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## **‘Shoot some pepper gas at me!’ football fans vs. Erdoğan: organized politicization or reactive politics?**

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In June 2013, during the Gezi protests against the Turkish Government, football fans in Istanbul appeared to be key elements in the movement, challenging common opinion which qualified them as a passive social element. Another major factor in the movement was the use of social media, especially Twitter, by mostly middle-class people with anti-government views. This paper examines a sample of independent, Istanbul-based match-going football fans’ political expressions on Twitter between 2012 and 2015 to attempt to uncover whether their online political expression hints at an organized and durable politicization or rather a spontaneous reaction against the government’s attempt to replace the core values, or ‘doxa’ of the republic, with Islamist principles. The findings of the research suggest that the fans’ lack of political engagement or experience prevented their involvement from having a serious political impact, a feature shared by most layers of the middle classes in Turkey, which may have blocked the Gezi Movement from making further political gains.

### **Introduction**

Football fans in Turkey, until recently, were considered by many to be a rather passive social element, exclusively interested in football, apolitical and even anti-political, except on issues for which there was an overwhelmingly dominating public opinion. They were also considered to be uninterested in mobilizing, except around rivalry-based brawls and fights with other football fans. However, especially since 2010, this image has changed as football fans have appeared as vocal political commentators notably on issues connecting with their world, such as the widely politicized match-fixing operation in July 2011 or the restriction on the sale and use of alcohol enforced in May 2013. During the 2013 Gezi protests, against the rising autocratic tendencies of the then-Prime Minister (now President of the Republic) Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s Justice and Development Party (AKP) government, football fans constituted an important element as they helped popularize the movement by lending it their ways of making noise (chanting, slogans, the use of humour). They furthermore created an important on-site presence as they were used to physical battles and experienced in clashes with the police. As protesters pushed the police behind the barricades and self-governed Gezi Park and its neighbouring Taksim district in downtown Istanbul, football fans were saluted as heroes enabling this ‘victory’. Their involvement in the protests also resulted in a court battle, as Beşiktaş’s

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notorious Çarşı group leaders were briefly prosecuted for ‘attempting a *coup d’état* against the elected government’. The charges were later dropped.

This paper principally deals with the participation of football fans in the Gezi protests. It aims to examine whether this participation was caused by and/or resulted from an enduring politicization among football fans in Istanbul. In order to explore these questions, Twitter messages from a sample of 36 football fans between 2012 and 2015 have been analysed. Twitter has been one of the key democratic channels where dissidents to the AKP regime might express their political views since the Gezi protests. It is therefore an important medium in the Turkish context, also bearing in mind that it played a considerable role in organizing the Gezi protests. It may be claimed that restricting the sample to Twitter users may result in a selection bias since this medium is considered to be used more frequently by the middle classes. However, it should be taken into account that Turkey is one of the countries in Europe where football fandom is least affordable, when comparing season ticket prices and TV subscriptions fees with the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita and the minimum wage. As a result of its transformation since the 1980 *coup d’état*, football in Turkey is a form of entertainment directly aimed at the urban middle classes. Therefore, Twitter users and football fans who can afford the games mostly belong to similar social classes, indeed with exceptions in both groups. Equally, it should be recalled that the core Gezi protests took place in three major middle-class neighbourhoods of Istanbul (Beyoğlu, Beşiktaş, Kadıköy),<sup>1</sup> which happen to be the birthplaces of three Istanbul teams. A KONDA survey suggested that the majority of Gezi protesters around the park were highly educated, young, middle-class people with no party affiliation who joined the protests mostly after witnessing the police violence.<sup>2</sup> Also bearing in mind that the urban, modern, secular middle classes in Turkey hold a special place as the successors of the Kemalist social project; the middle-class emphasis is therefore justified.

The Gezi Movement emerged as a political movement advocating a participatory, egalitarian democracy, challenging former and present regimes in Turkey in terms of their politics, social and economic policies. After the initial harsh treatment of protesters by the government and the police, the movement itself formed as a coalition of organized political bodies trying to find common ground with which to contest the AKP government over rights to public space, such as Taksim Square and Gezi Park. However, following the circulation of images of police violence on social media, it quickly became a mass movement of millions in several cities. Over the course of events, the movement shifted from a collective of political parties and associations to a spontaneous mass movement making impromptu political demands. For this reason, I find it important to make a distinction between politically organized bodies and the ‘newcomers’ who independently joined the protest in large numbers. Since independent football fans mostly arrived on the scene on 1 June, three days after the initial police attack against the tents at the park, they should be categorized mostly as ‘newcomers’. The organized Beşiktaş fan group Çarşı and some other leftist fan groups are an exception as they arrived early on in the protests.

The main hypothesis of this paper is that the online political expressions of middle-class football fans that go to matches and joined the Gezi protests have been of a reactive nature and mostly in line with the old republican doxa which aimed to be replaced by the Islamist principles of the AKP government. These expressions are not expected to show a political engagement in relation to the causes of the Gezi Movement other than restoring the old order; such as contesting neo-liberal policies,

gentrification agenda of the Taksim Solidarity collective, or in more general terms, creating a new and more inclusive democracy, alternative to the Kemalist or Islamist options, as frequently pronounced during the Gezi protests and the succeeding park forums.

### **Theoretical framework**

The principal question this research asks is whether these fans participated in the protests in support of the Gezi Movement's initial claims, mostly focused on environmental concerns and the government's neoliberal policies, or whether they participated in the movement in order to voice other claims. By other claims, I particularly interrogate the restoration of the old regime's principles (namely modernism, secularism and republicanism), gradually discarded after the AKP took over power and was replaced by more Conservative–Islamist principles. This research aims to analyse the social media expressions of middle-class football fans, which were a key element in the protests' popularization, over a period of three years to observe their political tendencies in order to find an answer to this question. The Istanbul-based football fans represent an emblematic group of people attending football matches in three major Stambulite football teams, which constitute about 80% of the football club support in Turkey.<sup>3</sup> They are economically and culturally restricted to the middle and upper classes as a result of a major transformation in Turkish football, which will be detailed in the upcoming paragraphs.

