successful in this because, according to the RP's former head of the Ladies Commission, Sibel Erarslan, "in the beginning the party (AKP) was extremely liberal". Despite Erarslan's statement, most of the voters and politicians came from *Milli Görüş* to the AKP (Yılmaz 2008). Moreover, to generate the range and number of voters, the party needed the human resources and political model that brought achievement in RP's case.

In this endeavor, women issue is a fruitful area for the AKP to show how it is different from *Milli Görüş* by following EU accession talk and employing new legal regulations in terms of women's rights. AKP was working hard to convince secular military and civil elite as it was not a member of *Milli Görüş* whereas it was struggling to manage party's women supporters who were demanding to lift the headscarf ban. The delayed reform was criticized by women, especially Kavakçı (2010) understands it as a strategy by Erdoğan to keep distance between himself and his political tradition. She adds that "it failed, however, to address the two major burning issues for religious Muslims; the headscarf and the *imam hatip* schools" (137). This indicates that how the veiled women and excluded Muslims have an expectation from the AKP, but how the AKP attempted to frame its distance pathway from *Milli Görüş*.

Until the date of lifting of the headscarf ban in 2013, Erdoğan and the AKP allowed veiled women in the AKP's party organization as an engine of the party politics. Yet, during the 2004 elections, Erdoğan asked veiled women for understanding and sought "unveiled women candidate" for

the elections (Hürriyet 2004). As Sözen (2006) shows, the AKP motivated the participation of women into politics and provided more opportunities for representation than the Welfare Party. However, it was cautious while choosing women who could be characterized as "Westernized, secular, and yet still sensitive to Islam" (cited in Coşar 563, Sözen 267). The attempt of the AKP to restrict veiled women in political representation despite utilizing their efforts in the political mobilization was justified to show AKP's moderate stance against its Islamist tradition. However, it is the beginning of how the puzzle between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics has reproduced by keeping women as a symbol in politics through rhetorical support directly from Erdoğan.

Contradictory situation in the AKP's women politics back the party's effort to keep distance from *Milli Görüş*. While the party encourages women's political participation as party activists, it does not aim to bring any affirmative solutions for women. Ironically, the AKP continues from the Welfare Party's dilemma because the first episode of this tension emerged in the case of the Welfare Party's Ladies Commission where women were included as party activists but denied political representation. As I mentioned in the introductory chapter, Islamist women's political activism questioned secular barriers in public and political spheres, yet despite their success and efforts in politics, it has not reshaped patriarchal pressure. The situation continues for the AKP women due to the party's gender regime with one difference: the AKP's women support the anti-feminist gender regime through a bargain with the patriarchy that I will discuss in Chapter IV.

After historically locating the AKP's tension between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics, I will analyze the AKP's unsteady relationship with women in order to define the AKP's anti-feminist gender politics. As I demonstrated above, the AKP's gender politics has two pillars: pro-Islamist-conservativism and populism. As a result of this combination, the AKP operates its anti-gender regime in ideological, discursive, policy, and mobilizational levels.

3.1.2 *Family-Mainstreaming in the Home, Housewifery and Motherhood Triangle: Ideological Source*

The AKP's Islamic-conservative understanding varies in the political and social realms, and it has been applied in the specific areas via political actions. In the case of the AKP's gender agenda, these actions transpire where the AKP meets with women as different manifolds of the AKP's Islamist-conservatism. According to Yeğenoğlu and Coşar (2011) the AKP's reign has constituted a new mode of patriarchy, which has been built upon with the process of making Turkey more conservative. In this vein, I examine the AKP's anti-feminist gender agenda from the party's Islamic-conservative stance by utilizing the concept of *family-mainstreaming*. Analyzing the AKP's gender regime from the concept of family-mainstreaming maps the AKP's approach to women at the three angles of *home, housewife*, and *motherhood*. By doing so, it examines the party, the government, and Erdoğan-led policies focusing on primarily societal areas where generally the AKP's conservatism glitters. On the one hand, this research aims to understand how the AKP's conservatism constitutes a family-oriented approach in society, and on the other hand, it provides an understanding of how the AKP's family-mainstreaming approach can function in the interplay between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics.

3.1.2.1 Family-mainstreaming and Anti-Gender Movements: Weaponizing the Family

The family-mainstreaming perspective is defined by United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs as:

> a) Identifying the implications for familial of any planned actions, including legislation, policies or programs, b) Making family concerns an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evolution of policies, c) Strengthening family-centered policies and programs as part of an integrated and comprehensive approach to development planning (Family Mainstreaming 2010).

Over time, the concept of family-mainstreaming has been contextualized with a more politicized frame than the UN's definition. The burgeoning literature expresses the association between the rise of the anti-gender agenda in political parties and governments and the so-called family crisis. Many right-wing actors declared in the 13th World Congress of Families (2019) where they put the family in their agenda to control the population in terms of reproduction and sexuality (Provost 2019). Due to the concerns over the demographic crisis and the so-called degeneration of the natural family, the (ultra) conservative participants of the meeting discussed strategies against abortion, reproduction technologies, sex education, same-sex marriages, and the rights of LGBTQI+ people (Provost 2019).

Family-mainstreaming is helpful to define the anti-gender agenda and to understand how it develops as a reaction against gender ideology. The conservative camp defines family—in other words, heteronormative family—a natural union of a man, a woman, and children (Patternote and Kuhar 2017: 1). Grzebalska and Pető (2018) cited from Kemper's research and define "familial" as "a form of biopolitics which views the traditional family as a foundation of the nation and subjugates individual reproductive and self-determination rights to the normative demand of the reproduction of the nation" (Grzebalska and Pető 167 cited in Kemper 2016). Anti-gender discourse demonstrates family-mainstreaming as a solution for what the world faces today in terms of demographic crises and the dissolution of social values. Moreover, it is a remedy for and reaction against what the international organization develop as gender-mainstreaming. Gender mainstreaming is a supranational level policy agenda which is defined as:

> The (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policymaking (Council of Europe 1998).

While the gender-mainstreaming approach aims to bring a new understanding on gender equality and its reflection on "all level of policies, programs and projects" (Council of Europe), it is perceived as a threat by conservative and right-wing actors across the world (Kováts 2018). For the protection from this threat, family-mainstreaming or family-oriented approach is created as a conservative call to prevent the gender caused dissolution towards natural understanding of the family in the society.

Within this framework, women are at the center of family at *home* and glorified through their natural task of *motherhood* and caring for their family members with domestic obligations as *housewives.* This outcome is surprisingly common between Christian and Muslim societies with different triggers. Moreover, similar attitudes are observed in European cases, as well. For instance, Austria aims to support women to stay at home because women could not find the time and possibility to have children to work outside (Mayer, Ajanovic, and Sauer 2014: 113). Moreover, Hungary and Poland are also the illustrative cases how family-mainstreaming is operated in the governments' illiberal understanding towards gender (Grzebalska and Pető 2018). Therefore, positioning family-mainstreaming against the institutional perspective of gender-mainstreaming brings tradition, family, and women in the middle of such debates.

3.1.2.2 Understanding Family in Turkey

As Sancar (2012) points out regardless the ideological positions of the governments and political parties, the gender regime has been shaped from the family-oriented approach in Turkey. From a supporting point, Özbay (2017) underlines that despite the transformation in the society - urbanization, industrialization, and capitalism- since the 19th century, Turkey has not gone through the same experiences as the Europe have had. She does not deny the impact of Turkey's capitalist transition process on the family structure, particularly in rural area. For instance, migration flow from rural to urban area created new opportunities such as increasing participation into education, however, it restricted labor participation with men in the family while decreasing the importance of

family in the production process. In other words, family as a social institution survived and moreover adjusted itself according to new conditions.

Family plays an important role in Turkish society, sustainability of the social links and traditions regardless the ideological formations of political parties or even individuals. Even though the family is the key marker for identifying the conservatives, culturally speaking, it has a solid role in the Turkish society. Drawing data in the WVS, more than 80% of the survey participant responded as family is important in their lives (See WVS: 1989-2014). With the confidence of Turkish society's pro-family attitude, the political parties set their agenda with the family-oriented perspective.

When it comes to the AKP, family is politically shaped and incorporated into the party's ideological and mobilizational levels. As a conservative party, the AKP has conveyed the existing knowledge of family from society to politics. Shortly, the AKP highlights the importance of family in its policy making process and strengthens the party's "family-mainstreaming" agenda in the party's women politics.

§ 3.2 The AKP's Family-Mainstreaming[2]

The AKP has urged the family issue since the beginning of its political life. The discourses, policies, and attitudes towards society have a coherence and continuity in its family-mainstreaming approach, with a particular spotlight on women. For instance, while the party has in flux its approach towards many issues from minorities in domestic politics to foreign policy in international politics, it has a sustainable and constant characteristic on its family related women policies.

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[2]   I started to conduct research about the AKP in 2019 as field research. Beyond the first hand data collection, I covered the AKP's political life in the scope of the research since beginning which I discussed throughout the dissertation. However, it would be important to underline that even though the research is a reflection of women's narratives between 2019-2021, they have been shaped through ups and downs in the AKP's politics.

The following policies and discourses towards women and family demonstrate the AKP's conservative calls to family-mainstreaming on society. In 2004, adultery was discussed as being defined within criminal law. In 2008, Erdoğan started to admonish women to give birth to "three children." In the same year, the new regulation on social security law was regulated from gender-blind perspective.[3] Afterward, the family-mainstreaming perspective of the AKP's government had been institutionalized through the establishment of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies instead of the Ministry of State Responsible for Women in 2011. Prime Minister at the time, Erdoğan justified the process by saying, "We are a conservative democratic party. Family is significant for us" (Bilge 2011). Thus, "woman" was removed both in name and in policies (Ulusoy 2013). Therefore, the AKP's pro-family definition and perspective towards women started to capture the existence of women in society with an anti-feminist stance. The anti-feminist snowball grew rapidly after 2011 and Erdoğan and other party members started to bring the party's perspective on women's issues with various claims. Discussions about abortion (2015) and religious marriage without the requirement of civil marriage are the most debated topics regarding their effects on women's status and equal existence in the society.

To better understand how the AKP approaches the family and instills family-mainstreaming in its policy-making process and discourse-level, I conducted my research through an analysis of the AKP government's policies, Erdoğan and other politicians' speeches, the declarations of the "Family Council" during the AKP's government (2004, 2008, 2014 and 2019), and the section of women's branches in the *AK Bülten*.

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[3] See: Social security system is generally included the individuals who are in the work force. Considering the women's place in the workforce (only ¼ of the workforce is composed of women), male dominated feature of the social security system will be uncovered. In this respect, women are beneficiaries of social security means that they work in a secure job in the formal sector; otherwise, they depend on a working man. In doing so, women are still dependent their families' male members, because their individual existence are ignored both in family and outside the family. The women are defined within the family, and matrimony as a continuity of family-mainstreaming approach towards women (KEİG Platformu 2018).

The AKP's understanding of family is firstly and coherently expressed as conservative ideology in the Party's Constitution:

> AK Party accepts the family as the foundation of Turkish society. The family institution that acts as a bridge between the past and the future; believes that it is the most basic and indispensable social institution in transferring our national values, emotions, thoughts and customs and traditions unique to our country to new generations.

This statement demonstrates that family has an instrumental function in the society for preserving tradition. The functional position of the family is also rehearsed by declarations by the party's members and leaders. The former ideologue of the party, Yalçın Akdoğan defines family as the most important social institution for conservative ideology. However, the dissolution of the family and its function as the carrier of tradition and social values are negative aspects of the modern era (Çıtak and Tür 2008). The consensus on family and its function in society is a permanent theme in Erdoğan's speeches on the Family Councils. In the V Family Council, he clarifies the AKP's family mainstreaming approach as:

> I believe that the strength of our family structure will contribute to the solution of many of our problems. In fact, this approach, albeit with a delay, is now becoming accepted all over the world. Especially developed countries attempt to reconsolidate and rebuild their divided and shrinking family structure (Erdoğan 2008).

In the VII Family Council, he declares as:

> The impact of family on the solid societal relations should not be underestimated. As an institution, the family is the main carrier of the transfer of social values between generations and the creation of a common culture of life (Erdoğan 2019).

In the beginning, Akdoğan was framed as an ideologue and Erdoğan was represented as a practitioner of the AKP's understanding of family. Clearly, family has a significant place in the political agenda of the AKP (Saraçoğlu 2011; Kaya 2015) and as an instrument for the policymaking process. In the party's first Government Program, family was represented as:

> The major philosophical and political concern of our conservative identity is to keep intact and healthy the social organism of the family that is capable of protecting the individual... Societal solidarity, happiness and peace depend on the family (cited in Kaya AK Party's Party Program, pp. 2-17, 2003).

The instrumentalization of the family domain paves the way for political infiltration of the AKP into the society. In the literature, the instrumentalization of family and the AKP's approach towards it have been studied in terms of neutralizing negative impact of neoliberal policies (Saraçoğlu 2011) and transforming to the welfare state (Yazıcı 2012). In other words, AKP's family-oriented stance influences in different ways to society through changing the frame of state-society relations. However, the main dynamic must be reminded, women in the society are the most vulnerable and susceptible to influence what AKP's family-mainstreaming operates. While the AKP centralizes the women's place in society through familial sphere definition, it reproduces and consolidates what anti-feminist gender agenda suggests for women. Erdoğan's statement in the VII. Family Council show the point where contradictory understanding is reflected between defining women within the familial sphere but underlining the significance of their role as:

> We know that mothers are the backbone of the family. The female bird makes the nest (Erdoğan 2019).

By these words, Erdoğan emphasizes the place and meaning of women from the AKP's family-mainstreaming stance. While women are defined as a cornerstone of the family, they also become an invisible component

of society. Rising political concern towards family diminishes the women's subjectivity and individual existence in society and causes a family-based perception toward women as mother and wife by restricting their place at home.

This perspective is also shared by other politicians in the AKP. To illustrate that a prominent women politician of the AKP suggests the improvement of the family while she points the responsibility of women. According to Fatma Şahin[4]:

> It is very important for us to encourage family institution as well as to promote agriculture and industry. By means of somewhat precautions and incentives should prove that not bachelorhood, the marriage is the sultanate/*Bekarlık değil Evlilik Sultanlıktır*. I think, the state has responsibility to encourage marriage, while women have responsibility to avert the dissolution of family, because family is everything to us (Şahin, 2004).

This statement is also reflected how AKP combines family and women and establishes them as the unified subject of the state and extension of the government. Relatedly, AKP Deputy Ramazan Can's speech shows that how AKP is decisive and certain about the place of women in the family.

> During the diminishing of the male domination, we should not invite feminism. The persecution of women is a violation of basic human rights. But when we say positive discrimination against women, we should also avoid things that might lead to undermining the status of women in the family and thus weaken the family (Cinmen 2012).

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[4] Fatma Şahin is one of the most prominent politicians of the AKP as a founding member. In 2007, she carried out the head of AKP's Women Branches in the headquarter and besides that she was entrusted with Ministry of Family and Social Policy. Currently, she is acting mayor of Gaziantep.

Beyond ideological reflection of women's definition in the familial sphere, it has a practical reason for the AKP's party politics. AKP interacts with the family through women which makes AKP's communication and access easier to society. For instance, in the publishing report "Strong Family, Strong Society" by AKP Social Policy Department highlights the linkage between party and women/mothers as "We give economic and social assistance payments (83%) to the mother for our children" (AK Party İstanbul 2018). While AKP loads the party's family-level existence on the shoulders of women, it also provides a way of inclusion for women which makes them an actor in the politics of AKP.

In the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics, AKP's family-oriented gender regime plays a critical role. On the one hand, women turn as a linkup between party and society as the carrier and symbols of AKP's ideological and political journey as mothers and political activists. Thanks to women support both in party activists and society, AKP establishes the way to penetrate its political agenda into society. On the other hand, AKP shapes the role and existence of women as the party's Islamist-conservative perspective which restricts women's emancipation. That is to say, AKP enables to mobilize women to political participation and supports. While AKP penetrates its political agenda in the society through women, it also turns women as the source of reproducing and reinforcing the party's family-mainstreaming approach. At the end, women become the actors of the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics what is defined as a trap for them.

Through the AKP's conservative policy framework, women's familial inhabiting provides a way of governmentality for the AKP's government. For instance, responsibilities of welfare state are assigned to women, as mother and wife who are considered as protectors of the home, suppliers of population. However, glorifying women through subsidiarity of the state and be the object of its policies increase the necessity of the women's existence in the society. The rising number of policies, social assistance programs, discourse and meeting with politicians significantly both keeps the interest alive on women and paves the way the AKP's political penetration into the society.

In short, the AKP highlights the importance of family in its policy making process and welfare state implications from the Islamist-conservative outlook. AKP puts family on its agenda as a political instrument to tackle various problems and provides a way of communication with family over women. Correlatively, the AKP's attempt to establish family and women dependency is dilating as a distinctive characteristic of the party which also sheds light to understand how the AKP sees the women. The AKP's family-oriented approach surrounds women from three aspects. These are determination of women's space as houses, women's occupation as housewife and women's duty as mother for childbearing and caring in the family. Accordingly, this section scrutinizes three pillars that have represented how the AKP locates, sees, and controls women. Discussing the policies, projects and discourses towards women gives an idea about the impact of the AKP's conservatism and family-mainstreaming. From this point of view, this chapter provides an understanding to sustainability between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics by questioning despite the women's restriction into familial sphere, how they could be the most prominent supporters of the AKP?

I focus on three pillars to clarify how family-mainstreaming agenda operates to what extend it shapes and contributes the feminizing and anti-feminizing dilemma of the AKP. For this, home refers to the place where woman belongs and can be available for the AKP. Housewifery addresses to the identity of the women what AKP sees as subject its policies, and projects. Additionally, as the AKP's largest number of supporters, I focus on housewives in the context of their impact on Turkish political life. The last pillar discusses the AKP's conservative population policy and its impact on the woman's body which is assigned to reproduction of the population to women as mothers.

3.2.1 *Home, Housewives and Mothers*

3.2.1.1 Home

Before the AKP, the party's organization and political mobilization strategy to build support among people, especially women, had been

established by the Welfare Party. The seminal works of Arat (2005) examine how the Welfare Party included women as activists at organizational and mobilizational levels and how they worked. She addresses the impact of Erdoğan[5] the head of the Welfare Party Istanbul who organized women within the party to get in contact with the other women (Arat 2005). In this way, women activists could reach and enter the private sphere where the party's male activists could not, and they raised the number of female members and supporters through their political activities in a neighborhood context.

I will discuss in more detail the incorporation of women into the Welfare Party's organization and its continuity in the AKP's party politics in the following chapters to demonstrate the nature of this tradition for women's politicization. With the Welfare party's strategy, which was permissive and supportive to women's political participation despite the party's Islamist concerns, it opened a line to reach women voters via person-to-person relations in their homes. In this way, the origin of the AKP's political strategy is emerged as home-based.

According to Hummon (1984), houses are meaningful social and cultural objects that express boundaries, emotions, and social processes, as well as provide physical shelter and cultural functions (cited in Edgü, 73). Based on this definition, the boundaries and functions of a home cause it to be referred to as a private sphere. Homes are not completely isolated or independent from the outside world. In a sense, the outside world is reproduced in the home and the individual is equipped with and prepared for the requirements of the outside world. Indeed, the home provides social expectations through accomplishing socialization at the individual level (Edgü 2010). In other words, the home is defined not only as a shelter or living space where the individual's basic needs are met, but also as a structure that gradually encompasses all the dynamics of life.

Multi-functional and semi-bordered characteristics of the home recall the Foucauldian conceptualization of "heterotopia"[6] which helps to

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[5] Erdoğan was organized Welfare Party's Ladies' Commission and organized their first training meeting by himself (Arat 2005).

[6] It is used according to the third principle of Foucault's explanation (see: Foucault 1967).

merge many places -that are incompatible to each other- within one real place (Foucault 2011:298). Considering home from women's perspective, it emerges as a heterotopia because it brings together the public and private sphere. In the case of AKP, the home is where women belong and are responsible for running it. Women can link with the society from the home with their home-related duties. Under the AKP's pragmatic and ideological frame, the home turns into a heterotopia for women in two ways. First, the AKP defines their roles from a conservative perspective while identifying women with home. Second, the AKP politicizes women through the party's political style at their homes.

The realities of life such as cleaning the house, cooking food, changing the sheets, ironing the cloths are assigned to women as their roles and duties. According to a TUIK survey on time usage, women are spending most of their time on unpaid work while men are devoting most of their time to paid work (Öneş, Memiş and Kızılırmak 2017:178). The uneven condition shows how the traditional gendered division of labor has been sustained. As the ruling party, AKP's gender agenda and perspective also feed the existing situation by adopting political strategy based on the traditional gendered division of labor. In other words, the AKP establishes a relationship with women who accept this reality as "alleged agency" (Petö 2016) by glorifying homemaker and motherhood.

This glorification is justified with the identification of a type of motherhood in which women are undertaking house works for their children. Working, caring, or cooking for children reflects an understanding for womanhood and motherhood that is lauded by society. For instance, a prominent female AKP politician Dr. Fatma Betül Sayan[7] shared her understanding in a women-only meeting as:

> Cooking a cake for my children is the greatest pleasure for me. However, I could not find time for this. Even though I feel sorry, then I realized I am doing politics for them, as you (women) are

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[7] She is former Minister of Family and Social Policy, and also she is vice president of the AKP, https://www.betulsayan.com/ozgecmis.

working at home for them. The main purpose and concern of all our children (Fieldnote, Istanbul, Küçükçekmece 2019).

Dr. Fatma Betül Sayan equalizes the meanings of politics and domestic works, and she reflects the AKP's monistic view towards women reckoning without societal position of women.

Additionally, homes are important for the AKP to perform and reflect the party's policies. Through a home-centric approach, the AKP provides a spatial justification for its conservative framework and family-mainstreaming approach towards women. Beyond the identification of women in the scope of the spatial reality of the home, this place paves the way to the operation and infiltration of AKP's political strategy into the society. "Home chatting" *(ev sohbetleri)* and "home visits" *(ev ziyaretleri)* are the significant tools of AKP's political mobilizational techniques. As mentioned in the introduction, these techniques are transferred from the Welfare Party, and in particular, the party's ladies commission. According to Arat, Ladies Commission's activities reflect what women do in their everyday lives, "gathering at home." With the entrance of Ladies Commissions into political life, the traditional meaning of the home was redefined with the concerns of the political realm.

According to Hüda Kaya, neither the RP's women nor the AKP's women have not organized the home events just for the party propaganda but they find a way to participate in the existing meetings of women at their homes (Personal Interview, Istanbul Taksim 2019). In Turkey, women who are living in the same neighborhood or with relatives gather at their homes as a social event. For instance, they organize *altın günü/Kabul günü* in which they serve foods and collect the "gold" in turn among their groups. They gather weekly, biweekly, or monthly in a home, and every woman in their turn is responsible for serving food while their guests give their a gold. This event takes about 3 or 4 hours and women talk about many issues about the neighborhood, or other mutual things.

Unlike women's social gathering, the other events reflect conservative and religious features of Turkish society like *mevlid* which is organized after the death of someone, birth of a baby, circumcision of a boy or a

marriage ceremony to fulfill the responsibility or celebrate and bless the events. A female *hoca* reads the Quran loudly and then the host serves rice, meet, *ayran* and dessert. After the end of *mevlid*, some women leave, but some others stay to chat. *Mukabele* also has a religious feature, that women gather to read the Quran together especially during Ramadan or on Fridays. The most common feature of these events is their homogeneous population which consists of only women, and most interestingly the women are about the same age. These events are organized generally on weekdays and at daytime, so it restricts other participants besides homemakers.

The religious and cultural factors in Turkish society opens a new line for the AKP/Welfare to reach women who spend most of their time in their homes and neighborhoods. They provide opportunities to meet between women and the party through the politicization of everyday life practices and routines. The incorporation of AKP's women politicians into the existence of homogenous female gatherings paves the way for a direct communication of the party with women voters as well. Moreover, with the consolidated organizational structure during the AKP reign, the woman's branches have gained more a hierarchical feature. Now, some of the traditional women's gatherings are organized by the AWBs' the head of the neighborhood.[8]

Hüda Kaya describes the relationship between home and AKP as: "the houses become a branch of the AKP" (Personal Interview, Istanbul Taksim 2019) through the penetration of the AKP into the home and family. Indeed, the party's conservative stance and the reality of the society have overlapped within the AKP's political agenda. AKP women adopt what the leader declares as a political strategy. Before every election, Erdoğan appeals to women activists and sloganizes the process with a motto: "Until there is no knocked door, no shaken hands, no entered house" /*çalınmadık kapı, sıkılmadık el, girilmeyen ev kalmayana kadar*. By this way, Erdoğan assigns the duties of women activists and uncovers his

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[8] Chapter IV analyzes the women's branches organizational structure and Chapter V explores their political style.

understanding of politics. The AKP's home discourse similarly reflect the party's conservative ideology and its politicization activities. Politicizing home has ideological and pragmatic meanings which also derive from the AKP's perspective on women that I discussed above. On the one hand, reaching family, and the centralization of the home in the AKP's discourse through a conservative framework reflects an ideological meaning. On the other hand, it organizes regular meetings and visits to homes with pragmatic reasons to access women. Indeed, AKP constitutes its policies and discourses which are compatible with what women are in society by encouraging their incorporation into politics without providing any transformation in their status.

In short, home is the first step in analyzing how AKP establishes its family-mainstreaming approach and how AKP sees women from this approach. AKP is putting the family at the center and weaving many elements to it. Defining women within the triangle of home-housewife-motherhood restrict women's actions but facilitates their control in the eyes of power. Gathering at home and accessing these gatherings seem an opportunity within the conservative limitation of AKP's politics. Instead of exclusion of women's participation into politics under conservative limits, AKP achieves to exist in the women's world. As I claim in this chapter, AKP's family-mainstreaming approach is the ideological source of coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics.

3.2.1.2 Housewives

In the eyes of AKP, women's place is their homes, and they are responsible for caring for their families as "housewifery". This identification is an expected outcome for a conservative party, because from the conservative perspective, the division of labor between men and women has a gendered feature. Despite some exceptions, women generally spend a significant amount of their time engaged in domestic obligations such as keeping their homes clean and tidy, cooking food, and washing clothes for the family, and taking care of their children (Hendry et al. 1993:224). However, this is not a natural consequence of the biological difference between the sexes. Even though being a housewife seems to associate with women's

natural tendencies and characteristics, the gendered feature emerged af-
ter industrialization which resulted in a separation between workplace
and home (Bora 2018:59).

I do not examine the historical background of housewives or the
emergence of housewifery as a women's responsibility (See: Davidoff
2016) in this chapter, yet I am asking that how AKP tackles this issue in its
gender agenda and mobilizational efforts. Moreover, I focus on how AKP
builds its connection with women by reproducing the gendered dynam-
ics of housewives. Accordingly, examining the relationship between AKP
and housewives from the party's family-mainstreaming perspective
bring two observations which are maintaining the women's existing life
conditions and mediatizing it with the society and politics. In other
words, the party accepts and glorifies what women are doing at home as
housewives (maintaining) and provides a connection and establishes the
policies through the existing situation (mediatizing). While the combina-
tion of this dual approach, the AKP connects with housewives who are
the most prominent supporters of the party[9], it also enlightens how AKP
reproduces its anti-feminist gender agenda by surrounding women
through ideological and pragmatic perspectives.

First, the AKP accepts women as housewives, and develops a political
agenda and mobilization techniques from this perspective. Moreover, as
a unique characteristic, the AKP recruits the housewives as the party's
activists for propaganda activities and access to other women. In the Wel-
fare Party, with the same reason, the housewives became the most influ-
ential human resources (Arat 1999). Moreover, recruiting housewives as
political activists has changed the framework of political meetings and
party activities while repeating their importance as housewives. Beyond
the male-oriented and conventional political activities in politics, women
have started to gather and organize in their neighborhoods and during
the daytime –the period between dropping their children off at school
and picking them up—activities. Due to time limitations, the party

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[9] Based on 2017 general election, housewives consisted of 37% of the AKP's total elec-
torate (KONDA 2018).

generally organizes breakfast event, because women can stay longer at these events (see the Chapter IV-V).

Based on meetings with housewives, the party can gather a large amount and diverse range of data from them. Their demands, everyday life practices, and experience are transmitting from party's local representative to party's headquarters. On the one hand, this opens channels for recognition of women by the government directly. On the other hand, this leads to the party's infiltration into society, especially among women in accordance with their demands.

Beyond how the party maintains the position of women as housewives in the party's political mobilization, it also uses it as a source for the party's discourses and policies to establish mediatization between party and women. AKP's women-oriented activities, projects, and policies have frequently appeared in the public sphere, but in the tone of appealing to the housewives. For instance, the AKP's policy on energy saving has been associated with homes and housewives. Through the "Energy Lady" project, which was initiated in collaboration with the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, the Ministry of Family and Social Policies and the Energy Efficiency Association, the party was also able to impose the responsibility of domestic energy saving on women.

Connection between the AKP's project and housewives is twofold. First, it directly appeals to housewives. Second, Emine Erdoğan, the first lady, is represented as the executor of the projects in the public sphere (See: Enerji Hanım Projesi 2013). It is an act for public visibility of the gendered division of labor in the President's home. While Emine Erdoğan initiates a project for energy saving as the housewife of President's home, other housewives should follow her attempts in their homes. Through the role modeling of Erdoğan's family for the Turkish public, the "Energy Lady" project shows how the AKP can blend political projects and the housewifery dimension in society.

Following the AKP's mediatizing approach towards women with its practices for maintaining women's housewifery position, the party focused on and formulated several projects and policies. Energy Lady was one of them. The other one was a policy which anticipated not taxing

women who were working in domestic settings. With the amendment, women's home-made goods such as towels, sheets, socks, woven products, lace, *tarhana*, noodles/*erişte*, *mantı*/dumpling are not taxed. However, there was a condition. By selling what they produced in their homes, their revenue should not be exceed the gross minimum wage within a year.[10] Exemption from tax underlines two important things, one of which is a limitation on revenue and the other is production and selling based out of the home. Indeed, AKP aims to publicize the party as not having any problem with women's participation in the labor force, albeit with certain limitations. When it comes to full-fledged demands for women's participation in labor, it faces reactions even from women representative of the party.

During the *Women are Talking the City* event, women were asking the kindergarten for their neighborhood where they can leave the kids when they are working. Dr. Betül Sayan placates women while explaining how they can earn money at home. She explains:

> Our women would like to contribute their family revenue. However, they have children, and also you do not have to go to work to outside. The AK Party's government always supports women. If you want to work, our government makes it easier for you by abolishing tax for women home-made production and income. So, you can stay at home, with your children and also you can earn money by producing goods.

Considering women within the home as housewives is reflected in the projects and policies of the AKP. "Energy Lady" and "Home-Made Production" are only two of them. However, these cases explicitly demonstrate how the AKP sees women and how it reproduces housewifery dimensions through politicization of the home and women. Through "Energy Lady" the AKP presents the recognition of women as housewives in the organization's eyes, and "Home-Made Production" reveals the AKP's

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[10] See Article 6 at Gelir İdaresi Daire Başkanlığı.

tendency to keep women at home, with a justification from the leader-level. Beyond these two examples there is another realm that combines the AKP's maintaining and mediatizing dimension towards women. Social assistance programs are the most important feature in the AKP's relationship with women when the relationship between women and AKP is discussed.

Social assistance programs provide a useful environment to the AKP for accessing and reorganizing women in regard to its political agenda. In the framework of the AKP's home care projects -such as elderly, disabled, and childcare assistance- women become the primary component of the social assistance programs. With this perspective, the AKP does not only evade welfare responsibility of the state, it also makes use of women's labor quite cheap. Scholars discussed the AKP's social assistance programs from the perspective of women's unpaid labor and the shrinking welfare state. However, social assistance programs have another dimension which provides communication between the AKP government and women. Yet, through this link, the AKP relies on women's free labor to sustain the care requirements in the society.

As mentioned above, the centralization of family is evoked in Turkish politics with the AKP, and it shapes the social assistance domain from the family-mainstreaming approach (Üzgel and Duru 2004). On the one hand, women became agents of the AKP's government's social assistance policy through their engagement with AKP's political agenda by reproducing their importance at home. On the other hand, social assistance programs serve as a platform for connections between the AKP, the AKP's female politicians and women voters. I came across this junction several times in my fieldwork. Once, in February 2019 I was in the Sefercik AKP building which served as the women's branch room. I was waiting to meet with the head of the women's branch of Sefercik, Aygül. Meanwhile, one of the women from the women's branch was talking incessantly and hastily on the phone. I then learned that she was the head of social affairs in the

Sefercik district, and her name was Rümeysa[11]. Everybody was busy in the building because of the coming local election, but Rümeysa's rush was different from the others. After a while, Aygül arrived and everybody welcomed her by standing up, myself included. Before we talked, Aygül had asked questions to everyone in the room about what they were doing and what they did for the campaign. Only then I did understand why Rümeysa was alarmed.

Rümeysa explained that the AKP's İstanbul organization asked them the name of some women who were responsible and knowledgeable from the neighborhood's social affairs. The AKP's provincial organizations had started a new nationwide program just before the election and for this reason the İstanbul organization required to know the elderly, disabled and people in need to care in the local areas. I thought that, after more than a decade, the party must have had this data. However, when Rümeysa indicated that women should use an application to upload the data directly to provincial organization, I understood the problem. Even though the party had human resources to organize information flows, a lack of technological qualification limited them. Despite this challenge, I witnessed the abilities, and networks of the party, because Rümeysa had organized women in a couple of hours. At the end of the day, the party had the information on houses where the elderly, disabled or people in need to care were living. The party knew that its female activists in the neighborhood had this information because they had connection with women who were taking care of individuals (elderly, disabled and people in need to care) in their families.

This episode illustrates how the AKP connects the party's political agenda and mobilizations strategy with respect to their social assistance program. Moreover, domestic work, childcare, elder care, and disabled care are recognized as women's work, and what is worse, most women have accepted this characterization. Thus, social acceptance of these types of works both help to perform the AKP's conservative social

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[11] Rümeysa is a veiled Kurdish woman in her late 40s. She was living in one of the poorest neighborhood of the Sefercik with her four children and husband.

policies, a room for women activists and provide a way to connect with women voters. In the case of social assistance, the AKP's member approach to families, especially women as their close allies, a member of family. In this regard, people do not think that "My state is caring me", they claim that -as I came across in the field "AK Party helps us", "Thanks to AK Party, my disabled child could integrate into society", and "finally we stopped being ashamed of our disabled [family]". Women do not recognize their effort and labor during the caring process, yet they are grateful to the AKP. Ignoring what women are really doing, they increase their awareness as the AKP emphasizes that these are our traditions and the conditions/circumstances that make us. Gül, the founding head of Bostanlar AKP's Women Branches notes:

> We should care our elderly family members. It is not an obligations or difficulties. It is what is our social reality.

Beyond elderly care, the party and party's women branches emphasize the improvement of integrating disabled people into society through financial support of the AKP's government. Seren[12], the former head of Ayanbağ AKP's Women Branches narrates the story of living with disabled family members without mentioning the women's labor as:

> People were hiding their disabled child before AK Party, they did not go out with their child. Now, it has been normalized. People are notifying us by themselves. The number of disabled increased in Turkey, after our government provided salary for them.

Knowing the needs of society is critical for a ruling party, however the reason behind the AKP's social activities is related to including women into the party agenda through intervening in their everyday lives. This shows that the AKP articulates and politicizes women's existing

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[12] Seren is a well educated woman who lives in a middle class neighborhood in the periphery of İstanbul.

situations in society. In other words, women's natural roles and domestic responsibilities that are defined by conservatives have been consolidated by way of policy making. Yet the AKP's women's branches also establish a link between the party and the women voters. The case of the AKP's social assistance domain opens a line for the party's communication with women. Within this domain, women have been considered from a housewife dimension, which provides an opportunity for the AKP's conservative identification and approach towards women. While weaving women's unpaid domestic labor with religious and cultural norms, it also raises the politicization of the local networks. This political dynamic certainly comes from the party's local representatives.

In conclusion, almost every one of the AKP's discourses, actions and policies towards women are shaped by the party's family-mainstreaming approach. Moreover, the AKP's ideological and pragmatic articulation toward women enables, at the same time, the coexistence between feminization and anti-feminization. Considering the party's family-mainstreaming approach to understand how it defines and what it assigns to women, two main domains of AKP's anti-feminist gender regime rise as the spatial realm as home, duties as a homemaking. However, the identity of homemaker does not reflect all aspect of women's assignments in the eyes of the AKP. Analyzing the AKP's body politics toward women reveals another central identity of women in the AKP's family-mainstreaming: motherhood.

3.2.1.3 Motherhood

As I mention in the title, Erdoğan depicts women as being more than half of the population, which reflects the AKP's symbolic and concrete ignorance towards women's identities and capabilities beyond motherhood. Moreover, as declared in the AKP program, "women make up half of our population, but also because they are primarily effective for raising healthy generations, they should be considered as individuals before everything" (Ayata and Tütüncü 2008). With this perspective, AKP's motherhood identification toward women is the final strand of the AKP's family-mainstreaming triangle.

The motherhood perspective in the AKP's party program reveals the party's eagerness in taking control of and making policies for women's body. Therefore, I will examine the AKP's concern over the women's body to understand how the AKP's conservative ideology politicizes or extends their interference into (Keskin 2013) women's bodies because of women's nature-given abilities /reproductive abilities (Ünal and Cindoğlu 2013; Kasap 2013).

The AKP's approach and policies towards women's body is one of the most frequently researched topics in literature in terms of the AKP's gender regime (Coşar and Yeğenoğlu 2011; Alpaslan 2016; Cindoğlu and Ünal 2017; Sümer and Eslen-Ziya 2017). In particular, the post-2011 era has been characterized in terms of the AKP's anti-feminist gender policies and discourses intended to control and regulate women's sexualities and reproductive rights. As I discussed above, scholars argue that this process is sustained by the AKP's current political status through numerous axes of its ideological components: pro-Islamism, neoliberalism, authoritarianism, and conservatism (Cindoğlu and Ünal 2017).

Conversely, the AKP's family-mainstreaming[13] concern and policy orientation have shaped its gender regime as an expected consequence of its conservative framework. Maintaining society is dependent on the domain of family, while sustaining family is based on women's nature given abilities: reproduction. On this matter, women and women's body have come to be seen as the most crucial component of society in terms of controlling, regulating, and reproducing the population. Beyond other negative side effects, this approach brings a problem and harmful effect in terms of women's bodily integrity with respect to human rights.

Bodily integrity means that "preconditions of women's full and free access to the public sphere. Critical to bodily integrity are reproductive

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[13] See politics of intimate; defining as the web of policies, decisions, discourses and laws and norms which regulate intimate and family relationships, sexualities and reproductive capabilities of individuals. Politics of intimate have the similar framework to define AKP's policies over women, yet to understand others dimension of the AKP's political existence family-mainstreaming gives a fruitful comprehensiveness. (Acar ve Altunok 2013, 15)

rights, embracing contraception, abortion and reproductive health" (Lister 2009). In other words, "the right to bodily integrity is a necessary condition for women's autonomy and self-determination. It is, therefore, integral to full citizenship" (Sümer and Eslen-Ziya cited in Outshorn 2011). Despite the reference of bodily integrity to gender-based violence (Manuh 2019), the concept has been extended and defended by the governments' tendencies to control women's body. It is a production of gender in the public sphere (Jakobsen 1995) through ignorance of women's rights over their bodies.

In the case of the AKP, harassment of women's bodily integrity occurs in the AKP's government's attempt to control women's' bodies and existence in the public sphere by defining them within the familial sphere (Cindoğlu and Ünal 2017) and emphasizing their caregiver roles (Acar and Altunok 2013). Making restrictions of women's decisions over their own body in terms of reproductive well-being and "subordination of their reproductive health to nationalist and pro-natalist aspirations" (Lister) are results of the AKP's political configuration. Turner calls this configuration "reproductive citizenship" through which "the modern state's attempt to control reproduction is much more essential, when compared to its interest in regulating sexual rights and setting out legitimate form of intimacy" (Turner 2008).

Turner's reproductive citizenship involves both men and women in a society. Yet, when it comes to the AKP, reproductive citizenship only concerns women. The AKP thus utilizes women's bodies to operate its conservative agenda in the society. As Cindoğlu and Ünal note, "women's bodies and sexualities have appeared as the main tool to consolidate conservative gender regime and the heterosexual family with children promoted as the basic unit to reinforce hegemonic moral values and norms" (Cindoğlu and Ünal 2017). As claimed in this chapter, the AKP's "conservatizing in the socio-cultural and political sphere" (Coşar and Yeğenoğlu) reflects its notion of the gender issue through its politicization and intervention techniques and discourses over women.

The AKP's regulatory policies over women's body are the most obvious and tangible consequences of its conservative ideology. When it

defines and disciplines women in the home as housewife, it intervenes in the women's bodily integrity, life, and autonomy, as well. Yet, the AKP's approach to women's bodies also has a concrete feature: through attempts at regulating the number of children (at least three), abolishing abortion, and diminishing cesarean sections will be analyzed in this section to understand how the AKP's conservatism portrays and controls women's bodies.

Relatedly, the AKP's insistence on population growth brings an obsession on child numbers in a family, which is one of the most striking approach towards women's body. As Erdoğan clarifies his vision as:

> One of two children mean bankruptcy. Three children mean we are not improving but not receding either. At least three children are necessary in each family, because our population risks aging (Hürriyet Daily News 2013).

According to the AKP, the growth of a country is based on its population size. If it is big enough, then the country is powerful enough. For this aim, women became a sort of resource producer for the sake of the country. Moreover, it does not contradict with traditional gender roles in society, which have been metaphorically defined by Delaney as women's bodies being likened to "soil" and men's sperm to "seed" (Delaney 2018).

> The perception of woman's body as "the carrier of the seed" makes a woman's body vulnerable to societal control and renders her womb subject to regulation by the modern administrative power (Cindoğlu and Ünal: 25 cited in Delaney).

In other words, decision of the government over the number of children for a woman to produce is a direct intervention to her bodily integrity, which emphasizes and sustains cultural perceptions of women. Yet, within the conservative, and glorified aura of motherhood, womanhood loses its autonomy and even existence in the societal context, because it

is placed in the context of familial responsibilities within the family-mainstreaming policy orientation.

When "three children" issue had been declared by Erdoğan, he sustained its emphasis on family. In his speech on International Family and Social Policy Summit he said as:

> In the beginning, we declared as we are conservative democrat. We establish the family as our purpose. Both as a party and the government, we saw the family as a cornerstone of society. We have been working in order to strengthen and protect the family for 10 years. If we are going to be a strong nation, we have to have strong families (Hürriyet Daily News 2013).

Erdoğan continued his speech: "women's status rises by being mother and heaven is only one step away from them" (Keskin:2). Glorifying motherhood is also related to the notion of proper female citizenship. Those who give birth to at least three children obey Erdoğan's call to accomplish their familial role as mother and wife (Ünal and Cindoğlu:24).

Following the AKP's obsession with child numbers reveals another problematic topic about the women's body. In 2012, the issue was realized as the anti-abortion policy initiative of the AKP. The anti-abortion initiative policy is important because it has mirrored the party's anti-feminist gender regime. For the AKP, abortion is not related to women, it is all about the baby/fetus (Ünal and Cindoğlu:29), and because of that it should not be considered as a birth control. The critical point is that the AKP removes women from the whole picture. Since the anti-abortion policy has been discussed, it became a heated topic for Erdoğan. He clarifies his ideas and plans about it in several meetings and openings in a hospital opening in 2012 he said:

> I see abortion as a murder. No one should have the right to allow this. I already told my minister (Minister of Health); we are preparing the law on abortion, and we will pass it (Cumhuriyet 2012).

Moreover, Erdoğan usually underlines the issues like "three children" and "anti-abortion initiative policy" during events, meetings and openings. Yet, the most fruitful meetings are considered as family-related conferences, and project presentations which are organized by the Ministry of Family and Social Policy or GONGOs like KADEM and Women's Branches Meetings. These provide a sort of a settled agenda which keeps the topic alive. For instance, a meeting of the Ministry of Family and Social Policy's project "Being a Family" is one of these organizations. When Erdoğan stressed the perspective of the party and the significance of the family by referring to religious cases and conservative party framework, he criticized accepted birth control and delivery methods by their names, abortion and C-section.

> They have operated birth control mechanisms in this country for years. They have been sterilized our citizens and our people. They did everything for this. This is what is called 'Caesarean', this is called 'abortion'. They always did that. In doing so, they almost committed murder, almost deceived. 'You're dying, we'll save you from death'... However, the issue was different. The issue is that they have started campaigns to earn more money and, unfortunately, 'you can't have more than two births by caesarean section.' They cheated on it and convinced it. Many mothers and families had to believe, 'What if I didn't have a caesarean section?' They believed it. Is that the truth? Not. The issue was something else. The issue is that decreasing our population and this nation fall back in the race of nations (CNN Türk 2013).

The speech shows how the AKP correlates issues such as abortion and C-section, which are surely the women's own decision, with a nation-wide issue. He continues to assign responsibilities on the shoulders of women:

> I call especially mothers, especially our woman. You are the first to disrupt this game, you have to put your attitude here. As a Turkish mother and woman, you are the first to disrupt this. Secondly,

I address the fathers; You shouldn't be a part of this game. You have to solve this in solidarity with your partners (CNN Türk 2013).

Today, abortion is not officially banned, but it is restricted on public hospitals. Despite the abortion law which has been legalized in 1983, public hospitals follow the "*de facto* ban" (DW 2019). Obviously, Erdoğan gives the responsibility to woman to protect the family by serving her body to the control of the AKP. Moreover, men are called to become the observer of the process, to check their wives whether they really obey the state-led pronatalist policies.

AKP's regulation policies and discourses toward women's body are correlated with the AKP's identification of motherhood with women. As it has been mirrored in the family-mainstreaming approach, defining women as mothers within the familial sphere is the basic assumption behind AKP's conservatism. The purpose is to define women as mothers and thereby give them responsibility to raise moral generations and transfer the norms to the future (Çitak and Tür). At the same time, ignoring and restricting women's autonomous choices for their lives and having a negative impact on women's bodily integrity are the consequences of the AKP's gender policies.

This part shows the AKP's tendency to control women's body from the conservative framework. In terms of body politics, scholars analyze the AKP's gender regime from different perspectives. Cindoğlu and Ünal discuss it through combining neoliberalism, pro-Islam, authoritarianism, and conservatism, while Sümer and Eslen-Ziya emphasize the alliance between conservatism and neoliberalism. Coşar and Yeğenoğlu approach it from a triad of neoliberalism, nationalist and religious discourse of the party. Considering all the research, scholars agree on the AKP's anti-feminist gender regime and its Islamist-conservative standpoint. More specifically, I argue that the AKP's family-mainstreaming policy-orientation relatedly with Islamist-conservatism has explicated the AKP's anti-feminist gender policies and enthusiasm over women's body since the beginning. Additionally, despite the direct influence over women's bodily integrity, the party's motherhood perspective, knitted with a Islamist-

conservative blessing, provides a peace between women and anti-feminist gender agenda.

I examine the ideological sources of the coexistence between AKP's feminization process by including women as political activists in party organizations and mobilizing women's votes, and anti-feminization process through conservative gender agenda. I thus claim that the AKP has pragmatic and ideological reasons and approaches towards women. While the AKP's family-mainstreaming strand locates women within the home-housewife-motherhood triangle, it also creates a key space for the party to reach women voters. While the chapter indicated the concept of family-mainstreaming is a critical mechanism to understand the party's anti-feminist gender agenda, it also shows how the concept is incorporated into the party's mobilization strategies by focusing on women. Indeed, the family-mainstreaming approach identifies women within the anti-feminist conservative framework, but it also motivates their participation in politics without eliminating traditional structures.

AKP's family-mainstreaming approach helps to clarify the relationship between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics by focusing on how the party recognizes women from its conservative standpoint. However, the AKP has another dimension which reproduces the enigma: populism. The AKP's idiosyncratic party politics is embedded with populism and in the case of the relationship party and women, it plays a vital role in mobilizing women as politicians and voters. Therefore, the family-mainstreaming approach provides a clarification about how the party establishes anti-feminism, while populism explores the party's feminization aspect in mobilization efforts. It should be noted that family-mainstreaming and populism are two essential elements of the AKP in terms of its gender regime, which are in a dialogue to define and mobilize women by reproducing the enigma.

§ 3.3 AKP's Gendered Populist Political Action

As mentioned above, the AKP has consolidated the party's anti-feminist gender agenda over time by establishing a home, housewife and

motherhood triangle from the family-mainstreaming perspective. After clearly defining the borders and formation of the party's gender regime, this chapter will continue to seek to understand how the party strategizes to mobilize women despite the anti-feminist agenda. To examine the strategies of the AKP toward women, I will utilize the concept of "populism" by treating it as a flexible instrument for the AKP's mobilization attempt for women. Therefore, this chapter scrutinizes how the AKP develops its gendered political strategy through populism and how it facilitates the continuation of puzzle between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics.

I examine the AKP's gendered populist political action using four characteristics of populism, which are: *anti-establishment, sublimating mass, constituting people* and *leadership.* I will offer a concise exploration of these characteristics using case studies. First, I will tackle with the anti-establishment feature of populism to understand how the AKP included the headscarf issue in the party's agenda as a means of political mobilization of women. Then, I will explore how it is sustained even today by conceptualizing "memory" in the populist sense. Second, I will focus on the AKP's party politics and home-visit activities as the reflection of party's populist political action, in terms of sublimating and glorifying women through visiting them on the individual level. Third, I will show how the AKP shapes its own circle -in other words, how it constitutes the party's women supporters and provides suitability among them by focusing on the party's network politics. Fourth, I will discuss Erdoğan under the leadership dimension to understand how populist leadership style provides another source for mobilization among women.

3.3.1 *Headscarf: as a memory-land of anti-establishment populist political action*

The headscarf issue is one of the first and the most visible domains of interaction between the AKP and women. Through this connection, veiled women are enabled to incorporate their demands into the AKP's political agenda and the AKP has found a way to communicate with women who have remained previously untapped and ignored actors of

politics. However, this eligible environment does not prove that the relationship has a smooth feature. Despite the politicization of women's demands for lifting the ban on headscarf by the AKP, the party was careful to highlight its difference from the previous Islamic-oriented parties. As a part of this, AKP has been approved as the representative of the veiled women. Therefore, this part aims to shed light on how the AKP, and veiled women's own experiences have transformed the headscarf issue as a source of motivation for the AKP's populist political action. First, this part overviews the historical background of the headscarf issue to understand the process of exclusion of the veiled women from the establishment. Then, it focuses on how this issue has been the foundation for a relationship between veiled women and the AKP and paved the way for the AKP's populist political action. In this way, I argue that the populist utilization of the headscarf is another source for the AKP, which enables the party to set and sustain its numerically feminizing politics while consolidating an anti-feminist agenda.

3.3.1.1 Historical Background

Scholars have discussed the headscarf issue from religious, conservative, feminist, and social transformation perspectives (Mardin 2018; Vergin 1985). Briefly, the headscarf is a social symbol and consequence of a social transformation which lead the veiled women to participate in the public sphere. As Cihan Aktaş argues, the veil, in essence, is a phenomenon related with society (Aktaş 2006). That said, through migration, the previously untouched traditional values of the conservative population have been carried over to the urban space. In other words, conservativism and tradition have become urbanized through institutions and everyday life practices. Qur'an Learning Center[14], mosques and the headscarf have appeared in urban areas as well because of the pious rural migrants' everyday requirements. Each of them has created a discussion in the public

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[14]   Evren Savcı suggests, Qur'an Learning Center is the best translation of the *Kuran Kursu* (2011:1)

sphere, but the headscarf has been the most prominent issue. In this study, I tackle headscarf as a political and social issue, which determines the study's framework and develops the perspective in terms of social dynamics such as migration and transformation of society, without ignoring its political consequences. From this point of view, I will focus on the headscarf issue in the context of changes in Turkish politics since the beginning of the dispute to uncover its rise as an anti-establishment symbol.

Since the foundation of Republican Turkey, the emerging state reorganized the relationship between the state and religion to embark on the path of modernization through incorporation of secularism and Westernization. The abolition of the caliphate (1924), closing of dervish lodges (1925), translation of Quran into Turkish (1925), and removing of the article "the religion of the state is Islam" (1928) can be given as examples to show the state's direct intervention and its active role during the state-religion reorganization process. Apart from the hat law (1925), the state's position for women outlook did not have a sharp characteristic (Kavakçı 2010). Needless to say, there was an informal dress code for modern, secular and westernized female citizens in regard to their coats and skirts in the public sphere, but at least there was not any restriction on what they could wear. However, the headscarf has often been discussed without considering women's self-identification or their opinions regarding the issue. Stigmatization of the headscarf as a political symbol (Saktanber & Çorbacıoğlu 2008) has limited further discussions from the women's side. In the beginning, it was a symbol of "the rejected Ottoman past" (Saktanber & Çorbacıoğlu 2008). Despite the stigmatization of the headscarf, the vague attitude of the state toward the women's own outlook on the issue would have derived from the absence of veiled women in the public sphere of the newly established state.

Understandably, the majority of the population in the young Republic was settled in the rural area (Öztürk et al. 2017). Despite the claim of creating a well-integrated and homogenous nation-state, the ideas and principles of the new Republic could not spread and reach each part of the country. In fact, Karpat (2016) argues that the aim for establishing a

nation-state and integrated population was achieved in the 1950s on-
wards due to migration flow and rising urbanization of the population in
Turkey. Until that time, rural areas remained isolated from Kemalist rev-
olutionary ideas and transformation.

Through migration and urbanization, a new pace has begun in the
state-society relation in terms of religion as well. The migration flow
brought the traditional and rural population into urban spaces. The im-
migrants adjusted themselves partially to the nation-state (Karpat 2016).
The selective adaptation drew a polarized society into two camps: mod-
ern vs. traditional. In this sense, the traditional camp of society was not
unconvertible; its selective adaptation attitude drove the changes within
the camp. For instance, adaptation of modern economic relations helped
the rising economic power of Islamists, participation in modern schools
paved the way to the emerging intellectual power of Islamists and finally,
organized, but unrepresentative parts of the population became more
visible through their political demands as a political power of Islamists.
These factors deepened the polarization between the camps by raising
Islamism as a challenge against the established order.

With these developments, the rising visibility of veiled women in the
public sphere, and especially in universities, created a new vein between
establishment and anti-establishment camps after the 1960s. The issue
was accelerating and even led to the rise of new public figures amongst
the veiled women such as: Şule Yüksel Şenler, Emine Şenlikoğlı, Bakiye
Ersoy, Mümine Güneş, Zeynep Müthena Polat, Gülhan Kavakçı, who have
all become cult figures in the debate about the veiled women. During the
turbulent atmosphere of Turkish politics, in 1968, the headscarf issue
gained public visibility through the actions of university student Hatice
Babacan (Kavakçı 2010). After that, an anti-veil campaign was started by
some universities which, as so-called centers of enlightenment Republi-
can Turkey, became a combat zone in this battle between the state and
veiled women.

Until the 1980s, the headscarf was a sign of rural, traditional life, and
a sort of a challenge against the ideals of the founding principle of Repub-
lican Turkey. From the 1980s onwards, this challenge has become more

organized thanks to the work of civil society organizations (Aksoy 2015; Kadıoğlu 2005). Well-educated, urban veiled women and university students were not compatible with the "ideal women" as imagined by the state. In that sense, veiled women both triggered the failure of the Republic of Turkey's secular vision of a modernized and westernized nation-state and represented an alternative to the established understanding of modernity (Göle 2000). Put differently, as a challenge to the desirable Westernized image of students, the veiled female students were undesirable and unexpected consequences of the Kemalist regime. To ban these unknown or unfit participants from the public sphere, the state's Constitutional Court in 1989 banned wearing the headscarf in public institutions (Saktanber and Çorbacıoğlu 2008).

The 1990s were the most intense period for the headscarf issue in terms of dramatic encounters between the veiled university students and the state institutions. With the authoritarian atmosphere of politics and the renewing of Kemalist principles through the coup d'état, there were new unsolved problems in 1980s society related to Kenan Evren, who is known as the person who introduced the headscarf ban (Kavakçı). Despite Özal's positive approach to the headscarf issue, it was restricted by another part of the Kemalist establishment, the judiciary (Kavakçı). Some studies give various dates for the prohibition of headscarves in universities between 1999-2010, so it is unclear exactly when this took place (Genç & İlhan 2012).

In the mid-1990s, rising political Islam after the election triumph of the Welfare Party meant that the headscarf issue gained a new momentum. Moreover, conservative civil society increased outside of the elite class as a challenge to the "secular and state-centric model of Turkish modernity" as well (Kavakçı). From then on, the visibility of veiled women increased in the public sphere and pushed back against the image the modernist camp cast them in, as an uneducated and backward group. Veiled university students who emerged as a challenge and opposition to the established state were targeted by the ban. Yet, veiled women also joined the chain of equivalence in a sense, by unifying the ideas of being an "outsider", "the other", "not included members" of society. The term

"chain of equivalence" is created to refer a sort of movement which composed of allied groups who aim to change the existing situation by Laclau. The participants in the chain have their own style of relationship with the establishment, but at the end, they are coming together from the perspective of being disadvantaged due to the current established bloc (Laclau 2001). In the public and political establishment, the veiled women were considered to be "the other" of the Republican women, despite their education-level or fashionable outfits (Saktanber and Çorbacıoğlu 2008).

