

**POLITICS AND THE TURKISH PRESS IN THE 2000s:  
FROM “AKP” TO “AK Parti”**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article uses a unique feature of Turkish politics, the differing practices of the supporters and opponents of the governing party regarding the abbreviations “AK Parti” and “AKP”, to examine the course of the relationship between the JDP and the press through the 2002, 2007 and 2011 elections. After establishing the validity of the measure, the article applies it to the press coverage on the elections eves, and finds that the JDP faced a very hostile press environment prior to the 2002 elections, which was somewhat moderated prior to the 2007 elections, before turning strongly positive prior to the 2011 elections. The article also evaluates some of the explanations for this radical shift from a very hostile press environment in 2002 to a very friendly press environment in 2011, and argues that the increase in the vote share of the party, changes in the ownership of some press outlets, increases in the circulation rates of some pro-AKP papers, and the government pressure are all legitimate explanations.

**Keywords:** Turkish press, content analysis, Justice and Development Party

**Türkiye’de 2000’li Yıllarda Habercilik ve Siyaset: AKP’den AK Parti’ye**

**ÖZET**

Bu makale, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi’nin ismi kısaltılırken partinin destekçilerinin ve karşıtlarının çoğunlukla farklı ifadeleri tercih etmesi olgusundan yola çıkarak, iktidar partisi ile basın arasındaki ilişkilerin 2002, 2007 ve 2011 seçimleri öncesindeki seyrini incelemektedir. Öncelikle kullanılan yöntemin geçerliliği daha ayrıntılı içerik analizi yapan mevcut çalışmalarla karşılaştırılarak gösterilmiş, sonrasında ise seçim öncesi dönemlerde günlük gazetelerde çıkan ilgili haber ve yorumlar incelenmiştir. Bunun sonucunda genel olarak Türk basınında Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi’ne yönelik tutumun 2002 seçimleri öncesinde son derece negatif olduğu, 2007 seçimleri öncesinde bir miktar ılımlılaşığı, 2011 seçimleri öncesinde ise son derece olumlu olduğu bulunmuştur. Makale ayrıca bu büyük değişimin nedenleri üzerine de fikir yürütmekte ve partinin oy oranındaki artış, bazı gazetelerin sahiplik yapısının değişmesi, parti hakkında genel olarak olumlu haberler yapan bazı gazetelerin tirajlarının artması ve hükümet baskısı açıklamalarının hepsinin geçerli olabileceğini ileri sürmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Türk basını, içerik analizi, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi

## Introduction

As of this writing, the Justice and Development Party (JDP) of Turkey has already congratulated its decade in power. Throughout this period, its relations with the press waxed and waned, but overall, it was antagonistic. The Prime Minister himself picked up fights with press barons,<sup>1</sup> sued individual journalists, and on many occasions, did not spare his words in criticizing the attitude of the press towards his party and his government. Indeed, it was one of truisms of the early years of the JDP government that the party came to power “despite the media.”<sup>2</sup> In turn, some of the press was ruthless in its criticism of the party, and they did not spare any words either.

This article aims to chart the relationship between the JDP and the Turkish press from 2002 to 2011. In doing so, it will exploit a unique feature of the name of the party, “Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi” in Turkish, which can be abbreviated either as ““AKP”” from the initials, as is the common practice in Turkish, or as ““AK Parti”,” which is the official abbreviation. “AK” as a word means white or clean in Turkish, hinting that the party is spotless, not affiliated with the corrupt practices of the earlier parties. From the very beginning, the supporters of the party were careful to use the official abbreviation, ““AK Parti”,” and the opponents to use the acronym form, ““AKP”.”

Because this also applies to media actors, it is the methodological claim of this article that we can use the ratio of the word ““AK Parti”” to “AKP” as a measure of the pro-AKP slant. Similarly, the ratio of “AKP” to ““AK Parti”” can be used as a measure of the anti-AKP slant. In the methodology section below, I substantiate this claim and examine the validity of this measure by comparing its results with the results of more detailed analyses of content. After establishing the validity of the measure, I apply it to the newspaper coverage of the JDP in the years prior to the 2002, 2007 and 2011 general elections, using the websites of all the national dailies with a web presence, which allows us to examine the trajectory of the relationship between the JDP and the daily press in some detail. First, however, a review of the relevant literature is due.

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<sup>1</sup> The fierce fight in 2008 between Erdoğan and Aydın Doğan, the biggest media mogul in Turkey, attracted a lot of attention. For two articles specifically on this subject, see Işık and Börekçi (2009) and Hawks (2011).

<sup>2</sup> “As you know, we, AK Party, came to power despite the media’, Erdoğan is reported as saying in a story on the official website of the party, going on to argue that “the visual media is deceptive, and the print media is open to manipulation” (AK Parti, n.d.).

### Pertinent Literature

In an article on the media and politics in Turkey, Kaya and Çakmur (2010) provide a review of the course of the relationship between the JDP and the mainstream media. They argue that in the beginning, “Nearly all of the mainstream media endeavored to legitimize the party and its leader,” and “Hürriyet of Doğan Group, known as the ‘flag-ship’ of Turkish media hailed the formation of the AKP as an antidote to the Islamists and shrinking political center” (p. 531). At the same time, ‘The media were criticizing [‘the traditional parties of the center-right and center-left’] severely and systematically” (Kaya & Çakmur, 2010, p. 531), resulting in net support for the party, however indirect. Later, the party entered the 2007 elections with “an unprecedented media backing,” the authors argue, because of its control of the state television, the seizure of the assets of the second biggest media conglomerate ATV-Sabah by the SDIF (Savings Deposit Insurance Fund), and more importantly, an “entente cordiale” between the party and the mainstream media, as a result of which “most of the mainstream media displayed a clear pro-government slant” (Kaya & Çakmur, 2010, p. 532). However, according to the authors (Kaya & Çakmur, 2010, p. 532), ‘the situation changed dramatically following the AKP’s landslide victory in the general election of July 22, 2007. Encouraged by the evidence of public support and confident of the solid majority in the parliament, AKP abandoned its consensus-building policies. The party no longer felt the need to make concessions to the big capital, including the big capital with media interests, which resulted in clashes with the Doğan group over development permits and oil refineries. In retaliation, Doğan newspapers’ coverage of the party turned negative, especially concerning the Deniz Feneri e.V. trial in Germany with alleged links to the party members and bureaucrats, and the group was in turn heavily fined for tax irregularities, seen by many as evidence of the government’s pressure on media. In sum, the picture Kaya and Çakmur (2010) draw is one of cordial relations between the JDP and the mainstream media from the beginning through the 2007 elections, which ended after the party’s landslide victory and gave way to a more confrontational relationship.

