

# Governing through Hate: Discourse Strategies Used by the AKP Elites on Twitter to Justify the Decision to Withdraw from the Istanbul Convention

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## ABSTRACT

*Under the AKP rule, Turkey has increasingly become a populist authoritarian regime. Since the day it came to power, the AKP has promoted itself as a servant of the Turkish people. Recent studies have shown that populism under the AKP era has become a dominant political strategy. Scholars have researched it as a discourse, a communicative approach appealing to the people and a way of mobilizing the masses. However, these explanations of the AKP era populism still maintain their demonstrativeness; this phenomenon needs to be reviewed using a new, holistic approach. Therefore, this study problematizes the AKP era populism as a dispositive and tries to understand it through a holistic approach. To test this hypothesis empirically, the study focuses on the decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention as the case study. It investigates how AKP elites justified the decision on Twitter throughout March 2021. In this context, the study focuses on AKP elites' and pro-AKP trolls' tweets and applies multiple methods in the process. First, the tweets of AKP elites were analyzed via the discourse-historical approach. Then, in order to understand how these tweets reflect on pro-AKP hashtag campaigns, #GüçlüKadınGüçlüTürkiye and #Morardınızmu tags were scrutinized thematically. The results have shown social media to be the most crucial technology for Dava to simplify the complex social issues and introduce a polarized mentality into daily life. Dava has significantly enriched the economy of enmity and vice versa, and has turned politics into governance – which is only possible through spreading the feelings of hatred.*

**Keywords:** AKP, Dava Dispositif, Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), Istanbul Convention, Twitter.

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## Introduction

On March 19, 2021, the President of the Republic of Turkey announced that Turkey would withdraw from the Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, known as the Istanbul Convention, as of July 1, 2021. Although the Istanbul Convention had remained on the agenda since it was signed, the withdrawal decision created a shockwave in public. Besides this, the rise in violence against women and femicides at that time had already intensified the affective publics. Statistics of *Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platform* and [bianet.org](http://bianet.org) report of this horrendous course of events. According to [bianet.org](http://bianet.org), 284 women were killed, and 285 children were sexually abused in 2020. One in every five women was murdered because they wanted to divorce their husbands[i]. On the other hand, the *Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platform* informs that the number of femicides in 2020 was 410. As of August 2021, the counter memorial declared that 225 women were killed in Turkey at the time[ii]. In this atmosphere, publishing the Official Gazette at a peculiarly late hour, social media platforms, especially Twitter, turned into hegemonic struggle spaces between pro-AKP and anti-AKP camps. While AKP elites posted tweets with *#GüçlüKadınGüçlüTürkiye* hashtag to justify the withdrawal decision, pro-AKP trolls shared provocative content and decontextualized the public debate with *#Morardınızımı*, *#MorHalkayaGüleGüle*, *#Elhamdüillah*. On the other side, the anti-AKP camp also tried to defend the Istanbul Convention and claimed that the decision to withdraw was illegal.

This polarization can be evaluated as a populist communicative strategy on behalf of the AKP media autocracy. Recent studies have shown that populism under the AKP era has become a dominant political strategy. Scholars have investigated it as discourse, a communicative approach, a way of appealing to the people and mobilizing the masses. However, these explanations of the AKP era populism still maintain their demonstrativeness; this phenomenon needs to be examined through a new holistic approach. Thus, I assert the Foucauldian concept to describe the AKP era populism. I define this populist zeitgeist as *Dava* and claim that *Dava* as a dispositive, consisting of discursive and non-discursive apparatus, makes it possible both to subordinate and govern harmonically. The most effective way of this governance is through hate. Along with populist-communicative performances for appealing to the people, fetishizing the will of the people or legitimizing the competitive authoritarianism, *Dava* constitutes an idiosyncratic ground to sustain polarization and enriches the economy of enmity both discursively and non-discursively. It paves the way for the divide and rule policy by blessing the revanchist and hostile feelings to-

wards others as a right of oppression. Last but not least, the social media platforms, as the technologies of *Dava*, have played a crucial role in closing the ranks since the Gezi Park protests. So, apart from examining the AKP era populism respectively as a discursive strategy, political style, mobilization of masses and communication strategy, it could be more helpful to grasp it as *Dava* dispositive consisting of mutually reinforcing apparatus.

Therefore, I divide this study into four sections. First, I define populism broadly and try to theorize *Dava* as a dispositive. Second, by applying recent studies on AKP's digital populism, I argue that social media have been the core technology of *Dava*. Third, to contextualize the matter, I give a broad understanding of the AKP era gender policies. Last, to prove these theoretical claims, I investigate the decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention as a case study and analyze it by applying multiple methods.

i]Available at: <https://bianet.org/kadin/bianet/133354-bianet-siddet-taciz-te-cavuz-cetelesi-tutuyor>, (Accessed: 27.08.2021)

[ii]Available at: AnıtSayaç :ŞiddettenÖlenKadınlarİçinDijitalAnıt (anitsayac.com), (Accessed:27.08.2021).

## **AKP's *Dava* Populism**

### **Populism as a dispositive**

Populism is a complex phenomenon to understand. Scholars embrace it as an ideology (Mudde, 2004; 2017; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017), ideational approach (Panizza, 2017), political discourse (Laclau, 2005), political performance (Moffitt, 2016), communicative strategy (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007), cultural approach (Ostiguy, 2017; Herkman, 2022) and mobilization (Jansen, 2011; Aslanidis, 2017; Türk, 2018), and so forth. As an ideology, it is accepted that it has four core concepts: the ideology, the people, the corrupted elite and the will of the people (Canovan, 2005; Müller, 2016; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). As Mudde (2004; 2017) states, as an ideology, populism “considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups”. In this way, it is also grasped that politics “should be as an expression of the will of the people” (Mudde, 2017). Similarly, J. W. Müller (2016: 3) underlines that, by granting privilege to the will of the people, populism divides society into two antagonistic camps morally; therefore, it should be treated as a form of identity politics. For populists, the opposition is always immoral (corrupted elites), and they see the world in a Manichaean sense. In his study of the rise

of populism in Latin America, Carlos de la Torre (2017: 252) argues that this Manichaeic sense exalts common sense and contributes to the setting of political agenda by populist identity demands and forming social mobilization from below. Hence, as Müller (2016: 20) suggests, it “is a particular *moralistic imagination of politics*, a way of perceiving the political world that sets a morally pure and fully unified people against elites who are deemed corrupt or in some other way morally inferior”.

Apart from the approaches that evaluate populism as an ideology, some accept it as a discursive-performative political practice. These approaches attempt to respond to why the people identify themselves with populist leaders and how they consent to the discourse of populist leaders. Therefore, a number of recent studies focus on the communicative performances of populist leaders and grasp populism as a political style (Moffitt, 2016; Ostiguy & Moffitt, 2021). Thanks to the Manichaeic discourses, they turn the opposition into enemies, polarize society, simplify complex social issues and mobilize the feelings such as anger, hate, pain, and resentment caused by corrupted elites. So, as Jagers and Walgrave (2007) argue, populism provides discursive-communicative tools and repertoire for populist leaders to appeal to the people and exclude “immoral” segments of society from politics.