Another turning point for this chain of equivalence was the post-modern coup of February 28, 1997. The Kemalist elite attacked the rise of political Islam and its components in the social realm and, in particular, veiled women. Yet, the situation was first triggered by Erbakan, who was the Prime Minister at the time and the head of the RP. He was not a compatible figure with the requirements of a secular and modernized state. His attitudes and the RP's political agenda had been perceived as a threat against republican principles, which were controlled and secured by the Kemalist camp, including the military, judiciary, and bureaucracy. After a while, the process ended with a party closure and political ban against Erbakan. The Kemalist camp put out eighteen directives after February 28. These were composed of protecting Republican ideals against anti-regime activities and promoted the judiciary to take action against them. Plus, they ruled that people should avoid encouraging the wearing of Islamist outfits. Additionally, the decisions reflected the probable danger of Islamic civic organization and municipalities, which were run by the Islamist party for established order (Bianet 2002).

The 1997 coup is also a cornerstone of the most visible restrictions against Islamists and represented the tangible confrontation between the two camps. As an extension of this process, headscarf was banned in universities rigidly beginning in 1999 (Genç and İlhan), which affected many women's lives from the perspectives of human rights and freedom of education and blocked the lower classes' upward social mobility chance through education. These were some of the common impacts of the ban, which were shared by many of the veiled women. Yet, the most common and shared consequence was the humiliation of the veiled

women in the eyes of the establishment camp. This humiliation was experienced even by veiled women who were university students or housewives in their everyday lives.

The inputs of the Kemalist regime, which aimed to follow the path of Westernization and modernization, did not lead to their desired outputs. In the case of veiled women, according to İlyasoğlu, the rising visibility of veiled women or their existence in the public sphere was a result of Kemalist modernization, which increased the education level and professionalization of women (İlyasoğlu 1994). Yet, this was an unexpected consequence of the Kemalist ideal, and educated veiled women seem like a deviation of the modernist formula. The headscarf was a symbol of tradition and backwardness in the mind of the establishment camp, which they anticipated would change through social progress and development (İlyasoğlu 1994). Since the 1960s, there was a conflicting encounter between the resistance of veiled women and the existing social and political atmosphere of the Kemalist establishment. Yet, this clash has been reframed through the AKP's election triumph by giving voice to the silent majority.

Initially, the AKP showed its distance from the headscarf issue to consolidate the party's existence within the system (Kavakçı). For Erdoğan, the decision to lift the ban required consent from the population (Akman 2017). This attitude had been questioned by veiled women, who make up the significant part of the party's mobilization and support. Moreover, this caused to question the relationship between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics both in the RP and AKP, because they recruited veiled women within the party organization and created the party's human resources in the Ladies Commissions (Arat 1999) or Women's Branches. Saktanber and Çorbacıoğlu argue that this is a kind of "symbolic feminization of right-wing politics" (Saktanber and Çorbacıoğlu) in terms of raising their democratic party image.

In the second period of the AKP's rule, on February 09, 2008, it attempted to manage the problem by passing two constitutional revisions which aimed to lift the headscarf ban in universities (Saktanber and Çorbacıoğlu). Yet, the amendments to the constitution had been rejected by

Constitutional Court as an incompatible position that challenged the unchangeable principle of secularism (Saktanber and Çorbacıoğlu). In 2013, without constitutional change or implications, the AKP used the democratization package to lift the ban in the public sphere. The longstanding issue was handled without waiting for a consensus in the society, as Erdoğan had claimed he would. The consolidation of the AKP's power enabled them to make this unilateral decision. As Öniş argues, the elections of 2011 in which AKP took 50 percent of the total vote boosted the AKP's self-confidence after the risk of party closure in 2009 (Öniş 2015).

The veiled women are the gendered indicators of the antagonism between established secular Kemalist state elites and the anti-establishment Islamist population. The clash reflects the dichotomic situation in Turkish society and the political achievements of the anti-established camp with the election triumph of the Islamic oriented AKP. From a gender perspective on this clash, the veiled women, and their inclusion in the Islamic oriented parties and the system, especially during the AKP era, is critical to understanding how the AKP operates through populism and the party's gender regime. I have introduced the historical stages of the headscarf issue to show how the veiled women and headscarf issue has been constituted as an "anti-establishment" element. Below, I will discuss the argument regarding the AKP's populist intervention in the issue in terms of the mobilization of women.

3.3.1.2 AKP's Populism on the Headscarf

I conducted my fieldwork when the headscarf ban had already been lifted. Therefore, my data does not cover the contradiction between the veiled women's effort in party politics without expectation of a seat. However, what I witnessed in the field is that, despite the lifting ban in the public sphere, the headscarf issue is still a big part of the discourse and political agenda of the AKP politicians. This seems like a reflection of collective memory for veiled women who preserve their sense of solidarity and belief in struggling against an established order that does not even exist anymore. Aygül, the head of Sefercik district, emphasized her political motivation during her campaign trail as:

There is only one reason why I am in politics: the AK Party, which is my aim to prevent a leftist party coming to power. They had humiliated us, and if they come to power, they will bring the ban again, I know. We have a *dava*/aim which must be protected.

She is a veiled women activist within the AKP's district organization, and at the same time she was elected as a councilor in the local municipality. The point here is that, even though she is free from the headscarf ban, she still centralizes the headscarf in her narrative by emphasizing collective memory. Based on fieldwork data, I will examine the role of the headscarf issue in the AKP's populist political action towards women in two main ways. First, the anti-establishment characteristics of the veiled women will be tackled in terms of how the veiled women can be identified as an anti-establishment group. Second, despite lifting the ban, and implementation of their inclusion into the public sphere, I will analyze how they can sustain the feelings of fear, solidarity among veiled women and requirements of protection from future harm by referring to memory. To understand this better, I utilize Taggart's "heartland" dimension of populism by reconceptualizing it as "memory-land".

The veiled women's anti-establishment existence has covered three features of a populist anti-establishment, antagonistic situation between the two camps, political discontent, and anti-elitism. As the determining characteristic, anti-elitism influences others as well in the case of this research. Yet, a number of populist scholars also agreed on how populism has a Manichean perspective (Mudde 2004) which provides an understanding of how society is divided into two camps antagonistically: the good and the bad (Ware 2002). Moreover, populism is used as a label for situations in which people are excluded from the system or are not able to integrate into it. This shapes and organizes people as opponents to established power (Taguieff 2017).

Since the exclusion of veiled women, the anti-establishment sentiment has been self-induced as a bottom-up movement. Yet, the AKP could easily build a link with the excluded veiled women through referring to

the idea that "I am one of you," under Erdoğan's leadership. His personal and political background reflect the idea and sentiment of "I am one of you" and were convincing people, as he is able to represent their demands. Indeed, Erdoğan's political ban and exclusion from politics was framed as an exclusion from the establishment camp, which built a sense of solidarity between him and other excluded groups. When Erdoğan read a poem during the election campaign in 1998[15], this was interpreted as an attack on the established order and caused his exclusion from politics until 2002. Indeed, the political ban was represented in the mass media in an insulting manner, and it was said that "he could not be elected even as a *muhtar*/headman" (Hürriyet 1998). This representation of him created a sense of similarity between the humiliation and exclusion of the veiled women and that of Erdoğan. In other words, Erdoğan became an ideal figure to lead the existing anti-establishment sentiments as the head of a populist mobilization or populist political party.

One of the most experienced local politicians, Ayfer[16], the head of Sultankapı district of Istanbul, shared her observation and understanding of how the AKP managed to include the headscarf issue on the political agenda and how the party's strategy enabled the AKP's popularity among women voters:

> AK Party is a women's party. Since the first day [Party's establishment], our president emphasizes the women's branches. Maybe, you do not recognize the situation from outside. Because, he knows, half of the population is women. So, no one ignores this part of population. Were there any who ignored it? Yes, they were. Women entered the politics with AK Party. When we mention

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[15]   Erdoğan's political march had been halted in 1998 through be banned from politics. He was accused for stimulating religious hatred and religious insurrection through his speech, particularly with Ziya Gökalp's poem: "the mosques are our barracks, the minarets are our spears, their domes are our helmets and the faithful are our army". He was punished with a ten-month jail and banned from politics for life (White 2004).

[16]   Ayfer is an Anatolian migrant with her mid 50s who is living in a working class neighborhood where she is active in politics. She is married with one child.

about this, they get angry with us, and they respond it as: there were Tansu [Tansu Çiller], Meral [Meral Akşener]. Yes, they were. But there were not an Ayşe [she means an ordinary woman] ...But women were absent in politics because of their appearance. In 1934, Atatürk gave the right to vote and to be elected. However, we could vote but we could not be elected. Is this a lie? Not. If we could choose our representative, why Merve Kavakçı was expelled from the parliament. Because of headscarf. There is a wound, you have opened this wound, and you are constantly pressing this wound/ *Yaraya tuz basmak*. However, there is no old Turkey, and the old women. We raise our voice... I know, AK Party and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had a significant influence on women's political partici-pation regardless of the appearance [headscarf] of women. Women have become the elected after 2014. Why were we ex-cluded? When we look to this, we can understand why women are in AK Party. Without women, no way to be in power for a political party. You [politicians] could not ignore women. Women can be veiled, or not, believer or not. But you could not ignore them. If you ignore them, you could not be in power for a long time. AK Party have seen this reality and dignified women. That is the es-sence of story.

Ayfer's narration helps us to understand how the AKP establishes a link with women through the headscarf issue and veiled women's exclusion from the system. While Ayfer was describing the exclusion process, her gestures and voice provided information about how a veiled women re-members and understands being excluded from politics or the public sphere. In other words, she was reflecting her political discontent with other political entities by showing her gratefulness to the AKP. Veiled women's journey in Turkish politics is a manifestation of their political discontent. To understand it from the AKP's populist viewpoint, Barr (2009) clarifies the situation by referring to how the political actors find it advantageous to cultivate this current sentiment for political purposes through an anti-establishment discourse. Moreover, the sense of political

discontent and its populist inclusion in this case, as the headscarf issue demonstrates, led to the emergence of bottom-up discontent and its transformation into a populist appeal by the AKP. As Akman emphasizes, "the AKP's pro-people discourse projected an image of inclusion for women as well."

Veiled women's political trajectory has been transformed with their inclusion in the AKP, from political discontent to political participation. Sevilay[17] as a veiled woman experience in the Kayabaşı district as a member of local municipality council reflects this transformation:

> I am the only one veiled woman in the council and I am leading the sessions. It was difficult at the beginning. In the previous term, we had a friend in the council, and she started to use headscarf. For that, CHP representative left the council. I felt really upset about it. Now, I am leading them who left the council. Can you see what I undertake as a mission? I am here, because of the requirement of this mission. There are a lot of friends who can do what I am doing. But, I have a mission. I am leading because I have to.

Even after lifting the ban, veiled women shared that they faced different attacks from the "established bloc". While the AKP's inclusionary attempts provided them with a safe space, their everyday experiences caused them to still feel the possibility of exclusion. Not only on politicians, but also on that of voters, women talked about the challenges of wearing the headscarf. Ceren[18] explains the incident that happened to her on public transportation when she was commuting with her children:

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[17] Sevilay is a former shopper in her district and now she continues her political life in the same place. She is coming from a Balkan immigrant family and married with her husband he has Black Sea origin. She has two school age children and experienced in politics in her early 50s.

[18] Ceren is a veiled woman in her mid 30s. She has an university graduation, but she haven't had work experience. After her graduation, she got married and have three children.

I was going to Aynalı for shopping. You know, Aynalı is known as where the CHP people are living usually. I always feel the eyes on me because of my headscarf. One day, I was sitting in the minibus with my two children. I knew that someone is going to say something about how I am occupying more space in the bus. Then, an old and blond woman started to yield at me by saying I am ignorant, I do not deserve be in here. I should go back my village. So, how can I vote the same party with this lady after that moment? It was a trauma for me and unfortunately my children.

The exclusion of veiled women combined with their repeated sources of political discontent created eligible conditions for the AKP's inclusionary strategies. However, the experience of veiled women sheds light on another of the AKP's populist political actions, which is the idea of anti-elitism. As a key factor of populism, anti-elitism provides a clear point of difference for a populist anti-establishment party from other anti-establishment parties. As a result of anti-elitism, demonizing the elites (Taguieff 1997) is based on the perceived attitudes of the elites by people who feel betrayed by the ideals and modes of legitimation and organization of the political community (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017). Rising antagonism between the people and the elite accelerates the distinction and polarization in society and shows us populist appeals.

Related to this, populism enters the political realm in order to rebalance the distribution of political power among the established and emerging social groups (Urbanitti 1998), but mostly in favor of the people, because elites are accused of betraying the people. There should be a mechanism for the re-representation of people's interests, and scholars show that populism fills the gap "as the most natural alternative means of mobilizing those in a modern democracy who deviate from the prevailing consensus" (Učeň 2007). As there is an ambiguous definition of "the people" in the populist appeal, the elites are also defined enigmatically. In a broad sense, the elite is an "amalgam of political, economic, and cultural actors" (Mudde 2007: 67). What is more, the definition of the elites

differs in different contexts, and their naming is based on the political culture of different places.

In the case of the headscarf, its anti-elitist position arose through encounters of different actors of the elite camp within the establishment order. The university, the judiciary and the parliament were the most symbolic institutions for the veiled women, where they often encountered the restriction from the elite. The veiled women's representation in the media was also another way they were excluded by the elite. As a reflection of the elitist camp, the coups were also numbered amongst these elitist institutions.

The clash between the Kemalist elite and traditional values has been reflected in different ways. Examining this relationship is not easy but allows us to take a new perspective that helps explain the reason behind the rise of populist sentiment within society. Gün narrates the veiled women's experiences in the public sphere:

> The land she lived in was always embezzled by those repressive mindsets, even the street she passed most of the time. For this reason, she remains as a second-class citizen of the state. She was not admitted to schools. Getting fired from their workplace. Even in the most civilian places, she faced sullen faces. She is called as a reactionary danger and pointed as a target to the society. Too many mothers can't take their child from the school. Speeches at school ceremonies was oriented around headscarves. All of a sudden, they became the Turkey's troublemakers (Milli Gazete 2006).

This quotation shows the emergence of veiled women as an antagonistic group against the established order. Feeling excluded and occupying a secondary position even in the street paved the way for this rising anger. With the Kavakçı incident, the Turkish public witnessed the clash at an institutional level. After 1996 National election, Merve Kavakçı became a representative in parliament. Yet, she was left out of parliament because of her headscarf. This is one of the most important events, which showed how the headscarf is symbolic and unacceptable within the

established order. After this event, Sibel Eraslan (2006)[19] wrote and defines the state as the subject of the mafia-sharing. She characterizes the elitist camp through their penetration into various aspects of the state. From institutional areas to the street, military to civil, political to everyday life practices, the anti-elitism has expanded as a sentiment among the veiled women against the established order. Sibel Erarslan is herself a critical figure for understanding the veiled women's political journey, as she experienced every phase and consequence of being veiled in Turkey. She writes in one of her essays about writing a lot of letters to Ecevit, before her political career, to inform him about the headscarf issue. Moreover, she added that, "as a social democratic party leader, he never answered my letters" (Erarslan 2016). It demonstrates that before AKP's populist appeal to veiled women, they tried to convey their demands and get the other parties' attention. Yet, they were ignored. Although the AKP did not respond to their demand as soon as the party took hold of the power in government, veiled women started to negotiate with the system which gave them a sense of hope about eventually being included in it.

During my interviews with the AKP's women politicians, the headscarf issue came up eventually. Women, with or without a headscarf, shared their stories about the issue, which shows how important it remains. Aygül was my first veiled interview in the field and her experience was quite illustrative. She shared that:

> I was a university student during the 27 February in an Eastern Anatolian city which is my hometown. I wore headscarf. Can you imagine that I was exposed to violence from the police just for that? So, I just found myself within a struggle. My headscarf put me inside the struggle for justice. Then, I joined demonstration in Istanbul. After a while, AK Party was established, and many of us realize that the party is parallel with our struggle. We thought that

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[19] Sibel Eraslan has been known as the women who made Erdoğan to be elected as the mayor of İstanbul when she was the head of the Ladies Commission.

we can do whatever we want easier with the AK Party. Therefore, my political life has incorporated with the AK Party.

The point is that the women have to find a place for themselves to participate in and also to make them publicly visible, politically active and socially integrated. This also supports a sense of solidarity and loyalty between women and the party. In other words, women are grateful to the party, especially to Erdoğan, who helped them achieve the more visible position they are in now (Yaraş 2019).

During the campaign trail, I was with Aygül to participate in a home-visit in the conservative neighborhood. The visits took more than 2 hours, because almost 30 women were in the living room. All of them were AKP's women voters but they were waiting to declare their criticism and demands toward the party. When the criticism increased, Aygül used the same technique to cool down the tension in the room, but this time she was talking quite harshly. She made a pyramid from the paper, and started her speech:

They (CHP) believe that only they can speak, think and produce. We (AKP) are as people, we cannot think, and we should not speak. See this pyramid. They are at the top of this pyramid, and we are at the bottom as a mass. We changed the pyramid. How? We united the state and people. We turned it upside down. You can say your demand to me; you can also criticize our deficiencies; you can argue with doctors that you can send your compliments to the institutions. You know your rights because we explained everything. We will do better.

Aygül managed to bring the women's attention to the party's central message: the AKP cares about people because they are valuable for the party. To show how they are essential for the AKP, Aygül preferred to show how the CHP excluded towards them by referring to it as elitist. Therefore, lifting the headscarf ban is not only relevant to the case of politicians, but I also witnessed how important it is for the female voters as well. After

Aygül's speech, a woman started to criticize the municipality and express her demands angrily. After a while, other women also joined the criticism. Yet, ironically, they admitted that they will never vote for another party or politician except for Erdoğan.

> Isn't Erdoğan made my headscarf free? He made me count with this headscarf. My hand won't go to another party. Neither the teacher would take us seriously, nor the doctor. Now, thank God they listen and respect to us (Fieldnote 2019).

The ensuing part of the discussion and response from Aygül reminded me of the "memory" dimension of the AKP's populist political action. The crucial anti-establishment moment of the headscarf issue was an easy entrance for the AKP's populism and then its heritage is to provide a proper memory, which constitutes and reinforces the sense of "us" between women and the party. The memory is constructed by the possibilities of what they could lose. Taggart's conceptualization of "heartland" enables me to understand the memory dimension of the AKP's populism. According to Taggart, heartland is "a territory of imagination that is different from ideal societies or utopia because it is seen populist costing their imaginative glances backwards in an attempt to construct what has been lost by the present" (Taggart 96). In the sense of Taggart's heartland conceptualization, the populists tend to combine people with a concrete place or at least its imagination. In the case of the headscarf, this reference is associated not with a mythical land, but a collective memory which represents the core of the community.

In another meeting with Aygül, I witnessed another reflection of memory, and its populist uses in terms of the AKP's contemporary politics. Another woman supported these criticisms, however, she also added to the discussion of her own experience by saying:

> I could learn the Quran after high school, but thank God, my daughter can read the Quran in the elementary school. How do we

ignore this, how can we turn our faces on to the party that gave us all these? (Fieldnote 2019).

Aygül constructed her answer again as related to the headscarf issue, because she understood the headscarf sensibility of the community, and started to explain her own experiences. By underlying how she was beaten by the police? How it was difficult to integrate to society, or find a job for her? Then she concluded her story as:

> Now we may have failure to fulfillment and mistakes as a party. It is not possible to make everybody equally satisfied. But what we know, the only party that will complete these deficiencies, is the AK Party. Who ended the struggle for the headscarf given so many years, it was AK Party (Fieldnote 2019).

This speech also reminded me that the headscarf issue represents something more than rising anti-establishment sentiment or its inclusionary remedy. It is also a base for constituting "us" among the veiled women in the sense of sharing memory. In Taggart's definition of populism, he explained that as populism refers to the heartland, the headscarf issue has referred to a memory-land for continuity and solidarity between women and for the next generation as well (will be discussed Chapter V).

The headscarf, as a symbol, refers to different issues in the eyes of different women. Experiencing the headscarf through the "headscarf ban", "exclusion from the public sphere, and political realm", "28 February", "repeating insulting in everyday life" and "the political inclusion of headscarf by AKP/Erdoğan" have constituted the headscarf as a reference point because of shared memory. In light of Taggart's conceptualization, renaming the heartland as "memory-land" shows the contemporary aspect of the AKP link with women through their populist political action.

To sum up, the headscarf issue is the combat zone for the AKP to include women who are against the establishment. For this, veiled women's experience provided a potential apparatus for the AKP's populist political action. Being excluded from the system through elitist and established

outpouring of the state raised the women's anti-establishment sentiment by triggering their political discontent. By lifting the headscarf ban, officially, the AKP opened the way for veiled women's participation in politics or the public sphere as representatives. However, the legal implications created a sense of "fidelity" on the women's side which is reflected in their memories. It appears that the headscarf issue has different faces in Turkish politics. Examining the issue of the AKP's gendered populism in the case of the headscarf issue provides an understanding of the source of continuation between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics. On the one hand, the AKP raised the number of women both in official and party politics by gaining their trust or establishing a legal framework. On the other hand, with the liberation of the headscarf, which is the long-awaited and tremendous reform for many women, the party stopped a substantive reformation process on women's issues. Yet, the headscarf is important to a group of women and generally it appeals to women who are educated, and the AKP as a political party necessarily appeals more than this. Without rejecting the headscarf reality, the AKP pursues other ways to involve women. From the perspective of populist political action, analysis of the party and observations from my fieldwork open the way for a new understanding of the AKP's populism and its relationship with women, in particular its voter base. I will analyze the AKP's appeal to women regarding the notion of "sublimated mass," which is how the AKP locates and frames the significance of women for the party.

3.3.2 *Sublimated Women: Appealing Women through Populist Political Action*

Claims of being the true representative of the people and having the right to speak for the people are based on the populist perspective, which sees people as the only source of legitimacy (Aytaç and Elçi 2019). In this form of political representation, the populists embark on a specific style to communicate with the people with "directness and simplicity" (Canovan 1999: 5). The AKP operates using this populist action generally through the elections and party politics mechanism during the campaign trails. Since 2003, the AKP has called on and consolidated the link between

people and the politics by repeating elections on the local or national levels. However, in the case of the AKP, populism shows up itself not only in the election, but during the campaign trail before the election. Under the campaign circumstances, the AKP's party workers could pay visits to the electorates which maintain the communication with the voters continually.

Succinctly, the elections have a multifunctional characteristic in the AKP's populist political actions. On the one hand, they provide a sublimated appeal to the people through claiming actualization of popular sovereignty, and also keep the link between the party and electorate direct and alive. The 2019 local election(s) was the last election before the 4 years election-less period. This was mostly used in the discourse of the AKP during the local election campaign trail as "4-5 years without elections, *Inşallah*, we are serving you non-stop." (Candidate of Sefercik Municipality, 2019 Campaign Trail). Aygül's quote helps us to understand the challenges of election trails for the party activists:

> You have to understand us. We are working for elections. 2016 referendums, 2018 national and presidential elections, now local elections. Can you imagine how difficult it is to organize an election period? Why are we doing this, for you? In order to protect your rights.

With a similar point of view, the head of Taşlıdere district, Emine, shared her experiences about the election trends in the AKP:

> I have been in politics since the establishment of the party. And now, I have been the head of the Taşlıdere Women's Branch for seven years. You know how many elections I have experienced? A lot, I could not count them. I had to get experienced as soon as possible in my first election campaign. I was assigned to be the head of the Women's Branch in 2013, and the election was in 2014. I had only a few months of preparation. Since 2013, with the local, national elections and referendums, I can say that I conducted

almost 8-9 elections. You know, it means that I had an election every 6-7 months.

The frequency of elections in the AKP period has been referred to as part of the populist "national will". Yet, on the party politics level, it reveals another dynamic of populism, which is opening a way to reach people directly and keeping their communication with the party alive in a very simple way. Emine's experience speaks to the women's efforts and function in the elections, which I approach as the source of the AKP's achievements among women. However, during my fieldwork, a question arose about understanding the functions of elections regarding women voters and the gendered meaning of the AKP's populist political action.

Edward Shils clarifies and defines the two basic principles of an appeal to the people in a populist vein with "the notion of the supremacy of the will of the people", and "notion of the direct relationship between people and government" (Panizza 2005 cited in Shils). From this perspective, the nature of the AKP's party politics fits the "directiveness" and "glorification of people" concepts of populism. While I will focus on these two dynamics of populism to understand the AKP's appeal to women, based on my fieldwork data, which draws on participant observation in the party's specific events and home visits during the election campaign in 2019, I will examine how the AKP sublimated women voters to take their support and include women as party activists. From these two dimensions of populist appeal, I develop my arguments as "dignifying women through visiting them in their home" and "directness of communication of the party among the women voters."

3.3.2.1 Bringing Politics to Home: Reaching Out Women Directly by Home-Visiting

The beginning of the chapter addresses how AKP politicizes the home through its conservative lens by locating women in the space of home. In the next chapter, I will explain how this perspective becomes a strategy for women politicians, but here it is important to understand its political meaning in terms of communication with women voters and the party in

the AKP's campaign trails. Indeed, since the Welfare Party's establishment home-visits have been a critical source of the Islamist party's political actions and derive from religious and traditional gatherings of women as mentioned above. Briefly, it is a political discovery for Islamist parties and in particular Islamist-conservative women's inclusion in politics. Despite its practical meaning, the AKP and women voters reframe the meaning of home visits. From the party's side, with the AKP, "homes" turn into a center of the political party and pave the way to rising support in the social base for the party regarding women's mobilization. In other words, the home visit is a political mechanism for the AKP to reach people/especially women in their home. Without pushing women outside their home, the AKP's members visit them in person.

From the women voters' side, the party visit is a symbol of honor for the female host. This symbolizes being considered, being remembered, and being important in the eyes of the political actors of Turkey. Being a host of a visited home is a kind of a prestige within the neighborhood because it represents being chosen. In addition, in the eyes of the inhabitants of the neighborhood, the house becomes a part of the political network after the visit of the party members. It is difficult to deny the importance of the home visit, especially for economically poor and conservative neighborhoods. Access to an actor from the political unit gives them a chance to speak their demands to the responsible person or unit.

By bringing into play an ethnographic microscope, during another home visit in a very poor and conservative neighborhood in Sefercik, I observed that the home visit is a political-oriented event for both sides. One side aims to spread its party propaganda, and the other one aims to demand something necessary for them. One way or the other, hosts are informed by party politics and projects, and they are also able to communicate their demands. This is actualization of popular sovereignty in a way which has come to be defined as "the decisive act of will is shifted from politicians and the elite to the mass of the electorate" (Canovan 2002: 36) in the populist literature.

The dialogue between Aygül and a woman voter gives hints about the populist framework by underlying the significance of home visit for both sides. With the home visit, women can express their demands, needs and ideas directly, while the politicians respond to them as soon as possible while proving their power and existence on every level. A young woman started the conversation by saying:

> Thanks to the AKP, we are not humiliated because of our headscarf anymore, everyone learned to respect us. Yet, it ignores us sometimes. Last year, we told our local mayor, the road which we used to go to school flooded in every rain, but he did not take care of it. It is really difficult to reach school on a rainy day.

Aygül was impressed and felt embarrassed, as I understood from her face and voice, because she asked "why are you waiting since the last year? You should apply to the municipality for your demand." At that moment, Aygül called a person [from municipality], and she asked about the situation with the aforementioned street. Taking responsibility for a yearlong waiting time in such a short time impressed everybody in the room. This incident includes a populist action known as "identifying people as the privileged subject of politics" (Stanley 2008:102) through actualization of their demands immediately. The party, through responding to women's demands, creates a significant political communication style. Each demand means and requires a response by the party which establishes a relation between them and the community. In addition, the party can learn about women's everyday lives and their problems this way. Through responding mechanisms and communication, the party is involved in women's everyday lives.

Beyond its practical meaning for the AKP's campaign trails and the home visit in terms of direct communication with women, they are symbolically significant in two ways. First, the AKP's politicians show that they care about women's lives by visiting them in their homes and listening to their problems. The home visit's meaning is to show and adumbrate the value and dignity of voters in the eyes of the AKP. This is what I

simply call "sublimating women." Second, women are accepting politicians into their private realm. In other words, despite the traditional nature of the private sphere, which opens only to family members, relatives or close friends, women have opened their doors to the party's members. In the light of the data, a fair question arises: How?

The answer includes two dimensions. The first one is related to the party's organizational structure, and the second one comes directly from the party's image in the voter's mind. The party's organizational structure (I will describe this in the next chapter) is based on a hierarchal setup which starts from the neighborhood to the national level. Within this multi-level structure, the AKP operates its party politics even on the street level through the neighborhood representatives. From a gender perspective, this organizational ability provides inclusion of women into party politics, because the party requires women representatives in the neighborhood to access women voters. One of the secrets of the AKP's voter mobilization is the party's knowledge about the local level and recruiting people according to their relativity/familiarity in the local region. My interlocutors illustrate how the AKP is recruiting women politicians according to the features of the local sphere, where they have specific characteristics, population, and service styles. According to that, the politicians should understand and behave accordingly the customs, characteristics and nature of the given locale. Demographic compatibility and knowledge of the local politicians are vital for political parties like AKP that conduct personal politics and face-to-face relations. Therefore, the AKP prefers selecting women politicians according to the electorates' demographic and political structures in different locales. The members and activists for the neighborhood organization of the party are recruited from the neighborhood among the most well-known, warm, and friendly women. Arat's analysis also has the same finding about the Welfare Party's local women representatives. She explains the recruitment of the women in her study about the Welfare Party recruiting similar actors like *Perihan Abla* (Arat 2005), which refers to a well-known TV series character. She can be described as knowing everyone and everything in the neighborhood and she also concerns herself with other peoples' troubles

and problems. The actual activist from the neighborhood provides accessibility for the party on a firsthand basis. However, with the AKP's long, 19-year-old legacy, its image also becomes "something familiar" for ordinary people's lives.

The party has been interiorized by the voters. Not in the beginning, but through the systematized structure of the AKP, it strengthens and has its existence accepted in the everyday life of the neighborhood. I participated in several campaign events during my fieldwork, and these events provided me with the opportunity to have unofficial and unstructured conversations with women voters or politicians. One of them was organizing for Aygül's candidacy in Sefercik for the local municipality. The organized event generally has different themes, which depend on the organizer. Aygül preferred to organize a dinner and invited her *hemşehri* (fellow citizen) from the same Anatolian city where she is from. The event was in the biggest wedding hall in Sefercik and two floors of the place were occupied. Men were on the first floor and the women were on the second. I waited on the first floor for Aygül, but she was busy welcoming people. Pınar[20], one of Aygül's assistants, welcomed me and said, "women will be on the second floor," and she added, "tonight, we have more guests than we expected". Indeed, I did not expect to be with Aygül during the event, I just wanted to thank her for inviting me, but I could not find the chance. I walked through the second floor and found a table I could sit at. Such a crowded event enabled me to meet women voters and learn their ideas about the event. I met Muradiye[21] that night as we were sitting at the same table. After we introduced ourselves, she told me that, "I generally do not attend this sort of event. But I wonder this time what they are

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[20]   Pınar was married with a local shopper in the district. She has a primary school graduation, but her early age and energy in the party help her to promote in higher position. Even though she has a toddler and spare her time to her, she is the one who required in the field due to her familiarity in the neighborhoods and district which comes from her husband occupation.

[21]   Muradiye is living in a conservative neighborhood in Sefercik. She is a housewife in her mid 30s. Her husband has his own business and they might be considered as middle class family.

doing. Also, I would like to give them support, this election seems to be difficult for us."

During the conversation, I learned she was also an AKP member, but this was not unexpected, because the AKP has 5 million women members and every year the party organizes nation-wide membership campaigns to raise the number. What surprised me is that, even though she is not an active member of the party, she considered and imaged the party as "us". When I asked about her membership process, she explained the moment how she joined the party:

> I was at home, and there was a knock at the door. When I opened the door, I saw 3-4 women and they started by saying, "we are coming from the AK Party." I asked her, what did you feel? She answered by saying, "I knew one of them from the neighborhood, I did not know she was working with the party. But even though I did not know her, I did not feel strange, because you know the AK Party is the AK Party, as we know". Then she continued by saying, "they asked me to be a member of the party and I accepted". She mentioned her husband had to give permission for her participation in the event, but she did not talk about her husband's consent or say that she had no hesitation about becoming a member of the party because of her husband. I asked, "what does your husband think about the party, and your membership?" She was clear about the answer: "my husband is also member of the AK Party. You know, we want to raise our children with the AK Party and want them to protect us from what we faced before the AK Party.

I spent more than 2 hours at the event with Muradiye, and she emphasized the idea of "us" several times by adding "the AK Party as we know (*Bildiğimiz* AK Parti)." Apparently, there is an "image of the AKP" in the mind of the people, who are constructing it through their experience, local and family dynamics, identity, shared values and so on. Muradiye helped me to understand how the AKP enables the party's access through constructing an image of the AKP in the people's mind. Moreover, Öniş's

conceptualization of "bounded community" is reflected in Muradiye's experience. Öniş's argues that "in these communities, individuals sometimes develop strong moral sentiments towards other group members, and refrain from punishing insiders to preserve the unity of their community" (36).

This concept is quite applicable when it comes to analyzing the AKP's politics on the local level and appealing to women through home visits. The party's member and its voters belong to the same group, who are considered insiders. Because of being an insider, they are not perceived as strangers even though they may not have been familiar to each other previously. In addition, intra-group trust constructs familiarity and closeness which provides easy access for populist penetration of the AKP into society. What Muradiye calls "the AK Party as we know (*Bildiğimiz* AK Parti)," is the succinct expression of this complex mechanism.

The home-visit activity of the AKP has a peculiar characteristic for the party, which combines conservative ideology and populist mobilization into political action. In terms of targets and audiences for this activity, women are rising both on the demand and supply side of this interaction. Beyond its party and gender-specific existence, the home-visit is a unique case in terms of populist mobilization, and political strategy among its counterparts in the world.

Hüda Kaya shared an incident from her campaign trial experience, which refers to the impact of the AKP's home visit strategy toward the female electorate. She conveyed the conversation with a male voter by saying:

> During our fieldwork in election time, we talked with many male voters. They are AKP supporters, but they tend to change the address of their votes. However, they told us, "Come to my home and talk with my wife, change her mind if you can" (Personal Interview 2020).

Kaya shared what she witnessed in the field about the AKP's existence and its impact on women voters. While the other parties conduct their

campaign trials in public spaces, the AKP can connect more privately with women. For this, male voters are even inviting Hüda Kaya to come to their home to visit their wives, as the AKP does.

From the female politicians' perspectives, election and campaign trials show that women have become an important human resource because of their availability, and especially housewives (Arat). With the inclusion of women in politics, the party organized a division of labor by taking into consideration the conservative limits (which will be examined in the next chapter) of the party in terms of gender. When the party includes women on the supply-side, they also pave the way for reaching the women who are on the demand side. Hüda Kaya helps us to understand this by explaining:

> They [AKP/conservative male politicians] understood that they could not be successful only with men. The only way to reach the female electorate was through women, and thanks to women they can enter the home.

According to the party's political understandings, requirements and style, women became essential components both on the supply and demand side. When the election is used as the most important mechanism to contact the people and is a representation of popular sovereignty in the populist sense, women have gained an important role during the process. The party's women activists provide a connection with the female electorate in society, which shows how this electorate is valuable.

The AKP's populist political actions reflect that they are aware of the people as the source of their legitimacy, and also the main actors in politics. For this reason, the institutions or other functions of the system have been eliminated, and the people become the only source of power in the system. Through a majoritarian appeal to people and by dignifying their votes, they recall the idea that, "The people is sublime, but individuals are weak" (Marqauand 2017) a declaration attributed to Robespierre. However, the AKP's populist political action has a gendered face as well. The importance of elections, campaign trails and the home visit activities are

at the heart of the AKP's populist political action and the party's women agenda. While the party aims its populism towards direct relations and sublimating the people [women in my case], it also creates a sustainable existence between the feminizing and anti-feminizing politics of the party.

Similar to the question of the "chicken and the egg," the AKP recruits women activists to mobilize women votes because of the conservative limits on interactions between men and women. While the AKP provides a vertical feminization, it does not bring any essential transformation regarding women's status in society. What is more, visiting personally has an important and cultural meaning in Turkish society, which indicates the value and importance of the host as being worthy of a visit. On the other hand, opening the door to a stranger also has a particular meaning in this case, because the home is available for well-known or familiar people. Overcoming this obstacle, the AKP finds a connection in the neighborhood, which is named as the head of the neighborhood and makes their access to peoples' homes easy. The AKP and its electorate established a "community" and sense of belonging which builds a connection among them even though they may not know each other in person.

In the political strategy of the AKP, the combination of conservatism and populism has been tested once again. The home is centralized during visits. Even though it seems to be politicized, its privacy has still been protected because the visitors are not strangers. This is characteristic of populism, which is "both depoliticized and hyper-polices the social relations" (Panizza 20). Maybe populism and its conservative partner bring a dynamism and inclusion of the private sphere and women's life, but they do not touch the structural situation. This blurs the meaning of feminization and leads to the coexistence with anti-feminization.

However, this coexistence is not only supported by the symbolic, cultural, and ideological concerns of women, but also by the AKP's populist political actions providing a material and tangible feature. In the next chapter, I will discuss the AKP's "buying vote/constituting vote" dimension from a gender perspective by illustrating the party's alliance in society.

3.3.3 *Building support as a populist political action: Constituting Voters*

I met with Aysel during my women voter interview period. She is a 50-year-old housewife with 3 children. Aysel was an AKP voter and has lived in İstanbul since the 1990s. She immigrated to the Istanbul-Anatolian side (Üsküdar, Çengelköy) from Konya with her family to provide better conditions for her children. She was a pious-veiled woman and she described herself and her family as "conservative people", who have supported the AKP. Beyond this background, Aysel's narrative reflects how she is hopeless for the future, regretful of the past and desperate in the present. The current atmosphere of Covid-19 also influenced my questions and I asked Aysel, how has she handled the economic, social, and psychological consequences of Covid-19? In the beginning she answered my question as a supporter of the AKP without saying any negative thought about the party. However, when I asked specifically about the current situation, she started to mention her complaints and regrets for how she had voted. She was not sorry that she voted for the AKP; or she did not consider changing her voting preferences, yet she was upset because she felt that she had voted for the AKP for nothing.

> Do you know what is my biggest regret? I wish I would have seized the opportunity when people (AKP) came to my doorstep before elections to ask my vote. I could not have done it. I wish I could. They are coming to doorsteps before elections. I know some people who are selling their votes. I know that. For instance, they (voters) are asking something like if you help me to construct my home or if you provide me a convenience by doing this X thing, you have my and my family's votes. However, I have never done it. You know, all my family, my siblings their children, we are almost 30 votes for the party. I wish I would have used them for negotiation. Maybe, everything would be different for me (Online Interview, 23 October 2020).

She equates voting preferences with personal interests and gaining material benefits. Indeed, she underlined that during the pandemic, she and her family have faced a lot of difficulties and she added that,

> I went to the municipality, social assistance institution, and called women's branches several times. I got only 750 Turkish Liras and a box of food. You know the pandemic has gone on since March 2020. I got only one time cash and one time food support. I know how people have access to the party, municipality, and other places. I have access as well, but I do not know how to negotiate for my vote.

It was interesting to hear that. Despite her suffering and complaints about the party, she underlined that she will not change her voting preferences. When I asked about what makes you sustain your vote for the AKP, her answer also clarified the material relations between Aysel and the party.

> Do you remember there was an association called *Deniz Feneri?* When we came to Istanbul, we were very needy. They helped us a lot. So, we fall for these supports. When someone brings clothes or food, we start to believe in their good intensions. So, we consider some favors. If I am still voting for the AK Party, this is coming from my previous experiences.

Aysel's story is a case that enables me to clarify how the AKP's past 20 years wove the party's relationship with voters by utilizing local municipalities, civil society organizations and the party's women branches. Based on Aysel's experience, I will focus on the "constituting and sustaining voters" dimension of the AKP's populist political action. By doing so, I will illustrate how the AKP creates the party's supporters and how it is able to sustain their support (as a part of it, Chapter VI examines political preferences of the women voters and routinized attitudes towards the AKP). This will bring about an answer to the main question of my

research from the material perspective of party politics as well. Additionally, the AKP's material network within society and its analysis from a gender-lens provides insight into the relationship between clientelism and populism in the Turkish context. The AKP's party politics with different actors and activities is a kind of network politics which is shaped by populist political action and conducted by brokering alliances. This network has three actors who can take diverse forms based on the triangle of "client-broker-patron" (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007:8). Examining the sources of coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics leads the research to reveal the gendered face of the AKP's network politics. Based on Aysel's narratives, I will focus on the broker side to understand the reality in the field.

Constituting and sustaining voters in society has two dimensions regarding the AKP's party politics, which are material and ideological relations. First, in terms of material relations, as Tuğal (2012) argues, the AKP's sustainable success has been based on "targeted poverty programs and election-time spending, as well as attacks on privileged sectors and the successful management of inflation" (p.30). Yet, the gender-specific dimension of the AKP's party politics still has only a limited explanation. Indeed, populism constitutes itself in terms of the party's relations with women, and the party targets women through a specific mode of action, in other words, specific social assistance programs to get their support. This requires not only a comprehensive understanding of the AKP's populist political action, but also its mode of action as it has targeted women voters. As Aysel's case demonstrates, she regrets not selling her vote or negotiating for her family's votes, which also uncovers how the AKP's party politics is related to social assistance programs.

Second, the AKP is not only providing material benefits, but also the party consolidates its relations with supporters through civil society organizations which are mirroring the party's ideological underpinnings. With the co-optation of the civil society environment through establishing GONGOs (*government-organized NGOs), the* AKP's party politics find another way to reach people by "fostering the state's agenda and disseminating its views and ideology" (Diner 2018; 102). Even though the
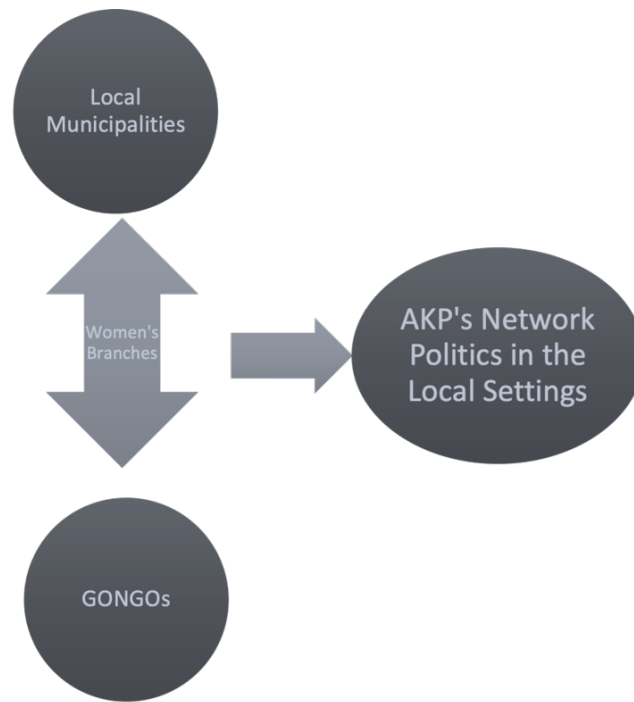
Figure 3.1 Network Mechanism in the AKP's Local Politics

relationship between the AKP and the GONGOs seems to be newly emerged, as Aysel's case reveals, the AKP has raised its support base using traditions established during the *Milli Görüş* period through Islamic charity organizations. In other words, according to the ethnography of Jenny White on Ümraniye (2005), a neighborhood can be supported and organized by the local municipality, party-related associations, and other civic organizations. In this sense, civil society organizations are depicted as civic and political institutions whereas they are also organized within personal, kinship and ethnic relations (179). When she focuses on the impact of civil society organizations on Islamist mobilization, she claims that the party's web on each level from neighborhood to provincial provides an easy access for people to the party. In light of Jenny White's research, it seems that organizational structures and party politics of the Welfare Party are a genetic heritage for the AKP as well. Indeed, the AKP

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has furthered this tradition by using them as an instrument for shaping society ideologically and to consolidate the sense of belonging the same camp.

At the Municipal level, I researched the AKP's municipalities in İstanbul on their websites. The AKP has 24 local municipalities in Istanbul, and only one of the mayors is a woman.[22] To understand their women-specific policies, I searched the website using the keyword "women," but I came across women only under the social service or social help unit (used interchangeably). Some of them refer to this unit using specific names such as ASYAM (*Arnavutköy Sosyal Yardımlaşma Merkezi*/Arnavutköy Social Assistance Center), AKDEM (*Zeytinburnu Aile Kadın Destekleme ve Engelliler Merkezi*/ Family Women Support and Disabled Center) which have included social and economic assistance programs for the local people in neighborhoods. As a local reflection of the AKP's family-mainstreaming policy, the municipalities include women under projects which are related to the family. In the table below, I listed the AKP's local municipalities and the name of their social assistance program with the activities to understand the scope of the policies.

Municipality	Name of Unit or Project	Activity
Arnavutköy	ASYAM (Arnavutköy Social Assistance Center)	ASYAM cards to grocery shopping (it provides 250 TL spending per month).
Bağcılar	Woman and Family	Training Opportunities for Women (No Information About Social Assistance)
Bahçelievler	BADE (Bahçelievler, Family Support House-	Family Support House acts as a bridge in delivering the first-hand

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22   Döğücü Sancaktepe Mayor, who was also the previous head of AKP's Istanbul organization.

	Bahçelevler Aile Destek Evi)	aids given by philanthropic businessmen to those in need. (Bahçelievler Municipality Website)
Başakşehir	Directorate of Social Assistance	
Bayrampaşa	Social Services	Women, Child, Family
Beykoz	Social Assistance Services	
Beyoğlu	Social Assistance	Social Market
Çatalca		
Çekmeköy	Directorate of Social Assistance	-
Esenler	ESAYDAM	Happy Family, Happy Esenler
Eyüp	Directorate of Women and Family Services / Directorate of Social Support Services	Kindergarten, Women's Shelter, Family Support Center, ESMEK, ESKEP.
Fatih	Social Municipality/ Women's Family and Education Unit	Museum Trips, Women's Health, Family School, Pregnant School, Newborn Package, Crafts
Gaziosmanpaşa		
Güngören	Social Assistance Box	-
Kağıthane	Women's Assembly	They work for protecting and transmitting national and spiritual values, traditions and customs, social values,

		for the generation of a generation.
Pendik	Social Assistance / Women and Social Services	-
Sancaktepe	Social Assistance Activities- Happy Homes	Altıneller Çarşısı / Women's Labor, Neighborhood Mothers
Sultanbeyli	The Latest News about Social Assistance was entered in 2017	
Sultangazi	Social Municipality / Women's Assembly	Dear Family, Generation-to-Generation, Conscious Mother
Şile	Services	Food, Goods and Clothing Aid, Social Economic Support
Tuzla	Hearts Hands	Women's City Volunteers
Ümraniye	Social Services	-
Üsküdar	Social Projects	-
Zeytinburnu	Family Women Support and Disabled Center	Unit of Social Services

Tabl*e* 3.1 The AKP's Local Municipalities' Social Assistance Projects and Programs

First, the table shows that there is no coherence among the AKP's municipalities on social assistance dimensions, except on the fundamental issues such as caring for disabled and elderly people and the position of women. Beyond that, the municipalities have different activities under the name of social assistance services to attract and appeal to the popular sector and distribute their resources. Although they are not concerned with the women-specific projects or activities of municipalities, their general receivers are shown as women. For instance, the social shopping

center (Beyoğlu) and ASYAM (Arnavutköy) use women in their website images. Plus, AKDEM and Ümraniye attach women's pictures during their encounters with municipality personal.

Second, the websites of municipalities are not well organized and informative. While some of them explain their activities in detail (Zeytinburnu, Gaziosmanpaşa), some of them are less informative about their activities in the social assistance domain. This is a bit shocking when it comes to the AKP's municipalities, which boast about their understanding of "social municipalities". Indeed, the lack of information on the website of the local municipalities leads me to think about how they conduct their social assistance program in the local settings. The confusion and ambiguity of the municipality's social assistance dimension seems like a sort of informality of the relationship between brokers and the local people. The informality is also proven when some of the websites include the required documents for applying for social help, but some of them do not. The municipalities are a direct link with the people, but their structural and legal deficiencies put them in an arbitrary position which leads to injustice in distribution of social assistance and ability to use it as a clientelist mechanism to build support. Injustice in the social assistance programs is beyond the scope of the research, but its arbitrariness and loose structure makes the local municipality a useful actor in terms of the AKP's populist action.

The source of informality or clarification of ambiguity in the municipality are provided by the party's female branches. For instance, Aysel tried to reach the women's branch to ask for help instead of going to the municipality. Moreover, I witnessed how the heads of women's branches convey the opportunities of municipalities for women, which they do not even do on the municipalities' website. After a meeting in a neighborhood of the Sefercik, women started to come to ask for something from Aygül. I was able to hear some of the conversations, but generally I could observe the reactions of Aygül. She was taking notes of the demands. Women were generally asking for financial aid for their home and children's education spending. I heard Aygül while answering a woman's demand saying, "you will go to the municipality tomorrow, and find Filiz

Hanım, we will inform her about you. She will take care of your demand and then she will send a team to check your home. After they will decide what kind of assistance can be given to you". Yet, the woman was not convinced, because she does not believe that the municipality will help her. Then she added "one of my neighbors got assistance from the municipality, even though their conditions are better than mine." Upon hearing this, Aygül called Filiz hanım in that moment to convince the woman, and she said "Filiz, I am sending a lady to you tomorrow. She needs help".

As seen in this case or Aysel's narrative, even though the municipalities are not underlining their social assistance programs as a woman-specific project, women are the most prominent receivers. Due to the organizational structure of the AKP even on the neighborhood and street level through women activists (such as the head of the neighborhood), a broker alliance in terms of the AKP's network politics provides a collaboration with municipalities. In the ethnographic study of Auyeuro (2000), the broker in Argentinian politics in the Peronist period also existed to provide distribution of food or medicine for their potential voters, who sustained their network through close relations and intense interactions with the local people. My case also represents similar trends in terms of rising accessibility of resources for the popular sector. Yet, the majority of women politicians in this process also make the women voters natural receivers of this process.

Additionally, the municipalities are not well-constructed to reach women voters in terms of informing them about their projects and programs. While this shows the weakness of the municipalities as brokers, it also points out the importance of the AKP's women's branches as another broker. Because of the blurred borders between diverse actors in the AKP, women's branches activists function to fill the gap within the AKP's broker alliances. In this process, on the one hand, the head of women's branches has to be responsive to voters' criticisms regarding the municipality and on the other hand, she has to be informative about the programs of the municipality.

Indeed, the AKP's network politics has a gendered face which is conducted informally through municipalities' social help units and the AKP's

women activists in the local settings. Conducting ethnographic research enables me to overcome the invisible and informal structure between the AKP's local representatives (party organizations and municipalities) and women voters. Therefore, I clearly observed the link between individuals and municipalities regarding the arbitrariness of the social assistance dimension. This link is a source or motivation for building support through "constituting and sustaining voters" of the AKP's network politics which is established through material flow. Beyond the material pillar of the AKP's network politics, it has an ideological aspect which has been acted on by GONGOs. The relationship between civil society organizations and the party has a loose and unofficial characteristic, which makes it more difficult to prove their collaboration with the AKP in terms of their place in the network politics as a broker.

The GONGOs, as the second dimension of the AKP's network politics, operate in the field to bring the AKP's ideological underpinning into society, especially among women voters, which leads to the sustainability of the AKP's established voter base. In other words, GONGOs act as a trigger for the social support, communication, and integration between the society, the party and popular sector.

Erdoğan declared that the function of civil society organizations is to complement the state. It should be underlined that Erdoğan alludes to service-based organizations which are organizing philanthropic and social help activities in society. As Zihnioğlu shows in her research, Turkey faces a shrinking civic space in terms of right-based activism, yet service-oriented activism has been sustained in the domain of Turkish civil society (Zihnioğlu 2020). This finding is helpful to understand the relationship between the party and certain types of CSOs-GONGOs.

Indeed, this is a reciprocal relationship, because after the AKP's political triumph, the GONGOs have consolidated their existence and impact on society, which also provides a way into understanding the AKP's network politics. In other words, as Sunar (2018) points out, the AKP's fifteen years in the government changes the relationship between the state and conservative civil society organizations on the basis of "rival or threat" to "support and encouragement" of each other (17). There is mutual interest

in the process, from which both the AKP and the Islamist/conservative civil society have benefited.

Beyond that, the relation between GONGOs and the party can be observed on the individual level, in terms of the relatives of AKP's members who are founders or on the board of management of the GONGOs. The most popular cases are Okçular Associations, TÜRGEV and KADEM, which were established or managed Erdoğan's son and daughter. Insistently, the foundations claim their autonomy from the party, yet the management board and members close relations with the party show this is not the case. More specifically, the case of KADEM illustrates the link between the AKP and GONGOs regarding its membership profile. Through a descriptive analysis of the AKP's women biographies, the conclusion about their relationship is easy to reach, because most of the AKP's women are members of KADEM. To understand the role of GONGOs in the AKP's network politics in the mobilization of women's votes, I will analyze KADEM as broker, beyond its complicated and shady relationship with the party.

KADEM is the most critical example in terms of the AKP's gender politics. In the latest literature about the AKP's gender agenda, KADEM is included as a case study to understand how the AKP instrumentalizes the GONGOs to employ the party's gender agenda (Arat 2021, Ünal 2021, Diner 2018). Without any objections to the arguments of the current studies, I will bring attention to their function in the party's politics. KADEM (Women and Democracy Association) was founded on 8 March 2013, and its founding president was Sare Aydın, who is now the AKP's deputy. Other members include Özlem Zengin—who was the head of AKP's Istanbul women branch and now is also one of the AKP's female deputies—and Özgül Özkan Yavuz—who was the AKP's Kadıköy municipality candidate in the 2019 local election. Even though an official link between the KADEM and the AKP is not mentioned, undoubtedly, they have an informal connection. Metaphorically, maybe it is hard to claim they are siblings, but they have a blood tie.

Second, the KADEM and the AKP cooperate on activities as well. More clearly, the KADEM feeds and consolidates the AKP's societal ties among

women compatible with the AKP's policies. As claimed before, they are aligned on the family issue. The previous section discusses how the AKP's family-mainstreaming approach shapes the party's understanding of women and also affects its policy towards women. Through the supplementary function of the NGOs, KADEM consolidates and sustains the idea of empowering the family within society as well. In the press briefing, Saliha Okur Gümrükçüoğlu, head of KADEM, noted that "women have to be empowered to live more easily, not to divorce easier" (Youtube 2019). This means that women should be empowered to build a strong family as a reflection of the AKP's family-mainstreaming politics in the civic area. The family is not in the center only in their speeches, but also in their events and activities. For instance, the KADEM organized III. International Women and Justice Submit together with the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Service in November 2018. President Erdoğan and Emine Erdoğan also were among the participants of the event, which was named "Empowerment of Family". Beyond collaboration on such events, the projects of KADEM are mostly sponsored by related ministries, like the Ministry of EU, the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Service or some other state institutions such as ISKUR (Turkish Employment Agency) and so on.

The KADEM does not only form as a GONGO, but also has a foundation to provide accommodations for young university students. The purpose of the KADEM's dormitories is to encourage young girls to be productive individuals in the socio-cultural, economic, art and academic realm (KADEM). Indeed, the foundation shows its supplementary role to the AKP in society through providing traditional accommodation which was interrupted after declaring the Gülen organization a terrorist group.

To follow the collaboration between the AKP and the foundation, there is a simple example which raises questions about whether KADEM employs Erdoğan's statements. In 2013, Erdoğan started a debate about men and women university students who stayed in the same dorm, called mixed flats and dormitories. He said:

We have witnessed in Denizli province. The incapacity of residences creates issues. Male and female university students share the same apartment. There is no inspection on that. This is against our conservative democrat mentality. We have given orders to the governor. There will be an inspection one way or another (Vardar 2013).

The managers of the KADEM might have remembered Erdoğan's concern after two years, because it opened its first dormitory in Denizli. The KADEM, through its pro-AKP activities and principles and the profiles of members, put in place the AKP's societal penetration of civil society organizations. The KADEM is an important actor when it supports the AKP's family-mainstreaming policy on a societal level by means of specific policies, projects, and discourses, but it also provides an eligible sphere for indirect connection with the young university students and the party's ideology through KADEM foundation's dormitories. Despite the latest tension between the KADEM and the AKP over the Istanbul Convention (Cumhuriyet 2020; Olgun 2021), this does not mean they are about to break up, but rather proves that GONGOs can be ineffective when they have different understandings and perspectives from the government.

Based on these cases, I showed the GONGO side of the AKP's network politics to understand how the AKP builds and sustains support on a societal level. More clearly, through civil society organizations, the AKP's policies are consolidated and sustained by local and horizontal penetration, because civil society organizations are crucial instruments of dialogue between the AKP and women voters.

In this part, I have described the connection between the AKP's populist political action and the party's network politics, which are conducted by broker alliance with women voters who have played a vital role in constituting and sustaining female support. This alliance includes local municipalities and GONGOs as the main actors and the party's local activists in the women's branches. By examining the reason behind the constituting and sustaining of female support, this part of the chapter aims

to reveal concrete party politics through material and ideological methods. This analysis explores the gender perspective on the AKP's extensive party politics and populist action regarding how the AKP creates and mobilizes women. The AKP's network politics utilize social assistance programs efficiently to access women in society. However, they also centralize the party's ideological penetration into society via GONGOs. These two dimensions pave the way for the coexistence of feminizing and anti-feminizing politics in the case of the AKP. Put differently, the AKP's network politics is compensating for the "material deprivation and socio-cultural destitution" (Auyero 2000:57) in society which emerges as another aspect of the party's populist political action. When the AKP's network politics increase the number of women supporters through material flow via municipal units, they also consolidate the party's anti-feminist gender agenda through the instrumentalization of GONGOs, which include the AKP's family-mainstreaming perspective in their projects.

