İSTANBUL ÜNİVERSİTESİ YAYINEVİ

SİYASAL: Journal of Political Sciences, 33(1):111–132

DOI: 10.26650/siyasal.2024.33.1387832
http://jps.istanbul.edu.tr

SİYASAL: Journal of Political Sciences

Submitted: 08.10.2023
Revision Requested: 10.01.2024
Last Revision Received: 20.02.2024
Accepted: 26.02.2024

RESEARCH ARTICLE / ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ

Political Communication in Disaster: Analysis of Two Main Political Alliances' Tweets After 2023 Great Earthquakes in Türkiye

Afet Dönemlerinde Siyasal İletişim: Türkiye'de 2023 Büyük Depremleri Sonrası İki Ana Siyasi İttifakın Tweetlerinin Analizi

Hayriye Nur Görkemli [1], Hatice Mine Yayla [2], Betül Çetinkaya [3]

Abstract
The presidential elections of 2023 in Türkiye witnessed the competition of two major alliance groups, comprising different parties, namely the People's Alliance and National Alliance. This study aims to investigate and analyze these two main groups' party and leader tweets after the two successive major earthquakes which occurred on February 6, 2023 and hit 11 cities in Türkiye and northern Syria, causing more than 50,000 deaths. Within the study, organizations' and leaders' tweets of both alliances during the first week after the earthquakes were manually gathered and categorized. They are grouped and analyzed under three main categories: information type, interaction numbers, and daily course of tweets. Despite the higher number of followers of leaders, it is observed that parties in both alliances preferred to post from party accounts rather than leader accounts. Parties of the People's Alliance shared predominantly "informational" messages, whereas the parties under the National Alliance used social media extensively during the disaster mostly for "information" and "criticism" purposes. The study also found that the average interaction per tweet of the presidential candidates in both alliances was higher than all other accounts. Moreover, the daily flow of messages was roughly parallel across the two alliances.

Keywords: Crisis Communication, Disaster Communication, Digital Political Communication, Content Analysis, Political Alliances

Öz
Türkiye'de 2023 Cumhurbaşkanlığı seçimleri, farklı partilerden oluşan iki büyük ittifak grubunun (Cumhur İttifakı ve Millet İttifakı) rekabetine sahne olmuştur. Bu araştırma, 6 Şubat 2023 tarihinde meydana gelen ve Suriye'nin kuzey kesimleriyle birlikte Türkiye'nin 11 şehrini etkileyerek 50.000'den fazla kişinin ölümüne neden olan iki büyük depremin ardından bu iki ana ittifak grubunun parti ve lider tweetlerini inceleyip analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Depremlerin ilk sekiz günü boyunca her iki ittifakın parti ve liderlerinin tweetleri manuel olarak toplanarak gruplandırılmıştır. Veriler tweetlerde aktırılan veri türü, etkileşim sayıları ve tweetlerin günlük seyri açısından analiz edilmiştir. Araştırma sonucunda liderlerin takipçi sayılarının daha yüksek olmasına rağmen, her iki ittifaktaki partilerin lider hesaplarından ziyade parti hesaplarından paylaşım yapmayı tercih ettikleri görülmektedir. Cumhur İttifakı içinde analiz edilen partiler ağırlıklı olarak "bilgilendirme" mesajları paylaşırken, Millet İttifakı içindeki partilerin afet sırasında sosyal medyayı daha çok "bilgilendirme" ve "eleştiri" amaçlı kullandıkları görülmüştür. Her iki ittifaktaki cumhurbaşkanı adaylarının tweet başına ortalama etkileşiminin diğer tüm hesaplardan daha yüksek olduğu da araştırma sonucunda tespit edilmiştir. Ayrıca, mesajların günlük akış seyrinin iki ittifak grubunda da paralel olduğu görülmüştür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kriz İletişimi, Afet İletişimi, Dijital Siyasal İletişim, İçerik Analizi, Siyasal İttifaklar

1 **Corresponding Author:** Hayriye Nur Görkemli (Doç. Dr.), Selçuk University, Faculty of Communication, Department of Public Relations and Advertising, Konya, Turkiye. E-mail: ngorkemli@selcuk.edu.tr ORCID: 0000-0001-5506-1343

2 Hatice Mine Yayla (Dr.), İzmir, Turkiye. E-mail: mineyayla79@hotmail.com ORCID: 0000-0003-1029-3946

3 Betül Çetinkaya (Dr.), Erciyes Üniversitesi, Directorate of Foreign Affairs Office Kayseri, Turkiye. E-mail: betuld@erciyes.edu.tr ORCID: 0000-0002-5126-9937

To cite this article: Gorkemli, H. N., Yayla, H. M., & Cetinkaya, B. (2024). Political communication in disaster: analysis of two main political alliances' tweets after 2023 great earthquakes in Türkiye. *SİYASAL: Journal of Political Sciences, 33*(1), 111–132. http://doi.org/10.26650/siyasal.2024.33.1347036

Introduction

Social media offers timely, dynamic, interactive, creative, limitless, and simultaneous communication experiences to its users and these peculiarities made it very popular in daily life. Today, it is estimated that around 4.76 billion people use social media as of January 2023 and this number is close to 59.4% of the world population (www.datareportal). As Grunig (2013) argues, in crisis circumstances, social media tools are actively used. Rapid developments in communication technologies allow important transformations to be experienced in crisis management. For instance, in the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, usage of social media in disaster communication was not prevalent. However, within five years, it became a very active tool in the 2013 Ya'n earthquake (Li, 2014: 249). Natural disasters are extreme events affecting a large number of people's lives and resources. So in these conditions, different bodies (public, government, emergency organizations, etc.) require timely and free-flowing information, and social media provides this opportunity to its users (Li, 2014:250-251; Shahbazi et al, 2018:416). Digital platforms eliminate the "gatekeepers", so they play a complementary role to traditional media (Gilardi et al 2022:39). Through these platforms, politicians freely and quickly reach wide audiences, express their views, and impress their voters.

Twitter, which enables its users to share and read short messages called "tweets", is one of the most popular social media tools. People can follow each other, get updates from the posts, comment on them, like and repost (retweet) the messages, and create or follow specific groups of messages under hashtags. Because of all these characteristics, it is a widely used medium for political bodies in various events, including crisis circumstances (Malasig and Quinto, 2016: 141).

This study aims to analyze the Twitter accounts of the two main electoral alliances ahead of the upcoming presidential elections following two consecutive earthquakes that occurred on February 6, 2023, in Kahramanmaraş, Türkiye. These two earthquakes with magnitudes of 7.7 and 7.6 hit 11 cities in Türkiye and northern regions of Syria and caused more than 50,000 deaths. This study investigates the content and the type of messages of the two polarized political groups in the aftermath of this disaster. In this context, the first part of the study will provide an analysis of the literature about the use of social media in disaster periods and the usage of digital platforms in political communication. The next part analyzes and compares the tweets of the two main alliance groups after the earthquakes. The last section is devoted to conclusions and recommendations.

