**Friendship, kingship and interest: Informal politics in Turkey and the Example of Vote Mobilization in Istanbul and Şanlıurfa**

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**Abstract:** *Turkish politics is directed through 'informal' tools and informal relations. My paper will attempt to understand more in depth some aspects of informal politics in the Turkish context with two case studies. The first example is built on 2009 electoral campaign in Istanbul's district of Üsküdar. The results of a field work and a survey in the district clearly show that the parties' strategies are built on a friendly relation with voters rather than on a formal campaign. Presents, a chat around a glass of black tea, hemşehri networks, and women networks appear to be much more influential than any media strategy. Indeed, voters do not recall even the slogans of the political parties. The second case shows the influence of 'chieftains' (ağa) in the Şanlıurfa province on electoral behaviours; the power of the 'chieftains' seems to be deriving from a mix of coercion, well rooted values of respect and tribal loyalty, and strong ties with the central authority. Even if this system often results in the imposition of unequal social relations, it appears to be widely accepted by the broader society through a validation process instigated by its democratic connotation. In this sense, with transformations in the demographic, social, economic and political spheres, tribal identities as well as hemşehri networks did not disappear but evolved into a functional network of patronage. An analysis of patronage and informal relations as well as their influence on political mobilisation may lead to a more informed understanding of political practices in Turkey, and to a specific assessment of the influence of informal politics upon electoral behaviours.*

**Keywords:** Voting Behaviour, Istanbul, Şanlıurfa, Informality

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Traveling in the Western Black Sea region of Turkey in July 2009 with my car, I approached a level crossing with barriers, lights, and acoustic signals. Few meters before, there was an interesting sign: 'Attention, the barriers can be broken, please pass carefully.' Black Sea people are famous in Turkey for their humour, but the sign really much represented the people's image of the state in the country: the state build and administer the railway system and the crossings, yet the public administration itself recognizes that it may be incapable of maintaining the level and that the level may be not working properly. Since there is no alternative, people inevitably keep on crossing the railway through the state infrastructures but at the same time look after because the state institutions may be insufficient in protecting their interests. People's perception of the state as clumsy or arbitrary institution helps the strengthening of alternative webs to protect the individual. Thus, beside the formal institutions, people resort to well established and informal sources of communitarian solidarity.

Because of the discontinuous process of democratization in the country democracy and party policies legitimised informality through the electoral logics instead of strengthening the image of the state and to spread trust for its institutions. Indeed, this paper argue that actually the modernization and democratization processes have left untouched and sometimes even bolster already existing forms of informal political networks. I will bring two examples to support the argument: the political campaign of 2009 local elections in Üsküdar and the case of 'united votes' (*birleşik oy*) in the province of Şanlıurfa.

The former case is built on 2009 electoral campaign in Üsküdar, one of the 39 districts of Greater Istanbul. The results of a field work and a survey in Üsküdar and two other districts of the megalopolis clearly show that the party strategies are built on a friendly relation with voters rather than on media and formal campaigns. Presents, a chat around a glass of black tea, *hemşehri* networks, and women networks appear to be much more influential than any formal strategy. Indeed voters do not recall even the slogans of the political parties, as we will see. The second example shows the influence of 'chieftains' (*ağa*) in the Şanlıurfa province on electoral behaviours; the power of the 'chieftains' seems to be deriving from a mix of coercion, well rooted values of respect and tribal loyalty, and strong ties with the central authority. Even if this system often results in the imposition of unequal social relations, it appears to be widely accepted by the broader society through a validation process instigated by its democratic connotation. It seems also partly accepted by institutions because despite of its size very few complaints are filed in court. In this sense, with transformations in the demographic, social, economic and political spheres, tribal identities did not disappear but evolved into a functional network of patronage. Understanding patronage and informal relations as well as their influence on political mobilisation may lead to understand (paraphrasing Foucault) the 'political technologies' in Turkey, namely a more informed understanding of political practices, and to a specific assessment of the influence of informal politics upon electoral behaviours.

## Campaign in Üsküdar[1]

After seven years in power and at the peak of the economic crises, *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party, *AK Parti*) faced a challenging local election. The party performed pretty well confirming people's positive perception of the party's achievements in government. Nationally, the party obtained 39 per cent of the votes against 23 per cent and 16 per cent obtained respectively by the opposition forces of *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (Republican People's Party, CHP) and *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* (Nationalist Action Party, MHP).[2] In Istanbul, *AK Parti*'s candidate for the Greater Municipality faced the challenger Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, now national leader of CHP, who gained wide popularity attacking *AK Parti* with allegations of corruption (unfortunately not always baseless) and with a populist hint just few months before the beginning of the campaign. Nevertheless, in Istanbul, *AK Parti* obtained 44 per cent of the votes against 37 per cent of the votes acquired by Kılıçdaroğlu. In a field work to understand political campaigns and voting behaviours we followed the electoral campaigns of *AK Parti* and CHP in

three representative districts of Istanbul (Üsküdar, Kadıköy and Küçükçekmece). In this paper, as first example, I will focus on the political campaign of *AK Parti* in the district of Üsküdar.