Aslı Tunç (2010), another author who observes a significant change during the JDP’s second term, argues, “After 2007, especially during the Justice and Development Party’s (AKP) second tenure, the structure of media changed radically with the increase of media outlets openly supporting government policies and with AKP’s move toward a more authoritarian control of the media” (p.645). The sale of the ATV-Sabah media group to Çalık Holding, a group close to the governing party, “has been interpreted as the Prime Minister’s

Berlusconiesque firm grip on the media” (Tunç, 2010, p. 645) because Erdoğan’s son-in-law, Berat Albayrak is the CEO of Çalık Holding. The author also calls attention to the connection between Doğan papers’ coverage of some corruption allegations and the tax fine imposed on the group.<sup>3</sup> Thus, Tunç (2010) agrees with Kaya and Çakmur (2010) that there has been a significant change in the JDP’s relations with the media following the 2007 elections, but she focuses more on the “control over media” aspect than “confrontation with the big capital,” and she makes no claim that prior to the 2007, the relations were cordial. To the contrary, her account seems to suggest that overall, the party faced a friendlier press environment after the elections compared to before, especially with the increase of media outlets openly supporting government policies (Tunç, 2010).

Another account of the relations between the JDP and the press is provided by Çağlayan (2010) in her content analysis comparing the coverage of the party in some selected newspapers prior to the 2002 and 2007 elections, the former when the party was contending for power for the first time, and the latter after five years in government. Çağlayan (2010) finds that the party “did not have a very strong media backing” prior to the 2002 elections except for indirect support because the other parties were severely criticized, but “there was a completely different outlook” on the eve of the 2007 elections, when Sabah was under the control of the SDIF, and “the remaining mainstream media outlets were exhibiting a political slant clearly in favour of the majority party” (p.94). She goes on to argue that “This media support had an irrefutable share in the landslide 2007 election victory of the AKP” (Çağlayan, 2010, p. 99). Çağlayan’s (2010) conclusions, based on a content analysis of four newspapers, seem to be in overall agreement with Kaya and Çakmur (2010), especially on the point that the party faced a friendly press environment prior to the 2007 elections, although she does not comment about the period after those elections.

In what follows, I chart the attitude of the daily press towards the JDP from 2002 to 2011, using the websites of all the newspapers that had a strong web presence during the periods under study. This will supplement the existing studies examining the press coverage prior to the 2002 and 2007 elections, and provide an analysis of the press coverage prior to the 2011 elections, filling a void in the literature so far.

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<sup>3</sup> For more on the sale of ATV-Sabah to Çalık Holding and the fight between Doğan papers and the Prime Minister, see Hawks (2011), Işık and Borekçi (2009) and Jenkins (2008). For a somewhat longer term perspective on the structure of media ownership in Turkey, see Şimşek (2009).

## Methodology

To detect the pro-AKP and anti-AKP slants, this article uses the ratio of the frequency of the articles containing the phrase “AK Parti” to those containing ““AKP”,” and vice versa. As is the case with all automated analyses of content, there is no problem of reliability, but establishing validity beforehand is a must.<sup>4</sup> In support of the validity of the inference that a paper has the pro-AKP slant because it has a higher ratio of the phrase “AK Parti” to ““AKP”,” I offer two pieces of evidence: 1- The party’s clear position on the issue as reflected in Erdoğan’s statements, and 2- Close correspondence between the results of the proposed analysis and more detailed analyses of content with human coding.

In June 2009, Prime Minister Erdoğan made the following statement on the issue:

The abbreviated form of my party’s name is AK Parti, not AKP. Those who keep saying AKP do so, unfortunately, because of a lack of concern for ethical, democratic rules, they show no concern for political ethics. My words are harsh, but candid. The abbreviated form of our name, as registered with the Supreme Court, is AK Parti.

Everyone needs to write it in this way. If they are not, than they have no manners or civility. You have to use our legal abbreviation. Otherwise, you are engaging in defamation. You are showing us in a way that we are not. You are trying to associate us with a name that is not ours.

Of course we do not have any respect for such people. When you say AK Parti, the word AK in there also means cleanliness. Using the initials of Justice (Adalet) and Development (Kalkınma), we also intend to clean the politics of our country. (*Milliyet*, 2009)

Erdoğan’s statement was widely reported in the press, and there has been a heated debate on the issue, with many columnists in dailies participating in the discussion. One of the sides accused the other, as did Erdoğan, with being rude because the official abbreviation is ““AK Parti”,” and the other side argued that ““AKP”” was the natural abbreviation and using “AK Parti” meant THE pro-government slant. What is clear from this debate and from the fact that the party felt the need to intervene in THE press discourse at such a high level is that the choice of abbreviations is a significant decision, with sharply divergent connotations. Reconciling the different views on the issue, and rejecting any claims that one is better than

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<sup>4</sup> Human coding and automated coding in content analysis have different advantages and drawbacks. Human coding provides more in-depth and valid results, but it is necessary to establish reliability, specifically in the form of inter-coder reliability because different human coders might assign different meanings to the same texts. Also, human coding is more costly and thus usually deals with a smaller volume of text. Automated coding, on the other hand, does not have any problems with reliability and it can analyze huge volumes of text, but the information it provides is usually shallow and of less use, or requires an effort at demonstrating the validity of the results for more substantial conclusions. In other words, to infer that a paper is pro-AKP because its content has a higher “AK Parti” to “AKP” ratio is not obvious. For more on the pros and cons of automated vs. human coding, see Mikhaylov et al. (2008). For a general discussion of reliability and validity issues in content analysis, see Krippendorff (2004) and Riffe et al. (2005).

the other because it is the “official” or “natural” abbreviation, we can argue that using “AK Parti” is an indicator of the pro-AKP slant, and using “AKP” is an indicator of the anti-AKP slant. The middle position would be using both abbreviations in a balanced manner.

This interpretation is also supported by the results of more detailed content analyses. To check whether heavy use of “AKP” does indicate an anti-AKP political slant, and vice versa, I have compared the results of this word-count analysis with the results of more detailed content analyses that use human coding. These studies are done by Tunç and Arsan (2007), Balkır et al. (2008), Çağlayan (2010), Şimşek (2009), Gölcü (2009), Bayram (2009), and Işık and Börekçi (2009). Although they have different methodologies and different time frames and examine different newspapers, all of these studies make analyses of positive vs. negative coverage of individual political parties, and their results concerning the coverage of the JDP are comparable with the results of the method used in this article, which measures the pro-AKP and anti-AKP slants.

