

# 9 Towards a new left-populist rhetoric in Turkey

## Discourse analysis of İmamoğlu's campaign

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### Introduction

In recent years, the political developments in the West and the resurgence of right-wing populist parties have popularised the debate on populism. Populism has different definitions, and the term is conceptualised in various ways such as an ideology, political style, or policies of political adversaries (Sözen, 2019, p. 268), and it transcends geography, time, and ideology. The common point made by the scholars studying populism is that it constitutes a threat to democracy. There are those who claim that populism could be a corrective factor for the errors and deficiencies of liberal democracies (Gidron & Bonikowski, 2013, p. 20). Today's populist movements are generally seen as a consequence or crisis of globalisation and neoliberalism. The forms of populism may vary depending on geography, culture, and the political system involved. Contemporary populism is labelled “national populism,” “right-wing populism,” “left-wing populism,” “neo-fascism,” “hyper-nationalism,” “authoritarian populism,” and so on. This chapter focuses on left-wing populism in Turkey, specifically on the election campaign of Ekrem İmamoğlu, the candidate of the main opposition party CHP, who won the local elections and became the new Mayor of Istanbul in 2019.

One of the distinguishing features of authoritarian populist politicians is that they build their politics on the distinction between “us” and “them.” The national community, based on the friend/enemy scheme, has a necessary “outside” from which it distinguishes itself. The anti-elite and illiberal populist politicians claim that they represent the “real people” and so encourage polarisation in society (Müller, 2017, p. 60). In Turkey, President Erdoğan, the leader of the Islamist-conservative party AKP who has been in power since 2002, regularly contributes to the political and social polarisation with his discourses and speeches in the mass media controlled by his government and on social media platforms. In this extremely polarised political climate, Ekrem İmamoğlu won the local elections on 23 June 2019. He became the new Mayor of Istanbul by defeating the ruling party AKP

who lost control of Istanbul for the first time since 1994. Several factors may explain this success. However in this study, we focus on İmamoğlu's discourse during his electoral campaign. We argue that his campaign is a good example when it comes to overcoming political and social polarisation as it provides important clues on how to fight authoritarian populist politics. Going beyond left-populism, his campaign put forward the embracement of a pluralistic society, the unification of polarised groups, non-violent language, and modesty against the arrogance of a one-man regime, in addition to confidence in institutions that are against favouritism. Our research methodology involved collecting campaign data from İmamoğlu's social media accounts and conducting discourse analysis based on the data collected.

### **Left-wing populism**

Meade (2019) argues that previous academics' focus on leader-centric and right-wing populist discourse obscures the display of populist discourse by left-wing movements and the role of democratic practices in constructing populist movements (Meade, 2019, p. 2). A relatively recent body of literature has been dedicated to left-populism, and it has been limited to the experiences in Latin America and Europe (Hawkins, 2009; Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014; Gerodimos, 2015; Katsambekis, 2016; Ramiro & Gómez, 2017; Gratius & Rivero, 2018; Hetland, 2018; Hart, 2019; Meade, 2019; Kioupkiolis & Perez, 2019; De la Torre, 2019; Neyra, 2019). Mouffe (2018) states that right-wing populism and left-populism differ from each other in the construction of the "we" and the adversary that they define. While right-wing populism claims that it will bring back democracy and national sovereignty excluding numerous groups that are seen as a threat to society, left-wing populism aims to federate the democratic demands into a collective will to construct "the People" against the "oligarchy." It requires the establishment of a chain of equivalence among the demands of the workers, the immigrants, and the precarious middle class as well as other democratic demands, such as those of the LGBT community (Mouffe, 2018, pp. 43–45). Left-populists, whose central ideology is based on the dichotomy of "moral people versus corrupted elite" and on a charismatic leader, construct their agenda around egalitarianism, collective economic and social rights (March, 2007, p. 66). Right-wing populists use ethnicity to exclude minorities and left-wing populists construct the category of "the People" as the majorities of their nations that are excluded by neoliberal policies. They conceive them as a plurality of actors with different views and proposals (De la Torre, 2019, p. 67). The left-populist discourse opens up to a much wider audience without completely excluding the working class, claiming that capitalism harms not only the working class but the entire population except for a handful of elites (Uslu, 2019, p. 261). As Mouffe (2018, pp. 70–81) puts it, the strategy of left-populism aims to

challenge post-democracy and re-establish the articulation between democracy and liberalism, putting democratic values in the leading role.

