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Perception of Democracy in the Turkish Political Culture

Summary: The subject of this article is political culture and its relationship with democracy. The article is focused mainly on Turkish political culture and democratic practices. It is clear that the political system is directly connected with the political culture of society. But how could we distinguish political culture from other things or do we even have to? The purpose of this article is to present and evaluate the main role of political culture, which affects levels of tolerance, interpersonal trust, etc., as well as the adaption of democratic institutions to the current system. The main problems of Turkish political life are discussed in the article with the perspective of the relationship between political culture and democracy. The aim of this article is to present concepts of cultural orientations, the reflection of economic and political factors, social structures, as well as complex and unclear relations between them, which are simultaneously linked to a stable democracy. Therefore, it can be observed that stable democracy is not a coincidence but a result of all mentioned factors.

Keywords: political culture, democracy, mass, democratic institutions, democratization

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Introduction

Is there a connection between the states' political systems, their institutions, and political individual behavior? What is the main role of that individual behavior or habits? Are socio-economic factors really as effective as we think? Political culture is a milestone for answering these questions and understanding the society.

The term of political culture describes what political and unpolitical behaviors are and explains their relations between the patterns, simultaneously distincting from the culture in a general form. Thus, Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba described the political culture as a specifically political orientation and attitude toward the current political system and its institutions or role of the self in the current system (Almond & Verba, 1989, p. 12). On the contrary, according to Maurice Duverger, classifications, political culture, economic culture, the culture of art, etc., have a pragmatic meaning for sure, but actually it can be very deceptive, if used as a term. Because in reality, the society has a culture and this culture has a political way or economic way, etc. Then, if these political orientations constitute a regular, coherent system, we can call this system as a culture but nothing else (Maurice, Duverger, 2019, p. 84). Therefore, one can observe that M. Duverger emphasized the multi-disciplinary role of the culture and its cumulative structure in society.

Despite lots of studies, the concept of political culture still remains unclear because of its changeable nature. Therefore, Edward W. Lehman argued that political culture includes the culture in general meaning, however, it also should be noted the concept of culture is extensive and, thus, it is difficult to detect which behavior has a political sense or specify its role for society. Also, political culture's analyses could not be general and holistic for the understanding of the political structure, so it is useless to refer the term more than what it is (Lehman, 1972, p. 361).

Although the opposite approaches toward the political culture, works and analysis conducted by G.A. Almond and G. Verba became extremely popular in the 1960s. *The Civic Culture* focused on the USA, the UK, Germany, Italy, and Mexico in the context of political

culture. This study gave the superiority to the Anglo-American culture in the first place and comparing to it other countries' systems. In the same time, the analysis fails to explain enough the subcultures which made it superficial. In spite of all the critics and lack of sense, these studies gave an important role to the term of political culture and focused on the relationships between the political culture and the political system in the society.

According to G.A. Almond, every political system based on specific orientation and patterns which have already existed in the society, and that is called political culture. Political culture does not coincidence with a given society or system and it is related to the general culture but it is autonomic (Almond, 1956, p. 396). Every society transferrs these norms and patterns which are called political culture, to the young generations. However, unfortunately, every group in the society could not contribute equally to the political culture or represent in the political culture but the role of the individuals could not be isolated from the civil and cultural system overall (Yücekök, 1969, p. 15).

According to Weber, political culture creates praxis of dominance, disobedience, revolution, and consensus on the base of the structure of the macro-sociological actors and their actions. At the same time, it intents through the patterns of individual and collective creativeness (Günlü, 2016, p. 23). Political culture is a complex and abstract term, however, it affects perception of democracy, legitimacy basis, current political orientation and power elites. Moreover, political culture is fed by history, tradition, lifestyle, etc., and it is not static. Such change is triggered by radical changes in the economic field and social life. Arguments related to the development of mass democracy accept the idea that linked with a political culture that exposes certain habits and behaviors that make the democracy stronger.

The Balance between Democracy and Political Culture

The 20th century was a time in which not only democratic failure was seen (e.g. collapse of democratic regimes caused the establishment of totalitarian regimes) but also democracy spread by the end of that century and achieved the triumph (Dahl, 1998, p. 163). The idea of organic society turned into mass democracy in the new world of mass communications (Williams, 1983, p. 315). Theoretically, the term of ideal democracy underlines a government by the public interest but in reality, since the public could not appear as a whole, the term refers to majority government, *de facto.* In other words, every democracy is a government of minorities which leads us to the elite theories.

The concept of democracy should be considered with political cultures. Such arguments like democracy, democratic institutions, qualification, and valuation of democracy must have pillars of democracy or relationships between democratic values and economic development, etc. (Özer, 1996, p. 83). Robert A. Dahl emphasized that the stability of democracy strongly depends on the political actors and citizens encourage to the democratic beliefs, values, and practices (Dahl, 1998, p. 128).

