

PARTICIPATING FOR A CHANGE:
POLITICAL ACTIVISM OF WOMEN IN AKP'S WOMAN BRANCHES

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Participating for a Change:
Political Activism of Women in the AKP's Woman Branches

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Abstract

The question of why citizens decide to participate in politics is of fundamental importance in a democracy and has been a long tradition of trying to answer it in political science. At the very heart of democracy is the possibility for all citizens to exercise a voice in politics which can be heard by those in government. In the majority of countries, a persistent gender gap in political activities remains and women have been less politically engaged than men but when they enter, they have the same motivations with men. AK Party's Woman's Branches paradigm in Turkey implies that these women were drawn to political action moved from different motivational factors but based on their desire to create change in their life and politics.

Keywords: Political activism, Turkey, AKP, women branches.

ÖZET

Vatandaşların siyasete neden katıldıkları sorusu demokrasilerde temel bir önemi haiz olup, bu sorunun cevabının aranması siyasal bilimler alanında bir gelenek haline gelmiştir. Demokrasinin özünde, bütün vatandaşların siyasetteki söz haklarını, seslerini hükümettekilere duyurabilecek şekilde kullanmaları yatmaktadır. Ülkelerin çoğunda, siyasi faaliyetlerle ilgili olarak süregelen bir cinsiyet uçurumu bulunmakta olup, kadınların siyasete ilişkilerinin erkeklere nazaran daha az olduğu ancak, siyasete atılan kadınların erkeklerle aynı motivasyonlara sahip oldukları gözlenmektedir. Türkiye'deki AK Parti Kadın Kolları örneği, kadınların kendi hayatlarında ve politikada değişim yaratmak arzusundan yola çıkarak farklı motivasyonel faktörlerden dolayı siyasi hareketin içinde yer aldıklarını göstermektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: siyasi aktivizm, Türkiye, AKP, kadın kolları

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Abbreviations

AKP	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AK Parti)	[Justice and Development Party]
CEDAW	The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women	
CHP	Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi	[Republicans People's Party]
DYP	Doğru Yol Partisi	[True Path Party]
EU	European Union	
KEİG	Kadin Emegi ve Istihami Girişimi	[Women's Labour and Employer Initiative]
RP	RP Refah Partisi	[Welfare Party]
WB	Parti Kadın Kolları	[Woman's Branch]

Notes on Translation

This study uses mainly English-language documents, and the ones I found in Turkish my friend Kerim Sabunis helped me with the translation. The interviews contacted in English apart from one that was contacted in German, and three in Turkish were the assistant of the interviewees made the translation.

Chapter 1. Women's Political Participation

1.1. Introduction

The question of why citizens decide to participate in politics is of fundamental importance in a democracy and there has been a long tradition of trying to answer it in political science. At the very heart of democracy is the possibility for all citizens to exercise a voice in politics which can be heard by those in government. In the majority of countries, a persistent gender gap in political activities remains and most of the studies reported that women have been less politically engaged than men in many established democracies. These studies hold the assumption that the motivations are the same for men and women.

Bucking in Turkey, the status of women has repeatedly emerged in current debates. The representation of women in the Turkish parliament is low and so is their participation in decision making mechanisms. There are number of different factors that make women's political participation difficult. Social and economic problems are main factors and the associated difficulties as illiteracy, unemployment, gender discrimination, domestic violence affect women in all areas and most notably in politics.

However, the engagement of significant numbers of women in Woman's Branches of AK Party unlike other parties cannot be explained considering the above parameters. Since its foundation, AK Party has established the Women's Branches, (WB) reaching as of today about 3.5 million women participating in it. Women from all social backgrounds participated in AK Party's Women's Branches nationwide. Taking the AK Party's Woman

Branches as a case, implies that women can be drawn to political action given the right set of motivations. By exploring the motivations of women's activism there could be a possibility of increasing women's participation and strengthen women's citizenship. What can the AK Party's woman's branches case tell us about the motivations of women participating?

1.2 The AK Party's creation, evolution and ideology

In the 1990's women started to follow a pattern of collective action for a more Islamic Turkish society and their political engagement was a part of the Islamic movement. Women started participating in organizations and in Refah Party with Ladies Commissions. In 1997 after the semi-military intervention Islamic parties were closed and the political activism of Islamist groups became more moderate.

The polarization of the secular, military-bureaucratic elite and the Islamists of the 1990's paved the way for the creation of the AK Party. The political, social, and economic turmoils of the 1990's led to the coalition government of the Islamist RP (with Necmettin Erbakan) with the centre-right DYP (True Path Party). This was a long awaited reward for the Islamists, as well as an alarming situation for those placed at the other end of the political spectrum- the Secularists. The actions of this coalition government which were under close monitoring of the military finally led to a series of "recommendations"-or a post modern coup as popularly known- on February 28th, 1997, by the National Security Council to curb the power of the Islamists in the government. This was the turning point for the creation of AK Party since what

happened in the aftermath- including the closure of WP and formation of the VP in the similar structure- had paved the way for a group of reformists within the- now VP- who had long participated in the Islamic movement, to decide that it's time for a division within the Islamist movement and for the formation of another political party structured in such a different way to serve the purpose of coming to and staying at power. Thus, AK Party was eventually established by a group of active reformists in the FP (Virtue Party) under the leadership of Abdullah Gül and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. In August 2001 (Atacan 2005, Toprak 2005, Heper 2005, Çavdar 2006, Yavuz 2006). The elections of 2002 brought to power the AK Party which formatted a single party government after a long decade of coalition governments. It won parliamentary elections in 2002 and 2007 and 2011.

The leaders of the party gave emphasis on their separation from the Milli Görüş (National Outlook) Movement of Erbakan- the longstanding leader of the Islamist movement and despite their Islamist roots they defined themselves as conservative democrats and have never defined the party with epithets like Islamic or religious. They positioned the party on the centre-right of the Turkish political scene and thus appealed to a larger public. AK Party ideology gave emphasis on traditional Turkish cultural values, which are close with the Islamic religious values and the politicians defined themselves as pious or conservative Muslims and the rhetoric of the party was constantly for the protection of values and society's conservative roots. Hale had claimed that the AK Party resembled the Christian Democratic parties in Europe because of their religious origins and commitment to faith-based values (Hale 2005). Nasr refers to this type of new parties as "Muslim Democracy" that

resembles the tradition of Christian democracy (Nasr 2005). According to Nasr Muslim Democrats differ from Islamists because they are committed to democratic principles and they do not implement the Shari'a law. AK Party's leaders rejected this label and they emphasized that their concern were the religious values and not the Islamist politics.

AK Party is defined as a mass party that has its roots in conservatism-keeping distance from the political Islam with Islamic roots or a post-Islamist centrist party (Akdoğan, 2006; Dagi, 2004). Akdoğan does not clearly define as an ideology the term of conservative democracy. AK Party presents its conservatism as different from the parties of the center-right of the past and the present and also from the Islamist parties of the past. AK Party cannot be defined as an Islamic party like the RP, because its politics deal with the state affairs in a secular way and Islamic law is not institutionalized in the state affairs (Dagi, 2004; Heper 2009). According to Etyen Mahcupyan AK Party's leadership does not use any rhetoric with the term "Muslim" because Turkey has an official ideology of secularism (Mahcupyan 2006).

At the time of AK Party's foundation, the political parties already in the arena suffered from a legitimacy crisis and the society from the economic crisis of 2001, so AKP - or AK Party, (Ak also in Turkish means white, clean) came with an image of "new" and "clean" party- was perceived by the voters as an alternative to the existing corrupted parties (Baran 2008, Yavuz 2009). This accompanied with a discourse of "change" and the party's pro-EU stance in contrast to the previous anti-Western stance of Erbakan gave AK Party the victory in 2002. AK Party has built close relationship with West and has introduced reforms required by the EU accession process. Also the party was

able to capitalize on the rightward move in Turkish mass public opinion and appealed to those with strong objections to state centered politics (Çarkoğlu 2008, Kalaycıoğlu 2007). The AK Party won the parliamentary elections in 2002 by receiving 34.2 percent of the votes and got 66 percent of the parliamentary seats. In 2007, it received 47 percent of the votes at national elections and got 341 parliamentary seats out of 550. In 2011, it got 49.83 percent of the votes and 327 of the seats in the parliament. Voters after their experience of the 1997 political crises and the 2001 economic crises went for AK Party believing in its promises for moderation and change, political and economic stability.

Even though there is a lot of criticism of the true intentions of AK Party's politics, it is commonly agreed that to a certain degree Turkey changed under its ruling. One of the biggest steps was the reduction of military's involvement in politics after the restructuring of the National Security Council (Turam, 2008; Uslu, 2012, Taşpınar, 2012). The AK Party following International Monetary Fund guidelines managed to recover the Turkish economy (Posch, 2007; Demirbaş, 2013; Çınar, 2013). In 10 years the Turkish economy grew by an average rate of 7.5 percent annually and due to lower inflation and interest rates domestic consumerism has increased. AK Party has managed to build a coalition among upper and lower classes. The evolution of Turkey's capitalism under the leadership of Turgut Özal in the 1980s created an entrepreneurial Muslim bourgeoisie in the conservative heartland of Anatolia. This Anatolian bourgeoisie has not been part of the existing affairs of state. AK Party's neo-liberal policies opened new ways of developments and redistribution of resources to enterprises allowing the new Muslim bourgeoisie

for a greater stake in Turkish politics and economy. From the beginning of its ruling AK Party has set as priorities the creation of a stable economy, the improvement of the people's living standards and democratic stability. There was a lot of talk on the political agenda since the mid-1980's about the privatizations of state economic enterprises and during AK Party's ruling a number of privatizations came to practice. Turkey also attracted foreign investments with this privatization program. As a result provided with economic stability, low inflation and a sense of security, all social classes benefited from these (Posch, 2007; Demirbaş, 2013; Çınar, 2013).

AK Party passed reforms not only pertaining to economy. Between 2002 and 2006 a series of reforms were implemented regarding the judicial system, civil military relations and human rights in compliance with European norms. Along with its grassroots network and the governmental institutions, AK Party made health care and public housing accessible to masses, distributed food and clothing, gave scholarships for students who are unable to pay, and invested in the improvement of the infrastructure of poor urban districts and contraction of roads. It also set as a priority the minority rights for Kurds and non-Muslims.