Certainly, the populist rhetoric needs to be analysed dimensionally as countries and their populist political movements are not identical (Elçi, 2019, p. 4). According to Gerodimos (2015, p. 610), the state of the political system and the levels of democratisation also play a crucial role in the development of different types of populism. One of the most interesting examples in the formation of the left-populist movement is the case of France. In the example of Jean-Luc Mélançon's presidential election campaigns in 2012 and 2017, he stood for the newness of left-wing populism and its democratic implications (Chiocchetti, 2020, pp. 106–128). In an interview with *L'Express Magazine*, he says: "I have no desire to defend myself against the accusation of populism. This is the disgust of the elite. Go to hell all of them! Am I a populist? I agree." In another interview, "Our discourse confronts two categories, he says, the people and the oligarchy" (Birnbaum, 2012, pp. 110–111). In Spain, Podemos, who has adopted the anti-elitist discourse and represents a response against to the "crisis of representation," also points out the distinctive features such as its initial roots in "horizontalist" social movements, its "technopolitics," and a reflexive application of populist theory (Kioupkolis & Perez, 2019, p. 25). Katsambekis (2016, pp. 393–399) attributes Syriza's short march to power in Greece to a kind of left-populism that is both inclusionary and egalitarian, reflecting the plurality, heterogeneity, and subversive political orientation of the squares. By focusing on the Occupy Movement and the Tea Party Movement in the U.S to trace the similarities and differences between left-wing and right-wing populist discourses, Meade (2019, p. 8) indicates that both share a narrative of national decline that is caused by cultural losses and economic and structural changes due to economic globalisation. Both left- and right-populists blame politicians, particularly those from their own party, for these losses. However, the Occupy Movement members' conception of "people" is more pluralistic than that of right-wing populists who exclude portions of the working class on the basis of perceived work ethic, race, or religion (Meade, 2019, p. 10). However, Hetland (2018) shows the ambiguity of left-populism based on his analysis of Chavez's Venezuela. Although the radical left-populism in Venezuela created hope by reducing poverty and inequality, and deepening democracy following the 2014 crisis, Chavista's model confronted two challenges: The unsustainable material foundation and statist trap (Hetland, 2018, p. 277). Furthermore, the discourse of the Greek anarchists constitutes a coherent populist ideology (division between the people and the elites, appealing to the people as a homogeneous body, proto-totalitarian utopia, and calling for violence as a response to complex problems) (Gerodimos, 2015, p. 622) and also a distinct populist identity based on victimhood, anger, and revenge, collectively challenging democracy (Gerodimos, 2015, p. 608). The main problem in today's left-populism debates is how to balance the idea of

“being a populist as a style and strategy, but not as the content of the political program,” using a populist strategy based on the distinction between the people and the elites on the way to power and how to follow an egalitarian, inclusive, and liberating strategy and to ensure the ability to keep the initiatives together. Regardless of how it is constructed, populist discourse blurs the boundaries between the right and the left (Uslu, 2019, p. 268).

## **Populism in Turkey**

Populism is not new in Turkey. Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017, pp. 39–40) argue that populism has become a more integral part of politics in the Middle East only in the 21st century. Populism is a characteristic of the ruling and opposition parties in more established democracies such as Israel and Turkey. Until recently, the Turkish version of political populism suggested that the Turkish nation, the country, and its religious values are in “great danger” and that the danger “coming from abroad” could be prevented if the country is unified under the leadership of a great leader (Kula, 2019, p. 811).