Table 1 reports the results of this comparison. In four of the seven studies, the rate of agreement between the method used in this article and the detailed content analysis was 100%. In the remaining three studies, the rate of agreement varied between 50% and 75 %. Overall, classification of the papers into “pro-AKP” and “anti-AKP” categories solely based on the relative frequencies of the phrases “AK Parti” and “AKP” was successful (that is to say, in agreement with the content analyses in the comparison) in 25 of 30 cases, representing a success rate of 83%. This percentage is even more significant when we consider that the time frames used in the detailed content analyses are rather short, varying between one week and two months. Over longer periods with a higher number of articles, the word-count strategy should work even better.

### **Data Collection**

Almost all Turkish dailies today have regularly updated websites that offer, in most cases, more material than their printed counterparts. Many of them also offer searching and browsing capabilities that provide easy access to their archives, but few of these archive systems allow advanced word search capabilities with custom date ranges and Boolean operators that are necessary for data collection. Some of those that do have archives with advanced search capabilities come with date restrictions, covering, for example, only the most recent two or three years. For the rather long period under study, spanning the ten years from

2002 to 2011, the only daily that currently offers a combination of good search capabilities and complete coverage is *Hürriyet*.<sup>5</sup>

Another alternative to using papers' own search engines is using Google, which offers good search capabilities with Boolean operators and custom date ranges. However, the disadvantage with Google's results is that it is not complete, it offers only a sample of all the articles published on the website of a daily, collected during one of its countless crawls through the web. For our purposes, however, this does not have to be a significant problem, provided that its results constitute a representative sample of the newspaper content in terms of the ratio between the phrases "AK Parti" and "AKP". To check whether this really is the case, I compared Google results with results from *Hürriyet*'s own search engine (see Table 2).

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<sup>5</sup> *Hürriyet*'s search engine is available at <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/arsiv/>.

**Table 1.** Comparison of the results of detailed content analyses and the method used in this article

Study	Tunç and Arsan (2007) <sup>1</sup>		Çağlayan (2010) <sup>2</sup>		Balkır et al. (2008) <sup>3</sup>		Bayram (2009) <sup>4</sup>		Işık and Börekçi (2009) <sup>5</sup>		Şimşek (2009) <sup>6</sup>		Gölcü (2009) <sup>7</sup>	
Event	2002 general elections		2002 and 2007 general elections		2007 general elections		Presidential election in the Parliament in 2007		Deniz Feneri trials in 2008		2009 municipal elections		2009 municipal elections	
Time frame	9/16/2002-11/4/2002		9/1/2002-10/31/2002 6/1/2007- 7/21/2007		5/7/2007-6/22/2007		4/24/2007-4/30/2007		9/1/2008-9/30/2008		3/1/2009-3/29/2009		3/15/2009-3/27/2009	
# of papers	10		3		4		4		4		4		4	
Results	I	II	I	II	I	II	I	II	I	II	I	II	I	II
	Cumhuriyet	X	2002 Hürriyet	-	Cumhuriyet	-	Cumhuriyet	X	Hürriyet	-	Cumhuriyet	-	Cumhuriyet	-
	Hürriyet	-	2002 Sabah	+	Posta	-	Milliyet	-	Radikal	-	Hürriyet	-	Hürriyet	-
	Sabah	-	2002 Yeni Şafak	+	Hürriyet	+	Radikal	-	Zaman	+	Sabah	+	Sabah	-
	Radikal	-	2007 Hürriyet	+	Zaman	+	Zaman	+	Yeni Şafak	+	Yeni Şafak	+	Yeni Şafak	+
	Vatan	X	2007 Sabah	+										
	Star	X	2007 Yeni Şafak	+										
	Akşam	-												
	Zaman	+												
	Türkiye	+												
	Yeni Şafak	+												
Agreement	6/6	100%	3/6	50%	2/3	67%	3/3	100%	4/4	100%	4/4	100%	3/4	75%
Overall agreement	25/30	83%												

- : Anti-AKP slant + : Pro-AKP slant X : Insufficient or no web presence I: Detailed content analysis II: Method used in this article, based on “AK Parti” vs. “AKP”  
**Notes:** **1-** (Number of positive news) - (Number of negative news) for AKP on the first pages and politics pages of the newspapers, calculated from tables on pages 52-53. **2-** (Number of positive news) - (Number of negative news) for AKP, calculated from Table 1 on page 33 and Table 11 on page 60. **3-** Figure 4. on page 208 shows that JDP was the most heavily criticized party in Cumhuriyet and Posta, and the least criticized party in Zaman and Hürriyet. **4-** (Number of positive cartoons) - (Number of negative cartoons) about AKP leaders, calculated from Table 1 on page 117. **5-** Based upon verbal evaluation on page 78, which sums up the results as Hürriyet and Radikal siding with Doğan, and Zaman and Yeni Şafak siding with the AKP. **6-** (Number of positive news for AKP+Number of corruption news for other parties)-(Number of negative news for AKP+Number of corruption news for AKP), calculated from Table 5 on page 135. **7-**The article does not contain tables or quantification. Based upon verbal evaluations on pages 90, 92-93, 95, and 98 for Hürriyet, Yeni Şafak, Sabah and Cumhuriyet, respectively.



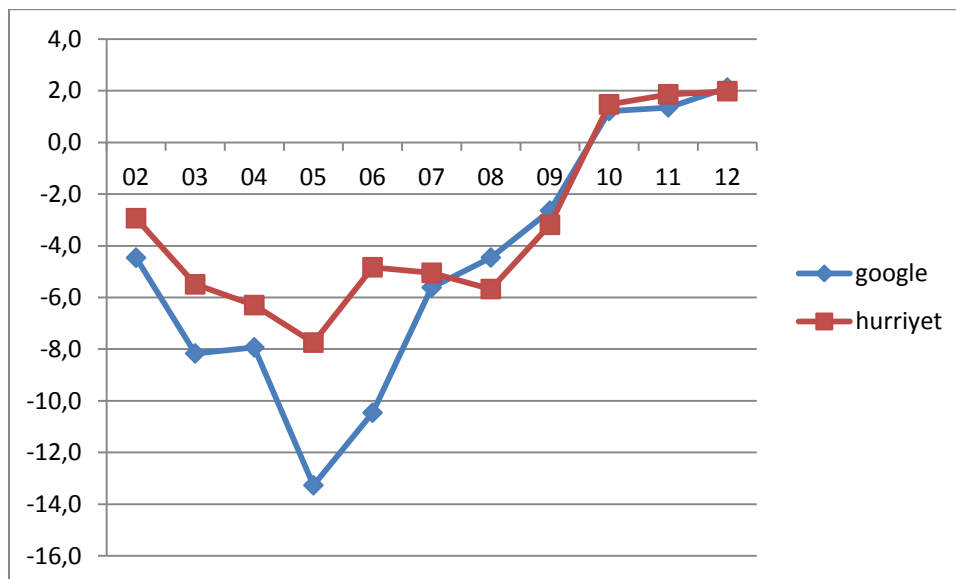
**Table 2.** Comparison of the results of Google and *Hürriyet*'s own search engine

