How Turkish Parties Organize: Political Socialization of Young Members in the JDP and the RPP*

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Research on political parties, which constitute the crucial institutions in modern democratic political life, are mostly focused on historical roots of the parties; on their ideologies; on their election performance and on their social bases. Research on party organization which examine formal and informal relations inside the party in daily life are limited. These limited researches mainly concentrate on party administration in the party headquarter, party representatives in the Parliament, the power relations between party headquarter and local party organizations, and power struggle among party fractions (see Katz and Mair, 2002).

As Öncü (1976) indicated organizations as the nucleus of modern societies are mostly examined as part of the balance of power in the changing socio-political structure of a given country. Organizations are set up to achieve specific aims. Political parties, as modern organizations, are structured in terms of formal rules, a hierarchy of offices and regularized duties which “officials” are called upon to perform (Giddens, 1992: 136). As Weber pointed out modern organizations tend to be bureaucratic in nature. Worsley argues that there is always informal/“unseen” web of relations behind this formal bureaucratic organizations (1970: 222). In other words there is another life behind this formal structure. Although the legal structure of the country imposes similar organizational structure on all political parties, each political party has its own “inner life” different from its legal aim and organizational structure. The “inner life” of the party contains different forms of conflicts, reconciliations and cooptation processes. As Katz puts it, “each party is also an organization with its own internal life and politics” (2002: 87).

People do not randomly become a party member; they choose to participate political parties. In the selection of the political party, embedded networks might be an important channel to reach

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the party. Once a party member, new networks which are built in the party, new status which are earned in the party, latent status such as age, gender, social background, and power structure in the party become important in the reproduction of the party organization.

In Turkey like many other countries, Law of Political Parties cause a formal uniformity among political parties. It is a well-known fact that there is a very complicated web of interactions behind the official objectives and organizational structures of political parties. These informal networks of relations contain different forms of conflict, consensus and cooptation.

People do not become a member of any organization like political parties by chance. They prefer to be a member of this party not that party. Personal networks may lead a person to have an access or to attain a membership of a particular organization or party. But once they become a member of the party, construction of different networks, earning new status in the party and “hidden status” like gender, age, class which play important role to earn these new statuses, existing fractions and power struggle among these fractions are the vital dynamics of the political life of a person.

People do not join the party as blanks but they are stamped by the organization after going through the socialization process. In this process, they do not only internalize the written and unwritten rules, norms and values of the party but they also discover that “party executives who control resources and information necessary to their tasks are often unconnected to them by the formal structure of the party mandate” (Knoke, 1990: 92).

Every member of the political party does not feel herself or himself responsible for the success of the party. They naturally are not active members but some may dedicate her/his time and energy for the objectives of the party and still some may have ambitions for his/her own career in the party. Although political parties try to create a kind of ideological uniformity via party programs, as an organization they do not represent one unified community. As Duverger argues the political party contains many groupings and it represents a federation of communities (Duverger, 1970: 52).

**Method**

In this paper we will present some preliminary results of our research which concentrates on the youth and party organizations of four different parties (JDP, RPP, NAP, PDP) represented in the Turkish parliament. Here we will discuss the data about Justice and Development Party (JDP) and Republican People’s Party (RPP) which represent two main political currents in Turkish political life.
The number of party members provides an important data to evaluate the level of organization but when we examined the ratio of provincial members to total members, we were faced with crucial limitations. Some of these limitations emanate from party status (e.g. in NAP, when the number of party members reach 400, that district will have to gather the district congress to elect the delegates for provincial and general congress. As the party leadership aims to control the party by appointing his own delegates, the official number of members is kept under 400 in most of the districts). This policy naturally misleads researchers to assess the level of organization. Other limitations originate from the practice of party closure in Turkish politics (e.g. PDP keeps the number of official members at minimum in the legal framework since several political parties were closed down in this political stand in the past) and special historical backgrounds of some provinces may cause distortion like Tunceli where mainly Kurds and Alawites live in (according to this data, RPP has the highest membership ratio in Tunceli). That is why we selected Istanbul as a sample in order to be able to compare these four parties in a common axis while keeping their differences.