Social Media Usage in Disasters and Digital Political Communication

Disasters can be defined as natural or human-generated catastrophes that can cause great environmental damage and deaths (brittanica.com). In these cases, continuous, interactive, effective, and fast communication plays a crucial role. During disasters, individuals need to let the people know whether they are safe or not. Moreover, for organizing and mobilizing help, efficient connections are vital. In these extreme cases, social media provides many useful functions making it essential to the general public, administrators, and various organizations (Splendiani and Cprielli, 2022:510).

Even though the phrase "social media" has no set definition, it refers to a variety of internet-based tools for information sharing and communication (Li, 2014: 251). Because they make the subject visual and interactive, social networking sites offer a lot of potential

for promoting readiness, knowledge, and involvement in crisis response (Malasig and Quinto, 2016: 143).

Social media is thought to outperform traditional mass media in terms of capacity and interactive two-way communication during hazard communication (Wang and Zhuang, 2017:162; Saroj and Pal, 2020: 1). It enables individuals to be ready, informed, and involved during times of disaster (Malasig and Quinto, 2016: 143). Various studies show that the internet and smartphones are preferred tools to help people communicate with each other in extreme cases. Jung and Moro (2014:5126) give the example that during the SARS epidemic, people preferred to use the internet as the source of information since they believed that the mainstream media didn't provide enough information. This platform offers users the chance to build rapid and extensive interactions. Therefore, it is preferred more than traditional media in addressing the public's need for information about emergencies, and it serves as a 'backchannel' that feeds broadcasters as it can provide information before official channels (Li, 2014: 252). People try to inform their family and friends in the disaster region about their safety and security. They look for or exchange information on necessities. The public can benefit from social media when many phone networks are unable to handle a sudden rush of calls during disasters.

Jung and Moro (2014: 5123) mention the five potential functions of social media in disaster communication. Firstly, it provides interpersonal communication at the micro level. Secondly, it serves as a channel for local governments. Thirdly, it has a function for organizations and local media at the meso level. Fourthly, social media serves as channels for mass media at the macro level, and lastly, it has a cross-level information sharing and gathering function among micro, meso, and macro level agents. Furthermore, Li (2014:253) claims that during disasters social media is either used passively to disseminate information or as an emergency management tool to spread event knowledge and alerts, collect victim assistance requests, track user actions and upload pictures or texts to calculate loss.

Digital platforms, which are intensively used by local and central governments in disaster management, are also an effective means of communication in the process of political communication. Gilardi et al (2022: 42-44) lists three reasons for social media preference in political communication. Firstly, politicians are freer in social media when engaging with the public, journalists, and political opponents, since this medium provides communication without restrictions in terms of time, duration, or content. Secondly, social media is not only for communicating with the target audience in political communication but also for setting the agenda in particular. The absence of traditional media's gatekeepers makes this new media preferable. Lastly, political actors can use social media to communicate not only with social media users but also with groups beyond them. This is because journalists and traditional media closely follow politicians' social media accounts and generate news based on their posts. With all these features, social media is a very popular means of communication that provides access to large masses without time, place, and content restrictions and is also a very effective tool in setting a political agenda.

During disasters, politicians actively take part in the transmission of information through the media. For instance, U.S. government agencies used Twitter for disaster communication during the 2010 Haiti Earthquake and 2012 Hurricane Sandy (Wang and

Zhuang, 2017:162). Ewart et al (20116:3) claim that a disaster is also an opportunity for politicians to be heavily involved in the media and reconstruct their profiles. Politics always have a role in the decision of what information is made public during a crisis, and the majority of large organizations and governmental bodies have policies that specifically address this matter. Wei et al (2010:1016) claim that in a crisis period, released information is always "a political decision". For this reason, politicians have to consciously use social media, which is a very effective communication tool in crisis and disaster periods. Coombs (1999:114-121) emphasizes the importance of being prompt, consistent, clear, informative, and instructive in times of crisis, stating that silence on the part of managers in times of crisis would mean passivity and uncertainty.

In the limited literature on the subject, messages sent by politicians during disasters are mostly analyzed in terms of their impact on the public (Cole and Fellows, 2008; Raynolds, 2009; Arceneaux and Stein, 2006; Strömbäck and Nord, 2006). Studies show the importance of these messages to inform, motivate, activate, and impress the masses from the target audiences' perspectives. In their study, based on their interview with emergency agencies, Mc Lean and Ewart (2015:521) recommended several principles to politicians for disaster communication. They claim that during disasters, politicians have important leadership and communication functions. However, their visits to affected areas shouldn't be seen as a tactical public relations opportunity and should be carried out within operational plans for supportive purposes.

Among other social media applications, Twitter is one of the most widely used in political communication (Bostanci, 2014:12). It is very simple to use, and it provides brief, rapid, and effective communication. Moreover, and most importantly, its easy access without any privacy or authorization concerns makes Twitter a preferred medium (Saroj and Pal, 2020:1). It is a prominent platform for political communication with two characteristics: as a "substitute" route to get over restrictions from other political arenas, or as an "amplifier" to amplify party statements (Silva and Prokosch, 2022:776).

The following section analyzes the use of Twitter by two political alliance groups in Türkiye in the aftermath of the successive earthquakes in southeastern Türkiye, which devastated a vast region and resulted in the deaths of more than 50,000 people.

Comparison of Two Alliances' Party and Leader Tweets in the First Days of the Disaster

About Two Main Alliances

In the run-up to the 2023 presidential elections in Türkiye there were two main alliance groups: the People's Alliance and National Alliance. Although there has been an increase in the number of parties joining alliances in the run-up to the elections, at the time of the study, between 6-13 February 2023, there were two political parties in the People's Alliance and six in the National Alliance. The People's Alliance is an electoral alliance between the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). The AKP, led by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and the MHP, led by Devlet Bahçeli, entered the elections together in 2018, and this alliance was established to re-elect Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as the president. The main rival of this alliance, the

National Alliance, is the electoral alliance established in 2018 between the Republican People's Party (CHP), İYİ Party, Felicity Party (SAADET), and Democrat Party (DP). For the 2023 elections, this alliance included 6 parties with the participation of the Democracy and Progress Party (DEVA) and Future Party (GP). The alliance, which was also referred to as 'Table of Six", aimed to designate and support a candidate against Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. These two main alliances, which were first established in 2018, expanded their scope over time with the participation or external support of other parties before the May 14, 2023 elections. The names, leaders, and political views of the parties in these two main alliance groups as of the date of the research are summarized in Table 1 below:

Table 1
Names, Leaders and Political Views of the Parties in Two Alliances

People's Alliance			**National Alliance (Table of Six)**		
Party	**Leader**	**Ideology/Position**	**Party**	**Leader**	**Ideology/Position**
AKP	Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	Right wing/Conservatism	CHP	Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu	Centre-left/Social democracy
MHP	Devlet Bahçeli	Far-right/Turkish Nationalism	İYİ Party	Meral Akşener	Center-right/Turkish Nationalism
			SAADET	Temel Karamollaoğlu	Far-right/Religious Nationalism
			DP	Gültekin Uysal	Center-right/Liberal conservatism
			DEVA	Ali Babacan	Center-right/Liberal democracy, conservatism
			GP	Ahmet Davutoğlu	Center-right/Liberal conservatism

On February 6, 2023, two major earthquakes with intensities of 7.8 Mw and 7.5 Mw occurred 9 hours apart in Kahramanmaraş's Pazarcık and Ekinözü districts, the epicenter of which is located in the southeast of Türkiye. According to official figures, at least 50,783 people in Türkiye (haberturk.com) and at least 8,476 people in Syria (reliefweb.int) died, and more than 122,000 people in total were injured as a result of earthquakes as of April 2023. In the aftermath of these two earthquakes, which are described as the biggest disasters in the region in the last century, the Twitter feeds of the two main political alliance parties in Türkiye in the run-up to the upcoming presidential election will constitute the main subject of this study. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who has been in the administration of Türkiye since 2002, became a candidate to be president again with the support of the MHP. On the other side, an alliance consisting of 6 political parties joined forces so that he would not be president again. The findings on the social media feeds of the parties and leaders in these two alliances during the first 8 days of the earthquakes are presented in the following section.

