Redefinition of state apparatuses: AKP's formal-informal networks in the online realm

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ABSTRACT

In Turkey, especially since 2010, the ruling Justice and Development Party has gradually assumed all power within the state. In parallel, it has introduced a hegemonic project widely known as "New Turkey," redefining state apparatuses through its proprietary web of networks of formal and informal relations. Inclusion in, or exclusion from, these networks is at the sole discretion of leading political actors, and can be considered as a state apparatus in itself, even though it contains elements that are informal or unofficial. All these networks of official and unofficial apparatuses are spread around President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Our research focuses on the Twitter interactions of 25 key elements of AKP's web of networks between 2010 and 2016, using Social Network Analysis. In the Turkish context, the use of Twitter as a means of communication is particularly pertinent, as it stands out as a unique channel for democratic discourse. The findings of our research confirm that the Twitter interactions of the 25 official and unofficial state apparatuses, with very few exceptions, constitute a network well-connected to the core, mostly represented by Erdoğan.

Key words: Turkey, AKP, Erdoğan, Social Media, Hegemony, State Apparatus.

Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, third world and emerging countries have been ruled by authoritarian regimes.[1] The decline of democracy and emerging forms of authoritarianism have become the focus of many scholars over the last two decades.[2] Turkey has not been immune from authoritarian trends, and increasingly so under the dominance of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* – AKP) in the new millennium. The AKP came to power in 2002, following a period of highly unstable coalition governments[3] and has held power since, winning successive landslide election victories. Apart from its organisational structure and political capacity, one of the fundamental reasons behind the AKP's electoral success has been the broad-based social cache and popularity of Turkey's current president and indisputable party leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Even though the AKP initially promised a new, more liberal social contract between the state and citizens, proposed to resolve Turkey's chronic Kurdish and Alevi issues, and advanced judicial reform, the party platform has become increasingly authoritarian.[4]

It would be fair to claim that the AKP has moved, especially since 2010, to steadily capture all dimensions of the Turkish state. AKP party members and supporters occupy most top-level positions in Turkey's bureaucracy, justice system and other layers of the state. While the annexation of the key levers of state power by the party had triggered multidimensional socio-political polarisations and conflicts, the AKP's project of consolidating its control continues unabated. Most emblematic is President Erdoğan's increasing power and dominance over the AKP itself and over the Turkish state and society more generally. Indeed, since the failed July 2016 coup attempt, which prompted even further consolidation of Erdoğan's power, the

president now stands more or less unchallenged within the political firmament. In today's Turkey, there is little differentiation between the ruling party, its leader, and the state.[5]

In his pioneering study, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, Louis Althusser defines the state as composed of an infrastructure (which is comprised mostly by its economic base) and a superstructure. He argued that even though it is possible to define the state as a repressive apparatus in itself, its superstructure comes into existence in the form of variegated state apparatuses of both a repressive and an ideological nature.[6] The former function primarily through repression and violence (or the threat of them) deployed through instruments under direct state control, such as the army, the police, the judiciary, and the prison system. They have recourse to coercion to regulate and exert control over society.[7] By contrast, ideological state apparatuses function primarily through ideology and thus serve to shape or transform the society according to the main ideas, principles and objectives of the dominant (i.e. hegemonic) political elite. Further to these functions, ideological state apparatuses shape and influence society *indirectly*.[8] Religious-based institutions, the education system, non-extreme political parties, ministries, multilevel state establishments and communication centres are the first things that spring to mind in terms of ideological state apparatuses.

While a core characteristic of the AKP regime has been use of both repressive and ideological state apparatuses to impose hegemonic rule over Turkish society, one crucial aspect of its power relations is often overlooked. AKP rule has consisted of formal and informal social networks that feature an estimated ten million members[9] and include hundreds of associations and foundations, NGOs, and business ventures. Inclusion in, or exclusion from, these networks is dependent on either Erdoğan himself, or on trusted high-ranking cadres within the party. This model, which depends on mosques and charity organizations at the bottom and the granting of state contracts and joint ventures at the top, is the harbinger of a Turkish party-state that bears all the hallmarks of crony-capitalism.[10] Thus, we consider a network-based approach indispensable to analyse the AKP's path to hegemony.

Social Network Analysis (SNA) is a mathematics-based method that aims to detect the interactions between actors (along with the roles of each actor) in a network. With this method, complex algorithms that analyse the volume of interactions between actors allow detection of the most influential members of a network as well as inner-clusters constituted by actors. This methodology, born in the eighteenth century, had remained the preserve of academic

mathematicians until quite recently. However, with the emergence of online social networks and Big Data, this method has garnered attention in helping social scientists explain social relations. While SNA may of course be used to explain offline social networks in Turkey, online social networks such as Twitter provide another opportunity to utilize SNA.[11]

Twitter stands out as one of the very few channels that enable citizens in Turkey to express their views, particularly following the 2010 Constitutional referendum that opened a new era in the consolidation of AKP power. On the one hand, Twitter has enabled media coverage of major incidents, such as the 2011 Roboski massacre when 37 civilians were killed by Turkish Air Force bombs, due to the number of tweets featuring news of it.[12] During the 2013 Gezi protests,[13] Twitter (albeit not single-handedly), helped protesters create an agenda, take it to the national level, organize mass street demonstrations, and even escape police brutality by facilitating real-time information sharing about risky locations. Because conventional media was heavily (self-) censored during these events, Twitter became an important tool to disseminate information among citizens and journalists alike. The use of Twitter became so crucial that President Erdoğan himself had to respond and vowed to "eradicate Twitter," which he branded "trouble."[14] Following unsuccessful attempts to block Twitter, the AKP was forced to recruit so-called "AK trolls" to break the psychological and political domination of dissidents on social media and to advance its own agenda on various online platforms. Therefore, we assume that Twitter is a pertinent domain of research, as it is a unique democratic channel where pro-government and the dissident public have a balanced share of voice. It is also significant that the functioning of this microblogging site is based on social networking, which enables researchers to apply SNA to detect the segmentation of users per common interests, the users connecting different groups (clusters) and influencers.

In this research, we aim to portray the interactions of institutions that qualify as state apparatuses on an online social network platform; namely Twitter. By analysing their Twitter interactions (which are exclusively online and discursive), we seek to detect the key actors that shape these institutions' communications on this platform. The underlying assumption is that interactions represent one important (albeit limited) online reflection of the AKP power structure, along with a survey of how certain actors are included (or excluded) from the national online debate.

A word of caution is in order. The scope of this research is, by definition, limited to the platform under examination, therefore we make no claim that our findings explain how AKP rule functions in other domains. That said, it is crucial to note that hegemonic rule cannot be analysed in the absence of a clear picture of how it functions on the discursive level. Taking into account the fact that interactions online occur in a relatively open digital public sphere, we believe that interactions between ideological state apparatuses in this domain may will indicate how the AKP regime perceives the the distinction between those who are socio-politically "included" and those "excluded" in Turkey more generally. Also, detecting key actors in this widespread but rather exclusive network serves to shed light on how it functions, whether in a horizontal and democratic or in a vertical and autocratic way.