While fans' (and other groups') participation in the protests is usually analysed through their behaviours during the protests,<sup>4</sup> this research rather examines a wider period starting one year before the protests and ending two and a half years after them, also covering important political developments, such as one municipal, one presidential and two legislative elections. As a route into the material, I will introduce Pierre Bourdieu's 'field theory', as it provides a set of concepts that link the cultural field with the political field. Using Pierre Bourdieu's 'field theory', I will try to understand politicized football fans' 'habitus', their relation to the 'doxa', the set of beliefs they have internalized, and the 'field of power', the field of various power struggles; mainly trying to understand whether football fans participated in these protests in search of a new political environment, of which they could be a part, or whether they simply wanted to restore the 'old consensus', where football fans were mostly non-political and their lifestyle was not contested by the political elite.<sup>5</sup> I have chosen a Bourdieusian approach because it permits the establishing of links between the cultural field and the political field without completely renouncing the Marxist conception of inequalities and social struggles. It expands them by suggesting that capital is not an exclusively economic phenomenon but that it rather exists in cultural and social forms which can be converted into other forms of capital. The Gezi example is a striking case of cultural capital being converted into political capital against a government which is rich in social and political capital. Bourdieu's theory therefore provides a toolkit for the analysis of football fans' participation in the 2013 protests. The narrative and repertoire of the Gezi Movement, for instance positioning itself as a continuation of Western new social movements such as Occupy Wall Street, hint that the movement was a spontaneous alliance of the urban, modern, secular middle classes, relatively rich in cultural capital. It was however still diminutive compared to the vast social network of the ruling party, with close to ten million members, hundreds of associations and the ability to address mosque

congregation. In other words, it was a battle between a spontaneously organized cultural capital owning minority and a social capital owning majority which substituted its lack of cultural capital with psychological and physical violence.

The term ‘doxa’ in Bourdieu’s sociology is vital in this research. The difference between doxa and other political/cultural hegemonic discourse concepts is the dynamic nature of Bourdieusian sociology. Doxa, ‘the naturalization [by the established order] of its own arbitrariness’ which makes ‘the natural and social world appear as self-evident’,<sup>6</sup> is different than other hegemonic discourses, as it is not actively dictated by a ruling class. It is a dynamic result of complex social processes which result in a ‘relation of pre-reflexive acceptance of the world grounded in a fundamental belief in the immediacy of the structures of the *Lebenswelt* [that] represents the ultimate form of conformism’.<sup>7</sup>

In Turkey, the national ideology, Kemalism and its six principles (Republicanism, Secularism, Reformism, Nationalism, Populism, Statism) have been a national doxa since the early years of the Republic. Among those, republicanism, nationalism and secularism stand out,<sup>8</sup> while militarism is a hidden element of these core values. The founding elites of the Republic were the Turkish Armed Forces, an element fortified by frequent military interventions in political life between 1960 and 1997. Meanwhile, democracy can be suspended if one of the core values of the Republic is at stake.

This national(ist) doxa can be found in Turkish middle class habitus’ ‘generative principles of distinct and distinctive practices’<sup>9</sup> as diffused by inherited and acquired cultural capital. It should also be noted that the corporatist Kemalist ideology directly proposed a single society without classes and privileges;<sup>10</sup> and the urban, secular middle class resulted as the prototypical remains of this social project.

AKP’s takeover of power is critical regarding national doxa as Islamism is one of the two main political movements that challenge it; along with the Kurdish movement.<sup>11</sup> While the party’s attempts to change the national doxa were limited until 2010, after the Constitution referendum, the AKP government openly challenged almost all elements of it. AKP’s anti-democratic and autocratic tendencies spontaneously united the traditional political outcasts such as the Kurdish political movement and communists with the ‘anti-political’ middle classes, as underlined by Gürakar.<sup>12</sup> However, the durability and capacity for transformation of this spontaneous and unexpected alliance is another question.

The ‘field of power’ is another term in Bourdieusian sociology which helps to explain the unique place of the Gezi Movement in Turkish political history. The field of power, which is described as ‘a field of struggles for power among the holders of different forms of power’,<sup>13</sup> is mainly a more reflexive interpretation of the ‘dominant class’.<sup>14</sup> It shows fluctuations between the balance of power and the effects of different types of capital (economic, social, cultural) in the power struggle. In this context, even though a group may be deprived of some types of capital, they can still contest the field of power with the capital they have. In the Gezi example, it is cultural capital which defines the actors’ position vis-à-vis the field of power. Cultural capital can be found in an embodied, objectified, or institutionalized state; acquired through family, school or cultural goods. During the AKP regime the well-educated, urban, secular middle classes were excluded from dominating economic and social networks, notably in intellectual professions such as media and the academy; the ‘dominated fraction of the dominant class’, who culturally, but not necessarily economically, belongs to the elite.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, it is critical to find out whether this

fraction of society, after joining the Gezi Movement, challenged the field of power altogether in order to make room for new actors or simply defended their own position formerly represented as the state itself but recently ousted by the AKP regime. In other words, it is important to find out if the millions who joined the movement in order to follow the anti-political doxa imposed by the state elite and restore its domination, or to create a new way of participatory democratic politics.