Study Content

The aim of this study is to investigate and analyze these two main electoral and political alliance groups' party and leader tweets after the two successive major earthquakes,

which occurred on February 6, 2023, and hit 11 cities of Türkiye and northern Syria, causing more than 50,000 deaths. Since the incident is relatively recent, there has been limited research regarding the use of tweets on the disaster before the election period. A limited number of studies in the literature examined the impact of social media posts of politicians during disasters from the perspective of the public (Cole and Fellows, 2008; Raynolds, 2009; Arceneaux and Stein, 2006; Strömbäck and Nord, 2006). Unlike other studies in the literature, this study will provide data on how the ruling and opposition alliances conducted their political communication activities through social media during the big earthquake disaster in the upcoming election process.

Twitter accounts of the political parties within the People's and National Alliance competing in the 2023 presidential elections and also the Twitter accounts of the leaders of these parties constitute the sample of this study. The Twitter account of the Presidency of the Turkish Republic, where President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's messages are conveyed, was also evaluated within the People's Alliance. Of the 17 Twitter accounts in the sample, five were examined under the title of People's Alliance and 12 under the title of National Alliance. The sample of the study was selected purposive sampling.

In the first week of the disasters, the news in the country was all about the disasters, but in the following days, new topics were added to the news. Moreover, on February 6, 2023, when the earthquake occurred, the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye declared one week of national mourning (Ministry of Communication of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, 2023). Therefore, since the agenda was only the earthquakes, and based on the date of national mourning, solely the posts of the political parties and leaders of the two main alliances between February 6 and February 13, 2023 were analyzed. Another limitation of the study is that the communication activities of the parties during the earthquake were analyzed only through Twitter. Lastly, the study only covers the messages of the parties and leaders of the two strongest alliance groups in the presidential elections, not all parties in Türkiye. These two alliance groups received more than 94% of the votes of all voters in the first round of the elections in May 14, 2023 (www.ysk.gov.tr).

In the study, tweets of political alliance leaders and parties were analyzed by the content analysis method. Krippendorff (1989:403) defined content analysis as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context". Content analyses are research syntheses that have an important role in disseminating the researched information and shaping future research, policies, practices, and public perception (Suri and Clarke, 2009: 395-430). In the first stage, the type of media to be selected is determined and the sample is selected by limiting it (Geray, 2004: 108-140).

The analyzed tweets were manually categorized, and a coding scale was created. The 100 tweets were selected as a sample and they were coded by two researchers according to this coding chart. The reliability coefficient was calculated as 0.92 which was found to be sufficient for the reliability of the research.

$$R = 2(C1,2)/(C1+C2)$$

$$0.92 = 2(92)/(100+100)$$

R *Reliability Coefficient*

C *1,2 Number of Common Coding by Two Researchers*

C1 *Number of Coding by The First Researcher*

C2 *Number of Coding by The Second Researcher*

This study analyses a total of 1,644 tweets sent by the leaders and their parties between February 6 and February 13, 2023, when the sole agenda of the country was the great earthquake disaster. In addition, the period also covers the national mourning. The research is designed to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. What are the dominant tweet categories of ruling and opposition alliances during the research period?

RQ2. What are the dominant tweet types of ruling and opposition alliances during the research period?

RQ3. What is the interaction level of tweets of ruling and opposition alliances during the research period?

Findings

As of the date of the study, the parties in the two main election alliances in Türkiye, the leaders of these parties and the number of followers of their Twitter accounts are given in Table 2 below. The official Twitter account of the Presidency of the Turkish Republic is also analyzed under the People's Alliance.

Table 2
Twitter Accounts of Political Parties and Leaders Included in the Research (as of April, 10, 2023)

PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE		**NATIONAL ALLIANCE**	
Parties/Leaders	**Followers**	**Parties/Leaders**	**Followers**
Recep Tayyip ERDOĞAN(AKP) https://twitter.com/RTErdogan	20.2 M	Kemal KILIÇDAROĞLU (CHP) https://twitter.com/kilicdarogluk	9.7 M
Presidency of Turkish Republic https://twitter.com/tcbestepe	9.4 M	Meral AKŞENER (İYİ) https://twitter.com/meral_aksener	5.9 M
Devlet BAHÇELİ (MHP) https://twitter.com/dbdevlet-bahceli	5.6 M	Ahmet DAVUTOĞLU (GP) https://twitter.com/Ahmet_Davutoglu	5.8 M
AKP https://twitter.com/Akparti	3.2 M	CHP https://twitter.com/herkesicinCHP	2.4 M
MHP https://twitter.com/MHP_Bilgi	2.6 M	Ali BABACAN (DEVA) https://twitter.com/alibabacan	1.2 M
		Temel KARAMOLLAOĞLU (SP) https://twitter.com/T_Karamollaoglu	1.1 M
		İYİ https://twitter.com/iyiparti	1 M
		DEVA https://twitter.com/devapartisi	418 K

		SP https://twitter.com/SaadetPartisi	360 K
		GP https://twitter.com/GelecekPartiTR	263 K
		Gültekin UYSAL (DP) https://twitter.com/ DpGultekinUysal	240 K
		DP https://twitter.com/_DemokratParti	28 K
TOTAL	**41 M**		**28.4 M**

In Table 2, the first noticeable situation is that political party leaders have more followers on Twitter than the political parties they represent. While Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has the highest number of followers (20.2 Million) in the People's Alliance, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu has the highest number of followers (9.7 Million) in the National Alliance. This shows that the presidential candidates of both alliances have the highest number of Twitter followers. It is seen that the number of followers of President Erdoğan is approximately twice the number of followers of Kılıçdaroğlu. The total number of followers of the five Twitter accounts analyzed under the People's Alliance is 41 million, whereas the number of followers of the 12 Twitter accounts analyzed under the National Alliance is 28.4 million. This shows that the People's Alliance has the potential to reach its target audience more through Twitter. The account with the second-highest number of followers among the accounts analyzed within the People's Alliance is the Twitter account of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye with approximately 9.4 million followers. The number of followers of Erdoğan's AKP (3.2 million) is behind the number of followers of alliance partner MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli (5.6 million). After Kılıçdaroğlu, Meral Akşener and Ahmet Davutoğlu have the highest number of Twitter followers in the National Alliance (5.9 million and 5.8 million, respectively). Among the accounts analyzed in the National Alliance, Akşener and Davutoğlu have approximately the same number of followers as MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli in the People's Alliance. The number of Twitter followers of the 6 political parties in the National Alliance is less than the 2.6 million followers of the MHP, the second partner of the People's Alliance. This indicates that the MHP has the potential to reach a larger audience through Twitter than the other parties in the National Alliance. After these three leaders, the account with the highest number of followers in the National Alliance belongs to the CHP, led by presidential candidate Kılıçdaroğlu (2.4 million).