In this study, we present three key hypotheses. Firstly, we assume that a network that involves the interactions of state apparatuses online (or in any other way, for that matter) should feature President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as its key member. In our methodology, we deliberately excluded Erdoğan's Twitter account in our data-collection list. Therefore, Erdoğan will be present in our network graph (or map) only if the selected state apparatuses interact with him, and will appear as a key member only if he is interacted with heavily. Secondly, we assume that there is no distinction between official and unofficial networks within the AKP's "proprietary" web of networks. If there is such a distinction, both official and unofficial networks should appear in our network graph in completely different clusters with very few connecting users (bridges) between them. If they appear to be connected by more than a few bridges with each other and bundled together, this would prove our hypothesis. Thirdly, we assume that the AKP state apparatus network is an exclusive, closed network that would not interact heavily with actors not seen as having an acceptable level of support for, or orientation towards, the regime. For example, dissident public figures or institutions not affiliated with the AKP (e.g. opposition political parties, associations, critical media) should not figure in the network map. If they do, this would disprove our hypothesis.

The following section presents a brief overview of the pertinent existing literature regarding the AKP period in Turkey. The second section lays out our theoretical approach, based on Althusser's definition of state apparatuses. The third section presents the main methodology with the pre-selected cases. The last section outlines the main findings of our analysis, followed by some concluding remarks.

Literature review: Turkey during the AKP period

The AKP's 2002 election victory and campaign promises to liberalize the country were initially welcomed by many scholars.[15] On the other hand, the ideological background, radical past statements, and potential conflicts of the AKP leading figures with Turkey's traditional Kemalist establishment left other scholars sceptical of the genuineness of the party's apparent moderation.[16] However, after AKP's first term – and particularly since 2011 – initial scepticism about the party's liberal–secular bona fides have given way to an entirely new set of concerns: the party's turn towards a Putinesque form of 'electoral authoritarianism'. Cihan Tuğal defines this slide into authoritarianism as a function of the collapse of the Turkish model of 'Islamic liberalism'.[17] As Birol Yeşilada summarizes, the positive environment of the early 2000s has been replaced by "a grim picture of illiberal political developments that are characterized by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's power grab, loss of judicial independence, and electoral manipulations to achieve the desired election outcome that favoured Erdogan and the Justice and Development Party."[18] For instance, according to Matthew Whiting and Zeynep Kaya, the AKP and its charismatic and influential leader's attempt to transform Turkey into an ambiguous presidential system where the president has increasing control over each and every aspect of the judiciary and legislature is perceived as perturbing and polarizing.[19] Scholars such as Berk Esen and Şebnem Gümüşçü define the situation, especially after 2013, as 'competitive authoritarianism', arguing that Turkey no longer satisfies even the minimal requirements of democracy.[20] Dağhan Irak uses the term "autocratic Islamists" when referring to the ruling party and its leader,[21] while veteran scholar Ergun Özbudun has adopted the moniker "majoritarian drift."[22] Fuat Keyman and Şebnem Gümüşçü also define the party and Erdoğan as a hegemonic power, and by doing so argue that AKP has combined a conservative, religious-based political discourse with a commitment to economic and political stability, in order to mobilize the majority of Turkey's citizens as permanent supporters.[23]

With increased authoritarianism, polarisation and the personalisation of Turkish politics, several studies have focused on the impact of Erdoğan on the Turkish state structure, in addition to aforementioned studies. For instance, Öztürk addresses Turkey's Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*) under the reign of Erdoğan and the AKP, arguing that it has been transformed into an expedient state apparatus for the implementation of the political ideology of the ruling cadre.[24] Furthermore, Kemal İnal and Güliz Akkaymak focus on the neo-liberal transformation of the education system in Turkey during the AKP period and try to explain how Erdoğan has derived tremendous political benefit from this shift.[25] Additionally, Dağhan Irak claims that the

AKP has created a dominant-party system with hegemonic tendencies. In so doing it has cultivated both a pro-AKP media, and instrumentalized the state- run media – such as Turkish Radio and Television (TRT) and Anadolu Agency (AA) – to advance and support the government's agenda.[26] In their brilliant study, Ayşe Buğra and Osman Savaşkan demonstrate that during the AKP period most successful businesses have been drawn into patrimonial relations with the government and have adopted its distinctive cultural values and beliefs while cultivating the loyalty to the leading cadre of the AKP, who have themselves moved in to leverage their political power to maximize their commercial interests.[27]

With the exception of few aforementioned studies, the network-based characteristic of AKP rule is often neglected in academic work. Moreover, the use of Social Network Analysis (SNA) in these works as a principal method is rare. We aim to fill this void by contributing a rarely-used perspective along with an innovative methodology. This study may also constitute a good example of how political science and media studies may collaborate to explain socio-political phenomena, borrowing the theoretical approach of one and the methodology of the other.

Theoretical background on Althusser's state apparatuses

Many scholars, such as Hall, sees Althusser as one of the key figures in modern Marxist theory and emphasize his clear break with some of the old protocols of that approach to provide a persuasive alternative that nevertheless remained broadly within the terms of the Marxist problematic.[28] It would be fair to say that Althusser built his studies on the work of Jacques Lacan to understand the way ideology functions in society, but this claim is not enough to apprehend Althusser and in particular his understanding of ideology and the different definitions of state apparatuses.[29] From this point of view, it could be argued that Althusser advanced a materialist understanding of ideology, rather than considering ideology as simply contrived ideas about the world or bald propaganda.[30] Furthermore, it is well known that Althusser drew part of his inspiration from Gramsci, who used the term civil society as opposed to political society. Gramsci, who famously assigned importance to the notion of ideology and ethics, contended that civil society also provides the terrain on which the progressive struggle of the ascendant class is played out, but Althusser turned this understanding and conceptual frame of things around by representing the ensemble of institutions as elements of the state mechanism thanks to which the bourgeoisie secures its domination.[31]

In his seminal work, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State*

Apparatuses, Althusser gave Gramsci his due regarding his famous claim: 'everyone is a philosopher' and he mentioned that Gramsci's observation on everyday language, the expression to take things philosophically, designates an attitude that itself involves a certain conception of philosophy, bound up with the idea of rational necessity. Furthermore, Althusser seemed to view Gramsci's definition of ideology to be essential.[32] Yet, Althusser presents critiques of both Gramsci's and the classical Marxist definition of ideology and finds them deficient. For Althusser, ideology, especially a dominant one, will tend to unproblematically reproduce itself and it may also instrumentalise class and status dichotomies that intertwine with history. Secondly, Althusser targets one of the fundamental notions of Marxism: false consciousness. He argues that there is only one true ascribed ideology for each class and claims that social relations and ideology give their unique unambiguous knowledge to perceiving, thinking subjects. Thus, true knowledge should be subject to a sort of masking, the source of which is very difficult to identify. Finally, he mentions that knowledge and ideology must be produced as the consequence of a special practice that cannot be reduced to a simple empiricist epistemology.[33] From these points of view, it is possible to argue that for Althusser ideology is essentially a practical matter. He claims that ideology exists, being produced and reproduced in institutions, and the different types of implementations and practices specific to them.[34] From this point of view, he categorises state apparatuses in two distinct ways: repressive and ideological.

