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THE AKP'S ELECTORAL STRATEGY IN THE JUNE 7 AND THE  
NOVEMBER 1 POPULAR ELECTIONS IN TURKEY:  
RELIGION AS A TOOL OF POLITICAL PROPAGANDA

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**Abstract:** This paper deals with the AKP's religious-political propaganda in the 7 June and the 1 November election processes. It forms a frame for this propaganda by focusing on some ideological-political formulations appearing in Turkish political history. It argues that these formulations are the product of two significant political interventions by the Turkish right-politics, including the 1960s and 1970s' nationalist-conservative composition and the post-1980s' Turkish-Islam synthesis. From a historical-political standpoint, it introduces how they have shaped and framed religion as an instrument of political propaganda. For this, the paper concentrates on the 7 June and 1 November elections hold in 2015 in Turkey, and discusses the AKP case to have put such propaganda into practice in the elections mentioned, by quoting the statements and views by the leading political actors of the party (AKP). It presents a historical-political framework, and tries to unveil the historical-political line of the AKP's religious-political propaganda within this framework. Taking into account all of these, it examines a religious-political propaganda special to Turkey interwoven with the state, the Turkish nation, and nationalism, and asserts how important this propaganda becomes for the right-wing politics, and thus the AKP, to come out of the elections with victory in Turkey.

**Key words:** Religious-Political Propaganda, Nationalist-Conservatism Composition, Turkish-Islam Synthesis, AKP, 7 June and 1 November Popular Elections.

## 1. Introduction

Religion, being appealed by a good number of right-wing political parties with a view to win elections, has been one of irreplaceable instruments used for political propaganda in Turkey. It has always been at the heart of political conflicts and struggles because of being a strong political argument in mobilizing masses with religiously-conservative disposition in political sphere and taking their political supports in elections. Of course, a great deal of reasons might be propounded regarding why this becomes so. However, following transition to the secular-national republican period, this underlying reason is that in the Turkish state and society the position of religion, i.e. Islam, has entirely changed. The founder elites of the republic, attempting at the building of a nation-state following the triumph of liberation war (1919-1923), had new ideas regarding the state and society, and these ideas were put into practice by being established a new state and society with secular-nationalist bases. From a political-historical standpoint, in next title, "Politics and Religion in Turkey" this study will discuss how the building of the state and society at issue were carried out at that time. On the other hand, it will also argue that relied on secular-nationalist principles, such state and society changed over time along with political and ideological use of religion as a propaganda tool. As a result of such a change, more importantly, it asserts that the relationships among politics, religion and society have transformed in Turkey. This transformation has been a product of various conflicts and struggles among different political groups, and of diverse ideological syntheses that reformulated relationships between politics, society and religion. It has long been one of essential topics to lead intellectual-academic debates in Turkey. The reason is that among most confrontational and antagonistic issues in the Turkish political order have been religion and religion-politics relations in a country, the majority of which consists of Muslims with religiously-conservative tendencies. In helping shape a political identity and creating an ideological-political unity and integration among voters to win elections, religion has become an irreplaceable tool of ideological-political struggles for political parties and the state, owing to its leading and active role in Turkish political life. So, it is required to state that the study will draw attention to the above-mentioned historical-political background regarding to religion and politics in discussing what type of religious propaganda the present ruling party (AKP) has applied to, and how a political-historical experience such propaganda has had, especially along with the transition to democracy, namely multi-party system, since 1950s in national-secular republican period. In the foregoing period, including a process from the beginning of the 1950s till the late 1980s, the political-

historical background, which we will mention describes the style of religious propaganda often appealed by the right-wing political parties, will illustrate on what sort of a religious-political propaganda the ruling party has put in place in the elections. For this, firstly, we will broadly debate the background mentioned above under a title, 'Politics and Religion in Turkey', in this study