Table 3
Coding Chart of the Twitter Posts

Post Category	**Post Subjects**
INFORMATION	Information about the magnitude and effects of earthquake Search and Rescue Assignment Decisions Announcement of Official Decisions Visits Infrastructure Works Warnings Comprehensive Press Statement on the Earthquake Other

HELP/SUPPORT	Food and drink Aid Humanitarian Aid and Construction Equipment Assignments Financial Aid Aid for Services
EMOTIONAL POSTS	Emotional Posts (messages of get well soon, condolences, prayer, remembrance and gratitude)
CRITICISM	Criticism of Search and Rescue Criticism of Earthquake Policies Criticism of Crisis Management and Organization Criticism of Communication Processes Messages of Pessimism / Despair Other
NON-EARTHQUAKE POSTS	Non-Earthquake posts

As shown in Table 3, all tweets shared by political parties and political party leaders between February 6 and 13, 2023 were categorized according to their topics and a coding chart was created. The tweets of both alliances were categorized under five main headings: information, aid/support, emotional sharing, criticism and non-earthquake sharing. The post categories were also coded under the subject groups, as given in Table 3. As shown in the table, messages of get well soon, condolences, prayer, remembrance and conveying gratitude, etc. were grouped under emotional posts.

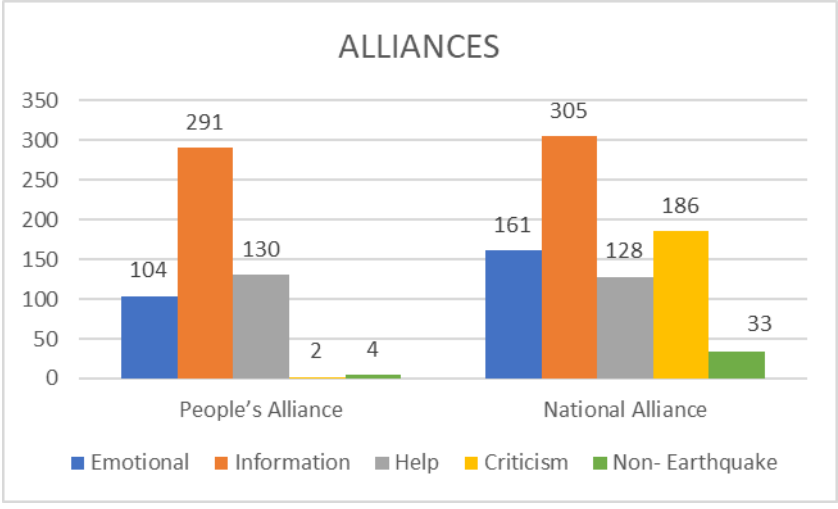

Figure 1. Comparison of Tweets by Numbers and Categories

Figure 1 shows the number and category of tweets of the two alliances during the research period. Both alliance groups shared Tweets in five categories determined above (i.e. information, aid support, emotional sharing, criticism, and non-earthquake). While a total of 531 posts were made from five accounts analyzed within the People's Alliance, a total of 813 posts were made from 12 accounts analyzed under the National Alliance. It is observed that both alliance groups shared similar numbers of posts in the "Information" and "Help" categories. The People's Alliance shared the most in the

"Information" category with 291 tweets, which constituted 55.3% of their total shares. Similarly, the National Alliance also made the most posts in the "information" category. The proportion of 305 information posts made by the National Alliance in total posts is 37.7%. Under the "information" category, the People's Alliance mostly shared "General Comprehensive Press Release on Earthquake", while the National Alliance mostly shared "Visit Posts". In the "Help" category, the People's Alliance shared 130 (24.5%) tweets, while the National Alliance shared 128 tweets (15.7%). In emotional posts, the National Alliance shared more than the People's Alliance (161 and 104, respectively). "Criticism" is one of the categories in which the National Alliance tweeted most differently from the People's Alliance. The National Alliance tweeted criticism intensively with 186 posts and a share of 22.8% in all its posts. It was observed that the National Alliance intensely criticized earthquake policies, crisis management, and organization. "Non-Earthquake Information" posts were made at a very low rate among all posts in both alliances.

While the rate of non-earthquake posts of the People's Alliance is 0.7%, the rate of non-earthquake posts of the National Alliance is 4.1%. Table 4 below shows the distribution of message topics within the determined categories in detail.

Table 4
Comparison of Tweet Subjects of Two Alliance Groups

		PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE		**NATIONAL ALLIANCE**	
CATEGORY	**SUBJECT**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**
INFORMATION	Information about the magnitude and effects of earthquake	24	4.5	6	0.7
	Search and assignment decisions	40	7.5	44	5.4
	Announcement of Official Decisions	13	2.4	3	0.4
	Visits	27	5.7	98	12.1
	Other	24	4.5	48	6.0
	Warnings	10	1.9	20	2.5
	Comprehensive Press Statement on Earthquake	142	26.7	78	9.6
	Infrastructure Works	11	2.1	8	1,0
	Sub-Total	***291***	***55.3***	***305***	***37.7***
HELP/SUPPORT	Food and drink aid	16	3.0	9	1.1
	Humanitarian aid and Construction equipment assignments	70	13.2	71	8.7
	Financial aid	28	5.3	39	4.8
	Aid for services	16	3.0	9	1.1
	Sub-Total	***130***	***24.5***	***128***	***15.7***
EMOTIONAL POSTS	Emotional posts (messages of get well soon, condolences, prayer, remembrance and gratitude)	104	19.6	161	19.8
	Sub-Total	***104***	***19.6***	***161***	***19.8***
NON-EARTHQUAKE POSTS	Non-Earthquake Posts Non-Earthquake Criticism	4 0	0.7 0	17 16	2.1 2.0
	Sub-Total	***4***	***0.7***	***33***	***4.1***
CRITICISM	Criticism of Search and Rescue	0	0	23	2.8
	Criticism of Earthquake Policies	0	0	72	8.9

	Criticism of Crisis Management and Organization	0	0	46	5.6
	Criticism of Communication Processes	0	0	14	1.7
	Other	0	0	17	2.1
	Messages of Pessimism / Despair	2	0.4	14	1.7
	Sub-Total	***2***	***0.4***	***186***	***22.8***
TOTAL		**531**	**100**	**813**	**100**

Table 5 below shows the sharing details of the parties and leaders in the alliances. The data in the table are visualized and presented below as Figure 1 and Figure 2 for the People's and National Alliances. Although the number of followers of leaders is much higher than that of their parties (Table 2), party accounts were used much more actively than leader accounts during the research period. The fact that voters follow leader accounts more than party accounts, but tweets were shared more on party accounts, is interpreted as a wrong strategy.