1.3 Women in AK Party's Ideology and Women's Political Engagement with the AK Party

In a social need of help after 1990's and beginning of 2000's, AK Party attracted men and women in the party. Women started to show interest for the new party. According to Minister Fatma Şahin, Erdoğan and the other founding members had a strategic plan in order to get women out of their homes and contribute for the welfare of their country. On 19th February of 2003 AK Party's Woman's Branches was officially established and Selma Kavaf was assigned as the Chairwoman (personal interview 06-05-13). From the early stages of the foundation of AK Party and WB, women from diverse political and social backgrounds started to get interested and to participate in the party. AK Party has attracted into the Women's Branches mostly those women who were not involved in politics in the past and the percentage of women in AK Party who have also worked for the RP or other party is estimated to be around 30 percent (Çıtak & Tur, 2008).

Women in AK Party “display a radical break from the previous, more vocal form of Islamist women's movement under the Refah Party” (Turam 2008). Women in RP participated in WB activities for God's sake, for their community and for men, and for personal satisfaction (Saktanber, 2002; Arat, 2005). A sociologist and an AK Party MP, Edibe Sözen argues that in AK Party there are three different categories of women. First category consists of the Islamist women who were supporting RP and who show interest to AK Party because of their affiliation with Erdoğan from 1994 to 1999 when he was the mayor of Istanbul. Second category consists of pious and conservative women, who

work in the Party's Women Branch, and who are well educated but never entered the workforce, women with no political activism background, and women who had worked for AK Party's local offices. The last category consists of the women deputies MP's where they position themselves in the center-right and they do not wear headscarf (Sözen, 2006).

According to Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator Egemen Bağış and Minister of Family and Social Policies and a Former Chairwoman of Women Branches Fatma Şahin, the profile of women participating in AK Party varies and cannot be drawn a general prototype. Women with various backgrounds from businesswomen to housewives and villagers, illiterate to PhD holders, from all corners of Turkey attend politics actively and voluntarily through the party's organizations at all layers. Minister Fatma Şahin said that "this is not weird because this is the profile of Turkey. AK Party and its organizations is a reflection of Turkish society. People feel comfortable in our party and that makes it so popular" (personal interview 06-05-13).

The position of AK Party regarding women's political participation and political life is illustrated in its program. The AK Party Program has a separate heading; "Women", which describes the party's perception of the women's issues and their problems that is diverged from the programs of other parties and seems to be more progressive in terms of its gender policies. It supports women's political participation and promotion in political life. In its program also, promises to encourage women to join the party and to take active roles in politics. But at the same time in its program it is explicitly stated a conservative view that women are important "not because they constitute the

half of the population but because they are responsible for the raising of the next generations" (AK Party, 2001). The program makes clear that "a culmination of long time neglect" constitute one of the priorities of the party. For example, as mentioned participation in politics and public life it is strongly encouraged, it promised to support women's civil society organizations and to develop programs that aim at educational activities -working with women's NGOs- targeting to stop violence against women, including sexual violence, honor killings and domestic violence and emphasizes schooling of girls as necessity. The program also points to the economic exploitation of women, and also it pledges to address the needs of female workers taking women as individuals but also as women with responsibilities in their families and argues that social security measures should include housewives (ESI, 2007). To a certain extent some of the above did went into practice.

The representation of women within the decision making process of party organs in parliament and cabinet was poor in political life of Turkey and we could say that the number of female representatives has improved. Number of women in Turkey's 550-member parliament increased from 50 to 79. The general elections in 2011 witnessed an increase in female representatives for all parties.

Table 1

Number of female representatives in the National Assembly by election year			
Election year	Number of seats	Held by women	Proportion (per cent)
1935	399	18	4.5
1939	429	16	3.7
1943	455	16	3.5
1946	465	9	1.9
1950	487	3	0.6
1954	541	4	0.7
1957	610	8	1.3
1961	450	3	0.7
1965	450	8	1.8
1969	450	5	1.1
1973	450	6	1.3
1977	450	4	0.9
1983	399	12	3.0 After the coup
1987	450	6	1.3
1991	450	8	1.8
1995	550	13	2.4
1999	550	23	4.2 After the coup
2002	550	24	4.4
2007	550	50	9.1
2011	550	79	14.3

Source: Turkish Statistics Office (TUIK), 2011

Still the representation of women in the Turkish parliament is low compared to the worldwide average and it is indicative of the problems existing in Turkey's political life. In local politics gender inequality is more obvious. In the 2009

local elections 27 women elected mayor among 3000 people. Two women mayors were elected in the 81 provincial capitals of Turkey (Aydemir, 2013). Even AK Party's 2005 report for its development goals female deputies to reach 17 per cent the results is different. As of 2012-2013 there is only one female minister out of the 25 in the cabinet-Minister Fatma Şahin, former chairwoman in women's branch and also a chemical engineer, and she is Minister of Family and Social Policies. However it should be noted that there is an increase compared to 2004 and also low participation does not stand only for AK Party. For example, where in AK Party the women in the parliament consist the 14.11 percent in CHP is 14.17 and women in local assemblies are 4.61 and 6.52 relatively.

The percentages of women in the party's branches as of 2012 are as follows: 15 per cent of women are in the Central Executive Committee, 29.4 per cent are in the Central Decision-Making and Administrative Committee/Party Assembly, 27.2 per cent are in the Central Disciplinary Board and 0 among provincial chairs (KADER, 2012).

Apart from the one and only female Minister in the cabinet, the fact that there is no female provincial chair in the AK Party is a strong indication of patriarchal hierarchy within the party structure.

In addition, AK Party's stance in specific issues concerning women does not have clear guidelines. Firstly the quota question that the central party led by Erdoğan was supported. The gender quota was increased from 30 percent to 40 percent for both national and local candidate lists in 2005. The gender quota was strictly implemented in the 2007 national elections and the 2009

local elections but the party soon refrained from committing to quota expressing his opposition to it because is humiliating for women. “Are women like tradable goods to which you can impose a quota? Can there be such a thing? This is nonsense”. “It is an insult to women” (www.akparti.org.tr). An interview of -Çıtak and Tur with Selma Kavaf in 2006 from AK Party Women’s Branches justifies this anti-quota policy telling that they want to climb up the ladder of politics by experiencing each step and maturing in the process and so not to get into any criticism that they got the ticket for a post because of the quota system. It is interesting to see that inside the party organization the more it goes to local level there is less willingness for women’s representation and this is seen when you consider that there is no chairwoman for city organizations. This “resistance” Fatma Şahin explained as “there exists a zero-sum game between women and men over political positions; for every new woman a man loses and men do cooperate with each other to retain those positions for themselves” (Çavdar 2008 pg 356).

In the case of the headscarf question again there is not an existing clear guideline. In Turkey, the issue of the Islamic headscarf has troubled Turkish society. The prohibition on wearing the headscarf in the universities has been lifted in practice but not with any statutory regulation and is still prohibited in some state institutions. The headscarf question is also important because it significantly reduces the number of women who will run for state offices. In addition demoralizes the efforts of women asking for more representation. Sema Kırıcı, an advisor to Erdoğan, and a member of the Central Decision Making and Administrative Committee in AK Party, said that she can’t put to use her experience and knowledge at another position because she is

wearing a headscarf (personal interview 28-03-13). This debate was developed mostly in 1990's and created a main parameter of polarization in Turkey where it led to the ban of the headscarf in the state institutions and in the universities (Turam 2008, Çıtak&Tur 2008). For AK Party leadership, it is an important preoccupation even though it states that headscarf is not on top of their agenda, it is placed at the center. Erdogan, before the 2011 elections at an AKP rally admits that his government has failed to end what he calls an "injustice". "With Allah's will, the doors of parliament will open for them (headscarved women) and they will continue their struggle there." (Setimes, 24 May, 2011).

For the women in AK Party there is a division of views. On one hand they argue that in fact there is no headscarf problem and it lies to the military-bureaucratic elite and they believe as the AK Party's leadership that it would be solved in time and through social or institutional consensus and after solving more serious problems as the ones in the economy. On the other hand, women in lower echelons where there are more women with headscarf and headscarf is an integral and natural part of their lives, find headscarf issue as important and at the same time believe in their leader that would find a consensus solution. Apparently the headscarf issue is related to women's participation in politics and in public sphere and according to Çıtak and Tur women in AK Party wearing headscarf are generally ambitious and want to climb up the ladder of the party from down to top by getting experienced in politics. But a woman who wears the headscarf cannot participate in political life in Turkey; she cannot become a member of parliament, a governor, a mayor, a head official of a district or a member in local governments. Women

in AK Party wearing a headscarf implied to be interested in such positions. They said that even if they want to use their experience from another position the headscarf is a problem (personal interviews 2013). As Cıtak and Tur contacted a member of Women's Branches wearing a headscarf she made them clear that "she would know how to react if another woman who had not sacrificed as much as she did for the party appears on the candidate list in the next elections". But it is interesting also that they found that there were other women ready to take their headscarf off in order to go for the candidate list (Çıtak and Tur 2008). Nevertheless, AK Party by placing women wearing a headscarf high on candidate list could lead to the allegation that AK Party is challenging Turkey's secular character as in the case of Merve Kavakçı in 1999.¹ At the same time, as Çavdar argues, AK Party reckons that if they gain more legitimacy through economic and democratic reforms they might solve the headscarf issue (Çavdar, 2006).

Apart from these, problems affecting Turkish women continue to be on the agenda. Generally, Turkey under AK Party's ruling has improved its laws, concerning women's domestic violence, unemployment, and illiteracy. However, gaps in the law and implementation failures by police, prosecutors, judges, and other officials make the protection system not sufficient to provide security towards women and according to a report of the International Strategic Research Organization in Ankara in 2012 (USAK), 42 percent of Turkish women suffer physical violence (USAK Report, 2012). In addition to that, as of 2010 figures, women's employment rate in Turkey are 27.6 percent

¹At the opening session of parliament deputy of FP, Merve Kavakci, tried to wear a headscarf, contrary to the code of conduct for public servants. Kavakci was subsequently stripped of her Turkish citizenship for applying for US citizenship without permission from the Turkish government, and did not take her seat in parliament.

and 35.2 percent of the women performing unpaid family labor, the latter setting Turkey in 131st position out of 134 countries where the last three are Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Yemen (The Global Gender Gap Report, 2012). Illiteracy figures by the Ministry of Education in 2012 show the great differences between men and women. Out of 3,825,644 illiterate persons living in Turkey the 81.6 percent are women.