	Hürriyet			Google		
	AKP	"AK Parti"	Ratio*	AKP	"AK Parti"	Ratio*
2012**	922	1.822	2,0	2800	5920	2,1
2011	2.558	4.743	1,9	5520	7450	1,3
2010	3.081	4.515	1,5	2050	2470	1,2
2009	5.810	1.820	-3,2	1950	737	-2,6
2008	8.361	1.472	-5,7	1940	435	-4,5
2007	7.572	1.499	-5,1	1500	267	-5,6
2006	4.914	1.016	-4,8	1130	108	-10,5
2005	4.116	531	-7,8	690	52	-13,3
2004	3.963	629	-6,3	595	75	-7,9
2003	4.491	817	-5,5	572	70	-8,2
2002	3.489	1.187	-2,9	469	105	-4,5

\*Negative figures are the ratio of "AKP" to "AK Parti" and indicate anti-AKP slant, positive figures are the ratio of "AK Parti" to "AKP" and indicate pro-AKP slant.

\*\*Figures for 2012 are for the first 6 months only.

**Figure 1.** Ratio between "AK Parti" and "AKP" as measured by Google results and the results of *Hürriyet*'s own search engine\*



\*Negative figures are the ratio of "AKP" to "AK Parti" and indicate anti-AKP slant, positive figures are the ratio of "AK Parti" to "AKP" and indicate pro-AKP slant

As Table 2 shows, the correlation between the ratios based on Google results and based on the results of *Hürriyet*'s own search engine is .92. What is more, in all the years between 2002 and 2012, Google succeeded in correctly estimating the sign of the ratio, with a success rate of 100%. For the years 2002 through 2009, both Google and *Hürriyet*'s search engine found that "AK Parti" was used more frequently than "AKP" on *Hürriyet*'s pages, and from 2010 to 2012, "AKP" was used more frequently than "AK Parti". The fit is even closer in

recent years, as Figure 2 shows, probably due to the improvements in Google's algorithms or more frequent crawls, but it is sufficiently good even prior to 2007. Thus, we can argue that Google does an excellent job of estimating the actual ratio between the two phrases on *Hürriyet's* web pages, measured in one-year periods, and there is no reason to assume that this would not be the case for other papers as well. Google results may or may not produce representative samples for other purposes, but for our purpose of gauging the ratio between "AKP" and "AK Parti" on Turkish dailies' web pages, it produces highly representative samples. In the absence of good newspaper archives, then, we can use Google results as estimates of actual ratios.

### Findings

Table 3 presents the positions of Turkish dailies towards the JDP in the one-year periods prior to the 2002, 2007 and 2011 general elections. It only includes papers that had a strong web presence for the periods under study, which together accounted for 43%, 53% and 92% of all the daily circulation. Prior to the 2002 elections, only seven papers met this criterion, 17 did prior to 2007, and 32 papers had a strong web presence prior to the 2011 elections.

Prior to 2002, the AKP faced a very hostile press environment, with five out of the seven papers with strong web presence carrying the anti-AKP slant, lending support to the party leaders' assertions that they came to power "despite the media." These five papers included the then highest circulation papers *Hürriyet* and *Sabah*, along with *Milliyet*, *Radikal*, and the small circulation *Yeni Mesaj*. *Hürriyet* used the phrase "AK Parti" only once for every four "AKP"s, and *Sabah* and *Milliyet* once for every eight. *Radikal's* aversion to the term "AK Parti" was even stronger, with an "AKP" to "AK Parti" ratio of 36. Among the papers included in the analysis, the anti-AKP camp accounted for 76% of the circulation.

The pro-AKP camp consisted of the large circulation *Zaman* and the small circulation *Yeni Şafak*, which together accounted for 24% of the circulation. Their preference for the term "AK Parti" resulted in a ratio of around four "AK Parti"s for one "AKP". Overall, the anti-AKP camp was stronger in its preference for one term and aversion to the other, with an average score (weighted by circulation) of -8. The pro-AKP camp had an average weighted score of 4.

In 2007, things changed significantly. Of the 17 papers with a strong web presence, only four were pro-AKP, but this time they accounted for 37% of the circulation. In addition to

*Zaman* and *Yeni Şafak*, the pro-AKP camp prior to 2007 included *Türkiye*<sup>6</sup> and *Star*.<sup>7</sup> The increase in the number of the titles and their circulation share was not the only change in the pro-AKP camp prior to the 2007 elections. The pro-AKP papers in this period also became more partisan, with *Zaman* and *Yeni Şafak* having “AK Parti” to “AKP” ratios of 8 and 10. *Türkiye* and *Star* had an even stronger aversion to the acronym AKP, using “AK Parti” 38 and 21 times more frequently than the other term. Overall, the weighted average score for the pro-AKP camp was 14.

The anti-AKP camp, on the other hand, increased in number, but decreased in terms of its circulation share in 2007. Twelve of the 17 papers included in the analysis carried an anti-AKP slant, and they generated 63% of the circulation. Their partisanship remained more or less the same, with a weighted average score of -7. In addition to *Hürriyet*, *Sabah*, *Milliyet*, *Radikal* and *Yeni Mesaj*, the anti-AKP camp this time included *Vatan*, *Cumhuriyet*, *Milli Gazete*, *Yeni Asya*, *Birgün*, *Evrensel* and *H. Daily News*. When we look at this list, it becomes clear that AKP had adversaries both in the large circulation mainstream media (*Hürriyet*, *Milliyet*, *Sabah*), among the small circulation dailies of the left (*Birgün* and *Evrensel*), and among the small circulation dailies with various Islamic/Conservative tendencies (*Milli Gazete*, *Yeni Asya*, *Yeni Mesaj*).