### **Football, politics and fandom in Turkey since 1980**

The post-1980 coup d'état Prime Minister Özal, who was an advocate of neo-liberal economic policies, was well aware of football's impact on social life. The major impact of Özal's policies on football was the liberalization of the football industry. The first task was to restore the faltering condition of Turkish football, making it competitive in the international arena. Turkey had been marginalized due to the unlawful occupation of Cyprus and the violent *coup d'état*; hence re-establishing football as a sound form of entertainment and a generator of national pride was key. Corporate figures close to Özal started to appear on club boards and invest in big clubs. During this period, training facilities and stadiums were modernized, restrictions on recruiting foreign players and coaches were lifted, and the clubs were given the authority to self-regulate ticket prices. In 1991, after Turgut Özal became the President of the Republic, his son Ahmet Özal (unlawfully) co-founded the first private TV station in Turkey, and made broadcasting deals with clubs, creating major income from football, at the expense of the state-run TV network TRT. A liberal economy in football was ironically established by heavy state involvement. In 1992, after the transformation of football in Turkey was completed, the TFF was given autonomy. In the same year Beşiktaş, and in 1994 Fenerbahçe and Galatasaray were given 'public benefit society' status, providing them with important benefits, including tax exemptions.

After the 1980 *coup d'état*, the political elite actively reshaped football in cooperation with the financial elite. Fans' involvement in all these transformations was virtually non-existent. Fans' role in football clubs' day-to-day affairs was limited to on the pitch-related affairs; and their participation in decision-making processes were neither demanded, nor offered. However, there was one important change during the Özal period; fans were no longer considered to be voiceless masses, but rather clients essential to the well-being of clubs. They were still seen irrelevant to the decisions taken by club boards, but they were now the ones who finance them. It should also be noted that Özal's policies made football an exclusive form of entertainment which only the middle and higher classes could afford, which also created a socio-cultural transformation in addition to an economic one. The new supporters were not only clients but also aware of what it meant to be a customer, which is to demand their money's worth.

The late 1990s and the 2000s were a period when the economic and cultural capital of middle-class football fans became crucial so as to keep up with global trends which were transforming football. With the introduction of the internet and widespread cable TV, these fans were now able to follow the globalized football scene; the legacy of the Casuals in England and the Ultras in Italy and other European countries. They could watch the better marketed leagues and games reaching international fame, such as the Premier League or El Clasico. They quickly adopted fandom practices from these examples. In 1996, Beşiktaş's socially conscious fan group

Çarşı published *Forza Beşiktaş*, a fanzine which quickly gained a legendary status. The same group adopted the Kop style chanting and singing, using the tunes of popular hits, and combining them with vulgar, yet humorous lyrics. Other fan groups from different teams quickly followed. While football in Turkey was on a par with international standards, the fans claimed equal recognition. English-language banners such as Galatasaray's famous 'Welcome to Hell' started to appear in the stands and 'We are the best' chants were sung in English as well. This trend was also coupled with a vindictive nationalism, fuelled by the treatment of Turkey as a sub-par country by its European counterparts. One of the most popular chants in the 1990s, 'Avrupa Avrupa duy sesimizi, işte bu Türklerin ayak sesleri' [Europe, Europe hear us, this is the Turks' footsteps coming up] was an indicator of this frustration towards the West. This 'frustration' arguably peaked when two English fans near Taksim Square were stabbed to death in 2000, an incident celebrated by some newspapers in Turkey.<sup>16</sup> Bora and Erdoğan call football the most visible and measurable domain of Turkey's self-comparison with Europe which may result in the most extreme cases of pro-European admiration, as well as a tension mutating into revanchism.<sup>17</sup>

Football fandom in Turkey followed the same direction as the political inclination of the country. The fans almost never challenged the political elite or official ideology. Football stands were either strictly non-political, or a vessel of state-approved political messages; such as hostility towards the Kurdish militant organization PKK or a need for recognition directed at Europe. One exception of this consensus may be Çarşı's involvement in anti-racist and pro-environment campaigns; however even this fan group once held a giant banner with the quasi-official militaristic-nationalistic slogan 'Şehitler Ölmez, Vatan Bölünmez' [Martyrs will not die, the Motherland will not divide] before a game against Liverpool in 2007. The real abolition of a consensus between the Istanbul-based football fans and the political elite happened after 2010, when Erdoğan recorded a major Constitutional referendum victory, transferring important authorities in various state agencies from military members or other appointed members to elected powers; resulting in the checks and balances being weakened and AKP rule gradually turning into an autocratic regime.

### **The politicization of football fandom during the AKP Regime**

The Justice and Development Party recorded landslide victories in the 2002 and 2007 legislative elections as well as in the municipal elections in 2004. However, the critical point for AKP's turn from a democratically elected government into an increasingly autocratic regime was the constitutional referendum held in September 2010.<sup>18</sup> As a result of this referendum, important authorities relating to the justice system were transferred from the civil and military bureaucracy to the legislative power. Therefore, the AKP, and its ally at that time, the Gülen religious group, had a massive impact on the justice system, threatening the separation of powers. Several politically motivated lawsuits were filed against AKP's political rivals, namely the army officials, their Kemalist allies and also pro-Kurdish politicians. The Specially Authorized Courts and Public Attorneys, closely resembling the High Security State Courts of the 1980s and 1990s, could easily instigate legal action against hundreds of people, usually accompanied by a months-long pre-trial and on-trial detentions. These practices, including sending dissidents to prison, were criticized both

by scholars like Akser and Baybars-Hawks<sup>19</sup> or Jenkins<sup>20</sup> as well as human rights reports.<sup>21</sup>

An investigation into football match-fixing allegations was launched in July 2011, and was carried out in a similar manner. Depending upon the newly enacted Law No.6222 on the Prevention of Violence and Disorder in Sports, the Specially Authorized Public Attorney ordered a raid on several sports officials' domiciles and offices, including those of Aziz Yıldırım, the chairman of Fenerbahçe Sports Club, the title holders of the 2010–2011 football season. Yıldırım, along with some officials from Beşiktaş and Trabzonspor, was arrested, and his mug shots illegally leaked. The General Directorate of Security also published a press statement emphasizing that the arrested officials were involved in criminal activities as noted in a *BBC* article on 07 July 2011.