Kampwirth's research (2010) on populist mobilization in Latin America among women provides a helpful case. This research in the Latin American context sheds light on how the extended material benefits through social programs turned women into dependents on the state, and clients in need of protection by the party's leadership. Thanks to the function of women in Latin American politics in this network, poor women are framed as heroes in Latin America. Similarly, the AKP's discourses and policies glorify the mother in Turkey as protector of the family by compensating deprivations of family members which make them crucial for the party's populist agenda. From a similar perspective, the AKP mobilizes women by linking with them through the party's network politics, which employ brokers as the carriers of the party's material and ideological links. Repeatedly, based on Aysel's narratives, without underestimating the function of the women's branches, this part of the chapter showed "Municipality Units" and "GONGOs" as brokers of the AKP's network politics, which actualize the party's "constituting and sustaining vote" dimension as a populist political action.

Through the headscarf issue, sublimating dynamics and the party's network politics, I argue how the AKP uses populist political action among women voters. In other words, I attempt to assess the role of party in the vertical feminization through focusing historical, ideological and practical avenues of the party. Moreover, I show how the AKP's populist political actions contribute to the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics by mobilizing women and consolidating the anti-feminist gender agenda of the AKP. This process is critical to understanding the gender perspective of Erdoğan's populism. Yet, there is one missing domain which bridges the diverse components under the name of the party. This domain is Erdoğan himself and the leadership dimension, which stimulate voters and represents the embodiment of the image of the AKP for people.

3.3.4 *The Leadership of Erdoğan as a Populist Political Action: "Rock Star of Turkish Politics"[23]*

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is the foremost populist leader among the various examples of such leaders in contemporary world politics (Guardian 2019). From the beginning of his political life until the present, he has constructed himself as an anti-established populist figure through his background, political experience, discourse, and strategies. In this section, his populist identification will be analyzed through the specific points where his populist leadership has touched women. Indeed, I came to understand what Erdoğan means for women on a party level and electoral level during my interview process, because (with just one exception), each of my interviewees used the AKP and Erdoğan interchangeably. In some cases, they were putting Erdoğan before the AKP. Women politicians, especially, described the AKP by saying "we are leader-oriented party". After I witnessed the prominent place of Erdoğan in the women's answers

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[23]   Jenny White uses the terms to identify the charm of Erdoğan (2002).

to my questions, I also asked what they envisioned about politics after Erdoğan, and Canan's[24] response was very illustrative:

> The AK Party is very important, and we all know, Erdoğan is also mortal. We want to do as many things as we can during his presidency. Our effort is always for him. I believe that our president is a very popular leader, a different politician. I think, it is quite normal for people to consider/focus on our president before the AK Party. Our President is far ahead of the AK Party. My God, give him a long life! After our president, I think people will start to focus on the AK Party, but as long as our president lives, I do not think the people's perspective can change. Because he is an exceptional case.

This answer was not surprising, since Erdoğan's followers often call him "Reis[25]" to show their loyalty and level of commitment. The critical point is to understand how Erdoğan creates this image. After analyzing the components of the cult of Erdoğan, it will be easier to deduce what makes his leadership significant for the AKP's populist political action among women. For this, Erdoğan built his populist leadership on the components of "presenting himself as the voice of a (silent) majority" (Mudde and Kaltwasser: 2), "by creating his own people (women)" (Moffit 2016: 64), "promoting the personalization of politics" (Mcallister 2007: 584). Through analysis of Erdoğan's biographical steps, and his political journey, I will demonstrate the impact of populist leadership on the AKP's

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24 Canan is one of my interviewees who has blur borders between being voter or party activist. Due to her neighborhood and family members, she is engaged with the party in her everyday life. She is living in a neighborhood which overwhelmingly votes for the AKP and she is coming a family who is not only supporting as a voter, but also working for the party since its establishment.

25 Meaning of *Reis* is the leader of the group and refers Erdoğan's leadership in the AKP's supporters' language. More specifically, people who define themselves more than a supporter of the party, use the term "*Reisçi*" to clarify their position. Reisçi means that they are not only voters or activists, but they are Erdoğan's followers.

populist political action and the coexistence between the feminizing and anti-feminizing politics of the AKP.

Erdoğan has been a distinctive actor in Turkish politics, not only during his 19 years of reign in the government, but also because of his background. He exemplifies a new political leadership style through his social and political origins, which have challenged the common imagery of political leadership (Rousseau 2010). Erdoğan was born in 1954, in Beyoğlu, Kasımpaşa. It is an urban margin which is not commonly seen in previous Turkish politicians' backgrounds.[26] Yet, Erdoğan's most unusual characteristic is his academic background which is in great contradiction with that of the general Turkish political elite. His theological (*imam hatip*) school background and ambiguous situation regarding his university education[27] make Erdoğan close to the people with the "one of us" sentiment while keeping distance with the established elite. This sentiment, as mentioned above, is important during the populist mobilization and building support among voters. The image and biography of Erdoğan give people an understanding of him as a leader just like them who can understand and care about them.

The importance of people having the same educational background is a point that I witnessed during my voter-level interviews. Didar[28] is a housewife and married with three children. When I asked why she is voting for the AKP, she brought my attention to the issue of the *imam hatip* school.

> My family was quite conservative. I also like to be veiled, read Quran and further myself in religion. I decided to use the headscarf after elementary school. Indeed, I had to open my head

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[26] Except Süleyman Demirel's rural background, but Demirel also had the chance for his upward mobility by his education.

[27] Erdoğan's university education and graduation are still matters of controversy.

[28] Didar is a housewife, mother and wife. She defines herself with three roles. She added that how she is happy with intersection of them. She has never considered to work. She does not want to any moment of her life. She is a lower middle-class woman. She is happy with what she is and what she has.

before going to class. So, I decided to change my school. But at that time, there were only a few *imam hatip* high schools. It was not easy to sustain education for a girl like me. Despite that, it has a meaning, I mean, being an *imam hatip* student has a meaning and prestige among the conservative circles. Because you have a chance to learn your religion and you were resisting society by going to *imam hatip*. So, *imam hatip* is not only a school for us, but also something meaningful as well. When Erdoğan was elected as a mayor in Istanbul, we were so happy because we knew that he was coming from an *imam hatip* background, and he is like "one of us".

Didar grew up in a conservative family, as a conservative woman, and she is living with secular people after her marriage. Her political identity and preferences were shaped by her family and her education. She sustains her connection with Erdoğan even today based on their shared educational background. Didar's case and the female AKP voter's attitudes toward Erdoğan enable me to understand how Erdoğan's biography becomes a source of populist political action among women, in terms of representing their silent existence, envisioning them as supporters and connecting with them through personalized politics.

Erdoğan's political career started at an early-age when he became the head of the National Salvation Party's Beyoğlu youth branch at twenty-one. In the following year, he became the head of the İstanbul province youth branch, then a member of the national youth branch General Management Committee in the same party (White 2005). After the 1980s, Erdoğan became a political figure at the national level, beyond his party-level activism, when in 1994 he was elected mayor of Istanbul (White 2005).

Erdoğan constituted himself as a leader in the Welfare Party, which started with his leadership position in the Welfare Party Istanbul organization before his mayorship. Erdoğan appealed to the newly-emerging Islamists in society, and through his populism, he "bridged the gaps between conservative religious culture, the rising aspirations of

disenfranchised youth and the new ideas and ideologies of educated Is-lamist" (White 2005). Contrary to previous leadership styles and populist characteristics in Turkish politics, Erdoğan adopted a vertical network among the party, party-members and voters through supplementary ac-tors such as civil society organizations (White 2005). In other words, he is an outsider in Turkish politics with an unfamiliar approach to politics. This also fits the understanding of anti-establishment populism in terms of satisfying excluded people from establishment by the efforts of the self-proclaimed leader. As exemplified in the headscarf issue, Erdoğan frames his image with the anti-establishment feeling which provides a link with the discomfort voters in the society. Voters have confidence that their anti-establishment demands are conveyed under the leadership of Erdoğan. This is an expected outcome for anti-established populism when it considers as a reaction against elite and established groups who are working for their interests instead of common people (Bakker et al 2021).

Concurrently, Erdoğan was cultivating a masculine image of himself by playing football and being a married man with four children. However, in a climate of anti-establishment sentiment among Islamist groups, es-pecially veiled women, Erdoğan's political journey provides a link be-tween these varied groups. They were excluded from the system because of their Islamic identity. Put differently, collecting people around the same political ideals is recalling the "political tribalization". According to Erdoğan (2019), tribalization in the political context specificizes "us" and "foreigners" and current feature of Turkish politics reflects as the "sup-porters of the different political parties are equivalent to the members of different tribes". The tribal boundaries are set by the shared experience, religious values and common fears. Clearly the tribes exclude each other and dissolve the coherence among them. In political tribalization/tribal-ism highlights the "understanding of politics as a war where defeating the other tribe in any way possible becomes the most important goal" (Krekó and Juhász 2019). The tribes redress as established and anti-established camps, and the war/struggle can sustain between these two camps as seen in Turkish context. In order to elude the establishment circle, the

AKP has organized a movement together, which they called "*dava*/ideal". Being a participant of the same *dava* makes them also a member of the same "bounded community", or the member of the same "political tribe". [29]

Dava refers to an intangible movement, and its meaning has been constructed by inner group dynamics and understanding. Since the National Outlook, members of Islamist groups have used the concept of *dava* as an ideal to be constructed and sustained. When I asked what *dava* means to Erarslan, she pointed out that it is difficult to explain *dava* especially to my generation, which does not have an ideal vision. When I asked questions in my interviews of the AKP's women politicians to understand the meaning of *dava*, they also had similar answers as Erarslan, because I, as someone who is out of their community and generation, am not capable of comprehending the meaning of *dava*. However, they kept repeating that they have a *dava* and that is why they are in politics. The *dava* rhetoric is frequently used by veiled women politicians toward veiled voters, and moreover in their speeches they refer to Erdoğan as *dava adamı*, "man of an ideal" to explicitly create a community through an ambiguous concept.

Aygül was speaking heatedly in the meeting with voters. In her statement, I realized how the ambiguity of *dava* brings women and leaders onto the same page by underlying the importance of the leader: Erdoğan is their protector.

> We are still at the bottom in the eyes of the CHP. The mentality is the same. I believe, you share the same opinions as me. I asked you as your sister, not give them a chance. I would like your support and contribution to our *dava*. I am entrusting the streets to you. This is not the AKP's *dava*, it is the *dava of ümmet*. We are the women who are companions for our leader.

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[29] Karaömerlioğlu (2014) historicizes what *dava* means in the Erdoğan's speech and brings insightful analysis about its diverse roots.

This statement is very common, and it is possible to come across something similar in various meetings of the AKP. It shows the place of Erdoğan in the mind of women, both for politicians and at the voter level. However, *dava* is not the only dimension that brings women and Erdoğan closer. As I mentioned above, Erdoğan's biography also has a critical function in this relationship.

Erdoğan represents a model of leadership that people on the streets can identify with. Furthermore, they hope for social mobility of their own thanks to his experience. They feel that they are similar to him. While Erdoğan, who is called the voice of the silent, has a meaning in society that does not distinguish between men or women, the fact that he included women in the movement and mobilized them made him a particularly prominent political figure among women (Yaraş 2019). Türk's insightful book (2018) on right-wing politics in Turkey and Erdoğan's place in this tradition not only provides an excellent biography about Erdoğan but also explains what constitutes his leadership cult. He touches upon various component of Erdoğan's leadership and asks in the conclusion "What kind of leader is Erdoğan?". He endeavors to answer this question from a comparative perspective among the other cases of Turkey's right-wing tradition. While he locates Erdoğan within this tradition and points out his similarities and differences, he remunerates his appeal in the people as "the leader is fallen in love" (394).

This section showed that Erdoğan himself paved the way for the existence of populist political action among women by contributing to the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics. Indeed, the AKP women, both on a political and electoral level, appreciate Erdoğan, because they believe that Erdoğan's political decisions make them eligible and important for politics. Erdoğan is the first Islamist politicians who invited women into politics as party workers. After his political innovation in the Welfare Party, the İstanbul organization has become a nationwide network which has still sustained the AKP's women branches. It was the first attempt at feminizing politics on the politician level. Yet, this attempt has included not the emancipation of women, but was rather employed to mobilize the women's vote, which can be seen the second

pillar of feminizing politics. Indeed, the intension behind the feminization of politics is also a representation of the anti-feminist agenda of the AKP and its ancestor, the RP. The inclusion of women into politics is a clear reason to refer to this as feminization, however, the style and reason for this inclusion explicitly demonstrates the visible and invisible attempts regarding anti-feminizing politics, which are justified directly by Erdoğan himself.

§ 3.4 Conclusion: Party-Level Analysis of Coexistence between Feminizing and Anti-Feminizing Politics

I designed this chapter to find out the role of the AKP as a party in the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics. The contribution of the party-level analysis is revealed that the impact of the AKP's family-mainstreaming gender agenda and the party's populist political actions. Based on fieldwork notes, interview data and politicians' statements, I conducted a party-level analysis based on historical, conservative identification and populist mobilization towards women.

In this chapter, I showed three aspects of the party which have contributed to the continuation of coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics. One is the party's historical backdrop which connects the AKP's anti-feminist stance from the party's political ancestors. By developing an argument about the consistency within the AKP's gender agenda since its establishment, I examined the role of the National Outlook both in the AKP's party politics and its anti-feminization aspect. Briefly, the first section of the analysis suggests that the AKP is an Islamic-conservative party which determines the party's perspective towards women through the lens of anti-feminism.

After brining a historical perspective to the AKP's feminizing and anti-feminizing politics, I analyzed how the AKP sees women. The party's family-mainstreaming oriented anti-feminist gender agenda which defines women in the home-housewife-mother triangle. I focus on these three pillars to clarify how the family-mainstreaming agenda operates and to what extent it shapes and contributes to the feminizing and anti-

feminizing dilemma of the AKP. For this, the home refers to the place where women belong, and they can be reached there by the AKP. Housewifery addresses the identity of the women who AKP sees as subject of its policies and projects. Additionally, as the AKP's largest group of supporters, I focus on housewives in the context of their impact on Turkish political life. The last pillar discusses the AKP's conservative population policy and its impact on the woman's body, which is assigned to reproduction of the population and the role of women as mothers. Therefore, this chapter found a significant correlation between how the AKP sees women and how this perspective contributes to the tension between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics. This section helps to explore the tension from the party-level by focusing on the party's ideological formation as the primary source of the coexistence.

This chapter also brings a distinct analysis in terms of gender and populist literature by focusing on the AKP's populist political action towards women. In the second part of the chapter, I indicated how the AKP operates party politics with populist themes to mobilize women despite the party's anti-feminist formation. Indeed, the AKP finds an access point through the veiled women's long-suffering stance toward the headscarf, which paved the way for the AKP's inclusionary attempt toward veiled women. Through anti-establishment discourse, veiled women took part in the AKP's alliance since the beginning, and with the "established fidelity" between women and the party, this memory has still been sustained. The AKP's populist actions mobilize women by recognizing their existence as what I called a sublimated mass. The AKP's unique political style has reached women in their homes and recalled their importance in the power of the party. Moreover, the AKP has different roles in the game. Specifically, the party's women-based mobilization shows the party's concern about women in society. Organizing network politics to reach women in municipalities and GONGOS reproduce the tension while enlightening the AKP's women specific party politics. Without ignoring the impact of Erdoğan and his leadership, I point out the importance of Erdoğan's biography when it comes to understanding this tension.

This chapter illuminates the role of the party in the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics of the AKP to understand its place on the vertical feminization. Analyzing the party's ideological formation and mobilizational attempts revealed what contributes to sustaining the coexistence between these two distinct processes in the case of the AKP. I indicated the continuity of the party's gender agenda since the previous Islamist parties, the party's Islamist-conservative ideology which is conceptualized as "family-mainstreaming" regarding women, and the party's gendered populist political actions as the sources of tension from the party-level.

In the end, there is an absence of a target for emancipation of the traditional patriarchal structure in the party's ideological formation, but the growth in inclusion of women as political actors and voters in the party's pragmatic approach leads women to become the actors in between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics; this seems like a trap for them. Despite what the gender and politics literature claims, increasing women's participation in a political party does not provide a substantive feminization of politics. In the case of the AKP, the party fences in feminization trends by utilizing anti-feminist slogans. From a different perspective, this fence also opens a space for women to participate in politics, which makes conservative women political actors by engaging them in politics. However, why do women in the AKP not question the party's gender agenda?

The following chapter focuses on the role of the AKP women in building the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics. By referring to the above question, the analysis will be developed from the women's branches level. In the following chapter, I will illuminate both the function of the women's branches in the AKP's party politics and their own understanding regarding politics. While analyzing women as political actors, I will attempt to understand their strategies for political survival, which I also argue are the source of tension.

4

The AKP's Women's Branches: The Active Submissive Actors in the Coexistence

I believe in your power since the first day we started

-Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, *AK Bülten 2018a*

I t was a rainy February day. I was with the head of Aynalı women's branch Ruhsar and her team in the center of the district. The plan was to spend my day with them to observe their election campaign trail for the upcoming local elections. They were visiting the stores in the center and talking with people to introduce and advertise the AKP's municipality candidates at both local and province levels. After a while, the candidate joined them with the party's three men activists. As far as I could tell, the men, too, were members in the AKP's district branch and working in the mother party unit[1], yet they were keeping their distance from the people and store owners. The women were the main actors on the

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[1] AKP's organizational structure has three domains. One of these is the mother/main party, "*ana kademe*" in Turkish, which is generally run by men and serves as the core decision making body of the party in every level. The remaining two, the women and youth branches, are two supportive domains.

ground, and their labor was the engine of party's election work on that day as initiators of the communication with the electorates. Moreover, they were directing the men, even the candidate, during the campaign work. It amazed me to see their effort and power of control on the ground. Ruhsar was in charge, and depending on that power, she was saying the candidate to stay out or get in the stores. Moreover, she was telling men what they must do without any hesitation. After three hours of election work on the streets and at the center of Aynalı, I left them. In the evening of the same day Ruhsar called me to ask about my observations and impression of the day. It was my third meeting with Ruhsar, and I believed we had established a bond of mutual trust. I knew that she would like to hear how her, and her team's work amazed me, because she knew what she was doing on the ground. I answered her question as:

> It was an interesting experience for me, and I appreciate that you gave me a chance to join the party's groundwork. I was amazed! If you had not offered me to join your groundwork, I could not have had any insight on what you really do as women's branches. You work with all your effort, and I did not know that, because there is no sign or representation about what you do at the party.

She expected to hear how impressed I was by their works in the election campaign, but she did not expect to hear what I added at the end of my observation, which led her to defend the party as:

> We are women and we are able to access everywhere. We know how to handle people on the street and how to communicate with them. We are more sociable than men. But do you know where the power comes from? It comes from our *Reis*, our leader, our president, Recep Tayip Erdoğan.

Beyond what I observed in the field, during my interview process, I came across several times with the emphasis on the leader and heard women's diminishing comments about their labor constantly. However, Ruhsar

and the vast majority of my interlocutors are aware of their importance in the party politics and party's mobilization activities, yet their emphasis on leadership (Erdoğan) or tendency to diminish the significance of their labor seem like a strategy for them to survive in a male-dominated political arena. In other words, the testimonies of women activists reveal that they are strategizing a coping mechanism in politics while incorporating the challenges and limits from the party's anti-feminist stance into their political agenda.

In the previous chapter, I examined the role of the party in the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminist politics. By focusing on the historical, ideological, and practical domains of the party, I analyzed how the AKP sees women and mobilizes them. In the analysis of the party, the leader fills the actor dimension of the context, yet the most influential actor group is still missing. Therefore, this chapter aims to demonstrate the role and impact of AKP's women's branches (AWBs hereafter) on the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics. Moreover, I argue that the main actors behind the coexistence are the women activists of the party (especially women branches), who link the party and women voters by redefining boundaries of politics and establish a bargaining with patriarchy.

The following two chapters aim to uncover the role of women's activists in the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics. For this, two questions drive the women's role. First, *what is the politics for the AKP women?* (Chapter IV). The second one is, *how do they perform it?* (Chapter V). Therefore, the former question will show the AKP's women politicians and their way of doing politics by underlying the reasons behind the numerical feminization and consolidating anti-feminism. The latter will help understand their impact on feminization among the voter base and infiltration attempts of anti-feminism through analysis of their political style.

In this chapter, I will explore the role of the AWBs' activists from three angles by addressing the question what the politics for them is as well. Despite the wide scope of analyses about the AKP, scholars have overlooked the AWBs. Since there is only little knowledge about the AWBs, I

will start by analyzing the AWBs as a unit of political party. After providing a descriptive introduction of the AWBs, I will examine their understanding towards politics, position within the party and strategies of women for political survival by revisiting the concept of patriarchal bargaining. By doing so, I will illustrate the meaning of politics for the AKP women. For this, I will concentrate on how women in the AWBs set the game by becoming the source of the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics. Additionally, by examining the role of the AWBs in such coexistence, I will attempt to understand relationship between the descriptive and substantive representation regarding conservative women (Childs and Webb 2012: 25).

§ 4.1 Women's Branches of Political Parties

As Childs and Webb (2012) indicate that women's presence in politics is not only about being elected representatives, their activities in party organization -women's organization- is also critical to understand women in politics. Furthermore, there is no consensus about the meaning and function of the political parties' women's branches. Earlier definition of political parties' women branches, which is based on the observations about the initial forms, reveals them as "ladies auxiliaries" that have shouldered "political housekeeping" and support positions for the party's activities (Campell and Childs 2015; Young 2000). Namely, they are subsidiary organizations to support the party's main body. A more contemporary approach from Kantola (2019), based on her qualitative research in Finland, finds out that women's organizations as a "safe place" to "practice doing politics" and become experienced in politics, as they provide an education for women to learn the norms and workings of politics (12).

In the case of political participation, women's branches[2] play an important role in women's inclusion in politics. When the women's organizations have enabled women's presence in the political context, which also leads to "public questions about the need for separate women's organizations in political parties to promote the position of women even further" (Kantola 2019: 8). Furthermore, the function and role of a separate women's unit within a political party begs questions to explore its advantages and disadvantages for women politicians. On the one hand, the impact of women's branches on carrying women's demands or bringing the women issue into the party's agenda has been considered their fundamental function. On the other hand, women's organizations' presence has been thought of as a marginalization of women's (substantive) representation in politics (Campbell and Childs). In other words, women's organizations can be identified as an opportunity to advance and a risk to prevent women's position in the politics at the same time (Kantola 2019).

§ 4.2 Women's Branches in Turkey

When it comes to Turkey, women's branches are the main setting for women to participate in politics. Drechselova indicates that political parties are the key actors in Turkish politics; and that's why their position is critical to understand women's representation (2020: 52) and participation in politics regarding my research. The first women's branches were established with the transition in the Turkish political system from a single party system to a multi-party one. Since the establishment of the Republican People Party *(Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi)* (9 September 1923), it had been the only option for the voters despite the attempts of some short-lived political parties such as the Progressive Republican Party *(Terakkiperver Cumhuriyet Fırkası or TpCF)* and the Free Republican

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[2]   In my research, I use women's branches to refer to women's groups in political parties. However, the literature uses women's organization, units and branches interchangeably. Therefore, depending on my references and their ways of inclusion, I use these three interchangeably, too.

Party *(Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası or SCF).* Yet, with the changes in the party system in 1946, political parties started to include political mobilization and vote harvest in their agendas because of the competition between the Republican People Party (CHP) and the Democratic Party *(Demokrat Parti).* The CHP was not the single actor anymore, and it had to learn how to mobilize voters. So did the Democratic Party. Therefore, the adventure of Turkey's party politics started as the parties attempted to appeal to occupational groups like workers, peasants, or urban settler bureaucrats. Within this environment, the parties realized that the women voters were crucial, since they made up half of the total population. First, the CHP organized its women's branches in 1952 (Ediz 1994; 159) to appeal to women voters. Yet, the CHP defined the duties of its women's branches' as not only appealing to female votes but also enlightening those who lived in villages. Since the establishment of the Republican Turkey, the CHP had had an agenda to enlighten men based on new republican ideas, norms, and lifestyles. However, women who did not live in the urban settings were forgotten or ignored until the political parties became aware of the value of women in party politics.

When it comes to DP, despite the lack of women's branches unit in the party, it had women supporters and activists under the umbrella of the Turkish Women Union (TKB), an association established after the closure of the first political party of women. Because of the ambiguity between different domains such as state-society and political party-civil society in Turkey's political culture, political parties and civil society organizations had an interdependent relationship. The TKB epitomized this characteristic of Turkish political culture because women from the CHP and the DP were active members of the Union. As the DP increased its political power, the DP's women became the dominant group in the TKB. While they organized their events and campaigns and sustained their political mobilization under the TKB, the party did not require establishing a separate women's branch within the party (Ediz 1994; 166). However, after the 1960 coup d'état and the closure of the DP, the period ended until the establishment of new political parties.

With the establishment of the Justice Party (*Adalet Partisi or AP*) in 1961, the existence of women's branches in the right-wing political parties started. Until the 1980 coup d'état, women's branches in the AP and the CHP had appealed to women voters. Yet, the 1980 coup d'état banned women's and youth branches in political parties. As a result, the political parties established after the coup organized women and youth units under the name of commissions instead. The Social Democratic People Party *(Sosyal Demokrat Halkçı Parti or SHP)* was established as the successor of the CHP and organized a women's commission to mobilize female votes and raising women's demands like gender quotas for equal political representation. The dominant right-wing party, the Motherland Party *(Anavatan Partisi or ANAP),* sustained women's position as an auxiliary group by keeping them out of politics and supporting them to organize a charity organization that upper-class women established. Semra Özal -the wife of the Prime Minister/President Özal- was the leader of this group, called the Daisies, which consisted of the wives of politicians in the ANAP and businessmen in Turkey.

Later, Turkish politics welcomed the "Ladies Commissions" within the Islamist Parties. The Welfare Party Ladies' Commission was a turning point in the Turkish political life, for it changed the face of politics through the participation of veiled women from various socioeconomic backgrounds. As a result, politics was no longer operated by "elite" and "educated" men only. Sibel Erarslan, the founder head of the Welfare Party's Ladies' Commission in İstanbul in 1989, narrates the experiences of women as:

> She had a happy marriage and she was happy at her home, but she was also curious about the outside. She enjoyed being in a woman-to-women environment. She was leaving the house for the first time. These were very important experiences. So, I remember very well going to a meeting, let's say in *Bağcılar* (a relatively poor district in Istanbul), we explained women which bus they should take to reach the meeting place, or at which stop they should get off. They started to get on the bus, even the plane. We started

together. In other words, it was a modernization process (Interview on Skype, April 2020).

Further studies have developed a comparative perspective among the political parties from the same or different ideological formations. Çakır's research (2019) focuses on women's situation in Turkish politics regarding their existence and experience within the "men's club." She claims that politics has been designed as a men's sphere in its both theoretical and practical meaning. Notwithstanding, women have participated in politics since 1934 -officially- in the Turkish case. Yet, Çakır explains this participation as an instrumentalization of women to shape them as carriers of a political project (126). She also regards the women's branches and their design in Turkish politics as powerless and ambiguous places to motivate women for politics within the political parties (145). In other words, women have been restricted within the women's branches without being a participant of decision-making processes. They are formed as an "auxiliary" unit of the party's general and fundamental processes, serving to raise the number of the members and conduct election works in local settings among mostly women voters (145).

According to Çavdar's (2006) comparison of the CHP and the FP, women's inferiority was reinforced in these parties by reproducing traditional gender division of labor, exclusion from decision making process, and so on (cited in Tasdemir). Saktanber's (2002) research on women in the Virtue Party traces the link between Islamist women by focusing on the presence of women as symbolically feminized.

Based on the existing literature, three characteristics of the women's branches arise, independent of the party's ideological formation. First, because of the male-dominated characteristic of politics and the artificial separation of spheres as public and private reflect the separation of the spheres in the politics that squeeze vast majority of women politicians in the women's branches. Second, despite the impact of the women's branches on women's inclusion in and integration into politics as observed in the world, the women's branches in Turkey do not fit this category which stay in symbolic representation in the parliament. Third, the

main task of the women's branches in Turkey is assigned as mobilizing women voters instead of having a feminist agenda.

Indeed, until the women's organizations in the Islamist parties and especially with the establishment of the AKP, the party's women's branches were not considered as a subject of analysis. Accordingly, in the case of Turkey, scholars of gender and politics increased their attention toward the meaning of women's branches in political parties with the Welfare Party's Ladies Commission (Arat 1999; 2005). However, after recognizing the significance of women in the pro-Islamist parties, the academic interest has verged toward the new participants of politics: pro-Islamist women actors. Scholars have analyzed the motivations and activities of them, yet remained inattentive to the gendered characteristics, internal dynamics, and functions of political parties in terms of women's representation.

The AWBs' case is consistent with what women's branches mean for Turkish politics, but it also has its own peculiar characteristics. Despite the invisibilities of the AWBs in the media or political institutions, they take an active part in AKP's party politics with 5 million women members and continuously working habit. The section below describes the organizational structure of the ABWs to explore how it is institutionalized and to what extent this situation impacts the ongoing relation between feminizing and anti-feminizing process, before digging further into the function of the branches in this/such tension.

§ 4.3 The AKP's Women Branches

After the AKP established its women branches in 2005, it has applied a hierarchical model resembling the mother party's organizational structure in every level. In other words, this unit is organized as a women-based model of the mother party. At the top of the organizational structure, there is the headquarters of the women's branch. Two units, the Central Executive Council *(Merkez Karar Yürütme Kurulu or MYK*) and the Central Administration Council *(Merkez Karar Yönetim Kurulu or MKYK)* are following the head, as in the mother party. In the Central

Administration Council (MKYK), there are 50 members and 23 reserve members. While some of the members are women deputies in the parliament, some of them are only activists of the AWBs. On the other hand, the Central Executive Council is smaller than Central Administration Council, and it consists of 15 subunits[3] that have specific areas to focus on and help to organize the branches' agendas. The head of the AWBs is also the head of the Central Executive Council. Plus, heads of each unit are working as deputy heads of the women's branch.

In the headquarter level, the heads of each unit set nation-wide strategies, policies, and agendas to provide standardization across the country in terms of the AWBs' activities. Yet, in the provincial level AWBs develop their context-based agendas compatible with the party's ideology and the AWBs' headquarters general framework. Indeed, their essential task is providing a connection between the headquarter and the district level. Each level has a connection point with one above and below. For this research, I conducted my research by focusing on the AKP's İstanbul women's branches, especially its district level women's branches.[4] In that regard, I had the chance to observe dynamics among different levels, and it is easy to say that there are hierarchical links and structural resemblance in each level of the women's organizations. The former head of Sırçakapı district, Gül, who was a member of Istanbul's women's branches executive council during our interview, helped me to understand the organization better by describing it thus:

> From the headquarters to the neighborhood organization, there is the same structure. For instance, I am in the province, and we have a head and deputy chairs who are the head of a unit with their

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commissions. This is also the same in the neighborhood… We have a unique organizational structure. Moreover, it was the same when the party was established because it completed its formative period during the National Outlook/RP period. At that time, women were organized under a commission, but now we have a separate structure under the women's branches.

As Gül[5] explained, the resemblance between each level is obvious. After the headquarters, the provincial level is coming. However, while the headquarters in Ankara and the head of the provincial level are the main body that set the agenda by following the steps of the party's main bodies, the action appears on the local level. After the provincial level, the party's district women's branches are listed in the rank. The district level women's branches also have executive and administrative councils which are modeled as small copies of the headquarters and provincial levels of the AWBs and mother party as well. However, at this level, four units are absent[6] that require more national or provincial level actions. On the district level, the General secretary is called the Secretary.

After the district level, the neighborhood level is listed yet this is the less autonomous unit in the structure because the border between district and neighborhood is not as clear as in the other levels. In terms of the district level, there are 10 women on the executive council, with the head of the neighborhood. Then, according to the neighborhood's number and the party's power in the local settlement, the number of administrative council members can change. Yet, it is around 25 or more women. While the executive council members are responsible for each

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[5]   Gül was head of two different districts in the past and currently she was responsible some districts of the Istanbul as a member of the executive council Istanbul women's branches. She is a veiled woman who comes from a conservative family in Konya and went to university during the headscarf ban. Now, she is married with two children and working as a engineer besides her political life.

[6]   Head of Foreign Affairs, Head of Human Rights, Head of Environment, Urban and Culture, Head of Research-Development are absent in the organizational structure of the district level WBs.

unit, the members of the administrative council are responsible for the neighborhood to see and provide a connection between the neighborhood and the district. Each neighborhood has its own head and administrative unit with 10 women as well. The members of the administrative council in the neighborhood work under the head of a specific unit of the women's branches.

There is also a newly established level in the AWBs organizational structure which is called the ballot box level. This is located under the neighborhood level. The purpose of the ballot box level is to target people who are voters of the same ballot based on their address.[7] The AKP organizes the party politics even at this level, especially during the election campaign.
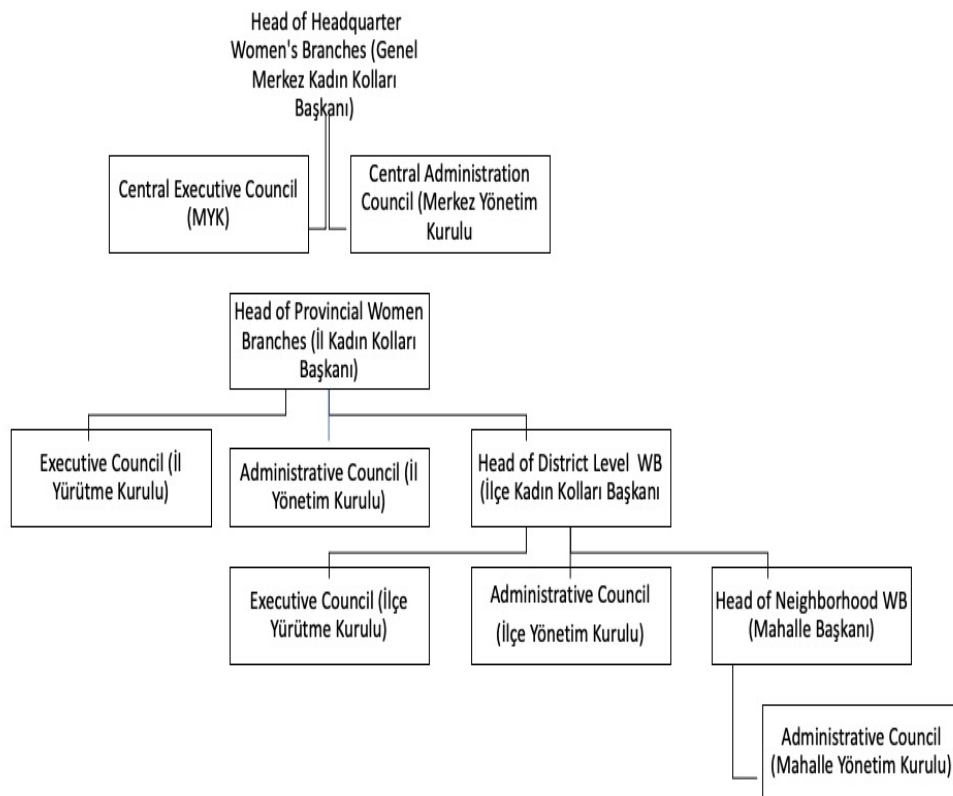
Figure 4.1 AKP's Women Branches' Organization Diagram

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[7]   In Turkey, based on the address of voter, their ballots are determinant.

This organizational structure is specific to the AKP's party structure[8], which includes women at every level by providing more places for their political participation. The institutionalized structure brings profession-alization and harmony to the party's activities. On the one hand, the party coordinates generic behavior about certain issues and conveys the party agenda from the top down. On the other hand, it increases control over the members by making them belong to a representative unit of the party. However, there is also another actor to sustain the structure: the coordi-nator. The coordinators are the members of the administrative council in the women's branches. If they are members of the headquarters, they are assigned to be coordinators for the provinces. A similar process is applied at other levels; for example, members of the provincial administrative council are assigned to be coordinators for districts while members of the district level administrative council are responsible for one neighbor-hood in their district. This is clearly explained in the AKP's party regula-tion as:

> Coordinator; was assigned with coordinating, controlling, and guiding the organizational work at the provincial, district or town level… (Chapter 18, Article 87).

The text simply explains what the tasks of the coordinators in the party are, but when I witnessed their participation in the AWBs' events it seemed more complicated than this.

On another woman voter visiting day with Aygül in Sefercik, we took the road in her car. Pınar, one of Aygül's deputies in the district, also ac-companied us. After a while we stopped to pick up someone who I did not know. Aygül introduced her to me by saying, "She is my coordinator." I was not very familiar with the title, either. Even though I scanned several webpages of the party to become familiar with the titles, positions and tasks before my fieldwork, the coordinators were invisible people. This made me curios about her function in the party, because Aygül also added

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8   Started to apply by other parties as well.

that she was charged by province. This seems like a control mechanism of the party, but as Aygül described the function, the coordinators have a dual function across the different levels.

> Gülhan[9] is my provincial coordinator. She is assigned from the province to check our work and provide communication between us and the province. There is also a coordinator for the province who is assigned from the headquarters. The coordinators are coming to work together and reporting on our work. The impact and participation of coordinators beyond their responsibilities are based on their characteristics. Not all the coordinators are as effective as Gülhan. She is effective and prefers to be with us both because she is living in this district, and this election is also quite important. Yet, thanks to the coordinators, the reporting process is concluded very fast.

In the case of the provincial coordinator, first, they convey the instructions from the province and then control the works in the district. Second, they collect the data in the field from the district and transfer it into the province.

Accordingly, the AKP has a well-organized hierarchal structure in terms of the party's organization. The organizational strength displays itself in terms of the women's branches as well. There is no gap between the different levels. Each woman is aware of her duty and responsibility. While this organizational structure strengthens the party, it also provides confidence for women who have a lack of political experience. This is also the reason behind how the AKP mobilizes women as party workers, and especially how it transforms housewives into political agents, because inexperienced women could easily keep up with the order of the party. Gül's opinion also supports this claim:

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[9] Gülhan is a middle age veiled woman. She was extremly strict while sharing her private life.

> As a person who has experienced different levels in the party, I can say that we have an organizational structure that improves house-wives incredibly.

I argue that one of the motivations of the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics is the organizational structure of the women's branches in the case of the AKP. While examining the organizational structure of the AWBs, I learned that women have their own sphere which is isolated from the party's general settings where are framed as male-dominated. This can be accepted as a risk in exchange for women's integration into politics where they are working based on a hierarchal structure. However, the AKP's organization structure and party politics rely on women's labor. To do that, the party recruits a wide range of women activists to employ them on different levels. Housewives are a major part of this labor. The party's organizational structure helps to deal with the women's lack of political experience. However, it also consolidates traditional gender roles. By doing so, the organization itself becomes the source of coexistence. Moreover, women are truly supporting this coexistence. For instance, the party and patriarchal traditions expect women be multitasking to sustain domestic obligations and political works at the same time:

> Witnessing that the head of the neighborhood are good mothers and housewives, as well as being successful in the party, made us happy. We have seen once again; our women are capable of doing multiple jobs simultaneously with their well-organized features (AK Bülten 2013b).

The relationship between the party's ideology and women politicians results from women's efforts, by making their entrance into the party represent an ideal woman. This ideal woman is a "mother, housewife, and devoted politician" at the same time. To be compatible with this identification and survive in politics that do not have a women-friendly nature, women have to work harder than their male counterparts.

According to the abovementioned identification and general patriarchal acceptance, women are in a situation in which they have "one hand tied behind" (Lister 149) because of their responsibilities derived from the traditional gendered division of labor. When I asked women how they can manage their situation both at home and in the party, many answered that it is not an easy job. However, Emine's response regarding the "one hand tied behind" position was illustrative of how difficult it is.

> Yes, a woman is making their home with one hand, and she is in politics with the other. Yet, I believe that the deficiency of the hand has never been noticed. She is always with her double hands everywhere. The hand is taking from your leisure time. In the evening, when she goes home, she is cooking or cleaning the house to prepare the home for tomorrow instead of resting or watching TV. This is how we are handling it. Otherwise, we could not.

Emine is planning her life out so that she does not miss out on anything. Women are openly showing their acceptance of being a "superwoman," which also makes them very valuable within the party. Indeed, women themselves show how they are capable of being both in politics and at home at the same time.

The AKP women are the engines of the party's local politics. On the one hand, the party should include more and more women to sustain its organizational structure, which makes it feminized in appearance. However, the heads of women's branches do not have the right to vote during the decision-making process with the mother party and do not have their own budget as a branch of the party.[10] This makes the feminization process suspicious, but on the other hand, artificial separation -even segregation- between men and women reproduces traditional gender roles without transforming women's position in society and politics. The

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[10]   This rule is specifically written in the Party's Regulation.

division of labor in the party's works is also an extension of their traditional gendered responsibilities.[11]

Moreover, the party raises the expectation for women to be more loyal and responsible for their domestic obligations to be good representatives of the party. The head of Caddebaşı district, Kamuran[12], shared her experience about having responsibilities at home as a mother and being in politics by saying:

> When I started to work in the AWBs, the relatives criticized me. They were talking like "she is leaving her children alone at home", "she is not taking care of her house and her children", "she is going out in the morning and coming back at the night". However, my children, even though they are boys, they grow up with responsibility. My older child brought up my younger... I was using my limited time very functionally. I support my children both in their social and academic lives.

She continued to explain her observations about the women in her team by saying:

> We have quite conscious friends. Indeed, organization, *teşkilat* gives this consciousness to them. They are working on such a planned program. One of them says I did my ironing before the meeting and the other says I cooked my food and then I came. You know, they cooked food and put it into the freezer to use on our busy days. For instance, some women's husbands work at different times. When her husband is working at night, he is at home

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[11] It is the same strategy for the party's gender agenda. While party defines women in society as a care person of houseworks, the same dynamics also works in the party's internal function.

[12] Kamuran migrated from an Eastern Anatolian city to İstanbul, after she got married. She was a housewife and her husband was an industrial employee. She was living in a working class neighborhood, then they moved to newly established neighborhood in the periphery of Istanbul where she started her political life.

during the daytime. So, she arranges their jobs according to this. She does her duties at home and is also here at the same time. I like this awareness. For example, today, I have a "Tuesday schedule," I mean, I have a meeting. So, I organized my home, and I did all of my arrangements about home a day before. Because I do not know when I will be at home. So, I prepared the house so that my absence is not noticed. Women in the women's branches are regarded as neglecting their husbands and children at home to be in politics. For instance, when we offer membership, they told us we could not work like you, we cannot neglect our children, and our husbands do not allow it. They assumed that we are here all the time. I told them to come and see how our works and lives are planned.

The AKP women usually mention how they have pride in their organizational capability, multifunctioning attitudes, and time-management ability during our interviews. As women, they feel they have to prove that they can be in many places and have many identities simultaneously. Another critical experience was Aygül's case during the watch on the 15th of July. She told me that she set the alarm to breastfeed her child every two hours when she was in the field after the 15th of July. Indeed, the AKP's women activists exist within the limits of the party by keeping pace with the party's "ideal" and "proper" woman definition. For this, they show their extreme efforts on being multi-tasking. In other words, they are struggling between limits and opportunities by shouldering more tasks than their male counterparts.

The gendered dynamics of the existence of women in the AWBs show up in multiple versions across their performance and activities. I will analyze how AWBs set the bargain by revealing the meaning of politics for them. Eventually, the political parties and the units of political parties such as AWBs are gendered institutions which reflect the tension between masculine and feminine identities by focusing on how the interactions between them shape the institutions (Lovenduski 1998). The well-structured and organized features of the AWB is the product of the male-

perspective despite its woman-only feature. This perspective artificially creates separate places for men and women. Whereas politics is a male-dominated environment and require a deconstruction of its gendered features, the below section will examine the strategies of women in AWB to show how they understand and exist in politics. Based on the analysis, I argue that women in the AWBs' way of understanding and existing in politics is another motivation behind the relationship between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics.

4.3.1   Revisiting Patriarchal Bargain: What is the Politics for Women?

> *The secret of the AKP's success is the existence of a dedicated women's branches organization*
>
> *-İffet Polat,* Milliyet 2015.

Over three decades, women's participation and even representation in politics has risen significantly in Turkey's right-wing political parties. One of the reasons for this is the establishment of the AKP and the party's attempts to recruit women. According to the latest data, the AKP has over 10 million members, and almost 5,5 million are women, which is more than the members of the second party in Turkish politics (Republican People Party).

Women are proud of the AKP's numerical feminization as I show through my initial visits to different women's branches, because they were starting the conservation by saying, "we are the biggest women's organization not only in Turkey but also in the world as well." As I indicated in the beginning of the chapter, the importance of *Reis* is followed by the statements of women. Indeed, I came across this similarity in the speeches of women politicians, for instance, Lütfiye Selva Çam, who was the head of the headquarters of the women's branches between 2017-2021. She pointed out that the AWBs are developing day by day by saying:

> Today we exist in every city, district and have almost 5,5 million (women) members… The women's branches have become a world brand. There is no such women's organization around the world. The number of members, reaching 5.5 million, is much higher than the number of members of all other parties.

Her emphasis on women's branches stopped with her appreciation of Erdoğan underlying all these statements, as she also added: "we ran from one achievement to another under the leadership of our President" (Taşcan 2021).

At first, these statements seem to reveal a contradiction by mentioning the power of the women's branches and then tying it to the *Reis*. Indeed, it is not a unique or incidental expressions of my interviewees and the outstanding women politicians. It is a repeated pattern among the women in the AKP. I approach this dynamic as the source of coexistence instead of a contradiction which requires analysis regarding the AWBs. This point brings me to think deeply about what politics for women is. Therefore, by focusing on three dynamics in the AWBs, which are women's understanding of politics, women's self-placement and self-identification within politics and the political strategies they use to survive, I will analyze how women are participating the game in the AWBs as the source of the coexistence. Yet, before being critical about the relationship between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics, it is important to understand that the AWBs are crucial for understanding women's participation as political agents. After that, it needs to be examined to reveal how these political agents act (Chapter V).

It is important to recall here the differences between women's inclusion and women's integration (Childs and Webb 2012: 35). The understanding of women's inclusion in politics (feminizing) positively impacts women's substantive representation. However, in the case of conservative women -despite claiming they act for women, they can act within the anti-feminist agenda (Childs and Webb). They are playing their roles in the game without challenging what the party expects from them. By

saying that, I do not claim they are simply pawns in the patriarchal setting. By seeking the "political existence/agency" of women within the AKP, I will bring two approaches together to comprehend the magic behind the coexistence. On the one hand, based on Mahmood's point of view, I follow the same road as she does in her reaction to the idea that "women Islamist supporters are a pawn in a grand patriarchal plan, who, if freed from their bondage, would naturally express their instinctual abhorrence for the traditional Islamic mores used to enchain them" (2011:1-2). While Mahmood rejects this approach by challenging feminist and secular-liberal thought, she conducts ethnographic research to understand the essence/motivation behind the women's mosque movement in Egypt. I would like to apply a similar approach in my case, simply because this is not different from saying that these women are in the AKP because they are Islamist and conservative. I am not rejecting this as a reality, but it is a reductionist and negligent perspective towards these women's political existence within the party. As I claim in my analysis, despite the conservative or Islamist identity of women, their political engagement with the party has different motivations, strategies, and types. Moreover, the conservative concern is not the only motivation for women to participate in politics, but it is also a frame within which women specify their boundaries to perform within politics (see conservative limits and possibilities section).

On the other hand, analyzing the AWBs can help us to understand women's branches' impact on women's substantive and descriptive representation. Despite the decreasing importance of women's organizations in politics in some established democracies, women's organizations are still a constant and crucial body of the political parties engaging women in politics (Childs and Kittilson). However, their impact on women's substantive representation is a debated issue. The political parties' women's organizations (branches) are not responsible or expected to contribute to political parties' policy-making processes or the number of women representatives in the case of the AKP[13]. For instance,

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[13]   It can also be generalized as a tendency of Turkish politics.

according to the AKP's Intra-Party Organization Regulation/*Teşkilat İçi Yönetmelik*, the women's branch works for the implementation of the party's policies regarding women and garnering the votes (50).

When I ask that we might rethink approaches like, "Islamist supporters are pawns" and "women's branches impact women's substantive representation". I suggest developing a perspective to clarify the AWBs' case in the Turkish context that focuses on another side of the coin. I argue that women's political existences have a complex nature which cannot be accounted for only by belief, ideology, tradition, or irrational choices. In other words, it is not a paradox; it is the way of women in politics who resist or maneuver the patriarchal norms of political and everyday life.

Therefore, analyzing women's political existence in the AKP requires not a linear explanation but a lens that makes it possible to see every nook and cranny where women's agency performs. Toward this aim, I will apply Kandiyoti's "patriarchal bargain" concept to show the acceptance and resistance strategies of women in their political existence which also enlighten the source of coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics from the women's politicians' side. The ethnographic account of the AWBs provides insight and concise analysis to understand complex and multi-dimensional relationships between men and women, and women and women as well. Therefore, I claim to reveal that the AKP women are neither submissive and impotent as they are often depicted, nor powerful or brave as they deserve. However, they are "actively submissive participants" of the game who rationally strategize and act between the limits and opportunities. By doing so, I will show how AWBs' way of political existence and their actively submissive features create and cause to continue the tension between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics.

The concept of the actively submissive participant means that on the one hand, the AKP women participate in politics through their own will, organize their own activities, have their own advantages, and make their own contributions as active political agents. On the other hand, while operating their political existence, they reproduce the patriarchy both in the society and the party by accepting that stay less visible,

underrepresented, and part of a limited sphere. The primary motivation of the mechanism is the women's attitude that "we are in politics with our female sensibility." As a common line of thought among women, this means they have an ideal female typology in their mind that is shaping how compatible they are with how the party sees women (as discussed in the previous chapter). However, accepting the limits provides a rise of women participation in politics which is what main driver behind the co-existence and derived from the women's operation of active submission.

The actively submissive feature reveals itself in the AKP women's political actions, the nature of AWBs and women's political understanding. In this sense, women understand politics as a performance in which they must be active and raise their contribution to the party in terms of garnering women. Yet, they are also aware and accept that politics has its limits when it comes to women's participation. This situation is a reflection of the bargaining of women with their party. Thus, I use patriarchal bargaining as an analytical tool. By doing so, I will investigate the context of the political party's women branches to apply Kandiyoti's concept of patriarchal bargaining. Then, I will build on the analysis by focusing on what has been established through bargaining and to what extent women's strategies and maneuvers reproduce the bargain, briefly to answer what politics is for women.

On the one hand, the AKP and its Islamist, conservative and family-oriented perspective establish its patriarchal identity, restricting women by assigned traditional gender roles according to a defined familial sphere.[14] On the other hand, the desire to win elections and the same patriarchal boundaries open women up to participate in party politics as activists. Therefore, bargaining is established within the intersection of

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[14] As I discussed in the previous chapter, the AKP's gender regime is based on conservative and Islamist identifications. To better understand I referred the Cindoğlu and Ünal definition as "the contemporary anti-feminist political moment in Turkey operates along the interweaving of pro-Islamism, neoliberalism, authoritarianism and conservatism, which generates a complex patchwork of regulatory narratives on women's sexualities" (2017: 40).

the limits and possibilities of the ideology, the tasks of women in public and private, and the mutual interest between the party and women.

4.3.2 *The Nature of AKP's Women Branches: Who is the Proper Woman for the Party?*

The nature of the AWBs takes different forms by including tensions. For instance, women are aware of their importance in the party politics, but they hesitate to reflect it openly and the fact that it is represented at a minimum level. This is very critical to understand how actively submission is established by women themselves within the patriarchal bargain. Indeed, women navigate their political trajectory in the shadow of male-domination, and they measure their moves not be understood as a threat by men in the same political environment. However, this formulation also brings up another features of coexistence which is what I analyze throughout the research. The AWBs' nature is critical to understand the relationship between the feminizing and anti-feminizing politics and the conditions of women's eagerness to participate in politics without challenging the patriarchal order. I will examine the nature of the AWBs by underlying how women are establishing it by including the statements of interviewees gathered during the fieldwork. This will reveal women's political understanding and self-positioning in the political party using survival strategies in politics. Relatedly, it is important to cover the initial point of women's journey and that's why I will focus on how they started to politics.

A vast number of women start their political career in the women's branches, with a few exceptions. For instance, Aygül's political career before the women's branches was launched in the youth branches and then she experienced the mother party. When she shared her political experience from 2002 to 2019, I realized how a woman finds herself in an exceptionally critical and vital position in the party.

> There is a [informal] woman quota for each level in the party (youth and mother party), 1/3 of their members must be

composed of women. Plus, there is a woman branch as well. Why? Because you[15] [male party activists] cannot knock on the door without women. You [male party activists] cannot set up a table in the squares. So, you [male party activists] cannot do anything without women. But I do not believe that women's place can be filled up at the party. Women are knocking on the door because on the other side, women are opening the door.

The AKP women are aware how vital they are for the party politics, because they know the difficulties that come up trying to reach the female electorate and sustain the party's political actions on the local level without them. The head of the Taşlıdere Women's Branches, Emine, shared her perspective, which also reminds us of the importance of women and their uniqueness for party politics:

Women can do the same activities that men do. Yet, our access to home as women is easier than men. When you [party activists] knock on the door, the host asks to see women. Moreover, it is easy for us to connect with a woman who has children because we probably do the same things and share the same experience.

While she was speaking, suddenly she stopped and started to think. After a while, she started to speak as suddenly as she stopped with increased self-esteem. As I understood from the atmosphere in the moment, Emine felt comfortable because of my lack of reaction while awaiting her speech and she wanted to share more with me about women's indispensable place in the party. I was listening to her without judging or criticizing what she shared with me, and this made her more talkative and open. I was waiting silently for her to reveal her thoughts; then she started to express them again, saying:

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[15] Here Aygül refers the party activists in general, but indeed here, she is underlying the importance of women activists by warning men in the party.

We are doing everything the same and also more than what men are doing. If the matters are home-visits and enrolling members, I do the same. In fact, it is easier for me than men because I can access homes easily. I enter the women's places easily. At the end of the day, our fields are wider than theirs (men).

The AKP women notice how critical their existence and political activities are in terms of party-voter relations. Similarly, the head of Çobancılar district, Songül[16], underlined her view about the women's branches' position while underlining women's accessibility inside the houses.

It is not the same as entering the house and passing through it outside. You cannot understand what happened in that house when you see it from outside. Moreover, when you enter the home, a man does not tell you something, but if a woman sees you as friendly, warm-hearted, and approachable as a woman, she can open her heart to you. For instance, women give us small notes if their husbands are at home; they invite us to come when their husbands are not at home. After that they can explain their problems and lives, not what it looks like from the outside. So, they can share their problems with us more comfortably since we are women.

The AKP women were emphasizing their importance for the party without claiming the party has to respond to this with a political reward, or they have to work for increasing women's status in politics. They show how they are critical for the party not because they are eligible politicians, but because they are eligible women. Even though women's political existence is underlined as especially critical, women's politicians such

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[16]   Songül is the one of the most interesting women who I interviewed regarding her personal life. She is living in an extended family that composes of her in-laws and husband. She came İstanbul after she married and entered the politics with the consent of not only her husband, but also her in-laws.

as the former head of Istanbul women's branches and current vice-president of the AKP, Özlem Zengin explained:

> In Turkey, male-related issues have been done. Women and youth-related issues have to be covered in politics. Who will be in power in Turkey? Does it depend on women, the changes in women's lives, and changes of democratic perception? We are here for this (AK Bülten 2013c).

It does not reveal that how the AKP responds to the labor of women. In other words, they are aware of their political impact; however, they have also been informed about the limits of their power. When my interlocutors explain women's capabilities in the AKP, they underline the difference between men and women. They also refer to the differences among women who cannot do what the AKP women perform. Özlem Zengin emphasized the expected characteristics for women who can participate in the party by saying:

> We invited everyone to join in the AK Party, but we asked them to have three things: morality, knowledge, and love for Turkey. If they have a lack knowledge, we can help them to complete it. However, if the others are missing, please do not take up our time (AK Bülten 2010b).

Beyond patriarchal restrictions, women themselves shape other women by reproducing the same limits in the women's branches. Özlem Zengin's statements are taking different forms on the district levels. Vast numbers of the AKP women are against female members smoking in the public sphere. Additionally, they do not take kindly to chewing gum in the public sphere. The primary motivation is to be a representative of the party in fields. Indeed, they see the women party workers as representatives of the party at the local level. Some heads extend the restrictions to women's social media and warn them not to share love words if they are married. If they are married, spending time in the cafes with friends is

not an acceptable activity. This is about the expected identities or characteristics of women who desire to attend the AKP and about accepting the position and assigned duties within the party.

Even though women believe in their power and importance by performing their political actions, they are also aware of the limits on what is acceptable for everyone. Thus, my interlocutors express why they are working with housewives, because according to their testimony housewives are more manageable and easy-going than educated women. As they explain, well-educated women are not doing what the AKP needs and asks from women in the field. Ceyda[17], the head of Ziyadepaşa district, shared one of her experiences in this vein by saying:

> One day a woman came to the party. She said, "I would like to work with you". It made me happy because she came to the party as I had come. Then, she started to explain, "I graduated from two universities. I worked as a manager in a company. I raised my kids, and now I have time. The AK Party is the number one party for me, and I can do whatever you want. Ask me to bring tea or soup. I do whatever you want." However, I did not believe her, although she was quite enthusiastic about being a party member. Anyway, she became a member and attended the administrative council as a reserve member. Then, she started to question why I am in this position. Then she left.

The interpretation of Ceyda's statement reveals that the AWBs' nature is shaped with the acceptance of women's places. They give consent to what the party's patriarchal frame asks from them. The woman who resists it or claims more than what she gets, can easily be identified as "unfit" for the nature of the party. This patriarchal context is reproduced by women

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[17] Ceyda started to live in an upper-class neighborhood after she got married just after her high school graduation. She was mother of three children and one of them is married. Even though Ceyda is in her late 40s, she had an early marriage experience by her wish. After raising her children, she joined working life -even though her family well-being does not need it- and political life.

who set the bargaining through their awareness of their limits and assigned roles.