Besides, to respond to why people identify themselves with populist leaders, one has to be focused on the demand side of populism. It might be said that the populist discursive construction of the people becomes possible with a meta rhetoric of oppression regardless of whether their identities and demands are ignored or not. De la Torre (2017) points out that in Latin America, the populist appeal to the people was efficient because their demands were always disesteemed. However, nowadays it is a fact that populist appeals are met with different discursive articulations in many countries, wherein transferring the people’s demands to the political decision-making process has been successful and political participation has been institutionalized. Thus, some scholars point out that populism is a type of mass mobilization (Aslanidis, 2017; Türk, 2018). Especially in times of crisis, populism is always on stage as a *Deus ex machina*.

Another attempt to make sense of the phenomenon of populism is the cultural approach. This approach attaches importance to populism as a phenomenon that shapes everyday culture and claims that populism participates in shaping cultural life by provoking emotions. Juha Herkman (2022: 8) identifies populism “as an affective identification and signification process in which a political identity is constructed through the use of various ideologically or morally laden cultural symbols and markers of the people and their alleged enemies”.

In terms of focusing on the identification processes and emphasizing the sustainability of the Manichaeic worldview via cultural symbols, the cultural approach may

allow for a more holistic approach to grasping populism. Therefore, by adopting the cultural approach, it can be said that populism may be defined as a dispositive. The dispositive that Michel Foucault (2008) put forward to conceptualize the relationship between power and subjectivation can be broadly defined as a unity of discursive and non-discursive apparatus that make government possible. Dispositive, especially in the *History of Sexuality*, illustrates the relationship between knowledge, truth and power. It indicates the application of power without turning into brutality. Agamben (2009: 14) calls the dispositive “literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviours, opinions or discourses of living beings”. This approach considers that the construction of the ideal subjects of power cannot be comprehended only via discursive construction. Non-discursive apparatus such as laws, technology, and institutions are technologies of power that play a critical role in subjectivation.

Foucault himself preferred the governmentality to dispositive; however, I underpin the dispositive conceptualization here in order to explain the discursive-performative aspects of populism. Because of the emphasis on the non-linguistic apparatus, the dispositive is important for understanding the relations that populism establishes with the institutions, especially the media, as shall be discussed below. To put it briefly, populism is never possible without media.

However, leaving this discussion for later, it is necessary to establish another connection, to which the cultural approach draws attention and which is also adopted within the scope of this study. As a dispositive, populism turns society into a “society of enmity” that Achille Mbembe (2016) calls “the economy of hostility” based on the investments made by hate movements and groups. According to Mbembe, the economy of hostility is nurtured by the distinction between those who share the same blood or roots and those who do not. In the state of insecurity, he says, “psychic structures and generic passionate forces are responsible for the dominant affective tonality of our times and serve to sharpen many contemporary struggles and mobilizations” (Mbembe, 2016: 26). In these circumstances, the security states have mobilized mental resources as well as material ones for subjectivation in response to threats. He also underlines that this state of insecurity is further fueled by the growing “thirst” for myths thanks to digital communication technologies (Mbembe, 2016: 27-29).

Therefore, populism may be defined as a dispositive, making it possible for politics to transform into symbolic practices that foster a state of insecurity through morally and culturally laden symbols, thanks to the non-linguistic apparatus of discursive performances. This way it empowers society to be governed by the antagonism of

us versus them. In the following sub-section, I shall try to expand this definition in the context of the *Dava* populism of the AKP.

### ***Dava* Populism in AKP era**

Under the AKP rule, Turkey has increasingly become an authoritarian regime. Since the day it came to power, the AKP has promoted itself as a servant of the Turkish people. However, “Turkish people” as an empty signifier did not have a pluralistic meaning. The AKP has aimed to create a new Turkish identity, a synthesis of Islamism, neo-Ottomanism and Turkishness. Although the AKP is not the first political party to try and create a new Turkish identity by correlating these identical approaches, what makes its attempt unique is that it mobilizes this identity against the founding Kemalist-secular identity and has constructed a new post-truth regime on the axis of this alternative identity. Nagehan Tokdoğan (2018) said that the AKP is trying to ensure partisan loyalty of the masses by constructing a collective memory and creating alternative narratives based on the revival and glorification of the Ottoman past. Generating affective publics (Ahmed, 2004a; 2004b; Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012; Papacharissi, 2014a; 2014b) created by the reinterpretations of objects, rituals and performances of the Ottoman past, the AKP has promoted revanchist and hostile feelings as core instruments of doing politics. Against the Republican rituals of the official Kemalist narrative identified with Ankara, Tokdoğan cites public ceremonies that are important in the Islamist and Ottomanist imagination, such as the conquest of Istanbul, as an example of this attempt. Similarly, Elif G. Eroler (2019), who examined the education policies in Turkey between 2002 and 2016, claims that the AKP’s goal of “raising a religious generation” is to establish hegemony in the cultural field via Islamization of the curriculum. According to Eroler (2019: 304), Islam has thus become one of the founding components of the Turkish national identity, as of the “real culture of the people”.

AKP has constructed a new truth regime on *Dava* discourse. *Dava* is a Turkish word that means purpose, mission, goal, or ideal. To discuss *Dava*, it would be helpful to periodize the AKP era into two phases: the pre-Gezi phase (between 2002 and 2013) and the post-Gezi phase (from 2013 to nowadays). In the first phase, AKP adopted thin-populism to get different social segments’ support to constitute a historical bloc against Kemalism. It took political initiatives such as the Alevi and Kurdish openings and grasped the EU membership enthusiastically. Nevertheless, in the first period, “the people” emphasis of *Dava* embodied in these initiatives, which were also traditional social problems of Turkey, was to overcome the Kemalist military tutelage (Özpek & Tanriverdi-Yaşar, 2018). However, in the post-Gezi phase, the

social structure has polarized on the identity axis. Moreover, after 2014, the political structure has increasingly personified around the *Reis* (means chief and used to call President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan) myth and has fulfilled the authoritarian character. This authoritarian shift went a step forward after the July 15 coup d'état attempt in 2016. With the referendum held on April 16 2017, the Turkish political regime turned from parliamentary to presidential, and President Erdoğan has preeminently consolidated his power (Adisonmez & Onursal, 2020; Yabancı, 2020).