Starting with this period, we are also in a position to examine any changes in the positions of individual newspapers. The most significant change in a newspaper from 2002 to 2007 is observed in the behavior of *Sabah*, which was confiscated by the SDIF only months before the 2007 elections and run by this state agency during the elections. Although it remained in the anti-AKP camp with an “AKP” to “AK Parti” ratio of 1.6, just above the necessarily arbitrary cut point of 1.5, below which papers are considered to have balanced coverage (see notes for Table 3), *Sabah* started to use a lot more “AK Parti”s and a lot less “AKP”s in 2007, compared to 2002 when it had an “AK Parti” to “AKP” ratio of 2007. The most reasonable explanation for this decline, which brought the paper on the brink of balanced coverage, seems to be the change in the control of the newspaper. Other papers in the anti-AKP camp did not undergo a similar change in this period.

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<sup>6</sup> *Türkiye*, which has long been in publication and supported the AKP in 2002 according to Tunç and Arsan (2007), seems to have increased its web presence to be included in the analysis in 2007.

<sup>7</sup> *Star*, which was previously owned by Cem Uzan and supported his Genç Parti (Young Party) in 2002 elections according to Tunç and Arsan (2007) and many other observers, was confiscated by the SDIF in 2004, and was owned by Ali Özmen Safa prior to 2007 elections. Later Ethem Sancak became the dominant owner, prior to selling his shares to Tevhit Karakaya in 2010, who served in the Parliament as an AKP deputy between 2002 and 2007. For a content analysis of *Star*'s coverage prior to 2002 general and 2004 municipal elections, see Öztekin (Öztekin, 2008).

The changes observed prior to 2011 elections in the Turkish press scene were even more radical. For the first time in its history, the JDP faced a press environment that was predominantly friendly rather than hostile. Of the 32 papers included in the analysis, 16 carried pro-AKP slant, representing a whopping 78% of the circulation. These results become even more significant when we consider that the margin of error for that year was considerably smaller from the earlier two periods, for 32 of all the 36 titles published at the time, accounting 92% of all the daily circulation in Turkey, were included in the analysis since they had strong web presence.

The increase in the number and circulation share of the papers in the pro-AKP camp came both from new additions and the change in the positions of some previously anti-AKP papers. Also, some pro-AKP papers increased their circulation shares. *Vakit*, *Posta*, *Takvim*, *Fotomaç*, *Habertürk*, *Akşam*, *Bugün*, *Yeni Asır* and *Hürses* were the new additions to the pro-AKP camp in the 2011 elections. What is interesting in this list is that in addition to the traditionally Islamist-Conservative *Vakit*, which probably supported the AKP all along but became visible only now because of its increased web presence, it includes a sport title, *Fotomaç*, and two tabloid papers, *Posta* and *Takvim*. Sports newspapers and tabloid newspapers, because their political coverage tends to be rather thin, usually have readership profiles that cut right across the political spectrum.<sup>8</sup> Their inclusion in the pro-AKP camp, instead of in the balanced category, shows the reach of the pro-AKP slant.

*Hürriyet*, *Sabah*, and *Milliyet*, the biggest papers in the anti-AKP camp in the previous two elections in terms of circulation, all modified their political positions significantly in 2011. *Sabah* had already become a mild opponent in 2007 compared to 2002, when it was a strong opponent, and continued its transformation in 2011 to become a strong supporter of the AKP, under its new management, with an “AK Parti” to “AKP” ratio of almost 4. *Hürriyet* had remained a strong opponent in 2007, but turned into a supporter, however mild, of the AKP prior to the 2011 elections, starting to use “AK Parti” more frequently than “AKP”, with a ratio of close to 2. *Milliyet*, also owned by Doğan at the time, kept using “AKP” more frequently, but its score dropped from 11.9 to 1.2, making it a truly balanced paper.

With these heavyweights now out of the picture, the circulation share of the anti-AKP camp dropped from 63% to a mere 14%. There were 14 papers in the anti-AKP camp, but a majority of these were small-circulation papers. *Güneş*, *Taraf*, *Yeniçağ*, *Aydınlık* and *Ortadoğu* were the new additions to this camp in 2011. The small circulation *Aydınlık* of the

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<sup>8</sup> For an analysis of the party preferences of the readers of Turkish newspapers, see Çarkoğlu and Yavuz (2010).

left, and *Yeniçağ* and *Ortadoğu* of the nationalist camp in Turkish politics are expected additions to this list. The large circulation *Güneş*, owned by Çukurova group which has interests in many sectors and which also owns the pro-AKP *Akşam*, seems to represent an effort on the part of its owners to avoid putting all eggs in one basket, or to have products that cater to different markets. Something similar is observed with regard to *Hürriyet* and *Radikal*, both of which are owned by the Doğan group but stand on the opposite sides of the pro- or anti-AKP divide.

The political slant of the anti-AKP camp in 2011 was a lot stronger than in the previous years, with a weighted average of -23. This can be explained with the defection of the most mainstream papers, leaving mostly small circulation papers in the camp, which tend to serve more opinionated content.

For the first time since 2002, we have balanced papers in 2011 elections, *Milliyet* and *Fanatik*, accounting for a sizable 7.5% of the total circulation.<sup>9</sup> The sports title *Fanatik*'s placement in this category is not surprising given its audience which cuts across party lines, but *Milliyet*'s placement is significant given that it is the only mainstream paper with a balanced position towards the AKP. Although classified in the pro- or anti- camps, *Hürriyet*, *Akşam*, *Bugün*, *Radikal*, *Taraf*, *Milli Gazete* and *Today's Zaman* came closest to being classified in the balanced category, carrying some but avoiding excessive slant in 2011.

**Table 3.** Daily newspapers' positions towards the AKP

	2002					2007					2011				
	AK Parti	AKP	Ratio	Circ.	Circ %	AK Parti	AKP	Ratio	Circ.	Circ %	AK Parti	AKP	Ratio	Circ.	Circ %
Hürriyet	79	294	-3,7	461.504	30	241	1630	-6,8	590.323	22	8300	4460	1,9	439.115	10
Sabah	10	81	-8,1	384.000	25	582	938	-1,6	484.893	18	9230	2470	3,7	356.605	8
Milliyet	32	248	-7,8	280.202	18	312	3720	-11,9	224.591	8	10200	12400	-1,2	145.528	3
Radikal	7	255	-36,4	46.597	3	66	894	-13,5	35.517	1	2890	6280	-2,2	62.433	1
Yeni Mesaj	6	262	-43,7	2.929	0	2	265	-132,5	5.283	0	3	449	-149,7	6.738	0
Zaman	291	77	3,8	301.694	20	1200	154	7,8	587.039	22	6340	1160	5,5	950.370	21
Yeni Şafak	47	11	4,3	68.298	4	2890	284	10,2	121.085	4	13300	832	16,0	103.761	2
Vatan						10	25	-2,5	197.065	7	85	890	-10,5	117.927	3
Cumhuriyet						1	29	-29,0	75.834	3	205	10800	-52,7	54.609	1
Milli Gazete						23	162	-7,0	51.348	2	510	872	-1,7	56.501	1
Yeni Asya						22	87	-4,0	7.550	0	37	317	-8,6	51.103	1
Birgün						19	821	-43,2	7.230	0	114	5950	-52,2	6.119	0
Evrensel						1	60	-60,0	5.547	0	43	4420	-102,8	5.927	0

<sup>9</sup> There were no papers classified as balanced in 2002, and only *Today's Zaman* in 2007 which accounted for 0.1% of the circulation and which turned pro-AKP in 2011.