Üsküdar, with its 582.666 inhabitants, was chosen as a study area because it represents middle-class moderate voter in the metropolis of Istanbul. Here the municipality has been controlled by Refah Partisi (Welfare Party, RP) and then by its follower *AK Parti* since 1994. *AK Parti* did not fear very much the challenge of CHP, which had local activists unhappy with the choices of the party nationally and with their own candidate, Sema Barlın, who conducted a bland campaign. The 29 percent of the votes that CHP gained are probably of partisans who vote aligning themselves to a traditional cultural cleavage. However, *AK Parti* was facing two threats: the Saadet Partisi (Felicity Party, SP) candidate Yılmaz Bayat who had been twice mayor of Üsküdar with a record of successes in the administration of the municipality. SP might have split the consent from moderate conservative votes and so strengthen the position of CHP. The second challenge was represented by the fact that the party had chosen not to re-candidate the actual head of the municipality who had become unpopular. The *AK Parti* candidate Mustafa Kara then focused his visual campaign on attempting to make his name popular and familiar among voters as well as in overwhelming SP's campaign, which was conducted with modest means. *AK Parti*'s campaign was successful and Kara obtained a relative majority of 38 per cent of the votes against 20 per cent of SP.

However, the result of a survey (see table 1 and 2) conducted after the elections showed that visual campaign has not been effective. *AK Parti* is the one that made the most successful campaign investing enormous human and economic resources. Despite that, nearly 80 per cent of the sample in the three districts does not remember any of the slogans. In Üsküdar, 27 per cent of the interviewed remember some of the slogans of *AK Parti* local candidate.[3] So why political parties invest so many resources in visual campaigns if just a minority of voters remembers the slogans? The response is probably in the will of showing their presence in the streets and in overwhelming visually the competitors. The real strategy of the campaign, however, is to reach the powerful networks of personal relations, something that White would call vernacular politics, namely an autonomous, grassroots political process, incorporating a variety of actors and views, in which local/religious networks work in tandem with political parties and civic organizations in the sustained social and political movement (White 2002, 261).[4]

**Table 1**: Do you remember any of the CHP slogans?[5]

|  | National | Greater Municipality | Kadıköy | K.Çekmece | Üsküdar |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Do not remember any* | 95,2 | 85,5 | 66,2 | 97,3 | 95,1 |
| *Sakin Güç* |  | 7,1 | 0,4 | 0,4 | 0,2 |
| *Kadıköylülerin Selami var* |  |  | 32,7 |  |  |

In her study of the RP and *Fazilet Partisi* (Virtues Party) in the working-class district of Ümraniye (which borders with Üsküdar), White noticed that what binds together in the Islamist movement is neither ideology nor any particular type of organization. "Rather, the movement is rooted in local culture and interpersonal relations, while also drawing on a variety of civic and political organizations and ideologies."[6] The success of the RP and its successors owed much of their success to their ability to incorporate hybrid populations and to build on local community networks. To gain access to these community networks, the Islamist parties had to become 'intimate.' They did so by interacting with constituents on an individual level through known, trusted neighbours, building on face-to-face relationships, and by situating its political message within the community's cultural codes and norms.[7] In 1969 electoral campaign, the founder of Islamist political movement in Turkey, Necmettin Erbakan, introduced a new winning methodology to mobilize votes. To the big crowded rallies Erbakan preferred small meeting,

possibly organized in private houses where the candidate might have a direct and more confidential relation with the voters. Initially, to help Erbakan's party activists were the local imams and other preachers that already gained the trust of people. In the villages there was a similar policy. Party activists were visiting the villages talking about religion and leaving a tape recorder with some audiocassettes of Erbakan's speeches.[8] Later, the party used municipalities and party's structures as well as religious confraternities, religious movements, and *hemşehrilik* (the bounds between fellow countrymen) as powerful webs of informal politics to win trust among a larger section of the population.

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**Table 2**: Do you remember any of the *AK Parti* slogans?[9]

|  | National | Greater Municipality | Kadıköy | K.Çekmece | Üsküdar |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Don't remember any* | 57,7 | 79,7 | 79,9 | 84,4 | 73,2 |
| *Durmak yok yola devam* | 21,4 | 3,9 | 2,9 | 2 | 0,9 |
| *Büyük düşün* | 9,4 | 6,8 | 11,1 | 2,1 | 5,1 |
| *Sen İstanbul'sun büyük düşün* |  | 6,6 |  |  |  |
| *Sen Kadıköy'sün büyük düşün* |  |  | 4,4 |  |  |
| *360 derece belediyecilik* |  |  |  | 3,2 |  |
| *Sen Üsküdar'sın büyük düşün* |  |  |  |  | 17,3 |

*AK Parti* emerged as the *yenilikçi* (reformist) wing of the Islamist political movement and inherited much of the cadre of the previous parties and their methodology. Actually, Erdoğan meliorated the methodology of the electoral campaigns. The party in this way was capable of winning the trust of the wide section of the population that felt excluded by the Kemalist state apparatus and distrusted mainstream national media. After being appointed leader of RP in Istanbul, Erdoğan widened the already marvellous electoral machine of the party and extended it to reach other sections of society too that perceived itself as excluded, which also meant visits to brothels (much beyond Muslim taboos). More Muslim confraternities and movements were included in the broad ideological coalition and more activists were involved in the process.

