



Social anatomy of Turkish top political elites in contemporary turkey

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ABSTRACT

Turkey has a strategic place in world politics. As Ahmad (1991: 226 and 1993) said, Turkey's strategic location on the Straits and on the cross-roads between Europe and Asia will remain unchanged. Turkey is a meeting point between Europe and Asia not only geographically, but also ideologically between Eastern and Western civilisation. The Turkish secular and democratic system has provided a model to both the Islamic Middle East and the new Turkish states of the former Soviet Union.

The new state was created from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire in 1920s. Turkey has turned her face completely to the west since the foundation of the Republic. The economic and social development, as Hale examined (Hale, 1981), have proceeded in a predominantly liberal competitive political system since the 1940s.

This paper will concern itself with the Turkish political leaders. Firstly, a brief information about the political structure of contemporary Turkey will be given. Then, the major findings on Turkish top political elites will be presented. The top political elites comprise all the presidents, presidents of the TGNA, prime ministers, and ministers who served in three or more cabinets during the whole modern Republican history of Turkey. In doing this, the variables of age, educational level, education type, occupation, foreign languages, gender and marital status, family size were used.

Key Words: *Elite, Elite Theory, Power, Turkey, Turkish Elites, Turkish Political Elites.*

ÖZET

Türkiye, dünya siyasetinde, stratejik bir öneme ve konuma sahiptir. Yalnızca Asya ile Avrupa'nın değı, aynı zamanda doğu ile batı uygarlıklarının, düşünce, hayat anlayışı ve yaşam biçimlerinin kesişim kavşagında yer alır. Yalnızca bu özelliğı bile onu, dünyada öncü ve örnek olabilecek ender ülkelerden biri yapar.

Bu çalışmanın temel amacı, dünya açısından stratejik bir önemi olan Türkiye'nin, toplum ve siyaset hayatında en stratejik konumları işgal eden (Arslan, 2004-c) siyasi liderlerini sosyolojik açıdan analiz etmektir. Çalışmada Türk siyasi liderleri kavramı kapsamına cumhurbaşkanları, başbakanlar, meclis başkanları ile üç ya da daha fazla dönem görev yapmış bakanlar dahil edilmiştir. Araştırma bulgularından hareketle, Türk toplumuna yön veren Türk siyasi liderlerinin sosyolojik profilleri şöylece özetlenebilir: Orta yaşın üstünde, üst düzey eğitim görmüş, evli, genellikle iki çocuklu ve küçük aile yapısına sahip, birden fazla yabancı dil bilen, meslek bakımından yöneticilik, hukuk ya da askerlik kökenli bir erkektir.

ANAHTAR SÖZCÜKLER: *Elit, Siyasi Elit, Üst Siyasi Elit, Türk Siyasi Elitleri, Elit Teorisi, Türk Siyasi Liderleri.*

1. INTRODUCTION AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Social equality is an ideal but it is far from realisation. Relatively, westernised political systems provide more civil liberties and rights to the people than other social-political systems. Nevertheless, Western democracy is not “government by the people” and has not created precise equality for every part of society: some people or some social groups are more privileged, more autonomous and more powerful than the other people in social and political life. They have more money, more prestige and they are more influential. They control either social resources or the socio-political decision-making process.

Two main strategies have been used for analysing (Gilbert, 1994) and explaining the inequality in power structure researches (Moysen & Wagstaffe, 1987). The first and the most popular strategy is the “class theory” (Arslan, 2004-b) which identifies the classes as the major social forces of the society. It was fathered by Karl Marx and especially formulated by Marxist

writers. There are two main schools of thought in class theory with their variations within each school: Marxist Class Theory and Weberian (Mainstream) Class Theory.

The second strategy is the elite theory (Arslan, 2004-a) which was historically overshadowed by class theory. The elite theory concerns power and influence at aim to analyse elite and non-elite (public) differentiation. Pareto and Mosca can be accepted as the founding fathers of the elite theory. There are three main traditions in elite theories: Pluralist Elite Theory, Elitist Elite Theory and Democratic Elite Theory.

Elite theory (Arslan, 2003-a) concerned almost exclusively with inequalities based on power or lack thereof. This distinguishes it from class theory. Power in turn, is based on other resources (such as economic assets and organisational strength) and for its part may give rise to control over other resources as well. Etzioni (1993: 19) stressed that elite theory is concerned primarily with the other resources which are related to it.