Table 5
Distribution of Tweets of Parties and Leaders in Alliances by Category

	Emotional	**Information**	**Help**	**Criticism**	**NonEarthq.**	**Total**
Peop. Allian.						
AKP	32	134	87	0	1	254
Presidency of TR	53	133	20	0	0	206
MHP	8	9	19	1	3	40
R.Tayyip Erdoğan	10	15	2	0	0	27
Devlet Bahçeli	1	0	2	1	0	4
Sub-Total	**104**	**291**	**130**	**2**	**4**	**531**
Nat. Allian.						
CHP	20	97	26	33	8	184
DEVA	27	48	21	70	2	168
İYİ	28	32	31	7	2	102
M.Akşener (İYİ)	22	19	21	5	1	68
GP	15	24	13	4	2	56
A.Babacan(DEVA)	15	18	6	12	0	51
K.Kılıçdaro.(CHP)	7	19	0	12	9	47
SP	5	20	3	8	0	36
A.Davutoğlu(GP)	6	15	2	3	4	30
DP	6	5	3	13	2	29
G.Uysal(DP)	5	3	0	12	3	23
T.Karamol.(SP)	5	5	2	7	0	19
Sub-Total	**161**	**305**	**128**	**186**	**33**	**813**
Total	**265**	**596**	**258**	**188**	**37**	**1344**

Of the total 531 posts of the People's Alliance, 254 belonged to the AKP and 206 to the official account of the Presidency of the Republic. The content of the posts was dominated by the "information" category and the number of tweets was 134 and 133, respectively. In the AKP Twitter account, the second most frequently sent message category was help with 87 posts, whereas the Presidency account sent emotional messages with 53 posts as the second-most frequent category. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who has almost as many

followers as the sum of the followers of all leaders in the National Alliance, had only 27 tweets. The leader account should be used more actively than just the party account to reach more people. This study found that Erdoğan's Twitter account was not used very effectively.

In the People's Alliance, Devlet Bahçeli's number of tweets during this period was only 4. The number of posts by the MHP in the alliance is also very low compared to the number of posts by the AKP and the Presidency of the Republic (Fig.2). In terms of the number of followers, the MHP, which has more followers than all parties in the National Alliance, and Devlet Bahçeli, who has 5.6 million followers, did not use their Twitter accounts effectively during the research period.

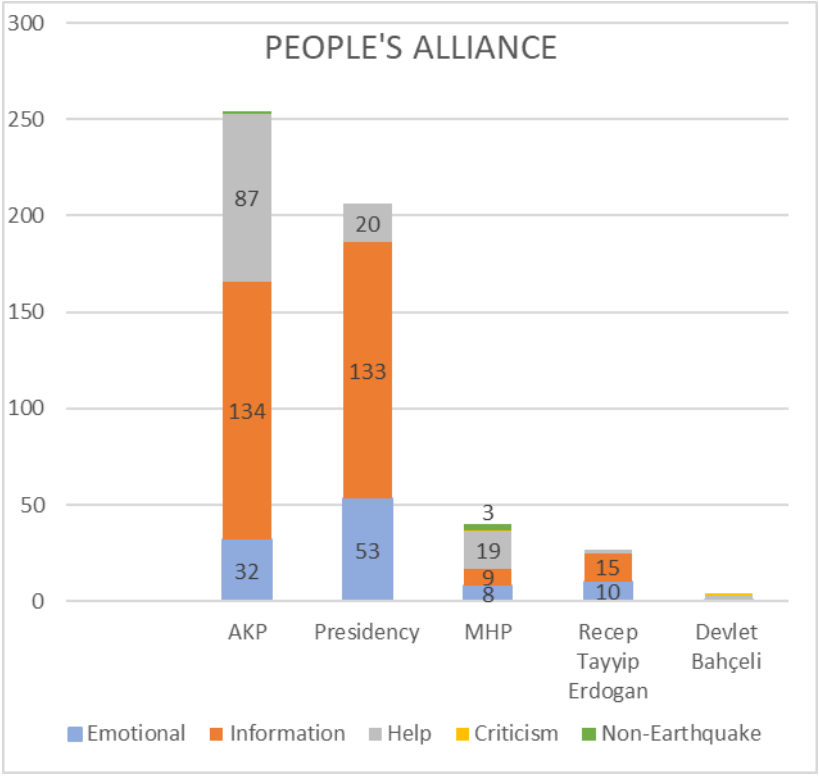

Figure 2. Tweets of the People's Alliance

Of the 813 posts by the National Alliance, 184 were by the CHP, 168 by DEVA, and 102 by the İYİ Party. Approximately half (52.7%) of the posts of the CHP, the party of presidential candidate Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, were informative and 17.9% were critical. The DEVA party, the second party in the National Alliance with the highest number of posts, had the largest share of criticism in its posts (41.6%). In the messages of the İYİ Party, messages of information, help, and emotional content were shared in almost equal proportions, while messages of criticism were rarely shared. During the research period, among other leaders in National Alliance, Meral Akşener (İYİ) was the leader who used her Twitter account most effectively. In the National Alliance, the CHP, İYİ Party, GP, SP,

K. Kılıçdaroğlu, A. Babacan, and A. Davutoğlu (GP), in order, gave the most informative posts. While M. Akşener shared emotional and helpful messages, DEVA, DP, G.Uysal (DP), and T. Karamollaoğlu (SP) focused on criticism among other posts (Fig. 3).