Fenerbahçe fans perceived this process to be a conspiracy by the AKP and Gülen against their clubs, and raised their voices. Especially, the critical fans' blog Papazın Çayırını (defunct since 2015) and semi-official fan site 12numara.org emerged as alternative media outlets where fans could convey their outrage.<sup>22</sup> Fans organized a rally in the club's home base Kadıköy district and also staged a protest against the supposedly pro-Gülen Taraf newspaper which claimed Aziz Yıldırım was a criminal. During the trials, Fenerbahçe fans organized rallies in front of the İstanbul Courthouse and faced police violence on several occasions. The striking point in these protests was the increasing emphasis on the pro-secular characteristics of the Kadıköy neighbourhood and the Fenerbahçe club, as well as the claim that the Islamist AKP and Gülen staged a conspiracy in order to take over the club and force it to lose its secular features. Even though this claim was quite contradictory as Aziz Yıldırım himself had invited many pro-AKP businessmen into the club board over the years, the motto 'Last Fortress Fenerbahçe' (against the Islamists), also voiced by Yıldırım himself, gained popularity. In May 2012, after a critical title game between Fenerbahçe and Galatasaray, police teargassed the Fenerbahçe fans in the stands and fans in return attacked police vehicles in Kadıköy.

Fenerbahçe was not the only team to have issues with the AKP government. Beşiktaş also had similar pro-secular characteristics, and its pro-leftist fan group Çarşı frequently clashed with the police. Especially after Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's working office was moved to the Beşiktaş neighbourhood, not far from where Çarşı fans gathered before the games; pressure on supporters increased. Also, the police brutally dispersed Beşiktaş fans on a number of occasions, notably before the Bursaspor game in December 2010 and Gençlerbirliği game in May 2013. The Çarşı group clashed with the police on other occasions, such as the Labor Day celebrations, which are frequently outlawed by the governor's office in Istanbul. On Labor Day in 2013, Çarşı introduced their anti-police chant, which would later gain legendary status: 'Shoot, shoot, shoot some pepper gas at us, take your helmet off, leave your club and we will see who the real man is'.

The other Stambulite giant, Galatasaray, also had its share of problems resulting from the AKP's increasing pressure on supporters. In January 2011, Galatasaray's new stadium, partly built by state incentives, was inaugurated by the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Erdoğan Bayraktar, head of TOKİ (Mass Housing Development Authority). In the opening ceremony, Bayraktar delivered a speech insulting Galatasaray's former president Özhan Canaydın, who had recently passed away. This resulted in a major protest organized by supporters. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was also booed and had to leave the stadium before the opening game



started. Furthermore, alcohol-serving cafés and restaurants where Galatasaray fans traditionally gathered in the Beyoğlu district faced AKP pressure, as their open-air tables were prohibited and some received penalties.

Law No.6222 also gradually introduced the Passolig e-ticket scheme, an identification measure similar to those proposed by the UK Thatcher government in 1989, considering all football fans as potential troublemakers.<sup>23</sup> The Passolig scheme also forced all football spectators to have an account at Aktif bank, a bank run by Çalık Holding, one of the holdings known to be closest to Erdoğan. Even though this scheme was fully implemented after the Gezi protests, the law with its securitist and anti-democratic aspects already created a negative reaction. According to Nuhurat and Akkoyunlu arguing in *Open Democracy* on 16 October 2013, this law was actually a harbinger of AKP's other policies that 'bestow democracy' and 'criminalize dissent'.

The common grievances of three fierce rivals' fans reached a climax in the Gezi protests in June 2013. The severe restrictions on alcohol sale and consumption were introduced days before the protests; and the Taksim urbanization project proved to be a concern for the fans as it was one of the symbolic locations of Istanbul's modern culture.

## Methodology

I made the choice to use middle-class football fans' Twitter messages as data for several reasons. Twitter, as a micro-blogging site on an agora-like timeline which can be spread through 'retweets' (shares), was a useful tool in the recent wave of social movements in order to help diffuse information and increase organizational capacity.<sup>24</sup> The use of Twitter for similar purposes during the Gezi Protests in Turkey is also remarkable. During the events (May 29–June 17, 2013), the number of Twitter users in Turkey increased from one million to 2.5 million, and the number of messages posted reached a peak of 25 million on 1 June, when the occupation of Gezi Park was met with police violence and mainstream media refused to cover the news; an analysis can be found on the *Insight Radar* website as of 07 August 2013. The use of Twitter during the protests has also been widely analysed by scholars.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, the political use of the Internet, notably of Twitter, resulted in a series of bans by the government, after the Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan vowed to 'eradicate Twitter'.<sup>26</sup>

Football fans' use of new media tools started long before the Gezi Park events. In a Likert-type survey conducted by Özsoy in 2011 with 620 university students, a score of 4.50 (out of 5) was recorded as regards Facebook use, 4.05 on using Internet to receive sports news and 3.00 on following sports blogs.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, sports blogs and social media also functioned as an alternative to the conventional media which focused on domestic sports news, while blogs employed a much more global approach. According to Çevikel, as of 2012, 57.2% of the total number of football columns in the conventional media covered four teams (Beşiktaş, Galatasaray, Fenerbahçe and Trabzonspor), while it totaled 29.7% on football blogs (which constituted 10% of the total number of blogs in Turkey in 2009).<sup>28</sup> While the football blogs featured more diverse content, they were also used to make bolder, more political expressions, like the Papazın Çayırı blog of Fenerbahçe fans during the match-fixing operation in 2011.<sup>29</sup> The change in content regarding discourse and diversity also hints at the content production and consumption by fans with higher cultural

capital, consistent with Özsoy's university student survey. In Turkey, cultural capital was also a sociopolitical factor, mainly reserved for the urban, modern and secular middle class,<sup>30</sup> until the AKP took over power. Therefore, social media-using football fans who could afford to attend the games constitute a remarkable group owing to their sociocultural and economic position. In addition, their mass participation in the Gezi protests had an effect due to their 'accumulated conflicts and experience'.<sup>31</sup>

As a sample, sixty football fans fulfilling a set of criteria were selected. First of all, the users writing under the #DirenişGeziParkı hashtag and/or posting their four-square check-ins at Taksim Square or Gezi Park between 31 May and 2 June, 2013 were manually searched for on Twitter. Among these users, the ones with symbols related to football fandom (the ones bearing the club names or foundation dates on their nicknames, using club hashtags on their Twitter bios, using club symbols as headers and avatars) were selected. Then, it was manually checked to see whether they attended football games, by using their Instagram and Foursquare check-ins posted on Twitter. Foursquare was used as a verification measure, since this application frequently uses location data. Among the fans who participated in the protests and attended football games, 12 Beşiktaş, 12 Galatasaray, and 12 Fenerbahçe fans were randomly selected.

