
Exploring Gender in Turkish Political Discourse: A Preliminary Computational Analysis of Official Webpages of Political Parties

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Abstract

This study introduces computational methods into the study of gendered political discourse in Turkey, an approach that remains largely unexplored within gender and political studies. In the context of Turkey's shifting democratic landscape—marked by increasing populism, illiberal tendencies, and the recent withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention—understanding how political parties construct gendered narratives has become particularly pressing. Unlike existing research, which often relies on relatively small datasets and focuses on the discourse of individual politicians or civil society actors, this study examines how political parties and their leaders selectively frame gender-related issues in their official digital communications, including statements, speeches, and news articles published on their websites. With a dataset of approximately 250,000 sentences across the Turkish political party spectrum—substantially larger than those used in traditional content analyses—it seeks to offer a broad overview of gendered narratives in Turkish politics. While some computational studies, such as topic modeling of parliamentary speeches, have begun examining gender in Turkish politics, the use of Turkish-language natural language processing (NLP) tools for analyzing party-controlled digital discourse is still underdeveloped. Therefore, this study explores possible methodologies, including sentiment analysis with transformer-based models and emotion analysis, to identify patterns in how different political parties discuss "women" and gender. Furthermore, beyond explicit gender discourse, it considers discursive silences, assessing the extent to which women's issues are highlighted or marginalized within party communications. Despite their potential, this study also acknowledges the challenges of applying computational techniques to Turkish political discourse, particularly regarding linguistic nuances and contextual interpretation. While these computational methods may not offer the interpretative depth or nuance of small-scale qualitative studies, they can facilitate the identification of overarching patterns, broader ideological divergences, and recurring gendered tropes (e.g., "nation as mother," "strong leader as father"). By integrating computational approaches into the study of gendered political discourse, this study not only seeks to contribute to understanding the strategic construction of gender narratives in Turkish politics but also simultaneously expand the methodological possibilities within gender and political studies. The findings may shed light on how gender is instrumentalized to legitimize authority, mobilize supporters, and define national identity, while also addressing the methodological challenges and possibilities of computational approaches in political discourse analysis. (366 words)

Five Keywords:

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- Gendered political discourse
- Natural Language Processing (NLP)
- Turkish political parties
- Computational methods in gender studies
- Ideological framing of gender