Though inside a different historical-political context, this background reminds itself to us once again. In order understand and explain better how and in what ways it has reappeared the context in question, namely the AKP period, our study embarks on a discourse analysis of two general elections, the 7 June and 1 November. More precisely, it is an analysis of the AKP's electoral strategy based on political-religious propaganda during these two popular elections. By and large, discourse analysis fundamentally focuses on social use of language in social context. But yet, it is needed to remark that such an analysis is defined in quite a few different ways, within which are signification, a particular use of language linked with one social field or practice, and a way of building aspects of world from a definite social perspective [e.g. a 'neoliberal economic discourse']. We will just prefer one from those ways, which refers to the use of language directly related to a particular social field or practice [e.g. political or economic discourse] (Fairclough and Fairclough 2012). So, the study enters upon a political discourse analysis, since it centers more upon one political party's electoral strategy during the June 7 and the November 1 elections within political field. However, it is also a critical political analysis that grounds on a study of how staying in power, political legitimacy and dominance have been reproduced. In the context of critical discourse analysis, what matters for us is that such analysis provides a basis for dialectically examining the -mostly power-relationships among some structures and institutional practices [e.g. politics, religion, ideology, media, and so on] (Van Dijk 1996; Fairclough et al. 2012). As would be seen here, a discourse analysis should be something beyond signification *per se* or social use of language *per se*, so as to find out and expose relationships, continuities and disengagements between particular social fields, such as politics, ideology, or religion. In a sense, a critical discourse analysis also makes the very way for us to perform such an analysis in the way before mentioned.

To sum up, based on such analysis, this study makes a discourse analysis of the AKP's religious-political propaganda implemented in two elections. For this, the first is to present a detailed historical-political background of relationships and/or connections between two significant structures, namely politics and religion, in Turkey. The second is to focus on how a right-inclined Turkish political party [Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi-AKP], -translated as Justice and Development Party into english- has used religion as a tool of political propaganda during the June 7 and the November 1 elections. In the third and the concluding part the study

concludes by highlighting that using religion as tool of a political propaganda, whether against secular politics or left-socialist political movements, has been a uniting element of right politics, from the AKP to others, in Turkey.

## 2. Politics and Religion in Turkey

Firstly, let us explain by what sort of framework the role and position of religion in Turkey can be made more understandable. At this point, in one remarkable article, 'Religion and Nationalism: Four Approaches', Brubaker by interestingly approaching to relationship(s) between religion and nationalism presents us a framework well enough, which to help understand better the case of Turkey. This framework has three main arguments concerning religion and nationalism: mode of identification, mode of social organization, way of framing political claims (Brubaker 2012, 4). Particularly, with regard to religion, two arguments, namely identification and way of framing political claims, come into prominence for analyzing and explaining the role and position of religion in Turkish politics. The reason is that religion, Islam, plays an active role in both creating a political identity- either for state or political party- and framing a great deal of ideological-political arguments advocated by political parties and movements. In Turkey, especially with the rise of the left-politics and political movements in the late 1960s and the 1970s, and immediately after, religion, mostly considered by right-politics and the Turkish state as an antidote of struggle against the left-socialist political ideologies and movements, begins to make important contributions to - Turkish- nationalism to be framed in ideological-political sense. Most of all, in a fairly racist tone, being a Muslim becomes equal being an essential element of having Turkish blood in the Turkish nationalist ideology with its emphasis on blood, purity, boundaries, and honor (White 2013, 3). For, along with the transition to multi-party system in Turkey, severe attitude taken against religion in the secular-national one-party period (1923-1945), have paved the way for being used religion by all right-politics, from the centre-right to Islamism and ultra-nationalism, either as a tool of building their political identity or a way of framing their political assertions and propaganda (Poulton 1997; Cizre-Sakallıoğlu 1992). What is more, to this attitude was strongly reacted by some social groups with religiously-conservative disposition, who had mostly lived in underdeveloped and rural regions and provinces. Thus, there has been a severely political-ideological cleavage between the religiously-conservative groups and the leading political cadres and military-civil bureaucratic elites of the new republic, welded from the declining role and position of religion in Turkish politics and society. That cleavage has been major source of the political initiatives to act the Turkish right-politics to aim at taking the support of vast majority of people in the elections in

years to come. In what follows, we clearly observe it while drawing a general framework for religion-politics relationships within Turkish political history.