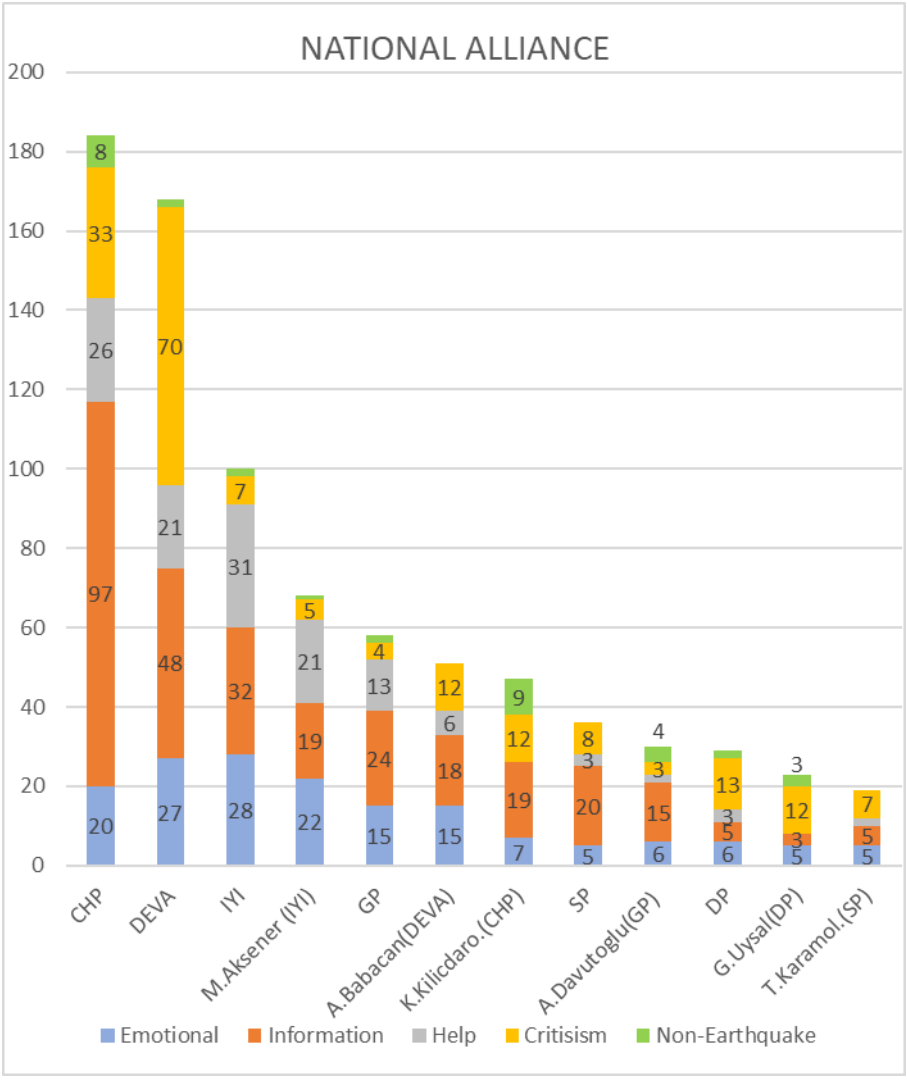

Figure 3. Tweets of the National Alliance

Half of the messages of both alliances were sent as "Retweet". The People's Alliance's posts were 39.0% text and 32.8% live video. The National Alliance, however, had 31.5% text and 29.5% video posts, respectively (Table 6).

Table 6
Type and Format of Tweets

	PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE		NATIONAL ALLIANCE	
Type of Tweets	**Frequency**	**%**	**Frequency**	**%**
Tweet	270	50.8	387	47.6
Retweet	261	49.2	426	52.4
Total	531	100.0	813	100.0
Format of Tweets	**Frequency**	**%**	**Frequency**	**%**
Photo	129	24.3	21	2.6
Text	**207**	39,.0	**256**	31.5
Live Video	**174**	32.8	68	8.4
Video and Photo	7	1.3	8	1.0
Video	14	2.6	**240**	29.5
Official Letter	0	0	21	2.6
Text and Photo	0	0	199	24.5
Total	**531**	**100**	813	100,0

Like, Retweet and Reply numbers were among the key performance indicators that show the effectiveness of messages. Table 7 shows the number of replies, retweets, and likes of the tweets of both alliances. When both alliances are compared, it is noticeable that the number of replies, retweets, and likes of the National Alliance was higher than the People's Alliance. However, since the number of tweets of the People's Alliance analyzed under five accounts (531) was less than the number of tweets of the National's Alliance (813), which consisted of 12 accounts, it would be more correct to calculate interactions per message. The interaction rates are calculated by dividing the number of replies, retweets, and likes by the total number of tweets sent by the alliances. Accordingly, the People's Alliance had a higher number of retweets per tweet (1,825.2) than the National Alliance (1,552.9). However, likes per tweet was 6,267.7 for the People's Alliance compared to 9,247.3 for the National Alliance. The number of "replies" per tweet was more than twice as high for the National Alliance compared to the People's Alliance (782.7 and 327.2, respectively). As a general assessment, the tweets of the National Alliance received more interaction during the research period. Within the People's Alliance, the account that received the highest number of interactions was the account of the Presidency of the Turkish Republic, followed closely by the accounts of the AKP and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Within the National Alliance, the accounts of the CHP and Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu were by far the most influential. The total number of interactions between these two accounts was higher than the total number of interactions of the People's Alliance. This shows that the Twitter accounts of the CHP and Kılıçdaroğlu received much more interaction in the first 8 days of the earthquake (Table 7).

Table 7
Interactions per Tweet

PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE							
Account	**No. of Tweets (A)**	**Reply (B)**	**Reply per Tweet (B/A)**	**Retweet (C)**	**Retweet per Tweet (C/A)**	**Like (D)**	**Likes per Tweet (D/A)**
T.R. Presidency.	206	61,793	299.9	400,543	1,944.3	1,358,893	6,596.5
AKP	254	39,133	154.0	236,840	932.4	746,714	2,939.8
R.T.Erdoğan	27	54,322	1,358.0	244,571	9,058.1	937,100	34,707.4
MHP	40	13,423	335.5	68,382	1,709.5	214,975	5,374.3
D. Bahçeli	4	5,289	1,322.2	18,854	4,713.5	70,500	17,625.0
Total	**531**	**173,960**	**327.6**	**969,190**	**1,825.2**	**3,328,182**	**6,267.76**
NATIONAL ALLIANCE							
Account	**No. of Tweets (A)**	**Reply (B)**	**Reply per Tweet (B/A)**	**Retweet (C)**	**Retweet per Tweet (C/A)**	**Like (D)**	**Likes per Tweet (D/A)**
CHP	184	281,844	1,531.7	530,077	2,880.8	3,458,800	18,797.8
K.Kılıçdaroğlu	47	276,955	5,892.6	460,067	9,788,6	2,823,544	60,075.4
İYİ	102	17,381	170.4	79,988	784.1	363,799	3,566.6
M. Akşener	68	15,024	220.9	75,154	1,105.2	348,910	5,131.0
A.Babacan	51	11,967	234.6	27,151	532.3	128,884	2,527.1
DP	29	3,329	114.7	12,604	434.6	61,188	2,109.9
G. Uysal	23	3,640	158.2	10,728	466.4	54,029	2,349.0
T. Karamoll..	19	4,002	210.6	9,419	495.7	52,788	2,778.3
A. Davutoğlu	30	3,975	132.5	8,473	282.4	26,245	874.8
GP	56	4,297	76.7	7,839	139.9	24,050	429.4
SP	36	463	12.8	5,447	151.3	18,501	513.9
DEVA	168	13,480	80.2	35,629	212.0	157,350	936.6
Total	**813**	**636,357**	**782.7**	**1,262,576**	**1,552.9**	**7,518,088**	**9,247.3**

Table 8 shows the interaction rates of the alliances' posts according to the number of followers. During the research period, the overall interaction rates per follower of the National Alliance's posts were higher than the People's Alliance. The number of Replies per follower was approximately 5.5 times higher, the number of retweets per follower was 1.8 times higher and the number of likes per follower was approximately 3.3 times higher in favor of the National Alliance. Within the People's Alliance, the AKP had the highest engagement rate per follower, while within the National Alliance, the DP had the highest engagement rate per follower.