The party itself attempted to build intimate relations with voters. The province director was the brain where all information and from where all orders originated. For every singly ballot box (in 1994 local elections in the province of Istanbul there were 15.596 ballot boxes) there was a group of five activists responsible for the campaign and of the relations with the voters registered for that box.[10] This system permitted the party to collect information on voters, but also to reach each voter. The party activists had to collect complaints and wishes and then transmit to the brain trough the chain of the party.[11] Particularly in the shanty areas activists had to visit families and many times deliver aids collected from the local businessmen or local authorities. In this way Erdoğan was able to build a wide web of relations between the party and the voters, built on more personal and informal relations, building trust between party activists and people.

The Islamist parties have acquired then a huge advantage against their challengers thanks to their ability to mobilize activists. The Istanbul *AK Parti* electoral structure includes a neighbourhood responsible with the duty of public relations under which there are for every ten ballot boxes coordinators. To help the ballot boxes coordinators there are ten groups of nine activists; each of the groups is responsible for a single box. Among the nine responsible for a

ballot box, three are activists of the Youth Branch, three of the Women Branch, and three are from the experienced members of the party. Each member is responsible to a number of voters (according to the law nearly 300 people vote for each ballot box). Activists will also serve as observers (*müşahit*) in the Election Day. Moreover, "neighbourhood and ballot box areas are the basic field for party activities. All the activities toward the voter must be done on this field with an 'active participation' and 'face-to-face/one-to-one' method".[12] In this sense, the Youth Branches (*Gençlik Kolları*) and the Women Branches (*Kadın Kolları*) play important roles. They are not exactly interested in gender or youth's main problems but are a powerful tool to mobilize votes and acquire new members to the party. Membership for *AK Parti* is not important for the revenues brought to the party budget. As stated in the *AK Parti* public 2010 budget, membership fees are not even one per cent of the incomes.[13] Membership is a way to build new links with party activists. After acquiring the voters' data, the local activists will visit them, check their registration to vote and build a new informal link. Youth will be incentivized by concerts and the 'Political Academy' which introduce them to basic knowledge on politics and party ideology, and then insert them in the party machine. Women will meet in tea parties and focus on mobilize family members and frequently in charity activities.

Moreover, activists are animated by the will to *hizmet* (to serve religion and the community) and to strengthen their own network. Moreover, working inside the well-known community networks and in the face-to-face campaign give a sense of empowerment to eventually excluded section of the population (women, young activists, religiously motivated activists). On the other side, voters were delighted to be involved into the system, to receive from the party visits eventual aid and small presents. In 2009 local elections campaign, the Üsküdar branch of *AK Parti* planned to knock to 50 thousand doors and to distribute coffee sets or *lokum*s (the traditional Turkish delight) during house visits as well as the traditional gadgets, i.e. 70.000 pen, 2.000 ties, bags and scarf with the emblem of the party and the name of the candidate.[14] As instructed in the party training material "the custodian of the ballot box and his aides must meet one-to-one (face-to-face) with the voters of the ballot, which they are responsible for, and win them to the party. To do that, party activists have to make periodic visits to the voters with the party leaflets and all other promotional materials."[15]

The Islamist parties' strategies have two effects.[16] First, it has challenged the authoritarian, centralized, top-down paternalism of the political system, and has empowered a new generation of politicians that the constituents perceive to be 'just like us.' RP, first, and then *AK Parti* usually share the same community networks. Moreover, the widespread feeling of *mağduriyet* (of being unjustly treated) also helps in strengthening the constituencies' feeling of closeness. During Erbakan's first campaign in Konya he was supported by the new emerging conservative economic elite, which was excluded by the economic and financial elites in Istanbul who are closer to secular and bureaucratic circles. Today, this new 'green' businessmen have gained strength and large quotas of the market but still are resentful of the past discrimination. Large sections of the 'periphery' of the country and of the metropolis share a similar feeling of being discriminated because of their socio-economic status or religious views. Second, even if the iconic nationalist and conservative dress of the party, local network politics has imported into the party the contradictory evaluations and competing motivations of the communities empowered by this alternative process.

During an interview, the head of Mustafa Kara's electoral campaign answered to a phone call from an *AK Parti* branch in Anatolia, who was asking for suggestions on how to make a winning campaign and replied: "One-to-one relations and keep him [the candidate] on the field."[17] His formula consisted of a campaign where the candidate meet people, shake hands and build personal relations with the voters. For months Mustafa Kara had an agenda with meetings with so called 'civil society associations' (*sivil toplum kuruşları*). They are indeed non-governmental associations yet they usually represent traditional community networks.