H. Daily News	1	82	<b>-82,0</b>	2.477	0	30	2140	<b>-71,3</b>	5.376	0
Türkiye	38	1	<b>38,0</b>	154.333	6	1120	7	<b>160,0</b>	145.163	3
Star	185	9	<b>20,6</b>	137.500	5	2000	386	<b>5,2</b>	151.541	3
Today's Zaman	196	158	<b>1,2</b>	3.731	0	3410	2030	<b>1,7</b>	5.013	0
Güneş						21	186	<b>-8,9</b>	101.337	2
Taraf						1940	4140	<b>-2,1</b>	53.827	1
Yeniçağ						241	3130	<b>-13,0</b>	51.437	1
Aydınlık						3	382	<b>-127,3</b>	41.404	1
Ortadoğu						96	2640	<b>-27,5</b>	12.887	0
Posta						2130	628	<b>3,4</b>	463.750	10
Habertürk						10500	2290	<b>4,6</b>	238.645	5
Fotomaç						49	7	<b>7,0</b>	214.568	5
Akşam						2150	1150	<b>1,9</b>	135.507	3
Takvim						937	238	<b>3,9</b>	110.943	2
Bugün						3810	1820	<b>2,1</b>	90.853	2
Vakit						2530	577	<b>4,4</b>	44.141	1
Yeni Asır						1100	202	<b>5,4</b>	32.341	1
Hürses						140	19	<b>7,4</b>	2.116	0
Fanatik						14	14	<b>1,0</b>	186.830	4
Vote share	34,28%			46,66%					49,83%	
<b>Pro-AKP</b>	<b>23,9 %</b>			<b>37,2 %</b>					<b>78,4 %</b>	
Weighted avg.	4			14					11	
<b>Anti-AKP</b>	<b>76,1 %</b>			<b>62,7 %</b>					<b>14,1 %</b>	
Weighted avg.	-8			-7					-23	
<b>Balanced</b>	<b>0%</b>			<b>0,1</b>					<b>7,5</b>	
Total circ.1	1.545.224			2.691.346					4.444.415	
Total circ.2	3.634.004			5.037.680					4.813.495	
Circ. Ratio	0,43			0,53					0,92	

Notes and explanations for Table 3:

**AK Parti and AKP:** Google results for the phrases “AK Parti” and “AKP” for the periods 11/3/2001-11/3/2002, 7/22/2006-7/22/2003, and 6/12/2010-6/12/2011 on the official websites of Turkish dailies.

**Ratio:** Negative figures are the ratio of AKP to AK Parti and indicate anti-AKP slant, positive figures are the ratio of AK Parti to AKP and indicate pro-AKP slant.

**Circ.:** Weekly circulation figures taken from medyatava.com for the weeks 09.12.2002 - 15.12.2002, 16.07.2007 - 22.07.2007, and 06.06.2011 - 12.06.2011

**Circ %:** The share of the daily in question as a percentage of Total circ 1.

**Total circ. 1:** Total circulation of the newspapers included in the analysis, which had sufficient web presence at the time. Papers for which Google turned up a total of less than 20 results were not included.

**Total circ. 2:** Total circulation of all daily newspapers published at the time.

**Circ ratio:** Total circ. 1 / Total circ. 2.

**Pro-AKP:** Total circulation share of papers with a pro-AKP slant as a percentage of Total circ 1.

**Anti-AKP:** Total circulation share of papers with an anti-AKP slant as a percentage of Total circ 1.

**Balanced:** Total circulation share of papers with balanced coverage as a percentage of Total circ 1. (Balanced coverage: Having a ratio figure between -1,5 and 1,5).

**Weighted avg.:** Weighted average of the pro- or anti-AKP papers' ratio figures, weighted by circulation share.

**Shading:** Light shade indicates papers with anti-AKP slant, dark shade indicates pro-AKP slant, no shade indicates a balanced position.

### A Word of Caution: News Content vs. Opinion Content

It should be kept in mind that the findings reported above do not make a distinction between the news content and the opinion content of the newspapers. It may well be the case that the news content and the opinion content of the same newspaper carry the opposite slant, one of them using “AK Parti” more and the other using “AKP” more. However, the Google search employed in this article does not allow making such fine distinctions, and the results reported apply to the total Internet content of the newspapers in question, without distinguishing news articles from columnists’ or other opinion articles.

*Hürriyet*’s pioneering online archive makes this comparison possible, with the search and browse capabilities that can separate columnists’ articles from news content, and we get a much better and detailed picture of the paper’s position towards the AKP. From the findings reported in Table 3, we know that *Hürriyet*’s position towards the AKP underwent a significant change, turning pro-AKP in 2011 after the two elections in which the paper carried a strong anti-AKP slant. Reading the paper’s columnists on the eve of the 2011 elections, however, one may not get this sense, and even have the impression that the party had more opponents among the paper’s columnists than supporters. If this really is the case, then observers of the Turkish press who form their opinions about papers mainly on the basis of their columnists would have a hard time concurring with the overall results reported in this article. To see whether the news and the opinion in *Hürriyet* carried the opposing slant, I compared their “AK Parti” vs. “AKP” counts over time, using *Hürriyet*’s own search engine, reported in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Political slant in the news and opinion content of *Hürriyet*

	Opinion			News			Overall		
	AKP	AK Parti	Ratio*	AKP	AK Parti	Ratio*	AKP	AK Parti	Ratio*
2012**	349	294	1,2	573	1.528	-2,7	922	1822	-2,0
2011	856	725	1,2	1.702	4.018	-2,4	2558	4743	-1,9
2010	1241	601	2,1	1.840	3.914	-2,1	3081	4515	-1,5
2009	1712	265	6,5	4.098	1.555	2,6	5810	1820	3,2
2008	2472	220	11,2	5.889	1.252	4,7	8361	1472	5,7
2007	2250	312	7,2	5.322	1.187	4,5	7572	1499	5,1
2006	1658	113	14,7	3.256	903	3,6	4914	1016	4,8
2005	1371	18	76,2	2.745	513	5,4	4116	531	7,8
2004	1404	13	108,0	2.559	616	4,2	3963	629	6,3
2003	1489	32	46,5	3.002	785	3,8	4491	817	5,5
2002	797	40	19,9	2.692	1.147	2,3	3489	1187	2,9

\*Negative figures are the ratio of “AKP” to “AK Parti” and indicate anti-AKP slant, positive figures are the ratio of “AK Parti” to “AKP” and indicate pro-AKP slant.