While ideological state apparatuses represent the 'soft' version of the dominant ideological expression, repressive state apparatuses consist of the army, the police, the judiciary, and the prison system. These operate primarily by means of both psychological and physical coercion and violence. Althusser sees ideological state apparatuses as functioning by ideology, using means of non-coercion and consent.[35] Even though, at first glance, repressive state apparatuses seem to be enough for the dominant structure to impose its ideology, they mostly fail to maintain social and political hegemony.[36] Therefore, the dominant power either unconsciously (but mostly consciously) employs ideology to manufacture consent amongst the masses. The apparatuses that the dominant political structure uses to do this are called ideological state apparatuses, which typically function semi-independently and without explicit intent to exert control. Although ideological state apparatuses seem to be relatively dependent on the state structure, their dependency is mostly based on the power and coverage of the state's dominance.[37]

Althusser delineates several different ideological state apparatuses, most prominently religious-

and education-based institutions, various and comprehensive foundations, associations, and unions that have direct and indirect connections to the dominant political structure. These ideological state apparatuses have the capacity not only to inculcate a certain worldview conducive to domination, but also enforce these beliefs by means of a series of rituals, habits and practices.[38] Furthermore, Althusser insists that ideological state apparatuses belong to the state even though they operate according to the dominant ruling structures' main ideas and approaches. In contrast to repressive state apparatuses, ideological state apparatuses "function massively and predominantly by ideology, but they also function secondarily by repression."[39] As a result, citizens acquiesce not on account of violence, but out of a desire to avoid marginalisation, scorn or ostracism.

From this viewpoint, one may argue that the state, as the macro-level repressive apparatus, can regulate and direct the activities and functions of other repressive and ideological state apparatuses. Furthermore, the state also constitutes and regulates the relations of all different state apparatuses among themselves, including their relations with the macro-structure itself. On the contrary, it is the dominant political structures' mentality and ideology that exerts control. According to Althusser, an ideological state apparatus is one that manifests the functioning of ideology in a concrete manner in daily life, by employing mechanisms that allow individuals to act of their own free will and comply at the same time. Employing a mechanism that causes individuals to act of their own free will. For Althusser, a person always acts in accordance with his world view of beliefs.[40] These relations between action and ideology are regulated through material practices controlled by the state. This means that if the state were controlled by a dominant and hegemonic structure and ideological mentality, ideological and repressive state apparatuses would find it almost impossible to act semi-independently. Additionally, Althusser points out that in highly-controlled states, the dominant actors have informal (and often quasi-concealed) apparatuses to support the more apparent ideological and repressive state apparatuses that can strike individuals almost anywhere.[41] The result is the enlargement of the state according to the dominant actors' aims.

Methodology

For this research, we selected 25 institutions that may be considered state apparatuses. These institutions include key ministries that convey the government's agenda such as the Ministry of National Education, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, along with institutions working under the Prime Minister's Office such as the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority, the *Diyanet*, and the Presidency for Turks Abroad and

Related Communities. The corporate accounts of state-run media outlets such as Turkish Radio, the Television Corporation, and AA are also included. Along with the Red Crescent Society, NGOs with close ties to the Erdoğan family and/or to the AKP, such as the Ensar Foundation, the TÜRGEV Foundation, and the Women and Democracy Association were also selected. To test the inclusion/exclusion hypothesis, along with the AKP-run Istanbul and Ankara municipalities, we also added the Municipality of Izmir, which is run by the opposition Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* – CHP). The full list of selected institutions, with their Twitter handles and their dates of joining Twitter are given in Table 1.

Institution	Twitter Handle	Date Joined
Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Centre for Strategic Research	@sam_mfa	December, 2011
Anadolu Agency	@aa_kurumsal	September 2012
Turkish Radio and Television Corporation	@trtkurumsal	February 2011
Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research	@setavakfi	December 2010
Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities	@yurtdisiturkler	February 2011
The Turkish Red Crescent	@turkkizilayi	January 2010
The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency	@tika_turkey	August 2011
Yunus Emre Foundation	@yeeorgtr	April 2010
Turkish Diyanet Foundation	@diyanetvakfi	July 2012
Presidency of Religion Affairs	@diyanetbasin	November 2011
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	@tc_disisleri	December 2009
Ministry of Foreign Affairs /English Account	@mfagovtr	October 2011
Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries	@sesric	June 2010
Ministry of Culture and Tourism	@kulturturizmbak	January 2011
General Directorate of Youth and Sports of Turkey	@GSBsporgm	March 2013
Ministry of Youth and Sports	@gencliksporbak	September 2011
Ankara Metropolitan Municipality	@ankarabld	December 2011
Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality	@istanbulbld	January 2011
Izmir Metropolitan Municipality	@izmirbld	July 2012
The Disaster and Emergency Management Authority	@afadbaskanlik	October 2011
Ensar Foundation	@ensarvakfi	March 2013
TÜRGEV Foundation	@turgev	July 2011
Woman and Democracy Association	@kademorgtr	June 2013
Ministry of National Education	@tcmeb	October 2013
Council of Higher Education	@yuksekogretimk	January 2010

Table 1 –Twitter accounts selected for the research

By using NodeXL software,[42] we collected the 3,200 most recent Twitter interactions (the limit permitted by Twitter) of each user, dating back to 2010. We conducted the data treatment using open-source Gephi software.[43] The collected data was analysed using the Eigenvector centrality algorithm that detects the most influential actors (nodes) in a network[44] according to which the most important actor has a value closest to 1, and the least important actor closest to 0. The data visualisation was also formulated by Gephi, applying the Modularity Class filter that divides and regroups nodes into clusters. Therefore, a network map comprised of clusters of nodes connected with each other based on their interactions could be produced.

Main findings of the research

Due to the massive amount of Twitter data available in the 2010–2016 period analysed in this research, we divided the data into time intervals in order to observe the changes between each period. These time periods roughly correspond to key political events in Turkey, allowing for more accurate tracking of the networks.

1 January 2010 – 31 May 2013: The first tweet sent by our selection to the Gezi events where protesters used Twitter extensively.

1 June 2013 – 9 August 2014: From the Gezi protests to the presidential election.[45]

10 August 2014 – 6 June 2015: From the presidential election to the first general elections in 2015.

7 June 2015 – 30 October 2015: From the first general elections to the second general elections in 2015.[46]

1 November 2015 – 14 July 2016: From the November elections to the 15 July failed coup attempt.

15 July 2016 – 1 December 2016: From the failed coup attempt to the end of data collection.

In the first period, before the Gezi events, we observe that few of the accounts that we included in the selection were then created or actively used. Among them, the accounts of Anadolu Agency and the Turkish-language version of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stand out. Meanwhile, in the interaction network of our selection (Figure 1), other accounts appear to be influential. These include the accounts of Ahmet Davutoğlu (@ahmet_davutoglu, the Foreign Minister at the time), Memet Şimşek (@memetsimsek, the Minister of Finance at the time) and the official account of the Public Diplomacy Office of the Prime Ministry (*Başkanlık Kamu Diplomasisi Koordinatörlüğü*, @basbakanlikkdk). The reason for the influence of these