In order to collect these fans' tweets posted between June 2012 and December 2015; a Java code written by Jefferson Henrique<sup>32</sup> was used. The principal methodology used was a hybrid content analysis. Quantitative analysis tested whether users posted tweets relating to a set of political developments within the afore-mentioned interval. These developments were: the 17–25 December 2013 graft probe against ministers, the 30 March 2014 municipal elections, the 13 May 2014 Soma mine disaster, the 10 August 2014 presidential elections, the 7 June 2015 legislative elections, the 20 July 2015 Suruç bombing, the 10 October 2015 Ankara bombing, the August–December 2015 curfews, military operation and clashes in Turkish Kurdistan, and the 1 November 2015 legislative elections. The quantitative content analysis did not depend on the number of total tweets posted by users as each user sent different numbers of tweets, which could result in unequal representation. Instead, the number of users posting on any particular subject was taken into account. The qualitative content analysis depended on linguistic and political trends among users, giving the reader a context for these messages.

## Findings

### *Identity in User Biographies*

The analysis began by visiting the fans' user profiles on Twitter. In order to find symbols and messages relating to fan identities on their profiles, I took the name, username, biography sections, as well as visuals such as headers and avatars into account. This part of the research asked three questions: whether they used Twitter anonymously or with their real name, whether their profile page contained any symbols or messages relating to the club they supported, and whether it featured any political symbols or messages.

Out of 36 football fans selected for analysis, 23 used their forename and surname. While it is not possible to confirm these names, it seems quite likely that they were accurate. While 11 fans used Twitter semi-anonymously, with their forenames and sometimes the initials of their surnames, two users were completely anonymous.

This is intriguing, for as Peddinti and others suggest,<sup>33</sup> Twitter's lack of a real-name policy, unlike Facebook or Google+, gives users 'the ability to tweet messages without revealing their actual identities [...] and to follow sensitive and controversial accounts'. In online activism, anonymity is not only a need when freedom of speech is threatened,<sup>34</sup> it is also an element that 'promote(s) identity formation and help(s) build communities'.<sup>35</sup> As reported in the newspaper *Radikal* on 20 May 2013 in Turkey, a minor was sentenced to three years in prison for his political Facebook messages and since then citizens have been frequently taken to court for their Twitter and Facebook messages. Therefore, supporters' preference to use their names on Twitter may be interpreted as evidence of their inexperience in online activism. Content analysis also supports this argument; the use of Twitter accounts for political expressions prior to the Gezi protests (June 2012–June 2013) was very low and the political messages were overwhelmingly on either national holiday celebrations or in support of the Turkish military against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), completely in line with Turkish national doxa. Some lifestyle issues such as the abortion ban or the restriction on alcohol sale were criticized by a few users, although not as intensively as those issues dominated the political debate on Twitter when they featured on the national agenda.

Another hypothesis regarding the lack of anonymity may be the belief that their arguments were in line with the national doxa and therefore they would not be persecuted, as opposed to thoughts expressed by other groups, such as Kurds or communists. One fact that may support this hypothesis is that, of the ten users who included political messages in their Twitter profile biographies, five quote Atatürk, the founding father of the Republic, while two wrote 'TC', short for 'Türkiye Cumhuriyeti' (Republic of Turkey). While these messages implicitly criticized the AKP government's anti-Kemalist, anti-republican policies, they did not constitute any risk of persecution. Meanwhile, those who used the words 'left', 'democrat', and 'çapulcu' ('looter', the word Erdoğan used to insult Gezi protesters) were either anonymous or semi-anonymous accounts. While the sample is not large enough to jump to generalizing conclusions, it may be said that being in line with the national doxa, even if against the AKP policies, is considered to be safe by most users, which might lead them to use Twitter with their full names.

Out of 36 supporters, 24 had at least one visual or verbal reference to the team they support. In 20 examples, fandom is presented to be the key identity asserted, as expressed by one user, 'Me = Fenerbahçe. My life is Fenerbahçe'. In four of the other biographies, fandom was listed among other interests. Since Twitter biographies act as a primary way of reaching out to potential followers, it may be claimed that expressions of fandom and being followed by fellow supporters are key reasons to use Twitter. In none of the examples were political expressions used. The majority of the sample introduced themselves as football fans and none of them prioritized their political identity over their fan identity. This deduction is also supported by the content that the sample produced.

Before analysing the content, it should be noted that the football fans participating in the protests did not constitute a monolithic block. However, there were also noticeable patterns.

Firstly, in none of the users' threads was the number of political comments larger than the number of comments on football or sports in general. Only one, who self-identified himself as a 'racist', wrote about his political views in a comparable amount to his views on Fenerbahçe and sports. His Twitter biography also featured

his political views and expressions regarding Fenerbahçe. All but six participants defined themselves as nationalists/Kemalists or presented views or actions in line with these ideologies. Even though most users expressed opinions critical of right-wing parties, only one user openly called himself a 'leftist'; while 14 users showed support for the centre/Kemalist CHP, despite only one user declaring their membership to this party.