According to elite theory, societies are divided into the “few” who hold power and rule and the “many” who are ruled. The ruling group called an elite, effectively monopolises power and makes the important decisions. The others (non-elites), the public or the masses have relatively no power and no choice but to accept the decision of the minorities. On a general basis “Elite Theory” was used in this study to understand, to examine the sociological profiles of the Turkish elites.

1.1. THE ELITE

The term elite (Jary & Jary, 1991: 188) is of French derivation. It originally derived from the Latin “eligere” which means select and shares a common root with “electa” that means selected (Arslan, 1995: 3). Theoretically, elites can be defined as those people who hold institutionalised power, control the social resources (include not only the wealth, prestige and status but also the personal resources of charisma, time, motivation and energy) and have a serious influence (either actively or potentially) on the decision-making process. They can realise their own will in spite of opposition (Arslan, 1999: 79).

According to this theoretical definition, the term elite does not necessarily involve only the occupier of the top strata. It may comprise both those people who are at the top, bottom or outside the organisations. Also it may include the people in the capitalist, middle or working class. Power,

control and influence are major words in this definition. If the people have power actively or potentially, they have a direct or indirect effect on the decision-making process and are controlling the social resources they can be identified as the elite. Their class positions or organisational positions are not a major criterion in this description. This theoretical definition will be used during this study except sampling procedure.

The elite concept acquired world-wide popularity in social science as a result of the writings of Italian sociologists Vilfredo Pareto (1968) and Gaetano Mosca (1939) in the nineteenth century. Then it became popular in Britain and America in the 1930s. They have usually settled in the highest echelons of the power and influence structures. For pragmatic methodological purposes and simplification, a positional definition of elites was used during the sampling procedure. In accordance with the positional approach (Turhan, 1991), elite can be defined as those people who occupy a position at or near the top of important institutional hierarchies, such as economic, political, judicial, civil service, military, mass media, educational...etc.. They have power because of their social positions.

1.2. POLITICAL ELITES

The political elites are those who occupy the strategic positions in the governmental machinery and who can effect the daily life of society directly or indirectly by their personal decisions. The meaning of political elites is different from the meaning of "political class", "ruling class" or "governing class". Their meaning is wider and comprises this concept. Pareto firstly divides society into two strata; the lower stratum (non-elite or masses) and the higher stratum (the elites), then he divides the higher stratum into two categories which are the governing elite and the non-governing elite. Governing elites are those individuals who play a considerable role in the government.

The aim of this section is to sketch the social anatomy of top leadership in modern Turkey (Çağlar & Arslan, 2000). The top political elites comprise all the presidents, presidents of the TGNA, prime ministers, and ministers who served in three or more cabinets during the whole modern Republican history of Turkey. The sum of this kind of ministers is 132 for all the cabinets. In doing this, the variables of age, educational level, education type, occupation, foreign languages, gender and marital status, family size were used.

2. THE POLITICAL STRUCTURE OF THE MODERN TURKISH REPUBLIC

The Turkish Republic is based on a democratic laic (secular), pluralist and parliamentary system where human rights are protected by laws and the idea of social justice (Finkel, 1990). The National Assembly is elected by popular vote and the nation is governed by a Council of Ministers directed by the prime minister. The main state organs of the Turkish Republic are the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA), the presidency and the cabinet:

2.1. THE TURKISH GRAND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

The Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) has been Turkey's 450 (recently increased to 550) seat unicameral Parliament since 1980. It is the sole legislative authority. Its members are elected for a five year term through universal suffrage, however, the Parliament can decide on early elections before the termination of this period.

Besides its legislative power, the Parliament elects the president, has the authority to declare war, proclaim Martial Law, ratify international treaties and debate requests for parliamentary investigation of high ranking state officials. The Parliament can also amend the constitution with a two-thirds majority. All Turks who are at least 30 years old and are not disqualified according to Article 76 of the Constitution, are eligible to become candidates for election to the parliament.