Accordingly, the head of Kayabaşı district, Sevilay, revealed that determining who the most appropriate woman for the nature of AWBs' is and what is essential to sustaining the patriarchal bargain by reasoning that her preferences to work with the housewives is based on the fact that:

> Housewives are suitable for the mission of the women's branches. Every level of the AK Party has its own missions. We are ten women in the executive council in Kayabaşı women's branch, and all of these ten have to be aware of the political agenda, party politics, and so on. Yet, the rest of the women activists, like the member of the administrative council and head of neighborhoods, do not have to be aware of them. It is enough to join the meetings and follow the political agenda and activities what is assigned to them. The reasons for women to be in politics are different from men. They do not have expectations. They are not interested in financial issues. Additionally, I cannot make an architect, or a lawyer knock the doors. For instance, there was a lawyer in my administration, but she could not join that kind of party works, I mean the street works. They would like to be in the saloon events, the dinner meetings, but they were not on the street. We have another campaign to gain new members to the party; I responsible for having 2500 new members. Think, Kayabaşı has to get 3500 new members, and the women's branch has to get 2500 of them. It is not an easy job. Women are making a big part of the job. I cannot make the architect, and engineer work for this. So, we become much more successful with housewives.

It has to be clarified that the AKP women are not a homogenous group. Despite the significant number of commonalities, the heads generally have their own style and managerial approaches towards the organizations, functions, and establishment of women's branches. As my

interviewees agree, housewives are more suitable for the women's branches. Yet, for some positions, some qualifications like being educated and well written and good at expressing oneself are required. Gül shared her strategy while recruiting women when she was the founding head of Bostanlar district women's branch by explaining:

> I needed a group of women who are able to do the work assigned from the province and also a group of people who are able to go door to door. But when a woman did not want to a go to the field just because she is a college graduate, what was I doing then? I was choosing one from that friend (educated) one from the other (women from the neighborhood). By doing so, they were learning from each other. There were so many women from the neighborhood culture that you would not believe them. I think they are my gains. Those ladies can easily explain all our political structure and have the ability to persuade those who work better than many university graduates.

She also added that:

> You must have seen them in your interviews as well. Many of our head of district women branches have not graduated from university, but they are incredible women. They have talent. I would not change those ladies for women who have graduated from a university. While you are showing those ladies to educated women, you can change their expectations. I mean, they (well-educated) change their perception that "we only do desk work." When they saw each other, they started to think, what difference do I have? While they are leaving their children at home and preparing their food, and caring for their home, I [educated] am more comfortable than her [housewife] because I have a cleaning lady who comes to my house. She is doing everything at the same time. So, I can do that as well. Bringing them together is the best solution. I think this is the biggest advantage of AK Party in politics.

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This statement is insightful for understanding how patriarchal limits impact women's managerial attitudes and how they found a way to coexist with different women. They saw this as an advantage for handling their differences while motivating the educated women to take part in political actions without expectations and make sacrifice regarding minimizing expectations. Homogenizing and encouraging women to work without expectations shapes the AWBs as a desirable entity for the party's patriarchal order.

The primary principle of the nature of the AWBs is "you can earn as you work". Despite the self-recognized significance of women, this motivates them to think they have to work more to earn their political status in the party. The principal is derived from patriarchal ways of thinking and is compatible with what Erdoğan declared about the quota issue. Erdoğan gave a speech at one of the meetings which was organized by AWBs in 2008, and he explicitly shared his opposition to women's quota by saying:

> We acknowledge that applying a quota is being disrespectful toward women. This means submitting women to men's control. In other words, men will ask, and women will enter Parliament. This cannot be. What should be done instead is to clear the way for women and to provide a decent competition environment for them (Benmayor 2008).

Erdoğan interpreted the women's quota in his own way. He attributed a negative meaning to the quota by referring to it as a humiliation for women. Indeed, he believes that women can earn their place in politics by working hard, in other words by competing with men. Women are accepting and also reflecting Erdoğan's view by acting according to the principle "you can earn as you work".

Sevilay was one of the most experienced heads of the women's branch among the other women who had been in her position for 6 years in Kayabaşı district. She started as the head of the neighborhood in Kayabaşı in

2009, and then she was promoted to be the head of organizational affairs in the women's branches. In terms of women's branches, this is a pattern for choosing women for positions in the organization. For instance, if the head of the neighborhood is quite active, hardworking, capable in party politics, and has good relations with people, she can find a place for herself within the party's district organization, especially as an executive board member. Instead of having a reference from other party members, a woman can advance in her career depending on her capabilities and diligence in the women's branches. This is a repeated pattern in the political experience of women in the AWBs, yet Sevilay's case shows each step, according to her testimony:

> Since I participated in the party, my performance has never decreased. Kayabaşı always comes first in the activities among the other districts in İstanbul… Of course, this is the effort of the women's branch.

When she was talking about her experience, she referred to her and her team's diligence by underlying that she is in the position she deserved by reminding me of the "you can earn as you work" dimension of the nature of AWBs.

> I am in politics by chance. I do not have a plan for later, and I did not have a plan previously either…In terms of Kayabaşı, I sense my own worth. The party gives me enough space. I do not know the other levels, like the provincial level. Yet, if you work well, the road takes you somewhere. Yes, of course, fortune and luck shape the road, but you can get a reward for your labor.

Sevilay's experience demonstrates the typical steps in the AKP regarding women's political trajectory by minimizing expectations. In other words, Sevilay's case reflects how she believes she is in the right place, where she needs to be for the party. The AKP women understand the mechanism as working without demanding. This mechanism also reflects itself

in women's representation in the municipalities' local council. Instead of considering the importance of being a representative, they are assessing it as "the party believes that we will be more efficient here as being an elected". Indeed, both making women more efficient and also rewarding them are the motivations behind the women's representation in the AWBs. The head of Caddebaşı district, Kamuran, highlighted the importance of her political efficiency by saying:

> It is quite influential. I congratulate the people who made this decision. For instance, I am in the field all the time, and I face different problems of people. I need to reach people directly to convey a problem in the field. Yes, I knew whom to reach to solve the problem when I was only the head of the women's branches, but it was different while being elected. Being elected is useful both for people and for us. Let's say I am in the local. He/ she has a problem as personal or local. I directly send the problems of people to the relevant unit and solve it. If I am not a councilor (as an elected), only the head of the district women's branches, I can convey it, but I can get an answer lately. However, since you have been elected, you have to convey the people's problem to the municipality, and the municipality has to answer your question. The duty of the council members is being the bridge between the municipality and the people.

The decision that Kamuran referred to is including women in the AWBs on the candidate list from the winnable seats for the local election. It is not wrong to say that most of the head of women's branches in the Istanbul is a representative in local municipality and even some of them are eligible[18] to participate in Istanbul's metropolitan municipality council. Taking an active part in local politics as a political party worker opens the door to being a local representative. In other words, women understand

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[18]   Due to the election system in the Turkey's local election, the members of the provincial municipality's councils are determinate according to the party's voting percentage in the locals.

the system as being "you can get as you work". Examining the woman councilors' function and party's promotion mechanism in the AKP leads me to think about how it is an instrument for local party politics rather than raising the number of female representatives in the local council. In other words, although it has an impact on the numerical feminizing process, it does not have any substantive impact on women's status. Moreover, to be eligible to be promoted and elected, the party expects women to be compatible with the party's patriarchal limits.

Given the underlying importance of being hardworking in party politics, they also emphasize the significance of "internalization of the position". This is related with deserving what they have. The head of Sultankapı district, Ayfer, talked about deserving what you have and proving yourself to have it:

> Some of our friends want to rise immediately. Of course, we have impatient and ambitious friends as well. But we are with people who want to be with us and can internalize/*hazmetmek* this process. Ambition is a kind of an inability to internalization/*hazmedememe.* It is also very dangerous in politics. You have to come from the neighborhood, from the bottom patiently. For example, the member/*teşkilatçı* while rising from the neighborhood is precious for me. Because she came through internalizing the process, instead of someone who went to the executive or administrative council with someone's reference directly. It is not my style, and they do not have any importance for me. I have never taken such women in my team. I have not been such a person either. I have always come somewhere with my work. At the party, if you work hard and show a valuable performance in your position in the neighborhood as a head of the neighborhood, you are glaring and will be noticed. In my experience, our head of the district left the position, and the party was looking for someone. I was in a very low position, I was just a head of the neighborhood; there are administrative and executive councils above me, but they gave my name to the province with two more women as candidates for

the head of district. I was not assigned as the head of women's branches, but I attended the executive council as the head of organizational affairs. We worked very well in this position, and after two years, I became the head of the women's branches. Now, I am one of the oldest heads of women's branches in Istanbul.

Ayfer gives the impression that she is a decisive, disciplined, and hardworking woman politician. When I met with her, I also realized she has a powerful and dominant personality. Nevertheless, she accepts the mechanism in the party without challenging the patriarchy by rationalizing it as a matter of internalization. But she also underlines the positions as a reward for performance just as Sevilay does:

> If you are eager and successful, the party brings you somewhere. It is impossible to be not seen. If one does not see you, the other one can see you. I have never accepted that you will want to something, but you cannot take it. However, if you wish something, you should work according to it. We see in other parties. Two days ago, a woman became the head of women's branches; then, she was shown a candidate for general election. It does not happen in our system. Of course, it is about supply-demand. We have a lot of women and less place to rise. But also, this is not a concern for our women.

While Ayfer narrated her experience and observation with me, I thought about how she understands and accepts the system even though she, as a head of women's branches, works harder than any other party unit in the field. While she criticized other parties for their women policy, she reflected her pride about the AKP's women policy and women's attitudes towards it. She is now in a leading poising at the municipality, and according to the logic of AWBs, she gets her position as a consequence of her works by internalizing every step in her political journey.

Through the experiences of the different head of women's branches, the analysis demonstrated the nature of the AWBs by focusing on how

women understand the game and participate in it. Even though women emerge as active participants in the system and have power through their works, they reproduce the patriarchal order by their acceptance, restricted expectations and by excluding unfit women. They emphasize what they can do and what they cannot do in politics within the nature of AWBs. From Kandiyoti's perspective "women become experts in maximizing their own life chances" (280). To protect the conditions of bargaining and sustain their existing zone, they are not welcoming women who do not appear to fit the nature of the party. Otherwise, the unfit women can attempt to claim what they deserve by challenging the order. As one of the basic rules of this system, women do not claim what they deserve; they accept what they get. However, this does not mean that women are passive and submissive in this bargain; they read the system as being one in which "you earn as you work."

Moreover, women read the system without making comparisons between men and women, and they are focusing on the differences among women. Another dimension of the nature of AWBs as "internalization/deserving the position" recalls the "gender qualification gap" which means women must invest and prove themselves to promote the workplace or politics (Baurer 2020). This point of view is an illustration of the acceptance and reproduction in the understanding of women in the AKP. Without challenging the existing barriers and obstacles that derived from patriarchy, they attempt to shape women's attitudes according to what the system requires.

The nature of the AWBs, which is shaped by the AKP women, reflects how AWBs contribute to the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics. On the one hand, women demonstrate that they are aware of their significance in the party and power of the AWBs regarding the rising the number of both women politicians and voters. On the other hand, their political understanding and self-positioning reflects that they consolidate the party's patriarchal orders and limits themselves within its limits. Within this dilemma, the AKP women establish a negotiation process with the party; in other words, they set a patriarchal bargain to survive in politics. In this section, I elaborated on the nature of the AWB

by answering the question of who the proper women are to operate and sustain this bargain. In the next section, I will examine the women's strategies more closely by taking into consideration the party's Islamist-conservative and patriarchal limits.

4.3.3 *Limits and Abilities of the Conservative Concerns: The AKP Women Political Strategies to Survive*

Gender and politics studies have mainly focused on women in leftist parties (Childs and Webb), which is associated with the assumption that the leftist parties' gender agenda is more compatible with women's feminist interests than other political parties that are located on the right side of the political spectrum. Moreover, women have more of a tendency to participate in left-wing parties than right-wing ones-which is called modern gender gap (Norris 1996; Mayer 2015). While previous scholars have underlined this general tendency, it is important to note that scholars in Turkey generally take a different approach. Despite the small number of total studies that have been done on women in right wing parties, the Islamist-conservative parties' and women's issues take center stage in Turkish political analysis. One limitation of these studies is that they focus on the party's gender agenda more than women's subjectivity. This is maybe one of the reasons why the research on this topic is so narrow, because women's political trajectories and narratives in right-wing parties are underestimated.

However, Mahmood's research on the women's mosque movement in Egypt (2001), reveals that women can show their agency or resistance without needing to engage in disruptive action. In light of religion and context-based possibilities or restrictions, women have developed various ways to show their agency, resistance, and capacity to exist where they are excluded. Moreover, the organization of Islam and conservative practices within society enable different opportunities for women to be visible in the public sphere. Despite the potential threats and restrictions arising from the partnership of Islamist-conservatism and patriarchy,

social reflections of Islam and basic conservative borders also offer potential for women to be part of public and political life.

In this section, by taking into consideration the limits and possibilities of the combination of Islamist-conservatism and patriarchy in the AKP, which allows women to join politics in unanticipated ways, I will look at women's testimonies and activities in the AKP that demonstrate how they navigate and survive political life. I argue that as they negotiate with the patriarchy, they also negotiate with the party's ideological framework, and modify them in according to their own strategies. In order to support this argument, I will concentrate on the AKP women's operations as they exist within the party's conservative limits, and how they use these operations for their political survival. However, this part also explores how women's acceptance of the limits provide the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics. In other words, while the conservative limits of the party enable women's participation in politics, women's activities also reproduce and consolidate the combination of Islamist-conservatism and patriarchy by adapting to traditions, traditional gender roles and arbitrary limits for women.

The AKP's party politics, mainly based on personal visits to voters' homes[19], increased the requirement for women activists to garner the women's vote, which is the sine qua non for the AKP's party politics and feminizing process. However, the AKP's inclusion of women in politics is not about building up a women-friendly atmosphere. It is based instead on conservative boundaries which restrict the mobility of the male party activists when it comes to being able to reach female voters. Both conservative and Islamist limits ban the meeting of a non-related woman and man in a private sphere (the home) where the AKP operates its party politics. From another angle, this restriction becomes an opportunity for

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[19] I am concentrating on home-visit activities of the party organization almost each chapter by analyzing it from different perspectives. Chapter III focuses on meaning of home-visits in populism in the party politics, this chapter focuses its gendered structure by underlying its function as the AWBs' activities. In the following chapters, I will examine home-visit to show how women meet and how women voters understand this activity.

women. The interviewees echo this view of the situation by identifying themselves as a "key to reach and open the doors."

As I indicated above, women are aware of their significance in terms of mobilizing the women's vote and helping the party infiltrate society. As Aygül reminds us:

> I do not believe that women's place can be filled up at the party. Women are knocking on the door because on the other side, women are opening the door.

The expression "women's branches are the key to open doors" shows how the function of the women branches is accepted by both male and female politicians in the party. This function is derived directly from the party's conservative limits, which allow women's participation in politics and the numerical feminization of the party. However, the entrance of women into politics is not a smooth process; it includes diverse forms of contradiction within the patriarchal and Islamist-conservative environment of the AKP.

When it comes to analyzing how the AKP women exist within the party, their attitudes and strategies are critically similar to those of the senior women in patriarchal extended families and their resistance to keep the order as it is (Kandiyoti), because the AKP women in the party maintain and reproduce the conservative framework. Even though the acceptance and internalization of concrete constraints by women lead to understanding women as submissive, powerless, and irrational actors, I argue that this is not true, because they are aware that their political life depends on the conservative mindset of male politicians and conservative boundaries of political actions. Indeed, the most important work of the AKP women is their labor in the field, which is derived from conservative limits. While they are aware of the significance of their existence, they are also aware their demands can be understood as a threat by men, which can jeopardize their current situation. This is reflected in my fieldwork with a statement shared by vast majority of women: "we have to know our place." Although this sounds like a passive statement, there are

two meanings in it. One is that women say this to themselves to reflect that they are aware of their limits in politics. The other is that women say this to men to delineate the borders between men and women in politics and prove their importance to the AKP's success. By saying this, they are referring to the conservative boundaries which are vital for their political existence and their function in politics, and which men cannot fulfill. In other words, knowing their place is not as submissive an action as it may seem, because they push the limits or make themselves accepted through their work. The statement of the head of Güllük district, Aynur[20], highlights the dynamics of her experience:

> It was not easy for me to get myself accepted to the head of the mother party. Because he did not want to include me the events. However, I am a very well-known woman in my district, and women are asking about me if they do not see me in an event. So, one day, the head of the mother party and some male party members went to visit a home without me. They even did not invite me. But, you know, I was the one who organized the visits. Three men visited the home when the husband was at home, but during the visit the woman host complained about my absence. The day after, she asked me, well, why did not you come last night? I could not say it was because they did not invite me, I said my child was sick. But what happened after that the head of the mother party has never visited a home without me. He recognized my importance, even if I have to participate in the visit with my child, he has never stopped me again.

Aynur is a less experienced head than the other women, however, she comprehends how the mechanism works and how she should cope with it. While she did not say anything to the head of mother party about his

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[20] Aynur is an unveiled woman. She got married after graduated from high school and even though her young age (she was early 40s) has two school age children. She havent worked as an employee and she experiences participation into public life with her political journey.

exclusion of her in a party activity, her works and functions proved that she was an integral part of the process. The case of Aynur, even her silence waiting to be acknowledged, shows that "we have our place in politics" to the head of the mother party. Moreover, it demonstrates that women know their place which is being indispensable in AKP's party politics. Aynur's local ties and popularity among women in the district made her position vital and consolidated her place in the party. While women's activities link the women electorates and the party in society, they also create a link among themselves as well. When I asked Aynur the reason why she is popular in the district, she answered me by saying:

> I have lived here for more than 20 years. My husband was born and grew up here. He is working here and he is known by everyone. Because of my husband's occupation, I can access every home, even to people who are not accepting those outside of their own communities. I am just behaving how I am, naturally, as a woman. I was visiting them even before my political life as well as their friends. Now, I am doing the same thing with a new identity, as the head of Güllük district women's branches.

Aynur sustains her ordinary practices in the district. This is a simple version of what the head of women's branches are doing in terms of reproducing conservative limits. However, women have more specific and agenda-based activities, which are based on the conservative framework. By organizing such specific activities, women reproduce traditional gender roles within politics and apply gendered features of time and mobility dimensions. I would like to analyze how women use the possibilities that seem like dangers and restrictions for them through the partnership of the patriarchy and the Islamist-conservative framework.

During my *AK Bülten* review, I came across different activities that the women's branches have organized. Despite their various forms and purposes, many of them share the same conservative motivations and emphasis on traditional gender roles. The traditional visits among neighbors and relatives, such as for the birth of babies, condolence, and

marriage celebrations, have become a political routine in the AKP women's activities.

> Sultanbeyli Women's branches continue to visit door to door without ceasing. Their activities range from presenting the dowry of our young girls to a visit to our older people who turn from the duty of pilgrimage, from visits to newborn babies to the condolence visits to our deceased people's homes (AK Bülten 2018b).

Women as political agents still sustain their traditional gender roles, by adapting traditional activities into their political agenda. Additionally, various activities of the women's branches, ranging from home visiting to shopkeeper visiting, are organized as women-to-women activities in general. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the women-only home visit activities are also traditional events for women's socialization within the small setting of a neighborhood community. Yet, this is not simply a mechanism for politicization. It also has an overlapping meaning for the everyday life of women. In terms of the activities of the AWBs, home visiting refers to a process that consolidates women's place according to party's family mainstreaming agenda and approve women's function in the political mobilization. Women's response to this, in the vote-harvesting process reflects their acceptance of what they are assigned, as a woman within the conservative framework. Examining home-visits as a continuation of a tradition, which accept and engage traditions within politics, reveals how the AWBs are eager to sustain conservatism. Regardless of being conservative and pious women, they are also aware of the importance of their activities for the sustainability of their political existence in the party.

From the AWBs' perspective, they believe that their activities have a significant impact on people's voting preferences. Kamuran points out that, in regard to her place in the party, "people are seeing us always in the field, not only during the election period." In a similar vein, Ayfer also highlighted how these activities match the electorates' traditional expectations:

Our electorate profile is composed of Anatolian people. Their expectations is that you should be part of them and behave like them/ *hemhal olmak*. They love this. If you do not visit them, they ask you why "you do not come to my wedding ceremony or funeral. You come only from election to election." They are friendly people, and they expect the same friendly behavior from you.

The expectations of voters and the AWBs are running the supply mechanism for the party. However, women's existence in the field repeats traditional gender roles as a reconstruction of tradition in politics. Beyond their traditional visits to voters—dictated by requirements of the day, which range from weddings, to funerals, soldier farewell/*asker uğurlaması*, circumcision ceremony and so on— they also organize celebrations of some important days for conservative people. For instance, Islamist-conservative characteristics of the activities along with their political objectives come out both in the standard and the particular events of the AKP's women. Vast numbers of the interviewees underlined the important days and weeks for their political agenda such as Kamuran listed as:

As Muslim believers, Ramadan, The Holy Birth Week of the Prophet Mohammed/*Kutlu Doğum Haftası*, Ashura Days are important for me as well. Elderly people, veterans, or families of martyrs are important for the society and for us as well.

A speech by Şeyma Döğücü illustrates the importance of these special days for the activities of women:

Although it has been three months since we[21] have been inaugurated, we have had more work than other political parties perhaps that could be done throughout the year. We used the special days

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[21] When she or other politicians in the AKP use "we" they mean "I".

as an opportunity, from the Hocalı Massacre to 28 February, the 8th of March to The Holy Birth Week of the Prophet Moham-med/*Kutlu Doğum Haftası*, and Mother's Day, to knock on every door and reach out to everyone in the street, which becomes a part of our routine works. This working style has become our tradition since our establishment. Because we know that when we raise a smile on the face of every needy person, when we knock on their doors or raise a smile on an innocent child, when we caress her/his head, this is not only a political work, but we serve also all of the values we believe in. When we visit houses for our patients or for condolence visits, and we leave there, we do not aspire only to their votes but also their blessing. We hear the peaceful prayer behind us (AK Bülten 2017).

As an experienced politician, Döğücü's statement reveals that the AWBs are utilizing conservative settings and dates to reach people. Indeed, women's existence and active role in the field occurs in the limits of tra-dition. Here, I will focus on specific events to show how the AKP women set their political schedule by redefining the existing limits as possibili-ties. For this, I will analyze Ashura Days as they are used in the AWBs political activities. After that I will show how women transfer gendered divisions of labor into the political sphere.

Ashura[22] day is quite critical to observe because it has an important place in Islamic and Turkish tradition. During the Ashura day, women prepare their Ashura and divide them into bowls to distribute across neighborhoods. The AWBs in Istanbul districts organize Ashura day as a reflection of this tradition. Ashura day is described in the AK Bülten as:

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[22] Lara Deeb explains Ashura in her book *an Enchanted Modern* as "Ashura—the commem-oration of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn—is frequently taken as an essential cultural paradigm for Shi'ism, by both scholars and Shi'i Muslims themselves, including my in-terlocutors"(2006). Despite the similar motivations of Ashura practices in Shi Lebanon and among Sunni Turks, in the AKP's Ashura organizations do not include *Kerbala*, İmam Husayn or Hz. Ali into their discourse. Overwhelmingly, the organizations emerged around the "cultural and conservative" practice discourse.

This time, the hand of the mercy of our women's branches met in the unity and solidarity of the Ashura. Our women's branch organizations in 39 districts celebrated Ashura day with various activities. In their activities, they emphasized unity, togetherness, and sisterhood, and they bring citizens together by sharing the flavors of blessed Ashura (AK Bülten 2016b).

The detailed statement demonstrates that tradition is used by the AWBs. However, it has to be emphasized that it is not seen just as an opportunity for the AKP women to connect with the women voters, but also to revitalize the meaning of tradition and the consolidation of gendered division of labor within a political framework. For instance, Caddebaşı organizes multiple Ashura days instead of only a day. The heads of the neighborhood of Caddebaşı are cooking Ashura in their houses and inviting women in the neighborhood to share both food and Ashura with them. Kamuran is also invited as the head of Caddebaşı. Thanks to the Ashura event in the neighborhood, the AKP women are able to connect with women and women in the party prove how that they acknowledge and uphold the conservative limits.

Sefercik organizes Ashura event in a different form than Caddebaşı, which has the same motivation. Aygül explains the event by saying:

We find the low-income families in the neighborhood, and then we organize an Ashura day in their home. We say that our head of the neighborhood or a woman from the administrative council goes to the house a day before to prepare Ashura, and the next day the house invites her neighbors and us; then we organize a *mevlid*. In the name of Ashura, we go there to talk. By doing this, Ashura will be cooked in her house, and we will go there and have a chat.

The AKP women organize their activities with conservative concerns in mind, to be compatible with the party and sustain their existence by increasing the party's dependence on women's labor. Thanks to the Ashura

organization, women show their effort in the field to reproduce conservative motives that are also important and have a place in society and have infiltrated culture. Yet, the AKP's women also illustrate that, even in politics, they still sustain their traditional gender roles, including cooking food even while participating in the political sphere.

The cooking practice is a widespread pattern in the AKP women's activities. Ashura is one of the most inclusive activities for women to reach a large part of society and show their embodiment of traditional women's roles to the voters and the party. Besides the Ashura, women also organize other cooking activities. Kayabaşı is a critical case to see how women join politics by cooking while reproducing the tradition as well. Sevilay shared her experience during Ramadan, recounting how they rented a restaurant kitchen to cook food for needy people.

> Our municipality does not have a soup kitchen. Even if there is one, people are not able to come there, as this is a large district. So, we rented a restaurant's kitchen, which was closed during Ramadan. Then, we scheduled and made a division of labor within the women's branch, such as having a different neighbor come to cook every day. I and my two heads of the district, and the vice president, were in the kitchen every day. We cooked a three-course meal. Then, we prepared the menu for tomorrow. We cooked all of this. Also, we distributed them from our cars…. Women are doing this, women who are from the neighborhood. They are doing a different aspect of politics.

Sevilay seems to be a very successful and effective party member in the AKP, as I observed. Her activities have an impact on the district and help to shape politics without challenging the existing order in the party. Thus, on the one hand, her activities -like those of others- consolidate the party's Islamist-conservative and patriarchal concerns regarding women. On the other hand, she also consolidates her place in the party.

Other important dynamics in terms of conservative borders and women's political strategies include women's mobility and time

restrictions. As Lister argues, time and mobility limits are the specific cause of women's absence in politics (Lister). The lack of mobility of women as underlined above by Erarslan -while she narrates women's experience in the RP's Ladies Commission to go out from their homes-[23], causes limited access to public spheres for women, yet the activities of the AWBs reorganize and reshape this restriction as a source of their political activities. I attended several neighborhood meetings. Most of them were organized with a theme—like tea meeting, Quran audition, breakfast event—which are also common events in women's everyday life as they gather with their friends. The women's branches turn this into a platform for political activity. These events are organized women's homes or local buildings -in the neighborhood level- which are available for women's arrival by walk. If the meeting is organized in the district level, the party -generally municipalities- provides shuttle for participants. However, the most critical aspect of this is about the activities; thanks to the location of the event, women can easily access women-friendly political environments. In other words, the risks and limits of the male-oriented public sphere and concrete constraints generate alternatives for women's participation.

The activities of the AWBs include women who have mobility restrictions by recognizing the limits of women voters. Beyond that, these events are organized by taking into consideration another limit: time. Time is a critical concept for women in politics, which has a gendered meaning. The AKP women use "time" very wisely in their own lives; as I indicated above, they prove their multi-tasking ability in terms of being both a good housewife and politician. However, at the same time, they try to conserve the gendered limits of time in political activities and mobilization. Conserving the limit of time helps women have peace with what the order gives them. However, it also demonstrates how women navigate their activities according to the gendered limits of time in the field to maximize their interests.

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[23] Daily routine of housewives continues in their houses and the neighborhoods. They need a reason to leave their houses and neighborhoods such as visiting a relative who live another district. Being mobile out of their daily nature is not a usual case.

The activities of women's branches have been organized generally during the daytime, especially in a certain period. The open-ended feature of domestic obligations consumes the women's time in traditional gender settings, and they usually cannot find an opportunity to participate in politics. However, the AKP women cope with women's time restrictions by organizing their events or meetings along with the women's everyday life routines, which happen between 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., to accommodate when a housewife is most available.

One day, Aygül texted me very late and invited me to the AKP's local building before noon the next day. I thought she finally had free time for our interview. I was at the building at about 11:30 a.m. and Aygül had not arrived yet. They offered me a cup of tea and then Pınar came. We were talking about how she was busy because of the coming elections and how she was handling her children and party obligations. I asked who was taking care of her children when she was working in the party, and she answered, "my children are at school now. If I am late to pick up them from school, my mother-in law is taking care of them. She is living very close to me." Pınar's case illustrates that the AKP women cope with the limits and obstacles of their traditional gender roles by cooperating with the conservative frameworks even in their personal lives.

While we were talking with Pınar, Aygül entered the room. She was checking the schedule for the day, and I was waiting for our interview. But after a while, she informed me that we had another plan. It was the second time that Aygül had surprised me about the purpose of our meeting. I asked about the plan for the day, and she told me, "You will be with me all day, we are going to meet with women. Do not worry, we probably will return before your husband comes home". This was an informative sentence, but I did not understand its meaning at first. The meaning of the sentence became clear after my fieldwork and interview with the AKP's women which refers "it is important to be at home before the husband arrives".

We had several stops for that day. One of the meetings was in a neighborhood in Sefercik started at 2.30 p.m. after women sent their children to school, cleaning their home and preparing food for dinner. Indeed,

Aygül was planning to arrive there before 2.30 p.m., but the previous meeting took a longer time than was expected. Aygül was sorry to arrive late because she was aware that many of these women would have to leave the meeting after half an hour. As expected, more than half of the participants left the meeting to pick up their children from school.

Time is quite gendered and includes different dynamics when it comes to the political sphere. Yet, the experienced women in the AKP know how to use time effectively to approach women voters. The head of Taşlıdere district, Emine, narrated her one election day schedule according to the gendered features of women' time by saying:

> Our most important aim is to reach as many electorates as we can. For instance, we meet with women in the morning for breakfast. These events can be in our election liaison offices if this is suitable. If we have greater participation, we meet women at the possible local places with the motto "the tea is from us, the chat is from you." Then, we organize afternoon tea. In between these two tea-based organizations and according to their location, we visit the neighborhoods in between them. Let's say there are four neighborhoods between these two places. We think about who we can reach, and what we can do in these neighborhoods. The heads of neighborhoods help us during this time to visit specific families. Or we can also attend some other meetings that can be organized by others like civil society organizations or close relations. So, we started at 10 a.m. at the latest. Of course, we need to pay attention to the time when women take their children to school. Women are available after this time. For instance, we are going to the street market, so the street market day is important for our organized event in this locale. For example, we organize an afternoon tea event with this concern in mind. Before going to the market, women can join our afternoon tea. Or we visit the markets to reach women depending on their time constraints… When we are planning our visits, we consider this.

Women both on the supply and demand side have time limits that dictate their political activity. This reality impacts the organized events for women voters and also their intra-party meetings. Gül referred to women's politics as daytime politics. This is also critical to understanding why women choose to be in women's branches instead of other party units. They claim that instead of the other units' late activities, the women's branches' organizations are generally active in the daytime, which is a more accepted time for women who operate within a conservative framework. This arrangement regarding women's time paves the way for getting more women to participate in politics both as politicians and voters.

Therefore, the AKP women reflect Islamist-conservatist values in their political activities to seem less dangerous to men, but they are in fact determining and consolidating their place in politics by excluding men from their activities. In other words, tradition and women's roles in traditions, and the revival of this combination in political activities makes possible the protection of conservative limits and their sustainability in politics without challenging the patriarchy and existing Islamist-conservative settings. By showing that they are acting as proper women, they are increasing their importance in politics while organizing the activities that men are not able to do. A closer look at some of the political activities provided evidence of this. Ashura day is a woman-based activity and cooking is organized among women by excluding men. Moreover, the AKP and its women's branches are familiar with the aforementioned restrictions and accept women's everyday routines by arranging themselves and their activities depending on women's availability. As a continued pattern and repeated attitude, the AKP women perform political activity within the existing borders of patriarchy and reproduced the conservative limits of women's lives in their activities.

As I argue, conservative concerns prevail in the AKP women's activities and their preference for being in the women's branches. To account for the women's choices to sustain conservative limits and consolidate patriarchal order by organizing their activities within this realm, we must consider their aim to survive in the political sphere. Politics and the

structure of political parties are challenging for women, and this can be doubled in right-wing political parties because of conservative expectations when it comes to women's roles. Yet, the AKP women's acceptance, preferences, and activities are important to consider when we analyze how they are compatible with the AKP. Besides their sacrifices, double-burdens, or limitations, women are happy to be in women's branches because this maximizes their opportunities within the conservative system. In other words, women are redefining their place and limits quite effectively to sustain their political survival. Beyond these restrictions, being in the women's branches is associated with conservative concerns and is important to the actualization of women's political existence in their domain.

The conservative features of women's activities and their compatibility with traditional gender roles reveal women's contribution to the partnership of the patriarchy and the Islamist-conservative framework. This triggers the anti-feminizing process of the AKP through the activities of the AWBs, because it sustains women's traditional gender roles by basing their political activities around them. However, analysis of the AWBs from a patriarchal bargain perspective demonstrates that they have a vested interest in maintaining conservative constrains. Therefore, I will focus on women's strategies to maximize their interest and survive within politics, which are associated with their impact on the party's feminizing process. Thanks to their tradition-based activities, they connect with women who have been forgotten by politics.

While I analyze the impact of the AWBs on the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics, the analysis clarifies the nature of AWBs, and the women's strategies. However, one aspect of this process is not accounted for. The following section is designed to fill this gap by focusing on the head of the women's branches and their feminizing process to understand what makes them anti-feminist actors.

4.3.4 *Empowerment without Emancipation: Being the Most Powerful Women among Women*

Examining the meaning of politics for women helps us to understand the role of the AWBs in perpetuating the relation between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics. While doing so, I utilize the concept of "patriarchal bargain" to analyze how structure (the nature of WBs and conservative and patriarchal frameworks) enables women to keep this relationship sustainable. However, as the main actors in local politics, I have to consider the heads of women's branches to understand their function as both active and submissive participants. In this section I will analyze women politicians by arguing that they are powerful but unemancipated participants in politics.

While women establish and sustain their political existence, they must take into consideration their relations with the party, and with both men and women in the party. The above sections mainly analyzed their relations with the party and only narrowly touched on their relations with men. In this section, I will focus on the AKP women's relations with men, and how women in the party elucidate their role as both active and submissive participants in the political process.

The AKP women are aware of men's perception of them. Aynur's statement is illustrative to understand the general voice by emphasizing that:

> If Tayyip Erdoğan does not protect or support us, our male politicians do not respect us, they hesitate to behave negatively or disrespectfully toward us, thanks to Reis.

Women in general agree that Erdoğan is the one who supports and motivates women's participation in politics. Although women do not emphasize the difference between involvement and integration, they underline the importance of Erdoğan's leadership for their existence in politics. In her speech, Ayfer Yaman- one of the heads of İstanbul women's branches (2007-2012)-, highlighted the impact of Erdoğan:

> As Istanbul Provincial Women's Branches, we have accepted our culture, accumulations, and realities as the reference point. We

continue to work thanks to the inspiration of our president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan since the beginning. With the support of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, we emphasize the participation of women in politics and focus on this direction. It is essential to see and provide a transition for women from a social identity to a political identity. We are a bridge in this transition (AK Bülten 2010a).

So, they believe that they are visible and influential in politics thanks to Erdoğan's perspective on the AWBs. Emine described what she witnessed and experienced during the periods of the AKP with and without Erdoğan:

> You know we have a "three terms rule." After the third term of our president as the head of the party and president, Recep Tayip Erdoğan was replaced with Davutoğlu and he became the party's leader. I have been in the party since it was established, and I separate the terms when Erdoğan was the head of the party from when he was not. When he was not the leader, the perspective towards the women's branches drastically changed. Women were viewed very differently, namely as an auxiliary unit. Yes, we are, because the Regulation says so. Yet, the atmosphere was such that it is the same whether you were at the party or not. When our president was absent, I felt like the women's branches became a back-burner unit. After our president became the head of the party, we started to feel important and influential again.

As Emine's statement highlights, women recognize that their role in politics depends on different variables. Within the accepted conservative boundaries, they also accept the impact and importance of the leader, which is identified as a guarantee in the male-dominated atmosphere. In other words, while women have to cope with the conservative concerns and male-dominated hierarchical structure of the party, they also benefit from this hierarchy when it comes to the leader, Erdoğan, placing restrictions on men. Emine added that:

> Our value and importance come from our President. This is what he personally wants. He always asks for the participation of women's branches, both in consultation, and through invitations.

The vast majority of women were eager to share their moments with and memories about Erdoğan to explain how he remunerates them by highlighting their existence. According to Gül's narrative about Erdoğan's impact on the restriction of male domination of women, which conveys another woman's experience:

> I have been in the party for 18 years and have been in the field; our president shows the value of women through every speech he gives. He always asks the head of the women's branch to the party's events. He asked where my head of the women's branch is; even if someone does not let them in, he is sure to ask and let her in. His interest and relevance motivate us. I can see that men want to suppress women to some extent. They do not want to see women forming an opponent wing in politics. But I think our president is highlighting the women's branch to prevent this. For example, we went to an event in Kayabaşı where they did not let the head of the women's branch participate, and our president made an announcement from the bus to call the head of the women's branch.

Erdoğan's perspective on women's political existence does not only prioritize protection for women in politics, but also provides a justification for women's political participation. All of my interviewees shared the same answer about how they asked for their husband's consent before starting their political careers. The level and meaning of consent differ depending on the features of a married couple's relationship. For instance, while some of them define this as permission, some refer to it as just a consultation with their husbands. Yet, all of them underline the importance of Erdoğan in their husbands' decisions or perspectives

towards their wives' political participation. Aynur described her husband's position and Erdoğan's impact on this when she decided to attend politics:

> He did not have a positive perspective because I have two children, and my daughter was only four years old. But he saw my allegiance to my president. He is also one of his big fans of Reis. So, he accepted my political activities. Yet, he warned me that "you can be a head of the women's branch, but your leadership stays out of the door".

Women in the party can benefit from Erdoğan's influence when it comes to overcoming the restrictions of male domination in the party and at home. At this point, the understanding and perception of male party members regarding their wives' participation in politics should be clarified to demonstrate the men's perspective on the AKP. For this, along with the impact of Erdoğan, the power, position, and experience of the AKP women are critical when it comes to convincing their male party members. As an experienced woman, Kamuran shared her observations about men in the party:

> The male mentality is free from the political party and homeland. I saw it in the party. For instance, they [male party members] came to me for the first time during the previous intra-party congress term to say they want their daughter and daughter-in-law to come join me [women's branches]. I was astonished. Before that, they had not approved the participation their daughters into politics. Yet, they were coming to say Kamuran *Başkanım*, can they work with you? The men in the AKP do not want to include their wives in politics. However, the male municipal councilors and male participants of the mother party brought their female family members. I have been here since 2005, but it has never happened before. You know, during the Welfare Period, the Ladies' Commission was composed of the wives and female relatives of male party

members. It has not been applied here. But I believe it is associated with our President and his family life. I mean, this is relevant to the relations and activities of his wife and daughter in the state and the party. He also holds his wife's hand everywhere he goes. Also, his daughters are in the foreground. This encourages women and men who would not otherwise allow their wives to join them. They thought that if *Emine Hanım* is going everywhere, our wives can also come and join.

Kamuran associated changes in men's attitude with Erdoğan and his own attitudes and approach to family life. However, her political experiences and impact on the AKP's achievement in Caddebaşı prove that politics is impossible without women. Women can still encounter resistance from male party members despite Erdoğan's impact, if the head of the women's branch is not experienced. Aynur's stunning experience shows men's attitudes towards inexperienced women in the party:

When I participated in the party, it was difficult to find a woman to join the women's branches. You know, this is a small place, and we are not in power in the municipality. So, it is difficult to make the party attractive for women to join. So, I asked our male party members to meet with their wives. I am in the field to talk with women, but I have never seen their wives. Moreover, I asked them to bring their wives to help us because we lack human resources. They have never done that. I noticed; they do not want their wives to meet with me. If they do so, they are afraid that maybe their wives can change.

As a new participant, Aynur has difficulties both in her home life and in the political party organization. Even though Erdoğan impacts the political participation of women both in the political and private realm, women know that they have to navigate their own existence within the political party. In other words, they have to find a way to make a bargain with the patriarchy without speaking this aloud. Obviously, Erdoğan's impact does

not change the patriarchal norms in politics. Yet, even as it consolidates patriarchy, women see this as an opportunity for them to be in politics. The major outcome about the relationship between women and Erdoğan demonstrates women's tendency to sustain patriarchal borders while maximizing their interest when it comes to their political trajectories. However, the acceptance of the existing limits of Islamist-conservative and patriarchy does not always have a positive impact on women's political experience. Within the limits, women give their consent to not be emancipated but to be empowered as much as possible.

More detailed analysis of the AKP women demonstrates that women's acceptance is not a result of conservative false consciousness. Women notice that men tend to underestimate, ignore, and even denigrate women's existence in the party. Indeed, women do not want to give examples from their personal experiences, but they do share their observations regarding other women. For instance, Gül observed the absence of Sevilay in the election bus (above), and Sevilay shared her observation to illuminate the patriarchal challenge in the province:

> We, as women, do not find enough places for ourselves. Male domination still persists. Indeed, I do not encounter male domination in Kayabaşı, but it can be seen at the provincial level. For instance, our İstanbul head of women's branches, *Rabia Hanım*, shares something on Twitter. Yet, her tweets have never been retweeted by the İstanbul head of the AK Party. This is something that shows your value in the eyes of the male politician.

Indeed, at the beginning of the interview, Sevilay expressed that she accepts her place in politics. When it comes to observations about other women, my interview subjects reflect their own reactions and discontent with the system. This shows that they recognize the inequalities within the system, but they set their strategies individually to get the maximum benefit and achieve the highest point of their career. Gül also described the structural challenges in the system while emphasizing that women have to show more talent, qualifications, and eagerness to take part in

politics than men do. In other words, she pointed out the gender qualification gap:

> Political parties are more selective in terms of women. This is true not only in the AK Party but also in other parties. They become more selective when they choose a woman for the position. For instance, women mayors and deputies are more qualified than males. For women, parties are looking into their language qualification, attitudes, education, etc. But these are not mentioned when it comes to selecting men.

These women's awareness of the male-dominated political structure does not make them feminist participants in the system, nor does their acceptance make them submissive actors. When I questioned the women's existence within the party, I did not think of them as submissive actors. They are performing within the combination of Islamist-conservative and patriarchal order, which is ironically the reason they are able to be in politics in the first place. However, their strategies for existing in politics cause a coexistence I underlined above. The AKP women use their position, place, and limits very effectively to empower themselves even as they sustain the patriarchy. In other words, while the heads of women's branches attempt to survive within existing borders, they do not act to change them for their emancipation, but rather extend the limits for their empowerment. To this end, the AKP women construct their own space while working in the women's branches instead of struggling with the men in the mother party. Therefore, the women's branches are not the women's destiny, but rather places where women can be the most powerful among other women.

The title "head of district level women's branches" does not only refer to a political position, but also symbolizes power for women as well. Excepting the other members or party workers, women's branches have approximately 200 women actively taking part in the party organization in a random locale. The head of the women's branches is the manager of 200 women just in the one district. As outlined above, the well-structured

nature of the AKP's party organization includes a huge number of party workers. In terms of AWBs, with a simple calculation[24], in an averagely populated district in İstanbul -one with around 20 neighborhoods- the head of the women's branches manages more than 200 women. So, the head of the district level women's branches is responsible for more than 200 women, and, if she establishes a well-organized system and motivates 200 women to work for the party, in that case, she constructs support for the party in the field and can be successful within the party. This is the most important way for a head of the district level women's branches[25] to exist in politics. Along with the political performance and capability of the head of the district level women's branches, the political structure of the party allows for their visibility and empowerment among other women in the organization. Indeed, the position of the head of the women's branch can be compared to the problem of the chicken and the egg. For instance, being a powerful head of women's branches in the district is associated with having a powerful, well-structured, energetic, hard-working organization. However, to have an organization with these qualifications, the head has to be powerful to manage, control, and protect the organization's women. In this formulation, two things put the head of women's branches in a different situation, which also influences their position in the bargain. These are experiences and power that come from their investment in politics.

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[24] Nine women are coming from the executive council, above 20 are from the administrative council, and it makes almost 30 in the district level. When it comes to the neighborhood level, If the district has about 20 neighborhoods, it makes 200 female members from the administrative council of neighborhood organizations. Overall, the head of the women's branches at the district level is responsible for organizing, managing, controlling, and communicating more than 200 women under their direction.

[25] As I mentioned in the introduction chapter, district level is the most critical part of the AKP's party politics in terms of women, because party politics and loose borders between neighborhood and district, and the background of the head of women's branches (she is coming from neighborhood level) makes this level more dynamic and multi-facet with including different actors. For instance, while the Istanbul's provincial head of women's branches responsible less women than Aygül does.

When I spoke with these dominant and powerful women during my interviews, I asked them to explain how they can face and account for women's position in the party when they lack the right to vote in the party's decision-making process.[26] Ayfer's answer was quite astonishing because she did not accept their absence in the decision-making process. I had to try to understand her answer and also calm her down, because she was offended by my question: "according to regulation, it seems that you are participating in the meetings but could not use the votes to make decisions". When she saw my confusion, she took a step back and clarified what she meant by saying:

> In our Regulation the head of the women's branch is a natural participant in the mother party meeting without the right to vote. But we have. When the head of the mother party asks me something, I can influence his decision. Maybe we do not have the right in a formal way, but we have it informally. Because you show your existence, no one can ignore your existence and underestimate your power. If you are sure about your works as the head of the women's branch, you always have a voice. Everyone respects you. If your opinion is not considered, you should consider your impact on the mother party and make them recognize your work. Why? Because you are contributing to their work. You make a contribution to an election which is critical for the future of the country. If he does not take into consideration me and my opinion, ok, he knows...

After she stopped, she started to smile ironically, because she knew that without her and her teamwork, the party would not be able to win in the local elections. Ayfer's case and her way of doing politics is the purest illustration of how women establish a bargain with the patriarchy. Ayfer

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[26] According to AKP's Intra-Party regulation, the head of women's branches does not have right to vote in the party meetings.

was a powerful woman and what makes Ayfer powerful in the bargain is her firsthand experience, but also her works, activities, and relations with people on the local level. In other words, her position as a woman among other women makes her powerful in the bargain.

Sevilay is another experienced and powerful woman in her locale and a respected leader for her team. Before we started the interview with Sevilay, she introduced me to the mayor of Kayabaşı. It took more than an hour. When I was talking with the mayor, Sevilay's phone rang, and she picked up the phone. She stopped our conversation and explained to the mayor something about her phone call. The caller was a woman from one of her neighborhood organizations, and she wanted to consult about something regarding her daughter. She needed some help with her daughter's education. Without any clear information, Sevilay promised to help her and take care of it. Sevilay referred to this incident during our interview, and she described the reason behind her power over her team:

> Of course, leadership is important. To manage, lead, and give confidence to them (women) is important. For instance, you have just witnessed the issue. A head of the neighborhood's daughter will be taking the talent exam, and she consults about the issue with me. I never ignore such concerns. I try to solve their problems and defend their rights. I do not let them be suppressed, but I work them hard. Because I am working very hard… I respect them. I try to arrange meetings for women. I do not set a meeting in the evening. I organize meetings according to when they are available, for instance, in the morning after they drop their children off at school.

The relationship between women in the party is also similar to the relationship between women and men when it comes to the hierarchal situation. For the head of the women's branches working mechanism, the "I get as I work" attitude is also applied to the women's branches. Women in each level recognize that if they work harder, they get more opportunities, spaces, and chances within politics and improve their social status

as well. Sevilay's organization style brings success, admiration, respect, and trust from inside the WBs and other units of the AKP as well. Indeed, Sevilay is aware that she does not have the right to vote in the party's decision-making process, but she has her own "party" that belongs to her. At this party, she works harder and harder with her team by empowering them and empowering the AKP on the local level.

Along with Sevilay's ability in politics, she should be considered within her local setting, because she is part of politics in areas where the AKP is in power.[27] On the other hand, the heads of the women's branches, such as in Güllük where the AKP is the opposition party[28], do not have as many opportunities as Sevilay. In other words, Sevilay has the opportunity to work in a locale where the AKP is in power and she was able to establish her team by sharing opportunities and resources with them, which increased the number of women working with her. However, Aynur does not have the same conditions in her locale, which leads to her lack of power: "it is difficult to keep women here. I cannot give them a job". The stories of women's strategies and their means for existing in the party are numerous and depend on the context in which they perform them. As rational actors, women have a reason to be in politics, which is to maximize their interests as much as they can within their limits.

While women establish themselves to become the heads of branches, they aim to become the most powerful women in their districts. They shared their experience to illustrate how they interact with men in the party, but they bragged about their leadership of other women. In other words, even though being in politics has several challenges, the head of the women's branches attempts to minimize them by staying in the women's branches and making their position as powerful as possible. Additionally, they prefer to stay in women's branches where men are excluded both physically and discursively. In this environment, women can increase their power without needing to compete with men.

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[27]   Which means that AKP has the majority of vote in the district.

[28]   Which means that AKP has not the majority of vote in the district

Examining the preferences of Ceyda, the head of Ziyadepaşa district, for transferring men from the mother party to the women's branches shows some of the women's tendencies. Among my interviewees, only three of them came from the mother party instead of the women's branches. Transferring from the mother party to the women's branches is not common, because generally when women join the party, they automatically become a member of the women's branches. Even though women's branches give at least two women to the "mother party" in each congress period, their preference is generally for staying in the women's branches. Ceyda explains her own experience by saying:

> I started to be in politics as a head of the neighborhood of the mother party organization in 2013. I worked in the neighborhood during the local election, and our head of the district was the candidate. He saw my style of working, and after the election, he asked me to join the administrative council of the mother party... A woman friend from the mother party told me that, "if you want to continue your political career, I suggest you join the women's branches. You know, I am here for a long time, and there are male politicians in the mother party's leading position. They do not look at politics like we do. It is challenging for women to be elected to a place there. If you want to continue, you should continue in the women's branches." Then I decided I would continue in the women's branches, as a woman.

Women's desire to be in the women's branches is related to their plans in politics, even though they may not acknowledge that they have plans and aims. Ceyda's case shows this explicitly. I argue that women have more chances to further their political position in women's branches, because, they are more likely to further their political position there than their male counterparts, even if they start in politics at the same time and in the same position. To illustrate that, many of the heads of women's branches come from the neighborhood organization. Yet, I have not met or noticed a male politician in the party's leading position who came from

the neighborhood organization. The chance of upward mobility within the women's branch is also an important motivation for women to stay in women's branches.

On the other hand, the mother party invites successful women to join their group, but these women are aware that staying in women's branches furthers their career within the women's branches. For instance, Ayfer shared her opinion:

They asked me to join the mother party. But I do not want to go. I am a member of them as a head of the women's branches. If I join them, I should be the head or deputy head of the mother party. I have my voice in the women branches; why should I go there?

Ayfer has a point. If I did not observe women in the women's branches, I wouldn't have anticipated that women choose to stay in women's branches. Even though the party's male members tend to see women as natural members of women's branches, women have a rational reason to be in women's branches.

The main result is that women recognize the rules of the game and redefine the game instead of changing the rules. In this process, they construct themselves as harmless actors, but extend the limits of power as much as possible at the individual level. While this leads to unemancipated political agents, it sustains the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing processes within the AKP. By raising the number of women under the roof of the women's branches, women are segregated from the main party organization because they consolidate the male-domination of the other branches.

§ 4.4 Concluding Remark: How Does the Bargain Work?

The findings stemming from different parts of the analysis demonstrated the AWBs' role in the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics by underlying their existence as actively submissive participants. I applied Kandiyoti's patriarchal bargain concept to examine

AWBs, which enables me to see how the AKP women contribute to the continuation of the relation between feminizing and anti-feminizing processes through their political understanding.

First, I started to research the impact of the organization's structures on the coexistence. With this well-organized structure, as the AKP as a political party enables the participation of women in politics. There are two things that pave the way for the feminizing process in the AKP from this perspective. First, the party's political style, which requires women's inclusion and, second, the party's structure, which enables women's performance despite their lack of political experience, because they need women's labor at every level. However, including women in the party does not lead to their integration into the party's political agenda. In other words, women's inclusion in the party has the aim of increasing women's vote in the party, not by creating gender equality and representing women's interests. However, the acceptance of women's participation is a result of requirement for women's labor requirement in the field. The analysis demonstrates that the acceptance of women comes with restrictions, which reflect and consolidate anti-feminizing politics by emphasizing women's traditional gender roles in the private sphere. In the following part of the analysis, I address the women's existence in politics by focusing on how they understand, locate themselves and produce strategies in politics. By doing so, I argue that women seem to accept the rules of the game, but indeed they are actually redefining the rules as active submissive participants.

This chapter brings answers to the question of what politics is for when it comes to women. I concentrated on women's roles in the continuation of the coexistence. While I constructed an answer by combining the analysis of women's agency along with the restrictions of the partnership between Islamist-conservative and patriarchal limits, I utilized patriarchal bargains as an analytical tool to understand how the AWBs become the source of the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics.

Applying patriarchal bargain as an analytical tool led me first to understand the settings in which women operate. In other words, the

nature of the women's branches is critical to demonstrate women's understanding of politics and their self-positioning within the party, which also produces the tension. The dimensions of the nature of the AWBs are women's awareness of their significance in the party and their acceptance and recognition of the limits. These dimensions are redefining feminizing and anti-feminizing politics in women's branches, since women are representing themselves as vital agents of the party while giving their consent to the limits they must face.

Moreover, the AKP women show their compatibility with the party's gender ideology by accepting the limits and shaping the membership profile within the women's branches. In other words, despite the rising number of women politicians/actors in the AWBs, both the party and women themselves line up with the significance of women's traditional gender division of labor. Accordingly, the participation of women, especially housewives, in politics does not lead to the transformations of their existing positions. Moreover, the nature of women's branches demands transformation in educated women's lives by making them accept domestic obligations and the nature of politics for women. While women thrive in politics, they do not have an impact on structural transformations regarding gender equality or integration of women's interest in the political agenda. as the attitude "you can earn as you work" makes women active participants in the system because their political survival depends on their efforts, but their acceptance of the limits causes their submissive participation by consolidating the existing anti-feminizing process. They are not claiming, and they do not allow others to claim, that they deserve something different despite their critical impact on the field. Their acceptance and motivation for working is a sign of their patriarchal bargain and the source the coexistence.

Indeed, the AWBs have represented the women's existence in politics from different perspectives, which I consider in terms of the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing process. The coexistence in this demonstrates women's attempts to survive in politics by staying within the limits of the patriarchy and Islamist-conservatism. This chapter revealed that the AKP women operate in line with traditional settings in

society in terms of women. In other words, the AKP's women enable their political survival and the participation of more women in politics by recognizing the traditional boundaries and the obligations and limits of women, such as time and mobility restrictions. By taking this into consideration, the AKP women redefine politics and political activities for women, which helps feminizing politics in the party. However, by doing so, they consolidate the limits of the patriarchy and Islamist-conservatism by reproducing them in their political journey, which keeps them in the women's branches and segregated from the rest of politics. I would like to put a question mark here to ask how does consolidation of conservative limits and women's segregated place in politics impact women's political existence?

The analysis revealed that women are active participants in this process because they realized their political survival in politics depends on the limits of the patriarchy and Islamist-conservatism. Because of this formulation, the party needs women's labor in the field. Just as women are excluded from particular levels of politics, women can exclude men from their own realm. In other words, to strengthen their hands in the game, women consolidate the challenges. Also, this clarifies the relationship between the descriptive and substantive representations regarding conservative women. The AKP women act for women but not in terms of their social and political improvement; they act to survive in politics, which also causes the aforementioned coexistence which push women in a vicious circle.

The AKP women are aware that the AKP might relocate women out of the picture immediately, as they witnessed in the early period of the AKP. While the AKP started to negotiate or consult with the feminist organizations, the party turned its back on them because their understanding of women was totally different. However, this experience did lead to a push back effect among the AKP women in terms of formulating feminist demands, because they realized this has consequences which would lead to political suicide. Even Fatma Şahin who is known for her "relative openness to dialogue with feminist women organizations" (Coşar 2019) moved away from her position, as seen in her statement that, "feminism has so

far benefited no one, neither will it in the future". The AKP women, even the outstanding ones, do not hesitate to share their anti-feminist vision explicitly and this is shown on the local level both in discourse and activities as well.

If women are not acting for women, what does politics mean for them? As I argue, women in the AKP pursue individual empowerment instead of emancipation for women in the party. Indeed, both patriarchal bargain and the individual level reflect active submission and cause the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics, but also the conclusion of women's attitudes regarding empowerment without emancipation in politics. The heads of women's branches, especially, are the most powerful women in every level of the party organization. However, this does not mean they are emancipated from the restrictions of the patriarchy, but also it does not mean they attempt to save themselves from it. Employing individual survival strategies makes women powerful, but not emancipated in the politics. Their survival strategies include attempts for raising the number of women in politics and the irreplaceability of women's labor in politics, but do not help women's substantive existence in politics. Conversely, in the case of the AWBs, women's feminizing process consolidates the party's anti-feminizing politics by consolidating the activities of women, which shows their internalized anti-feminism. Moreover, while they see their labor as the source of their political existence, they also rely on some other dynamics to increase their validity in the party. However, their external sources, especially Erdoğan, are the main reason for the continuation of feminizing and anti-feminizing politics, because of Erdoğan's perspective regarding women's existence in politics. According to him, women should be in politics or political platforms symbolically.