Distance and even hostility towards political parties and 'being political' were a visible tendency among participants. Except for the afore-mentioned CHP member, no user declared membership to a political party. Four users from three teams were openly against political parties. One Fenerbahçe fan also did not want party and organization flags at Gezi rallies. A Galatasaray fan wrote, 'I'm not left-wing, I'm not right-wing, I am just a citizen. I am not a rioter, not an activist, not a terrorist; I just want a space to live'. The lack of political adherence was often replaced by fan identities. The same fan wrote, 'Fuck AKP, CHP and HDP (pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party). Galatasaray is the greatest'. A Beşiktaş fan said that his political view was 'Beşiktaş'. A Fenerbahçe fan believed that the ruling party and the opposition were defined by her club Fenerbahçe. Another Fenerbahçe fan, in contrast, stated that Fenerbahçe has always been against political powers and 'the moment political tutelage is down, Fenerbahçe prevails'. A Beşiktaş fan complained about his team Beşiktaş being dragged into politics.

While some users replaced their lack of political adherence with fandom, others explained their fandom as being in harmony with their political views. For nationalist users, it was a common practice to brag about how nationalistic their teams are and to criticize the rival for not being nationalistic enough. Fenerbahçe fans often called Galatasaray 'the French', as the club was founded by a graduate of a French-speaking high school with the same name. A nationalist Fenerbahçe fan called Galatasaray 'French' and also 'PKK', as PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan is known to be a Galatasaray fan. Meanwhile, a Galatasaray fan shared an article on Galatasaray players who fought in the Gallipoli War in 1915. Some Fenerbahçe fans bragged about the General Harrington Cup, a tournament Fenerbahçe played and won against the British occupation forces in 1923, while a Galatasaray fan claims Fenerbahçe played that cup in order to avoid actual battle.

### *Ethnic Issues*

In Turkey, ethnic issues arose out of the Ottoman Empire's demise in late nineteenth century, such as the Kurdish issue, the Armenian Genocide and the Greek-Turkish conflict, all of which define the core of Turkish nationalism. These issues remain controversial in Turkey, if not taboo. The Turkish national doxa is clear cut on these issues, as the 'Republican cosmology', according to Göker and Akdeniz, invents 'Turk' as a super-identity, helping nationalism to completely dominate the political field.<sup>36</sup> In other words, a 'Turk' as a political individual is expected and provided with a set of arguments to defend 'Turks' political righteousness in relation to all of these conflicts.

In this research, narratives outside of the official ideology on ethnic issues were scarce; the 2011 Roboski massacre in which 34 Kurdish civilians were bombed to death by Turkish Air Forces was mentioned by only two users, while other controversial ethnic issues such as the Armenian Genocide or the 6–7 September 1955

pogroms were mentioned only once. The Kurdish issue was not frequently debated either, despite its severity between June and November 2015, after the AKP government launched a military intervention in Kurdish regions against PKK guerrillas, resulting in hundreds of civilian deaths. Only one user mentioned the civilian deaths, 12 users mentioned the Kurdish problem a couple of times, exclusively through the Turkish perspective, and only citing the ‘martyrs’, the description in national doxa for soldiers killed in clashes with the PKK. Only one user declared as voting for the pro-Kurdish HDP, as he considered this party the only power able to stop the AKP. Four other users praised the HDP for similar reasons, despite not voting for the party. More nationalistic users expressed severe criticism of HDP voters, calling HDP co-chair Demirtaş ‘a baby murderer’, and considering voting for the HDP ‘treason against Turkey’, or stating that ‘Istanbul needs to be burned down because the HDP had more votes than the nationalist MHP (Nationalist Movement Party)’. Three users were openly against peace negotiations with the PKK, while one user, a Kemalist CHP voter stated that the only way to reach peace was to negotiate with Abdullah Öcalan. Except for the self-defined racist user, who called for a genocide against Kurds, violent militaristic views were not popular among the participants, even though the overwhelming majority of users were not critical of the Turkish Armed Forces’ treatment of civilians in the Kurdish region. It should be noted that this aforementioned user is an exception within the sample; he also seemed to retract his support for the Gezi Movement later, accusing the movement of paving the way for ‘terrorist organizations such as the PKK and DHKP-C’.

### ***Environmental Claims***

While environmental claims were at the heart of the Gezi Protests, messages regarding environmental issues after June 2013 are almost inexistent in the sample, despite other environmental protests such as in Cerattepe and Artvin taking place against proposed mining activities in February 2015. In this research, no evidence could be found that would falsify the hypothesis that football supporters drew on environmental claims as a proxy to convey their silenced political concerns. As a matter of fact, this argument was frequently used by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as evidence of protesters’ ill intentions of overthrowing the government. However, the state of freedom of expression and data on the lack of political participation suggest that the protesters’ use of environmental issues as a proxy for other political concerns is an indicator of the massive democratic deficit in the country.

### ***The Graft Probe and the 2014–2015 Elections***

An important event that took place after the Gezi protests was a corruption scandal in December 2015. Starting from 17 December, public attorneys close to the allyturned-enemy Gülen religious group launched a major graft probe against several high-ranking government officials, including four ministers and their families. A second wave of raids was expected, aimed at Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s family, but these never occurred after intense governmental pressure on the Higher Authority of Attorneys and Judges. As reported on the *Reuters* webpage on 02 May 2014, the Erdoğan government dismissed all allegations as a ‘judicial coup attempt against the government’, and later in May 2014, the case was dismissed after almost all police officers, attorneys and some judges taking part in the probe were replaced.

Meanwhile, before the March 2014 municipal elections, anonymous sources presumably close to Gülen leaked voice recordings criminalizing the Erdoğan family. As noted by *TIME* magazine on 21 March 2014, it triggered bans on Twitter and YouTube, where anti-government messages and recordings were massively circulated, after Erdoğan vowed ‘we’ll eradicate Twitter’ at a public rally. However, these events did not affect Erdoğan’s AKP as it increased its votes by 4% in the elections.

In the sample, 27 users were actively interested in the graft probe, the tape recordings and the local elections. These users unanimously protested against the government as regards the corruption scandal, believing in the authenticity of the voice recordings and overwhelmingly hoping that the main opposition party CHP would challenge the AKP in the municipal elections, notably in Istanbul and Ankara where Islamist parties had reigned for over two decades. After these cities were won by the AKP, general disappointment and severe criticism were observed and most users stopped writing political messages.