However with the above issues along with the low level of female representation in the parliament and within the party organization, does not suggest women's lesser involvement in or absence from the AK party. Women organized under the separate party structure named Women's Branches (Kadın Kolları, WB) reaching 3,237,742 as of January 2013 members which is the largest branch for women in Turkey. AK Party has highly-motivated and hardworking, and highly-effective women's branches throughout the country. Women from all status- but most of them with modest living standards in big cities and in medium sized towns, attend AK Party and provide for more than a decade of valuable work (Posch, 2007). That creates an ideal situation for AK Party for two reasons at least; one is that the target group women represents the majority of the population who constitutes the core voters of AK Party all over Turkey and the second one is that this target group has the greatest potential to reach all segments of the population- namely for the simple reason of being in the middle- the interaction of them with upper and lower segments of the society is maximum compared to any other group. Since women can get the pulse of social dynamics and networks in their own environment and from those environments with which they are in interaction, they can immediately and effectively transfer the most crucial

pieces of information to the higher levels of WB and thus to the party management which for the most time could be impossible for their male counterparts to retrieve from the society as well as the women. It could be also mentioned that the women's interaction in WB activities also provides them to be more aware of what is going on around them, along with the prestige and the significance of playing a role in a big "cause" like this. So this could be stated as an ideal situation for both AK Party and the women working in WB, resulting in mutually benefiting parties.

1.4. Method and Primary Evidence Collection

In this study in order to understand women's activism motivations in AK Party's women branches, qualitative methods via in depth interviews contacted with AK Party female members was used. I want to see who the women activists of the women branches are, what motivated them to participate into politics and what they gain in return to this participation.

Interviews were contacted through the snowballing method. Humeyra Keskin who is a Member of the Central Decision Making and Administrative Committee of AK Part's Woman Branches and former Chairwoman of Foreign Affairs of Women Branches, was the initial contact. Her reference and support helped me arrange the interviews that otherwise would be more difficult for me to arrange. The fact that I am a foreigner from a neighbor country and my affiliation with the Greek Parliament was an advantage in getting interviews because they were willing to show their work and knowledge and I was able to understand easier issues and matters due to my past experience. A total of

twelve interviews ten with women and two with men, were contacted. Lokman Ayva and Sema Ramazanoglu are among the sixty four founding members of the party, Egemen Bagis and Fatma Sahin are ministers and the last was Chairwoman of Women Branches, Derya Bakbak is an MP, Guldal Aksit was Chairwoman of WB and Minister and the current Chairwoman of WB, Ozlem Topal is the Chairwoman of Istanbul WB, Selva Cam and Pinar Ersoy are the Chairwomen of Foreign Affairs the first of WB headquarters and the latter of WB in Istanbul, Sema Kirci is Advisor to Chairman and Member and Former Vice President of WB of the Central Decision Making and Administrative Committee, Serpil Bagriacik is Chairperson in Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, Humeyra Keskin is Member of the Central Decision Making and Administrative Committee of WB and Former Chairwoman of Foreign Affairs of WB headquarters.

Primary and secondary sources concerning the political situation in Turkey have been collected and consulted for this study: academic books, articles, journals, government publications, parties' and officials' websites, reports, documents published by political parties and NGO's have been also used. Some of these documents were on line and many of them were obtained from the Istanbul Bilgi University and Brown University libraries.

Interviews were carried out in the Turkish Parliament, and in Women Branches Headquarters in capital city of Ankara, and in Istanbul metropolitan city.

Those who conceded to be interviewed gave their interviews with enthusiasm, warmth, hospitality, and in general in the interview situation, there was a congenial atmosphere. Most of them exceeded more than one hour time and

two of them were about three hours. I did not use a tape recorder and so that made them feel more comfortable expressing certain issues and we could have more intimate dialogues. All of the interviewees expressed that their interviews could be used with their names.

Despite the advantages I had, methodological limitations exist for this research. First, I am not a Turkish language speaker and the interviews were conducted in English, one in German because the interviewee after my confirmation that I can also speak German was feeling more comfortable using this language, and three with a translator from the party. These three were not because the interviewees could not speak English but they preferred in Turkish in case they would say something that could be misinterpreted since English is not for both of us the native language and their position is in high offices. This language barrier possibly limited also my research fieldwork in written materials that I was not able to find related to this research, but with the ones I found, Kerim Sabunis helped me with the translation. Secondly, the quality of information from two interviews might be limited because one elected officials and one in a high position, were extremely guarded in their comments because they knew that their comments could be used in the party and so they rarely voiced their opinion on some controversial issues and so they were very cautious.

1.5. What follows

The thesis proceeds in the following way. Chapter 2 provides the existing literature on Motivations in Women's Political Participation and the theoretical

model that this study uses. Chapter 3 provides an overview of historical context on women's political activism in Turkey and the AK party and maps the characteristics and role of the Woman's Branches. Chapter 4 offers an analysis of women's motivations to participate in AK Party's Woman's Branches. It is divided in 6 sections where each motivation is being analyzed. Chapter 5 contains the conclusions drawn from the case studies and discusses suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2. Motivations in Women's Political Participation

2.1 Women's Participation in Politics: Theories, Findings and Case Studies

Participation in political party activities has been a long tradition trying to answer it in political science. During the 1920's and the 1930's, studies have reported that men were more likely to vote than women in many established democracies (Meriam, 1924; Gosnell, 1930; Tingsten, 1937).

The classic surveys in social psychological tradition for political participation of Verba and Nie (1972), Verba, Nie, and Kim (1978), are the most prominent models of political participation have established a series of findings on causes of activism. These surveys compared all conventional forms for political participation: voting turnout, party membership, and community organizing, and concluded that sex is related to political activity and men are more active than women. (Verba, Nie, and Kim, 1978) Barnes and Kaase expanded this study on "protest politics" and established that women attended demonstrations, occupations and strikes less than men (1979).

Verba and Nie developed a socioeconomic structure that explained who became active, according to income, occupational status (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993; Verba et. al. 1995) and educational qualifications. Motivating

factors related to socioeconomic status, education, political interest, efficacy and knowledge were also important. "Individuals are more likely to participate if they know and care about politics and if they think that their participation would make a difference" (Verba and Nie, 1972, Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993; Verba et al. 1995; Schlozman 2003, pg 439).

Rational choice theorists looked into voter turnout as a form of political participation and argue that citizens are self interested actors and make conscious calculations of "costs and benefits" (Downs, 1957). According to these theorists voting is costly regarding to returns and people will choose not to vote and free-ride" (Olson 1965).

Studies on mobilization argue that people participate not because of who they are, but because of what they are offered and are more likely to participate in politics if they are directly contacted by a political party or a candidate (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993).

Studies on civic voluntarism argue that free time, income and civic skills are important for political participation for citizens and also that people develop their skills after their engagement with organizations and institutions (Verba et al 1995).

Studies relying on general theories of attitudes and behaviors examined motivation in four categories: Material benefits, social gratifications, civic gratifications, and collective outcomes (Schlozman et al. 1995, Wilson, 1977). Material benefits are the benefits people can gain through participation, such as finding a job, career advancement, or help with a personal or family problem. Social gratifications are the personal benefits that people gain when

working with others or the excitement of politics which people would not be able to enjoy unless they participate. Civic gratifications are similar such as the belief that people are paying their duties and contributing to the welfare of the society. Lastly, collective outcomes that motivate people are for those who want to implement desired policies, or to elect a specific candidate.

Much of previous research has tended to examine case studies on political parties and suggest that women party activists at the women's organizations play a role in advancing women's representation (Caul, 1999). Historically the European parties have had women's organizations which recruit women as members, support the party, mobilize women in election campaigns, and lobby for women's representation in the upper echelons of the parties (Childs, 2008; Kittilson, 2010). These organizations within party structures mainly aim to reach female voters while providing a structure offering the opportunity for political participation, either as party members or as volunteers.

Several scholars indicated the positive impact of women's branches in increasing women's representation and their utility as an opportunity to introduce women's concerns into the party agendas (Henig & Henig, 2001:44-46; Bussemaker & Voet, 1998), pressuring the party leadership about women-related policies (Kittilson, 2006, 2010; Leyenaar, 2004; Lovenduski & Norris, 1993). Women's branches additionally provide political training to women and create women politicians (Kittilson, 2006).

These women's organizations are considered subsidiary organizations operating locally, regionally and nationally, and they lack autonomy or involvement in the decision-making processes of the main party bodies

(Kittilson, 2010; Lovenduski & Norris, 2003). According to Kittilson, women's organizations within the party structure bring matters of social justice which can contribute to gender equality (Kittilson, 2010).

Despite these arguments stressing the importance of women's organizations some scholars questioned the contribution of separate women's organizations has been questioned. For example, Kolinsky argues that women's organizations within the political parties have limited political impact on the main party organizations or cannot be represented in positions of political power (Kolinsky, 1993).

As far as Turkey is concerned, much of previous research has tended to examine the political experience of women in single parties, Islamic, conservative, or secular (Senol, 2006; Y. Arat, 1984, 1998, 1999, 2005; Cosan & Cindoglu, 1999; Ilyasoglu, 1998). They have also focused on women who participated in demonstrations, election to the parliament through a particular ideological camp.

There have been a number of single-case studies examining the impact of women's organizations of Islamist political parties on women's engagement in politics (Arat, 2005; Güneş-Ayata, 2001; Saktanber, 2002; Turam, 2008). Ayşe Saktanber (2002) examined the Ladies Commissions of the Islamist Fazilet Party. Her study was examined from the liberal economic policies of the 1980's and indicated that women's activism in this women's organization was viewed from these women as a service to God, their community and to men. In addition to these Arat (2005) examined the Ladies Commissions of

Refah Party and also found that the main factors behind their activism and success were for “God’s sake” and personal and individual satisfaction.

There are no studies with systematic comparative analysis that had examined the differences or the similarities between motivations of women joining the Islamist/conservative parties’ WBs. Gavdar has examined the women’s political participation through WBs comparing the secular CHP (Republican People’s Party) and FP (Virtue Party). She found that both parties’ WB’s “did not play important role in renegotiating the gender roles in Turkish politics but rather recreated them” (Cavdar, 2006 pg. 13). Cansun, examined the approach for women’s political representation in Turkey comparing the two leading parties of AK Party (Justice and Development Party) and CHP with different ideologies respectively. She found that there was no significant difference in the promotion of women as politicians no matter the parties’ ideological differences (Cansun, 2013).

Sahin, (2011) in a single case comparative analysis on women’s political representation among Kurdish, Kemalist and conservative Muslim women, concluded that intra-party organizations provide the space for women to become active in political parties and opportunities to demand further representation. Particularly, for AK Party she argues that participation in AK party’s WB’s “transformed from simply civic engagement to a path to increasing involvement in party politics and an opportunity for representation in elected offices” (pg 183). She suggests that women joined the party for the well-being of the public and to contribute to the solving of the country’s problems women believe that they do something good for the society. She

concluded that women working in the party have changed from the past. Through WB women have learned the dynamics of the party, increased their visibility and were empowered politically.