Istanbul with its 14 million population as the biggest city in Turkey is selected as sample because these four parties are well organized here; all of them have significant number of members and followers. They also have a potential to win new members in Istanbul.

In the selection of districts for fieldwork we assumed that well organized parties have a better capacity to mobilize the electorate and we determined the districts in which the parties had the highest votes in the 2011 general elections. In this framework JDP had the highest vote (% 68.9) in Sultanbeyli district and RPP had the highest (% 64.2) in Beşiktaş.

In these districts we did depth, semi-structured interviews with parties’ youth and rank-and file. Since we wanted to examine the organization and its socialization process, we carried out the research not only at the district level (new youth members, district youth executives, and party chairman) but also at the provincial level (provincial youth executives, party executive in charge of organization and parties’ provincial chairmen) and at the party headquarter (vice-president who is responsible for party organization, head of youth branch and executives). In other words we carried out research at three different levels in order to be able to see different processes taking place within a party.

The main purpose of this paper, which concentrates on the youth organizations of the Justice and Development Party (JDP) and the Republican People’s Party (RPP) of Turkey, is to understand the socialization process and the role of the party organization in this process. In other words, the preliminary results of our research will be discussed here.
We argue that youth branches function as socializing agents for partisanship and organizational learning process. “Not only do they introduce young members to the ideology of the party, they also function as a kind of learning school where the members gradually grow acquainted with political and party life” (Hooghe, Stolle and Stouthuysen, 2004: 196).

Youth organization of a party is a place where young members adopt the written and unwritten rules, norms and values of the party. They enter into or form new networks to become an essential member of the party. In this context, the paper analyzes the political socialization of young JDP and RPP members; the formal and informal processes that are crucial in the formation of the party identity; and how the JDP and the RPP impose their common values, norms and goals to their new members.

Formal structure of a party has limited value for understanding what really goes on inside the organization. In the course of their daily routines, party members discover that party executives who control resources and information necessary to their tasks are often unconnected to them by the formal structure of the party mandate. Vital data, critical materials and definitive authority may be located in other positions or networks. The only way to obtain these essential resources and information is for young members to construct direct or indirect social relations with their possessors. Thus, alongside the formal organization of a party grows up a more complicated informal system (Knoke, 1990: 92).

Justice and Development Party

The Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) was established in 2001 basing on Milli Görüş (National View) tradition which came into existence in Turkish politics with the establishment of National Order Party in 1970. Since 1970 several political parties which emanated from this tradition were founded and many of them were closed down by the Constitutional Court. Islam has been the main pillar of Milli Görüş although several arguments such as industrialization, establishment of greater Turkey, etc. in party programs have been changed during the course of time. Aiming to become a new center-right, mass party in Turkey, the JDP openly declared its split from Milli Görüş and it formulated its ideology under the title of “conservative democrat” which is ambiguous enough to call out to followers who consider Islam as a core value in their life and the ones who are more secular on this sense. The JDP has
come to power in 2002 and stayed in power until today. The party has followed authoritarian populist policies in which it fully committed neo-liberal economic policies.¹

When we analyzed the formal organizational structure of political parties in Turkey, we found out that the Law on Political Parties impose a certain structure for all parties. For this reason, almost all Turkish political parties have very similar organizational structures. Names of the organs may change, but their functions are the same. Yet parties’ bylaws and regulations allow them to differentiate at the youth and women’s organizations level (For the typical organizational scheme of a Turkish political party see Appendix A).

According to the bylaw of JDP, members of the party under the age of 30 become a member of the youth branch when they are registered in the special book for youth branch which is a subsidiary organ of the JDP (Article 83.2). The JDP officially does not apply quota for gender and youth but it is said that in practice it applies a gender quota of 30% and a youth quota of 30% in determining MP candidacies and in the election of candidacies for provincial and city council members. Erdoğan has designed and insisted on this policy although some local administrative units haven’t been pleased about it.