The first of these primitive networks is based on *hemşehrilik* loyalties. Istanbul is now a megalopolis inhabited predominantly by immigrants. Nevertheless, migration to a big city and the participation in a capitalist economy and a rational social organization did not transform voters'

worldviews. For first generation of immigrants, their political socialization had started in the periphery and been strongly influenced by their close environment. In the city, the influence of the region of birth is maintained through patriarchal, kin relationships, marriages, economic relations, and the strong *hemşehri* networks. Second generation of immigrants then inherited their family's strong local identity and networks. Moreover, this generation experiences the periphery only during vacations, yet their political socialization occurs in the urban and social 'periphery' of Istanbul, which has failed to develop its own inclusive identity.[18]

In Üsküdar, this divide is even more evident. According to a survey conducted in 2007, 44 per cent of *AK Parti* voters in this district were born in the Black Sea region, and 56 per cent of voters' fathers were born in the Black Sea region. Only 26 per cent of voters were born in Istanbul, and only 5 per cent of voters' fathers were born in Turkey's biggest city.[19] From another survey of Üsküdar's social mosaic conducted in 2002, it is evident that Black Sea voters are overrepresented in *AK Parti*. In fact, only 30 per cent of Üsküdar dwellers were born in the Black Sea region and 33 per cent were born in Istanbul.[20]

Mustafa Kara spent a great deal of his time visiting these hemşehri associations. For instance, on 31 April 2009 he visited the *Bitlis Hizan Gayda ve Çevre Köyleri Sosyal Yardımlaşma Derneği* (Association of Social Solidarity of Gayda [district of Hizan in the province of Bitlis] and neighbouring villages) in a very joyful and crowded meeting. Beside the 'stock speech' presenting his programme and the list of priorities, he added anecdotes linking him (Kara is from Kars) to the region of Bitlis and his passion for Bitlis' delicatessen. Yet the real link between Kara and the Bitlis network was the candidate to the municipality council that the fellow countrymen were promoting. Moreover, the Üsküdar branch of the party organized nights dedicated to different regions in a festival called '7 Regions 7 Colours' (*7 Bölge 7 Renk*) with music, entertainments, and local food in the biggest cultural centre in the district. The first and better organized was obviously the night dedicated to the Black Sea region on 28 February. The majority of immigrants in Üsküdar and the majority of *AK Parti* voters in Istanbul as we have seen are originally from the Black Sea region. Here again Kara repeated his 'stock speech', and then demonstrated his closeness with the people of the Black Sea and his passion for local food. Moreover, since Erdoğan's presidency of Istanbul's section of RP, the lists of candidates are prepared respecting the proportion of the population's place of origin with a fixed quota of women and handicapped. At the same time bearing in mind that 44 per cent of *AK Parti* voters in Üsküdar are originally from the Black Sea region,[21] 25 of the 45 candidates for the municipality council were originally from the Black Sea region, against only six that born in Istanbul and seven that were born in the Central and Eastern Anatolia regions. 11 candidates who were involve in NGOs, many of them representing *hemşehri* networks. Obviously the candidates to the city council representing the Black Sea quota were among the most active in the organization of events. They worked hard for high attendance and also for the presence of businesses that offered gadgets, refreshments and tastes of the local cuisine to the potential voters. Businessmen are interested in participating because it gives visibility among *hemşehri*s. Their support (probably also with conspicuous donations) to their closer candidate's campaign will help them in the future bids, in obtaining permits and in building relations to be eventually exploited during the legislation. Attendees were happy to support the party and their *hemşehri* candidate for a purpose (to see one of them elected) but also with the expectation that their candidate will be a bridge between the community and the municipality as well as the party at national level. The candidate that share your loyalty will eventually help the voter in the future according to the political philosophy of 'who you know' in the state apparatus and in the business.

The choice of the party to rely on *hemşehri*s is obviously strategic. The majority of *AK Parti* voters and supporters are from the Black Sea, whereas people from Istanbul are more likely to vote for CHP.[22] However, as we will see also in the case of Şanlıurfa, since the introduction of competitive elections, political parties try to exploit the already existing primitive loyalties. Inevitably this brings to maintain informal relations with the so called 'civil society organizations' and the primitive loyalties beyond the formality of a campaign. However, also after the campaign with great diplomacy and forms of patronage the party leaders have to maintain a solid coalition

of networks. In this paper, I can mention only the official events of the campaign, we cannot write about the numerous hours spent behind closed doors with the candidate and representatives of different loyalties, including religious groups. The reason is obviously that we were not granted access to it with our camera, voice recorder, and notebooks.

### *Birleşik oy* in Şanlıurfa[23]

There is absolutely no doubt that the leaders of tribes represent strong political elites outside big urban areas and mainly in East and Southeast Turkey. If we examine the list of elected members of Parliament from the constituency of Urfa in Ottoman and Republican times, we can easily observe, for instance, that members of the Cevheri family have been elected at least ten times to Parliament since 1876, the Bucak, Öncel, and İzol family members were elected at least 13 times, seven, and four times to Parliament and the Senate respectively.[24] At the local level, these families are even more powerful. A swift analysis of published official results in the rural areas of the Şanlıurfa province may also show how many villages decide to vote in mass or collectively (the so called *birleşik oy*, collective vote) only for one political party.