Although many scholars agree that the Gezi Park protests in 2013 were a turning point, some scholars assert that *Dava* gained its thick features after the 2008 economic crisis, which caused the EU to withdraw into a shell. This withdrawal has re-enlarged anti-Westernism and Euro-sceptic psyche that called the Sevr paranoia. Zafer Yılmaz (2018) argues that the Sevr paranoia has permanently aggravated the ontological insecurity since the early Republican era and induced politics to have been shaped by state-minded reactionary trends. Similarly, Akkoyunlu and Öktem (2016) underline the autocratic character of Turkish democracy in which elites have not intended to share the power because of existential insecurity. It is seen that this reactionary political consciousness has spread to the entire political arena, from right-wing parties to left-wing parties. According to Hakan Yılmaz (2011), the reactionary political psyche can be seen frankly in right-wing parties' chauvinist nationalistic attitudes towards the West. Therefore, the question is what are the features that distinguish *Dava* from the previous reactionary populist logic.

First of all, it can be said that the Turkish identity, strengthened by Islamism and neo-Ottomanism, constitutes the moment of moral superiority of *Dava*. At this moment, the people have not been imagined as a majority, as Müller (2016: 20) states, but as a 100% whole. In this way, it is ensured that the Sunni-Islamic morals of the majority, claimed to be "native and national" (*yerli ve milli*), are genuinely accepted, and the will of the people has been fetishized on the axis of these morals. Therefore, the identification process of *Dava* has been constructed by appeals made to the masses demanding the adoption of Sunni-Islamic morality. The most vital outputs of these moral appeals are the political and discursive mobilization of a "state of siege psyche" (Yılmaz, 2018: 28) that aggravates the hostility towards minorities. This economy has turned the "pious/oppressed" citizens of "New Turkey" into soldiers of *Dava* by nourishing the threat of "an absolute reckoning that may return at any moment" (Yılmaz, 2018: 31). Furthermore, this threat has also legitimized the violence as a right and obligation of "New Turks" arising from past oppression (Bozarlan, 2016). Similarly, Tanıl Bora (2015) accentuated the importance of lynching as a nativist reflex of political praxis in the Turkish context.

Hence, *Dava* can be identified as a discursive-performative articulation of political practices that Mbembe (2016, 2020) calls “politics of enmity”.

Nevertheless, this definition is not all there is to it. The other unique trait of *Dava* is that it has cultivated the *Reis* myth to perpetuate a populist-political mobilization below. President Erdoğan has gradually succeeded in synthesizing Weberian charismatic leadership and authoritarian populism since 2007 (Türk, 2018). The leader’s performances have concretized the discursive goals of *Dava*. For example, after every Friday prayer, President Erdoğan sets up the political agenda by giving a speech to journalists. This ritual has always been acted on stage, mimicking the holiness of the mosque in front of the public. Hence, the distinction between the materialistic side of politics and Islamic morality is blurred. Furthermore, this performance also helps to favour the common sense that politics is a moral practice, and it strengthens the Manichaean worldview. Another example is the President reciting verses from the Qur’an on religious festivals. This performance is also served as news by the pro-AKP media; thus, the notion of the *Reis* as a “true” believer is resurrected as one of “us”.

It should be noted that apart from the rhetoric, *Dava* has animated Sunni-Muslim Turkishness via non-linguistic apparatus in multiple areas. Many scholars draw attention to the Ottomanist hegemony that tried to be established in the cultural field. C. Yang Erdem (2017) conceptualized Ottomantality to “underscore the convergence of neoliberalism and neo-Ottomanism for governing culture”. Defne Karasmanoğlu (2020) points out the use of culinary items as political communication tools and addresses the AKP’s efforts to appeal to the “authentic” people. She claims that the AKP has tried to sustain its divide and rule policy by appealing to the people through culinary items. Peker (2015) illustrates Ottoman styles as a populist tool in architecture during the AKP period and defines these attempts as revanchist architecture. Focusing on Ottoman-themed TV series and shows, some scholars confirm Ottomantality’s cultural hegemony. Burak Özçetin (2019) demonstrates that pro-AKP media promotes Ottoman-themed TV series as a “show for the people”.

Considering all of these findings, it is worth investigating the methods of the *Dava* as mechanisms of the *Doxa industry* in which the masses are subjected to the roles of pious-nativist citizens by testing patriotism, nationalism and statism (Yılmaz, 2018: 31). Thus, as recent studies have shown, the media, primarily social media, must be treated as populist actors, not just the medium (Moffitt, 2016: 100; Mazzoleni, 2014, Kramer, 2014, 2020).

## **Social Media**

The media is one of the featured areas where the neoliberal governance of the AKP is extensively visible. As many studies have found, since 2002, the AKP has created a media autocracy by changing media ownership using the SDIF, facilitating media ownership of the Islamist capital, and regulating legal codes to leave opposition voiceless, using taxation as a punishment (Akser & Baybars-Hawks, 2012; Yesil, 2018). According to the data of Media Ownership Turkey, as of 2021, 80% of the press, 90% of the TV companies, and 70% of the most widely read news portals are closely controlled by pro-AKP capital groups<sup>1</sup>. Burçe Çelik (2020a) claims that the communicative authoritarianism of the AKP can be understood with periodizations between 2002-2007 and 2008-2016. According to Çelik, in the first period, liberalization and de/re-regulation policies in the communication and media sectors were created within the framework of the EU acquis. During this period, pro-AKP capital gained solid ground in the media sector. As the output of the ownership structure transformation in the second period, the AKP started to control the communications sector and has used this control effectively in the hegemonic struggle against the opposition groups. In another study focusing on the 2018 general elections, Çelik (2020b) draws attention to the role of television in constructing the post-truth regime of neoliberal authoritarianism, which she calls Erdoğanism. Because AKP voters mostly prefer television, Çelik demonstrates that by creating a climate of political fear in this medium, Erdoğanism consolidates electoral support and effectuates the post-truth communication style (Çelik, 2020b: 4).

The issue that scholars agree upon is that the Gezi Park protests constituted a critical turning point in the evolution of the media autocracy of the AKP era (Akser & Baybars-Hawks, 2012). The attitude of the mainstream media that ignored the protests increased the distrust towards them, and popular social media platforms, especially Twitter, have become the primary news source for the opposition groups. In this process, the government, on the one hand, tried to control alternative publics and discussions on these platforms via legal and technical regulations as is its custom; on the other hand, it also endeavoured to dominate public debates directly through official accounts and indirectly through troll and bot accounts. Many studies have found that pro-AKP troll accounts, Aktrolls, produce fake news, groundless claims and gossip on social media networks and organize collective lynchings against the opposition (Karataş ve Saka, 2017; Bulut ve Yörük, 2017; Saka, 2018; Yıldız ve Smets, 2019). As essential components of media autocracy, these strategies and practices deepen the polarization, strengthen the tendency of self-censorship among users, and try to restrain participation in public debates. Bulut and Yörük (2017)

argue that AKP has created a digital culture based on censorship and collective lynching through cyber battalions and troll activities and has tried to form political astroturfing via pro-AKP hashtag campaigns. Erkan Saka (2018) and Yıldız and Smets (2019) confirm that AKP's digital populism is established on coordination between identifiable official accounts and anonymous trolls and bot accounts. Accordingly, the coordination mentioned above has a hierarchical nature, where hashtag campaigns and collective lynching attempts first start with the content produced by the accounts of the party administrators, then spread through the identifiable accounts of AKP supporters and finally circulated through the content copied by the anonymous accounts (Yıldız & Smets, 2019). Özdüzen and Korkut (2020: 497), on the other hand, elaborate that the AKP's digital populism seeks to mobilize the Sunni Muslim Turkish segment of the society against other segments of the society. Özdüzen and Korkut (2020: 497) find that digital polarization is shaped by four main axes: sexual orientation, national identity, religious belief and political orientation. Similarly, Ural (2021: 1087) evaluates the AKP's social media strategies and tactics as harmonizing cultural and political polarization with networked conversation and social networks.