The JDP bylaw allows the chairmen of the youth branches to attend the administrative and executive committee meetings of the party at every level of the organization (district, provincial and headquarters). They can express their opinions, participate discussions but cannot vote (Articles 86). Youth branches are financially dependent on the district or provincial party organization’s budget but it is obvious that youth branches do not have serious problem with finance. The party headquarters may also allocate a budget for the nation-wide projects of the youth.

**Republican People’s Party**

Republican People’s Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, RPP) is the oldest political party in Turkey. It has founded the republic and ruled the country for 23 years as a single party. After the Second World War, Turkey has experienced the transition from single to multi-party system and the RPP took over the role of the opposition in the 1950s. In the 1960s the party positioned itself to the “left-of-centre” with an emphasis on a Turkish style social democracy. Today the party claims to adhere to the universal tenets of social democracy and is a member of the Socialist International. However, the RPP has never been able to become a social democratic

¹ For a detailed analysis on the historical and ideological evolution of Milli Görüş see Atakan, 2005; Cizre, 2008; Yavuz, 2009.
party in the European sense of the term. In its historical baggage, it has always carried the characteristics of being the founder of the republic and shaper of its founding ideology of Kemalism. Its identification with the state, and the continued influence of party elites whose social origins were still bureaucratic and middle-class, have narrowed the space of action for the RPP to act as a true left-wing party.²

The formal organizational scheme of the RPP’s youth branches that regulate the functioning of party youth and its relationship with the party organization depends on the RPP bylaws and the regulation on youth branches. According to the RPP bylaw, all members of the party aged under 30 (30 included) are accepted as the members of the youth branch which is defined as a subsidiary organ of the RPP. The party has a gender quota of 33% and a youth quota of 10%. A minimum 10 percent of all deputy candidates, party assembly members, convention delegates and officials in the provincial and district administrations must be under the age of 30, according to quotas laid out in the party’s bylaw (CHP, 2012a; CHP, 2012b).

The RPP bylaw allows the chairmen of the youth branches to attend the administrative and executive committee meetings of the party at every level of the organization (district, provincial and headquarter). They can share their opinions, but they cannot vote (Articles 29, 33 and 37). Both youth and women’s branches are financially dependent on the district or provincial party organization’s budget. Each district organization has to allocate 10 percent of its budget to the youth and women’s branches. Party headquarters also allocates a budget that is supposed to be sufficient for the activities of the youth branches.

On the other hand, party statutes or bylaws are not always reliable sources of information about internal party procedures, as parties may not obey their own rules (Poguntke, 2002: 53). This means that daily functioning of a party does not fit to the formal rules written in the bylaws. For example, in Beşiktaş district both central party officials and youth members admit that the 10 percent of the budget to the youth rule is never applied. It is the chairman of the district who decides to the amount and timing of the money that will be allocated to the use of the youth. As the control of the financial resources has an indispensable role on the intra-party power struggles, subjective funding of the youth activities instead of written rules, is a part of the power games within the party. Another example to the difference between the rules and the informal functioning of the party is seen at the issue of youth branches congress within the RPP.

² For a detailed analysis on the historical and ideological evolution of the RPP see Bilâ, 1999; Güneş-Ayata, 1990; and Kômürçü, 2010.
Even though the youth branches regulation declares that the congress has to gather in every two years, not a single youth branches congress gathered for 8 years between 2004 and 2012.

On the other hand, the RPP youth enjoys a relative autonomy within the formal organization of the party: the youth organization is represented by its own leader in the provincial or district party organs instead of a vice chairman who is responsible from the youth. Yet in practice, the autonomy of the youth organization is not regarded as something desirable by the senior officials of the RPP. They emphasize that the autonomy given to the youth and women’s branches causes a view of three separate parties within the RPP. They claim that the youth activities have to be in line with the general direction of the party. One official from the central executive committee of Istanbul argues that the autonomy given to the youth by the bylaw may look democratic, but in fact the youth organization is not ready to be autonomous yet.