In Turkish politics literature, three types of populism can be distinguished: Social engineering in the early republican period, the import substitution regime in the multi-party system period, and finally, patronage and the centre-right analysis (Baykan, 2017, p. 164). According to Toprak (1992), a fertile ground for populism in Turkey has emerged from the beginning of the 20th century and continued as “intellectual populism” until the 1950s (Toprak, 1992, pp. 42–65). The populism of the early Republic era is characterised by “social engineering” of the single-party system, and based on the understanding of “for the people despite the people” by the elite. During this era, Turkish populism was formulated through the “Six Arrows” and functioned as a strategy to reject class politics and to defend national identity (Boyras, 2020, p. 34). During the subsequent multi-party system period, populism can be considered as a rejection of the early Republican populism. According to Artunkal (1990, pp. 15–26), “populism authentique” developed against the intellectual populism of the modernising elites after the 1950s in Turkey. Tekeli and Şaylan (1978, p. 89, cit. Baykan, 2017, p. 165) claim that the populism principle, which was included in the program of the Democratic Party in the 1950s, was “by the people, with the people and for the people.” Baykan (2017) adds “populist patronage,” a third period of populism, used by centre-right politicians to gain electoral support. According to Heper and Keyman (1998, p. 262), “populist patronage” is used by the politicians from the centre-right tradition to “present themselves as the will of the nation against the will of the state and the protector of the masses against the state elite.” Populism has gained a new dimension with the AKP’s accession to power in 2002. Yalvaç and Joseph (2019, p. 1) indicate that the AKP has followed different hegemonic projects, changing from an initial majoritarian populist politics to one of neoliberal authoritarian populisms to consolidate its hegemonic depth.

Although the populist language of the centre-right political parties was effective between 1950 and 1970, a form of “left-populism” emerged in the 1970s. Despite the common belief that leftist parties and movements were always elitists in Turkey, the mass mobilisation beginning from the second half of the 1970s referred to the “left-populist discourse” (Baykan, 2017, p. 171). Left-populism remained weak until the 1960s due to the fact that left-politics was not legal and was generally centred on a limited intellectual group which excluded the general public. Left-populism was only possible with the establishment and election of the TIP, the Workers’ Party of Turkey, and the CHP’s positioning itself on the left after the second half of the 1960s, that is, with a historical delay. In the 1970s, the CHP, led by Bülent Ecevit, adopted “left of the center” politics and turned from state elitism to a more nationalist leftist colour (Aslan, 2019, pp. 113–114). In the 1980s, the Social Democratic Populist Party represented another remarkable example of left-populism, mobilising the urban poor and lower middle classes against the neoliberal and conservative populism of the Motherland Party, ruled by Özal (Boyraz, 2020, pp. 36–37). However, after the 1980 Coup d’Etat, the party has returned to its constitutive ideology of Kemalism, and has become the protector of the establishment against the rise of political Islam (Elçi, 2019, pp. 5–6). According to Grigoriadis (2020, pp. 8–9), the right-wing populism has prevailed in Turkish politics due to demographic, political, and social reasons as well as due to the rupture of democracy by a series of coups, and the suppression of left-wing populist movements. Between 1980 and 2000, Turkish politics witnessed the struggle of elitist, pluralist, and Islamist populist political actors. Over the last 20 years, two concurrent populisms, “conservative” and “secular,” have been dominating the political scene (Aslan, 2019, pp. 116–118).

There has been a transformation in secular politics in the last 20 years. Secular politics have manifested themselves in an elitist form for a long time. The Kemalist bureaucratic-intellectual elite, which holds state power, has brought secular politics to life in an authoritarian way. However, as an inevitable consequence of the melting power since the 1990s, the politics of secularism have moved away from an elitist form of politics and have started to adopt a populist form of politics. Examples include the Republic Meetings in 2007 and the Gezi events in 2013 that constitute the development of secular populism (Aslan, 2019, p. 118). Another step in radical left-wing populism can be illustrated by the performance of the HDP (People’s Democracy Party) in the 2014 presidential elections and the 2015 general elections campaigns. The inclusive populism of the HDP challenged the AKP’s right-wing populism based on authoritarianism, majoritarianism, and illiberalism by constructing a new and alternative “people” concept and by mobilising social movements within horizontal politics (Tekdemir, 2019, p. 346). Its discursively articulated pluralism included feminists, democratic Islamists, human rights activists, Alevi leaders, socialists, environmentalists, representatives of LGBTQ organisations, liberal-leftist intellectuals, and artists (Kaya, 2019, p. 809). The presidential campaign