As example of mobilization of votes through informal relations, I intend to understand the political power and the patronage structures of (mainly Kurdish) tribal leaders in Şanlıurfa; not just their power in mobilizing votes for themselves, but in directing voting preferences for villages and districts as well as for the local rural communities that are the roots of their strength. The conviction is that there is not only a power of coercion on the tribesmen but mainly a patron-client relationship with mutual benefits. Tribesmen support a specific leader or political view not because they feel obliged to or are forced to. Although they may evaluate their bargaining position on a different basis than in the Western areas of the country, nevertheless their decision-making is still recognisable as a process of calculating individual or collective interests within certain constraints.[25]

A dominant ecological constraint is the particular agricultural economy and the state bids; for instance, the distribution of water in the fields and the distribution of state bids can be maintained and enjoyed equally by all tribal members only if they manage to act collectively. The collective 'action' is diverse and complex, and involves cultivation of tribal contacts, ranging from partnership in trade and agriculture, to exchanging brides and engaging in reciprocal visiting and gift exchanges.

Tribesmen, then, expect a familiar range of patronage services from all influential educated local persons. In fact, the sons of tribal leaders usually possess a very good education from prominent universities; because of their leading position in the regions' economy and society, they have privileged access to political relations as well as local and state authorities. Consequently, expectations are even higher from a kinsperson for help in solving bureaucratic problems, getting a place in a hospital or finding a job. Nevertheless, *ağa*s (the leader of a tribe) do not have a monopoly on providing the variety of services since tribal villagers are likely to enter into different types of patronage relations with the many civil and military administrators in their villages or towns. However, it seems that the state authorities and national parties usually tend to favour the tribal order, because it is a well-established patronage system that can benefit all.

The easiest and most straightforward system to understand the tribes' (*aşiret*) influence on the electoral process is an analysis of detailed results. Particularly in the districts of Harran and Siverek many villages vote in mass (usually without any invalid vote) for the party chosen by the chieftain. In 2007 elections, of the 113 electoral boxes of Harran rural areas 48 were openly cases of '*birleşik oy*;' in Siverek, of the 186 boxes 51 were cases of collective vote. In the previous general elections the figures were more encouraging: of the Harran's 120 boxes only 17 were openly cases of '*birleşik oy*' whereas of the Siverek's 215 boxes 54 were cases of collective vote. This system does not favour *AK Parti* alone. However, the *AK Parti*'s good performance and

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stability have persuaded tribes to align themselves to the strongest actor on the political scene. Many villages made similar choices in 1983 elections when they preferred a party backed by the military junta, *Milliyetçi Demokrasi Partisi* (Nationalist Democracy Party).

A first example of collective vote can be brought from Çağlarbaşı in the Siverek district (see table 3). In this village the leading family is the Bucak clan that since the 1970s is close to AP, which was re-established as True Path Party (*Doğru Yol Partisi*, DYP) after the 1980 coup and entered the 2007 elections as DP. Many Bucak clan members were elected to parliament and relatives were elected to the municipality of Siverek. At least 21 villages and some areas of the city of Siverek are controlled directly by the tribe, and many more prefer to get along with the Bucaks to avoid troubles.[26]

The tribe power derived from their huge possessions in the area (yet no one of the interviewed during the fieldwork could quantify it), have a strong power of coercion, and have very strong relations with the state: the guardianship (*koruculuk*) function in name of the state against PKK and gloomy relations with the so called 'deep state.' The most famous member of the family, Sedat Edip Bucak, was even involved in the Susurluk scandal.

In this last example, land and relations with the state provided strength to the tribe. According to many testimonies that the author has collected, the Bucaks have many armed men at their disposal. But their control of the local society is very much due to informal relations. People feel necessary loyalty to the chieftain (or at least they prefer not to challenge it) because the Bucaks can protect them in case of necessity thanks to their strong local network but also their links with many sectors of the Ankara apparatus. Consequently, votes are granted or irregularities at the polls are overlooked not for fear, yet because the protection of the notable might be necessary in the future.