Twitter is inclined to amplify polarization and disinformation due to its structural qualities (van Kessel & Castelein, 2016; Gi de Zuniga et al., 2020). Twitter's content sharing service, limited to 280 characters, provides that content has to be produced reactively and quickly detachable (Bakir & McStay, 2021; Bulut & Yörük, 2017). Furthermore, the algorithmic structure of Twitter to commodify the user effectively forms echo chambers and filter bubbles, and it allows populist discourses to dominate the circulation and public discussions (Jiwani and Al-Rawi, 2020: 205). Ruth Breeze (2019: 259) and Filibeli and Ertuna (2021: 2239) state that the ability to remain anonymous bolsters the populist tendencies of users and encourages them to develop the hate speech trends such as humiliation, threats, and bullying.

Researchers (Korkut et al., 2015; Korkut & Eslen-Ziya, 2016; Şahin et al., 2021), who contribute to the digital populism debates with the concept of discursive governance, define discourse as communicative action and draw attention to the critical role of political entrepreneurs in shaping the dominant narrative. For them, political entrepreneurs use discursive governance as a communicative populist strategy for constructing identity and socio-political meaning, legitimizing political action, framing the political debate, and bypassing institutional structures and decision-making procedures. Thanks to communicating directly with the public, political entrepreneurs perform anti-elitist and anti-intellectual attitudes and bypass decision-making procedures. From another point of view, this competence creates not only a climate of discussion where the public's voice is suppressed or self-censorship prevails but

also highlights the public as the self-responsible participant in the decisions of political entrepreneurs (Şahin et al., 2021: 597). As Muehlenhoff (2019: 207) presents, the “self-responsible citizens” are constantly provoked to participate in public debates and decision-making processes via social media platforms.

If one looks from the viewpoint of *Dava*, it would be seen that the discursive governance of the AKP elites invites users to adopt Sunni Muslim Turkish subjectivity. Therefore, one must examine how the AKP elites mobilize discourses and discursive strategies as political entrepreneurs to understand this governance. In this study, I effort to contextualize this governance by investigating how the AKP elites justify the withdrawal decision from İstanbul Convention. However, before analyzing this governance, it is crucial to examine the gender policies of the AKP era to understand the *Dava* as dispositive in the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention.

### **Family Discourse and Gender Policies in the AKP era**

The gender policies of the AKP have not welcomed gender equality. Despite substantial efforts, such as changing the Civil and Criminal Code and implementing CEDAW effectively (Koyuncu and Özmen, 2018: 6), tensions between codes and praxis are still present. Negron Gonzales (2016:201) confirms that EU-mediated efforts have always encountered structural limitations. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan himself, in many of his speeches, stated that he does not believe in gender equality and gender justice based on *fitrat* understanding of Islam should be adopted<sup>2</sup>. As Koyuncu and Özmen (2018) highlight, political will has been shown to emphasize gender justice instead of gender equality in the vernacularization of international conventions. In connection with this, as Ayşe Güneş Ayata and Gökten Doğangün (2017: 8) demonstrate, the policies adopted to strengthen the family since 2002 have constructed a vulgar dichotomy that the upper-middle-class family has been accepted as the model of Kemalism, and the lower-class family sanctified as the bearer of conservative and religious values. By doing so, stable touch with the primary electorate has been guaranteed. For example, the efforts to solve the “headscarf” issue during the AKP era were instrumentalized not as initiatives for pious women to get a taste of freedom but to maintain political polarization (Koyuncu & Özmen, 2018). The polarization deepened by gender equality vs gender justice, secular vs religious, and normal vs abnormal has limited the dialogue opportunities between feminist movements and organizations and has fortified Turkey’s patriarchal dominance (Simga & Göker, 2017).

Some studies consider the gender politics of the AKP era as exceptional governmentality consisting of social security policies and biopolitical processes, in which gender

roles and identities are shaped within the institution of the family. The researchers have in common that family rhetoric cannot be evaluated only as an indicator of the patriarchic regulation of society (Coşar & Yeğenoğlu, 2011; Yazıcı, 2012; Kaya, 2015; Yılmaz, 2015; Kandiyoti, 2016). Thereof the family (the three-generated family) is regarded as the incubator of self-entrepreneur subjectivity. It regulates the gender order, puts the sexual experience in order and sets up moral values (Acar & Altunok, 2013). Another dimension of the family is that it is a problem-solver and protector of individuals and society against threats from outside. Therefore, family discourse should be treated as a populist strategy in which gender equality demands and organizations are devalued and criminalized because they threaten social integrity and moral order.

The family discourse also allows the sociological realities to be simplified in the struggle between good and evil by reproducing the society into two antagonist camps: the native and oppressed people who adopt Sunni-Muslim Turkish morality and defend heterosexual social order and the corrupted elites composed of Westernist, compradors and those who advocate homosexuality. Although these dualities have always been conjectural, as Yeşil (2020: 340) reminds us, the divide and rule policy has consistently been sustained. LGBTQ+ individuals and their demands have been demonized; they have been identified as abnormal. Further, the increasing Islamization of everyday life has provided a legacy to fight against abnormal. This situation leads to the governance of the rights and freedom struggles for gender equality by breaking them apart and creating a difference in legitimacy between feminist demands and LGBTQ+ individuals, causing the agenda to be shaped within the framework of gender complementarity. AKP administrators displayed attitudes affirming hate speech and crimes against LGBTQ+ individuals in their statements. Especially in the increasingly authoritarian socio-political climate since the 2013 Gezi Park protests, Pride Marches have not been allowed, and the disproportionate use of force by police against LGBTQ+ demands has been tolerated. As the last concrete example of this situation, the normalization of police violence by the Minister of Interior and other authorities can be shown in the protests at Boğaziçi University. During the protests, LGBTQ+ students were detained for blaspheming Islam and the Kaaba; Rainbow flags and Shahmaran figures were reported in the pro-AKP media as symbols of a terrorist organization and heresy. While the protests at Boğaziçi University continued, the decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention was another step that deepened the social polarization.