A research on the role and status of women's branches of political parties in Turkey argues the profile of the women participating is similar. They have obtained a secondary school diploma, or they are housewives of pensioners and have a close relative who is also active in the party. Their activities were limited to social than political and they were not involved in developing gender equality. The role of these intra-party organizations was to attract more members and so to increase the voter potential in the elections (Cadir, 2011).

With an extensive research, regarding the identity changes in the 2000's of Islamist parties towards conservatism, scholars examined the conservative AK Party. According to the common arguments on women's participation in AK Party is mostly due to party elites decision to increase women's inclusion in politics in order to present a more moderate image than to contribute to gender equality and that they had recognized women's contribution for attracting new members and increasing the voter potential for elections (Sözen, 2006; Citak & Tur, 2008, 2009). Much less attention has been given to women's motivations for political participation through women's branches of political parties.

Through these studies noted above, findings also have been reached concerning particularly to women's motivations in participating in AK Party's Woman Branches (Citak and Tur, 2008, 2009) found that the main reason for women joining the party was Erdogan's personality who they had followed

when he was a mayor of Istanbul. Also women admired his personality, his personal life, and his background underlining that they feel he is one of them in contrast with the previous politicians. They expressed their admiration for Erdogan (Sozen, 2006; Cansun, 2013) and regarded him as honest, sincere and as someone who has charisma and they believed that he was able to solve Turkey's long lasting problems. Moreover they also thought that the party's program was contemporary because it showed an understanding of Turkish reality. AK Party's ideology complied with their ethics and beliefs because it gave an emphasis on traditional Turkish cultural values, which are close with the Islamic religious values.

Tur and Citak (2009) drawing data from 21 semi-structured interviews and 38 surveys contacted with provincial and district heads of the AK Party's WB, found that women entered politics because this participation made them become more self-confident, better mothers and neighbors, and more active citizens.

The sociologist and AK Party's MP, Edibe Sozen (2006) argues that in AK Party there are three different categories of women groups. Firstly is the Islamist women who were supporting the RP and who show interest to AK Party because of Erdogan since he was the mayor of Istanbul from 1994 to 1999. Second category is pious and conservative women, who work in the party's Women Branch, are well educated, but never entered the workforce, women with no political activism background, and women who had worked for AK Party's local offices. The last category is the women deputies MP's where they position themselves in the center-right and they do not wear headscarf.

According to the above findings, the important shortcoming notable in the literature on women's activism in AK Party's WB's is that it lacks a study and an analysis on motivations for participating in this woman's political organization.

This study does not aim at comparing the motivations for participating in a political party with the motivations of men in AK Party, although the literature provides a framework for this type of comparison. The goal is to look at different motivations of women's political participation in AK Party. Nevertheless, this study will treat them as a single group for the sake of analytical rigor.

2.2 Theoretical Model

The question raised in this research is what motivates participation in Woman Branches of AK Party making it the largest woman's organization in Turkey reaching about 3,500,000 female members. One literature can be used in order to help in understanding women's motivations in political participation in Woman's Branches.

Firstly, in examining the goals that citizens are trying to achieve through their participation we will examine the four categories towards traditional politics that scholars generally examine: Material benefits, social gratifications, civic gratifications and collective outcomes. (Schlozman, Verba and Brady 1995; Wilson 1973). Material benefits are the benefits people can gain through participation, such as finding a job, career advancement, or help with a

personal or family problem. Social gratifications are the personal benefits that people gain when working with others or the excitement of politics which people would not be able to enjoy but only with the participation. Civic gratifications similarly such as paying their duty and contributing to the welfare of the society also derive from the participation. Lastly, collective outcomes that motivate people are for those who want to implement desired policies, or to elect a specific candidate.

I argue that the above definitions of motivations explain women's participation in politics, but provide a limited view of the wide range of factors than can motivate participation. The high participation of women in woman's branches of AK Party cannot be explained only with the traditional definitions and different set of motivations should be researched. Taking the AK Party's Woman Branches as a case, implies that women can be drawn to political action given the right set of motivations. What are those motivations?

Chapter 3. Overview of Women's Activism in Turkey

3.1. Women's Political Activism in Turkey and Women's Branches

The first discussions on women's rights in Turkey began after Tanzimat Reforms which were passed by the Ottoman Sultan in 1839- long before the young Republic of Turkey was founded- and the first women's organizations were founded in 1908.² During the War of Independence years which paved the way for the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the foundation of the new Republic of Turkey, women became politically active in order to protest and defend against the occupation of the country. This participation effort leads to the foundation of the women's branches of the Defense of Rights Committees that held various meetings and conferences all around Anatolia and organized the defensive efforts against the enemies of the nation. After the foundation of the new Republic of Turkey in 1923, the founding father Mustafa Kemal ATATÜRK's reforms increased women's engagement in the public sphere. The Turkish Republic and the republican elite initiated a number of reforms that were necessary in order to establish a Western type, secular state. Political, economic and social life went through a period of radical changes. The role of Islam in public life was limited and women were granted with political and civil rights equal to men. For example the Civil Code replaced the Islamic Law (Shari' a). With the Civil Code, polygamy was abolished, the right to divorce, inheritance and children custody to women were granted and equal status for men and women was established. In 1930, women got the

² The first modernization attempt, as accepted by the most of the historians on Ottoman Empire, is called Tanzimat Reforms and were made by Sultan Mahmud II. (Tomic, 2011)

right to vote and in 1934 women got the right to vote for members of the parliament and run for the elections themselves (Arat, 1994; Petek-Salon& Hukum 1986). Turkish women got the right to vote a decade or more before women in such Western European countries as France, Italy, and Belgium. The male ruling elites wanted to separate Turkey from Islamic past and by giving rights to women Turkish state would gain/reinforce the secular system (Göle, 1998). The republican elite though, dominated the process of women's engagement in the public sphere despite the fact that the civil and political rights of women were granted by law. They were granted by civil and political rights. Feminist Nezihe Muhittin, in 1923, attempted to establish a women's party named People's Party of Women (Kadınlar Halk Fırkası), but was rejected by the government. In 1924 the party was organized as a union with activities aimed at securing the rights of women to vote and to be elected and when these rights of women were officially granted with the law that was passed in 1934, the union was asked to dissolve itself because of lack of state authorizations (Tekeli, 1991, Altınay, 2004; Bozdoğan, Kasaba in: Arat, Y 1998, Keskin 1997).

The multi-party system that was established in 1946 as a result of a plethora of forces of socio-economic pressures for change and external pressures for democratization brought further changes to women's political participation and representation. The electoral competition among political parties forced the parties to seek more women voters and after the introduction of multi-party system, women voters became more influential than in the past. The first women's branches were created in 1955 by the CHP (Republican Peoples Party). Women mostly with education at the level of high school or above

were recruited in the branches. Women were organizing meetings in order to discuss the organization's goals and, under the CHP rule at the time, many reforms were made concerning women. The women branch of CHP's proximity with the Party itself was relevant because many of the members of the women's branch were the wives of members in the Party (Cavdar, 2006). Similar women's organizations were established within such political parties during 1970s and 1980s like DP (Democrat party), MNP (The National Order Party), MSP (National Salvation Party), RP (Welfare Party). All these branches lacked autonomy and systematically were excluded from the decision making mechanism of the parties and so were ineffective in affecting party decision making (Tepe, 2008). They were mobilized in order to gain support for the party among women and at the same time their activity in the party did not free them from their traditional roles within the family (Çavdar, 2006; Keskin, 1997). Women branches mainly arranged informal home visits with women in order to communicate their parties' policies. Active participation of women in politics was blocked because the protection of traditional family structure demands women to be at home. As time went by, the women branches of the political parties turned to be power centers attracting non-active females to vote for male candidates. (Arat, 1989). On September 12th, 1980, women's and youth organizations affiliated to political parties came to experience their share of the ban by the military coup. Women's branches continued their activities without any formal connection to the political parties, but with an existing support from them, functioning as charity organizations (Aydemir, 2013; Çavdar, 2006).

Major changes took place in the women's branches in Turkey during the 1990's, when the Secular-Islamist confrontation was dominating the politics of that time. The RP's women's branch known as "Ladies' Commission"-reaching approximately one million female members, mobilized many women to vote for the Islamist party RF and these women were the major reason behind the electoral success of the party which was able to make a coalition with the secular DYP. That success put the secular parties and the military who perceived the Islamists as a threat and thus undertook the role as defenders of the Republic to concerns about the secularism of the country, and the contribution of the RP's women's branch to that success led many other women's branches to adopt strategies and structure from the Islamist party's women's branches. The LC women's branch was the hardest working group of RP and its activities ended in 1997 with the party's closure (Arat, 2005). Following the same structure, FP (Virtue Party) the same year, established Islamist women's branches at district and province levels and in the meetings they held traditional values and Islam were the dominant issues of the discussions. In 2002, a new women's branch called "Kadın Kolları", was established within AK Party (Justice and Development Party) - the newly founded and entered party in politics, with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan mobilizing this women's branch personally as an experienced leader in working with women from his time of office as the provincial leader of the RP and as the mayor of Istanbul between 1994 and 1999 (kadinkollari.akparti.org.tr).

3.2. AK Party's Women's Branches structure and role

Ak Party's party machine at the organizational level has managed to establish a strong human network through organizations and institutions (Mardin 2004 in Yavuz 2009, Posch, 2007). AK Party and Erdoğan personally, mobilized women into politics who were highly educated like, Sema Ramazanoğlu, Güldal Akşit, and Serpil Bağrıacık. They said that AK Party found them and Erdoğan proposed them to take office and accomplish the party's goals (personal interviews 11-04-13).

The WB has the organizational structure of the AK Party's central bodies having a Central Decision Making and Administrative Committee of 50 members elected by secret ballot as well as a Central Executive Committee of 12 members who have been assigned by the chairperson of the Women's Branch Headquarters out of the administrative board and these members are responsible of 12 different field activities. According to Egemen Bağış, the fact that the structure of the organization chart of the party is the same from the central committee to the provisional and sub-provincial committees and branches, is an excellent construction model that makes the organization of all branches to work efficiently (personal interview 05-05-13).

The WB is positioned within the AK Party organization as "a subsidiary organ" and continues its work playing several roles in party politics: To recruit new female members into the party and train them in politics and provide them with further education as well as employment opportunities, to expand their networks with local, national and international organizations so to cultivate-

spread the party's modern perspective about women, propagating the party's agenda and helping in the organization and mobilization for party's massive events and collect information and gain feedback from the grass roots -and not only- of the society (www.akparti.org.tr).