The years that the above-mentioned cleavage itself had first arisen were the 1950s. In those years, when Turkey had switched into a multi-party political regime, religion became like a crucial propaganda tool to form a basis for the arguments that have been politically and ideologically used by the Turkish right-politics during elections. The 1950s' right-politics was a highly moderate and conservative-liberal one that had tried to soften the secular-national state elites' uncompromising attitude against religion in the one-party period, and that also attached importance to people's religious demands. The Democrat Party (DP), taking the lead of the right-politics of Turkey in the early 1950s, was founded by the ex-political elites who had had secular backgrounds and lifestyles, and also made politics before in the secularist-nationalist republican party (CHP) –Republican People Party-. It was strongly devoted to the secularist understanding of the –Kemalist- Republic, and thus, had no thought of building a new political order relied on religious-Islamic bases. In other respects, it was tolerant of devout-conservative masses, and partly of a societal Islam featured with moral, cultural and communal elements, but absolutely opposed to a political Islam in Turkey. As a consequence, its goal was to just create a more relatively tolerant atmosphere for religious life and a variety of religious thoughts and organizations, and additionally, taking the lead in a number of symbolic-radical legal changes, such as the Arabic call to prayer (azan), and compulsory religious classes in schools. Generally speaking, it is argued that the political attitude of the party in relation to religion, Islam, represented a nationalist-conservatist one attached to a religious worldview built upon national and spiritual values (Yıldız 2006, 43-44). However, as an outcome of this political attitude, on May 27, 1960, the intervention by the Turkish army to democratic-political process resulted in being closed down the DP on September 29, 1960 (Zürcher 2004, 241-242; Karpas 2004, 33-70).

Following the 1960 military intervention, Turkish political life was restructured with the emergence of new political parties, ranging from the centre-right (AP), Islamist (MNP and MSP) and nationalist right-wing (MHP) parties to the left-socialist ones (TİP). Likewise, religion, Islam, was a crucial political argument of all these right-politics once again in the post-1960s, amongst of which were the liberal-conservative (AP), ultra-nationalist (MHP) and Islamist parties (MNP and MSP), with a view to oppose the left-socialist politics rising from the mid-1960s up to the early 1980s. However, at political level, as White remarked, albeit applied for Islam by some political parties, among of which have been the Democrat Party, its successor, the Justice Party (AP), and other centre-right parties (ANAP and DYP), this has not been at all concerned with political interest and belief, as well as the Islamist-right parties (White 2002, 113).

Furthermore, not only the Turkish right-politics, but also with whole civil and military institutional structures the Turkish state itself felt compelled to do something in order to cease the ideological and political rise of the left-wing socialist politics and organizations. They at the same time paved the way for the political and ideological usage of religion by the right-wing parties mentioned above, with the intent of preventing the left-wing politics to emerge as a political alternative for masses. Additionally, the state began to soften its opponent attitude to religion able to be used as an antidote to the left's ideological-political domination, and religion itself was no longer to be seen as a threat to the Kemalist-secular regime, by the very reason of the fact that the new enemy of the state was the left-socialist politics and its political-ideological hegemony over masses. From now on, a new political synthesis was needed to incorporate religion, Islam, into the struggle of the established order with the enemies in question, and to use it as an ideological-political tool. This synthesis was a nationalist-conservative composition *-terkip-* being formed by making a synthesis of Islam and Turkish nationalism. It was to be a product of the right-wing intellectual movement founded as the Intellectuals' Club in 1962 but changed into the Intellectuals' Hearth in 1970s (Mert 2007, 115). Synthesizing nationalism and conservatism with religion, namely Islam, these intellectuals have been the architects of the foregoing political composition by defining a different nationalism and conservatism intertwined with Islam. Put it another way, defining this composition has been possible with a new description of nationalism and conservatism to be blended with Islam. In that composition, Islam was framed within a more conservative style. What is advocated under the name of conservatism has been fundamentally Islamic ethos that is described as 'sacred values', amongst of which have been God, prophet, and Holy Scripture, i.e. Quran (Okutan 2004, 167). By this way, while religion has gained a nationalist framework on the one hand, Turkish nationalism have had so many religious implications on the other. The nationalist-conservative composition at stake was in fact an intellectual-political interference that had tried to inject Islam into nationalism, at the expense of annihilating the present spiritual gap in the Kemalist-secular nationalism and incorporating a more moral-communitarian spirit into it. In one sense, it made Islam more conservative by underlining its ritualistic, traditional and communitarian elements (Bora 2012; Mert 2007). As a result of all these, religion, namely Islam, became one of the most essential elements of the state and Turkish nationalism, conjunction with change in the state's perception of threat intended for the left-socialist politics and political movements.