The meaning of democratic government is changeable for every society. For instance, it means majority rule for the UK and supports with representation and freedom of expression (Williams, 1983, p. 317). According to G.A. Almond's typology, political systems focused on the political culture and social structure and can be classified as four systems; i. Anglo- American system, ii. Continental European system, iii. Pre-industrialized or partially industrialized except European and American area, iv. Totalitarian regimes (Almond, 1956, p. 393). Anglo-American system is defined as dominant homogeneous and with secular political culture. Parties, interest groups, and media of communication are independent. However, in the Continental European system, political culture developed fragmentation of the political culture with many subcultures, and these subcultures are the main pillars of both systems and political culture. Scandinavian

countries, Low Countries, Switzerland, and Austria are "in-between" states which systems are more stable than the Continental European system and have homogenous democracy. However, it should be also noted that systems of these states are still fragmented into subcultures. As seen, the Anglo-American system was accepted *primus inter pares,* although G.A. Almond specified his typology completely independent from the geographical borders.

Almond and Verba's analyses focused on individual behavior. They emphasized that their analysis considering types of political culture is mainly concentrated on individual political orientation, and then related to them systematically to reach the political structure (Almond & Verba, 1989, p. 32). According to Almond and Verba's approach, if they make enough number of questionnaires, individuals' answers will show the political culture of the country, thus the political culture is a collective phenomenon and a result of cumulative certain behaviors of individuals.

Behavioral School had a golden age in the 1950s in social sciences, including in the political science. The behaviorist approach has affected the method which was based on questionnaire data and the main goal was explaining the differences in the world system. Moreover, ethnocentric researches combined with that attitude in the 1960s, so political culture studies became popular in the light of functionalism. Thus, Almond and Verba became leaders of that behavioral approach in the studies related to political sciences.

Arend Lijphart used the term of *consociational democracy* to explain relationships between the political culture and the political systems in a country without the boundaries of the American perspective and prejudice. Consociational democracy refers to a system that has a fragmented political culture and simultaneously has a stable democracy. For instance, Belgium and Austria have a consociational democracy which means not only the willingness on the part of elites to cooperate but also the capability of solving problems of their countries also avoiding immobilism (Lijphart, 1969, p. 218). According to A. Lijphart, the success of the governmental system is highly related to the structure of society and its political culture. So,

in homogeneous societies, the majoritarian system does not cause a real danger for the minorities, because the minority has a chance to replace the *status quo* with a majority in the next election. On the other hand, the majoritarian system could be a problem especially for minority rights in a fragmented society. Therefore, the principle of separation of power, the and principle of rule of law could not be enough for the minority rights. So, consensus democracy is a better option for those fragmented societies. Lijphart's classification is based on the stability of democracy and homogenous culture dependence and named as centrifugal or centripetal democracies more or less similar to the Almond's typology but, less geographical signs. It should be noted that Lijphart's centripetal democracies, such as the USA democracy, were established after the bloody Civil War, Afro-Americans were seen as second class citizens and Native Americans were massacred systematically. Besides, Dahl emphasizes that the American way of creating a stable democracy was assimilation to create a dominant culture (Dahl, 1998, p. 151).

An Overview of Turkish Political Culture

Cultural influences on the specific political behavior of the society are vague but it gives the indelible characteristics such as national character (Inglehart, 1988, p. 1204). Government system arguments that Turkey should be an example of Ronald Inglehart's definition. It was considered that the political culture of Turkey was balanced with the parliamentary system, and separation of powers was the *sine qua non* pillar. Moreover, other systems could not be suitable for the Turkish civic culture until 2004. Furthermore, checks, and balances system, and relations between the powers were found very abstract and fear of the danger of despotism was observed. On the other hand, political culture in the USA was suitable for the presidential system however, countries such as Turkey, which came from the parliamentary tradition, could not manage with the presidential system and its institutions. Such a state of the affair was the dominant aspect of the doctrine and public opinion.