**Table 3**: Elections' results in selected villages of Şanlıurfa (1969-2009)[27]

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Çaylarbaşı (Siverek)** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Registered voters | 387 | 393 | 468 | 321 | 488 | 550 | 545 | 788 | 901 | 578 | 665 |
| Voters | 285 | 199 | 420 | 277 | 470 | 534 | 543 | 792 | 911 | 576 | 644 |
| Valid votes | 274 | 187 | 420 | 277 | 436 | 532 | 543 | 788 | 910 | 576 | 644 |
| First party/votes | AP/219 | AP/108 | AP/359 | MDP/270 | DYP/287 | DYP/492 | DYP/543 | DYP/785 | DYP/900 | DP/576 | DP/644 |
| **Gülpınar (Siverek)** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Registered voters | - | - | - | - | - | 608 | 825 | 934 | 966 | 507 | 419 |
| Voters | - | - | - | - | - | 610 | 842 | 945 | 972 | 512 | 415 |
| Valid votes | - | - | - | - | - | 610 | 842 | 942 | 971 | 512 | 413 |
| First party/votes | - | - | - | - | - | ANAP/610 | ANAP/840 | ANAP/935 | ANAP/971 | AK Parti/512 | AK Parti/413 |
| **Büyüktepe (Siverek)** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Registered voters | 631 | 333 | 438 | 299 | 411 | 416 | 557 | 599 | 519 | 488 | 545 |
| Voters | 633 | 222 | 438 | 273 | 406 | 378 | 558 | 600 | 521 | 490 | 537 |
| Valid votes | 633 | 211 | 436 | 272 | 402 | 363 | 558 | 598 | 521 | 488 | 536 |
| First party/votes | Ind./597 | CHP/162 MSP/49 | CHP/247 MSP/152 | MDP/175 | ANAP/274 | ANAP/182 | RP/553 | FP/598 | SP/521 | SP/488 | SP/523 |
| **Parapara (Harran)** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Registered voters | 200 | 178 | 201 | 111 | 260 | 262 | 276 | 301 | 463 | 449 | 342 |
| Voters | 200 | 180 | 201 | 111 | 251 | 262 | 269 | 296 | 459 | 420 | 340 |
| Valid votes | 200 | 180 | 201 | 111 | 251 | 262 | 269 | 296 | 459 | 420 | 340 |

| First party/votes | CHP/1 98 | CHP/1 51 | MSP/1 80 | MDP/1 10 | ANAP/ 251 | DYP/2 62 | Ind./26 9 | DYP/2 94 | DYP/4 26 | AK Parti/3 63 | AK Parti/34 0 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Zincirliçay (Siverek)** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Registered voters | - | - | - | - | - | 139 | 133 | 144 | 182 | 156 | 230 |
| Voters | - | - | - | - | - | 139 | 130 | 141 | 179 | 1 | 230 |
| Valid votes | - | - | - | - | - | 131 | 129 | 140 | 174 | 1 | 228 |
| First party/votes | - | - | - | - | - | DYP/9 5 | DYP/1 26 | DYP/9 7 | DYP/1 63 | AK Parti/1 | AK Parti/10 2 DP/97 |
| **Dedeköy (Viranşehir)** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Registered voters | 119 | 110 | 109 | 112 | 127 | 125 | 207 | 185 | 186 | 167 | 225 |
| Voters | 119 | 79 | 106 | 103 | 127 | 117 | 203 | 184 | 184 | 166 | 216 |
| Valid votes | 119 | 79 | 106 | 103 | 126 | 112 | 203 | 184 | 184 | 166 | 216 |
| First party/votes | AP/119 | AP/67 | AP/99 | MDP/1 03 | ANAP/ 116 | DYP/1 08 | DYP/2 03 | DYP/1 84 | Ind./18 3 | AK Parti/1 36 | AK Parti/21 5 |
| **Doruç (Harran)** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Registered voters | 65 | 53 | 72 | 51 | 73 | 73 | 77 | 193 | 206 | 238 | 211 |
| Voters | 43 | 54 | 72 | 41 | 73 | 73 | 74 | 193 | 204 | 202 | 203 |
| Valid votes | 43 | 54 | 71 | 41 | 73 | 73 | 74 | 193 | 203 | 202 | 202 |
| First party/votes | AP/24 | DP/54 | MSP/3 5 | ANAP/ 40 | ANAP/ 73 | ANAP/ 72 | DYP/5 5 | ANAP/ 193 | MHP/1 79 | AK Parti/2 00 | AK Parti/15 3 |

Another good example is the Gülpınar family led by Şeyh Eyyüp Cenap Gülpınar, five times MP and also one time state minister. His family is particularly strong in the South area of Siverek's sub-district of Karacadağ. To the family prestige he can also add the fact that he is a şeyh, a leader of a religious confraternity. The results of the village of Gülpınar strongly controlled by the family demonstrate how the village supported the Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*, ANAP) unconditionally until the 2002 elections when Eyyüp Cenap Gülpınar failed to be elected because of his party debacle. He, then, shifted to *AK Parti* with his villagers' votes and become one of the parliament vice- presidents.

Another example may be the Kırvan (or Karavar) family. As the results from Büyüktepe controlled by the family shows (see table 3), from early 1990s the Kırvans are loyal to the leader of the Islamist party, Necmettin Erbakan. Because of the bad performance of the party nationally, he was elected only twice to Parliament (in the twentieth and twenty-first term). However, his influence in Büyütepe is still evident. Even though the party obtained only 2.49 per cent of the votes nationally, the remarkable local performance is a show of strength in the area and its influence inside the party.

From these few examples, it appears that all main parties have relations with tribes: CHP also seems to have a similar control of the South area of Siverek and MHP performed greatly in many villages of Harran in 2002 elections. What strikes is the fact that nobody challenges the system through court. In villages where there are no invalid votes, where participation is close to 100 per cent, and where one party may score 100 per cent of the votes, some irregularities can be supposed. However, thanks to the widespread *omertà* penal action is difficult to start. Even if he does not receive life threats, a villager risks being excluded with all his family from the village social and economic life. All political parties, which have according to law power of preparing the list of official and scrutineers as well as can send observers, are involved in this comfortable system of mobilizing votes.