In Turkey, where a new ideological-political formulation, termed as a nationalist-conservative composition, took the lead by synthesizing Islam and Turkish nationalism, in the past times, the severe and uncompromising attitude taken against religion has been softened, and

specially had a great change after the September 12 military coup. In the first place, it is required to remark that for Turkey this military coup expressed a well-rounded political, ideological and economic transformations which to go beyond a simply military intervention. It was fundamentally a state-led militarist-bureaucratic initiative that engaged in institutionally rebuilding the structure of Turkish society and politics, by forcibly restructuring political, economic, cultural and ideological fields in Turkey through the state's coercive forces. One of the most prerequisite reasons for the coup in performing a military intervention to restructure politics and society has been the stabilization of society and state. The coup rulers believed that the way to realize such a thing was to unite society by rejecting all kinds of ethnical and faith-based separations, ideological-political divisions, and fragmented-differentiated social identities and groups, without in no way considering the pluralistic structure of Turkish society in terms of class, religious, ethnical, political-ideological. According to them, this way was to pass from politically and ideologically reactivating Islam which they thought has a significant-unifying role in holding Turks together. For this, as Kaya points out, Islam has been one of the most essential tools for them to be used for redesigning society and politics on the basis of a 'nationalist Islam' (Kaya 2004, 101). Hereupon, the 12 September military regime initiated a wide-ranging state-controlled Islamization of society, by aiming at defusing the current left-wing, socialist political movements and organizations seen as a major threat to Turkish unity and integrity. Once, what makes this possible was the new role attributed to religion that the coup administration had seen as a cement of keeping Turks together, by being turned Islam into the most essential part of Turkish nationalism (Atasoy 2009, 91; Evin 1988, 211-212; Kaya 2004, 101). This role laid the bases of a political-ideological formulation, the Turkish-Islamic synthesis, similarly to the nationalist-conservative composition of the 1960s and the 1970s. The Turkish-Islamic synthesis was put into practice as a new ideological-political formulation of the Turkish state that had reinterpreted the nationalist-secular ideology of Kemalism and tried to reconstruct Turkish nationalism based on Islam (Atasoy 2009; Mert 2007; Bora 2017, Eligur 2010; Poulton 1997). It was a synthesis that had been formulated under the influence of some leading right-leaning intellectuals, among of who were Eşref Edip, Necip Fazıl, and Nurettin Topçu. In the foregoing synthesis, Islam has taken an active role in redefining the common-collective identity, namely Turkish nationalism which to have still secular implications as a product of the efforts of the 1930s' Kemalist nationalism. To be sure, historically, it cannot be argued that this synthesis first emerged at the beginning of the 1980s. On the contrary, its bases were laid by an organization, known as the Hearth of the Enlightened, in the 1970s, by being drawn the components of Turkish nationalism and Sunni-Islam together. The organization was established on 10 May 1970 by a group of