The WB organization was carefully constructed and structured in order to recognize the different needs and demands of local contexts. It has headquarters and organizations in 81 provinces, 900 counties and in all different provinces, districts levels, metropolitan cities, in central and southeast Anatolian towns reaching as of 2013 a total of 3,237,742 registered members and with its pluralization in activities in many fields contributes to party politics. The WB organizes nationwide and on a monthly basis meetings where the heads of women's branches of all provinces come together in Ankara. The leaders of the WB are proud of their organization suggesting that could be a model for other parties (Çıtak Z, & Tur O. 2008, Sozen, 2006). That was the feedback also I got from all of the female interviewees in Ankara headquarters and in Istanbul. They said that AK Party's WB's is the biggest in Turkey and no matter of the difficulties they have managed to operate all over the country.

Women's branches have neighborhood representatives who both register new members in the party and communicate party's ideas and messages to the people and get feedback on the people's demands from every district in Turkey to the party. Much of the hard work of the party organization falls to the WB especially during the political campaigns, before election periods, and on the Election Day. WB succeeds in mobilizing many women in the party, in order to participate in congresses, in speeches and to vote for AK Party. This

is a result of their networking and advanced organized structure and work throughout the year. Apart from the above mentioned duties, it could be said that much of the hard work falls to the WB especially during the political campaigns, before elections ,and on the day of elections because the political campaigns of all sorts whether be it for general elections or for local elections, or even about those issues where public opinion needs either to be created or manipulated in favor of the opinion of the AK Party, the members of the WB play a very important role that involves putting their personal time and effort by going from one electoral area to another to disseminate the views, opinions, and preferences of AK Party, and especially before elections which require these time consuming activities to be carried out in a limited period of time thus resulting in a more intensive contribution of the members. And on the day of elections, where the fruits of all the hard work that has been undertaken will be collected, the members of the WB act very vigorously and work diligently to make sure that every person within their area of influence comes to vote for AK Party, the voting process is carried out properly according to the rules of elections, and at the final stage the counting of the votes are carried out again in accordance with the prevailing rules and regulations, thus ensuring nothing goes against the benefits of AK Party.

In order to expand their network women pay home visits and arrange home meetings, they visit patients at hospitals and people with special needs at their homes, and they deliver food and flowers in special occasions.³ By this way women build personal contact with the people where men would not be

³ For instance, they are informed from the local municipality authorities after the loss of a member of the family they pay a visit to the relatives delivering them their condolences and food (according to the Turkish tradition).

able to knock a door and enter a house. It is easier to approach other female voters than the male counterparts as they are woman and some wear headscarf. So they feel more comfortable to talk with women from WB who look like them and coming from middle or lower class. When she was the head of the WB, Fatma Şahin, had said that women are pioneers because they have unique power which is the ability to penetrate the household whereas men cannot just knock at the door and enter a home. "When women do that, they reach other women and automatically that means that they reach the entire family. Considering the women's power to change it could be said that if the women change then the entire society will change" (Çavdar 2010, pg).

The activities of AK Party women are similar to the RP women of the 1990's. They provide aid by delivering food, clothes, means of heating and other appliances, they support young couples who are getting married,⁴ and they help people to reach state institutions and find solutions for their problems. They set up dialogues with NGO's and take place in common activities, as well as with foreign parties and the European Union's organs. And also they organize conferences, seminars and workshops for the political training of women.

They communicate the policies of the government to women in all districts. The WB's performance generates many benefits for the AK Party and women in the branch believe that they are the backbone of the party organization and that the party cannot be successful without them.

⁴ According to Islam it is great bless to provide help for the sake of marriage.

Chapter 4. Motivations For Women's Activism In AK Party

4.1. Motivated By The Leader's Charisma

In AK Party, particularly the central party leadership have encouraged and emphasized the importance of participation of the women in politics. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is the leader of the party since its foundation in 2002 and he seemed to be the most influential “gatekeeper” in appointing women for the elected offices and in power positions but also in attracting women in politics. His ideas about women's power and inclusion in politics were not something new. His former cooperation with women during his metropolitan mayoralty and his steady encouragement and trustworthiness are the most important factors that play a role in the continuing participation of the women in party politics. As Lokman Ayva, one of the founders of AK Party explains; his trustworthiness was first gained in the eyes of the women when he had solved the water problem in the city as the mayor. And women participated in the party for two reasons as he said: “Firstly Erdoğan was and is aware of the power of women and he knows how to work with women. Secondly, a woman of an Islamic point of view was positioned wrong and Erdoğan, step by step, increased the position of woman in the society and in the politics and thus his words gained the trust of the women.” (Personal interview 29-03-13)

During the foundation process of AK Party, Erdoğan personally invited 13 women among the 64 founders in 2001. Six of them wore headscarves and for this reason he developed an unprecedented system that positioned them as advisors in specific issues in order to include them in high decision-making

positions without which they would not be able to be included because of their headscarves. By this he had accomplished to give a message of AK Party's determinism on women's advancement in politics without violating the prevailing principles of Turkey's secularism at the time. Sema Ramazanoğlu, one of the 13 women invited, said: "I saw the light in him for the future of my country" (personal interview 07-05-13).

The primary role in the selection process of the candidate recruitment is played by Erdoğan and experience in WB is an important asset for women to be nominated as candidates. Women from the Branch were first introduced as candidates in the 2007 national elections. Women party elites along with Erdoğan and senior deputies discuss their opinions about prospective candidates and sometimes they have lobbied for a specific candidate (Şahin, 2011). Erdoğan himself chooses the female candidates and places them in safe seats on the party lists and so form the parliament's composition. This selection process does not seem democratic and fair for the local activists and the electorate in order to have an equal chance for candidacy, since Erdoğan decides the recruitment of female candidates and the composition of women in the parliament as well as for the assignment of ministries. Some of the Ministry and commission chairs which assigned to women by him include some of the party founders like Güldal Akşit as Minister of Tourism and Minister of State, Selma Kavaf as Minister of State responsible for Women and Family Affairs, and Fatma Şahin as Minister of Family and Social Policy. From my interviews with the female activists and interviews published in academic articles it is clear that Erdoğan himself as a strong personality is the main motivation and inspiration for the women members of AK Party and have

an ongoing influence on female politicians and female activists. In all of my interviews the first thing they told me as an answer to my question asking about the reason why they were working for AK Party was “Our leader, of course!” They have a strong faith and trust in him, underlined by their strong perception that “he is one of them” due to his personal life and humble background, in contrast to previous political elites. They are impressed by his –by their words- “honesty, sincerity, and charisma”. İbrahim Uslu, General Director of Investment Incentives and Foreign Investments, Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Turkey, said that “Women see in Erdoğan a good son, a good husband and a good father” (Hürriyet Daily News, 11 Jun. 2012). They believe in him and they have confidence in his leadership skills and his vision. Women are convinced that he is able to solve Turkey’s long-standing economic and social problems and as Ayva explained “women-as mothers, they are more sensitive for the future” (personal interview 29-03-13). Erdoğan’s rhetorical speeches and phrases make women feel close and familiar with AK Party.

In two of his speeches in 2005- one at Kahramanmaraş Province Women’s Branch and the other at Istanbul Province Woman’s Branch addressed to women it can be shown how he can grab women’s attention. Quoted as following: “Now we expect you to raise newborn hopes, dreams, and expectations”, “I believe that you will look after the dream of the AK Party as you look after your children. You will be excited to realize this dream more than anyone. I believe you, and I trust you. You are the real actors in politics. You are also real actors in society” (Tayyip Erdoğan speeches in Şahin

p.187). Egemen Bağış said, “According to Erdoğan, women who hold the half of the population are critical for productivity both in business and politics. A political system that ostracizes half of its population from social life cannot be democratic and is a loss for a country” (personal interview 05-05-13). Erdoğan considered the insufficiency of women’s political involvement to be as a result of male dominance and of men’s resistance to seeing and hearing women’s ideas and projects and thus encouraged women to work hard and overcome men’s resistance. He is the mediator between women and party elites and woman’s branch and even when some women faced resistance for their participation in politics from men in the party Erdoğan solved it by forcing men to accept those (Çıtak&Tur, 2008).

At the same time, despite his welcome rhetoric, Erdoğan had suggested that for a woman to participate in politics would possibly bring difficulties that had to do with the inconvenience of the working hours (Türkiye Bülteni, Nov. 2006).

He also takes every opportunity to express the essentiality for Turkey’s future that every woman bears three children along with his opposition to abortion, triggering a big discussion in Turkey since 2012. It could be argued that both having a welcoming rhetoric for the involvement of the women in politics and asking them to have three children and refrain from abortion at the same time may sound contradictory. And it may indeed be so for some women; the amount of time, energy, and resources that need to be put in raising not one, but three children especially, might render the involvement of “the mother to three” in political activities impossible since political activities also need huge amount of time, energy, and resources to be carried out effectively. It would

be possible only for a very small number of women who could manage to raise three children and also be politically active at the same time, so this reality would render the welcoming rhetoric null and void. However, it should also be noted that involvement of women in political activities is important for a society, and the involvement of men in politics who are also undertaking many important duties in the family that also require amount of time, energy, and resources are also not that easy. So there may be another perspective in understanding of the contradicting nature of the two above mentioned expectations from the women, which might involve a higher expectation of contribution, a greater priority to the importance of this involvement, and a better organization in the daily life. This could also be related to a lesser role that is expected from the women in the political arena (so what is expected of them can be carried out with three children), or that political involvement to be seen as a lifetime process and not confined to some years, or many different approaches alike expressing different views- some rendering it as contradictory and some not. Nevertheless, it is important for Turkey to have such a rhetoric in the air, whether be it attainable or not in the short run, since for sure it is to pave way for increased involvement of women in politics in the long run, by increasing awareness that was purely unprecedented for so many decades in the modern political history of Turkey.

Also there has been quite several times, where Erdoğan and other male members of AK Party expressed that participating in politics suggest difficulties for women, namely to do with the inconvenience of working hours. They claimed that politics is a heavy occupation and women getting back home late at night are perceived differently in the society. Edibe Sözen, a

sociologist and a MP in AK Party, found that “the political culture of the women in the party is in consensus with cultural codes, favoring consensus over disagreement and conformity over divergence” (Sözen, 2006 p. 268). Women in Turkey, face difficulties to enter politics because of cultural factors, which do not exclude women, however, neither do they make it easy for them (Sözen, 2006; Cansun 2013). However, a study conducted by KADER association with the research institute KONDA that at a social level there is no any obstacle for women’s political participation put from discriminatory culture. According to the data, 72 per cent stated that it does not matter about the gender when it comes to working in politics or being in the upper echelons like minister of internal affairs or national security. 56 per cent stated that would be for Turkey’s benefit if there is an increase on female politicians. 71 per cent disagreed with the statement that there was no need for an increase of female politicians, and with the statement that even if women participate in politics they cannot have opinions on subjects such as economics, foreign affairs and national security. 23.7 per cent expressed a need for the application of quotas and 49.1 per cent for more beneficial conditions for the female candidates and a 19.3 per cent disagreed on the need for a special treatment on female candidates. (KADER, KONDA, 2011)

None of the female interviewees mentioned about any sort of friction in the relations with the men in the party but Ayva said: “Men in AK Party do not act ethical. They stress the weaknesses of women in the party, but Erdoğan motivates women and demotivates men” (personal interview 29-03-13). At this point it is possible to talk about tension among the party elites and the males in the lower echelons in AK Party’s hierarchy.