It is important to analyze the historical background of the trust in the parliamentary system in Turkey. The multiparty system has been continuing since 1945–46 and it is the longest parliamentary experiment in Turkish history (Karpat, 2014, p. 91). Government systems are just an instrument for the stable democracy, so it is not certain to guess which country has a democratic or undemocratic dimension by just checking its government system. Therefore, the main goal should be practicing the system which balances the political culture of a given society. According to Nur Vergin, dominant thought about the role of the president of the Turkish Republic in the political system was limited, however, a well-educated figure and role model for the society (Vergin, 2000, p. 251). After the referendum, held on 16 April 2017, approved the constitutional change and election result on 24 June 2018, the presidential system entered the Turkish political life de facto. So, does this system fit the Turkish political culture which had parliamentary system's institutions before, or is the notion of political culture a myth overall? Supporters of the new system emphasized that even the system's name was completely integrated with Turkish political culture. Besides, they argued this "invented" system was the perfect solution for the minor problems in Turkish democracy. Now, the parliamentarism is accused of all faults and misleading of democracy which was considered the main pillar of the republic until 2017. Under these circumstances, should we consider this radical change as a natural result of the changing political culture or as a completely synthetic phenomenon aimed to manipulate the society?

The answer is hidden under the technical development and the way of populist leader's motivating the voters. According to R. Williams, mass democracy has new problems because of the effective use of public communication. Now, the age of mass-communication expanded the potential audience, thus the intention of writer or speaker has vital importance (Williams, 1983, p. 322). If writers or speakers start to manipulate society and the people could start to lose their individualism, they gain a mob-status which is a real danger to democracy (Williams, 1983, p. 323). This potential danger can be prevented, if the educational system is based on a literate cul-

ture (Williams, 1983, p. 328). S. Martin Lipset emphasizes that the education level is directly affected the perception of democracy and strongly connected with the level of individual behavior. The public opinion surveys showed that people in different countries questioned their tolerance to different beliefs, race, ethnic origin, minorities, and their thoughts about a multi-party system, whereas educated people gave the democratic response (Lipset, 1960, p. 56). It shows that believing in democratic values and supporting democratic practices are significantly linked with the education level.

Also, interpersonal trust is connected with political culture. According to R. Inglehart, personal life satisfaction, political satisfaction, interpersonal trust and support for the existing social order constitute together, which is called a syndrome of positive attitude (Inglehart, 1988, p. 1215). For instance, the society, which has a high level of personal interpersonal trust, life satisfaction and tolerance would be adopting democratic institutions easily (Inglehart, 1988, p. 1215). According to the World Values Survey findings, Turkish society has very shallow interpersonal trust. Ersin Kalaycıoğlu points out that this low degree of interpersonal trust would be increased by chauvinism and xenophobia in the society. As a result, such state of affairs seems to be a real danger for Turkey, including turning democratic values away and getting close to totalitarian regimes (Kalaycıoğlu, 2008, p. 277).

The state and citizenship relations are eclectic in Turkey. According to Kemal Görmez, this is a result of using irrelevant terms to refer to political culture. For the majority of Turkish society, the state has political and cultural-ideological value, so it could be found untrustable in administrative meaning, but in the cultural-ideological perspective the state is untouchable (Görmez, 1999, p. 17). As a consequence of this clash, the military is seen as a protector of democracy and democratic institutions. The reflection of this political culture can be found in the belief that the president of the republic should be supported by the army or have a military origin himself. Historically, the army is the only institution which still exists from the Ottoman period to the Turkish Republic and has a tradition from the Turkish heritage in Central Asia, Islam, from

the experiences of the Ottoman Empire and the Republic. Also, the reformists originated from the military in both Ottomans and the later Turkish Republic (Karpat, 2014, p. 289). It is forbidden to take part directly in politics, however, the army has a duty of protection of the new system which was founded by Atatürk (Karpat, 1970, p. 1659). This historical background of the relationships between the army, regime, and the state, as well as the subconscious military coups, contributed to the belief of some authorities in Turkey that the military may still step in, if the regime and the army itself is threatened by radical Islam (Heper & Çınar, 1996, p. 502).

According to the classification of G. Almond and S. Verba, in the countries which have a parochial-participant political culture, democracy may also be seen as an instrument, and these countries want to modernize, however the social structure is not ready for such development yet (Almond & Verba, 1989, p. 26). The multiple analyses showed that very few citizens have democratic attitudes and support for democracy as a political system. On the other hand, a majority of the society express their satisfaction with the *status quo* rather than a commitment to democracy (Tessler & Altınoğlu, 2004, p. 43). The society which has a democratic culture, democracy, and political equality as desirable goals, also the majority of them choose's the democracy and its institutions rather than undemocratic alternatives, and political disagreements and differences are tolerated and protected (Dahl, 1998, p. 157). That is why the countries which have a democratic culture survive from potential inevitable political crises.