accounts may be the fact that, in the pre-Gezi period Twitter – for which no localized Turkish-language version was in place until 2011 – was used by a limited number of people in Turkey, most of those being foreign language speakers. Ahmet Davutoğlu and Memet Şimşek are both fluent English speakers – a rarity among AKP ministers – and were among the first within the government to engage in Twitter conversations in both Turkish and English. Among the users with the highest total degree value (the number of incoming and outgoing messages), are the Council of Higher Education, the Ankara Metropolitan Municipality, and the Yunus Emre Foundation.
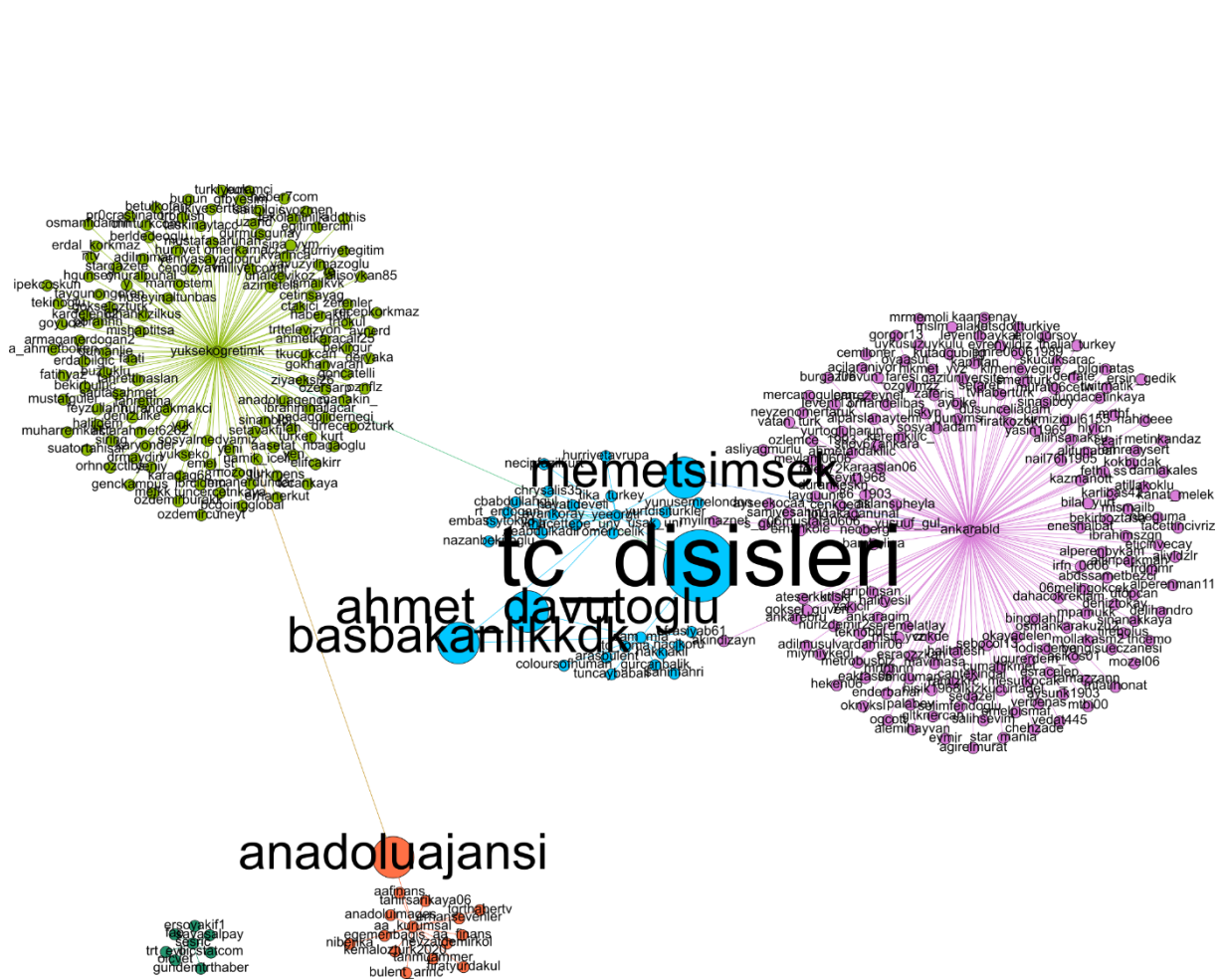

Figure 1 – The network graph of our selection, 1 January 2010 – 31 May 2013

After the Gezi events, the number of active users in official government functions rapidly increased. In the 1 June 2013 – 9 August 2014 period (Figure 2), many ministers and high-ranking AKP officials such as Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Egemen Bağış, Mehmet Hilmi Güler, Fikri Işık, Akif Çağatay Kılıç, Beşir Atalay, Ömer Çelik, Nihat Zeybekçi – along with official