university professors, intellectuals, and businessmen, who saw the rising of the left-wing ideologies as a threat, particularly at universities (Eligür 2010, 65; Poulton 1997, 179; Mert 2007, 78). All in all, it can be concluded that in Turkey the political use of religion to have been embraced by the right-wing politics as a tool of propaganda used to mobilize the masses in the elections has had quite strong statist-nationalist aspects interwoven with Turkish nationalism. What renders this possible has been two major political-ideological formulations: nationalist-conservative composition and Turkish-Islamic synthesis. Through those political-ideological formulations, Islam has been nationalized and seen as an ideological-political instrument capable of continuing the existence of the Turkish state and nation against separatists, external forces, and terrorists. From now onward, it has been one of the most essential elements to form the identity of the Turkish state and the consolidate of Turkish nationalism.

Shaped by the Turkish right-politics and the state itself, these two crucial political-ideological formulations have provided a basis for the use of religion, Islam, as a tool of political-ideological propaganda in Turkey. Most of all, of the Turkish right-politics, the Islamist-wing has been among the biggest supporters of the theses of those formulations to politically and ideologically aim at uniting Turkish nationalism and Islam. In other words, Islamism or Islamist politics has been one of powerful apologists of nationalist-conservative political line to reproduce statist, racist and chauvinist dispositions and form a basis for an ethno-religious community. Also, it has readily embraced the political goals of the Turkish-Islam synthesis that promotes religious identity, pietism and conservatism, and enhances the religious services (religious education, Quran courses, growing number of constructions of mosque) which to lay the social bases of Islamism in the post-1980 Turkey (Bora 2012, 130; Bora 2017, 402-403).

### **3. What happened in the June 7 and November 1 Elections? How an electoral campaign did the AKP conduct by using religion in its political propaganda?**

The AKP came to power in 2002 by taking support for the great majority of voters, about 34.3 percent of the votes. It is a political party founded by 'the innovationists'- *yenilikçiler*- on August 14, 2001, who have emerged as an opponent movement in the Islamist Virtue Party -FP-, led by National View tradition (MGG). In the 2002 elections, the AKP conducted an electoral campaign promising 'justice' and 'stability' to the voters, by taking advantage of the 2001 economic crisis and the failure of the coalition government. Since coming to power, there have been high hopes in the West to the AKP, by being supposed that it would make progress on democracy, human rights and freedoms, minority rights, and economic reforms in Turkey (Kirişçi and Sloat 2019). This hope has increasingly continued with the steps taken by the AKP in next periods,



especially the 2007 and 2011 elections. However, soon after, in all those promises and hopes were come to an end, and much changed during the 7 June and the 1 November general elections. For the AKP, it has turned to much more important than everything to gain victory at the ballot box, by being put a good number of political strategy or tactic in place from religious propaganda to statist-nationalist discourse.

To begin with, it is necessary to point out that the June 7 and November 1 elections have been a turning point for the AKP, differently from the former elections, 2002, 2007, 2011, 2014. The AKP achieved a great success in these elections by continuously raising its vote share from almost 34 percent to about 50 percent. However, in the June 7 election, situation changed, and the aforesaid election resulted in a great defeat and frustration for the AKP, which had lost a remarkable electoral support. With a nearly 10 percent decline, compared to the general election in 2011, the AKP was not able to obtain opportunity to form alone a government by receiving almost 40.9 percent of the votes. Then, the party's leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, made a decision to hold an early election or 'repeat' the former election on November 1, 2015. In the 1 November election, the AKP gained a true victory against the opposition by taking 49.5 percent of the valid votes -an all-time high of about 23.7 million total votes (Kalaycıoğlu 2017, 5; Çarkoğlu 2015). As such, albeit the poll defeat in the first election on one side and the victory in the next on the other, what comes to the forefront in those elections have been the AKP politics to embrace a nationalist-conservative discourse woven around the survival of state, Turkish nation, internal-external security, terror, and fears. Actually, what provides basis for such politics was the political atmosphere to rule over the country. Based upon a variety of discourses like state, nation, security, and political stability, this political atmosphere substantially arose out of a result of a range of terror attacks and mass violence, and also of a great deal of small-scale attacks against all parties (Çarkoğlu 2015). Erdoğan has, too, made a great contribution to the political atmosphere at stake by turning towards a quite severe and aggressive strategy aiming at receiving nationalist votes from the base of the MHP (Nationalist Action Party). Particularly, the power of fear in politics fueled Erdoğan and the AKP. The voters were forced to opt for a powerful majority government which to open the way for security and stability. So, with a sharply turn to nationalism and politics of fear, the AKP took back almost 5 percent of the polls to which had been gone the MHP in the June (Öniş 2016, 149-150). The driving force of such a politics to be built upon fears and Turkish nationalism has been that the power which the AKP had hold down since 2002 was at risk. In order to keep away from such a downfall, the governing AKP run a campaign for the Turkish nationalist votes and laid into a stiff political struggle against the opposition parties, especially the HDP- the People's Democratic Party- and the CHP, both of which is generally asserted to have situated within a left-