\*\*Figures for 2012 are for the first 6 months only.

As Table 4 shows, the overall shift in *Hürriyet*'s position mainly results from the shift in the discourse of the news articles whereas the columnists continue to prefer "AKP" over "AK Parti". There is a real shift in the columnists' discourse, too, as they start to use more and more "AK Parti"s and less and less "AKP"s, but this shift makes them only "balanced" by the criteria used in this article, not pro-AKP, unlike the shift in the discourse of the news articles, which turn pro-AKP starting from 2010. Thus, when we observe that *Hürriyet*'s overall discourse was pro-AKP prior to the 2011 elections, it should be kept in mind that this observation does not really apply to *Hürriyet*'s columnists, who on average used a balanced language in 2011.

In the previous years, though, *Hürriyet*'s columnists were far from balanced. To the contrary, their slant was a lot stronger than that of the news articles, with "AKP" to "AK Parti" ratios that were well above those of the news discourse from 2002 through 2009, peaking in 2004 when they used 108 "AKP"s for every mention of the abbreviation "AK Parti". Their aversion to "AK Parti" declined over time, especially after 2009, but it never became their preferred phrase over "AKP". Yet, this should not make us belittle the transformation that *Hürriyet*'s columnists underwent, for covering the distance from "strong opponent" to 'balanced' may be even more difficult than turning "mild supporter" after being "mild opponent."

### Discussion

Why was the Turkish daily press overwhelmingly supportive of the AKP in 2011, unlike the case in 2002 when the party faced a very harsh press environment? How come the pro-AKP camp accounted for only 24% of the circulation in 2002, increasing to 37% in 2007, and generating 78% of all circulation in 2011? Why did the abbreviation "AK Parti" gained in popularity while "AKP" lost favor? The reasons are probably manifold, and the following is a tentative account.

One obvious reason for the increasing popularity of "AK Parti" and the increase in the size of the pro-AKP camp may be the increase in the AKP's vote share, from 34% in 2002 to 47% in 2007 and 50% in 2011. If newspapers are in the business of selling news and opinion that cater to different tastes of consumers, then an increase in the number of the brands that serve the increasingly larger market segment of the AKP voters is only natural. Although it would be difficult to pin down causes and effects, there are studies in the literature supporting this type of an explanation. Gentzkow and Shapiro (2010), for example, find that the political



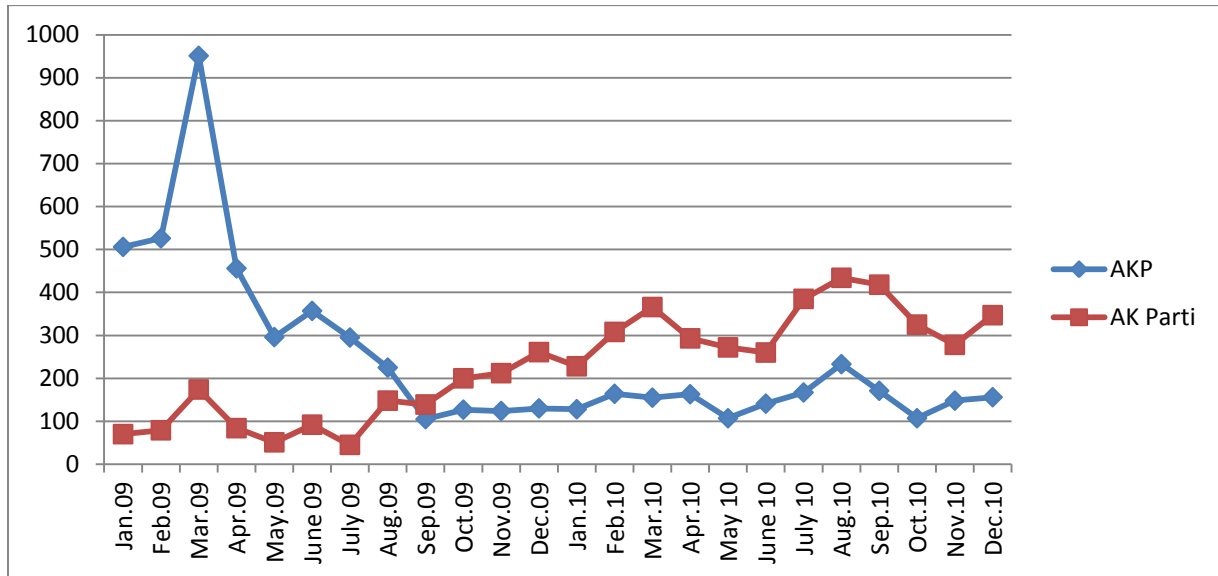
slant of local US newspapers closely follow the local strength of the Democratic or Republican candidates in that region. Their findings indicate the presence of “an economic incentive for newspapers to tailor their slant to the ideological predispositions of consumers” (p. 64). Answering the question whether similar dynamics played a role in the enlargement of the pro-AKP camp certainly requires more research, but Çarkoğlu and Gözde (2010) provide data showing that this at least is one of the probable explanations. Çarkoğlu and Gözde (2010) report that 43% of *Hürriyet* readers voted for the AKP in 2002, increasing to 48% in 2007 and probably increasing even further in 2011, which may have created some pressure on *Hürriyet*'s management to modify their slant in favor of the AKP.

Another explanation, also referred to in the literature on the recent history of the Turkish press, is the change in the ownership of very prominent newspapers. The most important examples are *Sabah* and *Star*, both of which came to be controlled by owners with strong ties to the AKP. Under its previous owners in 2002, *Sabah* was in the anti-AKP camp. Under the SDIF's management, it became a balanced paper in 2007, and under its current owner, Çalık Holding, the CEO of which is Erdoğan's son in law, *Sabah* was decidedly pro-AKP on the eve of the 2011 elections. *Star*, under the ownership of Cem Uzan, was little more than a mouthpiece for Uzan's Young Party and decidedly anti-AKP in 2002, but under the ownership of Tevhit Karakaya, an ex-MP from the AKP, it carried a strong pro-AKP slant prior to the 2011 elections. These examples show that changes in the ownership did play an important role in the shifts in the Turkish dailies' political positions.