Overall, the female members of AK Party idealize their Chairman and Prime Minister Erdoğan and this is the main factor for their mobilization towards AK Party. This, though, has been several times criticized from the feminist civil society organizations that women participating in AK Party do not act independently and do not represent women but they are obeying the leader of the party. Nükhet Sirman a leading secular feminist criticizes women's activism in AK Party as "the women of the Prime Minister" (Başkan' in Kadınları) (Sirman, 2007 in Turam 2008).

4.2 Social Policies – Civic gratification

A second motivating factor deducted from the interviews for women to participate in WB is the social policies of AK Party. They feel proud of the social policies that had been carried out during AK Party government- mainly concentrating on the improved health and security system, on the measures that were taken for sustainability and growth of employment, and many other achievements on social assistance, children, women, people with disabilities and public housing.

Şahin's (2011) interpretation of the data drawn from semi-structured interviews carried out with 61 female and male politicians from AK Party and the Women's Branch, advocates that their engagement in politics resembles serving for a civil society organization. The interviewees told her that they joined the party for the public well and to contribute from their own share for solving the country's problems and that they do something for the common good. Tur and Çıtak (2009), drawing data from 21 semi-structured interviews

and 38 surveys contacted with provincial and district heads of the AK Party's WB, found that women entered politics because this participation made them become more self-confident, better mothers and neighbors, and more active citizens.

All of the female interviewees stated that based on their own observations within the WB activities, they could easily say that most of the women in all other provinces of Turkey- just like themselves- participated because they feel that they contribute to the welfare of the society. Sema Özdemir, former Vice President in WB and current advisor to the Chairman of the Central Decision Making and Administrative Committee, said; "I feel very happy when helping other people. Caring for the people is very important in all societies all over the world" and she used the Turkish phrase: "İnsanı yaşat ki devlet yaşasın" which means "Let the people live in order the state to live". This actually relates to the conservative role of women in society.

In fact, the most important legislative and structural changes carried out by AK Party not only concentrated on women, but also on the children, and the elders, especially on the fields of health and insurance. According to a survey held in January 2013 by the MetroPOLL Strategic and Social Research Center, AK Party's success is due to its credibility and because provides financial assistance and care to the people in need (Weekly Zaman 26 Jan. 2013).

In the 1990's the system suffered as a whole and during the last 30 years Turkish Ministry of Labor and Social Security had not produced efficient policies to fight against many things like unregistered workers and uncontrolled workplaces (Özdemir et al., 2004). The four economic crises that

Turkey suffered during 1990's and 2000's and International Monetary Fund's (IMF) neo-liberal policy measures had contributed to the increasing marketization. AK Party, since it came to power in 2002, has introduced constitutional, institutional and legal changes that could be named as a "social security reform" in social security system. The AK Party government initiated a neoliberal plan in order to reform the unsustainability of the existing social security system which was suffering from the losses in health and pensions. One major act reformed in 2008 was the Act no. 5510: "The Social Security and General Health Insurance Law" (SSGSS) which also regulated the General Health Insurance and it is worth to note that this reform was supported by the IMF. Some other reforms carried out include implementation of new institutional structures integrating traditional institutions under a single roof and gathering the dispersed social benefits together so as to create a more harmoniously and thus effectively performing social assistance system. With this restructuring of Social Assistance, aid is provided to elderly and/or disabled people and to those people who live in poverty. The General Directorate of Social Services and Child Protection (SHCEK) provides aid to children, women, disabled, elders and families that need care, protection and assistance. One of the main projects- "The Green Card Program", introduced by The Social Aid and Solidarity Encouragement Fund (SYDTF) in 1992, aiming to provide health services to poor people who are out of the coverage of the social security system, has reached about ten million people in 2006 and put them under the protection of the "green card". The social assistance provided by the municipalities increased remarkably. They use two forms of assistance: in-kind benefits: providing for the needy food, coal, clothing, fuel

and medicine financed mostly by the charities and secondly benefits in cash which include assistance like helping for scholarship programs and providing cash for the needy in case of emergency.

Lastly tasks of alleviating poverty are given to public institutions and nongovernmental organizations (NGO's). According to some journals these NGO's, as in the case of Lighthouse Association which was registered in 1998 but gained a corporate structure after 2002, are established in such a way that mixed the modern corporate structures successfully with Islamic orientations. These organized efforts also help poor people by providing shelters, quest houses, public kitchens, handicraft education and in cash benefits (Özdemir, 2008; Çınar in Massicard, Watts 2013). This kind of social help, that they call "charity", had been introduced in the municipalities at the time of RP as well in 1990's, but AK Party differs from them in terms of the source of the funds- which is the state budget now and the allocation of those funds- which is now on the will of government. There has been criticism from the opposition party and some academic papers that they used this as bribery and as a patron-client relations under the name of charity, especially during the election periods by increasing the solidarity between AK Party and the poor, comforting the latter from social distress and so make AK Party popular (Özdemir, 2008,; Çınar in Massicard, Watts 2013, ; Alınçık & Ustubiçi 2012) but during the 2011 elections the opposition party CHP used the same way to approach voters through the municipalities (Çınar in Massicard, Watts 2013). It is also said that AK Party's Social Security Reform concentrating on pension and insurance is far away from a "rights-based" approach and suggest that is still a family-based one (Alınçık & Ustubiçi 2012).

Serpil Bağrıaçık said that the municipality's free of charge educational programs for 181 different sections (e.g. lessons for foreign languages, computer, handicraft work e.t.c.) provide young people and women with a certificate in order to find a future job. Also the municipality's free of charge health centers provide health services to people with no social security coverage (personal Interview 11-04-13) Overall with these Social Security Reform package lower classes and underprivileged groups found something beneficial. It introduces a general health insurance policy for universal coverage for the integration of workers, self-employed and civil servants but also cancelling some privileges of the latter (meaning the public servants). It applied universal policies such as providing and covering the costs of basic health services for every citizen who is in need for (Çınar in Massicard, Watts 2013). Derya Bakbak, an AK Party MP, said that people feel safe with AK Party's political reforms because they changed the system which was not working for many years (personal interview 28-03-13).

Regarding women there were important legal and institutional developments during AK Party's ruling. Egemen Bağış said that AK Party has kept its commitments on women's rights that were promised in the party program since it came into power in 2002 and women feel more secure as they are protected by the law (personal interview 05-05-13). Serpil Bağrıaçık and Lokman Ayva said that women can solve their problems only through participation in politics. Ayva stressed that "we need women in politics" and women during the AK Party's ruling understood that (personal interview 11-04-13). Barriers that exist and the patriarchal attitudes that keep away women

from higher echelons of the party need to be considered but women's more participation might have been a step for changes towards their interests.

Even though the party failed to live up to promises of internal democracy within its organization, it has made progress on women's issues since coming to power (Tepe 2006, Çavdar 2010). It is important to be mention that these reforms were as a result of the contributions of civil society organizations and independent women's movement, NGO's, along with EU's support. Turkey committed itself to gender equality in 1985 by rendering to the Convention on Elimination of All Forms. Turkey withdrew its reservations in 1999 and in 2011, signed an agreement in the area of women's rights with the Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence entailing the right to Turkey to impose sanctions. Two changes, dating back to 2004 and 2010, in the constitution were in Article 10 of the constitution regarding gender equality, where in the constitution men and women appear to have equal rights. The implementations of these rights are the State's responsibility and positive discrimination is enclosed in establishing in the Turkish Grand National Assembly "The Committee on Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men". In 2002 any provisions that set man as a head of family were removed and in case of divorce assets acquired during marriage became to be divided equally. In 2003 "family courts" were established that deal with issues related to domestic violence and law about the protection of the family and prevention of violence was expanded in 2007 was put into effect in 2012 (ESI, 2007; Aydemir, 2013). In 2005, with the reform in penal code contained 36 articles regarding sexual freedom and sex crimes against women of offence against social morality, were changed and

classified as violations of personal rights. "The research committee of the honor "killings" was established at the Turkish Grand National Assembly under Fatma Şahin's (MP) presidency, in order to search the causes of the problem and propose solution. They abolished the former Ministry for Women and Family Affairs and replaced it by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies and cooperated with women's rights organizations and other NGO's.

Turkey in terms of women's employment rate is ranked 131st out of 134 countries where the last 3 countries are Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Yemen. Turkey's rate of women in the employment compared to the international average (47.8%) is low 24% (International Labor Office 2012). No matter of the arrangements done in 2003 of equal pay for equal work among women and men that had been brought in Labor Act, and the maternity leave for working women that increased to 16 weeks, and the obligation of employers not to discriminate on the basis of gender, the percentages in employment of females are 30.1 and 71.9 of men. This is mainly because women have to care of children and elder members of the family (Aydemir, 2013). National Campaign and circular for this problem from the Ministry for Family and Social Policies had been entitled.⁵ However according to the Women's Labour and Employer Initiative (KEIG) these efforts are not promising but the proportions of female CEOs in Turkey, which is 12 percent, places the country in the fifth place worldwide (Açıkgöz, 2013).

In terms of education, in order to decrease illiteracy they created a nationwide campaign "Hey Girls, Let's Go to School" and so to increase the schooling of girls. In the school year 2001/2012 the percentage of boys was 98.77 and for

⁵ "My mother's job is my future", "Increasing Womens' Employment and achieving equality of opportunity" in 2010

girls 98.77 think that came to balance the figures of 2001/2002 that were 96.2 and 88.4 respectively. In 2010, an AK Party-appointed education minister overrode a Constitutional Court's ban on the headscarf in public institutions giving guidelines without statutory regulation to the universities to permit covered women into the programs which possibly played a role in more females to enter higher education. In the academic year of 2010/2011 45 percent enrolled in the universities, percentage which is double compared to the last ten years (Aydemir, 2013,;Sussman 2011). However the new school reform known as "4+4+4" which put in effect in 2012 has created a debate that this would increase the underage girls getting married and child labor since the last 4 years of education are not compulsory and in rural areas children would be kept at home (Sabancı, 2012; Turkish Politics in Action, Feb. 2012).