Women's attempts to enhance the symbolic limits to the descriptive representation level still stay within the borders of symbolic and descriptive existences, as a result of the patriarchal bargain. Indeed, while puzzling over the absence of substantive representation of women despite the number of female political actors, this shows that feminization in politics does not prove women are acting for women. Indeed, the

relationship between politics and women inherits constant tension, because women, regardless of their ideological position, attempt to exist in a male-dominated environment. In this chapter, I did not intend to rephrase this phenomenon. However, I aimed to show that despite the number of women in politics, in the case of the AKP, this makes male-domination sustainable. In other words, I am asking what the role of women is in this coexistence by locating women as actors in the center of the analysis. The role of women does not only include their means of existence in the party; indeed, their way of acting in the party regarding mobilizing strategies is also crucial for understanding this tension from the angle of the voter base.

The following chapter concentrates on this critical question: how do women perform politics? I plan to investigate its impact on the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics through an analysis of the political style of the AKP women and will investigate instances of women politicians and voters.

5

Political Style of the AKP Women: Redefining the Borders of Politics

> *Women politicians approach mothers to hear*
> *their observations about schools and infrastruc-*
> *ture at the local level. They know locales better*
> *than us. We can hear about problems from*
> *women*
>
> -Interview, 2020

The previous chapter focuses on the existence of the AKP women in politics by concentrating on their survival strategies in the party and their impact of the women with the AWBs on the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics. However, the question that remains to be unanswered is how the AKP women perform politics to actualize their essential function in the party: to garner women's votes. Therefore, in this chapter, I will sketch out the AKP women's style in politics by analyzing particular encounters between women, including politicians and voters. Beyond that, this chapter aims to answer to demonstrate how the AKP women's political performance becomes a source for the continuation of the coexistence between feminizing and anti-

feminizing politics in the AKP. In other words, drawing on the data from individual in-depth interviews and ethnographic observation, this chapter will introduce the vivid performance of the women in the AKP to see how feminization and anti-feminization occurs in the interactions among women.

On the one hand, this chapter approaches the AWBs' political style as a reason behind the rising number of women in the party both on the activist and voter sides. On the other hand, it focuses on the extent to which this style cultivates an anti-feminist understanding along with the party's gender agenda. More clearly, while analyzing the sources of coexistence through the political style of the AWBs, this chapter touches upon absences in the link between descriptive and substantive existence in the case of the AKP, which I argue is the result of the aforementioned coexistence.

There is burgeoning literature about women's inclusion into politics as party activists to garner and mobilize women voters. Although the research in developed countries has a leading position on this topic (Kittilson 1997; Williarty 2010; Childs and Kittilson 2016; Wineinger 2022), Goyal's research (2020) draws attention to how women's inclusion into politics works differently in developing countries because of their political style. Goyal describes women politics in the developing setting (Delhi) as unscripted, loosely organized, and targeted at the neighborhood level. By applying Goyal's approach to my analysis, I argue that women in the AKP do not operate within the limits of formal politics by pointing out that the AKP's women discover a new political style that extends the boundaries of the private sphere by bringing traditional gender roles into politics. To show the extent to which the AKP's women's political style impacts the coexistence, I will concentrate on four prominent leitmotifs of the AWBs which are the politics of motherhood, the politics of neighborhood, the politics of everyday life and intersectional political mobilization.

Each section argues that the AWBs' political style consolidates the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics by clarifying specific aspects. First, the politics of motherhood is an extension of the

AKP's anti-feminist gender agenda in the AWBs' politics. Internalizing the political understanding of the party and using motherhood as a source for women's political participation causes the reproduction of the anti-feminist agenda by diminishing representation of women beyond their motherhood identity. However, bringing the motherhood dimension into politics opens a place for mothers that justifies their political existence and paves the way for feminization.

Second, as mentioned in previous chapters, the AKP's party politics is based on local mobilization, in-person communication and direct interaction between party and voters. Among the actors in local politics, the AKP women are in the leading position that guarantees their political existence by making the party dependent on women's labor. In this regard, women's politics in the AKP are defined as the politics of the neighborhood. The contribution of neighborhood politics to the coexistence is derived from the requirement of women's labor in the field. This helps the feminization process while keeping women in a limited sphere that causes an anti-feminization process regarding women's exclusion from mainstream politics. However, this section will also show how the AKP women redefine the boundaries of politics by blurring the artificial distinction between private and public spheres as an anti-feminist survival strategy in politics.

Third, looking at the lives of mothers at the neighborhood level naturally brings everyday life to the attention of the AWBs. Moreover, exclusion from mainstream politics and limiting their agenda in local politics leads the AWBs' style to focus on the politics of everyday life where they operate for women and represent their demands. The role of the politics of everyday life in the continuation of coexistence is derived from the fact that AWBs adopt traditional gender roles in the private sphere as their political style, because in that way, they are reproducing and consolidating the existing gendered division of labor. This is what I call anti-feminization, because despite the number and activities of women in the AKP, they do not attempt to change the existing order in favor of women. However, the politics of everyday life also has a feminizing dimension because it establishes close relations with women who have distance from the

formal borders of politics. In other words, through the politics of everyday life, AKP women successfully transform women from voters to political agents by incorporating their realities into politics.

Fourth, as I argue in the previous chapter, the AKP women have strategies to survive in politics which is also a source of coexistence. Their strategies do not only occur through their political existence within the party and their response to male-domination, but also as they act strategically during their encounters with women voters by incorporating intersectional attitudes into their political mobilization. The intersectional approach of the AWBs brings a dynamism to the feminizing process, because the AKP women's intersectional lens regarding women voters allows them to deepen and widen their scope by reaching the female electorate. Despite the inclusivity of the intersectional approach, it still keeps women out of formal and "big P" politics. By adopting an intersectional perspective, women separate themselves from the critical issues in politics and hesitate to bring women's approaches and interests into it which cause the anti-feminization process and lack of substantive representation. In other words, the AKP women are capable of solving problems at the local and individual levels, yet this does not have an exclusive impact on women's lives.

The coexistence within the political style of the AWBs is representing how they perform politics by achieving their main purpose in politics, which garners women's votes. In this regard, the panorama shows how they are not able to convey numerical power to a transformation in the lives of women and how they reproduce existing anti-feminist gendered structures through their political style. Women's novel attitudes and strategies are important for understanding the AKP's women-specific political style by blurring the borders between the public and private, consolidating traditional gender divisions of labor, limiting the field for women in local politics and lack of women's perspectives in politics as a reflection of their active submissive features in appealing to women voters.

Indeed, the AKP women conduct informal politics that is based on intimate, in person, local relations and social aspects of women's problems.

This style paves the way for the inclusion of women in politics as politicians and for mobilizing their votes as AKP supporters. What the AKP women do can be interpreted as "shifting the dynamics of interaction between public and private from a vicious circle that undermines women's citizenship to a virtuous circle that promotes it" (Lister 200) regarding feminizing politics. However, it is also a source of anti-feminization and lack of substantive existence despite the numerical power of women in politics.

§ 5.1 The Politics of Motherhood: Women Act as an Extension of the AKP's Gender Agenda

I conducted my fieldwork among women and at women's political events. The unexpected participants of the events or interviews are generally the children of the women I met. Bringing children with them into the party building or political events is a very common practice among women in the AKP. Not only the physical presence of children, but also the identity of motherhood is an integral part of the AKP women's political journeys. In this section, I argue that motherhood is a significant component of the AWBs' political style and contributes to the sustainability of coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics.

As I discussed in Chapter III, including traditional gender roles in politics, particularly motherhood, is one of the most outstanding motivations behind the formulation of the AKP's anti-feminist gender agenda. The AKP women extend the AKP's motherhood dimension of family-mainstreaming by adopting it into their political style. They line up with the AKP's anti-gender agenda, and in regards to the motherhood aspect, they take a step forward, because they consolidate the understanding of the party into their political style. Keeping women within the scope of motherhood and identifying them through the anti-feminist understanding of motherhood is compatible with the party's anti-feminizing process, which leads to the glorification of motherhood. Also, the AKP women transform motherhood into a source for the feminization of politics by using it as a political motivation. In other words, the AKP women

centralize women in politics as mothers, which keeps them within the limits of the motherhood identity but also enables them to participate in politics.

Indeed, using motherhood as a motivation for political action is not a discovery of women in the AKP, who are concerned with organizing social movements for a while. This has been called "activist mothering" (Naples 1992) and is a term that helps to explain:

How 'women draw on traditional female identities to justify taking revolutionary actions to improve their communities and their families' lives while in the process defying 'the dominant definition of motherhood as emphasizing work performed within the private sphere of the family" (12).

As has been seen, the traditional role of motherhood became a tool that mobilizes women from their private realm into politics. The analysis of Celene Krauss (1993), which focuses on ordinary women's movements organized against toxic waste in America, shows how ordinary women, housewives, could come together as a political group. She explains the characteristics of protests as framed "in terms of the traditions of motherhood and family" (249), which can be defined as anti-feminist. However, the other dimension of movement, which clarifies opportunities for the feminization process, includes "how ordinary women subjectively link the particulars of their "private" lives with a broader analysis of power in the "public" sphere" (1993: 249). Accordingly, motherhood can be the motivation behind political mobilization, using language, or building support for a certain group of women, and especially housewives in the case of the AKP.

When I visited Kamuran in the AKP's Caddebaşı district building, she invited me to her room. The room seemed like a usual bureaucratic office with brown leather sofas, an office table and grey wall paint. It was one of the warmest afternoons in Istanbul during early September and that's why she turned on the air conditioning at the beginning of our interview. Kamuran, as my other interlocutors, served me a Turkish coffee. When

we were drinking coffees, I was trying to get to know the room. Despite the bureaucratic atmosphere of the room, I noticed doodles on the wall, the scratches on the table and sofa. Kamuran noticed what I was looking at, and she started to explain:

> I am working here with women who are married with children. Sometimes they have to bring their children to the building. I am supporting this attitude. While children are around, they motive us. Moreover, we are giving consciousness to them about what we are doing here. For instance, I try to organize an event for needy families' children in every Bayram. As the Caddebaşı AWBs, we are collecting money and buying new clothes for children as *Bayramlık*. You know what I am doing. I am asking my women [women members of her team] to bring their children to the party building for helping to wrap the gifts. For the children, I want to give them this consciousness and feeling of happiness regarding the importance of doing something for someone. If I do not allow women to bring their children into the party, I know they feel a distance between themselves and the party and maybe they will stop coming the party.

Kamuran's perspective about the children in the party building is not an unusual case among women in the AKP. I came across children at every political event, especially those who are not yet old enough to go to school. In the *Kadınlar Şehri Konuşuyor*/Women are Talking the City event, Fatma Betül Sayan Kaya clarified the issue by referring to the children in the room by saying:

> I am really happy when I see the children in our event. I am happy because women feel free themselves to participate in our events with their children. I am happy because I was also at the party's events [she mentioned about Welfare Party, because her mother is one of the founders of Welfare Party Ladies Commission] with my mom. I know, even though they seem like they are not listening

or recognizing what is going on around them, they are growing within this environment.

In the beginning, it seemed that women do not know how to separate their private life and political activities. Yet, the AKP women's political style arises from the opportunity that comes from this blurriness between the public and private sphere. The existence of the children around party events and buildings is a sign of the redefinition of borders by the AKP women. However, this is also an instrumental mechanism in the co-existence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics. First, this allows women to participate in politics and second it causes a double burden for women regarding the accepted identity of motherhood and its continuation in politics as well.

However, the notion of motherhood is at the core of the AKP women's political motivation before it shapes their political style. Using motherhood as a political motivation, which is quite common among them, with a similar justification, they claim that they are in politics because of their children's future. As Ayfer underlined, motherhood as a motivation for women connects the importance of their identity as mothers with their place in the AKP:

> I think the AK Party is a party special to women. I think women find themselves a place here. They are here because they are accepted without any discrimination or marginalization. They believe here is the only place to best realize their ideas for this country and their children's future.

The key point of Ayfer's statement is the "acceptance" of women by the AKP without any discrimination. It is quite important, because with a lack of education, lack of time and domestic restrictions, women are excluded from politics. Yet, in line with the AKP's gender agenda, women have been accepted as crucial actors in the party without needing to bracket their identity as mothers. The AKP's attitudes and centralized understanding regarding motherhood opens a space for women in politics, but the

handicap that is motherhood becomes a supra identity of women, which eliminates the possibility for women's social existence outside of motherhood. Moreover, when the AKP women claim they are acting for women this means they are acting for mothers. More clearly, women in the AKP set their political agenda by strategizing motherhood in their political style through the inclusion of the concerns and abilities of mothers. Gül's statement clarifies how and why the AKP women adopt motherhood as a political style:

> I think women, especially mothers and housewives, face problems in person. I am the one who experiences both sides by being a politician and a mother; I believe women are touching life when they are housewives. It is our (the party's) most important advantage… Once, women have to know the kitchen where women are connecting with the economy. Women are following the homework of children. It is the same in many houses, not only in Turkey, but also throughout the world. Women can follow the political agenda by experiencing it in their houses. I see women in the field who are more capable than their husbands when they criticize, give comments, or demand something about politics. That's why women are doing politics differently than men. Our power is based here.

Gül's statement shows how critical it is to be aware of women's situations in Turkey and be able to share experiences with them in terms of motherhood. What they are doing by including motherhood into their political agenda is transforming the requirements of women who experience difficulties as mothers into an advantage for reaching women voters. They also use their motherhood identity to communicate with women, as Emine mentioned:

> We are women and mothers as well. We can easily contact women who have children who go to school… We can show empathy toward the situation of women. We can meet at a common point with a woman. For instance, she has a disabled child. Even if we

do not experience this, we meet many cases in the field which develop our understanding of the problems of women. We can help or guide her. Maybe she gets bored, maybe she needs to talk, a man does not understand her. But we can.

Using motherhood as a shared identity among women on different sides of politics paves the way for establishing a connection. As the political style of the AWBs, they reinforce this shared identity. The speech of Ayfer Yaman reflects this idea:

> I believe that we all meet on a common point. It is being a woman and being a mother. As women, we are the bearers of traditions and values, not only for the next generation but also for the nation's future (AK Bülten 2010a).

Indeed, including mothers into politics supports the feminizing process in the AKP, yet they also support the idea without diminishing women's issues at the motherhood level while extending the AKP's gender agenda, which is what makes them anti-feminist.

The politics of motherhood shows itself in the words of the AKP women: "I am a mother too, and I can understand you". Ceyda's statement helps us to understand the function of motherhood, as she expresses her reason for joining politics and limiting women's issue to mother's issue by saying:

> If I have a contribution for people's lives, I want to support women first. Because I also experienced similar problems as women. I got married and had children when I was too young. I will be very happy, If I touch and change the lives of women. You know, if women change, society changes. This is the same for the family as well. If you can develop women, you can develop a society.

While their attitudes appear to be a trigger for coexistence, they also motivate the impetus for women's political existence, which helps them to

operate in their function in the party regarding garnering women's votes. By doing so, they emphasize the significant position of women as mothers at home and they rationalize the reason why they choose mother as their political targets. From the party's and the AWBs' point of view, mothers are critical for setting the political agenda and reaching the family. Kamuran shows this is a Turkey-wide reality by saying:

> Women are quite effective. No matter if they are eastern electorates or western. If they wish, they can change their husbands' and children's minds.

The AWBs equalize the meaning of woman and mother. Further, they equalize the meaning of the mother with the family. They organize their political style to reach the mothers of the family, and this way they believe they can reach each member of the family because mothers convey what the AWBs declared to them. This is also the reflection and extension of the AKP's family-mainstreaming approach in the political style of the AWBs. However, it is not the only aspect of the familization of the AWBs political style; they also see the party as their family, which is a sign for understanding how the AWBs are redefining the politics and border between public and private spheres. Songül narrated as:

> We are here as a family. Maybe we do not see our family members as much as we see our party friends. We are spending most of our time here by doing party works with my team. But it is important that I am here because I like to be with my party friends.

Emine followed the similar frame with Songül and shared her view as:

> We are unified here with our family. I mean, we see this place as our family. We do not separate this from our lives. You see being here as your child, like your family. The party is the same age as my little child. I raise the party how I raised my child.

These statements show that both political mobilization and political identification have blurred the borders between public and private and redefined the meaning of politics and party as being a part of a family. In other words, they construct transitive meanings, attitudes, and identities in terms of motherhood, which allows women's participation in politics without discriminating against their existence, but also creates motherhood as a supra identity which renders motherhood totalizing.

> We are a big family. I am proud to be with you at such a blessed and fruitful table. There is a magnificent picture that symbolizes sisterhood and peace, and this picture is suitable for our organization. We are a beautiful and big family.

Likening the party to the family is a typical attitude among the AKP women. Besides their identification, they use the party-family analogy to express their organizational structure as well. Moreover, this resemblance enables women's existence in politics, because they can justify their existence in politics as being part of a family. While women reflect their motherhood identity onto the mobilization process, they also mention how they sacrifice their own family, as Gül expressed:

> Can you imagine that you can be here without liking being here, without a sense of belonging? When we sacrifice our family, we think that here is our family.

When I asked for more clarification, she added that:

> Even though we are making "motherhood politics" in the AK Party, we have sacrificed our children…Indeed, many of us think in this vein. We would like to work for our country by having an impact on successful things. But sometimes, we feel bad, like we cannot do our motherhood tasks. On the other hand, I feel bad if I do not work because you see how people work for the party, especially Tayyip Erdoğan.

I recognized that they have a dilemma while performing motherhood politics. However, they try to justify what they believe with what they can do without criticizing the structure. Ayfer expressed sincerely her feeling about compromising her child for political works:

> My child had expectations from me. Yet, many times I could not meet those expectations. I neglected. Indeed, my child paid the price of my political participation. Maybe you damage your child because he could not spend time with you. Yes, we are doing many things for others' children. You sustain this for the future of the country, the happiness of children, in which yours is included as well. If you don't sacrifice, if you stay behind the scenes, our country won't end well.

While women blame themselves for not responding to their children's needs, they try to see what they are doing for all others from the perspective of motherhood. However, they do not recognize that they are blaming themselves for working outside the home or they are not asking for help with childcare from the party or the government. It does not mean that they have a false consciousness, but the politics of motherhood pushes the limits of the party's anti-feminist gender agenda in the style of the AWBs and in their personal lives as well. Moreover, the formulation of "woman equals mother" and "mother equals family" causes the elimination of feminist perspectives regarding women's issues and motivates the anti-feminist process in how the AWBs act for women.

The coexistence presents itself in opportunities for women's existence in politics as mothers but bracketing their womanhood for the sake of the motherhood. Indeed, the politics of motherhood also reflects how the AKP women navigate their existence in politics by sustaining the active submissive characteristic which contributes to the coexistence as well. They represent the transformation of the idea of women's political participation by redefining the meaning of politics through opening a space for women who have a lack of education, political experience, time,

and opportunity. According to the politics of motherhood, being a mother is a critical justification and qualification for women to be in the AKP. Although the AKP's family-mainstreaming approach and the AWBs motherhood politics pave the way for feminizing politics while motivating women's participation in politics as politicians and voters, they do not pursue concerns about representing women's interests and issues in politics. Their concern is about including mother's concerns in politics, which is achieved through their political style. Reducing women's concerns to the mother's perspective and centralizing motherhood rather than womanhood leads to the anti-feminizing process in the AWBs' political style. Keeping women's issues within the limits of motherhood issues also is the reason behind the lack of substantive existence of women, despite the number of women in the AKP.

Examining the politics of motherhood shows how the AKP women's political style drives the coexistence even at the individual level. However, the activities of the AWBs have different aspects, which raise curiosity about how they navigate limits and opportunities in their political journey. In the below section, I will analyze the AWBs' neighborhood politics by referring to their contribution to the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics.

§ 5.2 The Politics of Neighborhood: Politicizing Within the Borders Where Women Live

> *We worked together with our head of neighborhood and their administration without leaving any voters not contacted by visiting neighborhood from street to street, door to door. We tried to establish ties of affection with every voter and then asked for their votes. We accelerated our works by taking support and prays via shaking hands. We reached out to our valuable voters under all circumstances and conditions by reflecting on AK Women's power during the election process.*

-Şeyma Döğücü

Conducting party politics at the local level[1] has become one of the key elements behind the election success of the AKP (Doğan 2019). What I can add to this, drawing from my fieldwork, the human resources of the AKP in local politics consist of women party members. Relatedly, the AKP women's bargain with patriarchy sets a reciprocal relationship between women's political participation and the AKP's party politics at the local level. With women's abilities in local political mobilization and the party's organizational structure, women have shaped their political style through neighborhood politics.

Neighborhood politics has advantageous and disadvantageous outcomes for women, which can also impact the coexistence. Within the

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[1] In this section, I am using the local interchangeably with neighborhood and district level politics.

context of the neighborhood, women perform in a limited and familiar environment, which paves the way for their participation in politics by helping them overcome mobility restrictions, lack of political experience and bureaucratic knowledge. Moreover, neighborhood politics is also critical for raising the number of women voters because in the scope of the neighborhood, the interaction between women from the supply and demand sides enables women's inclusion into politics. In other words, the politics of the neighborhood operate within the familiar borders of the AKP women and through a close connection with women voters. However, being in the neighborhood and conducting political performance in the locale also represents a restriction for the party's women actors because it keeps them away from mainstream politics. The locale has its own unique, close, and intimate ties for organizing a political relationship or political action. Even though women navigate their political trajectories into upward mobility, their access is still limited due to the nature and mechanisms of neighborhood politics.

Overall, the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics is shaped by neighborhood politics while the party requires women's labor in the locale to mobilize women's votes, and it also keeps women within the borders of the neighborhood. However, as I underlined in the previous chapter, the AKP women are active submissive participants in politics, and they strategize and navigate their political trajectories as rational actors. To maximize their role in politics and strengthen their hands in the bargain, they attempt to extend the limit of ordinary politics and arbitrary distinctions between the public and private. In other words, women construct the meaning of neighborhood politics through their activities as counter-public spheres; Fraser defines them as spaces for subaltern groups to discuss and express their interest in the "public sphere" (1990). From this perspective, the AKP women as active submissive participants organize women-only home meetings, events, and organizations as their counter-public spheres to perform their politics and reach to women voters.

In this section, I will demonstrate to what extent feminization and anti-feminization are happening in the AKP women's districts and

neighborhood politics where women actively operate as political agents. In terms of the feminization process, I will discuss the impact of local politics on women's political participation and operation. Regarding the political participation of women, the AKP's party structure and political mobilization requires human resources which consist of women's labor in the locale. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, the AKP organizes the party structure from the bottom up by including several numbers of party activists. When it comes to neighborhood politics, each neighborhood consists of 10 women, just in the case of women's branches. Moreover, neighborhood politics pave the way for overcoming the time and mobility restrictions that prevent women from participating in politics, and they also escalate political mobilization among women voters. Women-only organizations, in-person interaction, and door-to-door communication provide a sort of intimacy between the women on the supply and demand sides, which leads to the requirement for women's labor in the locale and increases the number of women voters.

It is not only the party's mobilization strategy and organizational structure, but also the background of the locale that plays a critical role in the feminization process. The power of the party in the locale is the most decisive factor for the feminization process. During my interviews, the heads of district-level women branches referred to the impact of the municipality on their political activities. There is an obvious outcome when the AKP is in power in the local government, the party organization, and the women's branches: they are more influential than the other locales regarding recruiting women to the party and garnering women's support. Ruhsar emphasized the differences between the locales regarding where the party is in power or in the opposition. She conducts politics in Aynalı where the AKP is the opposition and compared her position with Aygül, who is the head of Sefercik, where the AKP is in power.

> In our district, we are struggling with "*kemikleşmiş ideolojiler* /ossified ideologies". They [voters of Aynalı] see us as retrogressive groups. Even the voters are not happy with the CHP mayor, they do not vote for us. So, it is really difficult to do politics in this local.

For instance, in Sefercik, it is easier to do politics than Bakırköy, Beşiktaş, Şişli, Kadıköy [where AKP is in opposition], because Sefercik have an AK Party mayor. You [the head of women's branch in the local where AKP is in power] can lean on your back to the municipality. You can work thanks to the facilities of the municipalities. In our local, we are working with each other's strength, because we do not have a mayor. But we are working to put the AKP flag on the municipality.

In neighborhood politics, the relationship with the municipality and the party's local organization is significant for effective party politics in the field because it supports the power of party workers. Ruhsar's comparison is not a unique case. I witnessed the complaints of the heads of the district level women's branches, who are working where the AKP is not in power. They claim that "it is difficult to work with this kind of locals because we do not have municipal support." It is important to recall Aynur's statement, which underlined how the feminization process is associated with the party's power in the locale:

It was difficult to find a woman to join the women's branches. You know, here is a small place, and we are not in power in the municipality. So, it is difficult to make the party attractive for women to join.

However, the party attempts to overcome obstacles regarding the party's power in the locale by initiating the projects such as "sibling locales". For instance, Çobancılar is the sibling district of Güllük. Aynur described how crucial the sibling mechanism is for sustaining the party's mobilization in the locale among women:

You know, the municipality is not ours. We also lost the metropolitan [in 2019] and it is difficult for me to mobilize people without anything. Thanks to Çobancılar municipality, it provides us gift boxes to use our voter visits like a newborn baby or patient. You

know, our district is also different in terms of location in Istanbul. To participate in some events in Istanbul and bring women the sibling municipality is also provided the bus for us.

The dependency of the AWBs on the municipality results from their low budget. According to the party regulation, only the mother party has a budget. Therefore, the power of the party in the locale affects women's branches more than other units regarding their events organization, and mobilization efforts. It should be underlined, however, that while the AKP was in power in the Istanbul metropolitan municipality, the difference was relatively less salient than now, because the opposition districts were supported by the facilities of the metropolitan one.

Beyond the power of the party in the locale, the background of the locale itself has an impact on the feminization process. In 2008, the government legislated to establish new districts in Istanbul like Sultangazi, Arnavutköy, Ataşehir, Başakşehir, Beylikdüzü, Çekmeköy, Esenyurt, and Sancaktepe (Resmi Gazete 2008). With the establishment of these districts, the party required party organizations, which paved the way for new actors to participate in politics. Kamuran was living in one of the oldest districts, Aybahçe in Istanbul when she first engaged with politics there. However, because of her husband's new job, she had to move to Cennetköy, a neighborhood of Caddebaşı.[2] She could not continue in politics because of the lack of networks in the new neighborhood. In 2008, Caddebaşı was separated from Sefercik and the party required a new party organization and new heads of the neighborhood. This opened a line for Kamuran's political participation at the neighborhood level where she is the head of Caddebaşı women's branches. Ayfer's case is also illustrative of how the new district can open a door for the feminization process. She had lived in an Anatolian city in the eastern part of Turkey before she moved to İstanbul. When she came to Istanbul, she wanted to be active in politics. Her move to Istanbul and the establishment of the

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[2] Cennetköy was the neighborhood of Sefercik before 2008 and after that it becomes the neighborhood of Caddebaşı.

Sultankapı organization overlapped and turned into a chance for Ayfer to participate in politics. When she heard about the new party organization, she came to the party building to participate. She explained her first impression at the party:

> It was a newly established branch, but many of them knew each other from the previous organization. I was new and I was quiet. After they interviewed me, they assigned me to be the head of the neighborhood where I lived. I was shocked because I was not familiar with the party, politics, and İstanbul either. They also did not expect me much, because I did not give them such an expression.

Despite the lack of experience and mutual negative impression[3], Ayfer became a very successful party worker in the neighborhood, and then was promoted to being a member of the executive council, and then head of the women's branches, within a short time. Now, she is in a leading position in the local municipality. Despite her lack of knowledge and experience in politics, and even -according to her- the party's negative impression about her, she was able to participate in politics because of the requirement for human resources in the new district. After Ayfer became the head of the neighborhood, Turkey had a local election in 2009, and she showed her abilities in politics even in her first year.

> I was shy during my interview, but I worked hard in my neighborhood. While the head of the district had no hope of me, I was organized my neighborhood very well within 5 months. I was full of the love of work for the party. Even I finished my work in my neighborhood, I was going to others to help.

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[3] Moreover, Ayfer was lack of familiarity about neighborhood, however, she was supported by the other women in the neighborhood who are the member of her neighborhood administrative council. Ayfer achieved to transform her neighborhood network as a source of political organization and mobilization in the local.

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The party's power in the district and background of the district have an impact on the feminization process in terms of women's political participation. Along with that, the demographic structure of the district is critical for both sides of the feminization process. In other words, the AKP recruits women who are compatible with the demographic structure of the district and even neighborhoods to appeal women voters. According to Kamuran, the districts have their own characteristics, population profile, and service style. Politicians should understand and behave compatibly with this.

> I cannot be successful in Güllük, and the head of Güllük cannot be successful here as well. Neither I nor she is not aware of the dynamics of each other's locals. Of course, we have a general idea, but that is it.

Demographic compatibility and knowledge of local politicians regarding the locale are vital for political parties like the AKP that conduct personal politics, and face-to-face relations for political mobilization. Therefore, the AKP prefers women politicians according to the demographic and political structures of electorates in locales. The most salient tendency of the AKP in particular where it is in opposition, is assigning unveiled women to be heads of women's branches. I did not witness any discrimination or favor within the party in terms of women's preference for using a headscarf or not, but generally, the party recruits unveiled women in particular districts like Kadıköy, Bakırköy, Şişli, Adalar, Beşiktaş. On the other hand, the heads of women's branches in districts like Gaziosmanpaşa, Sultangazi, Arnavutöy, Sancaktepe, Tuzla, Ümraniye are generally wearing the headscarf, and beyond that, they compose of an Anatolian immigrant background according to their district's demography.

Familiarity with locales is more essential at the neighborhood level where the meaning of politics is equalized through in-person and face to face relations. Local women actors should fulfill certain conditions to be preferred for the party. My interviewees describe the requirements for being heads of the neighborhood, including being familiar with the

neighborhood's demography, being friendly, and being familiar with the local shopkeepers and bureaucrats like teachers in the schools and doctors in the community health centers. Sevilay expressed the reasons why she chose women for her team according to where they live:

> Even though we do not have to pick women from the same local as the head of the neighborhood, I prefer such. Because, at that time, you have a representative in the local she knows shopkeepers as grocers, and others, school and the president of the school and community health center. She provides easy access for us to the neighborhood.

While strategizing according to local dynamics, Gül's case reveals the most interesting point in regards to recruiting an Alevi woman for a neighborhood in Bostanlar district where the majority of the population is Alevi.

> I had an Alevi head of neighborhood. She was the first one at the party for Istanbul. But the majority of the neighborhood was Alevi. I thought I have Alevi voters, so I should recruit an Alevi head of neighborhood for there. She was quite useful to me.

The AKP women are aware that how they navigate and strategize the existing structure increases their impact on politics by making their presence felt at the local level and mobilizing women's votes. However, the nature of neighborhood politics is also helpful for the feminization process in terms of the numerical presence of women. As I repeatedly mentioned, the most important political event of the AKP is home-visits and in-person contacts to increase access to women voters. Scholars agree about the positive effects of in-person interaction in terms of political participation (Green and Garber 2004). When it comes to women's political participation, this turns into a vital instrument for reaching women in cases where formal politics barely include women. Songül exemplified

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how home visits work in terms of women voters and the AKP's party politics:

> We visit women, generally, in their homes or their small business. But generally, home because homes are essential for women. I did in 2023 home visits for the 31 March local elections. I stopped 2023, you know it is important for us. During the election time, we have a chat/*sohbet* commissions to organize home visits. We call our members or inhabitants of the neighborhood ask them we would like to visit you. If they say yes, we collect a team to visit them.

Thanks to the neighborhood politics, the AKP women establish a dynamic process where they are accessible and visible to women voters within ordinary women's living space. This is a sort of a motto for the AKP women, which is also commanded by the party's headquarters. The party highlights the task of women in the party by saying, "you have to be in the door of people during their good and bad days" (AK Bülten 2016a). Indeed, local political mobilization is quite helpful for the party, especially in cities like İstanbul which consist of more than 16 million people and have a heterogenous structure. Achieving access to people, especially women who have a lack of mobility compared to other sectors in society, is one of the critical impetuses of the party and its relations with women.

The dynamics and nature of the politics of the neighborhood reveals that the political style, party organization, party's power and the demographic and historical features of the locale are triggers for the feminization process in the case of the AKP. The requirements of women's labor, proper conditions for women's political participation and their efforts to garner women voters support the feminization process. However, the politics of the neighborhood has also challenged women's political trajectories, which constructs the anti-feminization process through this coexistence. When it comes to the anti-feminization process, I evaluate the role of neighborhood politics in terms of delimitating women in local politics, who take part in separate spheres as women in neighborhood

politics, blurring the meaning of politics and civil society and a lack of transformation in women's lives.

The literature on gender and politics debates the differences in political understandings between men and women (Childs and Krook 2006; Paxton et all. 2007). Both women and men have common and particular interests, which should be represented in politics. When it comes to the AKP's neighborhood politics, the AKP women accept the differences between men and women, yet instead of representing women's interests through substantively, they restrict their acts for women and women's concerns at the neighborhood level by redefining the social side of politics. By doing so, they motivate the anti-feminization process through their political style which keeps women's politics informal, and in social and neighborhood politics only.

This is quite interesting because, more or less, each of my interviewees underlines that woman have different motivations for being in politics and women voters have different agendas and concerns regarding politics in comparison to men. This difference constructs women's politics as neighborhood politics because they include women's local problems into their political agenda while contacting with women in the neighborhood. Indeed, the AKP women consider women's concerns and issues regarding their local experience. Gül described how women's interest and concerns are included in politics:

> Men are coming to the neighborhood after work, I mean in the evening. He knows something, but he can miss something else. For instance, he does not know about his children's school, but the woman cares about her children's school even though she works. At least she is aware of the kitchen and economy just because she cooks at home.

From the same perspective as the AKP's motherhood politics, Gül defines neighborhood politics from the perspective of gender roles. Like mothers at home, women in the neighborhood are aware of their situations and problems. Songül expressed how the party transforms this reality into an

advantage for politics: "We meet mothers and housewives to understand what society needs. They know what the neighborhood needs".

Despite the inclusion of women's concerns into politics, the party still constructs them within the women's traditional gender roles and limits of the locale. This locates women's politics out of mainstream politics, but it also causes a lack of substantive representation for lasting solution to women's problems. Despite the rise of women's numbers in the AKP as activists and supporters, their political representation remains within the framework of informal politics.

Through what women faces in locales, the AKP women activate informal networks within the neighborhood while extending the boundaries of the private realm to the public sphere. Ruhsar was also one of the oldest members of the AWBs and explained her political journey regarding how she started:

> I am living in the same neighborhood since I got married. My husband is a shopkeeper in the same neighborhood, and that's why I was very well known by people in the neighborhood. One day, Merve called me and mentioned about the establishment of AK Party. She asked me that "the party's women members wanted a home-meeting. I thought about you. Your home is convenient, and you have extensive social network in the neighborhood. Can we organize a home-meeting in your home?" I was happy to hear that, it does not mean I am eager to participate in politics, what they chose me to collect people and help people.

After that, I asked Ruhsar about how, even though she was not eager to participate in politics, she came to participate anyway. Her answer was:

> Politics is not different from what I was doing before the AK Party in the neighborhood. If you are living in a neighborhood, you should think how we can get better service. This is based on neighborhood custom *(komşuluk hukuku).* If you have it, you should consider how you can make it better. The party gave me an

identity to do that. However, I have already done what I am doing as the head of neighborhood and now the head of women's branch.

Ruhsar's statement underlined that her political participation and her works within politics are not different from her pre-politics attitudes. In other words, having a political identity does not bring procedural steps for women's political operation. Indeed, Ruhsar is not a unique case, and the vast number of my interviewees shared similar linkages between their pre-politics and during politics attitudes. Some of them were politically active in regards to the headscarf issue, some of them were participants in civil society organizations and some of them were concerned individuals of the neighborhood. Among them, the headscarf issue is the most political topic, and it is also interpreted as a human rights and religious identity issue beyond simply a political concern. Accordingly, the meaning of politics and women's politicization brings the subject out of mainstream politics, which can be referred to with a capital "P". However, it also blurs where politics starts and where civil society ends regarding women's politics. Even though this approach regarding politics paves the way for the inclusion of women in politics, it restricts their existence as well. Songül also associated the before and after of her political participation, which reflects the complexity regarding what they understand as women's issues and how they act for women's interest.

> In my opinion, a person should not be as I do not care/*bananeci*. I mean, I could not close my door two of my neighbors are fighting by saying, "it is not my business." Or, if an ambulance comes to my street, I go to see what happened. I had the same approach to society before entering politics. If I see a stranger in my apartment, I ask him/her why did he/she come or to whom?

It seems women have incorporated their pre-politics approaches and concerns in their political style. This is an expected outcome for the AKP women, because the party demands exactly what they were doing before

politics. However, this raises questions about women's existence in politics and its role in women's lives. Local politics does not require knowledge about formal politics, and womanhood and motherhood abilities and familiarity with the locale are enough for sustaining the AKP's local existence among women. However, this causes a vicious circle between women politicians and voters within the repeated practices of their interactions, which do not open a space for women politicians to act for other women regarding structural transformations.

For the AWBs, doing politics has means of connecting with women voters through local politics. This drives their political style to be active, influential, and accessible in the locale. Even though they are engaging with politics, the meaning of politics according to the AKP women should be clarified. Sevilay was very open about her political understanding, and she also described women's position in politics as "social workers," which means that she locates women in the social part of politics.

> I am more on the social side of politics. Indeed, I think most women are like this. From the ballot box level to the presidency level, women's working style is more on the social side.

Sevilay's point was about what women are doing in politics. The ABWs are conducting daily politics without setting a long-term agenda. Rather than analyzing and suggesting radical solutions for women's interest, they are diagnosing the problem in their in-person meetings with women's voters and bring solution on the individual level in a short period of time. In other words, in neighborhood politics, the AKP women's social emphasis on politics works to build solidarity between neighbors.

The essential actors of the process are the heads of neighborhoods in the locale who are mostly housewives and inhabitants of their locales. Through the head of the neighborhood, the AWBs' political style empowers itself at the neighborhood level. Indeed, the head of the neighborhood's function is critical for examining and uncovering how the party establishes the link with women voters as well. The heads of the

neighborhood under the control of the AWBs act similarly to Auyero's analysis of women's functions in Argentina's local politics:

> It functions as a source of goods and services, a safety net protecting against the risks of everyday life, one of the few remaining paths of social mobility, and a solidaristic community that stands in opposition to the hardship and exclusion visited in poor and needy areas. This net concentrates (monopolizes) information and depends to a great extent on state resources (2000: 57).

The local activists are aware of the problems and needs of the local people. To some extent, they can solve problems and bring remedies. Yet, when the problem exceeds one woman's power, she knows who can solve it. Besides the fact that this shakes the existing structure of traditional politics, it does not introduce permanent solutions or substantive actions for women's lives. Moreover, it makes women who are in trouble and face problems in their lives dependent on the AKP for solutions. This mechanism empowers the heads of neighborhoods among other women, but it is still confusing whether or not they are emancipated. Gül described the political learning process of the head of neighborhood as:

> Along with the AK Party, women's self-esteem increased. I mean, with the organizational structure, we choose the head of the neighborhood. Then we inform them to establish their administration in the neighborhood. To do that, they go to their neighbors and relatives. Now, they have a title. From the head to the members in the neighborhood. Each of them has its own title. We establish advisory councils that consist of the neighborhood administrations to learn the local problems. Since the citizens know that they are working in the party, they conveyed their problems to them. They do not any training to work like this. They are getting familiar with hierarchical order during the process while bringing problems and participating in their solution. By doing so, they become an internal actor in her society.

The position of the head of the neighborhood is consolidated and this woman is empowered within the party and within her locale. However, her political position does not bring any transformative and substantive impact on lives of women in the neighborhood beyond the cyclical reproduction of the mechanism in the locale. The party, on the other hand, motivates the existence of the head of the neighborhood.

The head of the İstanbul women's branch Rabia İlhan Kalander (2019-) gave a speech in a meeting that underlined the significance of the heads of the neighborhoods in the party's organizational structure:

> Neighborhood organizations of our AK Party's women's branches are both the backbone of our party, and the veins of that spread around (AK Bülten 2019b).

The party has established a mechanism to compensate for the lack of women's representation in formal politics by dignifying their existing and unchanging participation in politics. This is occurring even at the Erdoğan level. On the 1st of January 2022, Erdoğan visited the oldest head of the neighborhood in-person, Hatem Kurt (TRT Haber 2022). She has been working as the head of the neighborhood since the establishment of the party. Despite her 20 years of work, she is still at the bottom level of politics and working happily without expecting any elected position. What makes her motivated to be in politics is also the cause of the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics at the local level.

Individual level empowerment is critical for the source of women's motivation in the AKP. The meaning of empowerment is quite similar to what the head of district women's branches are doing: empowerment without emancipation. All women in the AKP are the most powerful women in their settings, where they are responsible for doing politics. During my AKP building visits, I came across several women who are working at the district level or neighborhood level. For me, it was difficult to distinguish them or categorize them according to their hierarchy because they call each other *başkanım*. I was confused and thinking about

how this can be possible and how all of them can be the leader at the same time. I asked Aygül the reason why women are calling each other *başkanım*, and she answered me seriously:

> Because they are. They are heads of different units in the organization. A woman can be head of the neighborhood or be head of social affairs in the neighborhood or district, or province. Each of them *başkan* of their level.

Indeed, they really are. Even though they are vice heads alongside Aygül in the district, they are the heads of a unit in the executive council. Moreover, 10 women in the neighborhood are also the heads of particular units in their own settings. Therefore, women empower themselves under the title of *başkan* and navigate their political trajectories as the most powerful woman in her setting without challenging the system. Sibel Erarslan also shared her astonishment with me about her latest observation regarding the AKP women by underlining what it means to have a new identity and belonging within the party:

> I participated in a fieldwork with AK Party. One of the members of neighborhood organization calls other as *başkanım*. One calls her my *başkanım*, the other calls her my *başkanım*. It was amazing. It is not district, not the headquarter. Think, it is the beginning of where capillaries start. For that woman, being the head of a neighborhood is something like being Tayyip Erdoğan in that neighborhood. There are inspirations from that great piece of soul. These were psychologically empowered and evolved into sociological strength.

Erarslan's observation demonstrates the identification of women at the neighborhood level. Indeed, during my interviews with women voter, one of my interviewees was the former head of the neighborhood in İstanbul, Rüzgarbahçe district, Ayşe.

When Ayşe described her feelings in the field as a head of the neighborhood, she saw herself not as Ayşe, but as Erdoğan. Putting her hand on her heart, she said loudly:

> I am Erdoğan, I am carrying him while I am in the neighborhood. Not only me, but each of my friends also does the same thing, feels the same thing, and shares the same responsibility towards the party. Otherwise, it is impossible to sustain a party for long years.

I met with Ayşe in a café in the center of Rüzgarbahçe. Despite the people around, she spoke very openly and energetically, especially when she mentioned her political experience in the AKP. That moment reminded me that women's enthusiasm in politics, regardless of their level and position in politics, reveals their individual self-realization. They realize themselves by having power, being a social actor, doing something for people and recognizing themselves as critical actors in the party.

While this section revealed the role of local politics in the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics, I highlighted the abilities and restrictions of local politics and also the behavior of the party and actors at the local level. Despite the limits of local politics, the AKP women find a way to mobilize women voters and recruit new activists as their local representatives. Hyatt introduced the concept of "accidental activism," which explains that "women who previously did not see themselves as in any way political are becoming advocates for social change" (Lister 1998:232 cited in Hyatt 1992:6). Yet, when they increase their existence, effectiveness, and mobility in politics through performance in local areas, they pave the way for "becoming an activist". Especially belonging to a community, a neighborhood, or a specific social group provides a sense of belonging and the ability to establish an informal network.

Attempting to question the role of women's branches in the representation of women reveals that women's function in politics is not to represent women's demand or interests in politics, but to act for mobilizing women by starting from the local level. By doing so, they are using diverse mechanisms to apply neighborhood networks, redefine politics and

empower themselves, but their existence in politics remains at the descriptive level without making any substantial transformation. Indeed, they do not attempt to change this vicious circle, rather they reproduce it, and consolidate their local existence by dealing with the daily problems of women which require sudden solutions. Without producing structural transformation or integration of women's issues into the system, the AKP women conduct their local politics by strategically within the limits and opportunities which provides a coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics.

§ 5.3 The Politics of Everyday Life: Consolidating Traditional Gender Roles in the Politics

When we talk about politics, the ballot, the elections, and hurry comes to our mind. Yet, politics is a condition of life, a way of life... As a child, as a daughter, as a student, and even as a mother, we are practicing politics where we locate. We always emphasize what we do. As women did not expect any reward while doing our job, what was important was the work itself rather than the result of that job; knocking on that door was making that visit.

-AK Bülten, 2013

Focusing on the AWBs' political style reveals the mechanisms behind their identification, settings, and concerns. The analysis of motherhood and neighborhood politics revealed the role of AWBs' political style in the coexistence by underlining what raises the number of women

(feminizing) in both sides and what causes the sustainability of anti-feminism in party politics.

As the natural result of the AWBs' political style, the AKP women's activities in local settings and framing notions of motherhood bring the construction of traditional gender roles within politics, which establish an interaction in the "complex relationship between everyday life and the larger structures of public power" (Lister 250). Redefining the borders of formal politics by extending the limits of the private sphere to the public realm is the key component of the political style of the AKP women and its dynamic process. Despite their institutional existence and hierarchical organizational structure, they conduct their political style based on an intimate and close relationship among women and in the local setting. By doing so, the AKP women are articulating cultural domains, personal problems, and local requirements as the main issue of politics. In other words, when they incorporate the components of everyday life into politics, they consider cultural, material, and personal needs by raising their importance, function, and the number of women within politics. However, the daily base of feminization produces anti-feminization by integrating traditional gender roles into politics without transforming women's interests and concerns into the substantive representation level.

Briefly, AWBs operate based on women's demands, which come from the locale and are generally framed within the requirements of women's day to day lives. Despite the political agenda of the headquarters or provincial AWBs, their activities are shaped in regard to women's everyday lives. Indeed, even headquarter decide women's activities regarding the information flow from the local levels. Ruhsar's statement enlightens the flow that makes the information from everyday life critical in the AWBs' activities:

> Thanks to our organizational structure, we can easily send and receive the data within the party. For instance, we call our neighborhood organizations our margraves. They collect the data from the bottom. Thanks to the responsible people at each level, they

provide the information flow from bottom to up, and vice versa...
Information from the neighborhood is coming to the district, then
we are sending them to the province and then sending them to the
headquarters. I always suggest my friend [the head of the neigh-
borhood], you should act as a city surveillance camera in the
neighborhood. You should know every action, problem, event. We
have to discern the negative atmosphere before bad things hap-
pen.

Ruhsar identified the heads of neighborhoods as a *city surveillance cam-
era* in the neighborhood, which assigns them to be active and aware of
the women living in the locale. The AWBs, and the AKP's party politics
attempt to compensate for the lack of institutional structure and the wel-
fare state by allying with women activists. Beyond these women, the lack
of knowledge at the voter level makes the AKP women essential for com-
munication between the government and citizen levels. The existence of
the AKP women in the everyday lives of women voters raises both women
voters' and politicians' importance in the party, which I underline as the
impact of everyday life politics on the feminization process. Moreover, the
AKP women discover how to be important actors in the field by fulfilling
the locales' vital requirements and embedding everyday life into their po-
litical agenda. By doing so, the AKP women reproduce traditional gender
roles at the political level and reduce women's concerns and issues re-
garding everyday life problems, which I relate it with the anti-feminiza-
tion process. More specifically, I will examine how women provide both
feminization and anti-feminization by incorporating daily-life realities
into their activities.

The most assertive characteristic of the AWBs is their ability to access
women in the neighborhood. The political style of the AWBs contributes
to enhancing women's participation in politics and increasing their rela-
tions with women voters. Women's familiarity with their locale and
women's everyday life experiences promotes communication and raises
the impact of the AKP women on women's lives. As a political action, the
AKP women use a common language with women voters and bring quick

remedies to local people. Thanks to their ability to be a city surveillance camera in their neighborhoods, they are aware of local problems, people in need, and the requirements of the locale; in other words, the AKP's women have insight that can help to reveal the characteristics and needs of the locale.

Furthermore, they organize *point shot visits,* which are visits directly to the houses of people who have been detected by the party's head of neighborhood as being in need. Ruhsar described her system in Aynalı by saying:

> We have access to everyone, and everyone has access to us. Not only me, but every woman who are in a leading position in the AK Party's organizations has information about their locales regarding who needs what. You cannot imagine what we come across in the houses. If you only knew how they live, what they need. We are not sharing every activity on our social media accounts. We work with the motto "What one hand gives the other will not see". A few days ago, we donated a wheelchair for a young girl. She is very beautiful, and she was very grateful. She thanked us and our president several times. So, that's why I am in politics: to touch people's lives.

Ruhsar narrated a very brief incident. However, her explanation leads to confusion about the place of women's branches, which are between political organizations and charity organizations. Indeed, the AWBs shape their identity through the stratified features of everyday life, and they can be selective within this multi-faceted environment depending on events. Ruhsar's case shed light on the fact that they are part of the life of the people, and they are helpful with whatever people need. They do not want to publicize their activities in order to avoid damaging people's anonymity, but they know that they and their activities will be known by the local people.

Beyond Ruhsar's specific and point shot visit, Kamuran described another aspect of the AWBs working style by framing cultural notions in women's everyday life:

> We never miss newborn babies; our municipality even has a "newborn baby kit". We never miss a funeral or weddings. We visit the mothers of martyrs, war veterans, and the disabled on mothers' day. We visit our older people on different days.

Both Kamuran and Ruhsar clarified that AWBs work by including people, and especially women's, everyday lives in their political agenda from cultural or personal aspects. They do this to sustain their existence and also raise support among women. However, their inclusion of women's concerns into politics does not have a substantive impact on women's lives. They bring solutions to women's problems, which reproduce structural disadvantages by glorifying traditional gender roles, as in the case of celebrating newborn babies or visiting mothers who have disabled children.

Kamuran added that:

> These events and works help us in the field during election time, I mean, they provide returns when we ask them to vote for us. Also, we express ourselves by saying that we are in politics; we are doing politics as well. We participate in every work in the public realm. Our president tells us to be with the people.

From top to bottom, the organization has been strictly established and is based on the party workers' intimate activities in the field regarding voters. Such personal events, which have cultural and symbolic meaning for society, shape the AWBs political activities. In the previous chapter, I emphasized women's activities in terms of their empowerment in the bargain with the patriarchy. Related to this, the AKP women build their political actions within the everyday life of ordinary women by concentrating on their daily routines and requirements. This is a

mechanism that escalates the feminization process in the case of the AKP. Including everyday routines into politics shows that the reproduction of tradition in the flow of everyday life practices opens a way for the political participation of women and builds support among women.

From the active submission perspective, the AKP women can incorporate themselves into women's everyday lives. While they increase their impact on locales, they empower themselves within the party and also become crucial to people's lives as problem solvers. This drives the demand mechanism in the AKP women's political style and makes the AWBs accessible to women. While their accessibility rises, they become more central in women's everyday lives, which consolidates their importance in the party but at the same time reproduces anti-feminization regarding embedded traditional gender roles that are part of their political agenda.

As I witnessed in the field, everyday women are asking, demanding, and expecting several things from the AKP women. Their demands differ according to voters' profiles and local structures, but the style is the same. They are demanding by directly asking. Indeed, the AWBs' political style constructs the demand mechanism in the field, because when the AKP women incorporate themselves into women's everyday lives, their physical existence in routine events becomes the source of the solution to women's problems. In other words, the AKP women and their political style mobilize the mechanism for receiving demands from the field and sending them along to be solved or considered. As I mentioned above, because of the lack of institutional infrastructures and lack of knowledge of voters about how to solve their problems, the AKP women construct an irreplaceable and essential existence within the locales. However, it also causes informality in politics, which leads to the necessity for a women's representative in the field. The dialogue I observed between Aygül and a voter (Emel) during the local meeting helps to clarify how the mechanism works and triggers the aforementioned coexistence. Emel[4] is an almost 35-year-old housewife, and she has two school age

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[4] Emel has working experience before she got married. Now, she is not working and living in a lower middle-class neighborhood. She is not very happy to dependent her husband economically, but she thinks to start working after raised her children.

children. She was one of the women who were sitting around the table in the AKP's Saatköy (neighborhood) building. After Aygül's short introduction about the reason why they had gathered, she asked women if they had any questions. Emel wanted to start. She asked about sidewalks and emphasized that women are not happy about the situation.

> Every day I am walking with my two children from our home to their school. It is not easy to walk in our streets because sidewalks need construction. I am not even talking about the traffic lights, because at least sidewalks will be helpful in the first hand.

This was one of my first meetings for my fieldwork and it made me think about whether this is what politics is about. Emel's demand ended up not being a unique case when I examined my field notes. It was the essence of politics for the AWBs; being part of women's everyday lives, taking care of women's demand about daily requirements and participating in important events for women. This is what politics means for the AWBs. However, the AKP women are not passive receivers of women's demands; they attempt to shape ordinary women's participation by motivating them to make demands from them to the local governments, which I witnessed in Aygül's statement when she responded to Emel by asking: "Did you inform the municipality about your demand?" Emel answered, "No". Then Aygül started her speech:

> You should not have waited until you saw us. If you recognize a problem, you know how to reach us. You know the head of the Saatköy neighborhood. You can find her whenever you want. She is reachable. If you did not know her, you know our local building in the center of Sefercik, and you should drop by to convey your demand. If this doesn't work with any of them, you know there is a phone line and website in the municipality to take your complaints and learn about your requirements. Otherwise, you should not wait for a solution from us for your problems.

The demand mechanism is established to activate interactions among women. Through this mechanism, on the one hand, voters are becoming initiators in the politics of the AWBs because their demands start the politicization process and act for them. On the other hand, the AWBs become the address for the solution of women's problems. While the process raises the importance of women on both sides of the conversation, it reproduces traditional gender roles by reducing women's daily problems, which should be recognized to improve women's comfort in their daily routines. This is important and required, but the AWBs' politics remained at the same level and consolidated the vicious circle which causes anti-feminization in their politics.

This is also associated with the AKP's motto "*Hizmet*/Service" which is activated in the field through the AKP women's labor. As Rabia İlhan Kalender explained, the interaction between women politicians and voters in the event is called Women are Talking the City/*Kadınlar Şehri Konuşuyor* and is about how the AKP's service understands the transformation in politics of women and escalates the feminization process by raising interest in their problems but also demonstrating the anti-feminizing process by locating women in the family:

> Thanks to the AK Party, women are in their deserved place, and afterward, they will be more included in the social life. As they (women) are successful in every field, they will shed light on the party's works with their opinions about our cities and districts. Women and children are our priority in service. Because if we can make the ladies happy, we make the whole family happy. Success is inevitable if the entire family is happy (Fieldnote, February 2019).

Indeed, Women are Talking About City/*Kadınlar Şehri Konuşuyor* was an election time event which was organized throughout Turkey and Rabia İlhan Kalender, as the head of İstanbul province, was the moderator of the event in different districts. At the Sultankapı event, she explained the political style of the AWBs and place of women's voters in their agenda:

At the beginning of the AK Party's establishment, it puts the women-related issue in its center and prioritizes it. When it organizes the projects/works, it asks women personally. Like here today, it is time to speak about our city and our neighborhood. Now you will ask, and our candidate will answer your questions (AK Bülten 2019a).

In their organized activities, they give a voice to women and assure them they are important for their party while underlying women's roles in city life. Their main claim is that "people can meet service with the AKP." Indeed, the AKP women personalized the issue regarding how the AKP meets with women in terms of paying attention to their everyday lives. Emine narrated women's everyday lives before the AKP by saying:

You know what? Many women have a hernia of the loins. Maybe men have the same disease, but you know why because they are working a very heavy job. But women, especially housewives, have it. Why? Because they were carrying water. When I was a child, there was a place where women were going to use water, we went to wash our carpets with my mother. There was no water in the houses. It was fun for me but, it was difficult to carry the carpets from home to *acı su* and back. My mother passed away after her lumbar hernia surgery. Women faced difficulties and suffered from them, because of the lack of services in the cities and neighborhoods. Water outage or lack of infrastructure of water was the main problem for women. Why? Because women are – cleaning the home, washing the dishes. These women were not noticed until the mayorship of Erdoğan. You can see the water outage as a stereotype, but they are important, it is important for ordinary women's live… It is not only about clean streets or water, but they caused the problem in people's lives.

Then she explained her own experience when she was a young and newly married woman:

> I have an interesting story. I was married in 1993. Sometimes we had water, and sometimes we did not have it in the house. I had both a washing machine and dishwasher, but they were useless without water. We were listening to the sound of water. When the water came, we filled the buckets. Then, I heard the water sound. When I tried to take the bucket from its place- I was putting them in the closet- it felt on my face. Anyway, I did not care, I went and filled the water, but my eye started to bruise. My mother called me to say some people would like to visit me to celebrate my marriage. I said to her, I got an accident and my eye bruised, and people can think differently... So, it was not an easy business to bring water. Service is essential. It makes our everyday life much more comfortable. Accessible water and clean air are critical for our -housewives- lives.

The AKP women are using their personal stories in their political style. While they revisited their memories and experiences, they established a similarity among Turkey's female population and the AKP's approaches towards women by focusing their requirements on everyday life. Centralizing women's everyday life problems in their political style and prescribing voters' demands to reach solutions paves the way to a consolidation of the AKP women's place in politics as well. However, identifying women and women's problems as part of traditional domestic obligations and providing remedies for women to be more comfortable and sustain their traditional gender roles triggers the anti-feminization process.