of Muharrem İnce, the CHP candidate in 2018, also had a strong populist discourse based on the antagonism of “poor” people versus “rich” elite (Sırma, 2019). The populist rhetoric that dominated the latest campaigns of HDP and CHP has enabled the alliance of the opponents and the increase of their vote. It moved even further forward with the İmamoğlu campaign and ended the 25-year AKP ruling in Istanbul.

## **Methodology**

İmamoğlu's campaign consisted of two stages: The first stage started on 18 December 2018, the day that the CHP declared Ekrem İmamoğlu as their mayor candidate for Istanbul. This stage ended on 31 March 2019, the date of the local elections. Although İmamoğlu won the local elections with a difference of 23,000 votes, the Supreme Election Board (YSK) controversially cancelled the elections on 6 May 2019 after a complaint from the AKP. The local elections, only for Istanbul, were re-ran on the 23 June 2019, and İmamoğlu regained with more than 800,000 votes (BBC, 2019).

The discourse analysis technique was used to reveal the left-populist discourse in İmamoğlu's campaign. The data, consisting of texts, images, and videos collected from his official social media accounts on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube between 18 December 2018 and 23 June 2019, was analysed in the context of left-populist discourse. All posts on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube were obtained through a back-track search. However, access to historical datasets and tweets on Twitter remains restricted which is the main reason why our data analysis was limited. No considerable difference was observed between the platforms in terms of discourse. However, the messages may vary due to the technical features of the respective digital platforms. For example, longer videos were shared on Facebook and YouTube compared to Instagram, and live broadcasts could be held on Facebook and Twitter.

Social media played a central role in İmamoğlu's campaign. While pro-government media outlets prefer to ignore or discredit the candidates of opponent parties, and TV debates gathering rival candidates are no longer broadcasted in Turkey, social media remains a primary medium to run a political campaign and to reach a larger audience. Although social media is closely monitored by the government and censorship is widespread in the country, politicians from opposition parties can still find an opportunity for representation on social media.

## **Populist discourses of İmamoğlu's campaign**

### *16 million Istanbul residents: unity against polarisation*

İmamoğlu's campaign offers a new construction of “the People,” “16 million Istanbul residents” as an alternative to the Islamic conservative/modern secular polarisation that AKP politicians have been feeding for

years. Against the authoritarian and discriminatory discourses of the right-populism that divide the people into two poles as “us” and “others” as a support of partisanship, the left-populism is building an imaginary of a unified and equal society. İmamoğlu frequently emphasises equality and fraternity in his speeches, and he calls Istanbulites as “my fellow citizens” regardless of their origin, identity, lifestyle, and political view. Against the “othering” strategies and stigmatisation practised by the AKP, the “16 million Istanbul residents” discourse is used as a unifying factor and as a supra-identity in order to overcome social polarisation.

This narrative is also supported by a description of big city life with metaphors such as a “bus” or “apartment block.” This emphasises the imagination of a diverse society where citizens live in the same apartment or travel on the same bus. This is where reconciliation and coexistence are dominant instead of conflict. In a TV program broadcast by the Habertürk TV channel on 24 December 2018, İmamoğlu says that Turkish society wants peace, friendly politicians, and sympathetic people:

At the end of the day, everyone goes home, they don't care who lives on the upper floor, who lives on the lower floor, or which party the next door neighbor vote for. We get warm in the same apartment block, we get cold in the same street.

In the campaign video posted on his social media accounts on 4 March 2019, citizens from various age groups, gender, and socio-economic levels travel together on a city bus. The external voice says:

Excuse me, which party did you vote for in the last election? Mrs. Ayşel gave her vote to the party A, Mr. Ümit gave it to the party B, Mrs. Nimet gave to the party C and Mrs. Semra to the party D. Well, local elections are approaching. We all want to live together with love. We want transparent and fair municipalities. In short, no matter what political view we have, we are all on the same city bus. We are waiting for you for a five-year journey. Republican People's Party.