## **Methodology**

I intend to show that social media platforms provide obvious reification of *Dava* via fusing in the daily routine. Thanks to the structural features of social media, *Dava*

simplifies the complex social issues and appeals to people to become soldiers of New Turkey. So, it can be argued that social media is not just the online public spheres where discursive hegemonic struggles occur, but it also a technological weapon of *Dava*. Therefore, *Dava* cannot be possible without social media. Hence, I aim to clarify this hypothesis by investigating how the AKP elites justify the withdrawal decision.

Nonetheless, there are two reasons for determining the Twitter posts as analysis units. Firstly, curfews and restrictions on assembly and demonstration rights due to the covid-19 pandemic made Twitter a priority platform for agenda setting and public discussions. Secondly, the Official Gazette was published at a late hour outside of its usual flow, which caused the news to spread primarily on social media platforms before mass media. Another issue about the methodology is that it needs to clarify who the AKP elites are. “The AKP elites” definition denotes ministers and persons working in the AKP administration. The data was collected through the rtweet package in the RStudio program from March 19, 2021, to April 2021.

In the data analysis, the discourse-historical approach (DHA) is applied. DHA handles the discourse as consisting of three dimensions: discourse topics, discursive strategies and linguistic means. Wodak (2001: 66) defines *discourse* as social practices that both construct and are constructed by these practices. According to her, due to its problem-oriented qualities, DHA provides eclectic, interdisciplinary, intertextual and inter-discursive frameworks in which text can be evaluated together with non-discursive elements such as genres, styles, and socio-political phenomena, institutions and organizations (Wodak, 2008: 2). Discourse is the product of an intertextual process in which different texts are decontextualized and then recontextualized (Wodak, 2008: 3). Therefore, understanding a social phenomenon is possible by contextualizing different theoretical perspectives, texts, readers and discourses (Wodak, 2008: 11).

Researchers apply DHA in the analysis of metadata with models gradually designed. Researchers have drawn on multiple methods designed eclectically, including mixed types of content analysis and discourse analysis-analysis. Further, computer-based quantitative and qualitative analysis programs are used to visualize the metadata. Needless to say that these computer-based eclectic methods are skilful in visualizing connections, interactions and polarizations (Bulut and Yörük, 2017: 4100); because I aim to examine the discursive and performative aspects of *Dava* dispositive, I prefer to apply DHA. In this study, I will apply DHA in two-phase. In the first phase, I will identify the discourse topics, discursive strategies and linguistic meanings of the meta-discourse constructed to justify the withdrawal decision in 59 unique posts. Although the AKP elites’ numbers of tweets were more than 59, I simplified

the data because I intend to explore the discourses on justification. In the second phase, I will focus on strategies that keep this metadiscourse in circulation in two pro-AKP hashtag campaigns: #GüçlüWomanGüçlüTürkiye and #Morardınızımı.

## General Findings

As shown in Figure 1, the account with the most interaction among the AKP elite posts belongs to Communications Director Fahrettin Altun.

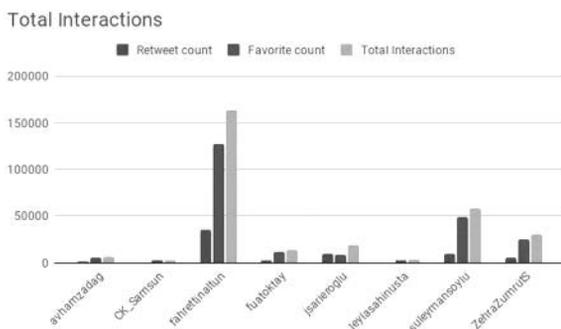


Figure 1 Total number of tweets and interactions

Graf 1. Ukupan broj tweetova i interakcija

Tweets can be better understood by clustering them. There were two types of tweets: a) reassuring tweets and b) polarizing tweets.

Zehra Zümürüt Selçuk's (@ZehraZumrutS) tweets can be counted on regarding the first type. Zehra Zümürüt Selçuk identified legal reforms that were made during the AKP governments as “revolution” and pointed to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who bestowed these reforms on Turkish women. Further, Selçuk also tried to convince the public by sharing data, including increasing women’s employment, education, and literacy during the AKP era. Director of Communications Fahrettin Altun’s (@fahrettinaltun) tweets, on the other hand, can be mostly addressed as examples of the polarizing type. In his posts, Altun blamed and discredited opposition parties, especially CHP, for dichotomizing public debates via old vs new Turkey schemata.

Additionally, the most important key concept of AKP elites’ populist performances was immediacy (Baykan, 2021: 205) which was embodied in the image of *Reis*. As political entrepreneurs, the AKP elites have consistently shown their loyalty to the leader by quoting his speeches, sharing sections of his speeches, and mentioning the @RTE account. Sieg heil to *Reis* can be interpreted as one of the methods of enriching the symbolic capital of political entrepreneurs is to show their loyalty both to the leader and to the *Dava* in the most robust way at every opportunity.

## Discourses of Justification

It is possible to cluster the tweets of the AKP elites under two discourse topics: women and family. The AKP elite justified the withdrawal decision by reconstructing the “Turkish woman” identity and vigorously emphasizing the family as the keeper of the ideal Turkish society. Women are primarily identified as “women of the country” (*Bu ülkenin kadınları*), “our women” (*kadınlarımız*), “children of the country” (*bu ülkenin çocukları*), “Turkish women” (*Türk kadını*), “women with headscarves” (*Başörtülü kadınlar*), “subjects” (*özne*). The *we* possessive suffix was used to appeal to the authentic people of New Turkey by distinguishing the true woman from the corrupted elite, those who lack the sense of Turkishness. These nominations stabilized the limit of being a woman through traditions, Islam, Turkishness and masculinism. According to this, the “true/authentic woman” should be loyal to Turkey (Turkish women/children of the country), embrace the Islamic values (headscarf), and be subjected to a man (our women). Consequently, these true vs corrupted schemata allow those not included in these categories to be marginalized.

Moreover, the AKP elite reconstructed the Turkish woman identity by adapting it to the New Turkey discourse. This old vs new Turkey dichotomy masculinized the female identity through the adjectives attributed, including “active” (*aktif*), “strong” (*güçlü*), and “confident” (*özgüvenli*). Besides, it also called for women to become dauntless advocates of New Turkey. According to this, Turkish women owe their current strong subjectivity and self-confidence to the AKP rule and especially *Reis*’ leadership. It may be argued that this dichotomy also mobilized the threat that “if the AKP era comes to an end, all the gains may be lost”. So, if women want to preserve these gains, the remedy is straightforward: they must support the AKP. This correlation is remarkably declared by the tweet, “if the woman is strong, the family will be strong; if the family is strong, the society will be strong”. Further, the reconstruction of the female identity can also be seen in the name of the pro-AKP hashtag campaign, #GüçlüKadınGüçlüTürkiye (StrongWomanStrongTurkey).