Overall, it is possible to talk about limitation on women's participation in other areas of politics than of social. In order words the women's participating in WB enthusiasm and pride about AK Party's social policies is due to the fact that they are dealing mostly on these political matters in the WB and in government. So, it can be claimed that this come in accordance with the report for the role of women's organizations in Turkey in 2011, where resulted that women's organizations are not much political as social and women engage in activities which it is easier for the party to reach the people (Çadır, 2011).

4.3. Material benefits

“Everybody expects something”, Güldal Akşit, the Chairwoman in Women Branch said during the interview (personal interview 28-03-13). Women participating in AK Party enter for two kinds of rewards, material or intangible. Some women participate because they feel that they would be benefited for issues and needs that they have. Serpil Bağrıaçık said that they enter AK Party in order to help their children and families such as finding jobs, career advancement, or help with personal or family problems related for example to government and municipalities authorities (personal interview 11-04-13).

Some of the female interviewees said that they entered the WB to gain political experience and they expressed implicitly that they would like to utilize the experience they gained so far through a formal position. Minister Fatma Şahin said that “women are carefully planning their political career” (personal interview 06-05-13).

Şahin argues that participation in WB “transformed from simply civic engagement to a path to increasing involvement in party politics and an opportunity for representation in elected offices” (Şahin 2011pg 183). From her interviews she concluded that women working in the party have changed from the past. Through WB women have learned the dynamics of the party, increased their visibility and empowered themselves politically. Sema Ramazanoğlu said that since 2002 they worked on bringing women forward in order to increase the rate of female participation and that women want to be in politics (Sözen, 2006). Although the case suggests that with AK Party the representations of women in the parliament and public sphere increased, they

still lag behind the western countries. However, according to recent findings women's organizations in Turkey do not play significant role in advancing women's participation. They are aiming not to foster gender equality but rather at making easier for the party to reach the people and attracting new members (Cadir, 2011).

Drawing on data from 21 in-depth interviews contacted with women MP and members of the AK Party's WB, (Çıtak & Tur, 2008) it is found that women in WB distinguish themselves from other parties through their institutionalized educational and training activities. Through these educational activities and a wide range of subject seminars, there could be a way of socializing these women. According to Cansun, the WB is considered to be substantial for training women in AK party's politics (Cansun 2008 in Şahin 2011). Sema Ramazanoğlu criticizes the other parties' women branches explaining that some of them are only on papers established, and in the case of CHP that it is an "oligarchic establishment" because the chairwoman of CHP was the same for fifteen years in a row and without conducting any congress for eight years (personal interview 07-05-13). After joining the party, the leaders of WB introduce the women in party politics. They organize training programs, panels, seminars in order to educate women. These programs are important because they reflect the way in which women perceive women's role in politics. However AK Party's patriarchal and traditional ideology regarding women appears because in all its programs and seminars and publications women are called to keep a balance between family and politics (Ayata & Tütüncü 2008). Erdoğan constantly stresses the importance of women in Turkish family, motherhood and in raising the future society and the

essentiality for Turkey that every woman bears three children. All of the interviewees said me that through WB, women from all layers of the society become aware of politics and start to become familiar and aware with political terms, organizations and institutions that they had no idea of their meaning and existence in the past.

Gradually their involvement with and understanding politics, women in WB became aware of party hierarchy, networks, unwritten rules, networks, political maneuvers and started to become more demanding and press for more like representation in the parliament. Also there is criticism on women that are elected representatives who did not come from the party hierarchy and so the political work of the WB is being underestimated. They argue that selecting women candidates from the party organizations would be influential and would give a motivation for more women to participate in the party (Özcan, 2007 in Şahin 2011 pg 184). In fact, women who were among the founders of WB and got political experience through the branch like Remziye Öztoprak, Güldal Akşit, Nimet Çubukçu, Selma Kavaf and Fatma Şahin were appointed as ministers.

Apart from the empowerment of the WB, women within the branch started to seek for more power and they are more competitive among them. Cıtak and Tur argue that there is no solidarity among women in the party and sometimes they put obstacles among them (Cıtak & Tur, 2009). Ayva during the interview told me that women avoid confronting with male counterparts but they compete each other strongly (personal Interview 29-03-13). Özlem Topal said that when women enter the party they lack of cooperation, not intentionally but because they are not used to it (personal interview 06-05-13). Three of my

female interviewees said that working with women is very hard and sometimes for the sake of power some women do not act ethical. At this point it is possible to talk about a possible friction among women working in WB.

Minister Egemen Bağış said that AK Party gives the opportunity to women to socialize through politics; they become visible in the society; they are represented in politics both in the local and central government and to party's organizations, and are more active in social life. Activism in AK Party enables women to get out of home and to socialize, since AK Party as a conservative party gives the feeling of safety to the males related to these women. Women's Branch provides some platform for some women to socialize through their work in the branch, their visits to homes and neighborhoods, gatherings and travelling throughout Turkey.

Another benefit that women gain through their activism in WB is recognition in the society and family. They feel that they are a part of a wide group powerful and prestigious. During the interviews the interviewees I contacted expressed that their family and friends are supporting them and feel proud of them. They get recognition and respect among their local societies, and feel important and powerful. Sema Ramazanoğlu and other interviewees explained that women through this participation they become aware of politics and they can express their opinion on matters something that they could not do in the past. They are more prestigious among their societies and attain higher status. These women instead of staying at home all day, or meet with other females at their homes or watch television programs, now they can do something that provides them more self confidence.

4.4. Social gratifications

Schlozman, Verba, and Brandy found that: "Without taking part, there is no way to partake of the fun, gain the recognition or enjoy other social benefits" and women in WB exemplify this (Schlozman et al. 1995 p 277). Women without taking part in WB they cannot gain any of the benefits described in the previous chapter. Recognition among their societies, socialization, political experience and career advancement, helping to solve personal or family problems, all these cannot be enjoyed apart from the act itself. My personal contact with the interviewees suggests that the women attending voluntarily in WB feel AK Party as their home and one of the questions which was asking them to tell an incident that touched them most during the years they worked for the party was answered as "the decision of the closure of the party in 2008".⁶ Selva Çam, Sema Kırıcı and Hümeysra Keskin told me that they were crying as if it were a loss of a member of their family. Hümeysra Keskin said: "When we come to the party we do not feel that we go somewhere else than our home". "Even when I resigned from my former position I was feeling that I was leaving my baby unattended, but when Selva Çam took the position I was relieved that she will take care of it". Working in AK Party no matter of the competition among them they feel that they work with people that they enjoy sharing the same or different opinions, and the division of labor to accomplish the tasks they are assigned to. Selva Çam wearing headscarf said: "Working in AK Party gives me the opportunity to show other people, especially abroad,

⁶ On March 14 2008, the chief prosecutor of the Court of Appeals asked the Constitutional Court to close the ruling AK Party on the grounds that it had become a "center of anti-secular activities," and also demanded a five-year political ban for 71 current and former members of the AK Party, including prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and president Abdullah Gül. (SETA.ORG)

that because I wear headscarf I am not an alien. If I was not in the party I would not be able to do that”.

In the beginning of AK Party's ruling the WB had divided Turkey into sections and twelve women were responsible for different cities in the country. Each woman was responsible for cities in regions other than their home city and some of them were going to places that they were not familiar with. One of the female interviewee said: “We worked very hard going in every home even in the most isolate areas of our country to meet women – especially in eastern Anatolia that a woman's life is devoted to be a wife and a mother- aiming at raising the level of consciousness, education and training of them in income-generating activities so as to help them attain a higher status in society. Seeing results out of this hard work is the most exciting and satisfactory”. Sema Ramazanoğlu said that in the early stages of the party's establishment, when they were visiting cities and villages across Turkey with Erdoğan on a bus, women seeing other women on it started questioning their non-participation in an organization as such (personal interview 07-05-13).

Overall, differently motivated women, from different backgrounds were accepted as they were, that is, women from all social segments of Turkey found a space for themselves in WB. WB would act as a catalyst, channeling women's different interests into the political arena.

4.5. Collective outcomes

Schlozman argues that “All else individuals are more likely to participate... if they know and care about politics and if they think that their participation

would make a difference” (Schlozman 2003, p. 439). According to Sözen, women’s low representation in Turkish politics does not mean that women are not interested in Turkish politics but have cultural obstacles (Sözen, 2006). Egemen Bağış said that women in Turkey are highly interested in politics and they are ready and volunteer for making active politics. Their motivation is intrinsic to them and AK Party provides a platform for them to perform their interests (personal interview 05-05-13). Sema Ramazanoğlu said that Turkish women from all social layers care about politics, but they lack the knowledge, however, after entering the party and getting some education they become more familiar with politics and its procedures (personal Interview 07-05-13). Even though women’s activism in AK Party’s WB suggests their desire to contribute in the enactment and implementation for public policies concerning though mostly social policies, and to elect AK Party and its candidates, after my research on academic journals and articles and my personal contacts, it is doubtful as of the first. By and large, they work very hard especially before and during elections in order to attract new members and so to increase the voter potential for elections (Cadir, 2011). It is not clear if their activism has a motivation in order to participate in the decision making mechanism or to come up with possible resolutions in order to achieve desired public policies or just to follow the party’s policies. Sirman, has criticized women MP’s do not represent women’s interests, but rather represent Erdoğan’s orientation (Sirman, 2007 in Turam, 2008). During the interviews I contacted, the female interviewees when referring to the developments and changes that took place with AK Party in government, they were using the words “he” (referring to Erdoğan) and “with AK Party” without using “we” or “women’s branch”. They

stressed that they communicate government policies to people and they visit all districts of Turkey in order to get feedback from the civilians and they give the report to the Central Decision Making and Administrative Committee to elaborate this and proceed to solutions. Despite WB's power, within the party their role is still limited and AK Party has failed to pay its promises of internal democracy within its organization (Tepe, 2006). According to Sözen, in the last fifty years of Turkish politics, the women's participation in politics is maintained by a cultural role in Turkish society. Their participation has a role of resemblance rather than of a role of differentiation and so, women experience the success of men as their own success. She argues also that women instead of representing themselves directly, they believe that they could be represented by the males.