The actual mobilization of votes follows different paths. The most common one is through the head of the villages. They communicate their decision to the villagers or he

communicates it to elders. All the villagers will usually be loyal and respectful of elders' or *ağa*s decisions. In certain cases it is the head of the village himself who casts their votes in the name of all commoners. In this case, the officer with the box and the cards the night before the election day reaches the village and is usually hosted by the *muhtar*. During the night, among pleasantries, the officer (frequently a state official or a teacher coming from other provinces) agrees to let the head of the village cast the votes or he agrees to an open vote. The officer also casts his vote in the same box and this is why how in many villages of Siverek and Harran all the registered voters' votes go to a party and the only votes from non-registered voters go to alternative parties.

If in a determined area there is not an *ağa* politically involved, villages' heads or family elders try to reach an agreement with other *ağa*s in exchange for protection or material advantages. It may happen also that the head of a village reaches no agreement with the representatives of a party or local notables. A good example of it may be the case of Zincirliçay in the North of the district of Siverek (see table 3). In 2007 elections, out of 156 registered voters only one cast his vote (presumably the state official). In previous electoral contests they aligned to DYP but in 2009 local elections they opted for a neutral stand splitting the votes among *AK Parti* and DP. The example of Doruç and Parapara show how there is no ideological commitment to a party and probably villagers try to exchange their vote to the party or clan that offers more. Doruç example also shows the clash existing in the powerful Arab Cumeyle tribe split between two cousins: Mehmet and İbrahim Özyavuz. The first is the present Harran mayor and MHP local representative. The latter was twice mayor of Harran (in 1999 with ANAP and in 2004 with *AK Parti*) and appeared to be particularly strong locally and in the party so that he has made possible the election of his wife Çağla Aktemur-Özyavuz to parliament in 2007.

Clashes between chieftains and party leadership can also break the charm. In 2002, the son İdris of Mehmet Fevzi Şihanlıoğlu, three times MP in the ranks of DYP, failed to obtain a candidacy from his party. DYP's Viranşehir and Ceylanpınar branches were closed and the votes of the Şeyhan tribe went to another prominent member, Sebahettin Cevheri, who became independent MP and in 2007 became MP with *AK Parti* (see the example of the Dedeköy village controlled by the Şihanlıoğlu family, table 3). His elder brother, Necmettin, was elected five times with AP and DYP and served in four governments and as Minister of Agriculture (sic!) in the forty-ninth Turkish government led by Süleyman Demirel. Their father Hacı Ömer Cevheri was also elected in 1950 in the ranks of CHP.

**Conclusion**

Even if in other districts of Urfa the phenomenon of *birleşik oy* is less evident, *aşiret*s keep a huge influence on the electoral process. Circles of agnates, relatives, friends, and clients continue to dominate the public life of the province. As a matter of fact, Turkish public life is dominated by interpersonal relations, face-to-face, person-to-person relationships: the Ottoman system, which survived in many forms also during the Republic, was built on personal relations as Meeker rightly notices.[28] Today, public life is characterized if not dominated by interpersonal relations. As we have seen, a big city like Istanbul besides a conventional political meeting, parties prefer to do a door-to-door political campaign, to visit families, businesses, associations of immigrants for a *sohbet* (intimate conversation) in front of a glass of tea that would be much more successful. *AK Parti* is the movement that probably used better than others informality as a tool to mobilize votes. It is true that as Meeker observes these networks set aside nationalities (still a not well defined concept even in modern Turkey), communities, families, and tribes. However, Turks prefer to keep using existing tribal, family, *hemşehri*, or community networks to have access to public life if they are effective. Once these networks become ineffective and do not produce the expected results, individuals or entire families may decide to switch to other more successful networks, which can be an alliance with another tribe or with a different kind of network. The fragmentation of the tribal system meant also that clans opt for the strongest network without considering kin anymore. Moreover, today there are different kinds of networks including

Ergenekon-like formations, *tarikat*s and *cemaat*s, which represent a strong challenge to the tribes, at least in urban areas. However, community appear as perpetuating their willingness for networks.

This general research for network means also that there is lack of individualistic culture in Turkish society. Through this culture, individuals cannot then develop their own identities with some autonomy from their family, group or community, but also develop the ability to think about themselves, their social life, institutions and political leaders. Oligarchy is a shared phenomenon among all kinds of institutions and organizations. Individuals should have enough enthusiasm and initiative to participate actively in associational life.[29] Society has been certainly changing in the region particularly since 1980, however the lack of individualist culture and apathy toward public life are still relevant and among the main factors that maintain the feudal system in areas of Urfa.

One reason behind apathy is the fact that, despite the 90 years old Republic, the state still lacks legitimacy and effectiveness. There is a general lack of confidence in the state, as the level crossing in the Black Sea region symbolized. This is due to the incapacity of the state to implement the rule of law inside society and also in the incapacity of the state to deliver services. This aspect is also changing, but people still prefer to employ the networks closer to them to obtain services and protection. The *aşiret* system provides an informal network for obtaining services from the state and removing red tape, to have access to the market or even to arrange marriages. *Hemşehri* networks help immigrant to survive in the metropolis thanks to solidarity networks, to find a job or to provide help in the bureaucratic system. Particularly in Southeast Anatolia the state has failed in gaining effectiveness and legitimacy among its citizens. Because of the need to mobilize votes and reduce costs, democratic politics have also preferred to strengthen these informal networks even more.