2.2. THE PRESIDENT

The President of the Republic is the Head of the State. He represents the Turkish Republic and the integrity of the Turkish nation. The President is elected by secret ballot and a two-third majority plenary session of the Parliament for a term of seven years. He is elected from among the members of the Turkish Grand National Assembly who are at least 40 years old and have had a higher education or are from among Turkish citizens who fulfil these requirements and are eligible to be deputies.

2.3. THE CABINET

The Council of Ministers or Cabinet is led by the prime minister and is made up of his/her ministers. The prime minister is appointed by the President from among the members of the Parliament. Once the President has approved the cabinet list, the government programme has to be read in Parliament within a week. Then a vote of confidence is taken two full days after the reading in Parliament of the government programme and one full day after the debate over the programme has ended.

In the event of general elections, the Prime Minister is required to replace the ministers of the interior, justice and communication with independents. In the event of early elections, the Prime Minister is also required to replace these ministers within five days of the Parliament's decision to hold new polls

3. THE SOCIAL-POLITICAL ANATOMY OF TURKISH TOP POLITICAL LEADERS

3.1. AGE

It can be clearly seen in the Table-1 that there is a very heavy predominance of the older generation in the presidency post which is the top leadership position in the Turkish political hierarchy. The proportion of the older generation, who are between 55-85, is 78 % for this category whereas the remaining proportion of 22 % is occupied by the middle-aged who are between 40-54.

The younger generation has a proportion of 12 % in the presidency of the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) which is the second most important post in the political hierarchy. However, the older generation still have the biggest proportion, that is 47 %. Nevertheless, the proportion of the middle aged is 41 % among president of the TGNA.

There is a very small proportion of youth amongst the Turkish prime ministers, only 4.5 %, while the old aged individuals occupy the highest rate which is 54.5 %. The rate of the middle aged is again 41 % for the prime ministers, like the presidents of the TGNA.

The proportion of old aged and young people began to decline in the category of ministry. Middle-aged individuals form the most dominant group amongst ministers with a 72 % rate. The proportion of the young and the old generations are nearly the same, that is 14 %.

Table-1: Age Groups for Top Political Decision Makers.

| AGE GROUPS (%) | TOP POLITICAL LEADERS | | | | AVERAGE |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|------------------|---------|
| | PRESIDENTS | PRESIDENTS OF TGNA | PRIME MINISTERS | MINISTERS (*) | |
| 30-34 | - | - | - | 1.5 | 0.4 |
| 35-39 | - | 11.8 | 4.5 | 12.3 | 7.2 |
| 40-44 | 11.1 | 11.8 | 18.2 | 32.3 | 18.3 |
| 45-49 | - | 11.8 | 4.5 | 26.2 | 10.6 |
| 50-54 | 11.1 | 17.6 | 18.2 | 13.1 | 15 |
| 55-59 | - | 11.8 | 27.3 | 12.3 | 12.9 |
| 60-64 | 11.1 | 29.4 | 9.1 | 2.3 | 13.0 |
| 65-69 | 55.6 | 5.9 | 13.6 | - | 18.8 |
| 70-85 | 11.1 | - | 4.5 | - | 3.9 |
| MEAN AGE | 62 | 53.3 | 54.6 | 46.1 | 54 |

(*) Those ministers who served 4 or more times were taken into account.

The average age of Turkish presidents is 62 whereas the mean age of the presidents of the TGNA is 53.3 and of prime ministers, 54.6. The youngest group is ministers with a 46.1 mean age among the Turkish Top Political Leaders.

Generally the dominant age group is of advanced age with a 48.6 % share in the Turkish top political leadership. The second biggest group which is middle age, has a rate of 44 %. The proportion of the younger generation is only 7.6 %. The general mean age for the Turkish top leaders is 54. From this we can easily conclude that the top leadership is the business of late middle-aged or early advanced aged people.

3.2. EDUCATIONAL LEVEL AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE ABILITY:

Table-2 shows clearly that Turkish top political leaders are very well educated. 95 % of Turkish leaders have been university trained, the residue of 5 % being shared by those people who received high school (lycee) and private education.