Additionally, the AKP women are not visible only during the election process; they have a sustainable existence in politics which makes them accessible to voters. Therefore, the AKP women locate themselves as very essential in women voters' lives by being accessible to them. Even my experience during the interview process proved that the AKP women are

accessible. Emine expressed her relationship with women voters to demonstrate the accessibility of AKP women:

> They can reach our phone number very easily. If they attended one of our meetings, maybe we gave our number in there. We are offering our phone. Even I do not give; they can find the number from the head of the neighborhood. They are calling me whatever they need. On a typical day, I have at least one appointment with the citizen. Now, three people sent me messages from Instagram. One of them is about the problem of a woman's business, one of them is coming from disabled young who sent his/her CV to ask me a job. Even we do not have anything; we are busy to handle with the demands of the people. Because we try to find a responsible unit and person in municipality and district governor who can solve the problem… The understanding of "politicians are inaccessible" has changed with the AK Party.

The accessibility of the AKP women raises the visibility of women, both from the politicians' and voters' sides in politics. However, it also causes a redefinition of politics by including a diverse range of issues based on women's everyday lives. Songül explained the outcome:

> Every woman can reach us. With different reasons from victims of domestic violence to one cannot solve their simple problems. Look, a woman bought a refrigerator, and it has broken. She called me to talk with the brand to change her refrigerator. Recently, a woman called me whose siblings tried to ban her to take her share in her parent's heritage. They can reach us to ask whatever they need. A woman was looking after her disabled and cancer sister and demanded a wheelchair from us. Then she asked for a bed for her sister. After a while, she called us to say her sister passed away, but they could not arrange her funeral transfer from Istanbul to their hometown. So, I have never said that it is an unknown number I should not open. I answer and try to help them. Did I ask you

who you are? No. The aim is to help people. Students are calling us like you. For instance, a young boy called me he is doing research about *Kuma* issue and he needed to interview with them who are living in the same house. I know all the districts, and I know many of them. I found a family that the man has two wives. After I asked the wives to join the interview, they accepted, and I contacted the student with them.

She does not question what people ask of her, as other women counterparts in the party do, and also she does not question the *Kuma* situation from a gender perspective either. She is proud of being aware of everything in the field and being useful to people. Indeed, the "big picture" of politics and its established rules do not open spaces for women to take part in the everyday lives of women, and also women do not open doors to becoming actors in politics; the AKP women navigate their political existence to generate alternatives as well. Based on their political activities in everyday life, each of them reflects quite different cases that made me question the meaning of politics. Sevilay's experience is also critical to see how the AKP women can touch people's lives and how it is important for their motivation to be in politics and work for the party.

I have an exciting experience; I could not forget it, and it affects me even today. We visited a home for election works. I was not head of the district women's branch; I was the head of the women's branches' organizational affairs. We have election coordination centers/*Seçim Koordinayson Merkezi* during the election time, and it organizes our events, visits, and program according to the election period's schedule. Anyway, according to the center's program, we are visiting our members or electorates. We present a packet of coffee as in the saying "a cup of coffee has forty-year's sake". We visited a home. When I saw the home outside, I noticed one of its rooms was messy; its window was broken. It seems like it was not used while the rest of the home seemed normal. An older woman opens the door, and we introduced ourselves; we

came from the AK Party; we brought Erdoğan's greetings. Then she started to cry and explain; her daughter was living in the room, which seems messy. She had been there for 14 years, and the mother had not seen her daughter for 14 years. She had locked the door, and when they tried to open it, she was having a nervous breakdown. The mother spent most of her days outside so her daughter could move at home easily. Especially in the winter, because they had no idea about the situation of the room. So, the mother was ignorant; you know she had never called a police officer. This was an interesting case; I decided to solve this problem... I started to visit them frequently, but we could not get any reaction from her. I had to find a solution to convince her. Then, I decided to introduce myself as an officer from Population Directorate/*Nüfus Müdürlüğü*. I went there and called from outside; her name was Ayla. Ayla Hanım, I am coming from Population Directorate, we are researching people, but we do not know whether you are alive or not. Because her father had passed away, she had the right to take his salary. But for 14 years, she did not take it. Then, I told her that you would be considered a dead person if you do not speak with us. Then she opened the door suddenly. But we had no idea what we were going to see. We saw a clean and beautiful woman when we anticipated seeing a dirty and messy person. When I saw the room, I was shocked because there was nothing in the room. She was burned everything to warm up. I sustained my role for her, but I informed everywhere bank and hospital where we had to visit. Then she was diagnosed as schizophrenic. She stayed at the hospital for a while; I visited her every week. Then, she started to use her medicine. Now, her sister thanks me because her children can meet with their aunt.

Even though this might seem like an extraordinary case, it is the reality of everyday life. The AKP women's political style brings concerns of women to the center of politics, which increases the interaction between women and the party and consolidates the women politicians' places in

the AKP. This is the feminization face of the politics of everyday life. The AKP women set out informal networks, reproduce traditional gender roles and politicize new concerns that cause a redefinition of politics, blurring the borders between public/private and political/civil. Yet, the inclusion of women's issues by reducing them to the sphere of motherhood and housewifery and ignoring womanhood from the everyday life perspective. Their distance from the idea of gender equality or lack of substantive representation triggers the anti-feminization politics but also their political style prevents the incorporation of women's terrain in a feminist sense. Yet, they choose to conduct their political activities within ordinary women's everyday lives by listening to the problems of voters' children, husbands, or the dirtiness of the street.

In the politics of everyday life section, I attempt to show how the co-existence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics takes place in the political style of AKP women. The critical finding is that, despite the fact that the AKP women have incorporated women's concerns into politics, they still consolidate anti-feminization because of their focus on everyday life and simplification of problems by excluding women's structural problems.

The politicizing of the everyday life of women enables them to access women and include their concerns in politics by creating their own areas. When women are restricted from full access to "established" politics as representatives, they change the game by shaping their approach differently in society. By doing so, they extend the boundaries of politics by introducing the concerns of ordinary people's everyday lives. This is also the most critical point of the AKP's election success because, in the voters' eyes, it is identified as the party that knows us better than others. Indeed, the politicizing of everyday life is important for women's participation in politics and reshaping the boundaries of male-oriented politics by segregating themselves. Despite the focus on women's existence and women's voices in politics, ordinary women's status and women politician's lack of representation in politics are still valid cases that support the anti-feminizing face of the coexistence.

Up to this point, I have concentrated on the AWBs' political style to demonstrate their approach to women voters and to performing politics in the field. By doing so, the analysis revealed how the AWBs' political style becomes a source for the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics. While the sections politics of motherhood, politics of neighborhood and politics of everyday life characterize the AWBs' political style, they also indicate the source for the coexistence produced by the AWBs. Along with the three components of the AWBs, they also navigate their strategic appeal during the encounter moment. I utilize the concept of intersectionality to analyze the AKP women's attitudes in the encounter moment by claiming that this is another source of the coexistence. Due to the intersectional approach, the AKP women have a flexible approach to women which sometimes diverges from the party's perspective. In other words, while the AKP women are capable of reaching and mobilizing outsiders of the AKP's political spectrum, I will demonstrate that, in the encounter moments, their hesitation or limitation in integrating women's interests and perspectives into politics causes the anti-feminization of the process and lack of substantive representation.

§ 5.4 The Politics of Intersectionality: The Strategy to Mobilize Women's Votes in the Encounter Moments

Women's existence in the politics is a fact despite the male-dominated feature of the politics. When it comes to conservative and right-wing parties, the patriarchal order reproduces itself within the frame of religious and conservative borders as well. Throughout Chapter IV and above, I analyzed AKP women's strategies for surviving in politics and their contribution to the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing processes. However, the strategies of AKP women do not remain limited to the male-dominated environment of politics; they navigate their political style as a strategy to mobilize women's votes in society. Therefore, this section will examine the AKP women's strategies in their political style by utilizing the intersectionality perspective. By examining the small-

scale canvassing activities of the AKP women, such as home-visits, neighborhood meetings, *AK Nokta* tables, and phone calls, I will show how intersectionality becomes a source for the mobilization of women's votes (feminizing) causing a lack of substantive perspective (anti-feminizing) at the same time. To better understand how the AKP women perform in politics, I utilize intersectionality by following Collins and Bilge's (2016) definition:

> Using intersectionality as an analytic lens highlights the multiple nature of individual identities and how varying combinations of class, gender, race, sexuality, and citizenship categories differentially position each individual (31).

I claim that everyday life is intersectional, and social interactions among people portray the nature of intersectionality in their encounters. In the case of the interaction between the AKP women and women voters, I show the intersectional nature of individuals and how their simultaneous identities become a way to mobilize encounter moments. By focusing on intersectionality and rethinking categories to understand the AKP's political achievements among housewives, I will analyze my ethnographic observation to reveal how ethnicity, gender, social class, neighborhood (locale), age, marital status, and lifestyle all create political action between the supply and demand sides. Moreover, Collins and Bilge suggest that "intersectionality proposes a more sophisticated map (43)" to understand reality by going beyond its singular explanation.[5]

Furthermore, bringing intersectionality into the analysis will allow me to overcome a homogenous perspective regarding women politicians and voters. By utilizing intersectionality as an analytical tool, I also aim to go beyond the homogeneity of the headscarf. As Sibel Erarslan underlined, the headscarf provides equality to women, but also causes a

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[5]   In their research, Collins and Bilge use the intersectionality to understand social inequality within the different domains. I am using their instrumentalization of the intersectionality as an analytical tool by adjusting it into the political style of the AKP's women.

homogenous understanding of them. What I noticed in the field, despite the shared meaning and function of the headscarf, is that women, on both sides, build their existence in politics and society within the intersection of diverse notions. At this point, intersectionality will guide me to analyze the diversity of women voters as well through encounter moments, before analyzing their role in the coexistence in the next chapter. In other words, the intersectional identity of the AKP women appears clearly during the encounter moments between women politicians and voters. The AKP women are shaping the nature of mobilization from an intersectional framework by considering the ethnicity, economic class, religion, marital status, and education skills of the women whom they appeal to. Moreover, they attempt to include their own intersectional identities to reach women voters as a mobilization tool.

I discussed the home-visit and its place in the AKP's party politics from different angles in the previous chapters. Here, instead of focusing on the home-visit dimension as a style, I will focus on its content as an encounter moment. It should be remembered that this is a vital strategy for reaching women voters, in particular housewives, which also reveals both the AKP's populism (Chapter III) and its gendered features (Chapter IV). However, being an observant in a home-visit and witnessing the dynamic relations and encounter moments among the AKP women and women voters paves the way for me to extend the outcomes of the event.

One of the most critical outcomes is that the AKP women diverge from the party's general policy or discourse during encounter moments in order to reach women voters. This attempt leads to numerical feminization because the AKP women increase the scope of their mobilization by diversifying and using an intersectional approach to reach women. However, their attempt remains limited to the individual level, which does not have an impact on the representational level in terms of bringing women's concern or women's perspectives into the policy making process. In other words, despite the fact that the AKP women are autonomous from the party, they remain limited to the discourse-level, which causes anti-feminization in terms of lacking substantive effects.

In interviews, the AKP women are willing to talk about two topics in particular. The first one is their devotion to the leader and the second is their achievements and abilities in the field when they visit voters, especially in their homes. When I asked about the home visits, they invited me to participate in their events. Yet, they added that, "because of the pandemic, we stopped visiting voters' houses." Fortunately, I started my fieldwork before the pandemic and got the chance to observe the AKP women's political performance in the 2019 local elections through their canvassing work. Here, I will talk about one of these women, which allows me to understand how intersectionality works in the AKP women's political style and contributes to the tension.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Aygül invited me on a home-visit. I was in the AKP's Sefercik building and assumed I would be interviewing her. After we drank our tea, she said suddenly:

> Let's go, you will join us today. Do not you want to see how we are doing politics? You will see it today. I chose a very busy day to take you with us. First, we will visit a home and then locals in different neighborhoods.

I was surprised because I did not expect such an experience and to participate in in-person canvassing with them. I had asked her in our previous conversation to participate in their field work, but she had said, "we will try to do something for you" which was not a clear promise. Then, we left the building with three women: Aygül, Pınar and me. Her car was parked by the municipality, and we only had to walk three minutes to get there. After getting on the road, she stopped to pick up the provincial co-ordinator (Gülhan, see Chapter IV). Aygül was familiar with the neighborhood where we were visiting homes, but she did not know the exact address of the home we were going to. She called the head of the neighborhood, who arranged the event. About 15-20 minutes later, we arrived in front of the building. It was in one of the poorest and overpopulated neighborhoods, İsmetpaşa, in Sefercik. The population of the neighborhood is also overwhelmingly pious and conservative.

After we found the apartment, we climbed the stairs to reach the third floor and entered the home. I walked behind the AKP women in full concentration and silence. We passed directly to the living room, but it was very crowded. There were more than 25 women of different ages who were sitting on the sofa, chairs and floors. Indeed, seating arrangements were based on age. The older women were sitting on the sofa, middle-aged women were in the chairs and younger women were on the floor with their children. Children younger than the school age were at home as well.

Despite of the fact that it was mid-March, the weather was cold, and we were still wearing our coats. I could not find a chance to take off my coat inside the house. Indeed, the AKP women did not take off their coats either. This gave me an advantage for my observations because I was the only one who did not wear a headscarf, which is why I felt a bit uncomfortable while trying to be invisible. But I kept my beanie on my head, which covered my hair and made me more invisible in the living room. We were excluded from the rules of the seating arrangements, and I found an empty place to sit. I shared my sofa with two older women and after a while, I realized that they cannot speak Turkish. Then I noticed that the population of the room was overwhelmingly Kurdish.

According to my prima facie, we were in a conservative and pious neighborhood. Moreover, another variable was the Kurdish ethnicity of the house we were visiting. Beyond their conservative, pious and Kurdish identity, they were separated from each other by their age, marital status, number of children, and even their relationship with the different religious orders (tariqat). Indeed, I was in an environment full of diversity and intersectionality. At first, the women seemed quite homogenous because they were all veiled Kurdish women. However, when the conversation started, I noticed they were part of different groups —what the literature defines as intersectionality. I was wondering how Aygül was going to handle the situation and frame her appeal to these women voters by considering their intersectionality.

Aygül started her speech by emphasizing that, "we are here to chat with you about the problems of the neighborhood." However, everyone

in the room was very informed and familiar with what they were going to face, both as politicians and voters. Indeed, the women voters seemed like they were in a very comfortable environment. They were ready to ask questions and demand something. The experienced politician, Aygül, was also ready for such a well-prepared group.

> Before you start to share problems, let me take a minute to share with you that we have done in previous periods and what we are going to do in your neighborhood in the next period. If you think this not enough, then I will take notes of your opinions. Then, I will inform responsible people in the municipality or other local institutions. *Inşallah* we will fix the deficiencies. You know, İsmetpaşa, this neighborhood is very precious to us. We have a population of 500.000 in Sefercik and 16 neighborhoods. But in İsmetpaşa we get the most votes among these 16. That's why we wanted to do our best in this neighborhood. We started a center for women, parks, and schools for children. We know the requirements of the neighborhood. We planned to construct a health center/*sağlık ocağı* and one more school.

Then the women in the room interrupted Aygül and started to speak loudly. One of them was saying that health center/*sağlık ocağı* is the most needed, and the other one emphasized the requirements of schools, while another woman wanted to take attention regarding the deficiency of the bus stop. Aygül gave her attention to one of those women (Birgül), and then conservation starred between Aygül and Birgül:

> *Birgül[6]:* You told us that you brought services to İsmetpaşa, but Rumiçi (another neighborhood in Sefercik) has better conditions than us.

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[6] Birgül is an urban poor, housewife, veiled woman. She married with three children. She was sitting her child in her lap during our conversation.

Aygül: İsmetpaşa is really important for us.

Birgül: We do not see this importance.

Birgül did not sustain the conversation, because she found a chance to talk with Aygül and managed to get her attention. She started to explain why they need another school in the neighborhood. It was really difficult to handle the room, because the women had diverse demands based on their neighborhood and everyday lives and motherhood experiences, which necessarily shapes the AWBs' political style, but Aygül knew how to control and respond to the women's reactions. Then Aygül raised her voice while talking about Erdoğan and his period as mayor:

> As you know, we have been governing İstanbul since 1994. With Tayyip Erdoğan and his mayorship in the İstanbul metropolitan municipality, Istanbul met with service. We all remember the garbage mountains and water outages. The classrooms of our children were not of 50 students like they are now, they had 80-90 students in the same classroom. We remember that parents could not buy books for their children because of a lack of money. Yes, we know, you have needs. However, we promised we are going to meet all of them, as we did the previous ones *elhamdülillah*. We did until today. Our references are very clear. Our reference is our service. We have never spent our money on FETÖ[7] or PKK. We used the money for the service to women. There could be deficiencies, but we have never done anything wrong.

Aygül combined different aspects of politics with the political concerns of the AWBs, like motherhood, local and daily-life requirements, and some topics of the "big P" like PKK and FETÖ. Indeed, Aygül's attempt relieved the women for a while, because they did not want to be seen as

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7   After the relationship between AKP and Gülen *cemaat* was dissolved, the party started to refer Gülen *cemaat* as a terrorist organization and call as FETÖ which is the shorter name of *Fetullahçı Terör Örgütü*.

ungrateful for the AKP's service. Women started to shake their heads to show they agreed with Aygül, but they were not happy with the current situation of their lives for various reasons like the unemployment of their husbands or children or deficiencies in the neighborhood. Indeed, references to Erdoğan, FETÖ and PKK are the basic components that unify the AKP's voter camps in the discourse of the AKP, regardless of gender. Love of Erdoğan and being anti-FETÖ and anti-PKK, which are identified as the enemy groups of the current government, are simply accepted by the AKP's supporters. However, when it comes to encounter moments and individual incidents, this does not work in reality. When Aygül raised her criticisms of FETÖ and PKK, the host (Şengül) came close to Aygül and whispered something to her. After that, Aygül stopped referring to PKK or at least she decreased the tone of her hostility. Indeed, I had not realized what happened because it happened in a second. Then, suddenly, Aygül revealed that she is Kurdish as well and she started to speak Kurdish. I did not understand what she said and why she did this at that moment. I assumed it was another strategy to show the similarity between the AKP women and women voters by showing "I am just like you". Yet, it was not that simple; I mean it was not just about conveying this message.

Applying and following the AKP's general discourse in the field leads to a stalemate in the dialogue among the AKP women and the women voters in terms of various issues. The party's lack of intersectional perspective, antagonistic divisions, and its conservative understanding of society restricts its inclusiveness. When it comes to a direct relationship with political mobilization, treating people as a homogenous entity prevents the party from reaching women voters by considering their intersectional realities. Witnessing the encounter moments in a home visit revealed that the AKP women can formulate their discourse during political mobilization, even if it differs from the party's discourse. By doing so, the AKP women construct their own autonomous performance while mobilizing the women's vote, or, at least, constructing an appeal without excluding any of the women. Additionally, they make an intersectional adjustment to the party's appeal to women voters by stretching the big P issue.

Aygül had followed the same path with the party discourse because the home we visited was in a neighborhood which overwhelmingly votes for the AKP. However, after Şengül's approach to Aygül, there was a salient change in the discourse and attitude of Aygül. She faced obstacles even in such a pro-AKP neighborhood, which was associated with the ethnic identities of the women. I had to wait until we sat in the car for clarification about the changes in Aygül's discourse. When we were in the car after the visit, she confirmed my observation by saying:

> Did you realize there were three women in front of the window? They did not speak and participate in the conversation. I did not notice them at the beginning. Then, Şengül came next to me and told me that the children of some of these women are in the mountain with the PKK. She came and warned me when I referred to the PKK as an enemy of the party. She did not address the women, but I realized who they were. They were sitting in front of the window quietly. They seemed very upset. God help them.

Aygül did not explain this to me. She was talking with Gülhan in front of the car. However, I had noticed the three women in the room because my eyes were scanning the whole room during the visit, and indeed I had a profile of the room in my head. They had not talked or even shown any reaction during the visit, but Aygül was right, they seemed very upset. After she was informed about the women by Şengül, she did not use the PKK and did not refer to it as an enemy of the AKP. While the AKP's women referred to the enemies of the AKP together with FETÖ and PKK as Aygül did at the beginning of her speech, she stopped to add the PKK to her statements. Then I understood why she started to speak Kurdish and shared her ethnic identity with the community in the room; it had a deeper meaning than simply revealing her similarity with the audience. During the visit, she explained how she learned Kurdish by saying:

> Look. I am Kurdish and I can speak Kurdish as my mother tongue. I went to X (an Eastern Anatolian city) for university. None of my

cousins can speak Kurdish. My grandmother does not speak Turkish. So, they cannot speak with each other. They did not expect that I can speak Kurdish. I know, I am a Kurd, and I am proud of my identity. Yet, I am not a participant in the PKK. It does not mean every Kurd will be a part of it.

While Aygül tried to explain the difference between being a Kurd and being a part of the PKK by using the example of her personal life, she avoided referring to the PKK as an enemy of the AKP after Şengül's intervention. After that, the women in the room started to agree that "Yes, we are all Kurdish." However, they were not as energetic and enthusiastic as they had been at the beginning, and the Kurdish issue overshadowed the women's daily-life politics. Aygül recognized this situation and also tried to regain the women's interest by saying:

> You may be angry with the AK Party. But, if you do not support the AK Party, if you support the CHP, Saadet (Felicity Party or SP), or other candidates, we will all say *eyvah* at the end of the election. No one will be angry with each other. We will not cut off nose to spite face/*pire için yorgan yakmayacağız*. You know that when we mention the survival of the state, and the efforts of president Erdoğan to find food for his people, the CHP and its mentality is kidding with us. A week ago, I went to a home where the CHP electorates were the majority. I explained our services and the efforts of Erdoğan and a woman disturbed me by asking "why are you saying all this? I am reading books until the morning. I just came from Greece, I visited Atatürk's house. You supported Ottoman dogs."

At that moment, women grumbled. With the support of the audience, Aygül continued:

Did you see, the mentality is the same. Even after 100 years, their mentality and our place in this mentality will never change. We are the dogs of the Ottomans and dumb cluck/*bidon kafalarız*.

Aygül led the visit according to the demands, characteristics, and realities of the audience while underlying the importance of the vote for the AKP and support for Erdoğan. By doing so, she used an intersectional framework in her language and attitude. In the beginning, she followed the general discourse of the party, but after a while she noticed that, even though the audience and neighborhood are overwhelmingly conservative, they are also Kurdish. At the intersection of gender, conservative ideology, piety, and Kurdish identity, Aygül established her communication with the women voters by representing her identity as also emerging from the same intersection. I argue that, even if Aygül were not Kurdish, she would follow the intersectional framework in her political mobilization by finding another angle to relate with women, like motherhood, age and so on. This is one of the core abilities of the AKP women when establishing a direct relationship with women voters. Despite Aygül's general opening speech, after she understood the profile of the room, she reframed her political appeal while keeping this profile in mind. To do that, she demonstrated that she accepted the intersectionality of the group. If Aygül did not care about the case of the three women when identifying the PKK as the enemy of the AKP, the visit probably would not have been as successful as it was.

This was quite an extreme case that Aygül faced in the field, but also critical to demonstrate how intersectionality is included within the AKP women's political style. Through an intersectional adjustment of her political style, Aygül built a connection with the women in the room and her flexibility in the discourse prevented a reaction against the AKP. Aygül's inclusivity regarding intersectionality should be underlined as source of feminization in terms of keeping a connection with women voters in the room despite the fragility of the situation. Moreover, Aygül acted autonomously from the party regarding the PKK issue, while recognizing the significance of the topic among Kurdish women. Indeed, Aygül accepted the

issue from the women's perspective, which also contributes to the feminization process. However, it remains only at the discourse level. Even though Aygül, and other women in the AKP face similar cases in the field and handle them in a similar vein as Aygül did, they do not sustain the same discourse to substantive level. Although they recognize the problem and comprehend women's concerns, they do not represent it in the "big P" sphere such as party meetings, local government assembly and so on. Their approach remains limited to the daily base, which causes a consolidation of anti-feminization by keeping women's concerns about the big P issues out of the women's agenda.

Aygül's intersectional approach prevented the marginalization of women in the room in terms of the ethnic dimension of their identities. Moreover, Aygül managed to appeal them as well by bringing their attention to the central message of the party, which is that the AKP cares about people because they are valuable for the AKP, but that other parties, especially the CHP, insult them. By referring to the biggest enemy, Aygül emphasized the point that brings them together.

While Aygül lightened the environment in the room, the host served some food and tea. She prepared some pastry, *sarma*, dessert and *çiğköfte* which is from the host's hometown. People, even Aygül, started to ask about the recipe for the food on the plate, and at that moment, it was quite similar to a women's ordinary gathering in their everyday lives. A women's gathering turns into a political environment and a home becomes a public sphere where women discuss their problems as citizens.

Another obstacle for Aygül during the event revealed that intersectionality is not only based on ethnicity among the women but is also constructed based on age. Younger women who have school age children were not satisfied with the conditions of the schools in the neighborhood, while the older women were expecting more support for their religious practices such as visiting holy places. Aygül was notably successful in answering the questions of these women and responding to their diverse demands. She is probably familiar with all these issues from different neighborhoods and, moreover, she could frame her responses as intersectional by considering the differences among them.

Aygül was capable of handling different women within the same room. She did not treat them as a homogenous entity, but rather took into consideration their differences by addressing them, even though they are in the same camp, which is the camp of AKP's voters. However, Aygül failed only in one issue. It was the generation issue. I argue that the AKP and its party workers could not develop an intersectional understanding regarding the younger generation-such as daughters of the AKP's supporters. They did not accept or assume that the younger women/generation have different opinions than their families. The young daughter (Ceren) of the host was very angry with Aygül. She criticized her many times by saying, "she came here to talk not to listen." My sofa was very close to the door, which was very close to the kitchen as well. Ceren was working in the kitchen but occasionally was coming to the doorstep to check the living room. Every time she complained about Aygül and her mother warned her. Sometimes Aygül heard Ceren, yet she did not answer her. Aygül believed that she will also vote for the party, like her family, and she was just behaving spoiled during the visit. This was what Aygül thought about the younger generation before the election. After the election with the AKP's loss of the İstanbul metropolitan municipality, they recognized the reality. The vast number of my interviewees, including Aygül, diagnosed the situation as "girls voted for a young and handsome candidate. Even though they are wearing the headscarf, even though their family voted for us, they were deceived." Beyond the AKP women's intersectional adjustment of their political style, observing such an intense and small-scale atmosphere proves that the women voters of the AKP should not be seen as a homogenous identity. Even though they have a lot in common, their diverse intersectional social divisions lead them to be a heterogeneous group.

Then we left home to make it in time for another visit in an AKP locale. It was an important experience to reinforce and observe another encounter moment among the AKP's women and women voters. I was not the only one who sat in complete silence during the home visit. Pınar also did not speak throughout the visit, as she was busy bringing brochures and gifts for the host. During the visit, she was taking photos to share on the

women's branches' social media accounts, yet Aygül asked her to stop taking photos, probably considering the three women in front of the window, because she looked at them after warning Pınar. While Pınar was busy with all of this, she forgot about me. When I was walking with them to the car, she told me that she forgot that I was with them. I was not speaking and was sitting in my dark colored coat among the 25 women. I was not invisible, but I was forgettable to them, at least in a tense environment.

When we sat in the car, I was in the back seat with Pınar. Aygül asked me what I thought about the home. I did not expect such a question, but I answered that it was difficult for me to respond to her question at that moment because I had to process and think about such an intense atmosphere. They were smiling and Aygül said that "it is a very typical home for us, they are our electorate. If you participated in our previous visit, which was in a CHP supporters' home, you would see how women criticized us." I did not answer her and only smiled. Yet, I started to think about how their previous visit was not an exceptional and unexpected one. Witnessing the encounter between the AKP women and pro-AKP voters was much more interesting in terms of understanding the diversity among them.

I mentioned our second stop in the Saatköy neighborhood of Sefercik in the previous chapter regarding gendered meanings of time and the politics of the neighborhood and everyday life. However, from an intersectional perspective, the content and dialogue in the meeting revealed a similar conclusion to that of a different case: FETÖ. The neighborhood meetings are organized as women-only events by inviting AKP women politicians or male party members who are in a leading position. They are daytime organizations and have a particular theme, like a tea gathering. The Saatköy event was held around 2:30 pm and the head of neighborhood, Fatoş[8] prepared tea and some pastries with other members of

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[8] Fatoş, as a head of neighborhood, has a very active and friendly characteristic. She is coming from a working-class background with her working experience in a textile atelier, she did not stop working after her marriage. However, she stopped working after her participation into politics.

the neighborhood organization, and they behaved like the hosts of the gathering. In a way, they were.

The event was in the AKP's neighborhood building. The AKP has neighborhood buildings beyond their district buildings in the center. These neighborhood buildings generally have one room, and they are active only during the election time. Outside of the election period, the buildings are closed and used for intra-party meetings. They open during the election period to organize events for electorates and set meetings within the party's organization. The events are generally small-scale in these places because they are small buildings. We came to the building; it was like a store at the entrance of an apartment and there were about 20 women who were sitting around a table. Aygül told me that the event was organized thanks to her because she said that she was curious about the demands and requirements of women in Saatköy.

Even though the space was different from the previous one, the context was the same. Aygül started to speak, using the same words. Yet, Aygül was warned by voters that they had to go to school to pick up their children. Aygül said she was sorry to come late because of the previous event and she stopped talking. Women were prepared to ask their questions and explain their demands. They even chose a volunteer to declare the problems of women in the neighborhood.

The volunteer woman (Emel) stood up and started to enumerate the problems one by one. She expressed herself very clearly and she also criticized the party very rigidly. Indeed, she mentioned infrastructure problems in the neighborhood, but criticized both the mayor and the women's branches by saying, "you come only during the election time, and you do not check on us or ask about our problems at other times." While her criticisms increased, Aygül needed to stop them or answered them. As I understood from the previous visit, if she did not intervene, the criticism would be shared by other women. Therefore, Aygül stopped her smoothly, first asking her name and then saying:

> Emel, I am very grateful to hear your comments, observations, and
> demands. However, we are not only coming during the election

time. We are here all the time. I do not have to be here, my neighborhood representative is here. But if you see us insufficiently, then come and work with us. We would like to work with women like you who know the field, its problems. We would like to see women like you with us who follow their demands and keep working until a problem is solved.

Emel did not listen to Aygül. She only expressed her problems. Aygül called a person from the municipality to ask about Emel's demands and she answered her immediately. However, Emel was still unhappy. Then, Aygül used another card to first calm Emel and then the other women who supported Emel's criticism. This card was the headscarf card. In this meeting, I was not the only one who was unveiled, but veiled women were the majority of the group and Emel was one of them.

You know, these are not unsolvable problems. We did many things. Even though we have deficiencies, we promise we will work on what remains a problem. There could be deficiencies, but there is no mistake. We did not give money to PKK and FETÖ. Today, many political parties come together which cannot be on the same page for one reason to defeat the AK Party. So, you should not say we have to punish them (AKP). In the end, you will face difficulties. We brought the state and people together. Since Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's mayorship, İstanbul can meet the service. I am a sister whose head was forcibly uncovered in 1999 and I am your sister who was beaten in the Beyazıd Square by the police.

Then, a woman (Gülşah[9]) interrupted Aygül to share her own memory:

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[9] I had the shortest interview with Gülşah. She was trying to catch her children to pick them from the school. She was friend with Emel, they were living in the same apartment. However, economically Gülşah has difficulties due to her husband who was at jail at that time. She is not able to work due to her toddler. She lives with financial support from her neighbors.

We were Muslims who did their practices and read the Quran se-
cretly in the Muslim country. We were going to the Quran courses
secretly. I did not go to university because of the headscarf. How-
ever, we can live our religion independently now.

Aygül was happy to hear this support because the women in the room
became quiet and calm. Emel was also quiet, but she seemed unhappy.
Even though she wears a headscarf, she did not participate in the conver-
sation. Aygül continued by saying:

You expressed very well what I feel right now. I cannot believe the
political parties and their claim that we will serve the people, and
we will not prevent the wearing of the headscarf. I cannot believe
it because actions speak louder than words/*ayinesi iştir kişinin
lafa bakılmaz.* First, I looked at what they did, and then I can an-
ticipate what they can do.

After this speech, women stopped their criticism, and they only men-
tioned some demands based on the neighborhood. The atmosphere be-
came quite silent. I was listening to every word and sentence but did not
understand at that moment how Aygül had changed her speech to bring
women into the religion. Differently from other meetings, it was the first-
time religion became a core issue of the meeting. Both Aygül and other
AKP women repeatedly included religion and the headscarf issue in their
agendas, but during the Saatköy meeting, dialogues were constructed
around religion, the AKP's position in the life of pious people, and espe-
cially women and the headscarf issue.

Even though our previous visit had seemed like a more appropriate
place to discuss Islam by referring to Erdoğan as the leader of the *ümmet*,
Aygül underlined her Kurdish identity to prevent the alienation of the
Kurdish women. These two events in a row allowed me to compare
Aygül's attitudes and discourse. Her explanation on our way back was
also helpful for me to understand the reason why she emphasized ethnic-
ity in the first meeting and religion in the second one. She told me that:

> The woman had come to escalate the meeting. If I did not stop her, she would be the only one who spoke. Then I understood, she probably has a *cemaat*/FETÖ background.

Aygül was talking about Emel. I was not very familiar with the women who were coming from the *cemaat* background at that moment. However, I had met some women during my women voter level interviews who were former members of the *cemaat*. Indeed, their attitudes, discourse, and criticisms towards the AKP were quite similar to Emel's. Now, I see Aygül had a point by referring to religion, which is a mutual area between the party and the *cemaat*. Even though they are separated from each other like enemies, they have more common ground than other parties have. The intersectional framework of Aygül and the AKP women paves the way for the inclusion of diverse figures into the AKP's political mobilization.

With a similar strategy in the home-visit, Aygül applied the intersectional approach to not marginalize women from the AKP. However, in a similar vein, Aygül's intersectional approach contributes to the coexistence between the feminizing and anti-feminizing process, because while Aygül's attitude helps to consolidate the AKP's supporters by preventing breaks caused by differences, she does not work on representation of the differences in the party's general discourse. Because of the lack of women's perspectives on issues like PKK and FETÖ, AKP's general discourse continues to criminalize people. What Aygül did was that she avoided reflecting the hostile attitude of the party to sustain a relationship with supporters, yet she did it only during the encounter moment, which did not bring any substantive transformation based on women's concerns.

FETÖ and PKK are identified as one of the main enemies of the AKP and its main components of the othering discourse in society. Overall, the AKP sustains this discourse at almost every meeting until they encounter a voter who has/had related with them. These two cases, both in the home and the neighborhood visit, indicated that the AKP women are

prepared to handle criticisms in their encounters thanks to their intersectional outlook towards voters. Throughout my research, I underlined the dynamics of the relationship between the AKP, the AKP's women, and women voters. By doing so, I recognized diverse forms of communication and themes among them. While I introduced the two extreme cases of PKK and FETÖ and how the AKP women dealt with them during their encounters with voters, my purpose was to show how the AKP's women formulate an inclusive strategy and political mobilization by using an intersectional outlook. Despite the identification of "others" in the party's agenda, the AKP women are capable of finding a way to communicate and reach voters by preventing their marginalization. Clearly, the AKP's camp, particularly its women components, can be defined as a heterogeneous "us". In other words, while the AKP shows its supporters and components as a homogenous entity, it does not approach them from a single-axis framework. As I claimed above, in terms of the AKP women's political styles, they use an umbrella perspective to frame, keep and identify the "us" as a homogenous entity like motherhood, the locale where they live, and problems that they face in their daily routine, yet they are aware of the heterogeneity of these intersectional identities.

Using intersectionality causes a continuation of the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics because the AKP women lack enthusiasm to represent the women's perspectives in the political realm. This is also related to the AKP's women's positions in the patriarchal bargain, which constructs women as active submissive participants in politics. During the encounter moments, Aygül also acted within the active submissive framework while appealing to women voters. This strategy is the fundamental source behind the coexistence. The political life of the AKP women occurs in their interaction with the patriarchy and women voters. The former is the border within which they have to survive, and the latter is the reason for their political survival.

Additionally, my other observations during fieldwork uncovered that the AKP women have a greater ability or tendency to include an intersectional outlook and strategic behavior than their male co-workers. I did not interview the AKP men during my fieldwork, but I met them while I

was visiting the AKP's local buildings, municipalities, or AK *Nokta* in the streets. These visits to the different levels gave me a chance to meet male politicians from different levels as well. During my fieldwork, I met a local mayor, heads of the AKP's local branches, and members/party workers of the AKP's local/neighborhood organizations. While I was able to conduct a long conversation with the high-level male politicians, I did not find a chance to do the same thing with the men at the bottom of the party hierarchy. However, I found a chance to observe them during their work for the election campaign. The AKP men use the party's general discourse without adjusting it according to the features of the audiences, as their women counterparts do. Moreover, they do not only sustain the party's discourse, but they are also very loyal to the discourse of Turkey's right-wing tradition.

The heads of the AKP's district-level branches are mostly men. During my interview with the heads of women's branches, I found a chance to talk or meet with them. When they asked me about my research, I started to explain but they generally did not listen. Mostly, they wanted to talk. When they talked, they emphasized how Turkey is powerful, and how the "foreign powers" set traps for Turkey. The AKP women also touched upon such topics, but these were central for the AKP men. As I mentioned above, the AKP women recognize the social side of politics. This is the gendered division of labor in the AKP in simple terms. In the current situation, the AKP men and women have different interests in political mobilization, and they are diverse in representing the discourse of the party.

I noticed the difference during one of my visits to the AK *Nokta* which was located across from the Hagia Sophia in Sultanahmet square. I visited the table on a Friday afternoon to witness the encounter between the party and electorates. It was a month after the Hagia Sophia had been opened as a mosque for worship. Despite the pandemic, people were visiting the Hagia Sophia every day, but most intensely on Fridays. Sultanahmet was very crowded on a sunny August day. Before I approached to the table, I observed the environment: how many people were at the table, how many women/men there were, how often an electorate came and how long she/he stayed, and so on. I was part of the crowd that was

standing close to the table. I was able to hear everything. They were constantly repeating their general statements:

> We are here to raise our number and supporters of Erdoğan. We, as a family, are looking for new family members.

The AKP had started a new campaign to raise the numbers of party members and the AK *Nokta* tables were set up to reach people. There were 4 people at the table and 3 of them were women, while one of them was a man. There were several women around the table who were approaching the people walking around the square. One of them also approached me and I asked questions about the duties of the members, the consequences of being a member, and the importance of my residential address to be able to work in the party. She was not happy to hear such questions, because she did not want to spend her time with me. She introduced herself as a member of the Emirpaşa municipality council and asked about my job. I was honest with her by sharing that I was a member of a university. She lost interest in me because she thought I was not an AKP supporter. The man at the table said that:

> We are all humans who are living in Turkey. You know our victory in the war of independence. We were together in the battle with *Alevi, Sunni, Laz, Çerkez, Türk, and Kürt*. We face the same war with the Western power, and we have to be together.

I was listening to the man, but it seemed to me he did not have the aim of gaining me as a member. He sustained his rhetoric to make me believe we are all the same. On the other hand, there was another woman, Makbule[10] was interested in me after I mentioned my job. She did not interrupt the others, but when I was about to leave, she stopped me and started to talk with me in a very familiar tone. First, she introduced herself as one of the

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[10] Makbule is a veiled woman in her mid 40s. Her appearance seems younger than her age, but she was used to the reaction from people against the mismatch in her age/appearance.

vice heads of Emirpaşa district women's branches. She started to explain what the party is doing in Emirpaşa, and how valuable my membership for their services in Emirpaşa, Istanbul, and Turkey would be. She was different from the others while approaching me very positively, tolerantly, and inclusively. After she explained herself, she gave me her phone number in case I needed it. At that moment, I saw how the AKP women differ amongst each other regarding their political existence in women's branches or the party, and the AKP men as well. Makbule is a party worker who has experience reaching voters and is an excellent case to represent members of the women's branches. She had developed a tolerance for diversity within the voters while the others tended to ignore or give up talking with me.

§ 5.5 Concluding Remarks

To establish a successful party politics in the field, in particular at the women voters' level, the AKP's district-level women's branches use different strategies. As I examined above, the AKP women's political style includes motherhood, neighborhood, everyday life and intersectionality politics, which increase the number of women politicians and voters (feminization) and consolidate the lack of women's perspectives regarding integration into mainstream politics (anti-feminization). The existence of women in politics is associated with "feminizing" politics because of the visibility and presence of women in the political realm and political activity. When it comes to the AKP, their case reveals that a higher number of women does not lead to women's integration into the system. In other words, women in politics can sustain the existing patriarchal limits and anti-feminization process by navigating their existence and mobilizing women's votes.

This chapter analyzed the AKP women's political styles and the encounter moments between women on both sides, and how they make possible the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics. I examined the political style of the AKP women based on four

characteristics while concentrating on small-scale events like home-visits, local meetings, or AK *Nokta,* where encounters are happening. As understood from the analysis, each characteristic of the AKP's political style constructs and supports the coexistence in some ways. On the one hand, they provide a political platform to reach women voters, but on the other hand, they are keeping women in a limited area that is out of mainstream politics by causing a lack of substantive representation.

There are two main findings of the chapter. First, the AKP women are situating their active submissive feature in the voter base to navigate their successful mobilization of women. Second, the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics can be reframed as the tension between the existence of descriptive representation and lack of substantive existence in the case of the AKP's women's political style.

After focusing on the contribution of the party and women's branches to the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics, I will examine the role of the AKP women voters in this relationship. By uncovering the links within the party's gender agenda, the AKP women's political styles and their ways of emerging at the women voter level, in other words examining the vertical feminization through the AKP, I will demonstrate the political behavior and political understanding of the AKP's women voters. By doing so, the next chapter aims answer two sequential questions to provide the clear understanding. The first opens the curiosity with a question as: "why do women vote for the AKP? After that, I will build on the initial curiosity by deepening the ongoing reality "why do women continue to vote for the AKP?"

6

Political Agency of the AKP's Women Voters: Routinized Voting in the Feminizing and Anti-Feminizing Politics

I visited Seda[1] one random Friday in the summer of 2021. I contacted Seda through her daughter Ece, and she asked me to visit them when her father was not at home, which was generally on Fridays.[2] I went to her home to interview with her and her *elti,* Hasibe.[3] When I arrived at Seda's home, she and Ece were both there. They welcomed me warmly and led me towards the living room. It was one of the hottest summer days in Istanbul and we were sitting in the room with the windows open.

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[1] I contacted Seda via her daughter Ece who I know from work. When I was explaining my research to Ece she mentioned that women in her family support the AKP in every election. My personal contact with Ece and her familiarity with my research opened their doors to me for an interview. Seda is a middle-aged woman who continues her education after raising her children. She is living in a family apartment which was constructed by her father in-law and live in the same building with her *elti's* family.

[2] As I discussed the importance of Fridays in my research in the methodology chapter, the case of Seda also overlaps with the same concerns and opportunities for me. Women feel free to be themselves when men are not around.

[3] Turkish has specific names for different kindship relations. *Elti* is one of them and it is used to identify two or more women who are married with brothers. Put simply, I went to Seda's house to interview Seda, and Seda's husband's brother's wife Hasibe. She is a housewife in her late 50s.

Our small talk in the house and the noise of children in the street mingled with each other. Seda was familiar with my research, or at least she was aware that I was going to ask something about her pro-AKP political attitude. After the initial excitement of the meeting had passed, I started to ask my usual introductory questions to prepare my interlocutors for further questions. However, Seda seemed to be prepared already. She was talking about her justifications for her voting preferences instead of explaining what her motivations were or how she navigates her votes for the AKP. The conversation between us demonstrates that she defended her voting preferences by underlying her agency:

> I asked Seda *do you remember your first vote? Which party did you vote for? How did you decide?* She got a bit confused and started to think, saying, *I don't remember, did I vote before I got married? I got married in 1996, I was 21 years old. I think I voted when I was single. Probably I voted according to my father because we went to vote together. I had not researched then. I even did not know who did what in politics. I followed my father's voting preferences. We voted for Tansu Çiller, I guess. Yes, we voted according to what my father said.* Then I asked a follow-up question*: how did you decide to vote, on which party, after you got married?* She interpreted my question in a different way and asked me, *are you asking me whether I am voting according to my husband after I got married?* I tried to clarify by saying*, indeed I would like to learn, how do you decide?* She explained herself sincerely by saying, *I guess awareness is really important, isn't it? Now, I am thinking, environment [she means people around her] was very influential in those years, but if you ask me now, I am old enough to make my own decisions in a better way. Now, no one can influence me.*

I witnessed a similar pattern during my interviews and visits over and over again, with women describing how they are in charge while deciding to vote for the AKP. I collected the data for this chapter by interviewing 30 women who are voting (or used to vote) for the AKP. My primary aim

was to concentrate on housewives, yet it was revealed during my field-work that women have multiple identities and occupations at the same time. However, they prioritize their housewifery and motherhood identities based on traditional gender roles while still emphasizing their free will. Gözde[4] is a married with three children and is around 40 year old woman. She was one of the decisive AKP voters who votes for a different party from her husband. She shared her dialogue with her husband regarding the latest local elections in Istanbul (March and June) 2019:

> My husband told me *lets vote for İmamoğlu this time*. However, I like Binali [Yıldırım-the candidate of the AKP for Istanbul munici-pality]. I could not vote for İmamoglu, my hand went there [AKP] again. Indeed, we do not talk about politics with my husband. It was the first time he asked me something. You know what, Tayyip comes, Özal passes, but family, relatives are permanent. Everyone has different views; this is what makes everything pleasant. No one can think in the same way. Yet, you should be respectful.

Gözde is not the only one who voted for a different party than her husband. Indeed, a gender gap within the partners in a family is more common than I anticipated before my fieldwork. Hülya is 53 years old, upper middle-class woman. She is married with a child. She is living in building complex in a well know CHP-neighborhood and defines herself as a minority due to her voting behavior. When I asked about her husband's understanding of the neighborhood, she said:

> Ooh, my husband is a very strong CHP supporter. We are not discussing politics at home and also we are not discussing football. Everyone respects each other. If Tayyip [Erdoğan] or the other [Kılıçdaroğlu] appear on the television, we turn it off immediately. We are not commenting together... You know what happened once,

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[4]   Gözde is the most cheerful interlocutor among others. Her husband has a shoe store in a middle-class neighborhood. They are also living in a middle-class neighborhood in a duplex flat.

they called me from the party [AKP], and they asked me: you seem
to be our member, but your husband is not. She asked me to make
him a member. [Hülya started to laugh], I could not say that my
husband is substantially anti-AK Party and votes for the CHP. Then
I quickly skipped like saying "maybe he is seen in another district,
not yours."

Considering Gözde's and Hülya's statements, the gender gap within the
family seems possible but also leads the analysis to focus on women's
agency, which makes women the main actors in shaping their voting pro-
cess. After underlining women's agency, which is critical to understand
feminizing politics as well, this chapter is designed to bring an in-depth
analysis of the AKP's women voters. Through the narratives and obser-
vations provided from women who vote for the AKP, I aim to enlighten
how women receive the party's anti-feminist messages and transform
them within their politicization process, which is constituted the bottom
of feminizing politics in the AKP. Moreover, how this interplay contributes
to the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics will
be the focus of the chapter.

As I denoted by conceptualizing the feminizing process in Turkey as
vertical process, women's participation in the party politics of the AKP
has emerged in different forms. This chapter focuses on the bottom of
this vertical process, which is women voters. Indeed, the current litera-
ture on feminizing politics encourages the research to extend to actors
from politicians to the voter's level. However, it does not give a road map
for analyzing the process of the destination of women's votes. If I go back
to the beginning of the story, Childs reminds us of the anti-suffrage argu-
ments: "if women had the vote, they would either: (a) vote in the same
way as their husbands or (b) vote as a group" (2008: xxi). She underlines
the logic behind the argument is the understanding of women's lack of
agency. Indeed, the literature on women voters is built on an answer to
the argument that attempts to clarify that women have agency and
women's votes might end up in different directions from each other and
from men. Despite the numerous studies on the women's vote, there is

still a missing part, that is women voters in the non-Western context who are understudied.

The contextual difference has to be underlined, because women's political preferences in the West and out of the West have apart from each other. For instance, western literature follows the seminal work of Norris (1996) to examine the women's political behavior in terms of gender gap. In this article, Norris did an analysis about the gender gap and 1997 British election. Through the analysis, she attempted to figure out how voting behavior between men and women accommodate according to existing explanations in the literature. By doing so, she introduced three approaches. First, *traditional approach* which is based on a gender gap understanding by claiming "women have more tendency to vote for right-wing parties than men". Second, *convergence approach* which basically understands men and women's political behavior become more similar with transformation in the social, economic, and political life and its reflections into the individual level. Third, *revisionist approach* suggests a reverse gender gap which points out women's votes shift from right to left while men's votes shift to right. Norris brings a periodical explanation while she examines the 1997 elections. Her inclusive analysis provides a road map for further research in the West to evaluate the gender gap or women's political participation in the West.

Together with it, Norris brings the attention an intersectional fact which is more convincing than the simple dichotomy between men and women. Norris (1993) asserts the difference in political preferences between older and younger women which is named as "gender-generation gap". However, Norris explains both "gender gap" and "gender generation gap" with structural factors in the context, political parties' agenda, and social factors -women's movements. Based on contextual feature, structural, ideological, and social factors affect the political appeal towards the individuals as men and women or younger women and older women. Beyond the frame of this reality, internal dynamics will demonstrate various reflection in different contexts.

While Norris's works are important to understand dynamics in the context out of the West, they still do not fully correspond to non-Western

context. Lately, scholars turned their focus on non-Western context to understand the women's politicization. Sarah Khan (2017) suggests a perspective the gender gap in a non-Western context. Her research focuses on Pakistan, but she provides an overview about how social structures and traditional gender roles specify gender-based political preferences and how this outcome leads a gender-based gap in the non-Western context. For instance, while Khan questions the relation between women's votes and drinking water, she brings quite gendered and context-based explanation for Pakistan. Waylen (1996) analyzes the political existence of third world women in a wider perspective and she highlights how risky to assume third world women a unitary bloc.

Therefore, while focusing on the women and politics relation in Turkey, I consider Turkey's as a context and women as actors accompanying various identities as well. I endeavor to do this for every actor in the vertical feminization process. In this chapter, I bring the pieces together regarding women's motivation and how they have navigated their voting behavior in terms of the AKP since 2002, to complete the analysis of feminizing politics. The analysis reveals that there is a repeated habit in the women's vote, yet at the same time women actively show their agency in the decision-making process. To capture this paradox, I argue that the repeating votes of women should be considered a well-established and consolidated mechanism, which I conceptualize as a "routinized voting behavior". The concept is useful to understand how women's active decision-making process ends up again and again with the AKP. Put differently, 20 years of a relationship between women and the AKP shapes the form of routinization. For this, first, I will start by analyzing how women decide to vote for the AKP in the beginning. Second, I will discuss the consolidation mechanisms and arguments, which are also determinants of women's vote for the AKP in every election. Third, I will approach, from other side, the routinization by exploring why women do not switch their votes. By doing so, this chapter will help readers to understand how feminizing politics is maintained under anti-feminist circumstances by women voters.

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§ 6.1 The Beginning of Routine

With the thrust and love for Erdoğan not the Party

The AKP was founded by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on the 14th of August 2001, and it has become the ruling party in the upcoming election in 2002. Although no one expected this result from the newly formed party, the AKP -as a political tradition- was not as new as has been assumed and Erdoğan was not an inexperienced politician. Erdoğan was a popular politician in the Welfare Party (and previous National Outlook parties) and he had been elected mayor of Istanbul in 1994. Not only Erdoğan's personal heritage, but also the AKP, transferred political experience from the Welfare Party by adopting the practical sides of organizational and mobilization skills and moderating the extreme sides regarding the level of Islamist understanding within the party. Güler [5]was used to being a AKP's head of the neighborhood in one of the Istanbul's district and now she is only a voter for the AKP. She is 58 years old and a single (never married) woman who confidently explained how women started to vote for the AKP, which denotes the divergence between the AKP and Welfare parties as well:

> I think the AK Party became a school for conservative woman. The party and being a supporter of the party makes her a member of a certain social circle. Even as she shows her existence at home to her husband. Welfare or Virtue (Party) would not have done this. A man from Welfare or Virtue would not have participated in anything with his wife or daughter. Yet, the AK Party is not like that. Tayyip Erdoğan's biggest achievement for women is that he is participating everywhere with his wife and daughters. After that,

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[5] Güler is living in a poor neighborhood, but she has relatively better economic condition than their neighbors. She is living in a family apartment which was constructed by her father. She has her own flat. Her family's economic well-being is related with her father who was migrant worker in Germany.

people sincerely or not follow what Erdoğan does. When men open the door for once, it is not possible to close it again.

Güler's point is interesting for seeing the impact of the AKP on women's progress because it underlines the AKP's relatively moderate position according to previous Islamist parties. Yet, she commented from another perspective which clarifies also that the AKP provides what conservative women want in comparison to the leftist party.[6]

> When we look to the past, the leftist parties have made several mistakes, especially regarding the headscarf issue. Maybe, this is the biggest mistake. My dad did not say to me to start wearing headscarf. He told me as "you can do whatever you want". But I did it very fondly, with the perception I got at the lectures of Şule Hoca [She referred Şule Yüksel Şenler]… However, I have never understood why people are looking the veiled women as if they are ignorant. How can you [she referred the ban supporters] ban someone's right to education just because of her headscarf. Previously, I was thinking like, you are calling veiled women ignorant, but you also do not let them go to school. If she is ignorant, let her go to school to overcome her ignorance. This what makes the AK Party powerful among women indeed, especially for women who feel alone after the closure of the Welfare Party.

The moderate position of the AKP is better described as less Islamist than the Welfare Party and more inclusive than the DSP/CHP, which paves the way for a relationship between the party and women from the beginning. Güler's analogy between the AKP and real life is also critical and demonstrates the AKP's beginning strategy to appeal to as many people as it can.

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[6] The interlocutors are identified CHP (in contemporary context) and DSP (previous context) as leftist parties.

> When there is sale somewhere, everyone goes and sees what is there and what I can find for myself. The AK Party did the same when it came out with a political agenda that everyone wants to look at once. The AK Party runs that political style and network very well. For instance, the party said to people, "you can buy it as a person whose money is not enough to buy it".

This analogy reveals the AKP's inclusive and responsive character in the beginning, which reached people (women generally) who were untapped and forgotten. As Güler underlined, "the AK Party has gained success because it knocked on the doors of women who have never been visited before," which is a significant point for understanding how the AKP became a well-known and accepted party by the vast majority of society, even such a short time after its establishment. Women have seen the AKP as being formed with their desires in mind and a place for them to position themselves. Moreover, women have been discovered politically by the AKP as activists and voters. Indeed, it is difficult to simply call the relationship between the AKP and women a "perfect match". The complex nature of the relationship between women and the AKP varies from person to person and context to context.

When the relationship is considered as a research concern, the material connection has been at the center of the research (Çavdar 2022) which is not a mistake. However, women's agency does not perform only with material interests and based on my fieldwork, women have indirect material and non-material motivations and narratives to support the AKP.[7] In other words, when the AKP knocks on women's doors, it does not bring only a gift, but also reminds women they are important for the party. For this, I argue that non-material motivations are decisive in women's votes at the beginning in support of the AKP. Before focusing on reinforced mechanisms within routinized voting behavior, I will start by concentrating on how the relationship begins.

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[7] I will show in the consolidation part, women are not giving up voting for the AKP, although the party does not respond their material demands.

Based on my fieldwork, women have narrated a shared motivation toward the AKP, which is their *love and trust of Erdoğan* as a leader more than the AKP as a political party. I was anticipating women's warm feelings towards Erdoğan, which I observed in party meetings and rallies and heard from the heads of the women's branches previously. It was a repeating and typical outcome for women at every level of the femininization process. Interviews seem to repeat each other in the beginning when women reason about their political motivation to favor of Erdoğan. However, the interview data at the women voter level revealed that women are framing their *love and trust for Erdoğan* with particular themes.

Over time, I categorized the women whom I interviewed into three groups that were building their connection with the party based on Erdoğan and framed around diverse themes. A vast majority of my interlocutors addressed religion and referred to Erdoğan as their protector and savior. By referring to religion, I address religious practice and its rooted impacts on women's lives. A group of women who faced difficulties in their everyday lives regarding the lack of infrastructure appreciated the services of Erdoğan, since his Istanbul mayorship, and depict Erdoğan as the one who knows them better than anyone else. Another group of women defined their source of love and trust towards Erdoğan as tied to his love and care towards the nation, like Atatürk.

6.1.1 *Roles of Religion*

He is a Perfect Muslim/Namazında Niyazında biri

The role of religion is reflected overwhelmingly in the headscarf issue in regard to women. Although it is the most shared argument among my interlocutors, regardless of their veiled or unveiled appearance, it is not the only religion-related motivation for women to vote for the AKP. Moreover, all the women I interviewed prioritize Erdoğan instead of the AKP when it comes to their votes. While they associate their religious concerns with *love and trust for Erdoğan*, they express that they built their pro-Erdoğan attitude based on their piety. In other words, while addressing religion as

the source of motivation, I consider what religion is in the minds and practices of women I interviewed and how they frame it with politics.