wing, social democrat and secular political-ideological line in Turkish politics, and directly their leaders (Kalaycıoğlu 2017, 2, 4-5). Given the foregoing ideological-political line of the opposition parties, the AKP located itself in a religiously-conservative and Turkish-nationalist political line. The essential emphases of the party were on religion, the state and the Turkish nation. These formed a basis for the political discourse of the AKP in either elections. Before the 2015 general elections, such political discourse was in having desire to keep all symbols of power in its own hand as a proof of having identified itself with the state from now on (Öztañ 2015). These symbols were in general the state, Turkish nationalism, and Islam, the main framework of which were designated by the 1960s and 1970s' nationalist-conservative composition and the 1980s' Turkish-Islam synthesis. They were the main political arguments to shape the electoral campaign of the party during the June 7 and November 1 general elections. With those political arguments, from now onward, among the political discourses of the AKP were interior and external security, terrorism, and the survival of the Turkish state.

General speaking, roughly outlined above, the political arguments of the party have also come to the forefront in two electoral campaigns. These arguments have fundamentally aimed at the opposition parties. The opposition has been accused of being "non-national crowds", by being used such arguments by the AKP which to lay the bases of a religious propaganda. Most of all, a severe political stance has been taken against secular-Kurdish politics organizing under the leadership of the HDP, charged with maintaining its relationships with the PKK, the armed Kurdish forces, and supporting terrorism. Ahmet Davutođlu, the chairman of the AKP and prime minister at that time, clearly expressed this at a party meeting before the 1 November election, in his word: 'We will ceaselessly battle against terrorist groups which threatens our nation. We are decisive about maintaining this struggle to the end so long as weapons are not taken away. But we never have bent, and will not bend, our head against those who pull a gun on the nation. Then, you will work much and leave them – the HDP- under electoral threshold' (Davutođlu 2015a).

In fact, following the end of the democratic solution of 'Kurdish question' called 'democratic opening' and 'National Unity and Brotherhood Project', as Davutođlu's statement above showed, the AKP and its leadership initiated an aggressive political-ideological struggle against the HDP within a religious-nationalist line by targeting its relationships with the PKK, and its secular and left-inclined politics. Particularly, the secular Kurdish party's (HDP) ties with the PKK have been turned into a handicap and demonized. Moreover, notably the state, the governing party (AKP) has been contented with only watching the HDP itself, its leaders, organization, and followers to be inactivated by being exposed to physical and symbolic violence (Menderes 2015). Already, it put an end to being democratically solved 'Kurdish question', known as

'the solution process'. Erdoğan, being Turkey's president since 2014, clearly stated in a TV programme: 'It is no longer possible to continue the solution process with those who wish to damage our national unity and brotherhood. We have noticed that this process got damaged. There is an obvious reality. -Unfortunately-, the solution process did not get attention required' (Erdoğan 2015b).