4.6. Expectations of Change for the Better

AK Party's victory as analyzed in chapter 2 has been characterized as a political earthquake and it had several causes (Zurcher, 2004). Turkish society and voters needed a change. They rejected the parties in the government coalition holding them responsible for the collapse of the economic system. The votes were floating and traditional party loyalties had almost vanished. The voters were in need for a hope and would follow anyone that could offer that. AK Party with its leader Tayyip Erdoğan had a profile to serve this purpose. His working class background, his mayoralty of Istanbul had an appeal to the masses. Turkish people voted for him because he was outside the system believing that he could put an end to poverty and

corruption and not because they wanted a more Islamic state (Zurcher, 2004,; Dagi, 2008). The overwhelming majority of Turkish citizens had demands for freedom and transformation. According to Yavuz, AK Party gave opportunity spaces in politics and public space. Turkish society was seeking for a new social contract based on social justice, human rights, and democracy under the Turkish values and people found a hope for opportunity spaces and social mobility (Yavuz, 2003). To a certain extent AK Party filled the social vacuum that existed and gained men's and women's trust during the years. From the interviews I contacted the interviewees explicitly told me that Turkey needed a change and progress and this happened under the AK Party's ruling. Sema Ramazanoğlu explained that at that period of time Turkish country and its society suffered problems accumulated from the past years and people were anxious. "Every day I questioned myself: what can I do for the future of my children and my country? I must do something" (personal interview 07-05-13). Their involvement with AK Party's WB allowed them to have access to a political voice. Güldal Akşit said "Women wanted a change. It is not a coincidence that among the voters of AK Party 55 percent consists of women" (personal interview 28-03-13). Derya Bakbak said that "AK Party appreciates and cares about people, especially women and children. AK Party's policies solved all the problems which could not be solved for many years and had become more complicated. People do not feel anxiety for the future as they did in the past". (personal interview 28-03-13). The AK Party's main strength is its reputation gained through the years, for efficient government that changed the country and delivery on its promises in all parts of society (Posch, 2007). Another aspect that my findings suggest but has to be further

examined is that women participated in the WB in order to contribute in the reverse of the power relations but actually we do not know if it actually happened. Some female interviewees implied this, using words as “unjust” treatment and the “exclusion” of Islamists when the previous secular governments were in power from economy, lifestyle and social sphere. And as Sözen argues, at the heart of the women participated in RP women movement-some of whom later continued to work for AK Party- “is the strong desire to be the new owners (lords) of the city” (Sözen, 2006, p. 268)

Chapter 5. Findings, Implications, And Future Study

Bucking the long tradition of the low female participation in politics, women’s activism in Turkey and in AK Party’s Woman’s Branches suggests that women can participate more in politics. However, my findings do not suggest that their participation is in order to press or bring new policies rather than following the party’s policies. In other words behind this participation in WB, the presence of women in decision making mechanisms is low. At the same time it should be considered that an important step towards democratization has been made. My results suggest that these women were motivated from traditional definitions of political interest but also from different motivational factors and are not mutually exclusives.

Material benefits, social gratifications, civic gratifications and collective outcomes motivated women for their activism in AK Party WB. They work

hard especially before and during the elections in order the party and its candidates to be elected; they seek power but they do not compete with the male counterparts because of cultural factors; they feel that they pay their duty and they contribute to the welfare of their country by helping other people; they socialize through politics; they become visible in the society gaining a higher status and the feeling that they are important; they are represented in politics both in the local and central government and in party's organizations..

In my research I also found out different motivational factors that led them to be involved with the AK Party's WB. The main reason for the activism in WB is the leader of AK Party, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who reflected the sociology of Turkey, and gave them hope for a different country. They found hope in him and in the party in a difficult time of Turkey. Also there was a need of change in 2000's: the majority of Turkish society and women had demands for freedom and transformation, and found a hope for opportunity spaces and social mobility. During the years, AK Party gained more women in WB because they believe it is credible and successful to be there and it gives financial assistance to the needy.

The above findings suggest that the understanding of what motivates women's political activism can be expanded beyond goals and psychological factors concentrating on traditional politics. What motivated Turkish women for participating in politics through Woman Branches was based in traditional politics but they cited two more different factors: they related their involvement with the leader of the party and for making a better change.

Understanding the different factors of motivation among women can contribute to make political organizations that seek for new ways to motivate citizens for more participation. Recognizing that women can have different political interests may help the political organizations to reach more of them, mobilize them in politics and so increase the female participation in politics. Given that women's representation in Turkish politics is low not because women are not interested in politics but because of cultural factors existing in Turkish society, (Binnaz, T. & Kalaycioglu, E. 2004; Gaspard, F. 2005; Sozen, 2006; Cansun 2012) this study may also possibly contribute to recognize that the feminization of Turkish politics and decision-making mechanisms is not promoted for reasons more than a political party's ideology.

This study also may suggest three fruitful directions. Since the existing literature and the data of this research are limited it cannot be extricated whether these women participated to AK Party's WB because with their participation they could press for or bring new policies rather than following the party's policies. It should also be further examined if women's activism in the WB was in order to shift the power from the secularists to the Islamists. These could be examined in a broad study with a random sample method in order to eliminate the present biases in this study.

Lastly, is important to note that my research was completed on 16th of May 2013. On 28th of May a protest took place against environmental destruction with the urban development plan for Istanbul's Taksim Gezi Park that government undertook the decision without consulting or listening to the

residents of the neighborhood, urban planners or other concerned constituencies.

According to this plan the replacement of Taksim Gezi Park would take place, with a shopping mall as well as reconstruction of the historic Taksim Military Barracks -which was demolished in 1940- over the Taksim Square.

Very soon it spiraled into full-on anti-government demonstrations. The mobilization started in Turkey's main metropolis, Istanbul and solidarity marches and movements then spread through the entire country. It burst only after the police used excessive force and pepper gas and water cannons against people who were sitting in the park to prevent the uprooting of trees (CNN, Jun. 2013; BBC, Jun. 2013; The Guardian, Jun. 2013).

Protesters called for the resignation of Erdogan, who they claimed had become more and more authoritarian. The accumulation of Prime Minister's actions led citizens to protest a wide range of concerns, at the core of which were issues of freedom of the press, freedom of expression, and the government's encroachment on Turkey's secularism (CPJ, 2012; Ozel, S. 201; Hurriyet Daily News, Aug. 2013; BBC News, Jul. 2013; Oztan, R.H. Jul., Jun. 2013).

Prime minister's response to these events was a number of speeches on a defiant tone. He dismissed the protesters as a few "capulcu" which means looter, he said that "the Taksim redevelopment project would go ahead", he referred to the protesters occupying the square as "marginal groups" he addressed the opposition "If you gather a hundred thousand people, I will gather a million", he characterized social media to be the worst menace to

society, and he declared that behind the Gezi events lays a conspiracy theory from abroad like the CIA, Europeans jealous of their economic success, unspecified foreign forces in cahoots with terrorists, Twitter, the "interest rate lobby", and the international Jewish conspiracy (Gibbons, F. 2013; Letsch, C. 2013; Zalewski, P. 2013).

Turkey according to articles the government acted with arrogance and had come to a point that does not bear any opposition to its policies. They suggest that a crisis that could have been managed through a democratic process had escalated to polarization and violence (Ozel, S. (2013); Gibbons, F. (2013); Eldem, E. (2013).

The above event is not mentioned throughout my research because it occurred after I completed my research and reach to my conclusions. It is worth noting that possible future implications of the above mentioned event on the conclusion of this study could be additional research topic for further future research on this topic for two main reasons: one as mentioned throughout the research AK Party WB because of its huge size and its broad coverage of all segments of Turkish society bares many individuals having different opinions on social matters. Second, is that closer look on the nature of the events and the demonstrators especially those who could be described as peaceful demonstrators come from different socioeconomic and educational backgrounds of the society. So, these two reasons require a precautious approach which need further to be research on future studies for the fact that two phenomena affecting the same society might have an intersection of the groups.

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Appendix A: Interviews

Table 1: List of Interviews

Names	Title and Position	Date of Interview	Place of Interview
Egemen Bagis	Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator	05-05-13	Istanbul
Fatma Sahin	Minister of Family and Social Policies Former Chairwoman of Women Branches 2007-2011	06-05-13	Istanbul
Derya Bakbak	AKP Deputy for Gaziantep Member of the Parliament Member of the Public Works, Reconstruction, Transportation and Tourism Committee	28-03-13	TBMM Bakanliklar Ankara
Lokman Ayva	Chairman of Beyazay Member of the Central Decision Making and Administrative Committee of AKP Former MP One of the Founders of AKP	29-03-13	Istanbul
Sema Ramazanoglu	Member of Central Decision Making and Administrative Committee of AKP One of the female Founders of AKP	07-05-13	
Serpil Bagriacik	Chairperson EU & Foreign Relations Committee Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality	11-04-13	Istanbul

Table 2: List of Interviews

<u>AK Party's Woman's Branches Chairpersons</u>			
Names	Title and Position	Date of Interview	Place of Interview
Guldal Aksit	Chairwoman of Women;s Branches since 2011 Former Minister of State and Tourism Former Minister of Women and Family	28-03-13	AK Party's Headquarters Ankara
Sema Kirci	Advisor to the Chairman Member of the Central Decision Making and Administrative Committee, Former Vice President of WB	28-03-13	AK Party's Headquarters Ankara
Humeyra Keskin	Member of the Istanbul Municipality Council Member of the Central Decision Making and Administrative Committee of WB Former Chairwoman of Foreign Affairs WB	26-03-13	Istanbul
Selva Cam	Chairwoman of Foreign Affairs Former Chairwoman of Economical Affairs	28-03-13	AK Party's Headquarters Ankara

Ozlem Topal	Chairwoman of Woman Branches in Istanbul	06-05-13	Istanbul
Pinar Ersoy	Chairwoman of Foreign Affairs in Istanbul	06-05-13	Istanbul

Appendix B:

Interview Questions

1. Could you tell me about yourself?

- a. Where and when were you born?
- b. What were the occupations of your parents?
- c. Which schools did you attend?
- d. Are you married?
- e. What is your husband's profession?
- f. When and how did you develop your interest in the AKP?
- d. Are you working?

2. How is a regular work day for you?

- a. Can you describe what you do in the party?

3. What do you get in return for your efforts in the party?

4. When and how did you become involved with the AKP?

- a. Did some people, the party's ideology, or institutions affect your decision to work for the party?
- b. Did a friend, a certain group of people, or other factors evoke your interest in the AKP?
- c. Why did you begin working for the party?

5. Do you have any political training?

- a. How were you educated in the party?

6. How do your family, relatives and friends feel about you working for the AK party? Do they treat you differently after you started working for the party?

7. During the years you have been here can you tell me one incidence that touched you?

8. How do you feel about the AK party's policies in general?

9. If you where the leader of the AK party, what would be the first policy that you would follow?

- Would you like to utilize your experience from a more formal position?

10. Which national leader do you feel closest to?

11. Does the branch you work for receive feedback on it's activities from the upper ranks of the party hierarchy?

- How autonomous from or dependent on the Central Party Organs is Women's branch?
- Which decisions or what issues do the central organs shape?
- How far do the political cleavages within the AKP get reflected in the Women's Branch?
- Who decides on the agenda or the division of labor within the Women's Branch?