Table 8
Interactions of Posts per Follower

PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE							
Account	**No. of Followers (E)**	**Reply (B)**	**Reply per Follower (B/E)**	**Retweet (C)**	**Retweet per Follower (C/E)**	**Like (D)**	**Likes per Follower (D/E)**
T.R. Presidency.	9.4M	61,793	0.007	400,543	0.043	1,358,893	0.145
AKP	3.2M	39,133	0.012	236,840	0.074	746,714	0.233

R.T.Erdoğan	20.2M	54,322	0.003	244,571	0.012	937,100	0.046
MHP	2.6M	13,423	0.005	68,382	0.026	214,975	0.083
D. Bahçeli	5.6M	5,289	0.001	18,854	0.003	70,500	0.013
Total	**41M**	**173,960**	**0.004**	**969,190**	**0.024**	**3,328,182**	**0.081**
NATIONAL ALLIANCE							
Account	**No. of Followers (E)**	**Reply (B)**	**Reply per Follower (B/E)**	**Retweet (C)**	**Retweet per Follower (C/E)**	**Like (D)**	**Likes per Follower (D/E)**
CHP	2.4M	281,844	0.117	530,077	0.221	3,458,800	1.441
K.Kılıçdar.	9.7M	276,955	0.029	460,067	0.047	2,823,544	0.291
İYİ	1M	17,381	0.017	79,988	0.080	363,799	0.364
M. Akşener	5.9M	15,024	0.003	75,154	0.013	348,910	0.060
A.Babacan	1.2M	11,967	0.010	27,151	0.034	128,884	0.107
DP	28K	3,329	0.119	12,604	0.450	61,188	2.185
G. Uysal	240K	3,640	0.015	10,728	0.045	54,029	0.225
T. Karamol.	1.1M	4,002	0.004	9,419	0.009	52,788	0.048
A. Davutoğ.	5.8M	3,975	0.001	8,473	0.002	26,245	0.005
GP	263K	4,297	0.016	7,839	0.022	24,050	0.091
SP	360K	463	0.001	5,447	0.015	18,501	0.051
DEVA	418K	13,480	0.032	35,629	0.085	157,350	0.376
Total	**28.4M**	**636,357**	**0.022**	**1,262,576**	**0.045**	**7,518,088**	**0.265**

The daily trend of the share numbers between 6-13 February after the Kahramanmaraş-centered earthquake show that the People's Alliance shared more in the first two days compared to the National Alliance, and the shares gradually decreased at the end of the 8th day with slight fluctuations. The National Alliance, however, shared more posts than the People's Alliance, except for the first two days, but at the end of the 8th day, the message numbers of both alliances were the same (Fig. 4).

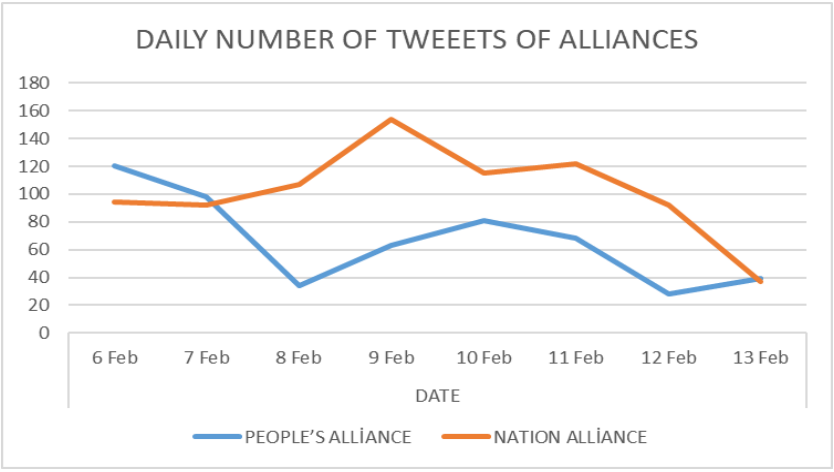

Figure 4. Number of Shares of Alliances by Days

In the People's Alliance, it is noteworthy that the tweet shares of the Presidency of Turkish Republic were higher in the first two days, while the number of shares of the AKP

was higher in the following days. The MHP had a higher number of tweets in the first two days, and very few afterwards. Again, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Devlet Bahçeli used their Twitter accounts very little during this period (Figure 5).

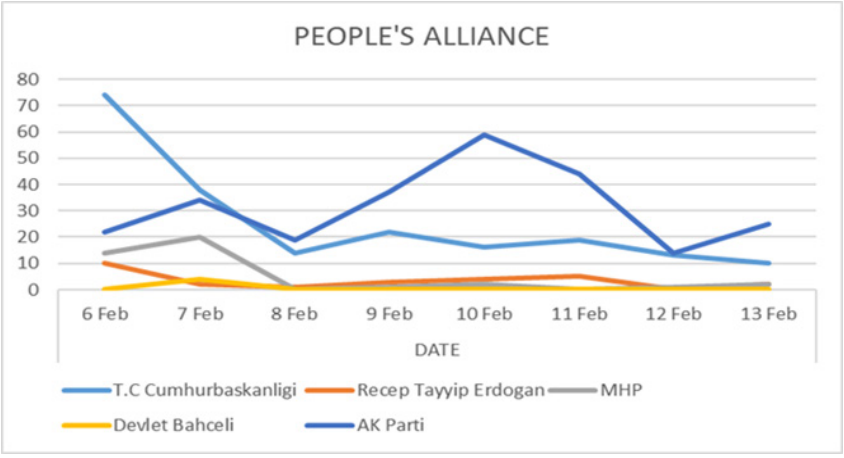

Figure 5. People's Alliance's Daily Flow of Tweets

When the 8-day course of the Twitter accounts of parties under the National Alliance is analyzed, it is observed that the CHP and DEVA used their accounts intensively and continued their posts in an increasing trend, especially on days 4-5-6 and 7 after the earthquake. Other parties continued to post less and in a horizontal trend (Figure 6).

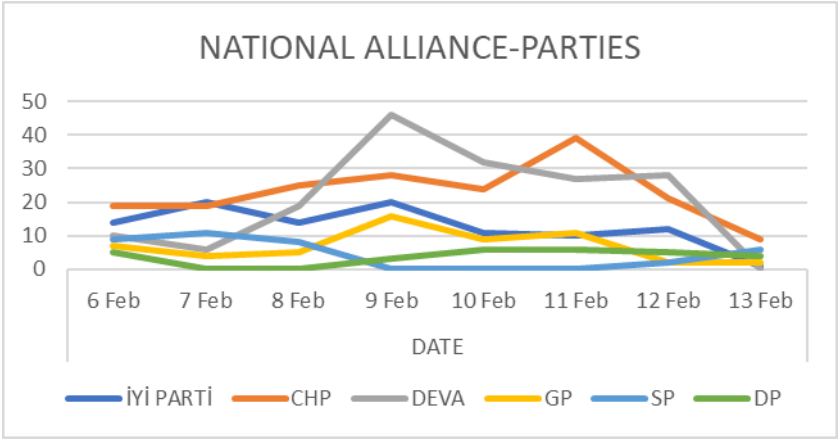

Figure 6. National Alliance Parties' Daily Flow of Tweets

An analysis of the posts of the leaders in the Millet alliance shows that Meral Akşener, Ali Babacan and Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu posted more than the other leaders in the alliance and that the number of tweets of these leaders fluctuated over the days. The other leaders in the alliance shared fewer tweets and the number of tweets followed a horizontal trend over the days.