On the one hand, the fact that those citizens have different political views and support different parties is normalised. The AKP, on the contrary, is stamping out and criminalising those who have not supported themselves for years. On the other hand, by emphasising that they live in the same city, it is stated that the problems related to the city are common and that the local elections intend to solve the common problems of everyone beyond partisanship.

The emphasis on “We are one” is not only a discourse that is featured in advertising videos and TV speeches. It is also brought to life through the performance of İmamoğlu in his marketplace visits. In other words, it is not only said “We will overcome polarization if we are elected.” At the same



time, he visited the marketplaces and embraced conservative citizens who have voted for the AKP for several years, chatting, listening to their problems, and coming face-to-face with the rival party supporters. The main message of this performance is that polarisation can be overcome through dialogue. The embodiment of dialogue and tolerance occurs without underestimating or overlooking the AKP's supporters, and by respecting their preferences, for example, saying "Thank you" to those who would not vote for him, and by adopting a "calm" attitude in contradiction to "angry" and "vociferous" political figures.

### *Liberating religion from the monopoly of right-populism*

Another tactic to overcome the Islamist conservative/modern secular polarisation is using a plethora of religious elements, which has mainly been appropriated by the Islamist parties. However, İmamoğlu's campaign does not establish a narrative like "religious people are always the victim" as the AKP systematically does. Rather, he draws a portrait of a politician who is devoted to his religion, who performs the Friday prayer with his people, and who does not misuse the name of Allah while also leading a modern lifestyle. The videos were prepared to introduce İmamoğlu, as he was unknown to most of the population at the beginning of the campaign. They were also circulated on his social media accounts, offering a narrative that blends the traditional and modern lifestyle of the İmamoğlu family. These videos include his journey from his hometown Trabzon to Cyprus where he studied for a short period of time, then on to Beylikdüzü where he settled with his family. In these videos, the values such as "homeland and nation," "reason and science," and "traditions and values" are put forward. The story of how he met "social democracy" is told to the public.

During the campaign, he frequently visited conservative districts that are seen as the "AKP's fortresses," such as Eyüp, Fatih, Bağcılar, Arnavutköy, and Başakşehir as well as the religious sites of symbolic significance for the AKP. Unlike the AKP politicians who favour a Sunnite interpretation of Islam, İmamoğlu approaches other religions and sects with respect. He celebrated the new year for the Armenian community in their church, he visited the leaders of the non-Muslim communities in Istanbul, and he met Alevi community several times. The instrumentalisation of religion can be seen as an effort to break down the prejudices against the CHP which was presented over the years as a "non-religious party" and as "a political party that disregards our religion" by the AKP and its voters. He displays a different image from the classical CHP candidates by referring to Islam often, praying with the Muslim community, or breaking fast in conservative families' houses during the month of Ramadan. These religious references are only used as the basis for his cultural values rather than as religious politics. This strategy helps to combine a secular understanding that is at peace with faith.



*A populist leader connected to his people*

The campaign draws a portrait of a politician embraced by his people, in contrast with the ruling elites who have lost their connection with the public, especially with the President who currently lives in his “palace” and cannot be easily reached by ordinary people. The campaign is mainly built on face-to-face communication, which is one of the oldest strategies of political communication; and local markets at the heart of everyday life and of the economic crisis are chosen as the principal stage for İmamoğlu’s performance. There, he portrays a leader who can establish close contact and good relations with his citizens by listening to their problems and trying to solve them. The images shot in the marketplaces when he had travelled with the Beylikdüzü TV team were broadcasted without editing. The critics towards them by the AKP supporters are also shown uncensored. The images of İmamoğlu, who was surrounded by the public, highlight the fact that AKP politicians have been disconnected from the citizens. It also proves that CHP politicians are not “disconnected from the public” as the AKP members suggest.