Generally speaking, also considering their statements above, both Erdoğan and Davutoğlu, two foremost leaders of the AKP in either election campaign, seems to have conducted a strong religious-political propaganda against the HDP politics and its leader, Demirtaş. They maintained this propaganda in the election meetings. Erdoğan, who went to his voters with Quran, severely criticized the HDP and its leader, and continued as follows: 'Those are the documents caught in the PKK camps in mountains. They are teaching Zoroastrianism. It is required to recognize and know those very well. We should make all those clear to my Kurdish brothers well' (Erdoğan 2015d).

In the same way, Davutoğlu also tried to differently conduct the afore-mentioned religious-political propaganda against the HDP by reminding Demirtaş's words time and again in the election campaigns. Citing that 'Demirtaş says that Taksim is our Kaaba', Davutoğlu directly took aim at the HDP's leader and said that: 'Demirtaş... the unaware who say that the Jerusalem is the space of Jews... the poor understanding who say that Taksim is our Kabaa. We, as the AK party will uprightly take a stance against all those' (Davutoğlu 2015b).

As seen here, the AKP's election strategy has been largely relied on a religious-political propaganda. This propaganda has completely shaped the party politics and political activities during the election. However, religion itself did not just create such propaganda that had framed the AKP's election politics. At the same time, security, the Turkish nation and state itself have been the crucial components of this religious-political propaganda. It has not been difficult for the AKP to incorporate these concepts into a religious-political propaganda, given the relationships between religion, the state, and Turkish nationalism debated above on the basis of a historical framework.

Following all these discussions, having integrated with Turkish nationalism and the state itself in compatible with two political formulations mentioned above, Islam has been the most essential part of the political propaganda by the AKP in both the 7 June and the 1 November. The party's leader, Erdoğan, has continued to target two secular opposition parties, the CHP and the HDP, by highlighting how much important religion has been in Turkish society. More particularly, criticizing the secular Kurdish party, HDP, with religion-centered emphases, Erdoğan asserted: 'Does this party -HDP- has a difference from the secular CHP's mentality? What do we say? Our Kaaba is Mecca. But it

did not end. This party-HDP- argues that religious courses in the schools will be lifted. Why? Because it desires an atheist structure. Even, it has presented a so-called religious official as candidate in Diyarbakır, a province located in the south eastern region of Turkey. This religious official says that he nevertheless become candidate, even if his party's religion is Zoroastrianism. Look at that' (Erdoğan 2015c).

On and on, Erdoğan kept this religious-political propaganda going during the election. He differently expressed it several times in the election meetings. Once again, he called out to Selahattin Demirtaş, the chairman of the HDP, by taking Quran at this time, holy scripture for Muslims, in hand at Şarlıurfa meeting. He told to him: 'You would do it whatsoever the Quran says, if you learned the Quran from your grandfather, or father'. Because, the Quran is not an ornament. Properly know that it-Quran- has not descended neither to read under the sod nor to tell fortunes' (Erdoğan 2015a).

In the same meeting, Erdoğan maintained his criticisms by opposing to Demirtaş, and the HDP politics under his leadership. He expressed that: 'Here you are! What say? Says that our Kaaba is Taksim (a square located in İstanbul). What say? Says that compulsory religious courses should be abolished. What say? Says that Presidency of Religious Affair -Diyanet İşleri Bakanlığı- will be lifted. I show the Holy Quran translated into Kurdish language by our Presidency of Religious Affair, but Mr. Demirtaş is disturbed by that' (Erdoğan 2015a).

Undoubtedly, Erdoğan has not just run this religious-political campaign against the secular Kurdish party. The campaign by Erdoğan has also targeted the CHP and its Alevi voters. Therefore, it has become a part of religious propaganda to be conducted against a faith group (Alevi), with a view to be able to take the support of Turkish-Sunni voters. By pointing out that a politics whose project is made in Europe has played a game like Alevism without Ali, a prophet in Islam, Erdoğan explicitly put into words in his meetings: 'Now, there is such a confusion. What did we know at one time? We knew Alevi as those who love the prophet Ali. Is that so? For that reason, I say that if Alevism means loving the prophet Ali, I am more Alevi than ones who allege to be Alevi. Because I try to live like the prophet Ali, but those do not so' (Erdoğan 2015a).