institutions such as the Ministry for European Union Affairs, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Grand National Assembly of Turkey – joined Twitter. Among the official institutions, the President's Office, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency and the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities stand out as influential actors. President Abdullah Gül and the Parliamentary Speaker Bülent Arınç also appear to be very influential users. In this period, it can been observed that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (both Turkish and English accounts) interacts with high-ranking foreign officials such as Štefan Füle (European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy of the period), William Hague (the UK's First Secretary of State in the period), along with Richard Haas (President of the Council on Foreign Relations in the US) and Anders Fogh Rasmussen (Secretary-General of NATO). Also, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's personal impact on the network diminished while the institution's official accounts took over the interactions. Therefore, it may be said that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs appears to be one of the first government institutions to use Twitter as an official way of communication. Also, the Yunus Emre Foundation, a public foundation that aims to promote Turkey and the Turkish language abroad, used Twitter in that period in connection with the MFA and the EU Ministry. One important appearance in the network is Istanbul Şehir University (@sehiruniversite) established by the Foundation for Science and Arts, of which Ahmet Davutoğlu was one of the founding members. The university appears in the network in connection with the MFA and the Yunus Emre Foundation. This is important because Istanbul Şehir is a private university, and therefore a non-governmental organization, the first such institution to appear within the network of our sample as an influential member. Another striking point is Izmir Metropolitan Municipality, run by the opposition CHP, which appears in our graph as it is included in our sample for the first time. However, it has no connection with the rest of the network, and has its own cluster (sub-network) comprised of pro-opposition users. Meanwhile, as seen in Figure 2, all other clusters of the network are connected to each other with at least one edge (connection).
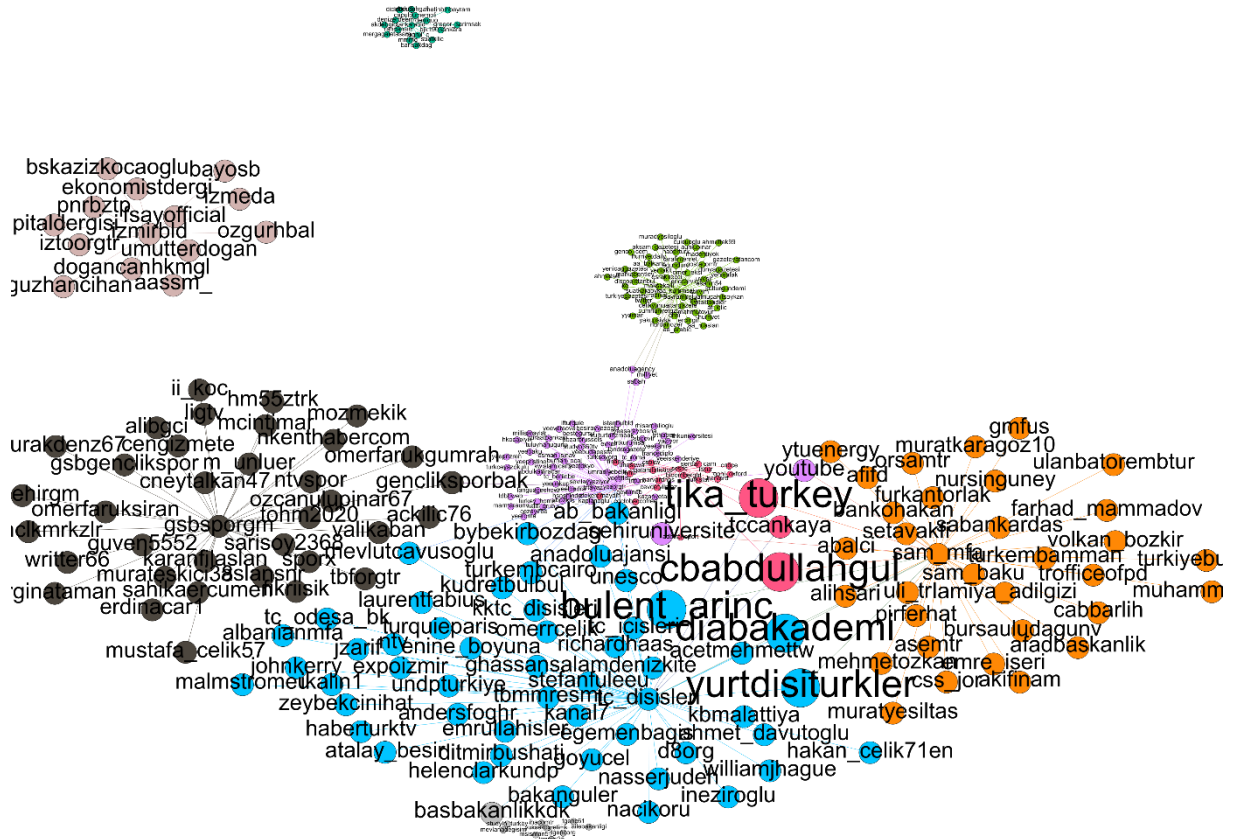
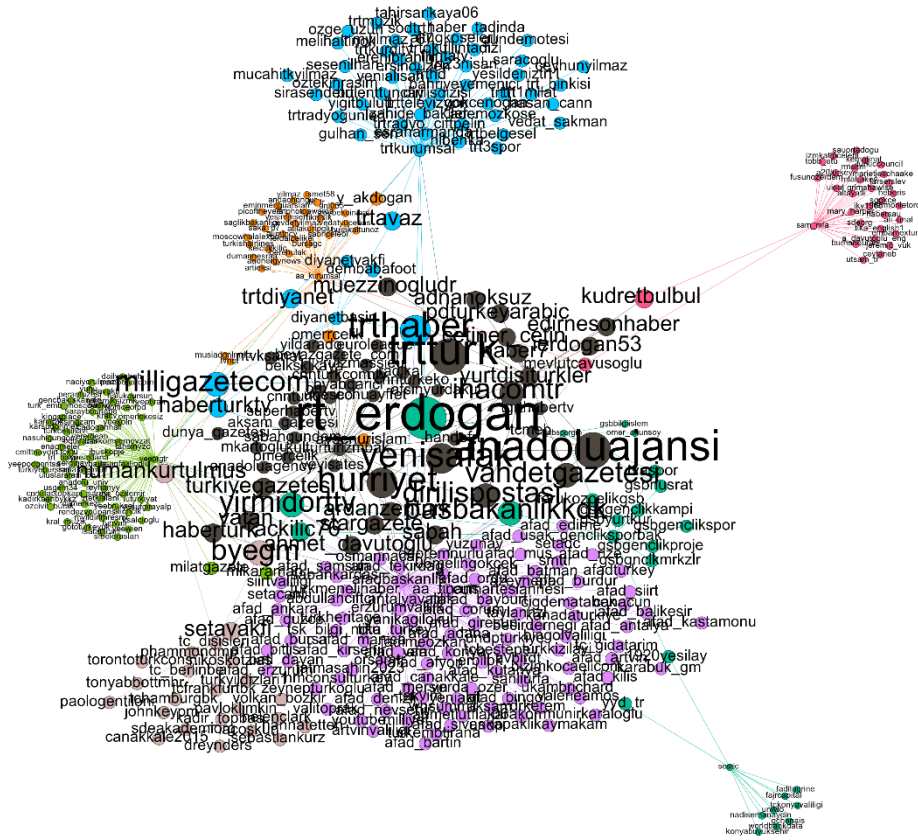Figure 2 – The network graph of our selection, 1 June 2013 – 09 August 2014

Figure 3 – The network graph of our selection, 10 August 2014 – 6 June 2015

The 10 August 2014 – 6 June 2015 period (Figure 3) is another period where important changes are observed within the network. The most important among them is Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (@rt_erdogan) joining Twitter, a medium that he had previously condemned on several occasions, calling it "the biggest menace" and at one point vowing to eradicate it. Indeed, he has sought to block it many times. Newly-elected President Erdoğan's account instantly became the most influential member of the network, referred to by several institutions within our sample. Another important development of this period was the strong appearance of pro-government media in the network. Along with TRT and AA, which significantly increased their Twitter activity, many pro-AKP and pro-Erdoğan media outlets –such as Yirmidört TV, Diriliş Postası, Vahdet, Yeni Şafak, Milat, Star, Sabah and Türkiye –appeared in the network as influential actors close to the core of the network, some even belonging to the same cluster as Erdoğan. Some pro-Erdoğan journalists, such as Ardan Zentürk, Çetiner Çetin, Yıldıray Oğur,

and Nihal Bengisu Karaca, also appeared in the network, along with the mainstream outlets Hürriyet, Vatan, and Habertürk.

In this period, some other new actors also emerge. One of them was Numan Kurtulmuş, once Erdoğan's fiercest critic as the leader of the opposition Islamist People's Voice Party (*Halkın Sesi Partisi* – HAS) but later Deputy Prime Minister under President Erdoğan. SETA Foundation, a pro-government think-tank close to Davutoğlu, who became prime minister in August 2014, also appeared in the network as an influential member, in proximity to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. With the increased importance of the refugee crisis, AFAD (the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority) also increased its Twitter activity with local branches.

The 10 August 2014 – 6 June 2015 period covers Erdoğan's first months as president and the first months of the AKP without Erdoğan at the helm. There were already hints of the "New Turkey" project that would later come to dominate the AKP's political vision. Communications, dominated in the previous period by foreign affairs, became increasingly focused instead on domestic politics, revolving around President Erdoğan. The pro-Erdoğan media appeared to be influential and central in the network, included prominently in the communication corps of the regime. Mainstream media, increasingly under government pressure regarding editorial and hiring-firing policies, were not excluded. Other media openly critical of Erdoğan, such as Cumhuriyet, BirGün and Evrensel do not feature in the network at all. Another interesting point is that newly-elected Prime Minister Davutoğlu's impact on the network decreased visibly (he is less influential than pro-government media and farther away from the core), while the SETA Foundation close to him appeared as a fringe element. It would be fair to argue that Davutoğlu's new position was not really a promotion but rather simply established him as a placeholder until Erdoğan could establish a new constitution concentrating executive power in the presidency. Meanwhile non-official institutions close to him could still benefit from Davutoğlu's higher place in the hierarchy and proximity to state institutions, notably the MFA. This is a trend which started in the previous period, with the Istanbul Şehir University example.