As mentioned above, *Dava* has astutely discredited gender equality and emphasized the family as the core agent of the Turkish society. The AKP elites promoted the family as the bearer of traditions and customs and embraced it as the incubator of the next pious generations. The sharpest example of this is that the Vice-chairman of the AKP, Hamza Dağ (@avhamzadag), identified the family militaristically as “headquarters”. He, in his posts on March 20, 2021, recognized the family as “the headquarters of modern life” and claimed that the Istanbul Convention “kept the family in the background” and “encouraged homosexuality”. Although, a lack of adequate data on whether or not the other AKP elite share Dağ’s opinion,

it can be asserted that his tweets epitomized the general long-standing attitude that “weaponized homophobia and Islamic beliefs; however, the causation is not apparent” (Elmas et al., 2021). Besides reframing the family militaristically, it may also be argued that Dağ provoked the traditional-Islamic-based fears and sought to mobilize the people to become soldiers of *Dava*.



Picture 1 Tweets of Hamza Dağ<sup>3</sup>

Slika 1. Objave Hamze Dağa

The AKP elites vehemently embraced the family as a conservative-neoliberal institution. AKP elites pointed out the significant role of the family and nominated it as a “problem-solver”.

In the tweets, the family discourse is constructed with nominations as “solution generator” and “headquarters” and predicates such as “strong”, “compatible”, and “need to be protected”<sup>4</sup>.

### Discursive Strategies to Justify the Withdrawal Decision

The first prominent argumentation topos is the emphasis on self-efficacy and tradition to be “native and national”, and for Turkey to be one of the ten wealthiest states in the world in 2023 (100th Anniversary of the founding of the Turkish Republic). This argument stated that Turkey needs to return to its roots and take traditions as a reference rather than import or imitate any external contracts and regulations. In this regard, Vice President Fuat Oktay (@fuatoktay) underlined the protection of women’s rights and the family structure as the “noble cause” and said that what needs to be done is “to return to herself”<sup>5</sup>. *Dava*’s power narcissism glamorized the gender complementary policies of the AKP throughout the family, indicating the authentic self and traditions as sources of being strong. According to this, the AKP elites, in their tweets, vigorously alleged that legal codes made during the AKP era were sufficient for guaranteeing and developing women’s rights. To corroborate this, they identified violence against women as a “crime against humanity” and used “zero tolerance” rhetoric<sup>6</sup>. Thus, by doing so, they make an effort to keep the family and patriarchy out of public debates.



Picture 2 Tweet of the Minister of Family and Social Services Zehra Zümrüt Selçuk (@ZehraZumrutS). The tweet can be translated as: “Violence against women

is first and foremost a crime against humanity and combating this crime is a human rights issue. The main thing is the principles. In this direction, we will continue our struggle against violence with the principle of zero tolerance, today and tomorrow, as we did yesterday.”<sup>7</sup>

*Slika 2 Objava ministrice obitelji i socijalne skrbi Zehre Zümrüt Selçuk (@Zehra-ZumrutS). Tweet se može prevesti kao: “Nasilje nad ženama je prije svega zločin protiv čovječnosti, a borba protiv ovog zločina je pitanje ljudskih prava. Glavna stvar su principi. U tom smjeru nastavit ćemo našu borbu protiv nasilja po principu nulte tolerancije, danas i sutra, kao i jučer.”*

On the other hand, the self-efficacy argumentation was the presumption of legitimacy that reproduce the duality of the “authentic” people and the “corrupted” elite. Even though it was signed and entered into force in 2011, the Istanbul Convention was related to the “old Turkey” period and discredited as a conspiracy<sup>8</sup>. Hence, emphasizing self-efficacy also let demonizing adversary political parties and social segments who do not believe in New Turkey and Strong Turkey esprit. This correlation was composed of narratives that identified the pre-AKP era with the main opposition party, CHP. In his posts, Altun held the CHP responsible for anti-democratic practices in a historical moment that would be followed from the 1960 military coup to the headscarf ban in the 1990s and accused the CHP of conspiring with terrorists<sup>9</sup>. Thus, it can be claimed that Altun was trying to mobilize the Sunni-Muslim Turkish segments of society against opponents by aggravating the past fears that still remain in the collective memory. In the tweets, CHP was identified as not being sincere about women’s rights and implied to be an immoral group. The AKP elite scandalized the harassment and rape allegations within the CHP and generalized it as a usual CHP administration. Hence, they discredited the CHP to “keep silent against harassment and rape” within the party<sup>10</sup>.

Once the CHP was accused of being evil, it would be easier to orchestrate the negative feelings and bad manners against the opponents to decontextualize the public debate. They decontextualized the public debate about the decision by reducing the debates into a Manichaeian war between good (the AKP as representer of the people) and evil

(opposition as representer of the corrupted elites). The simplification of social reality, encouraging collective lynching and mobilizing revanchist feelings against the opposition constituted the negative representation of the Other in tweets. Calling for conservative affective memory, CHP has been criminalized as a party that persecutes the country's true/authentic women because they wear a headscarf. It was also identified as "shameless" and "insincere" and claiming that CHP does not have the ideal of being indigenous because it adopts Western values. On the other side, this approach associated the withdrawal decision with the Beka discourse, which has occupied a dramatic position on the public agenda since the March 31 local elections in 2019. In addition, after CHP Chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu declared his support for the Istanbul Convention, the AKP elite villainized him as "sinister" and "garbage"<sup>11</sup>. As it will be discussed below, this argument strategy was the primary strategy of the polarization that was reinforced through troll and bot accounts in provocative hashtags like #Morardınızımı, #MorHalkayaGüleGüle, #Elhamdülillah.

Another argument strategy that manipulates the discussions is the intensification of the threat. The threat was concentrated on two axes: an existential threat based on what if the AKP era would end and corruption of Turkish social order via the Istanbul Convention. Regarding the first one, the AKP elite incited the enemy of the people narrative by discrediting CHP and other opponents, as discussed above, to link the fate of pious people to the AKP government by re narrating the headscarf ban. They continuously highlighted the anti-democratic policies of the past and identified them with CHP. Thus, they elaborated that these anti-democratic policies would revive if the AKP era ended. To strengthen this view, the AKP elites constantly emphasized the legislative regulations to guarantee women's rights and presented them as the outputs of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's worldview. Hence, it can be claimed that the opposition embodied in CHP is the existential threat that constructed the pious self of *Dava*.

The other threat topos is that the Istanbul Convention corrupted the traditional Turkish family structure. Although concrete evidence for this claim was not expressed, it was frequently stated that the Convention did not represent Turkish traditions. As shown above, the family was defined as "the problem-solver", "the reason for a strong Turkey", and "Turkey's source of dynamism", and underlined the importance of protecting the family.