On the other hand, young members of the RPP Beşiktaş district defend the importance of their autonomy within the party. Beşiktaş district youth branches chairman Selim Kayan says:

“We always argue that youth organization has to be autonomous. Of course our activities will be in line with the party programme and bylaws. But still we need a financial autonomy. Our bylaw assures us such autonomy. In every district, 10 percent of the budget has to go to the youth. But in some districts this doesn’t work. Our priority is financial autonomy. We can’t assure administrative autonomy without the financial one.”

Nevertheless former youth chairman and current deputy chairman of Beşiktaş district RPP organization tells about his experience on the autonomy of youth as follows:

“They don’t know that you have to be a little bit fickle if you are the youth leader. For example, the district chairman wants something from you, but the youth organization opposes. You have to do that, because you don’t have autonomy. Either you do it by yourself or you ask help from those who are close to you.”

Roads to membership

The literature on political parties distinguish three different incentives that condition the political participation of citizens to the parties. These are material, purposive and solidary incentives (Clark and Wilson, 1961). Bruter and Harrison formulate these incentives that motivate young members to join a political party under three categories: the moral-minded members; the social-minded members and the professional-minded members. Moral-minded or ideologically motivated members join a certain party because they identify themselves with the “cause” of the party. Social-minded members who are motivated by incentives of solidarity join a certain party because they share political or social goals of the other participants. They have
the chance to meet like-minded people, make new friends and exchange political opinions. The professional-minded members who are motivated by material incentives join a party because they are in search of status and prestige and they want to become professional politicians (Bruter and Harrison, 2009a: 20-24; Panebianco, 1988: 10-11). They have “a desire to achieve positions and honours, become a politician, and derive money or material benefits from party membership” (Bruter and Harrison, 2009b: 1270).

In this regard, many members of the JDP youth organization seem to be professional-minded members who desire a political career and seek for material opportunities whereas the young members of the RPP present themselves as ideologically motivated, moral-minded members. RPP members refer to an ideological path when they tell us about their story of joining the party. On the contrary, the JDP members never refer to any ideological elements. This is not to say that all RPP members are ideologically motivated and all JDP members are professionally motivated. Of course, all these paths can either run in parallel or be merged.

The JDP promises political future for its young members. Tayyip Erdoğan has started his political career in the youth branch of the National Salvation Party in 1976 and has climbed the ladders form here to the head of the party in İstanbul province in 1985, and then the leadership of the JDP. He has also become the mayor of Istanbul in 1994, MP and prime minister in 2003, and finally the president. He is a role model for many young members. The discourse of the party on youth also emphasizes that mobility channels are wide open for them in party politics. Party administrators in different levels always state that “you (the young members of the party) will be on these seats in the future”. Many members, from ordinary members to the administrators, of the youth branch easily think of themselves in different positions such as member of city council or MP in the future. Actually the JDP has encouraged its young members to become an MP or a member of provincial or city councils. Head of the education branch of youth organization said that “Whether JDP is power or not, there is at least one young member of the JDP as a member of a local council in every province of İstanbul….Mehmet Muş, who was the head of the organizational branch in youth organization, was elected as an MP from İstanbul”

Family ties and friendship play important role for having first contact with the JDP; “My cousin is the member of the party. Through him I came to the party and then became a member too. My heart has always been with the JDP but I did not participate its party activities before,” “We had a relative who worked for the JDP. Through him I became a member. He introduced me to the party. My family has always voted for the JDP” Besides these networks, some young
members used to be affiliated with different political parties or Islamic organizations in the past but they have shifted to the JDP in their personal search for political stand. These people are an important source of new followers. National Action Party membership and the Fetullah Gülen movement have to be mentioned in this sense at least in our sample. Almost every young members insists that many other people join the party because of personal benefits but they themselves are there to serve the people. What they mean by this varies from finding a job to obtaining some economic profit. It is a well-known fact that party members may get personal or collective profit by using several solidarity networks inside the party. These benefits might be quite small or substantial particularly if the party happens to be in power. In this case the JDP is not an exception. As Panebianco (1988) mentioned regular members and activists in the party gain interest in different forms and quality. When the youth define politics as serving the people on the one hand they strip the ideological content of the party, on the other hand they justify their positions and aims in the party.