The government pressure on the press outlets is also advanced as a cause of the shifts in the newspapers' political positions. The most prominent example in this respect is what is referred to as the Doğan-Erdoğan fight and the tax fine imposed on Doğan Group in September 2009. Although this is a controversial issue with fierce supporters on both sides, this at least needs to be registered as one probable cause of the change in the slant of the newspapers, more specifically of *Hürriyet*, and examined in more detail. Luckily for us, *Hürriyet*'s online archive provides ample information to probe this question. Above, it was noted that the most significant change in *Hürriyet*'s news discourse happened from 2009 to 2010. When we look at the ratio of “AK Parti” to “AKP” in more detail, at the level of months instead of years, we can pinpoint September 2009 as the month in which the transformation happened, curiously coinciding with the tax fine on Doğan (see Figure 2). The group was notified of the fine on September 8, making the headlines the following day, and from this month onwards, the count of “AKP”s in *Hürriyet*'s news articles never exceeded the count of “AK Parti”s, reversing a policy pursued for eight years since the establishment of the party.

This timing provides a strong support to the argument that *Hürriyet* changed its position as a result of the government pressure, whether perceived or real.

**Figure 2.** The count of “AK Parti”'s and “AKP”'s in *Hürriyet*'s news articles



Another explanation for the rise in the circulation share of the pro-AKP camp is the rise in the circulation figures of the pro-AKP papers. The most prominent example is *Zaman*, which sold around 300.000 copies a day in 2002 accounting for 8% of total circulation, and which sold around 950.000 copies a day in 2011, single-handedly accounting for 20% of all daily circulation (see Table 3). Although *Zaman*'s numbers are criticized because it relies heavily on subscriptions rather than single copy sales, these figures show a real increase in the circulation share of at least one pro-AKP paper.

**Table 5.** Effects of Erdoğan's intervention

Newspapers	Before	After
Hürriyet	4,9	1,9
Milliyet	3,4	2,9
Vatan	20,6	5,4
Akşam	1,9	7,3
Cumhuriyet	317,0	284,0
Radikal	2,7	2,1
Taraf	2,7	2,4
Ortadoğu	201,0	59,0
Yeniçağ	48,0	16,9
Birgün	135,0	67,9

Evrensel	27,0	15,0
Yeni Mesaj	25,0	27,0
Yeni Asya	6,5	3,8
Milli Gazete	4,6	3,7

Note: 'Before' refers to the period between March 1, 2009 and June 4, 2009, and 'after' refers to the period between June 4, 2009 and September 1, 2009. The figures are the ratio of "AKP" to "AK Parti", indicating anti-AKP slant.

Finally, another reason for the change in the fortunes of the phrase "AK Parti" over "AKP" may be PM Erdoğan's high-profile intervention in June 2009, heavily criticizing the use of "AKP" and urging all actors to use "AK Parti" instead. This may have tilted the discourse of all the newspapers, whether supporters or opponents, in favor of the latter phrase, and if it did so on a large scale, it would also diminish the validity of using the "AKP" to "AK Parti" ratio as an indicator of the anti-AKP slant. To examine the effects of Erdoğan's intervention, we can compare the "AKP" to "AK Parti" ratios in the anti-AKP camp prior to and after June 3, 2009, when his rebuke was reported. Limiting the comparison to the three-month periods before and after, we can isolate the effects of Erdoğan's intervention from the effects of the Doğan tax fine of September that year. Table 5 shows that there was indeed a decline in the "AKP" to "AK Parti" ratios in all of these newspapers except one, moderating their anti-AKP slant. However, none of these changes were large enough to put these papers in the pro-AKP or balanced categories: They all remained clearly in the anti-AKP camp, easing our worries about the validity of the measure after this date.

### Conclusion

Using the ratio between the phrases "AK Parti" and "AKP", we can identify the pro-AKP and anti-AKP papers. After establishing the validity of this measure by comparing its results with the results of the published content analyses, and with reference to the party leaders' statements, I have applied it to the press coverage prior to the 2002, 2007 and 2011 general elections. The results showed that the AKP did indeed come to power "despite the media," as is frequently claimed by the party spokespeople, facing a very hostile press environment prior to the 2002 elections, but the conditions in the last two elections have markedly improved for the party. In 2007, the pro-AKP camp in the press got larger, but it still remained smaller than the anti-AKP camp. In 2011, however, the papers carrying the pro-AKP slant accounted for 78% of the total circulation, providing the governing party with a very strong net support, so much so that we can safely attribute part of the spectacular success of the party in those elections to this friendly press environment.

As to the reasons for the increase in the size of the pro-AKP camp, I have discussed the rising popularity of the party with the voters, changes in the ownership of some press outlets, the government pressure on some papers, and Erdoğan's highly publicized criticism of the use of the acronym "AKP", calling all actors to use "AK Parti" instead. I have argued that the rising popularity of the party with the voters is a legitimate explanation, although one that needs further research to be established. The second explanation is supported by the prominent examples of *Sabah* and *Star*, which were in the anti-AKP camp under their previous owners, but carried the strong pro-AKP slant in 2011 under their new owners who have strong ties to the AKP. I have also found strong support for the third explanation, at least with regards to *Hürriyet*'s behavior, whose transformation coincided perfectly with the tax fine imposed on Doğan Group: from September 2009 onwards, when the tax fine was imposed, *Hürriyet* always used more "AK Parti"s than "AKP"s in its news discourse, reversing a policy of eight years followed since the establishment of the AKP in 2001. The final explanation, that Erdoğan's high profile criticism might be the reason for some of the increase in the number of papers carrying the pro-AKP slant, was not supported by the data. Although many papers in the anti-AKP camp moderated their slant after Erdoğan's intervention, they all remained decidedly anti-AKP, still preferring "AKP" over "AK Parti".

This article exploited a unique feature of the Turkish politics in the 2000s to examine political positions of the Turkish dailies. In the absence of this strong division with regards to the abbreviation of the party's name, the study would require costly human coding. In terms of methodology, the article shows that combining knowledge of the local context with simple word-count techniques; we can answer some very important questions, which might be applied in other contexts as well.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> For other studies which use simple word-count techniques to draw substantive conclusions, see Groseclose and Milyo (2005) and Bayram (2009).

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