Furthermore, religion has a significant place in the lives of the women I met. By saying this, I do not mean that women are just following the rules of the God. Indeed, I emphasize how women incorporate religion into their lives. This part discusses how religion impacts women and how the process of religious practices ends leading women to vote for the AKP. Both their appearance (wearing a headscarf) and their educational background prove the role of religion in the establishment of their political agency. Nergis[8] centralized her narrative around the headscarf and religious issues, while emphasizing the importance of the leader by saying:

> Now I am going to talk about its services… But indeed, while you are shopping somewhere and talking with someone, you have a feeling, but you cannot express it verbally. But you feel it and you feel comfortable that it is harmless. Of course, my national and religious ideas are overwhelmingly effective in my support to AK Party support. Yet, when we compare the AK Party with the leftist parties, religiously as a Muslim country, the AK Party seems to me the best choice… Indeed, let me rephrase what I said. Not to the party, but my love and trust for a person: Recep Tayyip Erdoğan… I trust Erdoğan so much.

Nergis is a pious woman with a headscarf. Religion is visible in her motivation to vote for the AKP and her love and trust for Erdoğan. Indeed, personal religious understandings take a political form through voting for the AKP and warm feelings towards Erdoğan. Nergis demonstrates the role of religion in her political decision at the individual formation level. Another way that women's political formation established a link with the AKP is inspired by the (religious-related) social environment

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[8] Economic well-being of Nergis's family has gradually increased. She mentioned how her husband poor while they got married. After raising her children, she started to work in a sale network that improved her family's conditions.

that women have experienced. For this, Quran Courses-religious education centers are the primary source of their social circles.

The women I interviewed have diverse educational backgrounds. However, the vast majority of them share only a primary school education. There are multiple reasons behind women not continuing their education. Some of them started to wear the headscarf after primary school graduation (like Nergis) which emerged as a block to further education under the headscarf ban, or they continued to imam hatip high school (like Meral) or are *Medrese* education (like Gülşen and Ayşen) or have taken Quran Courses (like Gözde and Nurdan). These educational backgrounds are bonded with religion and trust for the leader, which shapes women's political preferences through being part of a certain social circle.

Nergis is a primary school graduate like millions of other women in Turkey. She shared her grandfather's role in her life:

> My grandfather was against the education of girls. As a matter of fact, he asked us to wear the headscarf just after the primary school graduation. Indeed, I was a successful student, but my grandfather was the head of the family. When he said no, no one could resist him.

Gözde is another woman who started to wear the headscarf just after primary school graduation. She sincerely explained that no one forced her to be veiled and no one prevented her from continuing her education. She expressed her enthusiasm for religious education as:

> Indeed, I would have planned to continue to *imam hatip*. We went there with my mother to be registered but they did not accept me because I did not have any knowledge about the Quran. They [school administration] told me to come after improving my Quran knowledge. Then I started to go to Quran Courses. Then I stayed there.

Nurdan[9] continued the same Quran Courses with Gözde and graduated from there as a *hoca*. She narrates her experiences in Quran Courses as influencing her political choices:

> Do you know Ecevit? When I was going to Quran Courses, Ecevit was the prime minister. Maybe you do not understand me because you have not experienced the same thing, when you compare this with today's comforts. We covered the windows with papers to make us and the inside invisible. Believe me, we did not have any differences between night and day. What were we doing there? Nothing. We achieved our *hafiz* status under those circumstances. We could not go out sometimes. We could not enter the course in the daytime. Generally, we preferred nighttime for going out or entering.

She continued with a comparison between past and present:

> Now, we have Erdoğan as the leader. Who says what to whom if you are unveiled or you are veiled? Who asks why are you wearing chador? Who does feel pressure? But we experienced the pressure strongly. I heard cruel words just because I wear a chador. Of course, I will vote AKP, of course I will support it.

Personal experiences like Nurdan's exclusion and humiliation because of her religious identity, are a repeated motivation behind the direction of the women's vote. Meral's pro-Erdoğan motivation has a similar root to Nurdan's. Meral is a middle aged (45) veiled woman who is married with two children. She is living in a well-known formerly left-wing squatter neighborhood. She has an imam hatip high school education. During the interview, she revisited her memories frequently to demonstrate how she was right to vote for the AKP and support Erdoğan.

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[9] Nurdan has one teenage and she is a divorced woman. She and her son live with her family in a working-class neighborhood. After she divorced, started to work as a kindergarten teacher in a religious-oriented school.

> I was going to *imam hatip* high school, which I had to use a bus for, to get from home to school. But sometimes the buses were not taking us and even were not stopping in the station just because we wore a headscarf. Buses were not stopping even though there were others in the station. Just because of us. For this reasons, other people were angry with us because they understood that buses were not stopping because of us... My biggest reason to vote for the AK Party— I am emphasizing this experience of not being able to get on the bus. Also, I could not continue to university for the same reason. I am not giving my blessing/*Hakkımı helal etmiyorum.*

As seen above, these cases revolve around a similar point and form women's political stance based on a shared experience. Prevention by family and pressure or exclusion from society because of religion reflects the diverse forms of the role of religion in women's lives and contemporary political decision when they are comparing the past and present. During the interviews, Gülşen (30) and Ayşen (27) were the most extreme cases among other interlocutors, as two sisters who got their education in the *Medrese*.[10] Gülşen[11] is the older sister and started high school in a *Sağlık Meslek Lisesi,* but she could not continue her high school education because of the headscarf ban. Then, she went to a *Medrese* in Fatih,

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[10] Medrese is an educational institution. Medrese, conventionally means more religious-oriented institutions. Contemporarily, Medrese education in Turkey is to be executed by various religious groups. They are different than *imam-hatip* high schools which are under the state control. However, Medrese that Gülşen and Ayşen participated in, are managed by a well-known pro-Islamist group.

[11] Gülşen is married with two kids and part-time Kuran teacher in a mosque where her husband works as a Imam. She is living in a lower middle-class neighborhood and belongs very well-known Islamist community. She meets with her husband in the same community via arranged married.

Çarşamba.[12] Her sister Ayşen[13], never started a regular school after her primary education, and she followed her sister. Both of them got married and had two children. Their marriages were arranged by their *Medrese*. Their husbands were also educated in the same *Medreses*, in the male section. Gülşen's husband is a mosque prayer and Ayşen's husband is a *hoca* in a Quran Course. Gülşen is also working as a part-time Quran lecturer to teach Quran to women in the mosque where her husband works. Ayşen wants to do the same thing as her sister after her children are older. Indeed, the *medrese* contributed more than just an education to Gülşen and Ayşen's lives. They formed their private, social, occupational, and even political lives. Gülşen described the initiation of her relationship with the AKP by saying:

> In my voting age, I saw only Erdoğan, and I do not remember the previous parties. Ever since I remember, Erdoğan has been there. I have not voted for any different party. Indeed, all my social circle has the same attitude. They prefer the AK Party because of the freedom of religious practices -maybe it seems to you to be a stereotype, but it is true. You started to vote for the AK Party to be free in your practices. After that you concentrated on the party's services, and the AK Party has had significant developments.

Ayşen had no experience outside of the *Medrese*, as Gülşen did through one year in *Sağlık Meslek Lisesi.* Ayşen's political motivation has been more religiously oriented than her sister's. She narrated and rationalized her political behavior:

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12   Çarşamba is a neighborhood in Fatih which is overwhelmingly chosen by religious groups to establish their headquarters or medrese.

13   Ayşen is Gülşen's younger sister and has a very similar lifestyle with Gülşen. She is married with two kids and living very close to the center of their Islamist community, because her husband is working as a teacher at that community. Economically, Ayşen's family has more limited options than Gülşen's one. While Gülşen's family is living in the housing provided by mosque, Ayşen's family is living in an apartment for rent.

Indeed, I cannot say I am from this or that party. I am voting for the AK Party because I am pro-AK Party. I am voting for the leader who I believe is a good Muslim. He prays 5 times a day. So, it is not related to the party. Today, if Erdoğan starts a new party, I will stop voting for the AK Party and vote for the new party. The reason why I am voting for the AK Party is because of the party's religious sensibility, which we see from Erdoğan. I believe he is a good leader, because he has faith. You can trust him, because if a person has faith, he/she is afraid of God when doing something bad. Don't you see, he is reading verses from the Quran [*ayet-i kerimeler*] while starting something. He is always repeating the name of Allah.

The role of religion in women's lives was frequently asserted in my interviews when they were explaining their life stories and reasoning about how they started to vote for the AKP. My crucial finding is about how they embodied their religious understanding through the leadership of Erdoğan. The role of religion in women's lives leads their political decisions and guides how they identify and accommodate politics within their world. From family background to educational formation, which is also the basis of women's social circles, religion interpenetrates women's lives and helps them to construct their political agency, which currently takes the form of a vote for Erdoğan. Experiences in women's formative years overlap with Erdoğan's manifested religiosity in politics.

The matching form of piety between women and Erdoğan seems to motivate women to vote for him. However, women's narratives showed another theme that can help us to analyze their behavior in politics: they emphasize their *love and trust for Erdoğan* as their initial motivation. This theme also emerged from their daily experiences, and, beyond a discursive act, it has an embodied reflection in their lives. In this part of the chapter, I want to focus on how Erdoğan's daily services affected women's political decisions.

6.1.2 *Identification of the AKP with Service*

> *We [Erdoğan himself] came to be of service to the people, not a master*
>
> -Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, 2019

Erdoğan repeats the terms *service* and *being a servant* to the people after every election and also refers to these terms while describing his vision for politics. Erdoğan's reflection on politics as a *service to the people* and his accomplishment in the Istanbul mayorship in terms of organizing and providing daily services and infrastructural requirements affects women, who are the main recipients of municipal services from the beginning. Erdoğan's efforts to improve women's daily lives revived when he came to government in a nation-wide sense, especially in the health sector.

Just after the 2019 Istanbul local election, I came across rumors in women's gatherings and suspicions in interviews about the failure of Erdoğan/the AKP at the municipality level. Rumors and sayings were about how Erdoğan came from the municipality, and now he had lost the major city: Istanbul. Was this a sign of the AKP's failure in the national elections? No one clearly admitted that the AKP had lost the elections, but they were emphasizing that Erdoğan was the secret of the party's and his own initial success. Nergis was saying: "Nobody can match Erdoğan in the management of the municipality". She said this after I asked what she thought about İmamoğlu as the new mayor of Istanbul? She was angry with him and the result of the election. The association with service and Erdoğan arose directly from denial and criticism of İmamoğlu as mayor, and a lack of expectations from him as a governor. Even though Erdoğan was not the candidate for mayorship in Istanbul, the women's statements could refer to *Erdoğan* as the repeated pattern. Nergis ended her statement by emphasizing her trust of Erdoğan, which motivated her to vote for the party in terms of his service understanding:

> You know where all this trust is coming from… We saw what he did, and we believe that he will do more. You know the phrase "what he did makes us sure what he will do". We started to vote for Erdoğan based on this understanding.

Nergis's statement associated service with a non-material theme: trust. Indeed, service means something tangible in women's lives. These tangible narratives were revealed in Nurdan's statement, while she was angry with people who were ungrateful for the services of Erdoğan:

> Now I am going to share a moment from my childhood. There was one public hospital in our district. Look! I am not exaggerating; we were going there before sunrise to get an appointment. Even before sunrise, there were a lot of people in the queue. If you lost your place in the queue, you should have given up for that day. If you were lucky, and if you found an appointment by chance and reached the doctor, you should have handled the humiliation of the doctor as the second stage. After you faced the humiliation, the new stage was the queue for taking your medicine. You could find some of the medicine but generally you could not find most of them. If they told me that you will take your appointment by phone and buy your medicine from the pharmacy in your street, it was impossible for me to believe them. It was a luxury for that moment.

Since his mayorship, Erdoğan has built the sense of trust based on his service. The services, as I analyzed in Chapter III and Chapter IV, were designed to improve women's everyday lives and created a dialogue between female actors of the feminization process. At the voter level, the services were proving critical in the beginning of the relationship between women and the AKP/Erdoğan. Nurdan's statement showed how Erdoğan conquered women's hearts by caring about their daily problems: "Have you ever heard before women were praying for a leader *as

may god take it from my life and give it to him? You know several women were saying this for Erdoğan."

Praying is a way of showing appreciation for Erdoğan, who saved women from spending a lot of time and effort to sustain their daily requirements. Gözde approached this from a more realistic perspective than others by saying:

I really liked how Erdoğan has worked since his mayorship. Thanks to him many things have changed. Indeed, their absence were a shame for politics. However, he was the first one who achieved them. You know that this was his duty, but when we saw from him these services, we liked it. He actually did what he was supposed to. I am aware that all of this was the responsibility of a politician. However, no one did it before. You know what I want, everyone [political parties] is going to work very well, and I will be confused to vote among them.

Esma[14] is married with three children and a middle aged, veiled woman. She was previously an active member of the AKP as the head of a neighborhood. Both as a member and voter of the party, she highlighted the importance of the AKP regarding how it (indeed Erdoğan) has changed the meaning of service by saying:

They brought several things to this country. When we look at the party, there are a lot of positive sides. However, people are ungrateful, and they ignored the positive sides easily and focused on the negative sides. I know very well what I experienced in my childhood. I know very well what my neighbors faced as problems. I miss the old days just because of the sense of neighborhood. I don't miss anything else in terms of life conditions. It is great to

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[14]   Esma is living one of the lower middle-class neighborhoods. She is originally coming from a Black Sea family. After she married, she moved to Istanbul. Despite the single income -from her husband-in her family, their economic well-being is enough to call them a middle-class family. By considering they have a car and home.

live such a comfortable life nowadays. You know water, water was the biggest downside of our everyday lives. We were carrying water from the other side of the neighborhood where the municipality sent water tankers. Everywhere smelled of garbage. The roads were mud, there was no asphalt. There were a lot of streams that smelled badly. We grew up there. So, people were better than now, but the conditions and lifestyle were worse than today. I wish we had the same opportunities and lifestyle at that time. However, I am always proud of what the AK Party did and I appreciate the party.

Esma's narrative had a similar storyline to that of many other women I interviewed. She echoed others' reflections about the AKP's politics of service. Moreover, Esma also talked excitedly about the role of Erdoğan after her statement:

Indeed, I want to correct what I said. I would like to correct "the party" to "Erdoğan." Because I am proud of my leader, Erdoğan. When we look at it as the party, we cannot say all of them are good people. Look at my hands, do you think these five fingers are equal with each other? However, when we talk about Erdoğan, he is a leader in the world standard. When I look at him, I continue to walk behind him until my last breath. My aim is to see Erdoğan as a leader as much as possible. Who do you think Erdoğan is? He is me, he is you, he is everyone. He is the one who understands us better than anyone else.

Esma highlighted her leader-oriented explanation, as other women did, yet she reinforced it with Erdoğan's political understanding and what he did (does) for the people. She framed her *love and trust for Erdoğan* by directly identifying herself with him. As I discussed in chapter III, populist sentiments in the AKP's political mobilization are very critical in terms of building women's political agency. Esma reflected her political agency by interpreting Erdoğan as "one of us". There were numerous

ways to define and establish women's political agency and motivation to vote for Erdoğan, in terms of the theme of service, all of which comes from the same root as Esma pointed to: "he can understand us".

In the beginning of our interview, Hacer[15] warned me that, "I am not a fanatic AKP woman. There are some women who defend whatever Erdoğan does without any criticism. I don't like that attitude." She is a 48-year-old housewife, married with four children. After she warned me rigidly, she softened her tone and continued by saying, "but if I vote for him, I guess I like most things." She was a bit stressed because of the interview and I needed to reframe our interview as a casual conversation to make her comfortable. For this, first I asked my question in a general sense: why do you think people like about Erdoğan? She answered by saying:

> He is an Anatolian person.[16] He is using the same language that people use. Moreover, the majority of people in Turkey are pious, willingly, people are voting for him. So, everyone can find something.

Then I asked what did you find? What do you find? She explained that:

> Every party is claiming we will do this and that, but all of them have a failed background. They might convince the younger generation, but there is a group of people who experienced and remember everything, and they cannot convince them. Now, we are looking everywhere, he takes care of everyone. Elderly people, widows, disabled or people who care for the disabled. He supports everyone. This is very important in my eyes and has not been done

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15   I connected with Hacer thanks to Ayşen and Gülşen. Hacer is their mother. She is living in a lower middle-class neighborhood. She is a veiled housewife, but indeed, she worked for a long time in their own pastry with her husband. After her husband retired, he sold the store. Even though Hacer worked with her husband more than 15 years, she could get retired, because her husband did not see that is an issue.

16   Being an Anatolian person has a populist reflection which is derived from people's identification Erdoğan with their own origin.

before. Tell me, do you remember these kinds of things before? Maybe you can say that, if someone else comes, they can do the same thing. Maybe, but did they do it before? No. How people suffered before Erdoğan and what they faced... I think this is the reason for women's support.

Many women voters place great importance on Erdoğan's understanding of service to the people, which is generally designed to target women. At the beginning of their support for the AKP/Erdoğan, women referred to Erdoğan's Istanbul mayorship and his political legacy in terms of improving women's lives. Meral specifically underlined how her life started to get better under Erdoğan's mayorship:

> After Erdoğan was elected as mayor of Istanbul, we started to see green spaces in Istanbul. Before that, some of them existed, but we could not go to the green spaces, they became safer after Erdoğan. Everywhere is very beautiful right now. People are making fun of us for saying he constructed the roads, yet you know how important they are, especially for people who are living in Istanbul. Indeed, he did it. We went to Elazığ with my husband. Believe me, we were on the road. How can I say, he thought about the places that even God forgot?

As Meral pointed out, Erdoğan's achievements in Istanbul spread through to Anatolia while connecting people who are living in Istanbul to their hometowns. In other words, Erdoğan's political journey started at the local level and reached nationwide. Erdoğan managed to connect with women which he framed in his political understanding as service to the people, and he centralized women's concerns and daily requirements. As women highlighted, it was the first time that a politician remembered and understood them. According to them this can only be explained by the fact that he is coming among them, and they can trust him. Women were confidently repeating that *I found the AKP/Erdoğan very close to me*.

As I said before, women identify services in a non-material sense. Even though they talked about services in the material sense, they gave examples from their relatives or neighborhood, such as: "I am not taking any social help, but we are hearing there are a lot of people who are receiving them." Only Nurdan touched upon the material relation between her and the party:

> I think the AK Party is respectful of my religion. Additionally, it is serving. It responds to my demands. If I am waiting for a service, I can get an answer from the AK Party. For instance, thanks to the President's project on TOKI, we found a chance to have a house. See, thanks to him, I own a house. I am praying for him every day.

As the above quotations revealed, women have trust in Erdoğan, which is derived from his performance since his mayorship. Indeed, this was the initial motivation for women to vote for the AKP—based on their religious concerns. Beyond the memorized and stereotypical sayings, they were associating their political motivation with the improvements in their lives. In other words, more than just discursively admitting that Erdoğan is working, they underlined their trust with specific experiences and improvements in their lives. On a daily basis or nationwide, all the service-based developments are crucial to the construction of women's political agency and are part of what makes women vote for the AKP and signal Erdoğan as the leader from the beginning. Until now, I examined women's religiosity and service-based motivation as the source of their initial support for the AKP/Erdoğan. Now, the next part will discuss the final theme, which is women's understanding of the leader figure and identification of Erdoğan and his comparison with Atatürk, which represents him as a world leader.

6.1.3 *Erdoğan: a desired leader and the Second Atatürk?*

Kalaycıoğlu (2013) asserted that regardless of the ideological formation of political parties, leaders are key actors in vote mobilization. He showed evidence of political parties who failed after their founding leaders'

absence from active politics. Based on this observation, he examined the impact of current political leaders on voting preferences, and he found that "the popular image of Erdoğan and the AKP is the most favorable among all of the party leaders" (p. 493). Kalaycıoğlu's findings are based on two national surveys from 2007 and 2011. The quantitative research cut across what I came across in the narratives of women. While analyzing feminizing politics in the case of the AKP's anti-feminized features, I designed the research to have a qualitative in-depth focus on women's voices and self-expression to reveal the narratives behind their political agency. More clearly, how does women's political participation achieve to sustain coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics will be the focus of the chapter from voter angle.

Based on the reality of Erdoğan's popular image at the voter level, compared with other political leaders and his own political party, this part will focus how the image of the leader has manifested at the women voter level since 1994, when Erdoğan began consolidating his leadership status both in the minds and hearts of women. As the above analysis revealed, women are associating their (religious and daily base) experiences with Erdoğan clearly, but this part will centralize the leadership appeal of Erdoğan to women. I first consider how women point to Erdoğan as their leader. Then I move to a repeated pattern among women, which is their comparison of Erdoğan to Atatürk. The comparison is framed regarding two points in the women's narratives, which made them support the AKP. First, both Atatürk and Erdoğan are world leaders. Atatürk defended his country at the international level without compromise and Erdoğan is doing the same thing in the world by standing proud. Second, women believe that Atatürk provided several rights for women and Erdoğan completes and updates them in contemporary circumstances.

Before starting the interview, I was aware of the statistical fact of Erdoğan's popularity, yet I could not anticipate how women would put it into words. Over time, the interviews showed that women are associating every improvement and assertive thing in their lives with Erdoğan. This leads me to ask what makes women think Erdoğan is a proper leader. I

did not receive exact answers from women, but they generally asserted that "Erdoğan fits the leadership." Even though women expressed themselves clearly, when it comes to Erdoğan, they just said, "he is perfect for leadership". Gözde commented in a similar vein as:

> He fits for the leadership and is what Turkey needs. Whether you like it or not … Tayyip Erdoğan, how can I say, he has a leader's spirit. He always says: it will be as I say.

As I discussed above, several elements formed the relationship between women and the AKP, yet when it comes to the leadership of Erdoğan directly, women did not hesitate to denote him as a dominant leader. Indeed, they were justifying this by saying, "we need a strong and tough leader in Turkey". Gülşen's statement clarified the repeating argument behind why Turkey needs a strong leader:

> If Turkey has a silent and calm leader, there are several countries that are waiting to exploit Turkey. I think that Erdoğan's stance motivates us as Turks and Muslims, he activates the blood in our veins. I think this has made me, since the beginning, his follower.

Meral shared similar comments as Gülşen by adding the women's perspective:

> I have to say from my woman's perspective, I really like Erdoğan's strong stance against the outside. In a manner of speaking, he is banging his fist on the table against others, and he is coming back to his country with pride. This is power. We are women, we like this. I have to say, Erdoğan, his own character is the major factor behind women's support.

She also added:

One of my friends told me "We learned to live as a human from Erdoğan." This is her justification for voting. Without any reason why do we vote for him or why do we pray for him after each *namaz*.

Women's preference for Erdoğan were accompanied by his power and strong stance against the world and women admitted that they liked to see this power to feel personally secure. Güler rephrased this understanding with a comparison of Erdoğan to Atatürk by sharing her observation about women:

This is the thing, Tayyip Erdoğan is an excellent politician. He has a political intelligence; we have witnessed it since 1994. Also, he is very fiery. Yet, this overlaps very well with the features of his voters. Indeed, today there are a group of people who approve if Erdoğan says white to black. It seems like the people who are calling for Atatürk, as if he did not exist, we would not have been excited.

Güler pointed out the similarity between people who supported Erdoğan and Atatürk. From a different perspective, women compared Erdoğan and Atatürk in terms of leadership. The discursive comparison in women's narratives seems paradoxical when the AKP's political stands are considered as the exact opposite of the contemporary CHP, which was founded by Atatürk. However, as will be seen below, women supported their comparison while asserting *Erdoğan and Atatürk are the embodied reflections of the dictionary meaning of leader*. Hülya furthered this comparison by indicating what Atatürk would say to Erdoğan:

Atatürk, the leader. Rarely comes for a nation. Now, we have this chance for a second time. I see Erdoğan as the second Atatürk. If Atatürk knew who was representing his party, he would have said, "you are misleading my party's reputation". Now, we have another Turk as Atatürk. Tall man. I am proud of him. There is no such

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thing in any part of the world. He likes Turkey. He is sacrificing everything. If Atatürk lived, he would have wanted to do this as well. He would have wanted to see such a powerful leader. Because he was like that. Why are we represented in the world as losers after Atatürk?

Hülya's hypothetical narrative was not unique. Both Atatürk and Erdoğan and their parallel leadership were framed and became visible through women's reflections. Esma was seriously denoting Erdoğan by saying:

If today Atatürk lived, he would have supported Erdoğan. Atatürk was also a leader who cared about the nation and homeland. Erdoğan is also doing the same thing, is not he? He is also following Atatürk's path.

The women among my interlocutors, most of the time, attempted to justify why they voted for the AKP since the beginning. When I was asking questions, I followed a chronological line to reveal a clear analysis about how political agency is established (starts) and how it is consolidated (routinized). Representations of non-material themes in their narratives, such as religion and Atatürk, might be interpreted as the women's tendency toward moderation without polarized and extremist political agendas. Indeed, their initial votes also showed that women follow more moderate political paths. Moreover, women's political concerns are shaped around the service base activities which they associate mostly with Erdoğan and his political odyssey since the Istanbul municipality. As seen throughout these cases, women from different backgrounds identify with and correlate their experiences and political understandings with Erdoğan. My attempt was to avoid stereotyping women's approaches towards the party and especially the leader while analyzing their initial motivations as based on religion behind their votes. For this, I emphasize how women make sense of politics through their own experiences.

To recap, for devout AKP women voters, religion is an important motivation behind their vote for the AKP, yet piety shapes women's entire

lives through their practice, with family background, education (secular or religious), and individual experiences. Within this intertwined situation, it reveals that piety is critical in term of the determination for their initiation of voting behavior. From these backgrounds, they have embodied their political understanding with Erdoğan more than the party and imagine him as the provider and protector of their current lives. First, they identified Erdoğan as a powerful leader who is ideal for protecting Turkey against enemies on the outside, and Islam against the enemies on the inside. Second, Erdoğan himself is also assumed to be a good Muslim, which women believe means he is afraid of God, and this prevents him from doing something bad.

Moreover, Erdoğan, since his mayorship in Istanbul, has been identified as a service-based leader who cares and relieves women's daily requirements. Beyond the discursive and stereotypical reflections, women narrated how Erdoğan brought comfort to their lives, which led them to trust him. However, drawing on women's narratives, they are associating their votes' destinations with non-material concerns even as they formed them with the AKP's service-based understanding. As Schafer (2021) showed, low-income groups of AKP supporters are not motivated by material concerns. As interviews revealed in my research, women also lack material motivation and framed their initial motivations towards the AKP through their love and trust of Erdoğan. As I talk about below, religion and new services reinforced their *love and trust for Erdoğan*, and they indeed imaged Erdoğan as the leader that Turkey and they need. Therefore, Erdoğan himself and his politics were a sufficient reason for women to vote for the AKP in the beginning. Finally, identity formation and Erdoğan's place in this formation shapes women's votes from the beginning and leads them to insist on its protection. However, after 20 years of the AKP's power, continuity arouses curiosity while keeping an eye on the initiation. While focusing on the process of feminizing politics in the AKP and the party's anti-feminist constrains, the motives behind the sustainability of the party and women are the key indicators for understanding women actors at different levels. If I frame the question is: why do women

continue to vote for the AKP? I will bring more illustrative answers to an-
alyze this process.

In the second part of this chapter, I discuss the consolidation mecha-
nism of women's voting preference for the AKP. In other words, I consider
why women continue to vote for the AKP. As I discussed above, women
have diverse forms of initial motivations to vote for the AKP, which are
associated with the leadership of Erdoğan in different forms. Now, I will
concentrate on how women's votes are consolidated, and I will specify
the elements behind women's vote sustainability. After this part, I will
explain women's reluctance to switch their political attitudes. By doing
so, I conclude the discussion of the routinization of women's votes and
what it means in terms of the feminizing process.

§ 6.2 Direct Consolidation of Routine

> *Even the road you know is long, it is a guaranteed*
> *road*

Turkey and the case of the AKP has been witnessing a consolidation of
the voting process in terms of people's preferences. Gümüşçü (2012)
called attention to this by referring to the AKP's increasing votes in the
national election of 2011 as the first time in Turkish politics that we saw
the "cycle of dominance". Çakır (2020) showed how partisanship limits
electoral volatility and defection via quantitative analysis. He also under-
lined that since the AKP has been elected for the first time in 2002, the
electoral volatility remained stable.

Based on the statistical facts and my fieldwork, the lack of volatility
and consolidated voting behavior emerged as a repeated and typical re-
sult among my interlocutors as well. The process of feminizing politics at
the voter level reveals itself through routinization of votes. The consoli-
dating elements behind women's votes help to understand women vot-
ers' reflections and contributions to the coexistence between feminizing
and anti-feminizing politics. In other words, this section will analyze the
consolidation of votes for the AKP by focusing on women's expressions.

The feminization process will be examined from the bottom by touching upon the effects of the (anti-feminist) constrains or opportunities from the top. To shed light on the consolidation mechanism, I will focus on four elements based on interview outcomes: 1) *familiarity with the party*, 2) *fidelity*, 3) *overlapping world view on womanhood and motherhood*, 4) *effect of outsider enemies.*

6.2.1 *Familiarity with the party*

> *Returning to the AKP is something like returning to your ex-boyfriend*

While responding to my question, "does the AKP satisfy your demands in every election?" Melike[17], in a similar vein as other women, expressed as:

> the AK Party is a family for us, and we are used to it now. President Erdoğan has been our leader for a long time and people have greatly accepted his leadership. We are going around the same vicious circle maybe, yes.

Melike continued by justifying herself without me asking for further clarification and she added:

> We are opposed to innovation because we are afraid of it. We want to make sure / *garanticiyiz*. We are not very open to new developments. We do not have future projections.

Indeed, she pointed to the familiarity condition behind the consolidation of women's votes. As indicated above, since the beginning of the relationship between the party and women, trust has played a crucial role at

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[17]   Melike is a housewife with her one child. After she graduated from university, she got married. She did not have work experience, and she does not think to work while she is raising her child. Her husband is working in an Islamic financial business as a manager.

every level. While in the consolidation process, trust turns a habit, which derives from familiarity, towards the party. Based on her political experience in the past, Güler echoed women's understanding of their voting consolidation:

> There is no one she can trust...We want to make sure / *garanticiy* iz. People are saying that at least I know the AK Party, it took a way in politics, I have no idea about others.

The narratives of Melike and Güler suggest that the voting habit is neither an unconscious decision nor necessarily a clear decision. While women demonstrate how their votes were consolidated through familiarity with the party, they did not specify what familiarity means for them.

However, familiarity in the consolidation of voting processes does not have a passive tone from the women's side; they are questioning themselves and other parties in every election to understand what they want and which party they can trust. Gözde criticized herself open heartedly by saying, "I think we get used to voting for the AKP, we are following the same pattern". Indeed, her experiences and decision-making process in the rerun election of Istanbul 2019 shows that it is more than what she has gotten used to. Actively, she chose the AKP as a party which she is familiar with. She expounded:

> I think the second election in Istanbul was wrong. I thought a lot about the two candidates. Even my husband asked me to change my vote. But you know my husband voted for İmamoğlu, now he is not very happy about the situation in İstanbul. At least I voted for what I know. I do not know if I really like what the AK Party is doing.

The rerun election frequently came up in my interviews, and overwhelmingly women did not change their decisions in the second one, like Gözde,

but Dila[18] had a different story, which she expressed her regret in her narrative:

> I voted for İmamoğlu in the second election. However, I really regret my decision. I will never ever deviate from my decision. Returning to the AK Party is something like returning to your ex-boyfriend. Someone you know. You know him, he knows you very well. You believe his sincerity. Even if your boyfriend made a mistake, but you know him and you will return to each other. The AK Party seems to me the same. It touches us individually.

Dila repeated her regret in multiple ways, but all of them reflect her criticism of İmamoğlu and trust and familiarity with the AKP, even though she did not specify the motivation behind her feelings towards the AKP. Nergis touched upon what she understands from her own sense of familiarity and how she associates it with the AKP, which builds her voting habits:

> I trust so much, and especially I trust Erdoğan so much. I hope, God will not fail my trust. But many of my demands were realized by the AK Party. I know, you have to sacrifice something to reach your ideal... I do not like new things and their replacement of old ones. For instance, you are my best friend, and we know each other from our childhood. But some day, someone is going to tell you that *Nergis did something bad*. You are responding by saying, I know her for a long time and even if she did something like that there has to be a reason behind it. So, even if the party did something bad there has to be a reason behind it which we do not know. See, this is trust. We do not trust everyone like that.

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[18] Dila is unveiled woman who Works in the service sector as a secretary. She is married but does not think to have a baby yet. She is not a urban poor, but also not a middle class woman. Despite the total income of her and her husband, they are struggling in their economic well-being.

My interlocutors explain many things through analogies. The main idea behind their analogies shows their understanding of politics. Nergis and Dila's analogies also emphasize trust and familiarity as what consolidate their votes. Trust and familiarity are the key elements in the link between the party and women. Beyond solid material interest, women's voting consolidation reflects non-material frames, which involve both material and non-material factors. Familiarity, especially, provides a continuity and justification for women's votes, even as they question themselves and their votes, which also helps with consolidation. Indeed, women are not consolidating their voting habits according to what they are getting from the party; they also feel that they owe the party, which they phrase as "fidelity".

6.2.2 *Fidelity*

> *Yes, maybe it is fidelity*

The consolidation process is built on women's initial motivations. In other words, women believed that the AKP has done various projects for women, and it is natural to expect more. They are rhetorically asking *how can I give up voting for them?* In their view, the AKP provides an order for them which they are satisfied and happy with it. They consider who else did this or who else has potential to do this in the future. While I was thinking about this understanding of voting motivation, Hacer brought fidelity to my attention by associating her continuous voting for the AKP in her answer to my question: *Is there anything bothering you in your everyday life?*

> The AK Party did a lot of things. Did it not succeed with the economy? I do not know. Maybe it did, maybe it did not. But we know that the party did and does it best. I mean, we can say at least it tried to do the best. Now, I cannot say anything specific because I do not know the reasons very well, right? But you know, today siblings do not share the care and duty for their older parents

because the AK Party is paying subsidies and caring for older people. You can say fidelity is behind my support for the AK Party, because I see what good it did for us. May God bless him. [*Allah razı olsun*].

Women are selective while assessing the AKP's performance. I will discuss this finding later in this chapter, but in terms of fidelity, they prefer to focus on benefits of the AKP and generally they are doubtful about the party's negative sides. This is not an irrational or passive acceptance on the part of women. On the contrary, women are proud of their support for the AKP, which they envision as a repayment for what the AKP does for them. Meral strongly expressed how she is proud because of her insistence on support, which is a sign of her appreciation and fidelity to the party.

> Hereafter, it is unlikely for me to change my voting behavior. Nevertheless, if a party will come and should downgrade the AK Party in my eyes, then I can stop voting for them maybe. I have my freedom thanks to the AK Party. I think I am free with the AK Party. There is no way to vote for any other party for me, the AK Party improves my quality of life. I do not want to change. Even if someone approaches me to convince me to vote for the CHP, no way, I will not.

Meral's facial expression was also very serious, proud, and decisive when she talked about her decision. While she was narrating her voting experiences, her face reflected that she was satisfied with her decision. Even her straight shoulders signaled that she was ready to support her decision from every angle. The field and political experiences of Güler helped me to understand and describe Meral's expression. Güler was pointing out why women did not change their decision by referring to Erdoğan and fidelity:

Their hands do not go to vote for another party. As long as Erdoğan stays in the head of the party, we never change our votes. There are numerous women who like Erdoğan from the heart. Because Erdoğan touched these women's hearts. Fidelity is a very important element in women's vote which means no matter what he does. This must be taken into consideration as well.

Tokdoğan (2018) argues that analysis of the AKP in Turkish politics would be remain incomplete without considering the emotions (261). Throughout my fieldwork, I came across multiple forms of emotions that connect women to the party. This is a huge topic, which deserves in-depth research analysis. Tokdoğan frames the relations between politics and emotions from neo-Ottomanism perspective by touching upon various extension of the AKP's political style and mobilization. Indeed, emotions are not the center of my research, but women form their motivation through specific emotions which involve trust, love, familiarity, feeling close and, lastly, fidelity. Instead of approaching descriptively their meanings or referring to them as irrational, I examine their function in women's political behavior. Especially during mass events like political rallies and dinners, teas, breakfasts, or home gatherings, I observed how women generously display their feelings for the party. In interviews, women were also addressing their emotions by putting them into verbal form. In this case, fidelity is viewed as a reflection of their pride and satisfaction regarding the party's performance. For them, their votes represent their fidelity to the party and Erdoğan. The contribution of fidelity to the consolidation process is very significant because, despite the lack of initial excitement, the sense of fidelity leads women to not give up voting for the AKP.

Women skillfully reflected their thoughts while narrating their understandings of their vote for the AKP. While considering the positive impacts of the AKP's performance and Erdoğan's leadership on the consolidation process of women's votes, how they were dealing with the AKP's anti-feminist gender agenda was still an unexplored topic. In chapter IV, I discuss how the party's women activists navigate their political survival

regarding the AKP's anti-feminist agenda. The analysis found that they established a bargain with the patriarchy, which sustains the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics. Moreover, the previous chapters showed that while the women activists bargain with the party, they also mobilize women's votes and redefine politics. When it comes to the AKP's women voters, they do not constitute a bargain with the party as activists do. However, they basically constitute their political agency and follow the party's agenda strategically. While no one I interviewed - at both levels- argued against the AKP's gender policies, women voters clearly shared their understanding of womanhood or family, which over- laps with the party's gender agenda. As the third source of the consolida- tion mechanism, I turn to the ideological formation of women, which is one of the solid themes of women's votes.

6.2.3 *Overlapping Understanding*

> *It will be a bit like gender discrimination, but men*
> *do politics better*

Turkish voting behavior has been studied through an ideological per- spective by outstanding scholars. There are seminal studies about politi- cal preferences, voting behavior, election valuations, and self-placement in Turkey. While digging among the plenty of research, I noticed Şerif Mardin's center-periphery explanation (1993) for Turkish society allows them to establish their analysis. Following this framework, most studies account for Turkey's political picture as a homogenous entity from the political culture perspective.

The center-periphery framework of Mardin's provides a clarification for the socio-political structure of Turkey, which has been formed since the Ottoman Empire. While Mardin offered the framework as a key to un- derstand Turkish politics, he applies Lipset and Rokkan's cleavage theory which was developed to analyze party systems and elections (Çarkoğlu 2007: 254). Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu mainly visited the center-periphery

framework to elucidate the political behavior of Turkish electorates in their analysis. Basically, the framework sees Turkish society as consisting of two groups. One is in the center who organize around the state as a ruling elite group like civil and military bureaucrats. The other is representing a much more heterogeneous group of people who are locating in the periphery. During the 1950s and even until the 1980s, this division was relatively reflecting settlements as urban-rural of people. Throughout Turkey's election history since the transition to the multi-party period, the center-periphery framework paves the way to explain the dichotomy between CHP vs. DP in the 1950s, CHP vs. AP in the 1960s. Even after the flourishing actors of the periphery with pro-Islamist and nationalist parties, radical changes in party system with the 1980 coup d'état and transformation in the Turkish society from different aspects, the center-periphery framework remains a constant argument in Turkish politics. In other words, the historical legacy of the socio-political structure of Turkey has overlapped with the transformation of society. Therefore, while the understanding of dichotomy is still constant, the actors have been diversified.

While Turkey has gone through a rapid social change, its reflection in politics was inevitable. Since the mid-1990s, the pro-Islamist political parties have raised their political support by appealing to the heterogenous periphery unity of the society. The rising tide of pro-Islamist parties took the attention of the scholars to understand the impact of the level of religiosity, religious conservatism, family values, and level and type of education in their political preferences (Kalaycıoğlu 1994; Çarkoğlu 2007). Therefore, the center-periphery framework is revisited by dressing under the pro-Islamist vs. secular dichotomy or conceptualizing it as "kulturkampf" (Kalaycıoğlu 2012). Religiosity-oriented studies enable the interpretation of the political preferences of the majority. Yet, while the scholars continue to focus their analysis on line with the cultural cleavages, some groups remain out of it, such as: the Alevis and the Kurds. The former is examined by Çarkoğlu and revealed that the salient importance of religiosity in the political preferences by resulting as "if the Turkish party system remains under the influence of religiosity, sectarian

polarization, i.e., people of different sectarian affiliation tending to group more homogenously in different parties, may be increasing" (Çarkoğlu 2005:288).

There are more studies about the latter, particularly with the establishment of pro-Kurdish parties. As Kalaycıoğlu emphasizes that "ethnic identity has become another major cultural fault line dividing Turkish society into the two blocs of ethnic Kurds and others" (Kalaycıoğlu 2014:587). While the fundamental determinants of political preferences have been underlined from the cultural division of the society in terms of religious and ethnic identities, they also incorporated with the ideological self-placement of the people. For instance, the right side of the political spectrum is consisted of conservative and religious people, while the left side is generally characterized by secular inclination (Çarkoğlu 2007).

The dominant role of religiosity continues to shape the political atmosphere and ideological position of individuals in the Turkish context. Yet, the scholars deepen and widen their curiosity to seek other sources and determinants of political preferences in Turkey. The 2000s have animated these attempts; both the political panorama and voters' profile have changed as new actors on the supply and demand sides have participated in politics. These changes drive the studies to understand the political preferences of diverse groups by focusing on their rational motivations (economic voting) (Başlevent et al. 2009; Başlevent et al. 2016; Yağcı et al. 2020), party identification (Kalaycıoğlu 2008), emotions (Erişen 2013), and finally, demographic features such as: gender-based (İlkkaracan 2019) and age-based (Kayaoğlu 2017).

When it comes to my in-depth research, the outcome leads me to show women's political agency from different angles. It is obvious that women who vote for the AKP are conservative, pious, and anti-feminist. Moreover, their voting behavior is the most salient proof of their ideological stance, which consists of a combination of the above three. In other words, women's worldviews have a political meaning that is mimicked by the AKP's gender regime or vice versa. I argue that overlapping ideas on family, womanhood and the relationship between women and men are also critical when it comes to consolidating the women's vote for the AKP.

Islamist parties in Turkey have never faced difficulties in attracting women's votes. There are wide range of reasons that involve material and non-material interests. With the AKP, this has continued, and the party manages to consistently appeal to women. As I learned in my interviews, women prioritize the family, children and consequently women's house-wife responsibilities. Indeed, women's preferences and understandings are clearly addressed by the AKP's gender regime. I asked women the following questions: "how can you define womanhood?" and "What would you say is the biggest problem women face today?" These were intentionally aimed to learn more about their understanding of womanhood. My follow-up questions, "what is the most important thing in your life?" and "when do you feel happy yourself?" unintentionally uncovered the women's overlapping perspective with the party. With respect to the answers to these questions-and more- I found that the AKP's family-mainstreaming oriented gender regime involves home-homemaker-motherhood echoes in women's responses. Put differently, women's issues are framed parallel with the party's gender agenda and none of them saw gender inequality as a problem for women despite repeatedly underlining domestic violence and femicide as the biggest problems women face today.

As I described in the Methodology part, I interviewed women voters during the Pandemic. Whether they are working or not, women have been affected by Pandemic restriction negatively due to the burdens of their clashing duties as mothers, housewives and workers. In other words, Pandemic has deepened the existing gender equalities (Xue and MacMunn 2021; Chauhan 2021; Derndorfer et al. 2021). While Gülşen described her understanding of womanhood, she touched upon her experience in the Pandemic as well. She was a part time Quran teacher in the mosque where her husband works as a prayer. She was not working during the Pandemic because of the restrictions and spent her time at home with her children. Indeed, she clarified that even before the pandemic she was going to the mosque only after 12 pm and until that time she was cleaning her house, and preparing the food for dinner in a hurry. Gülşen noted:

In general, being a housewife is essential for a woman if she is rais-ing children. Otherwise, children are devastated. It is necessary to spare time for children. When you are in hurry, you cannot fulfill the requirements of children beyond the basics like food, sleep and getting dressed. This is what I realized during the pandemic. When I was working, I was not letting my kids paint freely. I had concerns like who would clean after them? I did not have time. However, now I am doing everything comfortably. I know it is not easy to make a living with one salary. But— do not take this as a backward idea, but if a woman does not have to work, she should take care of her children. I mean, I prefer that woman with chil-dren be supported so they do not need to work. There are some women who have to work. But if you offer them— I will pay what you need, stay at home, I think most women would prefer this and say, why should I suffer? I assume there is a limited number of women who are working just because of pressure. Women feel compelled to work in order to increase their welfare.

While I was thinking about her answer, maybe she read puzzlement in my face, and she continued to share:

Of course, sometimes I am questioning this. Especially when I could not get enough of everything. Especially when my husband does not care. But, when you think about it, this is your responsi-bility, these roles are given to women. Reproduction is given to us, mothers. If you are going to complain about it, you should not be-come a mother in the first place. No one says that it is an easy task.

There are numerous ways by which women could identify themselves, but my interlocutors preferred to focus on motherhood duties, which en-tail a combination of homemaker duties and family-oriented understand-ing. As Gülşen's narrative pointed out, if women choose to work, it has to be to support the family's welfare. In other words, there is not any reason

to require or justify women's labor participation. Meral's judgement about her sister was illustrative for understanding this attitude from another angle. When I asked Meral how she describes womanhood, she briefly noted that, *a woman should be attached to her family and home. Namely, she should be a woman.* "Being attached to family" involves more than just being responsible for family, and indeed it means a woman should sacrifice herself for her family. Meral was criticizing her sister for not being attached to her family, because she preferred to continue her working life after she had a baby.

> After my sister had a baby, she continued her work just because she does not want to take care of her baby. How do I know this— because her economic situation is very good. Her family does not need her salary. She owns a house and car. Why is she working? I think, if a woman is going to work, she has to do it just to contribute to her family's welfare. For instance, I had to work after my first child, when she was two. But I had to work because my husband's store was robbed. We were almost at the point of bankruptcy. But after we economically recovered, I did not work. I am angry with my sister. If you want to work, why did you have a baby just after getting married? It is laziness to leave your child to someone else's hand. The child should be raised by the mother. Our concept of the blessed mother is slowly disappearing in society. Women should stop working after having a baby, because she is the one who can take care of and breastfeed the baby. It is women's duty.

The main points of Gülşen and Meral's narratives were repeated over and over again by other women. Womanhood is intertwined with the priority of motherhood and family in their reflections, which also overlaps with the party's gender agenda. Talking about womanhood shows that this is how women are establishing their understanding of themselves, other women, the family, and society, which unsurprisingly leads to their voting attitudes functioning as a consolidation mechanism. More commonly,

they continue to vote for the AKP, which they believe represents their perspective by encompassing womanhood, family, and motherhood. Gözde was happy to support the AKP, but she was not happy with the current situation of society. She believes that something is wrong, and it is all about the degeneration of the family in Turkey. Gözde did not blame the government for the current situation; according to her, women are guilty.

> I think family culture is effective for society. But my children are saying that many of their friends' parents are getting divorced. They said how lucky they are to have us as their family. But our situation has become a rare case. Everyone is getting divorced. I agree, people have the right to get divorced, which is as normal as getting married. But why are they immediately getting divorced? Previously, women did not work, and they had to endure the marriage and raise the children. However, now, they started to get divorced because of very unnecessary things. Maybe you do not agree with your husband every time, but these marriage and divorce situations affect children negatively. Then children are going out, they start to use something bad, because no one controls them. So, the family is critical to protect children.

Family-mainstreaming was frequently a part of the women's responses and gave responsibility to women for keeping the family together. For this, the image of womanhood was reinforced through the subtext that women have to restrict themselves to bear with an unhappy marriage. Güler shared openheartedly and shyly what discouraged her from not getting married when she talked about how she wanted to have a baby.

> Being a mother should be great. I did not regret my decision to not get married, but I regret not being a mother. I thought that I could not get divorced after I got married which scared me. What if my husband was a bad one? I saw several bad marriages, which discouraged and scared me.

All these cases clearly demonstrate how women constitute womanhood as overlapping with the party's agenda and policies. Indeed, conservative underpinnings and religious motivations are not the only thing framing their ideas; anti-feminism is also involved in their responses.

Most women situated women as belonging to the home in their worldviews. By doing so, they defined women within traditional gender roles, but they also claimed that women are not capable of working the same jobs as men. Alev Özkazanç (2020) draws our attention to how the AKP centralizes gender justice instead of gender equality. She clarifies that the AKP addresses gender justice by claiming, "gender roles are God-given and naturally complementary." The above cases showed that women accommodate these God-given roles of women in their re-sponses. Moreover, women's views appear to fit the gender justice for-mulation of the government via their further understanding of woman-hood and its complementary features in the relationship with men.

I was wondering about women's perceptions of women politicians. Indeed, I designed a question to better understand their reflections about AWBs. However, the conversations brought a different outcome. Women in AWBs are welcomed and supported by my interlocutors[19], but they were firmly doubtful about women in dominant and leadership roles. Gü-lşen shared her perspective about how women should take part in the political setting:

> I do not think that every woman is suitable and capable for politics or government. Women who are not behaving according to their feelings, but who will really act with their minds, should take part. Of course, women should be in some departments. For instance, some ministries like family, or health. But both women and men should work together. For instance, a man can be a minister and a woman will be vice minister. Why? Because they have different

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[19]   In some cases women were judged to focus on politics more than their familieis.

perspectives. Men cannot understand what women want; therefore, women have to be included in some required positions.

Gülşen echoed ideas of gender justice and Erdoğan's complementary understanding of gender. The association of women's "limited" capacity and the requirement for women's perspectives in government highlights the complementary discourse in the women's own words as well. Gülşen only implied that women lack the capacity to hold a leadership position. However, Nergis clearly emphasized it:

Women are not suitable for leadership. Women have been created as mothers, which makes them merciful. Yes, women should be in politics, for sure, indeed they are in politics. But I do not think they are fit to be leaders. Even Meral Akşener, I am not supporting her leadership position. You know, during a religious marriage, women are asked for two witnesses while men are asked for one. I am not saying women should not be in any position, but I do not think they are appropriate for the higher positions. I think, however successful a woman is, men are always one step front of women. Women are created more vulnerable than men. Also, while women's voices increase in society, the order of that society deteriorates. If women replace men, it gets worse.

The level of certainty in women's responses was surprising but not unexpected. Indeed, the parallel understanding between the party and women is what makes this relationship so long lived. Women agreed with the party not only on general topics, but also on topics such as the Istanbul Convention, abortion, and gender-based segregated places.

The Istanbul Convention is another question from my interview guideline. However, women's answers were generally: "I do not know very well what the convention is about." It is frustrating for me to hear the same answer from women about something that is directly related to their lives. Only one of them, Güler, answered my question without challenging the government's attitude:

No one knows what the convention is about. If you ask me what I know, we are limited about its content, and I can only say that it is about homosexuality. Indeed, I respect people's personal lives. However, I think assuming these people are normal and accepting their public participation is wrong. According to religion, it is heresy. There are no other rights to be defended, and am I going to defend them? No.

Güler's moderate position suddenly changed when she was answering this question. Generally, she answered my questions more smoothly throughout the interview, but as I came to understand, my interlocutors have critical points from which they identify their anti-feminist stands, and they can turn very rigid. For Güler, it was the Istanbul Convention and relating it with homosexuality. In Melike's statement it was abortion. Indeed, I could not ask the abortion question after the first five interviews, when I understood it is a sensitive and highly personal issue for women. When I realized that they do not feel comfortable, I took this off from my interview guideline. However, Melike was very open and comfortable when answering the question, maybe because she was one of the younger participants or maybe because I have known her and her husband for a long time.

I do not find it (abortion) is right. I do not want to say big words, but I cannot accept it. God gives you this chance. It is a miracle among millions of sperm. How can you reject this miracle? If you do not want to have a baby, you should use one of the birth control methods. There is a solution for everything.

Melike was pregnant when we were talking. Based on timing, the question was ironic. However, she was the only one to answer my abortion question. Abortion is a key element for understanding Melike's anti-feminist stand, but throughout the interview, she emphasized the importance of motherhood in multiple ways. She is a university graduate,

but she prefers staying at home to take care of her child(ren). Women's free choices and voluntary acceptance of anti-feminist borders were asserted in different ways.

Meral's narrative also touched on women's participation in Islamic practices. There is a significant literature about how women claim their public participation through their piety across the Middle East -especially in Egypt (Mahmood 2005; van Doorn-Harder 2012; Bano et al. 2012). But it is still largely an ignored topic for Turkey. Not only Islamist feminism, but also religious practices of ordinary women, have not received much scholarly attention. However, religion has a critical place in women's lives, not only at the practical level, but also in regards to their political decisions, as I discussed above. Indeed, religion-due to its interpretation and implications in Turkey- is an instrument for reinforcing gender inequality and segregation, which is also accepted by women. Women's narratives about their daily religious practices took up a major part of the interviews. When I was asking about their daily routine, they were starting to talk about their daily religious routine. I was required to ask how they learned to practice Islam. I included the question in my interviews after conducting a few interviews, because women revealed their understanding of gender when talking about their religious practices.

Meral is an *imam-hatip* graduate, which means she has a religious education. However, she emphasized that she is not related to any religious tariqats.[20] Then I asked her how she practices religion or improves her existing knowledge about Islam, and she answered:

> I follow only Diyanet, its fatwa. Especially my husband goes to Friday prayers, and he conveys to me what hoca said that week. It is enough for me.

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[20]   After the clash between the AKP and well-established religious group Gülen *cemaat* in Turkey, the tariqats and *cemaat* become another sensitive problem. Especially, one of my interlocutors clearly said "I do not want to name my group as *cemaat* because the word *cemaat* reflects very negative meaning.

 Meral was not questioning her exclusion from the mosque or her direct participation in religious meetings. She was happy with her husband's messenger role as a weekly process. When I asked: why do you not prefer to participate in religious meeting directly? Her answer reflected how the organization of religion in Turkey excludes women from being active participants at a macro level and how she does not see anything wrong with the situation at a micro level.

> I think *Cemaats* are acting very wrongly. I am not participating in any of them. They are acting weirdly. Sometimes I am listening to some of them but no, I do not like them. Indeed, I wish we had a place to practice religion properly.

Then I asked: do you prefer to participate in religious activity with or without your husband? She said:

> Even if I participate in a religious activity with my husband, we are accommodated separately. You know, it is good to sit separately from men. I do not see any good sides to being together in a meeting with men. Generally, women have to serve while they are together. However, if women and men sit separately then we will be free to serve them.

It was a volatile conversation, from *cemaats* to gender roles to gender segregation. While the conversation demonstrated the intertwined concepts of religion, *cemaat*, and gender it also touched on the paradox of how women accept the existing exclusion as well. While Meral viewed gender segregation as a good thing for women; indeed, she showed her acceptance of traditional gender roles, which are reproduced in every aspect of women's lives. Unlike Meral, Ayşen is a member of a *cemaat*, which is where she got an Islamic education. However, this does not make a difference when it comes to how Meral and Ayşen think about women being restricted from religious practices and how they show their consent.

Ayşen was really proud of her Islamic training, yet she signified that it has a limit.

> I am not saying I am done with learning Islam. It is an infinite knowledge. I got 5 years education in the *cemaat*. For instance, my husband's knowledge is much greater than mine. Because men and women are learning about Islam at different levels. Men are going more deeply than women. We learned the same commentary/ *tesfir*, but he knows it better than me. He was educated 5 more years than me. Women do not have the chance to go deeply into the learning process. You have to deal with your children and housework. Not just us, both male and female *hocas* are different as well. As I said, men are learning more than us. Even the senior female *hocas*, they also have children and a home to take care of, but men are not like that.

Meral and Ayşen brought an unknown issue into the discussion, which deserves to be examined more seriously. For the scope of this research, I interpreted their narratives as an illustration of how their views overlap with the AKP's anti-feminist understanding.

In this part, I would like to show that the women who I interviewed have the same worldview that the AKP promotes in its gender regime. As indicated above, women actively reproduce the conservative, Islamist and anti-feminist elements of the AKP's gender regime in their lives. Indeed, it is unclear which part is more effective in the overlapping of ideology: the party or women. There are two possibilities: the first is that the AKP managed to penetrate its gender regime into women's perspectives, and the second is that women shaped the AKP's gender regime. The answer does not have to be either of them. However, women form their votes through their ideological formation, which firmly overlaps with the AKP's gender regime. Women's expected roles as mother, housewife and care of the family are the key elements of my interlocutors' ideological formations. However, I have to underline that being anti-feminist, Islamist or conservative does not make women passive receivers of the

political process. Indeed, they are acting according to how they perceive and interpret life. The constant worldview of women leads to the consolidation process of their voting attitudes toward a party which reflects their understandings.

While I examined the sources of the consolidation mechanism behind women's routinized votes for the AKP, I got into my interlocutors' world, where I faced their feelings and ideological formation. The last element of this part of the chapter incorporates the combination of feeling and ideology of the women I spoke with by referring to their patriotism and fear of losing the homeland. As women establish their understanding about this issue, both the unmitigated environment of the Middle East and encounters with immigrants in their everyday lives trigger their fear and sense of patriotism. Therefore, their votes for the AKP have another crucial aspect, which is keeping order in order to not be like Syria.

6.2.4 *Take a Lesson from the Middle East*

The external powers aim to destroy our Tayyip

Since Erdoğan's one minute incident in Davos, in 2009, he has been glorified as the man who stands against the whole world. Erdoğan's aggressive attitude in foreign policy is received by the women I interviewed as meaning that, "without Erdoğan we are an open target for other countries". The unclear descriptions women gave embodied their encounter with Syrian refugees in Turkey. Overwhelmingly, women have an anti-immigrant attitude; they criticize Erdoğan[21] but still have empathy with them, which consolidates their support for the AKP and Erdoğan. I did not ask any direct questions to learn about women's views regarding the current refugee situation in Turkey, but they were excitedly repeating how Turkey needs Erdoğan as an answer to different questions. For instance, Hülya referred to the issue in her answer to my question about

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[21]   It is the only topic women are criticizing the AKP and Erdoğan outspokenly.

the 2019 local elections. She personalized the election results regarding
Erdoğan by saying:

> I am deeply sorry because people left Erdoğan alone. Everyone
> went away and he stayed alone. I see, his votes are decreasing. I
> have a feeling everything will be worse in the next election. I think
> that the external powers want to take power over from Erdoğan.
> Because achieving election victory is not something İYİP or CHP
> can do. The external powers aim to destroy our Tayyip/*Bizim Tay-*
> *yibimiz*. I like him a lot, he is standing against to whole world. He
> is doing the right things, so we have to protect him. Don't you see
> how peaceful our country is. The outsiders are waiting to bite us.
> I am begging, stay together. I do not want to be like Syria. We ac-
> cepted Syrians, but who is going to take us?