During those visits, İmamoğlu frequently uses body contact by hugging people, shaking their hands, looking into their eyes, and listening to them carefully. The words most frequently used in his speeches are “beauty,” “hope,” “peace,” “trust,” “happiness,” “young,” “dynamic,” and “entering into the heart of people.” Later on, the candidate for the AKP, Binali Yıldırım, copied this strategy. The “warm” contact with the citizens gained a new dimension as İmamoğlu broke fast with a conservative family every evening in their house during the month of Ramadan. Thus, the campaign was not limited anymore to city squares and public spaces. It also expanded into private sphere. Close contact with conservative people may have had mutual functions. First of all, it may have served to break the prejudices of the AKP voters against the CHP and to convince them to vote for the CHP by underlining the conservative background of İmamoğlu. Second, it may have released the prejudices of the CHP voters about conservatives by making conservative citizens visible. In this sense, the “warm contact” strategy with the public may also have played a significant role in overcoming the polarisation between two groups.

*“Everything will be fine”: hope and non-violence against the politics of fear*

İmamoğlu’s campaign mobilises non-violent communication as a primary tactic to overcome polarisation and partisanship. The language of “hope,” “love,” and “tolerance” predominates the campaign against the toxic language of pro-government media and social media trolls. Without “othering” or targeting his rivals and their voters, a positive language is used in his campaign, and all of the verbal attacks from the AKP supporters are

ignored. A teenager running behind the campaign bus on 16 April 2019 shouted, "Brother Ekrem, everything will be fine my brother!" This sentence became the slogan of the campaign, and it went viral on social media. "Hope" is crystallised in this slogan of "Everything will be fine." Hopeful messages rapidly spread on social media.

Similar to the campaign in HDP's 2015 elections, this campaign also mobilises "hope." Unlike HDP's campaign, İmamoğlu ignores his opponent, AKP. He does not mention or target it, and he responds very cautiously to verbal attacks from the front of the government. Most importantly, he does not feed the "trolls." This tactic neutralises the attacks of the ruling party and their trolls, and it also strengthens İmamoğlu in terms of setting his own agenda. CHP's campaign strategist Özkan (2019) explains this tactic: "Without struggling with the feeling of 'Faith in Erdoğan' among the Ak Parti voters, we should have walked around and reached the result. In other words, we have seen that we can only win the Istanbul election with a campaign that deliberately keeps Erdoğan out of our agenda. We should have completely ignored Erdoğan. We should act as if there were no such politicians in our lives, and we should focus only on creating our own agenda" (p. 65). Unlike the right-populism, which is fed by throwing mud at the opponents and criminalising them, he takes advantage of ignoring the harassment and refusing to feed them by not reacting. He does not target politicians, but instead the on-going system. A unified and diversified people narrative is built against the "corrupted elites," described as "the mentality that has ruled Istanbul for a quarter century," "waste order," "grinch," and "unfair." Even on 7 May 2019, the day that the elections were cancelled, he went to Beylikdüzü and gave a message of hope: "We have a long road, high excitement and youth. We are Turkish youth who are thirsty for justice and have full faith in democracy. And we will never give up!"

*People ignored by neoliberalism: the urban poor, women, youth, children, etc.*

In contrast to the AKP's development discourses and mega-projects, the İmamoğlu's campaign focuses on social democrat projects that will improve the lives of ordinary and neglected people. His campaign makes visible the people forgotten by the AKP's neoliberal developmental policies; the emphasis is more on human-centred urban policies. The local election campaign, coinciding with one of the biggest economic crises in Turkey's history, favours social democrat projects against the AKP's developmental mega-projects to solve the daily problems of citizens. CHP candidate's projects include free transportation for mothers with babies, special care centres for elderly and disabled people and for children, the establishment of city and neighbourhood councils, green areas and reforestation projects, milk distribution for children, discounted transportation for university students, culture-art centres and libraries, etc.