Table-2: Educational Level and Foreign Language Ability of Turkish Top Political Leaders.

| Top Political Leaders | Educational Level (%) | | Foreign Language Ability (%) | | | | | Mean. Foreign Language |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------|------------------------------|------|------|-------|--------|------------------------|
| | University | Lycee | No | One | Two | Three | Four,+ | |
| PRESIDENTS | 88.9 | 11.1 | - | 66.7 | 11.1 | 22.2 | - | 1.56 |
| PRESIDENTS OF TGNA | 100 | - | 23.5 | 35.3 | 29.4 | 5.9 | 5.9 | 1.35 |
| PRIME MINISTERS | 90.9 | 9.1 | 4.1 | 45.5 | 36.4 | 13.6 | - | 1.59 |
| MINISTERS | 99.2 | 0.8 | 12.3 | 46.9 | 26.9 | 10.8 | 3.1 | 1.45 |
| AVERAGE | 94.75 | 5.25 | 10.7 | 48.6 | 26 | 13.1 | 2.3 | 1.5 |

89 % of Turkish presidents have been university graduates whereas only one person, Celal Bayar, received a private education. Furthermore, 100 per cent of the presidents of the TGNA and 99.2 % of ministers have a university level education while 91 % of the prime ministers have been university educated. Those people who have received lycee education form 9 % of prime ministers and 0.8 % of ministers.

Moreover, 90 % of Turkish top political leaders have ability in a foreign language, with 41.4 % of them knowing two or more foreign languages. All of the Turkish presidents know a foreign language, with 33 % of them knowing two or more.

76.5 % of the presidents of the TGNA, 94 % of Turkish prime ministers and 87.7 % of the ministers have ability in a foreign language. In addition the rate of those individuals who know two or more foreign languages is 41.2 % among the presidents of the TGNA, 50 % among the prime

ministers and 41 % of ministers. The mean foreign language peculiarity of the Turkish top leaders is 1.5 for the whole Republican period.

3.3. EDUCATIONAL TYPES

Those people who received a military education from the most dominant group with a share of 31.1 % within the Turkish top political leaders. As Table 3 exhibits, the second dominant education type is law and the third is political-social-commercial sciences and economics. The fourth biggest group is engineering and architecture with 14 % while the smallest group is education with 1.7 %. 66.7 % of Turkish presidents have received a military education. The second dominant educational group in the category of presidency is engineering.

Table-3: Education Type of Top Political Decision Makers.

| EDUCATION TYPE (%) | TOP POLITICAL LEADERS | | | | Average |
|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------|---------|
| | PRESIDENTS | PRESIDENTS OF TGNA | PRIME MINISTERS | MINISTERS | |
| Law | - | 35.3 | 18.2 | 34.6 | 22.0 |
| Engineer. & Arch. | 22.2 | 5.9 | 13.6 | 14.6 | 14.0 |
| Soc-Pol-Com. Sc. | - | 23.5 | 27.3 | 28.5 | 19.8 |
| Medicine | - | - | 4.5 | 9.2 | 3.4 |
| Military | 66.7 | 29.4 | 22.7 | 5.4 | 31.1 |
| Education | - | - | 4.5 | 2.3 | 1.7 |
| Forst. En. & Agr.S. | - | 5.9 | - | 4.6 | 2.6 |
| Others | 11.1 | - | 9.1 | 0.8 | 5.3 |

The most popular education type amongst presidents of the TGNA is law. A Military education comes second, with political and social sciences the third group in this category.

Those people who received a degree in political-social sciences and economics take the biggest proportion in the category of prime ministers. The second popular education type is again

military and the third group is law. Engineering is in the fourth rank with a 13.6 % share among prime ministers.

Law has the biggest proportion in the educational type of ministers, the second popular group is social-political sciences and economics, and the third one is engineering. Military education forms only 5.4 % in this category.

3.4. OCCUPATION

As clearly seen in the Table 4, civil bureaucrats and administrators take the biggest proportion, 33.3 %, in the occupations of Turkish top political leaders. The second biggest group is military officers with a proportion of 30 %, the third popular occupation is law and the fourth group is education. The rate of educators is 10.2 %.