To understand why current democracy can be in danger due to the charismatic authorities' manipulation, one should bear in mind Max Weber's theory of democracy describing democracy as a political system that both minimally protects individuals' liberty and minimizes individuals' personal sovereignty area. According to M. Weber, the modern society needs democracy, however, democracy is an instrument, not a main purpose for the system. Moreover, democracy is the only power that prevents the dominance of bureaucratic institutions (Prager, 1981, p. 930). Thus, the hegemony of capitalism and bureaucracy toward individual freedom can be stopped by democracy and its institutions. In Weberian theory, democracy is

just an instrument for the leadership, which enables candidates to make populists promises. If a charismatic leader catches the mass with emotional attachment, it could be a critical position for the continuity of democracy. Especially politically unstable democratic countries with weak democratic institutions could not be taken as shields toward the potential undemocratic practices which is a real danger for the process of democratization for those countries.

Conclusion

Although culture is a multidisciplinary subject which is directly linked with ethnography, sociology, political science, law, history and etc., it still has a grey area that makes it difficult to define and understand. The touchstone researches, especially about political culture, have been highly falsifiable nowadays. Despite that political culture still appears attractive to political scientists, who are trying to develop *de facto* matrix. As mentioned, the aspect of political science and the position of political culture still remain unclear. The dilemma is the definition of political culture, which is a reflection of public relations or the opposite: an instrument to regulate current public relations. For instance, M. Duverger described political culture as non-autonomous term that is general culture related to political issues. On the contrary, Almond, Verba, and Lijphart published studies, in which they positioned political culture as a regulator which defines political relations and political systems in the society.

Quantitive and qualitative data analyses of political culture might be used by populists to control or manipulate the voters to change current political system, because, if political culture degrades a simple propaganda tool, it should be mentioned neither as an ethics nor collective consciousness, but cultural armament. Moreover, if that catastrophic procedure is followed by capturing state apparatus, it transforms to fascism and fascist ideology takes the first place. As we have seen in the history, it is the real danger for democracy, democratic values and humanity.

Focusing on the specific actions and trying to find the role of Turkish political culture in this case is the main argument of this paper. So, historically, understanding of the public is desired to stay in passive status in Turkish political life. It is mostly connected with the understanding of the state power giving the rights, liberties, etc., to the public. Obeying the rules has a significant meaning due to the fact that the majority of the society considers citizenship as a responsibility. Moreover, religion and political culture support such an idea and, therefore, the society traditionally tends to express their respect to the state its. Furthermore, political actors still have this approach that rights, liberty, and democracy, etc., are values given to the society by them because they indirectly approve the society could not understand these given values. Besides, the fundamental rights and freedoms, democracy and democratic values are still considered abstract both by political elites and the society. According to K. Karpat, this situation is an extension of the perception that authority is a complementary factor and a part of the law in the political culture of Turkey. Thus, the authority of the institution becomes identical with the executor and, as a reflection, the public accepts the authority and obeys the rules and orders. In both the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic, the history of liberty and constitutionalism put an effort to purify the authority from the political elite's personality (Karpat, 2014, p. 319). However, this current political culture mostly tends to support traditional authority which is also very advantageous to the political elites. Also, populist actions are seen a lot in Turkish political life.

The multi-layered structure of the political culture and its internalrelationships would not be disregarded. General culture, political opinions, subculture groups, and public communication tools are directly affected by the political culture. Moreover, political culture and political system are balanced. Thus, the policy should be aimed to a decrease of political intolerance while increasing the trust to democracy and its institutions. Last but not least, the pessimist and unsolvable idea of "undemocratic practices and leaders are the faith of the country and it is connected with the political culture" is not

acceptable. Thus, the policy should be respectful to democratic gains, fundamental rights, and freedom.

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Obraz demokracji w tureckiej kulturze politycznej

Streszczenie: Tematem tego artyułu jest relacja jaka zachodzi pomiędzy demokracją a kulturą polityczną. Autorka skoncentrowała się głównie na praktykach demokratycznych w tureckiej kulturze demokratycznej. Jasne jest, że system polityczny łączy się z kulturą polityczną społeczeństw. Powstaje jednak pytanie w jaki sposób odróżnić kulturę polityczną od innych zjawisk? Celem tego artykułu jest wskazanie głównej roli jaką pełni kultura polityczna, która oddziałuje na różne poziomy tolerancji, zafuania interpersonalnego, itd., jak również odpowiada za adaptację instytucji demokratycznych do obecnego systemu politycznego. Główne problemy życia politycznego Turcji są podejmowane w tym artykule z perspektywy relacji jakie zachodzą pomiędzy kulturą polityczną a demokracją. Zaprezentowano koncepcje kultury politycznej, refleksje o wpływie czynników politycznych i gospodarczych, wpływie struktury społecznej, jak również wskazano kompleksowość relacji pomiędzy nimi. Stąd obserwuje się, że stabilna demokracja nie jest dziełem przypadku, ale rezultatem oddziaływania przywołanych czynników.

Słowa kluczowe: kultura polityczna, demokracja, instytucje demokratyczne, demokratyzacja