Historically, either social groups, whether the secular Kurdish movement, organized under a political party (HDP) or Alevi as a faith group outside the dominant Turkish-Sunni tradition, long supporting the CHP and getting into parliament from this party (Güneş-Ayata 2002), have had a common point particularly originating from their close relationships or/and ties with the left-socialist politics from the mid-1960s' onwards (Ertan 2016; Marcus 2010). This common historical past has been always at the core of the AKP's religious propaganda, based on an understanding of religion nationalized through the nationalist-conser-

vative composition and turned into the essential identity of the state with the Turkish-Islamic synthesis. For this, the party consistently attracted attention to those two groups' secular and left-inclined political identities and backgrounds in the hope of getting the support of the Turkish nationalists and religiously-conservative social groups in the 2015 elections. As seen here, the AKP capitalized on the above-debated political-ideological formulations for winning two elections. It explicitly appealed for a religious-political propaganda shaped by those two formulations in the election meetings. All in all, what matters here is that such a religious propaganda has been one interwoven with the state and Turkish nationalism. The AKP laid the bases of its own politics by standing on the religious propaganda mentioned above in the June 7 and November 1 elections.

#### 4. Conclusion

In Turkey, it appears that using religion as a tool of political propaganda had a long history from the Ottoman period to the early Republican years. This form of a religious-political propaganda has arisen as an outcome of the right-wing political-ideological experiences and/or practices in Turkish political history. Starting from the aforesaid experiences and/or practices, including the nationalist-conservative composition and Turkish-Islam synthesis, the Turkish right-politics has laid the bases of its own religious-political propaganda grounded on the state, the Turkish nation, prophet, and Quran. Characterizing three aspects of the Turkish right, ranging from the centre-right to Islamism and ultra-nationalism (Bora 2012), this politics has appealed to a religious-political propaganda historically resulted from historical-political experiences and/or practices in question. Likewise, in Turkish politics, coming from an Islamist-political tradition, namely National View, the AKP also used such religious-political propaganda special to Turkey shaped by the dominant Turkish-right politics in the 7 June and 1 November elections. Thus, the Islamist AKP by making such a propaganda in those elections has taken the vast majority's support of the voters and become first party in parliament. As stated earlier, this propaganda has been one that was historically formed with the aid of the particular political formulations in Turkish political history and used by the nationalist-conservative Turkish right against the secular, left-socialist, and social-democrat politics.

As Bora (2012) stated, the Turkish right consists of three fundamental political dispositions: nationalism, conservatism, and Islamism. The strongest ideological-political weapon by these three politics has been religion, i.e. Islam. A fundamental framework of religious-political propaganda, Islam has undertaken an active role in the formation of certain political symbols, the references of which have been God, prophet, Quran, Turkishness, nation, flag, and the state. More importantly, in the elections,

these symbols have become the most significant tools of the religious-political propaganda by the Turkish right, and thus the AKP, with an understanding of Islam embedded in Turkish nationalism. Above all, a product of the political symbols mentioned above, the religious-political propaganda is a nationalized-religious propaganda, the main framework of which have been made up of the Turkish state nationalism, terrorism, external-internal security, prophet, Quran, and mosque. In the 7 June and the 1 November general elections, the AKP used such propaganda to stay in power. It has been one of the most remarkable political cases that proclaim once again how a religious-political propaganda inherent in Turkey has been formed and conducted. This case (AKP) has had two important results in the context of our discussion. The first is how a religion-driven political propaganda has been significant and determinant in taking a powerful political support in the elections. Secondly, and more importantly, religion, namely Islam, has been still one of the most decisive political arguments of Turkish politics in winning elections, whatever national or local.

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