We have also to recognize, though, that the *AK Parti* volunteers constitute probably the biggest 'civil society' organization. Post-1980 Turkish society is a strongly de-politicized society yet elections are a show of participation. In 2009 elections, in the district of Üsküdar there were 1.252 ballot boxes and the party mobilized at least ten thousand people to pay visit to voters, observe voting operations and other campaign activities. However, until the formation of a strong individualistic culture and the emergence of an opposition to vertical organization of society, Turkish democracy will remain weak.

## NOTES

[1] The field work and part of the survey quoted in this sections were financed by TÜBİTAK (project 108K587). I would like to thank here TÜBİTAK for its generosity. I would like also to thank Ömer Çaha who brilliantly lead the project.

[2] All electoral result mentioned in this paper are taken from TÜİK http://www.tuik.gov.tr/secimdagitimapp/secim.zul and http://www.tuik.gov.tr/secimdagitimapp/yerel.zul

[3] Ömer Çaha and Michelangelo Guida, *Türkiye'de Seçim Kampanyaları* (Ankara: Orion, 2011).

[4] Jenny B. White, *Islamist Mobilization in Turkey* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2002), 261.

[5] Selected answers (Çaha and Guida, *Türkiye'de Seçim Kampanyaları*).

[6] White, *Islamist Mobilization in Turkey*, 6.

[7] *Ibid.*, 7.

[8] Soner Yalçın, *Hangi Erbakan* (Ankara: Başak, 1994), 106-8.

[9] Selected answers (Çaha and Guida, *Türkiye'de Seçim Kampanyaları*).

[10] TÜİK retrieved 9 February 2011, http://tuikrapor.tuik.gov.tr/reports/rwservlet?secimdb2=andreport=buyuk sehir_1994.RDFandp_il1=34andp_kod=2anddesformat=htmlandENVID=secimEnv

[11] Ruşen Çakır and Fehmi Çalmuk, *Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Bir Dönüşüm Öyküsü* (İstanbul: Metis, 2001), 49.

[12] AK Parti İstanbul İl Seçim İşleri Başkanlığı (2009), *Sandık Esaslı Çalışma Programı.*

[13] AK Parti retrieved 16 February 2011, http://www.akparti.org.tr/media/www/html/gelirgider/gelir_gider.htm

[14] Interview with Sinan Aktaş, Üsküdar 14 April 2009.

[15] AK Parti İstanbul İl Seçim İşleri Başkanlığı (2009), *Sandık Esaslı Çalışma Programı*.

[16] White, *Islamist Mobilization in Turkey*, 22.

[17] Interview with Sinan Aktaş (vice-president of AK Parti Üsküdar branch and Election Committee president), Üsküdar 14 April 2009.

[18] Yusuf Ziya Özcan, "Determinants of Political Behavior in Istanbul, Turkey," *Party Politics*, 6 (2000).

[19] Michelangelo Guida and Tülin Tuna, "Centre-Periphery Divide as a Key to Understand Electoral Choices in Istanbul," *EJEPS* 2 (2009).

[20] S. Murat, HY. Ersöz, S. Şener, Y. Bayat, *Dünden Bugüne Sosyo-Ekonomik Yönleriyle Üsküdar* (İstanbul: İşaret, 2006), 10.

[21] Michelangelo Guida, "The Political Geography of Üsküdar," in Coşkun Yılmaz (ed.), *VI. Uluslararası Üsküdar Sempozyumu* (İstanbul: Üsküdar Belediyesi, 2008), 338.

[22] 48 per cent of CHP voters in 2007 declared to be born in Istanbul whereas only 26 per cent of AK Parti voters declare to be from Istanbul (Guida, "The Political Geography of Üsküdar," 338).

[23] The field work mentioned in these sections has been supported by the Scientific Research Fund of Fatih University under the project number P51030802-2.

[24] The Urfa province in Southeast Turkey changed its official name into 'Şanlıurfa' ('the glorious Urfa') with Law 3020 of 1984 to commemorate the spontaneous popular resistance against invading French troops immediately after World War I.

[25] Lale Yalçın-Heckmann, "Kurdish Tribal Organisation and Local Political Processes," in A. Finkel and N. Sirman (eds.), *Turkish State, Turkish Society* (London: Routledge, 1990).

[26] T. Taş, "Siverek: Aşiretler Konağı," *Atlas* 125 (2003), 104.

[27] TÜİK http://www.tuik.gov.tr/secimdagitimapp/secim.zul and http://www.tuik.gov.tr/secimdagitimapp/yerel.zul

[28] Michael Meeker, *A Nation of Empire: The Ottoman Legacy of Turkish Modernity* (Berkeley-London: University of California Press, 2002), 395.

[29] Sefa Şimşek, "The Transformation of Civil Society in Turkey: From Quantity to Quality," *Turkish Studies* 5(3) (2004), 64-5.