The new members of the youth branch in Sultanbeyli said that they did not have a special educational program in the party but followed the discussions and learned about party policies. Some academics or party MPs and administrators are invited to give talks about the party ideology and current issues in Turkish politics for regular members. In these meeting they not only learn the party ideology but also learn how to discuss and formulate their arguments on many issues. Actually the party has different professional educational, training programs for the members who are in administrative position. In these educational programs they invite several academics to give talks on different issues such as political theory, history of the Ottoman Empire, the history of the JDP and its ideology, personal development.

In the year 2008, situated in Ankara and İstanbul, JDP has founded the Political Academy aiming to educate its cadres and to establish new ties with new potential members from all socio-political groups. Later the party has implemented the same educational programs in 76 cities and 35 provinces in different parts of Turkey. The Academy provides educational help to the youth branch upon their request. It must be emphasized that the JDP is far ahead of RPP in respect to intra-party education and indoctrination. The JDP give weight not only to the ideological education of its members but also to personal development programs which is considered as an important asset for party cadres.
The JDP has a highly centralized, hierarchical structure which is partly created by the Law of Political Parties and partly by the party itself. The party has created many posts in party’s organizational structure which reinforce hierarchy. Hierarchy is also an important tool to control the members. Young members of the JDP are happy to have any positions or title in the party organization but the administrators of the party use the very same positions to control the members by using them as an incentive or a punishment.

These complex web of hierarchical posts also tell us how difficult it is to move up in the party. It is very important for the young members to understand the main mechanisms and to operate in this complex organization.

In contrast to the JDP, RPP members never mention material incentives as their motivation to join the party. A young RPP member’s words on his political career is a good example of ideological motivation within the party:

“When I came to the party, I never thought that I would work hard and get a good position for myself. I don’t think that there is such idea in the youth organization. We want to see our party in power. (…) When we come here we leave our personal interests aside. We are here not because of our own interests, but for the interests of our country and people.” (New RPP member, 08.05.2013)

These moral-minded young RPP members also find intra-party discussions more interesting compared to the JDP youth and believe that these power games teach them politics.

For many RPP members, family is the source of their relationship with the party. When young RPP members were asked about how they joined the party, almost all of them mentioned that someone from their family was involved in politics within one of the parties of the RPP tradition. They also stated that it was a family tradition to be a member or supporter of the RPP. This family tradition not only motivate young people to join the party, but also helps them to internalize the principles, values, norms and procedures of the party.

It is also interesting to look at the times of their joining and the incidents that triggered their decision to join the party. The political conjuncture, intra-party developments and personal changes in life play crucial role in their decision to join a political party.

For the young RPP members, it is the authoritarian rule of the JDP government and the leadership change that took place in May 2010 within the RPP are two main factors that triggered them to join the party. By referring to the 12 years long rule of the JDP, they state that “under such circumstances of the country, it is a duty to join the RPP.” On the other hand, we
have observed that a large number of young RPP members of Beşiktaş district have participated in more radical, leftist or socialist organizations but then decided to join the RPP. They explain that the election of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu as the new RPP leader has given a new hope and energy to the youth.

After joining the party and becoming a member, it is social aspect of the organization that knit together young members. They enter a new circle of friends in which the more experienced teaches the norms, the values and the patterns of the organization to the new ones. Those who come to the party with an ideological cause quickly form an organizational commitment within that social environment.

A young RPP member from Beşiktas district describes his experience as follows:

“When I first came to the party, they welcomed me with open arms. There were good events. If you work for the party you feel committed after a while. In addition to that, the circle of friends, which I was looking for, made me continue doing politics.”

**Conclusion**

Within the party, the expected roles of young members are specified and seniors enforce them to conform the norms of the party. These rules and norms are not always written, but there are also informal boundaries for the youth. Some processes, obligations or actualities take on a rule-like status within the party (Knoke, 1990: 90).