### **Reflections of Discursive Strategies on #Morardınızımı and #GüçlüKadınGüçlüTürkiye Hashtag Campaigns**

Although the AKP elites preferred #GüçlüKadınGüçlüTürkiye, there were many hashtags to justify the withdrawal decision. As shown above, the AKP elites' efforts

to decontextualize the withdrawal decision in *Dava* were reflected in these hashtags. The most prominent aspect of pro-AKP hashtag campaigns was that, unlike the AKP elites' tweets, the users were disposed to humiliate the opponents. Users especially sharing tweets with the #Morardınızımı tag, tried to mobilize the pious people by provoking revanchist feelings against opposition and calling them to celebrate the victory. They also tried to silence opponents by bad manners such as slanging and cursing unreservedly, accusing LGBTQ+ and feminists of blaspheming Islam, and threatening them. It should be noted that in line with the evidence of recent studies on the AKP's digital populism, bad manners were welcomed by pro-AKP users and trolls as the right of the *Dava*. So, it would be appropriate to evaluate pro-AKP hashtag campaigns as unofficial discursive governance of *Dava*. Troll attacks on opponents have been counted as reflections of the will of the people fetishism, and the bad manners have been normalized.

#GüçlüKadınGüçlüTürkiye is the hashtag with the highest interaction between AKP elites and pro-AKP accounts. This tag was used by both AKP elites and pro-AKP troll and bot accounts. Two dominant populist performative strategies that fuel polarization stood out in the tweets: tweeting bad manners to fuel the revanchist feelings and glorifying the decision as an act of saviour. The withdrawal decision was illustrated as a victory of the oppressed/pious generation of *Dava* against the corrupted secular-Western elites. Islamic expressions such as "Alhamdulillah", "Praised be!" and "Allahüekber" was used to show these victorious feelings<sup>12</sup>.

Needless to say, the polarization was built on flexible and transitive clustering between pro-AKP and anti-AKP camps. Accordingly, the anti-AKP cluster consists of CHP, feminists, LGBTQ+ individuals, and terrorists; on the other side, the pro-AKP cluster consists of AKP, President Erdoğan and headscarved women. The true/authentic women were addressed with adjectives such as "Turkish Woman" (*Türk kadını*), "Mother" (*Anne*), "Wife of a Man" (*hatun*), and "God's gift to Man" (*Allah'ın emaneti*). Feminists were humiliated as "purple ringers" (*Mor halklalılar*) (A slang word coined to ridicule Mor Çatı, one of the first feminist organizations in Turkey), "Westerners" (*Batılı*), and "PKK supporters" (*PKK destekçisi*). Nevertheless, as remarked, these classifications have been flexible and could always change. For example, an account named @AlemdarHeybetli retweeted a picture of a group of women protesting the withdrawal decision, marked a woman with a headscarf and disdained her as a "wall flower". Thus, he reconstructed the true/authentic vs fake woman dichotomy between pious women.



Picture 3 Retweet of @AlemdarHeybetli<sup>13</sup>.

Slika 3 Retweet @AlemdarHeybetli

Nonetheless, the *Reis* image was mobilized to provoke the anti-AKP camp. As said, the fetishization of the will of the people has been embodied in the *Reis* image since 2014, when Turkey turned into a presidential system. The users shared @RTE's speeches, cited his words, and circulated his victorious images (mostly photoshopped). @RTE was represented as the victorious commander at God's

service, who follows Muhammed's path and fights for Islam<sup>14</sup>. Further, the *Reis* image also served as a father figure who knows the best for society and takes care of them. This approach fabricated the society as a family, accepting the Sunni-Muslim Turkish values as founding values and owing loyalty to @RTE both as a father of family and represent-er of the will of the people. So, the circulation of the *Reis* image was not just for celebrating the victory but also for provoking the others. The *Reis* image turned into an affective object that the nationalist and Islamist revanchist feelings and desires stick to, and the oppressed/pious people were appealed to embrace it<sup>15</sup>.

Picture 4 The Reis Image<sup>16</sup>.

Slika 4. Primjer slike Reisa



The other pro-AKP hashtag to manipulate the withdrawal decision is #Morardınızımı. In Turkish, “morarmak” has several meanings. The verb “morarmak” means bruising, “the deformation in any part of the body due to violence or a blow”. It also means, in slang, “embarrassment in the face of an unexpected situation”. Moreover, AKP trolls used this hashtag to irritate the feminists because the word “morarmak” originated from “mor” (purple), which is also a symbol colour of feminism. Hence, in the first place, it can be asserted that #Morardınızımı was a hashtag to provoke the anti-AKP camp. #Morardınızımı consists of tweets posted by troll and bot accounts with copy-paste contents for humiliating others and orchestrating hate speeches. The pro-AKP hacker group that calls themselves “Akıncılar” and the troll networks under “National Accounts” have carried out political astroturfing to poison the public debate rather than shape it.

The most frequent type of tweets were revanchist tweets. Statements such as “It will be your turn”, “who is with them”, and “all in due time” aggravated the perception that AKP has a hidden agenda. The most striking revenge rhetoric was derived from anti-Gezi narrations. The Gezi Park protests were characterized as the attacks of feminists and LGBTQ+ individuals against the government. Withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, the reopening of Hagia Sophia as a mosque and the construction of the Taksim mosque were enthusiastically celebrated as the victories of the *Reis* against perverted Gezi Park protesters. By doing so, they weaponized Islam to justify the withdrawal decision. Islamic expressions such as «alhamdulillah» and «la galibe illallah» were used in the posts, and the Farewell Sermon of Muhammed and the tale of Yusuf were instrumentalized<sup>17</sup>.

Once Islam was weaponized and legitimized the holy war rhetoric, hate speeches towards the other were normalized. Therefore, feminists and LGBTQ+ individuals were humiliated with sexist and misogynistic expressions such as “horny minority”, “immoral”, “dishonest wife”, “whore”, “fag-got”, and “ball”<sup>18</sup>.

Picture 5 The burst ball image is used to insult LGBTQs. The user also implies sexistly that President Erdoğan beats LGBTQs<sup>19</sup>.

*Slika 5. Fotografija ispuhane lopte koristila se kako bi se uvrijedila LGBTQ zajednica. Korisnik također implicira da je predsjednik Erdoğan pobijedio LGBTQ zajednicu.*



The collective lynching of opposition parties' figures is another populist-performative strategy to orchestrate hate speeches. However, unlike AKP elites, pro-AKP trolls primarily targeted female politicians, Meral Akşener, the Chairwoman of the nationalist IYI Party, Pervin Buldan, Co-Chairwoman of the pro-Kurdish HDP and Canan Kaftancıoğlu who was prominent in Gezi Park Protests and CHP Istanbul Provincial President. To protest the withdrawal decision Meral Akşener and Pervin Buldan wore the purple mask to act in solidarity with the pro-Istanbul Convention camp. Because they represent opposite sides of the ideological spectrum, one is nationalist; the other is pro-Kurdish and socialist, trolls accused them of cooperating. Thus, they reflamed the pro-AKP claim, which has been narrated since the 15 July coup d'état attempt, that opposition parties (Millet İttifakı) have conspired with HDP, consequently with PKK (pro-Kurdish terrorist organization)<sup>20</sup>. By constructing a chain of equivalence between the IYI Party and HDP, trolls and bot accounts tried to strengthen the traditional ontological insecurity concerns.