Table-4: Occupations of Turkish Top Political Leaders.

| Occupations (%) | TOP POLITICAL LEADERS | | | | Average |
|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------|---------|
| | PRESIDENTS | PRESIDENTS OF TGNA | PRIME MINISTERS | MINISTERS | |
| Civ. Bur. & Mang. | 33.3 | 29.4 | 22.7 | 47.7 | 33.3 |
| Law | - | 29.4 | 13.6 | 22.3 | 16.3 |
| Engineering | - | - | - | 2.3 | 0.6 |
| Medicine | - | - | 4.5 | 3.8 | 2.1 |
| Ind. Contractor | - | - | - | 1.5 | 0.4 |
| Medical Sciences | - | - | - | 1.5 | 0.4 |
| Education | - | 5.9 | 22.7 | 12.3 | 10.2 |
| Military | 66.7 | 29.4 | 18.2 | 5.4 | 29.9 |
| Trade & Industry | - | - | 4.5 | - | 1.1 |
| Fores. En. & Ag. S. | - | - | - | 0.8 | 0.2 |
| Trade Union | - | - | - | 0.8 | 0.2 |
| Others | - | 5.9 | 13.6 | 1.5 | 5.3 |

Military officers have a predominance with 66.7 % amongst Turkish presidents, while the proportion of civil bureaucrats and managers is 33.3 %. It is interesting that the three occupational groups of civil bureaucrats and managers, judiciary, and military officers have the same proportion among the presidents of the TGNA, that is, 29.4 %.

On the other hand, the two dominant groups are civil bureaucrats and managers, and educators amongst prime ministers, with a same percentage that is 22.7. The third largest group is military officers.

There is a domination of civil bureaucrats and managers, 47.7 % amongst ministers. 22.3 % of them are jurists (including lawyers, judges and public prosecutors) and 12.3 % of the ministers are educators, mostly from university. The rate of military officers is 5.4 % in this category.

3.5. GENDER, MARITAL STATUS AND FAMILY SIZE

Table 5 shows that the overwhelming majority of Turkish top leaders are male. There has been no female president or president of the TGNA in the whole Republican period (Arslan, 2003-b). Only one of the 17 Turkish prime ministers has been female. The proportion of females among the ministers is 1.5 %.

Table-5: Gender and Family Size of Turkish Top Political Leaders.

| TOP POLITICAL LEADERS | GENDER (%) | | MARITAL STATUS (%) | | Av. Numb. Of Children |
|-----------------------|------------|------|--------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| | FEMALE | MALE | MARRIED | WIDOWED-SINGLE | |
| PRESIDENTS | 0.00 | 100 | 88.9 | 11.1 | 2.22 |
| PRESIDENTS OF TGNA | 0.00 | 100 | 82.4 | 17.6 | 2.06 |
| PRIME MINISTERS | 4.5 | 95.5 | 95.5 | 4.5 | 2.05 |
| MINISTERS (*) | 1.5 | 98.5 | 91.5 | 8.5 | 2.07 |
| AVERAGE | 1.5 | 98.5 | 89.6 | 10.4 | 2.10 |

(*) Those Ministers who served 4 or more times taken into account

Moreover the vast majority of Turkish top leaders have been married while the rate of single and widowed leaders has been 10.4 %. Married prime ministers form the biggest proportion with 95.5 % and married presidents of the TGNA show the lowest rate at 82.4 %.

Table-6: Number of Children of Top Political Decision Makers.

| Number Of Children | TOP POLITICAL LEADERS | | | | Average |
|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------|---------|
| | PRESIDENTS | PRESIDENTS OF TGNA | PRIME MINISTERS | MINISTERS | |
| No Child | 22.2 | 17.6 | 13.6 | 13.1 | 16.6 |
| One | 11.1 | - | 13.6 | 17.7 | 10.6 |
| Two | - | 52.9 | 36.4 | 34.6 | 31.0 |
| Three | 55.6 | 17.6 | 31.8 | 23.1 | 32.0 |
| Four | 11.1 | 11.8 | - | 6.9 | 7.5 |
| Five or More | - | - | 4.5 | 4.6 | 1.5 |

Turkish top leaders have small families in comparison with Turkish society. The average number of children of Turkish leaders is 2.1. As seen in the Table 6, 66.7 % of the presidents whereas 29.4 % of the presidents of the TGNA have had three or more children. 36.3 % of the prime ministers and 34.6 % of the ministers have had three or more children.

In general, 32 % of Turkish top decision makers have three children and 31 % of them have two. The proportion of childless leaders is 16.6 %, while 10.6 % of them have one child. On the other hand, 7.5 % of the top leaders have four children and 1.5 % of them has five or more children.

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