After this disappointment, the number of users interested in the first ever presidential elections in August 2014 visibly decreased. Only 18 users expressed their views on the elections. These users were further disillusioned by the outcome of the vote won by Erdoğan with 52% in the first round, as well as the other candidates Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, a former Islamist, and the Kurdish leader Selahattin Demirtaş.

Before the June 2015 legislative elections, interest in politics slightly increased as the elections appeared to be a critical vote after President Erdoğan declared that he needed 400 MPs for his former party AKP to change the Constitution and establish executive presidential rule; a declaration widely reported in media as e.g. in *Hurriyet Daily News* on 05 February 2015. In order to prevent this, the pro-Kurdish HDP carried out a very active campaign under the slogan ‘we won’t let you be president’. The CHP also started a ‘Come, vote and send them away’ campaign, although they later changed it to ‘come and vote’. In these elections, HDP’s possibility of passing the 10% national threshold proved to be critical as the AKP could not reach the 367 MPs necessary to change the Constitution unless the HDP failed to pass the threshold. In the research sample, 23 of which commented on these elections, as mentioned, only one user openly declared that he voted for HDP, despite being a CHP supporter, while four others praised the party for challenging President Erdoğan.

After the June 2015 elections, in which the AKP failed to reach a parliamentary majority for the first time since 2002, a massive military operation was launched in Kurdish regions where the AKP was electorally dominated by the HDP, often interpreted as a display of vengeance against HDP voters. Also, a spiral of violence started to dominate the country as two major bombings occurred at pro-peace rallies, in Suruç on 20 July and in Ankara on 10 October, presumably committed by ISIS militants after major intelligence flaws by the Turkish security forces. Under these conditions, the country was taken to another legislative election on 1 November, where the AKP regained the parliamentary majority.

Interestingly, all these events were interpreted by just a fraction of the sample. Only 15 users commented on the Suruç bombing, and 14 on the attack in Ankara, while millions of users posted their comments on these events on Twitter. The 1 November elections were commented on by 18 users, as low as the number of users commenting on the presidential elections. The military operation and the month-long

curfews imposed in Kurdish regions were commented on by only one user, and the military killed by the PKK attacks were commented on by seven users.

### ***An Exception: The Soma Mining Disaster***

While interest in politics gradually decreased, a notable exception was the Soma mining disaster, where 301 miners were killed in a coal mine on 13 May, 2014. This disastrous event turned into a political scandal as the mine where the incident happened was owned by pro-government business figures and opened by the minister Taner Yıldız. During Erdoğan's visit to Soma, the political outrage became aggravated as security forces attacked victims' relatives, while Erdoğan himself tried to slap one protester and shouted an anti-Semitic slur. Also, Yusuf Yerkel, one of Erdoğan's aids, kicked a protester lying on the ground with the help of two gendarmes, and later received doctor's treatment for injuring his foot. These events triggered massive outrage on social media with 28 of the sample engaging in the debate. The high level of participation in the Soma debate may be related to the non-partisan nature of the incident. In the Suruç and Ankara bombings, the victims were pro-Kurdish, socialist and communist party members, and the clashes in Turkish Kurdistan were between the AKP government and the Kurdish movement, from which most users in the sample seemed to be distant. The non-partisan, relatively non-political and anti-AKP nature of events appealed to a public, distant from politics but concerned by the AKP policies, including many members of this research sample.

### **Conclusions**

The reactions and expressions of these 36 football supporters, who regularly attended football games and participated in the Gezi protests, on political events between 2012 and 2015 suggest that their participation in political debates was rather event-based and thus was inconsistent. About two-thirds of the sample were not at all engaged in political discussions on Twitter in the year before the Gezi protests, and 22% never participated in such discussion after the events. None of the users except one had a party membership, while some expressed dislike for party politics and even parties' participation in the Gezi rallies. In most cases, their football fandom was presented as a substitute for a political identity. Their non-engagement and even dislike of political participation is a trademark for the national doxa imposed in Turkey. Another major indicator of this doxa being present is the generic political brand of being 'Kemalist' or 'republican', which has been presented to the general audience, often replacing political movements deemed 'harmful', such as leftist, pro-Kurdish or Islamist politics. The visible dislike of pro-Kurdish politics in the majority of the sample is also a predominant trend in post-1980 coup politics in Turkey. In this research, I observed that the Kurdish conflict was generally interpreted through Turkish security forces' perspective and not as a negotiable two-party conflict, which is also a staple of the nationalistic-militaristic official narrative. In this context, it is very hard to claim that the majority or even a notable fraction of football supporters actually challenged the national doxa.

The initial claims of the Gezi Movement, comprised of organized political bodies, such as contesting non-libertarian and pro-corporate politics of the AKP regime were hardly shared by the sample of supporters, as resistance against the AKP was mostly explained via core values of the national doxa, such as republicanism,

secularism or nationalism, rather than substantial claims by the movement which generally proposed a new form of democracy in Turkey. Even claims based on fan identity (such as the controversial e-ticket scheme) or lifestyle issues did not dominate, even though the non-political messages of an overwhelming majority portrayed a secular lifestyle, heavily contested by the AKP.

The findings suggest that the majority of the fans in this sample have a distinctive inexperience and distance regarding participatory politics, which is reflective of both the general Gezi typology and the middle-class Turkish society. Consequently, the lack of a solid outcome and severe government pressure on protesters discouraged them from further challenging the AKP regime. Their engagement increased during the graft probe in which they were not an actor. It should also be noted that only 13 of the supporters were aware of the Gezi Park protests in the first three days before the event was communicated to by millions through social media, and none of them declared to be a part of the movement before the protests in the park took place. Therefore, it can be claimed that the supporters were mostly latecomers and/or passive participants in the political events challenging the regime. This is interesting as all three Istanbul clubs had problems with the police and the government before the Gezi protests. In this research, it can be observed that these issues never turned into a solid political movement involving football fans and even though football fans helped popularize the Gezi protests, their political input in the movement was very individualized and low.