On the other hand, the allegations of connivance of harassment and rape within the CHP were also echoed by pro-AKP trolls and bot accounts in #Morardınızımı. By doing so, they implied that the Kemalist segment of society is "sincere", "immoral", and "corrupted". Nevertheless, as said, the most prominent targeted figure was Canan Kaftancıoğlu. Although she has been on target by AKP elites and pro-AKP media since the Gezi Park protests, trolls and bots attacked her by spilling out hatred and misogynic expressions such as "whore" and "being inglorious"<sup>21</sup>. Furthermore, the troll activities aimed to provoke secular-Kemalist segments of society were not limited to the criminalization of the CHP or the humiliation of figures such as Kaftancıoğlu but also targeted Atatürk and the reforms of the early period of the Republic. Some accounts shared cartoons in which Atatürk was portrayed as a dictator, some of them posted fake and manipulated news seeming like Atatürk cooperated with Greeks, and so forth<sup>22</sup>.

Finally, it should be noted that #Morardınızımı is very successful in annoying the anti-AKP camp. Anti-AKP accounts, mostly real accounts consisting of artists, novelists, poets, singers, etc., lashed out against #Morardınızımı. They reacted by sharing the images of women killed and subjected to violence<sup>23</sup>. Besides, some users were affected by the revanchist climate that pro-AKP trolls and bot accounts created and humiliated the pro-AKP camps as "ignorant", "dishonest", "psychopaths", and "murderers"<sup>24</sup>. So, it may be argued that even if #Morardınızımı was not the top trending topic at that time, it was very successful in manipulating and decontextualizing the public debates.

## Conclusion

Despite a burgeoning literature on the AKP-era populism focusing on its link with neoliberalism, there are still unfulfilling responses about how the AKP elite can carry it out successfully. While the literature on populism has tried to understand it as an identical approach, political communication style, cultural approach or mass mobilization, I prefer the dispositive to gather all these approaches together and grasp it multi-faceted. By discussing the withdrawal decision as a case study, I tried to show how this dispositive can be practised discursively via Twitter.

First, I defined the AKP era populism as *Dava* and problematized it as dispositive, consisting of discursive and non-discursive apparatus. The discursive apparatus of *Dava* occurs of antagonism between the oppressed/pious Turkish people and the corrupted secular-Kemalist elites, the fetishization of the will of the people and the charismatic authority of the leader, *Reis*. However, *Dava* has drawn its strength from the economy of hostility. As seen in this study, AKP elites mobilize revanchist and hatred feelings against the opposition camps and deepen the polarization. Hence, as entrepreneurs of *Dava*, the AKP elites use social media effectively to guarantee governance. According to the DHA, the AKP elites endeavoured to justify the withdrawal decision from the Istanbul Convention in two discourse topics: the woman and the family. These topics indicate that they have tried to synthesize Islamic understanding *fitrat* with neoliberalism to straighten the gender orientation by gender complementary. They identified the women as entrepreneurs of New Turkey, labour, the guarantor of future generations within motherhood, and the bearer of Sunni-Muslim Turkish values. On the other topic, the family is defined as the core unit of Turkish society, the incubator of New Turkey, and the regulatory unit of Turkish moral order.

Furthermore, argumentation topos were mobilized to strengthen the polarizations of secularism vs conservatism, normal vs abnormal, and Turkish vs non-Turkish. Especially in pro-AKP hashtag campaigns, these topos were used to fetishize the will of the people by ensuring the glorification of Sunni-Muslim Turkishness. The most crucial point to be underlined here is that both the AKP elites and trolls legitimized the hate speeches towards others as a right of *Dava*. However, the majority of the AKP elites avoided uttering hatred feelings directly; applying bad manners to discredit the opposition encouraged trolls to manipulate and decontextualize the public debate.

Although the findings of this case study can not be generalized, it may be asserted that by simplifying the complex social issues and adopting a polarized mentality into daily life, social media is the most crucial technology of *Dava*. It has growingly

enriched the economy of enmity and vice versa and makes it possible to divide and rule. As a result, *Dava* has turned politics into governance which is only possible through mobilizing the feelings of hatred.

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(Accessed: 01.04.2021)
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<https://twitter.com/SahteKahraman10/status/1373182845083136002>  
(Accessed: 01.04.2021)
- <sup>23</sup> <https://twitter.com/melissakts2/status/1373309692043259920> (Accessed: 01.04.2021).
- <sup>24</sup> Examples of these tweets: <https://twitter.com/PelinBuzluk/status/1373229327660224512> ;  
<https://twitter.com/fadimemtr/status/1374401837932056577> (Accessed: 01.04.2021).

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# Upravljanje mržnjom: strategije diskursa koje elitni članovi političke stranke AKP koriste na Twitteru kako bi opravdali povlačenje iz Istanbulske konvencije

Hasan Turgut

## SAŽETAK

*Pod vladavinom Stranke pravde i razvitka (AKP) Turska je poprimila gotovo sve odlike populističkog autoritarnog režima. Od dana kada je stupila na vlast, AKP se promovirala kao sluga turskog naroda. Nedavne studije pokazale su kako je populizam u doba AKP-a postao dominantna politička strategija. Znanstvenici ga istražuju kao diskurs, komunikacijski pristup koji apelira na narod i strategiju za mobilizaciju masa. Međutim, ova objašnjenja populizma u doba AKP-a još uvijek su prilično demonstrativna; ovaj fenomen treba istražiti s pomoću novog, holističkog pristupa. Stoga ova studija problematizira populizam u doba AKP-a kao dispozitiv i pokušava ga razumjeti kroz holistički pristup. Kako bi se ova hipoteza provjerila empirijski, studija se usredotočuje na odluku o povlačenju iz Istanbulske konvencije. Istražuje kako su elite AKP-a opravdale odluku na Twitteru tijekom ožujka 2021. U tom kontekstu studija se usredotočuje na tvitove elita AKP-a i trolova koji zagovaraju AKP te primjenjuje više metoda u tom procesu. Kao prvo, tvitovi elita AKP-a analizirani su diskursno-povijesnim pristupom. Zatim, kako bi se razumjelo kako se ovi tvitovi odražavaju na hashtag kampanje koje zagovaraju AKP, oznake #GüçlüKadınGüçlüTürkiye i #Moradınizmi temeljito su ispitane. Rezultati su pokazali da su društveni mediji najvažnija tehnologija za Davu kad je u pitanju pojednostavljenje složenih društvenih pitanja i uvođenje polariziranog mentaliteta u svakodnevni život. Dava je značajno pridonijela promociji neprijateljstva (koje joj ide u prilog), a politiku je pretvorila u vladavinu – što je moguće samo kroz širenje osjećaja mržnje.*

*Ključne riječi:* AKP, dispozitiv Dava, diskursno-povijesni pristup, Istanbulska konvencija, Twitter