After joining the party, the process of becoming a ‘real’ member takes months or maybe years. It is something that takes time and commitment. As Poguntke points out “only a minority of those who join a political party get actively involved in its internal life” (2002: 51). Total commitment is not immediately achieved. Every party or organization needs a rapid but orderly integration. For this reason, commitment proceeds gradually and is not instantly attained with the act of joining.

First they involve in the party’s activities such as distributing flyers, putting posters on walls, attending demonstrations and even fighting others. Yet, on their path to become politicians, the most important activity for young members is to talk about politics, to debate and to convince others. By this way, they formulate their opinions, develop arguments and acquire a new vocabulary that is compatible with the ideology of the movement.

The process of becoming a real member of the party has three stages:
At the first stage, new members expend time and effort for the party; adopt the necessary beliefs and values; and internalize the ideology. At this stage, they enjoy participating political activities and begin to be integrated in the group (Bargel, 2011). Experienced members of the group teach the newcomers “the rules of the game”. This is a process in which they acquire –in Bourdieu’s terms– “sens pratique”. This means that in order to be able to play a game, it is not enough to know the rules of the game, you should also have a practical reason (Bourdieu, 1998).

A young RPP member tells about this process as follows:

“In the youth branch, you learn to get along with others. You learn to act together and to work as a team. When you start coming to the party, you start feeling like you are a representative of the party. (…) You have some responsibilities and you have to work under certain rules. You learn it by yourself. Nobody teaches you. It is a natural process.”

At the second stage, they start feeling as a part of the whole. They sacrifice their individual identity and autonomy. Because the party makes things simple for them and provides a framework for behavior. It is through this process that the member is armed with the verbal weaponry for becoming a real member.

And at the final stage, the party becomes a way of life by itself. This also means that the member excludes other environments and activities he/she was involved in earlier. In a sense he/she professionalize in politics (Bargel, 2011: 79-102).

Bourdieu claims that this process of becoming a politician depends on a special training. This training program includes “the entire apprenticeship necessary to acquire the corpus of specific kinds of knowledge (theories, problematics, concepts, historical traditions, economic data, etc.) produced and accumulated by the political work of the professionals of the present or the past, or to acquire the more general skills such as the mastery of a certain kind of language and of a certain political rhetoric – that of the popular orator (…) it is also and above all that sort of initiation, with its ordeals and rites of passage, which tends to inculcate the political mastery of the immanent logic of the political field and to impose a de facto submission to the values, hierarchies and censorship mechanisms in this field” (1991: 176).

At the process of becoming a real member, the JDP is able to produce a kind of uniformed youth member profile because it has an ideology and has several social mechanisms through which it forces the young member to internalize not only the ideology but also the values and
behavioral codes of the party. While the JDP crafts professional-minded youth members, it simultaneously puts goals, which leads to higher positions in the party and politics, for them. In this process, the promise of climbing the ladder in politics is the vital incentive of the JDP for its young members.

In contrast to JDP, the RPP does not have a clear ideology. It is not clear whether it is a social democratic or a nationalist (ulusalcı) or a Kemalist party. Although these different ideologies are represented in different proportions in the party, none of them are dominant. In this context, the party is not able to present a coherent ideology, which can unify the members through socialization mechanisms, to new comers. This situation coupled with the lack of proper socialization mechanisms cause a kind of disorganization in the youth branch. The RPP’s inability to put forward clear aims or objectives for the young members on the one hand provides some autonomy for the youth branch, but on the other hand it causes a low level of identification and loyalty for the young members and thus, they can easily leave the party.

On the other hand, ideological motivations for joining a political party are more powerful in heavily polarized political systems like Turkey. In this regard, current political polarization in Turkish politics seems to offer an opportunity to recruit young members for the RPP. Our research reveals that this political polarization is more effective on the opposition party members (RPP) than the members of the ruling party (JDP). Young JDP members’ motivation to join the party does not stem from an urge to fight against the opposition, but a great majority of RPP members emphasize the struggle with the JDP as the incentive that motivate them to involve in politics.
Appendix A

Organizational scheme of a Turkish political party
References