Figure 4 – The network graph of our selection, 8 June 2015–30 October 2015

The 8 June 2015–30 October 2015 period (Figure 4) is a complicated yet important period in the political history of Turkey, since after the June elections the AKP had failed to form a single-party government, thus leading to the first hung parliament since 1999. In this period, regarding the network graph of our selection, we observe that political actors, including President Erdoğan, lost their visibility, while media outlets, especially pro-government ones, dominated

the interactions. According to the Eigenvector centrality calculations of the tweets in this period, AA's Turkish account (@anadoluajansi) was the only actor with a full 1.0 value, while others such as TRT Haber, TRT Türk, Star, Yeni Şafak, and Daily Sabah were all among the most influential actors with values of 0.500 or more. The only political actors with considerable Eigenvector values were Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (0.498589), interim Deputy Prime Minister Numan Kurtulmuş (0.458321), interim Sports Minister Akif Çağatay Kılıç (@ackilic76, 0.446397), and the Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu (0.439294), who was unable to take part in the interim government, but resumed his functions after the elections. All other political actors had an Eigenvector value of 0.400 or less.
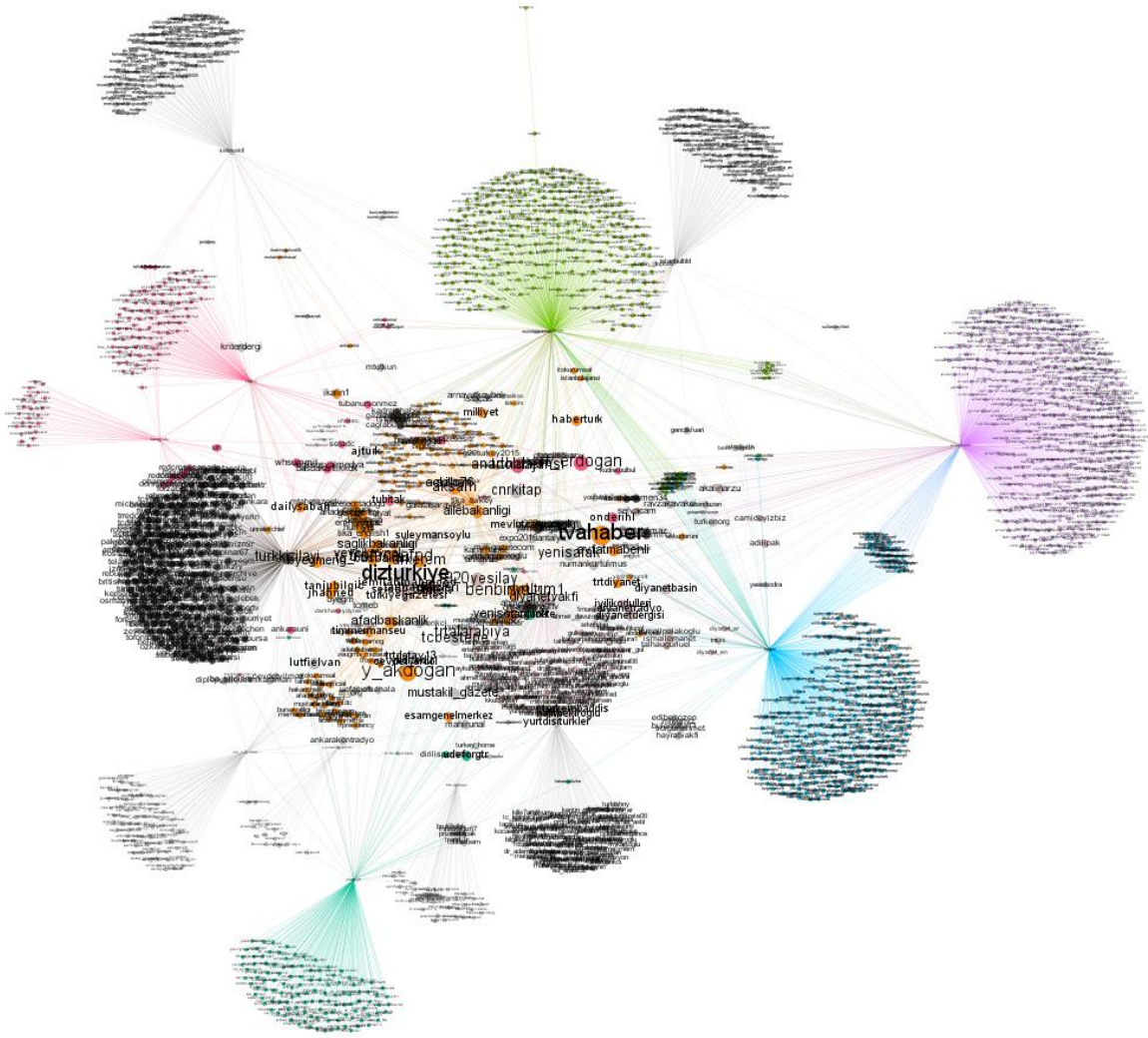