Finally, I reached the conclusion that the football fans participating in the protests should not be considered independent from the middle-class participants of the Gezi Movement. First of all, even though their fandom helped promote popular participation to the protests, politically their identity did not have an effect on the causes of the movement. Had this participation been in a context wherein fan groups joined the protests as an entity and became a part of the Taksim Solidarity movement, in order to contribute to the movement's decision-making, it could have been claimed that the fan identity had a major political impact. However, the fans' contribution to the movement regarding popularization and tactics cannot be disregarded. Fans' involvement in physical confrontation and the use of football chants in protests proved to be very important for the Gezi Movement. Nevertheless, the fan groups' political diversity and the lack of political interest or experience in most fans prevented this from having a serious political impact. I think that these characteristics of middle-class football fans are shared by most layers of the middle classes in Turkey, which may have blocked the Gezi Movement from reaching further political gains. Also, the lack of continuity for the movement can be attributed to the lack of political engagement of the middle classes, which is observable in the sample group as well.

The political reactions of football fans in Turkey can be considered as action against the autocratic tendencies of the regime. Since 2010, these reactions have been increasingly frequent, as those aforementioned tendencies have been felt more severely by society. However, it is very hard to believe that these reactions constitute a consistent politicization among football fans, or even the middle classes in Turkey, since these reactions did not lead to higher levels of political participation, more involvement or interest in organized politics, or a political evolution challenging the already imposed national doxa, or even advocating fans' own interests in a political context. In Bourdieusian terms, middle-class football fans in Turkey, as part of the cultural field, did not challenge, or aim to challenge, the field of power. They acted



upon their own habitus resulting from their embodied and acquired cultural capital, based on the national doxa that the state since the very beginning presented to the middle classes and considered to be the prototype of Turkish society. Even though most aspects of the Gezi protests are counter-hegemonic and very innovative for Turkish politics, this latecomer fraction of the protests were undoubtedly more devoted to the doxa, than to those aspects challenging it.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

### Notes

1. Tuğal, “‘Resistance Everywhere’”: The Gezi Revolt in Global Perspective’, 166.
2. KONDA, *Gezi Raporu*.
3. ANDY-AR/Habertürk Survey. Available online at <http://www.haberturk.com/spor/futbol/haber/1210919-turkiyenin-en-kapsamli-taraftar-arastirmasi>.
4. See Özçetin and Turan, ‘Kahire’den İstanbul’a’.
5. See Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*.
6. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 164.
7. Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 74.
8. Karakas, ‘L’impact Des Partis Religieux Sur Le Processus de Démocratisation En Turquie’, 51.
9. Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*, 8.
10. Bianchi, *Interest Groups*, 102.
11. Akdeniz and Göker, ‘The Historical “Stickiness” of Nationalism Inside Turkey’s Political Field’, 321.
12. Gürakar, ‘Bir Direniş Oyunu: Gezi’yi Bourdieu Üzerinden Okumak’, 258.
13. Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 76.
14. *Ibid.*, 229–230.
15. *Ibid.*, 192.
16. For an account of the nationalistic characteristics of Turkish football see Bora and Senyuva, ‘Nationalism, Europeanization and Football: Turkish Fandom Transformed?’.
17. Bora and Erdoğan, ‘Dur tarih, vur Türkiye’, 231.
18. Lancaster, ‘The Iron law of Erdogan’, 1683.
19. Akser and Baybars-Hawks, ‘Media and Democracy in Turkey: Toward a Model of Neoliberal Media Autocracy’.
20. Jenkins, ‘A House Divided Against Itself: The Deteriorating State of Media Freedom in Turkey’.
21. See 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2015 EU Turkey Progress Reports, 2012 Human Rights Watch yearly report on Turkey, 2012 Amnesty International Report on Turkey.
22. Irak, ‘Turkish Football, Match-fixing and the Fan’s Media’, 115.
23. Giulianotti, ‘Social Identity and Public Order’, 22.
24. For the use of Twitter in social movements, see Burns and Eltham, ‘Twitter Free Iran’; Christensen, ‘Twitter Revolutions? Addressing Social Media and Dissent’; Segerberg and Bennett, ‘Social Media and the Organization of Collective Action’; Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets*.
25. Gökçe et al., ‘Twitter and Politics’; Varol et al., ‘Evolution of Online User Behavior during a Social Upheaval’; Hacıyakupoglu and Zhang, ‘Social Media and Trust during the Gezi Protests in Turkey’, Yalcintas, *Creativity and Humour in Occupy Movements*.
26. For a detailed account of the internet bans in Turkey see Akgül and Kırılıdoğ, ‘Internet Censorship in Turkey’.
27. Özsoy, ‘Use of New Media by Turkish Fans in Sport Communication’, 172.
28. Çelikel, ‘Türkiye Spor Medyasında İçerik Çeşitliliği’, 117.
29. Irak, ‘Turkish Football, Match-fixing and the Fan’s media’.
30. Göle, ‘Secularism and Islamism in Turkey’, 50.

31. Özçetin and Turan, 'Kahire'den İstanbul'a', 138.
32. The Java Code was accessed on Jefferson Henrique's website <https://github.com/Jefferson-Henrique/GetOldTweets-java/>.
33. Peddinti et al., 'On the Internet, Nobody Knows You're a Dog: A Twitter Case Study of Anonymity in Social Networks', 84.
34. Kahn and Kellner, 'New Media and Internet Activism: From the "Battle of Seattle" to Blogging', 92.
35. Postmes and Brunsting, 'Collective Action in the Age of the Internet. Mass Communication and Online Mobilization', 295.
36. Akdeniz and Göker, 'The Historical "Stickiness" of Nationalism Inside Turkey's Political Field', 321.

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