This is a very typical answer amongst my interlocutors, who talk about
the loss of Erdoğan in a patriotic manner. The sense of fear of the outside
and the discourse about external powers is successfully incorporated
into the everyday lives of people by Erdoğan and interpreted by women
as a reason to support Erdoğan, for the survival of the country. Nurdan
was the only one who did not use anti-immigrant discourse.

> They [she referred to the West] destroyed Iraq, they destroyed
> Libya. Now, we are witnessing Syria. Is not it a sin? I believe a Mus-
> lim should help another Muslim. What should Erdoğan have done?
> He is protecting other Muslims... Yes no one is perfect, everyone
> has a problem, but I am praying that at least we are not like Syria.
> When I go to bed, I am saying at least I am in my homeland. When
> I see the Syrians in the street, I am praying for what we have.

This was her answer to my question: what is the biggest problem in your
life? However, instead of pointing out specific problems, she drew atten-
tion to how we should pray /*şükretmek* because we are not as bad as

other countries in the Middle East. Interestingly, her answer to my question: what makes you happy? completed her previous statement:

> Indeed, even not being like Syria is enough and a valid reason to make me happy. Thank God. We have a lot of things to pray for /*şükretmek*. We came to this world to be tested. God will challenge us and our faith. Sometimes you will be unemployed, sometimes you will be sick. This is all going to happen. What is the point of life if you are going to be happy all the time?

Nurdan's statement asserts the influence of another perspective on Syrian refugees in Turkey and how it impacts women voters. Women with patriotism and a feeling of fear compare their existence and order with Syrian refuges in Turkey. Nurdan's answer was more extreme than the others by showing her empathy through Islam which motivates her to pray for what she has.

As I indicated above, women who I spoke with fear for Turkey's survival because of outsider threats, which they see in the unstable situation in the Middle East and with Syrian refuges. This existential fear consolidates women's support for the AKP, and they justify their vote by saying, "only Erdoğan can save us". Nergis said:

> How can we be satisfied only with the roads and construction? Do you think it is our only motivation? Of course not. How can we be living peacefully while all the countries are staring at us and waiting for a moment to destroy us. Thanks to Erdoğan. There is nothing to do after losing the country.

I am not claiming that women's patriotism shifted after the Syrian refugee crisis, yet they found a way to embody their fears. Their comparison between them and Syrian refugees consolidates their support for Erdoğan, despite rising anti-immigrant sentiments.

The second part of the chapter focuses on consolidation mechanisms in the routinized voting behavior of women for the AKP. I sketch the

emotions and ideological formation of women and point to some of their underlying issues regarding specific topics which they associate with needing the AKP and Erdoğan. Here, I noted that women rely on the existence of the AKP not in a material sense but overwhelmingly in a non-material sense. They feel that they are represented and safe with the AKP. However, women are not passively receiving the AKP's messages and greeting it with applause. This part of the chapter shows how women construct their routinized voting attitudes as directly related with the AKP, based on interviews. Indeed, the same women repeated that they are aware there is something wrong. Therefore, the following part will examine how the consolidation mechanism is supported by factors outside the party.

§ 6.3 Indirect Consolidation of Routine

I look around and I don't see anyone to vote for

As I got closer to the end of my interview with Nergis, she started to repeat that she voted for the AKP in every election and she will keep voting for the AKP in the future, no matter what. She justified herself by saying:

> I vote for the AK Party, always. I know, they have made some mistakes. However, there is not any party that could govern this country as Erdoğan does. Even those mistakes, he did this for a reason, a good reason. He destroyed the house, but he knows all the infrastructure of the house. So, he will rebuild it very quickly and easily. Actually, when I mentioned problems, whoever would have been the leader, there would be the same problems. Moreover, none of the leaders in Turkey would have been as successful as Erdoğan.

Nergis's statement highlighted the impact of partisanship in women voters' approach to politics, and she was not alone in this view. Güler also

shared a similar narrative by pointing out why she is insistent on voting for the AKP:

> I would vote for Tayyip Erdoğan if there was an election tomorrow. This is what my heart says. It is not because I approve of the party and his policies. It is because I do not trust others. You can say to me that the party is doing wrong, but how can we be sure that others will not make the same mistakes or maybe more?

There is not Yes or No answers for Güler's hypothetical question, and indeed she was not expecting an answer. However, both Nergis and Güler's points underline another discussion about the consolidation process of the women's voting attitudes in the AKP. From the beginning of the direct consolidation process, women who I spoke with identified the bright sides of the AKP and Erdoğan by referring to improved conditions in their lives, frequently in a non-material sense. However, routinized voting behavior is also affected by women's partisanship filter, which is formed through two understandings. On the one hand, they claimed that "no one can govern Turkey as the AKP does" which is derived from their lack of trust for other parties and fear of a non-AKP order. On the other hand, they believed that regarding politics in Turkey, "no one can make difference," which comes from their acceptance that everyone may make mistakes, and everyone tends to make the same mistakes. I addressed women's partisanship, which was founded by Çakır (2020) and "influences how partisans perceive the political reality, thus having and indirect impact on vote choice" to understand how women close themselves off from alternatives.

6.3.1 *Switching off the Alternatives*

There are 123 political parties (Yargıtay 2022) that are currently active in Turkish politics. Despite the existence of plenty of political parties, there are less than 10 major actors in politics regardless of their seats in the

Turkish parliament. This is the general landscape. When I turn to the individual level, the numbers of parties are reduced to only one. My interlocutors, especially those who have never voted for another party since the AKP's existence in Turkish politics, were certain that there are no alternatives for them to vote for. Even if they mentioned some names or parties outside of the AKP, they were doing this to criticize them. When I asked during my interviews: what do you think about the other parties in Turkish politics, and especially the main opposition party? Even their voices were changing, and the level of tension was increasing while they were talking about the opposition. Gözde had a sarcastic style while she was answering the question:

> When you asked me about the opposition, it reminded me of Kılıçdaroğlu. He drives me crazy. I do not like him. Am I going to vote for him instead of Erdoğan? Do not tell me something like that please. I do not see a strong opposition against Erdoğan. I am looking at all the parties, but now politics is between two parties. Yes, there are some new alternatives, but I do not see them as significant. Namely, there is no strong opposition which can convince me. As long as an opposition does not come, the AK Party has been in power for years. I know, it has made some mistakes. First of all, as a housewife, I am feeling the situation in the economy. I do not know whether, if another party was in government, would it have solved it?

They see no alternative and lack trust in the main opposition party; these are repeating patterns in women's statements. They reinforced their support for the AKP by asserting there is not any option outside of the AKP, as they experienced İmamoğlu's mayorship. No one mentioned İmamoğlu in a positive way; sometimes they were neutral, but most of them were criticizing him. Hülya was the only one who told me she likes İmamoğlu as a person, but she highlighted that she wishes he would have been in the AKP instead of CHP. For İstanbul voters, where I conducted my research, the CHP is giving a test to convince voters and prove its

ability to govern. However, the women I interviewed confidently stated that they would not vote for İmamoğlu or Kılıçdaroğlu. As a critical point, they showed their appreciation for Mansur Yavaş based on his working style.

Hacer has also not changed her voting attitude since the AKP's establishment. According to her, voting is a very serious thing, and a person can regret his/her decision. She rhetorically asked:

> Do you know why I have voted for the AK Party for years? Honestly, I cannot see any alternative. You know, if I feel like an alternative might be better than the AK Party, maybe my ideas will change. But there is no such thing right now.

Women were well aware that the AKP has made some mistakes but believed there is no alternative for them to vote for. Their lack of trust and lack of interest regarding the alternatives and the opposition stem from various reasons, from not approving of the leadership of the opposition party, to concerns about the AKP's absence -which I will examine in the next part of the chapter. Interestingly, women were also blaming the opposition party, due to the fact that it did not manage to win any elections at the national level. In other words, women linked their routinized voting attitudes with the constant failure of the CHP-and other opposition parties. Güler's ironic answer acknowledged that women were aware of the AKP's mistakes, but they were also certain that they will not vote for the CHP.

> I am looking at the opposition parties, they are working for the AK Party's victory. Believe me, if the AK Party works for specific policies, it would not have been as successful without the opposition's help. If it was done as a fiction, it would not be like this. Even the opposition could build trust between the AK Party and people, despite the current situation, and this shows how the opposition is a failure. It is what it is from my perspective. It is really

unbelievable, how the opposition cannot respond to any of the AK Party's failures.

Then she asked excitedly "how I can vote for the party if it cannot even do that".

According to women, the opposition party –generally, the CHP- is not capable of ensuring that it is a satisfying alternative to the AKP. They were not clear about what they expect from an opposition party, but in any case, they were not willing to change their votes. The following part will aim to discuss the reason why women are reluctant to vote for other parties.

6.3.2 *Fear of non-AKP order*

> *I want everything to stay as it is/Dirliğimiz düzenimiz bozulmasın*

When the CHP won the local election(s) in Istanbul, the AKP's Istanbul voters faced the AKP's absence at the local level. The experience put them in an insecure position in terms of the future, because they started to associate whatever negatives they faced with the new administration in Istanbul and the possibility of its nationwide victory.

Nurdan's statement epitomizes my interlocutors' views about the case of the AKP's absence, in relation to the latest political developments.

Look, anti-AK Party people do not know how to respect us, but they always ask for respect from us. However, they do not respect us. It is resurrected once in a while. But of course, now they are spoiled, they won Istanbul and Ankara. I cannot imagine what they will do if they win the national elections. I am afraid that not only the headscarf, but even our country will be lost. Do you remember the 15th of July? What would happen to us if we lost it. Even the CHP's supporters would have suffered, not just us. God

had mercy on us. We know how to live with little. We pray that we have a very good leader. I hope we do not fall into CHP's or HDP's clutches. Look, they are angry with us even though they are not in power yet. I heard that Kılıçdaroğlu said clearly that he will close TRT[22], *A Haber*[23]. Because he does not respect us. See, *Fox TV*[24] lies from morning to night, but it is still broadcasting. Why? Because there is democracy. When they get democracy, they break it into pieces. We are always second-class citizens in their eyes. Indeed, they are angry about being governed by the majority. They were used to governing that majority but know they are governed by them. They did not internalize */hazmedemediler*. This is the long story short.

From Nurdan's perspective there is a clear "us" and "them" division in society. More than just a division, Nurdan described the situation as a competition between these two groups. As a member of the AKP camp, she also hinted at her fear about the AKP's absence while pointing out how she feels humiliated in this absence. Humiliation is the main impulse constituting women's fear about the AKP's absence, which they experienced with the 2019 elections. Gözde associated the humiliation with a lack of trust in the opposition, while she narrated an incident she encountered:

One day, I was returning from Bakırköy [one of the districts in Istanbul where the CHP has a majority of the votes]. I guess, it was during the Istanbul election, just after the first one. Anyway, I was with my youngest child, and we got on the bus. There was a young woman in the bus, she was staring me. I did not understand. Mehmet was reading a book about 23 April. Then she started to

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22   Turkish Radio and Television, national public broadcaster.

23   A news channel was established in 2011 which is overwhelmingly followed by the AKP's supporters.

24   A TV channel which is relatively free from the AKP's restrictions and generally followed by non-AKP voters.

talk loudly: "thank God, the new generation will be a more bright generation, finally we got rid of the dark one". I looked around, I tried to figure out who the woman said this to. I was shocked, because it was about me. Yes, it was me. What should I have said at that moment? I did not say anything, but I was shocked. The logic is still the same. I was so upset. I was upset because of her way of thinking. Are we still at this point? So, I am backward because I am veiled, and my son is progressive because he is reading a book about 23 April. This pattern, this perception has never changed. Therefore, even though the CHP marks a hijab woman with a badge[25], they will never seem to me sincere.

Gözde interpreted the abovementioned nasty experience as being linked to the election results in Istanbul. The words and actions of a random individual seemed to trigger Gözde's fear in the case of the AKP's absence. She felt insecure while commuting on public transportation. This sentiment is repeated in women's words after the Istanbul elections in multiple ways. Hacer also associated her fear with previous experiences:

They [opposition] does not need to say anything. In any case, I will not believe them. Because I know what I have gone through. Veiled women were not allowed to enter any places. But now. Now everything is great. This is what I consider. I have never believed that they are going to respect my religious freedom. Indeed, they are declaring this clearly. Even if they do not, we know what they did earlier.

The fear of the AKP's absence was fueled by concrete or hypothetical cases by women. The fear magnified their dependency on the AKP to keep the existing order as it is. Like Meral pointed out:

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[25] In 2008, as an opening of the secular CHP to the pious women, Deniz Baykal wore a badge the hijabi and veiled women who became new member of the CHP (Milliyet 2008).

> I think there is a very nice order in our country right now. No one interferes with women who are veiled or unveiled. Everyone goes where they want. No one interferes with women's miniskirts at the party. But we could not wear what we wished. So, today, everything is all right. I want everything to stay as it is. *Dirliğimiz düzenimiz bozulmasın.*

Sometimes I was asking for clarification to specify the sense of women's words. In this case, I asked Meral: what do you think will disrupt your order? She answered:

> Let's think about the 15th of July. It might have taken everything from us. In one night, we could have been destroyed. Or the CHP. The CHP has an opposite worldview from mine. It persecutes me. But, you know, the people's opposition to the AK Party is stronger than their opposition to the CHP in Islamist groups. I know some women from X *cemaat*[26]. They told me they voted for the CHP. I could not believe it. I could even understand if they would have voted for İYİP, at least it is more right-wing than the CHP, but how can a *cemaat* member vote for the CHP. I asked them how they could do this, even if they put a pouch of gold in front of me, I cannot do that.

Women's voting attitudes are routinized with the aim of keeping the order as it is. By doing so, most women who I spoke with saw the CHP as the opposite side of what they think about politics. Moreover, they addressed the possible outcomes of the 15th of July, which reinforced fear about the AKP's absence and the requirement to be a protector of the AKP. Melike noted that:

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[26] She specifically gave some well-known *cemaat* names, but I did not use them here due to the scope of the research.

Maybe you will say how free you are right now. Yes, maybe we are not 100% free, there are some restrictions. But can you imagine what would have happened to us after the 15th of July?

It is impossible to compare the narratives of women before and after the 15th of July and before and after the Istanbul elections. However, it can be said that these two incidents both triggered women's existential fears in terms of politics. Moreover, they are aware of the level of polarization in society, which make them more anxious about the AKP's absence. Gülşen pointed out the intense polarization by saying:

Now the society is 50-50. One 50 chose the government, the other chose Istanbul, as we saw. I could not say anything about how they are governing, but honestly, still I do not trust them.

The doubt is a continuous pattern among women, as Güler also said:

There are some extreme people in the CHP. I have still encountered. If they have the opportunity, they won't hesitate to do the same thing.

The first phase of the indirect consolidation process shows women's understanding that "no one can govern Turkey better than the AKP". Women thought about incidents and actors of the AKP to show why they need the political sustainability of the AKP. The way women described these events and political actors demonstrated their interpretation of the AKP's absence and women's fears. This may seem like a typical conservative reaction, which is true. However, this is an active process which has changed, been rebuilt, and reinforced by women through the context of their experiences and interpretations about new developments in politics. In other words, women form their political agency and act according to it. The next part of the chapter will give an explanation from another angle, regarding how women emphasize that, "no one makes a difference". Women who I spoke with expanded upon this by highlighting that

politics has an evil feature, no matter who governs. When it comes to the AKP, Gözde addressed the party as, "lesser evil than the others." There are two ways to think of women's routinized voting attitude towards the AKP in this sense. The first one can be phrased as "excessive tolerance", and the second one is an "ingrained vision of politics".

6.3.3 *Excessive Tolerance*

No one is Perfect

The indirect consolidation of the women's voting attitudes is not only constituted through criticism for opposition parties, but also through women's tolerance and understanding for the AKP. I asked women about the best and worst sides of the AKP during my interviews. Even though they had critiques of the AKP, they did not forget to add, at the end of their sentence, "but no one is perfect". It is critical to see how do women associate the phrase with their support for the AKP? Indeed, the initial trust which motivates women to vote for the AKP, is also reconstrued through women's excessive tolerance in regard to different incidents. Due to the timing of the interviews, the pandemic was providing an excuse for the deficiencies of the AKP. Not only temporary issues, but also the AKP's and Erdoğan's constant appearance in public reinforced women's opinion that, "they are the only ones who will compensate for their own mistakes".

As mothers and housewives, women have experienced pandemic related transformations, especially in education. Turkey conducted remote education for most of 2020 and 2021 (approximately 3 semesters). During this process, women who have children at the primary school level had to deal with their children's participation in class through online platforms or TV. Due to the unstable education situation, women were more part of the process than usual. It also affected their daily routines, as I saw when I faced difficulty scheduling interviews. I conducted hybrid interviews, which means I interviewed in person or online depending on what interviewees were most comfortable with. Regardless of the style of the interviews, I had to wait until the end of their children's classes.

First, they had to be sure that their children were in the online class. Second, they had to check if their children faced any disconnections during the class. However, they were very good at organizing their new daily routines and they found slots for interviews with me as well.

Indeed, the pandemic was highly related with voter's decisions, as seen with the 2020 US presidential election. Avina and Sevi (2021) show that despite the expectations for Trump's second term, the pandemic affected voter's choices and caused Trump's loss. In other words, the challenges of the pandemic have become a reason to punish parties in power. However, in women's narratives, the pandemic became an excuse to show their understanding and tolerance for the AKP despite their increased burden.

Hacer has four children, two of whom are married, but two of them are still students. Hacer was not dealing with her children's online classes because they are old enough to handle this on their own. However, we had to wait until the end of her children's classes to not cause any disconnection by starting our online interview.[27] I was not asking about their views regarding the pandemic, but they brought attention to the pandemic when I asked what the best and worst sides of the AKP were for them during my interviews. Hacer began her answer by referring to the pandemic as a reason for today's problems.

> Everything would have been better. However, there is this pandemic. It prevented everything. That's why I cannot say too many things. Not just us, but the whole world faces the same problems. It's already a hard time for everyone, everyone has difficulties in their lives. We cannot say to anyone that he is governing well or badly. No one should say anything about it. Look! Everyone is doing their best. While they are working hard, we-as citizens- have to help them. They are trying. Yes, of course I would prefer a better

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[27] The internet infrastructure in Turkey, the connection can be lost during in the home when more than one user is online.

economic situation and education level but, in this situation, they are doing what they can.

Hacer expressed her tolerance by comparing Turkey with the rest of the world. Some women were revisiting their memories from 1999[28] to compare two disasters and two governments' performances. Nurdan noted that she experienced the 2001 economic crisis as well as the crisis of today and she confidently asserted that the AKP government dealt with the situation better than the former one.

> Indeed, I am observing some mistakes today of course. If you ask me, despite the mistakes, why am I still voting, do you think it is just for lack of alternatives? Not actually. Beyond that, Erdoğan, the man, is trying to do something. There is effort here. We are going through a huge crisis right now, but even in this situation he is increasing the salaries. He is taking care of his workers. He is giving money to restaurants without asking them to repay him. Tell me, is 5 thousand TL little? Who did this? I remembered Ecevit in 1999 during the earthquake and economic crisis. He left people to suffer. Yes, I agree everyone has made mistakes. But I am saying at least Erdoğan is working and trying.

Nurdan did not specifically address what she means by "effort" and "trying". However, she highlighted the government's economic support for people who were affected negatively by the pandemic and compared it to 1999. Gülşen -30 years old- was younger than Nurdan and she admitted that she did not witness/remember any government before the AKP. That's why she was not able to compare the AKP's performance with previous governments, but she repeated that Erdoğan is a hardworking politician despite the party's mistakes. Actually, she said that even if the party had made some mistakes, Erdoğan is not responsible for these.

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[28] In 1999 was the year Turkey experienced a destroying earthquake.

I am not blindly supporting the AK Party, and I am not saying I will never give up voting for the party. However, even if they have made some mistakes, I believe that Erdoğan is working very sincerely for his *dava*. Maybe the mistakes are derived from the people around him. No one is perfect. Everyone can make mistakes... Additionally, there is a crisis right now. People are expecting extraordinary performance from the government. I think people should be more tolerant, but both the economic situation and unemployment trigger people's understanding.

The phrase "no one is perfect" hinges on seeing the AKP as a better option and Erdoğan as doing his best. My interlocutors justified their constant votes for the AKP by comparing a wide range of political cases. Through these comparisons, Erdoğan appears as an ideal politician, beyond political parties. I was not surprised by this after hearing women's appreciation and admiration for Erdoğan in multiple ways already, but the interesting thing was that women's views about Erdoğan separated him from his own party. Nergis's answer brought her tolerance to another level when she started to talk about the 17-25th of December.

It maybe seems to you that I am focusing on the positive sides of events. Not necessarily. I am gauging everything in my conscience. I always compare the pros and cons of both Erdoğan and the AK Party. Not the mistakes, like how they stole, or they did something wrong or sold out somewhere... Just sometimes I am questioning myself, am I too trusting? I felt this for the first time during the 17-25th of December period. I did not accept or reject anything about the events that occurred. I was always questioning myself. Yes, maybe they have been seen as failures and mistakes, but I said always, if Erdoğan did anything, it would have been for a reason. He was always doing something for something. We were all shocked when we heard about the money in the shoe boxes. Even at that time I was waiting for a reason, which indeed they clarified. It was a state affair... Yes, sometimes we choose to trust. No one is perfect

and everyone can make mistakes. Even I am struggling to handle my home with my two children. What do we expect from Erdoğan? Yes, people are making mistakes, but how can we blame Erdoğan for this? How can he control everyone around him? Maybe now everything seems very messy, but the only one who can reconstruct it is Erdoğan.

On the one hand, women underlined that no one can be perfect while justifying their tolerance for the AKP's mistakes. On the other hand, even if there was a mistake, they did not associate it with Erdoğan but with the people around him. At this point, Erdoğan and the AKP were not used interchangeably by women. Women saw Erdoğan and the AKP as separate entities for the first time. This separation disappeared while they were talking about the positive sides of the AKP and Erdoğan but appeared when discussing the negative aspects. Keeping Erdoğan out of the negativity and criticism left a comfort zone for women to not feel guilty about voting for him. As a reflection of my interlocutors' world, they do not like the idea of politics, which is understood as a place of war and full of lies. While they equalize politics and political parties as similar bad actors in an evil order, they put Erdoğan on another level, which they identify with themselves somehow.

6.3.4 *Ingrained Visions of Politics*

Whoever comes will do the same

Women were changing their discourse depending on what they talked about. They were not falsifying themselves, but they preferred to highlight some issues while veiling others. As I examined above, women have been voting for the AKP for years to keep the order as it is. However, the same women also criticized the political order as an established entity. This was confusing in the beginning, but after hearing these repeated statements, I noticed that it was an emic perspective for the women I spoke with. This stemmed from the meaning of order and what political

order means for them. Order is what women experience in their daily lives and has a tangible aspect in terms of their access to the hospital, appearance in public with a headscarf, and feeling secure. When it comes to the political order this is outside the tangible aspects of women's lives and they tend to define it through a negatively constructed lens. They believe politicians attempt to destroy order to gain power, in a vicious circle.

Dila's analogy between the well-known Turkish Film *Kibar Feyzo*[29] and the current situation provided insight into women's thoughts.

> I do not know, but if the order changes, everything can worsen. Do you remember there was a Kemal Sunal movie? No one liked the *ağa* in the village and they were trying to get rid of him. Finally, Kemal Sunal murders the ağa and goes to jail. Then he gets a letter from the village, which mentions that the new *ağa* is terrible and people even miss the former one. So, I am afraid of this more than anything else. I am afraid of what would happen if Erdoğan leaves the country.

Dila's statement combined her fear of the AKP's absence and lack of hope about any differences between different power holders. Indeed, the vast majority of women revealed a pessimistic perspective regarding any positive changes arising with a new government. This understanding and lack of expectation for any change also reinforces their voting routinization for the AKP. Gözde summarized women's thoughts with her humorous style:

> My mother-in-law is voting for the CHP. She criticizes me every time because of my voting attitude. She tells me I am voting for nothing. Who should I give it to go for something? They are tarred with the same brush/*Kime vereyim de doluya gitsin- Al birini vur ötekine*. I am laughing but indeed I am really sorry about what we

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29   Kibar Feyzo was filmed in 1978 by Atıf Yılmaz. The main message of the film was a criticism towards existing feudal networks in the rural side.

are going through. Everyone criticizes each other, but they are doing the same when they have the power. We are laughing but indeed they should not do that. This is a repeating order.

Melike noted in a similar vein to Gözde:

> This is how politics is in Turkey. After a certain level, you prefer to ignore it. Because there is nothing you can do. Yes, maybe you can vote for others. But I do not believe that someone else will do something different. Sometimes, I am criticizing the AK Party, but indeed, I noticed that it is not only about the AK Party. It was exactly the same before the AK Party and it will be the same after the AKP. We are criticizing them for spending our taxes. When someone else comes, what is he/she going to do? They will do the same thing. It is what it is.

Negative attribution to politics and political order opens a line for women to consolidate the destination of their votes. Moreover, this attribution was supported with a justification about what Erdoğan does. Gülşen showed her consent for Erdoğan's newly constructed complex which is called Presidential Complex/ *Cumhurbaşkanlığı Külliyesi*:[30]

> Honestly, I am not expecting a president to live in a flat as I do. However, I do not think he is living as a Sultan either. But Erdoğan is a leader who goes to people's houses and sits with them around a ground table. This is a reality as well. If I were him, I do not know, maybe I could have done more. The *Külliye* is not for him but for the reputation of Turkey. Yes, I know, the AK Party is supporting people and people benefit from it who are in the party's close circle. I know this even from my relatives. But I also know other

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[30] The complex was constructed in 2014 as a new residence for President of Turkey. Opposition parties and groups criticize it because they see this is a reaction against norms and customs. Moreover, they refer the new building as a source of waste.

parties will do this as soon as they come to power. Because I am aware of the situation, I am not giving up voting for the AKP.

The expected attitude from other parties and evil nature of politics was reflected in rumors about İmamoğlu's current Istanbul and former Beylikdüzü mayorship. Nergis was one of those who shared the rumors about İmamoğlu:

For instance, people are saying İmamoğlu bought several lands in Beylükdüzü when he was mayor.

She maintained:

See, everyone is the same.

The criticisms or rumors about İmamoğlu's economic investments were alluded to, and women believed İmamoğlu uses his power for his own well-being. More than economic corruption, women were talking about how he fired people from the Istanbul Municipality who were hired during the previous administration and how he employed people from the CHP. Indeed, they did not have any salient evidence, but the rumors were effectively constituting women's understanding that no one makes any difference.

In sum, the growing tendency of women to vote for the AKP despite the party's failures derives from their negative attribution to politics. They situate the attribution in the conjunction of a lack of expectation from politics, the opinion that everyone is the same, and rumors, which shows that women understand politics as an ingrained institution that no one can make any differences in.

§ 6.4 Concluding Remarks

Voting is a necessary part of women's lives. They believe that they are voting as responsible citizens to use their voices, show their decisions,

and provide safety for their country. In this chapter, I examined the impulses keeping women's votes for the AKP for years by referring to the routinization of voting attitudes. The concept of routinized votes helps to explain women's roles in the relationship between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics in Turkey. As an important outcome, women's abilities to evaluate current, past and future events are not restricted or shaped by the patriarchal order or directly by men, by anti-feminism, by the party, or by the growing impact of Islam and conservatism in everyday life. Women include all of this in their political evaluation, not as external pressures but rather as the key elements of their political agency.

From another angle, the routinization may make it seem as though women have been passively voting for the AKP for years. Indeed, the opposite is true. Women narrated how they have cultivated their political agency through Islamist, anti-feminist, and conservative angles. It is important to remember that the feminization process at the voter level does not function as it does at the activist level, where women are conforming to limits while setting a bargain as well, because activists are concerned with political survival. In the case of voters, their concern is being represented, being safe and feeling comfortable. Through women's narratives, the AKP appeals to this formulation and women can convey their expectations. The connection between what women expect/do not expect and understand about politics, and the AKP's fulfillment and political odyssey motivates women to keep voting for the AKP.

This chapter could have been summarized as: "women are Islamist, conservative and anti-feminist and that's why they are voting for the AKP." However, I wanted to examine how women's ideological formation emerged and shaped their voting attitudes. I showed that the routinization process of women's votes works at three levels in order to help readers understand how the routine started and what consolidates it directly and indirectly.

Drawing on interviews, non-material concerns and interests frequently appeared in women's narratives, referring to religion and particular emotions. Indeed, the AKP has been responding to women voters' concerns about these topics since the beginning. Since the party and

women have met, women were attracted to the presentation of politics by Erdoğan himself. As I examined in Chapter III, leadership is one of the major tools of the AKP for reaching women voters, which is the initial motivation for votes. Both a moderate Islamist stance and people-oriented service policies have tied Erdoğan and women and make him a new leader and replacement for Atatürk, in women's eyes.

Asking the question of why women's voting behavior is routinized led my analysis to focus on the consolidation process. I divided this into a direct and indirect consolidation process. The former refers to factors stemming from the AKP, and the latter focuses on the factors outside of the AKP. Both direct and indirect factors reveal that women's political agency responds to political developments through ideological lenses. The findings of the consolidation mechanism vary from the importance of emotions to lack of expectations for options outside of the AKP, and political incidents from abroad to domestic politics.

What I found very critical was how the interchangeable usage of Erdoğan and the AKP in the discourse of women changed when they started to criticize the political order. When they are critical of the AKP, they sharply delineate Erdoğan from the AKP. I revisited the leadership effect by highlighting how it mobilizes women's votes and how women situate it within their political agency. However, beyond leadership, the AKP proves that it manages to infiltrate both the party ideology and mobilization strategy of women voters -which I discuss in final chapter.

Indeed, women internalize the AKP's populist political actions -which I examined in Chapter III- and they reflect them in their voting attitudes. Both the party's mobilization strategy and their ideological framework keep women in the same camp. The deal between the gender regime, activist women and voters or coexistence between anti-feminization and feminization -as I called it- is how politics works for the AKP's women. In the final chapter, I will show the deal between these actors and provide my findings.

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7

Conclusion: The Politics Women in the AKP

As previous chapters have discussed, even though the AKP in Turkey exacerbates the party's anti-feminist policies and appeal, women in the AKP still actively take part in politics as activists and voters. This results in the coexistence of both feminizing and anti-feminizing politics in the AKP, as argued in my research. My focus on the context and actors throughout the research is meant to enhance the understanding of the gendered features of politics and the actors' strategies, which have a complicated connection. My aim in this closing chapter is to show how dialogue functions in women's political endeavors. In other words, I place women activists in the AKP at the center of my research to understand how they practice politics within these limits, and the possibilities of the dialect between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics.

More specifically, this coexistence emerged and functioned as a bi-directional process between the party and the women actors-activists and voters. On the one hand, the party's anti-feminist agenda deliberately specifies the limits of women's political involvement, bolstering it with the party's Islamist-conservative ideology. Also, the AKP reaches out to women and rhetorically encourages their political participation without pledging themselves to feminist emancipation. On the other hand, as suggested by my research, without challenging the strict bounds of the party, women activists carefully navigate their political survival by polishing

their mobilization abilities. Additionally, women voters increase their political agency by routinizing their voting behavior and identifying themselves as the AKP's supporters. For example, women activists use strategies, as specified in the research, with concepts like "active submissive participant" to survive in politics and use influential political styles to be indispensable to party politics. Plus, women voters follow the stages of their emergent political agency, which goes along with the AKP and constitutes their political preferences.

To elucidate the reasons why such coexistence is possible, this research pursued a dialogue between the context and actors to understand the unique historical, social, and political context of Turkey's AKP and the role of women and the interplay between the two. Firstly, the research (Chapter III) has specifically focused on assessing the party's gender agenda, which frames the party's general understanding of women's issues. To do so, it analyzes political ideology and the mobilization abilities of the AKP towards women. This shows that the party is able to combine ideology and mobilization strategies to sustain the anti-feminist context while increasing the number of women who participate.

In Turkey's AKP, the gender agenda has been shaped by involving both traditional gendered visions of Turkey, which is entrenched in Turkish politics, and the emergent gendered norms of the Islamist-populist actions of the AKP. Relying on existing and emergent norms, Turkey's AKP has sustained an anti-feminist understanding in Turkey and spreads this to women who are forgotten by politics and ready to be identified with a political entity, which is consistent with their existing cultural and emergent political expectations.

Not only does the Turkey's AKP frame the anti-feminist agenda, but it also opens a new line through the party's Islamist and populist innovation to appeal to women through what was initially practiced by the former Welfare Party. Through adopting an ancestor's political style in terms of women mobilization, the AKP reflects the everyday lives of women who were previously located on the margins. It is important to underline here that this research uses the notions of Islamist and populist to refer to their political practices instead of a theological

interpretation of Islam or ideological frame of populism. The meanings of the concepts in my research derive from how the AKP uses them in its political agenda and activates them in this context. The practical meaning of Islam and populism is directly related to the party's appeal to women through the embodiment of their everyday lives, existing cultural norms and traditional gender roles in Turkey.

The context is also shaped by various determinants including expectations, existing norms, and new political practices. In the case of the AKP, they redress through concrete names and political experiences, as discussed in Chapter III. What I found more than the characteristic of the context is that it contributes to the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics through its gender agenda and political practices. In other words, context itself is a determinant of the current feature of women's political presence in Turkey's AKP. The context for women's politics reveals that historical backdrops, cultural norms, and emergent practices are a matter of feminizing and anti-feminizing politics, which emerge as a process in the dialogue between context and actors. Moreover, analyzing the context paves the way for making sense of the obtained field data. In other words, an in-depth analysis of the actors during my fieldwork became more understandable when I examined them within their context. Relying on women's realities, Turkey's AKP sustains the anti-feminist understanding of Turkey and spreads it to women who are forgotten by politics and ready to be identified with a political entity which is consistent with their existing cultural and emergent political expectations.

The politics of the AKP women shapes and is shaped by the limits and possibilities of the context and women's reflections within the context, which relates to the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics. As I underlined, women are in the center of my research and my analysis of the AKP women's politics helps to explain the role of women in this coexistence through their strategies, which complicate conventional political understandings. After uncovering contextual components and characteristics, I focused on the actors at play to show how women

navigate their political existence in this context and how they strategize limits and possibilities in their political existence and political style.

Since the beginning, my curiosity has been directed toward understanding women's presence in politics through Kandiyoti's concept of the patriarchal bargain, in concordance with the dialogue between context and actors. This analysis creates its own concept after rethinking the presence of women in politics as "active submissive participants", a term meant to reflect women's strategic existence in politics. Briefly, this is another dialectic between two opposite but complementary situations. My empirically based qualitative research reveals the agency of women actors in the AKP by analyzing women's political activities, understandings, and narratives. Throughout the dissertation, I have argued that women in the AKP are acting strategically and despite their "passive" and "silent" existence or appearance they perform to maximize their interests. This argument also challenges the existing Western literature, which claims that women's presence in politics (numerical existence) affects women's integration into the political agenda, meaning that women are more likely to deploy influential policies (substantive) for women if there are more women in politics- which is defined as the feminization process (Lovenduski 2003). However, my research shows that the numerical existence of women in politics does not automatically lead to a substantive transformation for women. The finding warns scholars to be more skeptical about the meaning, function, and reflection of the numbers.

At first glance, women's political presence and their strategies in the AKP seem like the women's mosque/piety movement in many Middle Eastern countries. Obviously, the ambivalent existence of women's agency in the AKP does not fit *Western agency* (Mahmood 2005:15) as women in the mosque movements. However, the AKP women do not have a fully pious motivation; instead, they are motivated *politically*. Even though both the AKP and its women supporters include religion into their political spectrum, the AKP is not a piety movement. Moreover, the AKP is identified as a secularized movement by religious-oriented civil society organizations such as *Özgür-Der*, or liberal by previous members of the Welfare party who did not participate in the AKP. However, the

religious themes and elements exist in the party's agenda ostensibly like the headscarf issue and, also, they are utilized as a source of political mobilization, like religiously oriented women's gatherings. I examined the headscarf and women's gatherings from different angles in this research, but it is time to point out that, while concluding this research, they are important instruments for the party beyond their religious meaning. After the AKP's 20 years in power, it seems that the established party politics will be challenged by the new generation and their way of understanding both religion and the headscarf, which requires further analysis in the future.

The women in my research are on both the activist and voter levels. While I argued that women are acting strategically, this is valid for female voters as well. This research is limited to the AKP's women voters to focus on their certain motivations. However, the voter level analysis also reveals that women have a routinized voting behavior, but it has a rational justification and reason, which is not necessarily based on material interests (Chapter VI). The routinization is the contribution of women voters to the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics. If I recap some characteristics of the AKP's women voters, this will show why I underlined routinizing with the agency dimension. Firstly, women are generally conservative and pious, but also the dominant features of their political agency are in concordance with the AKP's gender agenda. Their political self-realization overlaps with the AKP. Despite their material concerns and interests, women are mainly motivated by non-material conditions which are founded in the AKP's political offers. In other words, the AKP's conservative-Islamist framework and populist political actions not only constitute the party's activists and voters, but also provide a sustainable relationship with them.

Second, it is the reality that traditional gender roles are still determinants of men and women's daily lives in Turkey. Moreover, the arbitrary division between femininity and masculinity and the societal reflections of the binary gender norms are incorporated in the AKP's political agenda. Women are stuck at home, and women's housewifery and daily conditions and abovementioned social reflections are the concerns of the

AKP's women voters, which meet the AKP's political agenda. When I defined the home-housewifery-motherhood triangle of the AKP's gender agenda, I underlined how the party constructs its anti-feminist ideology, but it also appeals to the real lives of the majority of the women in Turkey. Indeed, the AKP, without offering emancipation of women and women, without demanding transformation, meet at the point where they complement each other, which creates a coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics.

The context and the actors are inclusively active in the coexistence process of feminizing and anti-feminizing politics. This dialectic leads to a contradiction between conventional understandings of politics and the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation. While women's presence in patriarchal settings is a challenge by itself, the case of the AKP and the party's women actors reminds us that the question of "how should women's anti-feminist presence be understood" should be asked to learn more about women and politics. By revisiting the concept of feminizing politics, I have suggested a new concept to see the conceptual implications of the research on the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics.

§ 7.1 A Conceptual Attempt: A Case for Vertical Feminization

Why and how does women's political presence matter? Why does it need to be examined specifically? The introduction chapter of the Oxford Handbooks of Gender and Politics shows the significance of rethinking women in politics and in the political science. It would not be wrong to start by revisiting Pitkin's representation theories[1] to understand women's representation in politics. Over time, scholars attempted to extend the borders of existing literature instead of redressing them according to the feminist understanding.

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[1] Hanna Pitkin's theory on representation is a starting point for scholars who are focusing on representation. Especially, Dovi's approach to Pitkin clarifies her arguments and pave the way for further applications (See: Dovi 2015).

My curiosity about the women in the AKP follows the suggestions and maps of Childs and her co-authored studies to understand the meaning and effects of numbers. The numbers and women's clusters in the AKP led the research to focus on participation levels instead of representation. The case of the AKP women contributes to gender and politics scholarship by focusing on the meaning of the presence of conservative women in politics, not at the representation but at the participation level. Therefore, the research developed a perspective on the feminizing process on the women's activists and voters' level. Focusing on women's political participation required a new concept to clarify the borders between women's political representation, which is what the previous literature mainly covers.

As I discussed in Chapter II, vertical feminization emerged to reflect the feminization in the AKP for women's political participation process as activists and voters. The concept of "vertical feminization" corresponds to the hierarchical sequence of women, blurs border between voters and activists, and the permeability of the positions within political participation. Beyond the actor's side, the top-down impact of the party and the party's gender agenda are critical to shape the feminization process on the vertical level. The relation between actor and context in the vertical process creates the dynamics for the politics of the AKP women.

The concept -vertical feminization- claims that political participation is another facet of the feminization process, and it should be examined separately from political representation. The separation paves the way for deepening and widening the focus on the invisible actors during the process, such as party activists and loyal voters. Indeed, the requirement of a new concept and my focus on women's political participation have the same logic: I aimed to show that female political activists and voters exist with their own ways in politics within the limits and possibilities of their position.

The research does not involve the impact of women's political participation on women's representation. I mentioned briefly how and why the heads of women's branches have the chance to become elected members of the local council. Beyond that, the research does not have any findings,

such as why women voters vote for women candidates or the number of women activists increasing the number of women representatives. Some outcomes even prove the opposite, such as women voters hesitating to vote for a female politician and the leader-oriented features of the AKP purely affecting the organization of the women's branches. Many women are comfortable with being represented by only one woman –the head of the women's branches- instead of being representatives themselves. Even though there is a relationship between the number of women and their representation, it does not have a feminist angle in the case of the AKP.

This research aims to understand women in the AKP. Both the literature of Western right-wing parties and Islamist feminism in the Middle Eastern context do not have enough road maps and analytical tools to enlighten the questions about the women in the AKP. My findings in this research reveal that the AKP women participate in politics strategically but consolidate politics in gendered ways. The women activists establish their strategies sustain their political survival, whereas women voters seek to sustain their political existence as being remembered and involved in the party's political agenda. Therefore, I show through qualitative in-depth analysis that women are aware of the limits and possibilities within the vertical feminization process and develop ways and maneuvers to be political actors without damaging their political existence.

As I claimed in Chapter II, this research offers a combination of conceptual and empirical approaches to understand women's political participation. Despite the number of women in politics research, women's political participation is rarely focused on in the global and national literature. Especially at the national level, there is not any case except Zihnioğlu's work on women's political movements in the late Ottoman and early Republican period, and Arat's research on the Welfare Party Ladies' Commission. Indeed, women's absence in conventional politics reflects itself in the literature as well. With the increasing number of women participating in the AKP, women's presence in politics becomes a reality and source of scholarly curiosity. For this, it was important to understand emergent feminizing politics and the roles of the party, women

activists, and voters in this process. More specifically, examining the AKP women provides insights regarding women in politics in general and Turkish politics in particular.

The AKP's male and female politicians -especially the latter one- repeatedly say that "the AKP is a woman party". The increasing number of women representatives in parliament and local governments (descriptive representation) is one justification behind this motto. However, as many scholars ask, "how women represent women" is important to understand the real meaning of the AKP's feminization process. As part of this discussion, my focus is on women's political participation, because the motto is also based on the number of women voters and members/activist in the party. With all these women, the AKP's policy agenda involves women's issue along with the party's gender agenda. In other words, the AKP does not ignore women and women's issues, however, as defined throughout the dissertation, the party follows an anti-feminist fashion, which is not perceived as an unobtrusive situation by women supporters of the party. Indeed, women both in activist and voter levels emphasized that they are not feminists. Moreover, they are familiar with the context in which the AKP produces its gender agenda and women make sense of this and strategize this while forming their political understandings.

The practical result of the research shows that women are acting politically within the limits and possibilities of the AKP's anti-feminist, Islamist, conservative and populist borders. After I defined the contextual strands, I focused on how women participate in politics. In other words, I complicate women's narratives at activist and voter levels. At first glance, the participation of women in anti-feminist political settings has an ambiguous feature, moreover it might be assumed to reflect the tension between two opposite directions: feminization and anti-feminization. However, the in-depth qualitative research highlights the complexities of this relation, which is not a tension, but rather a coexistence that is balanced within the process of vertical feminization and women's strategies.

The research demonstrates that the AKP merges Islamist-conservative ideology with populist political action to appeal to women. It proved the significance of the political parties' gate-keeping role for women's participation in politics. The findings showed that populist political action and its gendered rooted implications are at the center of the party's mobilization. While the party is not promising to emancipate women, it provides a link between the party and women voters through gender-specific populist actions (Chapter III). While the AKP built on these party practices on the existing gender structure of Turkish politics, it provides a sort of flexibility from constrains. Why does the AKP do this? As part of a political system, the AKP needs votes to survive in politics. Apparently, it requires women's votes as well. As I titled Chapter III, based on the AKP's family-mainstreaming perspective, women are not only half of the population, but they are also more than half of it, because they are the mothers of the future generation. For the AKP, to activate party politics and the party-voter connection requires another actor in the field who mobilizes votes for the party. This group is the women activists in the women's branches who are acting for their political survival, which is based on their achievements in the field and compatibility with the party's agenda.

Women activists' political strategies entail mobilizing both women activists by applying the "patriarchal bargain" (Chapter IV) and women voters through their particular political styles (Chapter V). However, on the other hand, by accepting to stay in women's branches and remain in a marginalized position, they indirectly support the reproduction and consolidation of existing borders. Indeed, without destroying them, they redefine the borders while limiting their autonomous space in that marginality rather than pushing for emancipation. The unchallenged behavior of the AKP women provides them with political survival but prevents them from achieving further transformations for gender equality. In other words, their political existence is a way of contributing to the coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing.

Once again, the analysis of the AKP's party ideology and politics shows that the party needs women as voters and activists. This opens a

space for women within the patriarchal setting. Women did not demand to participate in politics in the beginning. Even during the former Welfare Party, Sibel Erarslan was invited to be the head of the Ladies Commission. Some of my interlocutors in the women's branches were also invited to be part of politics. Even though women are not demanding to participate in politics directly, their existence in politics should not be understood as irrational or passive. As the finding of the research show, women's silence is strategically employed in women's political agency. This study demonstrates that feminization and anti-feminization coexist together in Turkey's AKP and directly contribute to the success of the party. What the evidence shows is that women's strategies and political styles are the main drivers of this process.

As the literature suggests, gender equality in politics is based on the collaboration between the party and the party's women activists. While the party provides some structural transformations such as a quota and pro-feminist political agenda, women actors can promote strategies for gender equality. Moreover, women actors do not have to be party activists, as feminist civil society organizations can also actively join the policy making and feminizing process of the political parties. In the case of the AKP, this collaboration is absent for establishing gender equality (there was an attempt in the beginning), but it exists for political mobilization. However, the absence of a gender equality collaboration is not unique to the AKP; the political parties in Turkish politics rarely develop concerns about women in politics. The absence of feminist dialogue between parties and civil society, ineffective existence of women in politics and neglecting stance of the political parties towards women's terrain would be critical topics to be researched in the future to understand women in Turkish politics in a broader sense.

As the findings of this thesis illustrated, the party, female actors and voters are the main components of coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics. The emergence of women in the AKP begs a deep look to understand the further meaning of it. At this point, I believe that this research helps to see the dynamics of women's presence in the AKP. From a broader perspective, it reveals how women participate in politics

in Turkey's AKP, which might help to guide other political parties to mobilize and involve women as actors and voters.

§ 7.2 What Happened and What Are the Other Possibilities?

There is no doubt the AKP copies its ancestor the RP's political style when it comes to mobilizing women. Erdoğan, as the inventor of the idea to involve women as political actors and to canvas the women's vote, during his term as the head of RP's Istanbul organization period adapted the same organizational techniques as the AKP. While the AKP invests in women as the source of political activism, the party has managed to increase its female supporters despite the anti-feminist constrains against women. Moreover, women are rational participants of the process and pursue their interests while increasing their political experiences as both activists and voters. The AKP establishes the party's political activism towards women within this context and based on their gendered daily lives. As a part of this, women could easily adapt to this political environment by strategizing their existence.

Women's political power -as activists and voters- and the AKP's strategies towards women were ignored by other political parties. Even today, the political parties have focused on the voting preferences of the new generation and try to understand the political taste of the youth instead of mobilizing women. Symbolic representation of a few women and existence of women's branches within the party organization ease the patriarchal conscience of the parties. The women's poor economic conditions and lack of political experience double the ineffective existence of women according to the parties' ignorant attitude. Surprisingly, the political activism of the AKP women did not spread to other political parties despite the statistical facts of the party's success among women for a long time. The established and accustomed patriarchal boundaries sustain the exclusion of women from conventional politics. Moreover, it is an obstacle to involve women in activism which acts against the AKP's anti-feminism in the civil realm as well.

However, since the establishment of the HDP, a feminization process has been observed clearly (See Taşdemir) in the parliament and political realm. Furthermore, the CHP's local election victory reminded the party of the possibility of electoral gain, which increased the party's self-esteem to adapt more effective mobilization techniques. The newly begun feminization process has been observed in other parties, which is on the one hand a spillover effect of the AKP's women's activism after 20 years and on the other hand, a grassroot activism that comes out of conventional politics both in feminist and pious organizations. While the HDP manages to collaborate by raising feminist movements, the CHP started to mobilize the party's women's branches by adapting similar methods to the AKP. However, it will be intriguing to follow how the CHP mobilizes women activists as the AKP has done and how the party will appeal to routinized female voters of the AKP. Indeed, this research does not include a political economy perspective, which is examined in plenty of other research to show how the AKP adapts a neoliberal agenda to mobilize its supporters. This is true and the one of the reasons behind the AKP's political mobilization is the instrumentalization of social policy to appeal to women voters. It is clear that other parties should propose a strategy to build a welfare state and a political agenda which includes a well-equipped care system to appeal to women. These are what my research findings and field experience trigger me to do in the next step. However, the research limits itself to focusing on the AKP's women's politics, yet, while concluding this research, I found it very important to bring attention to women's political participation in other parties.

The current political system and routinizing voting patterns restricted the other parties that were also not very willing to start a feminization process. However, the transformation from different angles of what Turkey has gone through pushed political parties to break the routinized electoral nature and patriarchal boundaries that restrict women's participation. In other words, the unresponsiveness of the AKP towards women's new demands, which emerged from the gender generation gaps and structural transformations in the women's daily lives due to negative factors such as: Pandemic, economic crisis, migration and current war

atmosphere around Turkey and positive factors such as feminization of labor force, increasing education level among women and powerful feminist movement. The question for further research should answer what the other parties' agenda and strategies are to appeal to women who are stuck in a coexistence between feminizing and anti-feminizing politics of the AKP.

Drawing on the in-depth qualitative data, I discussed the AKP's politics with regard to women and women's reflections towards to it. In the combination of the contextual facts, the party's ideological and practical politics, this research delineates the political nature where women participate and analyzes what they confront. From other perspectives, this research concentrates on the women to understand how they deal with the context by pursuing their agency. Examining women's political participation from out of conventional politics through an ethnographic microscope paved the way to uncover how women's political presence aligns with the gendered dynamics of everyday life in Turkey.

This qualitative research demonstrates the contributions of context and actors to the coexistence between the feminizing and anti-feminizing process while analyzing how they are positioning themselves according to each other. However, this is a bidirectional and multi-level process. On the one hand, the party's general agenda shapes the party's gender agenda and women activists redress the agenda to convey the message to voters. At the bottom, voters receive the message and make sense of it according to their daily-base formations. On the other hand, women voters reflect their demands based on their daily requirements while women are in the field to collect data on what women voters need. Indeed, women activists' daily routines and political style provide a flow of enormous information to report to the party. At the end of this process, the party gains excessively raw field information which is important to shape their political agenda.

Instead of taking for granted the AKP's party politics and women's political participation, this research proves that the applied strategies from the party and actors' side provide insightful knowledge about Turkish politics and its gendered reflections. By focusing on the restrictions

and potentials of the context and the ways actors strategically respond, this dissertation presents an analysis of the politics of women in the AKP.

Appendix A   Interview List

NAME	AGE	POSITION/OCCUPATION	EDUCA-TION	MA-RITAL STATUS
Merve	late 40s	Former party activist, currently the head of a NGO	MA	Mar-ried
Ruhsar	mid 50s	Head of the party's district level wo-men branches	High School	Mar-ried
Aygül	late 30s	Head of the party's district level wo-men branches	BA	Mar-ried
Gül	mid 40s	Former head of the party's district le-vel women branches/currently mem-ber of the executive council of Provin-cial WBs.	BA	Mar-ried
Ayfer	mid 50s	Head of the party's district level wo-men branches	BA	Mar-ried
Sevilay	early 50s	Head of the party's district level wo-men branches	High School	Mar-ried
Emine	early 50s	Head of the party's district level wo-men branches	BA	Mar-ried
Kamuran	mid 50s	Head of the party's district level wo-men branches	Primary School	Mar-ried
Pınar	late 30s	Vice- Head of the party's district level women branches	Primary School	Mar-ried
Gülhan	mid 40s	Provincial Coordinator	High School	Single
Songül	early 40s	Head of the party's district level wo-men branches	Primary School	Mar-ried
Aynur	early 40s	Head of the party's district level wo-men branches	High School	Mar-ried
Ceren	mid 30s	Head of the party's district level wo-men branches	BA	Mar-ried
Ceyda	late 40s	Head of the party's district level wo-men branches	High School	Mar-ried

Esra	early 30s	Party Activist	Primary School	single
Rümeysa	late 40s	Vice- Head of the party's district level women branches	Primary School	Married
Seren	late 40s	Head of the party's district level women branches	BA	Married
Seda	early 50s	Voter-Housewife	Primary School	Married
Hasibe	late 50s	Voter-Housewife	Primary School	Married
Muradiye	mid 30s	Voter-Housewife	İmam-Hatip High School	Married
Aysel	mid 50s	Voter-retired housewife	Primary School	Married
Hüya	mid 50s	Voter-Housewife	BA	Married
Gözde	mid 40s	Voter-Housewife	Primary School	Married
Güler	late 50s	Voter-Housewife	Primary School	Single
Nergis	early 50s	Voter-Housewife	Primary School	Married
Meral	mid 40s	Voter-Housewife	İmam-Hatip High School	Married
Gülşen	early 30s	Voter-Housewife	Elementary School (Medrese)	Married
Ayşen	late 20s	Voter-Housewife	Elementary School (Medrese)	Married
Nurdan	mid 40s	Voter-Kindergarten Teacher	Primary School	Married
Esma	early 40s	Voter-Housewife	Primary School	Married
Hacer	late 40s	Voter-Housewife	Primary School	Married

Melike	early 30s	Voter-Housewife	BA	Married
Dila	early 30s	Voter-Secretary	High School	Married
Kerime	mid 50s	Voter-Housewife	Primary School	Married
Makbule	late 50s	Party Activist- Currently head of the party's district level women branches	Primary School	Married
Canan	mid 30s	Voter/Activist-Housewife	High School	Married
Emel	mid 30s	Voter-Housewife	İmam-Hatip High School	Married
Fatoş	early 40s	Head of a neighborhood-Housewife	High School	Married
Sergül	early 40s	Voter-Housewife	High School	Single
Birgül	mid 40s	Voter-Housewife	Primary School	Married
Gülşah	mid 30s	Voter-Housewife	High School	Married
Havva	early 50s	Voter-Housewife	Primary School	Married
Dilan	mid 30s	Voter-Housewife	BA	Single
Nevin	mid 40s	Voter-Housewife	İmam-Hatip High School	Married
İbrahim	mid 40s	Party Activist	Primary School	Married
Mustafa	mid 50s	Head of the party's district level	BA	Married
Esin	mid 40s	Voter-Housewife	Primary School	Married
Didar	mid 40s	Voter-Housewife	Primary School	Married
Nazan	mid 40s	Voter-Housewife	Primary School	Married
Sibel Erarslan		Former head of the RP's Ladies Co-mission		
Hüda Kaya		MP from HDP		
Sare Aydın		MP from AKP		

Appendix B   Interview Guidelines

Interview Guidelines for Women's Branches

Keywords	Ask to Learn
Demography	Age, Marital Status, Whether to have child Hometown, Education, Occupation
Political Life	When and How does she start? What are the motivations to participate in politics? What are the current and previous positions she has? What does she think of her political experience? What does she think of other women's political experience?
Politics	What is politics? What does she think about women and politics? How does she understand political career?
Women's Branches	How does she understand and identify women's branches in politics? Does it provides advantages or disadvantages for women? What is the function for the party? How does she identify her roles in the party?
Political Style	How does she perform politics? How does she organize her one day during election time or election-free time? What are the differences between men and women's political styles?

Party	What does party mean for her? How does she distinguish her party than other? How is she familiar with political party system in Turkey? How does she communicate men and the young in the party?
Political Agenda	Who is in charge to decide political activities, issues, events in the women's political routine? How does she negotiate the issues in her local with top of the party?
Power	How does she identify power? Who is powerful for her? Does she feel herself powerful? What makes a woman powerful in the party structure and party politics?

Interview Guidelines for Women Voters

Keywords	Ask to Learn
Demography	Age, Marital Status, Whether to have child Hometown, Education, Occupation, Place her live, Socio-economic Status he family
Politics	Motivation and reason behind her votes What does shape her political preferences? What is politics for her? How does she differ her political understanding than her husband/father/brother?

AKP/Party	When has she started to vote for the AKP? What makes her an AKP supporter? How does she see her relationship with party? What is party for her? Is she familiar with party's local activists? Does she join party meetings? What does she think about other AKP's supporters? How does she perceive AKP's party politics?
Leader	How does she locate Erdoğan in her political understanding? How does she identify Erdoğan in Turkish Politics? How does she use party and Erdoğan interchangeably? What does she think about characteristics of a leader? What should a leader does in politics according to her?
Womanhood	How does she identify women's issue, interest and problems? How does she narrate her understanding about womanhood, women in society, politics and labor force? How does she evaluate the political parties' women policies?
Women and Politics	What does she think about political participation of women? What does she think about political representation of women? Does she consider participating in politics? What does she think about a women leader?

Family	How does she mention about her intersectional identities? Is there anyone that comes first among others? How does locate herself in her family? How much does she spend time to take care of domestic work?
Voting	Does she feel represented? What is meaning of vote? How do emotions shape the vote?

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