Figure 5 – The network graph of our selection, 1 November 2015–14 July 2016

The 1 November 2015–14 July 2016 period (Figure 5) was dominated by two themes: the World Humanitarian Summit hosted by Turkey on May 23–24, 2016, and the ongoing refugee crisis in Syria. Accordingly, accounts and institutions related to these two events had a certain impact on the network map of that period. For instance, @dizturkiye, the Twitter account of the World Humanitarian Summit had an Eigenvector centrality value of 0.936704, ranking second regarding influence. The English account of the Office of Public Diplomacy (@trofficepd) was also among the top five most influent accounts with an Eigenvector value of 0.689857. Meanwhile, the only account with a full Eigenvector value (1.0) was the pro-government private TV network A Haber (@tvahaber). The most influent politician was Yalçın Akdoğan (0.898075), the deputy prime minister until May 24, 2016. Tayyip Erdoğan (0.714899) ranked second among politicians and fourth in total. The other politician in the Top 10 of the period was Minister of Family Affairs Sema Ramazanoğlu (@benbirkulum1, 0.67493). Ramazanoğlu's sudden spike in this era is remarkable, since she faced massive public criticism due to her defensive stance towards a child rape scandal that had erupted within the pro-government Ensar Foundation. It is also intriguing that while the minister received considerable attention from other actors, the Ensar Foundation account (@ensarvakfi) itself had the minimum Eigenvector value of 0.0. Here, the likely interpretation is that actors in the selection were reluctant to be associated with the Ensar foundation and the scandal, but were also ready to defend Ramazanoğlu herself and her tweets in defence of the foundation, which we found to be an integral part of the network through different periods.
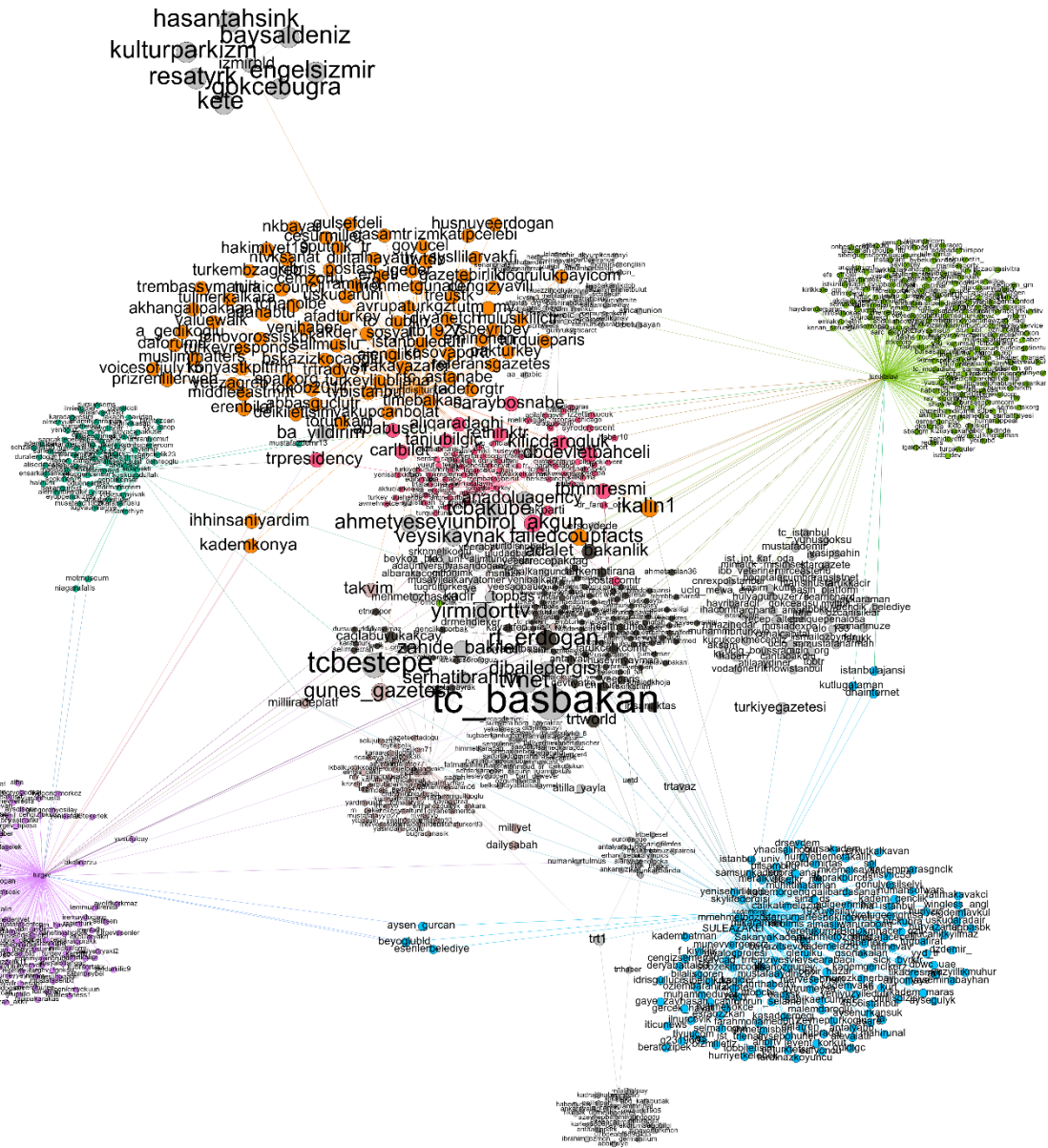
Figure 6 – The network graph of our selection, 15 July 2016–1 December 2016

After the failed July 15 *coup d'etat*, the network graph of our selection underwent dramatic changes (Figure 6). While Recep Tayyip Erdoğan remained the central actor of the network, two official accounts, the Prime Minister's Office (@tc_basbakan) and the President's Office (@tcbestepe) had the highest Eigenvector centrality values (1.0 and 0.679619 respectively). One very striking development was the inclusion of opposition leaders Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and Devlet Bahçeli (both having Eigenvector values of 0.363987) into the core network for the first time. This otherwise unexpected development is indeed due to the two leaders' participation in Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's massive Yenikapı rally in support of the President against the putsch. This rather spontaneous coalition, named the "national consensus" or "Yenikapı spirit," also

brought the Izmir Municipality into the network, a rare event. Meanwhile, the pro-government media closest to the President – such as 24 TV (@yirmidorttv, 0.454662), TV Net (0.501731), and Güneş newspaper (@gunes_gazetesi, 0.432859) – emerged as the most influential media actors in the network. In addition, one anonymous account called "Failed Coup Facts" (@failedcoupfacts) had an Eigenvector value of 0.411056) and frequently interacted with the Turkish Embassy in the Vatican (@VATIKANBE) through retweets and quotes. Another significant inclusion to the network in this period was Birol Akgün (@birol_akgun), the chairman of the newly-founded Maarif Foundation, an institution established by the Ministry of National Education, in order to take over pro-Gülen schools abroad.[47] Akgün's personal presence within the network is likely to be replaced by an official Twitter account for the foundation, which at the time of writing had yet to be established.

The particularity of the post-putsch era in our Twitter interactions network is the rising importance of official institutional accounts, rather than personal accounts as well as the inclusion of two opposition parties as embedded members of the network. Meanwhile, the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokrasi Partisi* – HDP) was not featured in the network, despite its unambiguous anti-coup stance. We should note that the HDP was the only party in the parliament that opted out of participation in the Yenikapı rally.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

When all the Twitter interactions of our 25 preselected accounts in 2010–2016 are taken into account (Figure 7), the final table of all actors (including others that were not preselected but included in the network through interactions) and their Eigenvector centrality values are given below (Table 2). These findings suggest that Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is the only political actor that has a full Eigenvector centrality value of 1.0 among all actors. Anadolu Agency's Turkish news account (@anadoluagency) ranks second, with 0.953466. This is expected as most state institutions, along with pro-government private institutions quote AA as their primary news source. The presidency's official Turkish account (@tcbestepe) ranks third with 0.944741. Yirmidört (24) TV channel is the only private institution in the Top 5 (fourth, 0.877474), while TRT Haber ranks fifth (0.784143). Other actors of the Top 10 are the official Turkish account of the Public Diplomacy Office of the Prime Ministry (0.743485), the official Turkish account of Prime Minister's Office (0.741246), Sabah newspaper, Yeni Şafak newspaper and the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency's Turkish account (@tika_turkey).
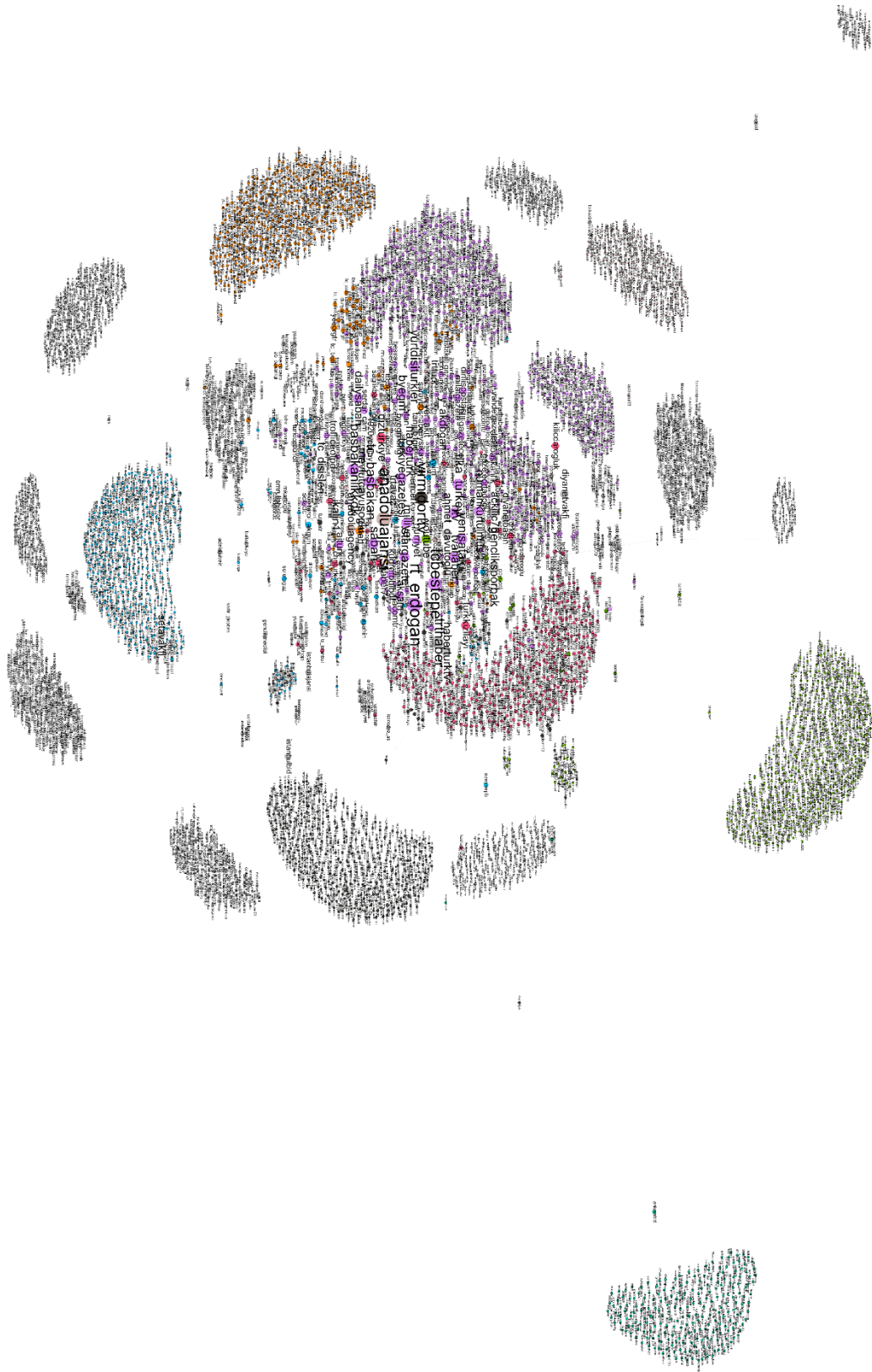
Figure 7 - The network graph of our selection, 1 January 2010–1 December 2016