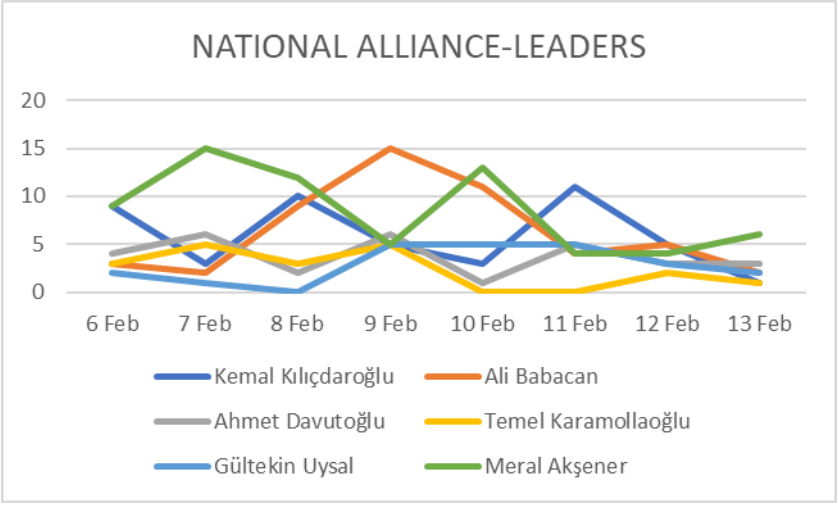

Figure 7. National Alliance Party Leaders' Daily Flow of Tweets

In general, although the number of followers of the leaders within the alliance is higher than the number of followers of their party accounts, the posts are mostly made from party accounts. While principally informative messages were shared by accounts under the People's Alliance, informative and critical messages were posted by the accounts under National Alliance. It was also found that the average interaction per tweet of presidential candidates in both alliances was higher than all other accounts. Apart from this, the daily flow of the number of messages during the research period was almost parallel in both alliance groups.

Conclusion and Discussion

Political communication can be defined as the communicative activities carried out by political parties and leaders to convince certain masses and to spur them to action when necessary (Aziz, 2014:19). It is possible to say that the roles of political parties and their leaders are of great importance in times of crisis or disaster. In a disaster period, political parties and leaders assume responsibility, and citizens need guidance from an authority (Köresenyi, 2013:2).

Social media is a very effective tool in disaster communication, offering its users fast and unlimited communication. With these features, it is possible for politicians to convey their messages through social media to their followers and even to a much wider audience than through traditional media organizations. In times of crises and disasters, making statements is not only about informing, organizing, helping, and criticizing, but it also contains a political dimension. In this context, the Twitter messages of the political alliances of the two presidential candidates in the run-up to the upcoming presidential elections in Türkiye following the two massive earthquakes that occurred in Kahramanmaraş on 6 February 2023, which were called "the disaster of the century" in the wider region, were analyzed between February 6 and February 13, 2023. The dates covered the national mourning period when the sole topic on the agenda was the

earthquake. The aim of this study is to investigate how the political parties and leaders in the two main alliances in the election process conducted their political communications through Twitter during the disaster.

The People's Alliance with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has more followers than the National Alliance with the candidate Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu. This increases the potential for the People's Alliance's messages to reach a wider audience. The account with the highest number of followers in the People's Alliance belongs to President Erdoğan with 20.2 million followers. One of the main findings of the study was that political party leaders have much more followers than the accounts of the party they represent. Despite the higher number of followers of leaders, parties in both alliances chose to post from party accounts rather than leader accounts. This has been interpreted as a wrong strategy in terms of reaching a wider audience. The posts of the People's Alliance were predominantly made from the official accounts of the AKP and the Presidency of the Republic, while Devlet Bahçeli and the MHP, the other member of the alliance with a high number of followers, did not use Twitter effectively during this period.

The People's Alliance shared predominantly informational messages. They are followed by messages of help and emotional content. Although informational messages constituted the majority of the messages of the National Alliance, it was observed that messages with content critiquing the government in terms of earthquake policies and crisis management were also intense. The National Alliance used social media extensively during the disaster to point out the negligence and mistakes in the disaster response. Although the CHP, the party of presidential candidate Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, mainly sent informational messages, DEVA, one of the parties in the alliance with the highest number of posts, used tweets criticizing the government extensively. The İYİ Party, the other high-sharing party in the National Alliance, equally emphasized information, aid, and emotional content. Within this alliance, it was observed that the GP, SP, and DP did not share as much as their other partners.

During the research period, the fact that there are only two parties in the People's Alliance and that it has a presidential leader with a very high number of followers constitute an important advantage in terms of ensuring consistency in the messages given on behalf of the alliance. However, it can be argued that this advantage was not effectively utilized for two important reasons. The first is that the presidential candidate Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, despite his large number of followers, posted very few messages from his own account and that the messages were predominantly from the official website of the Presidency of the Republic, which had fewer followers, and from his party account. Secondly, it can be argued that the accounts of the MHP and Devlet Bahçeli gave a passive appearance in this process due to the fact that they were not used effectively, despite their large number of followers. In the National Alliance, the presence of six different parties is a disadvantage unless the messages conveyed create the perception of a strong and consistent alliance that brings together different segments of the population and emphasizes the plurality of voices. The messages of the National Alliance were scattered, not integrated. If the alliance had an official Twitter account with a planned communication perspective in line with a philosophy of consensus, it could have been used effectively during the disaster response. The absence of a Twitter account for the alliance had a negative impact on the

consistency, effectiveness, and accessibility of messages during the presidential elections. The different emphasis of the messages of each political party and leader within the National Alliance was far from having a consistent impact on followers and voters. In addition, the lack of effective use of party accounts other than the CHP, DEVA, and İYİ Party during this period was also a negative point.

The study also examined the number of likes, retweets, and replies, which are among the key performance indicators of social media, and give an idea about the effectiveness of the posts. When the average number of likes, retweets, and replies per tweet of each alliance was evaluated, it was observed that the tweets of the National Alliance received more likes and more replies. The tweets of the People's Alliance were retweeted more. When the number of replies, retweets and likes per tweet in both Alliances is analyzed, it is observed that the average interaction of the National Alliance was higher than the People's Alliance, and the average interaction per tweet of the presidential candidates in both alliances was higher than all other accounts. This situation was interpreted as a suggestion that the strategy of predominantly communicating messages from party accounts rather than leader accounts during the research period was not very accurate.

Finally, the study analyzed how the tweets of the alliances followed a day-by-day pattern. The National Alliance shared more posts than the People's Alliance, except for the first two days, but at the end of the 8th day, the message numbers of both alliances were the same. However, it can be said that the daily flow of messages was roughly parallel across the two alliances.

Social media and especially Twitter, which is an important tool of political communication, should be used effectively in both crisis and election processes in order to manage the crisis well and to achieve political goals by staying in touch with large masses. This study examines the content, interactions, and daily flow of tweets sent by members of two different electoral alliances after two major earthquakes centered in Kahramanmaraş, Türkiye. The study is expected to contribute to the literature on political tweets in disaster communication. It is thought that the research conducted with content analysis will add a different perspective to similar studies and provide diversity to the literature in terms of comparison with the results obtained. In addition, the scope of this study can be expanded to include not only the earthquake period but also the entire election campaign period so the study can be further developed.

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.

Conflict of Interest: The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

Grant Support: The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

Author Contributions: Conception/Design of study: H.N.G., H.M.Y., B.Ç.; Data Acquisition: H.N.G., H.M.Y., B.Ç.; Drafting Manuscript: H.N.G., H.M.Y., B.Ç.; Critical Revision of Manuscript: H.N.G., H.M.Y., B.Ç.; Final Approval and Accountability: H.N.G., H.M.Y., B.Ç.

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