User	Eigenvector Centrality
rt_erdogan	1.0
anadoluajansi	0.9534661699114985
tcbestepe	0.9447410600224696
yirmidorttv	0.8774741849508173
trthaber	0.784142868758094
basbakanlikkdk	0.7434851427732126
tc_basbakan	0.7412460145051754
sabah	0.6856335322169869
yenisafak	0.6811499132186776
tika_turkey	0.6794010186726467
ntv	0.6732818396764239
yurtdisiturkler	0.6613684980643978
stargazete	0.6534493570814608
milliyet	0.6381856378597932
haberturk	0.6381856378597932
turkiyegazetesi	0.6381856378597932
byegm	0.6356261764559795
gencliksporbak	0.6334183753007457
tvahaber	0.6245273438819402

Table 2 – Top 20 users by Eigenvector Centrality value, 1 January 2010–1 December 2016

These findings suggest that our first hypothesis, which claims that a network that involves the interactions of state apparatuses on the online realm, or any realm for that matter, should feature President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as the key member, is fully proven since Erdoğan is the only actor with a full Eigenvector centrality value. The official presidential account also ranks in the Top 3 which suggests even further influence over all other actors.

Our second hypothesis argued that there was no distinction between official and unofficial networks for the AKP's web of networks. Regarding media, we can comfortably say that this hypothesis is valid since private pro-government media, such as 24 TV, A Haber, Sabah and Yeni Şafak had equal (if not higher) influence in this network compared to state-run media such as TRT and AA, which are also very influential. This is despite the fact that state-run media institutions are more numerous within the network. This suggests overall that media is a core influencing element of Erdoğan's regime. Meanwhile, other institutions such as associations and foundations like Ensar Foundation, TÜRGEV and KADEM, which have direct links to the

AKP and/or the Erdoğan family, are not equally central to the network. While these institutions are certainly inseparable parts of the network that have more than one connection to other institutions, they are not core elements but rather function as extensions of the regime. As we suggested in the beginning, these institutions, albeit not crucial or central, are nonetheless intertwined with the rest of the network. Therefore, the second hypothesis is valid to a considerable extent.

Our third hypothesis argued that the network of AKP state apparatuses should constitute a close network that would not include those not be deemed to indicate an acceptable level of support for or orientation towards the regime. While our findings mostly confirmed this hypothesis, we should note that there are circumstantial exceptions. The most notable are opposition leaders Bahçeli and Kılıçdaroğlu, who emerged as core members in the network after they joined the post-putsch Yenikapı rally. It should be underlined that this is quite startling, since the rally was intensely pro-Erdoğan, with overt hegemonic tones. The participation of the leading opposition leaders, along with the Chief of Staff of the armed forces and the *Diyanet* chairman as military and religious leaders of the nation, respectively, therefore provided an element of institutional consent, essential to any given hegemony. Meanwhile, it should be noted that the HDP and other elements of Kurdish politics (along with the Kurdish media) have been strictly and completely excluded from the network. Even during the Kurdish peace negotiations that lasted for over five years, state institutions (along with state apparatuses of an unofficial nature) abstained from interacting with Kurdish actors online. This is noteworthy, as the Kurdish presence on Twitter has been very strong for many years, evidence by the success in bringing the Roboski massacre in 2011 to the national agenda.

One other remarkable finding is the importance of state apparatuses responsible for Turkish foreign policy, such as the Office of Public Diplomacy,[48] TİKA, and the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities. As we stated before, the foreign policy actors were the first to join Twitter and to use this medium effectively among state-run institutions. These actors continue to be influential vis-à-vis the AKP's web of networks. However, their impact on their target audiences such the Turkish diaspora or foreign policy actors of other countries should be examined in more detail in future research.

The municipalities of three major metropolitan cities proved to be ineffective within our network. While even the mostly secluded Izmir Municipality, run by the opposition CHP, was

once connected to the core, the Izmir and Ankara Municipalities constituted distant clusters of the network, and the Istanbul Municipality did not have great importance either. This was a surprising finding, as Ankara mayor Melih Gökçek is an avid Twitter user who spends hours responding to pro-government and dissident users. Furthermore, he participates in hashtag campaigns, such as that run against BBC reporter Selin Girit whom Gökçek believed to be a British spy.[49] One explanation might be that his personal account is much more active than the official municipality account, thus overshadowing it. Nevertheless, even Gökçek himself is not a major figure in this network.

Conclusively, the Twitter interactions of our preselected 25 formal and informal state apparatuses, with very few exceptions, constitute a network well-connected to the core, mostly represented by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The interactions mostly happen on the institutional level, with even Erdoğan himself sharing his impact more and more with the official presidential account, while at the same time being himself the key "institution" within the network. Other key actors such as former President Abdullah Gül, former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, current Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım, and former Minister of Interior Affairs Efkan Alâ do not have the same long-lasting impact as Erdoğan. Even in their heyday, their political impact never compared to that of Erdoğan. The importance of key political actors to the network in any given period is limited to their term in office and once leaving their posts, their significance drops off noticeably. Even most prominent AKP members' impact on this network is defined by the collective importance given to them and eventually taken from them. Erdoğan remains the only person that appears to be exempt from this pattern.

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