“Urban poverty” constitutes one of the campaign’s most prominent themes. The videos from the local markets also served as a kind of alternative media, and they became the voice of subaltern subjects of neoliberalism. In a repressive regime where the mainstream media is controlled by the government and where censorship is widely practised and where even the reporting on the economic crisis is considered a crime, these videos have become the voice of the silenced masses, displaying the dimensions of the economic crisis and breaking the culture of fear. On 16 January 2019, a marketer in the Sultanbeyli marketplace said: “Now our people are hungry, they are in trouble. Ten years ago, we were making money; we could buy a house, a land. Now, we cannot feed ourselves.” A conservative woman from Başakşehir said: “Everyone is afraid, for how long will they be afraid? Your child’s bread was stolen. Everyone is hungry, everyone is unemployed. For how long will you be afraid? What is your solution?” In an environment where journalists, economics writers, and opponents are silenced, the video footage reveals the AKP’s fall: “I have been voting for AKP for the last 16 years, this time I will not,” say many citizens. In this respect, İmamoğlu’s campaign reveals the AKP’s weakness indirectly by making the public talk.

Women, youth, and children are the main target of the campaign. As a response to the AKP era, characterised by a decline of women’s rights, the approach that alienates women is dominant and femicide is on the rise. There is a narrative of women who are active in business life and taking part in decision-making mechanisms in equal positions with men. Nurseries for working mothers, various measures related to the safety of women and reducing the violence against women, a 40% women quota in management, and an equality action plan were among the promises.

On 15 March 2019, Dilek İmamoğlu talks about her husband’s women’s policy and projects in a video. The modern women’s myth, which is one of the important elements of Kemalist modernisation, is being reproduced in this video. Women are seen of as a symbol of modernity, dignity, and freedom. Dilek İmamoğlu embodies the Kemalist women’s myth with her beauty, modern clothing, secular lifestyle, and the role of a mother of three, career and education. In addition to the emphasis on the modern Republic woman, conservative women receive also significant coverage in the campaign videos. We witness the conversations and hugs of İmamoğlu with women wearing headscarves in both commercial films and local market videos.

The youth, one of the groups most affected by the economic crisis, also has an important place in the İmamoğlu campaign. Against the “old” Binali, the youth and dynamism of İmamoğlu is often stressed. Imamoglu visits the CHP Youth Branches, universities, homes, and dormitories of university students and produces projects that are specific to young people. Children are also one of the target groups that stand out in the campaign. Various projects are offered specifically for children: Their right to education, nurseries, the elimination of economic inequality, free milk distribution, the

construction of new playgrounds, etc. Unlike the AKP's Islamist generation creation projects, emphasis is placed on economic inequality and children's rights.

### *Democratic values against the authoritarian regime*

During the campaign, “democracy,” “democratic values,” and “modesty” are the key concepts foregrounded against “authoritarianism.” A vision of democracy based on pluralism, transparency, and equality, organised from bottom to top, where citizens will play an active role in decision-making is presented in the campaign. The emphasis is on “the People,” not on the “leader”: “We will succeed together, 16 million Istanbul residents will win.” “Do not count on the leader, but on the system.”

Another theme frequently mentioned during the campaign is the “principle of merit” against “partisanship” and “favouritism,” which became common during the AKP period. His speech on 4 April 2019 went viral on social media: “The service to the Man, person, people, religious communities, foundations and associations is over. The service will restart for the İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality (İBB) and Istanbul residents. Keep your mind at peace.” Through foundations and associations, he refers to the foundations and associations founded by the relatives of the President, gaining a profit from the Metropolitan Municipality. “Favouritism” will be replaced by “merit,” and the trust placed in democratic institutions will be restored. This democratic vision also includes transparency and accountability. After İmamoğlu was elected, the İBB Assembly started broadcasting their meetings live on social media platforms.

The campaign also puts forward the “normalisation of the country.” Unlike AKP politicians who only go to their own neighbourhoods and escape from meeting with their rivals on TV, İmamoğlu visited the election booths, wished them luck, and underlined the need for “normalising” the country. In the very first days of the campaign, the CHP candidate visited the former mayors. He shared the following message on his Instagram profile regarding these visits: “We set out to listen to everyone who has a say for Istanbul.” After having held a meeting with the President Erdoğan on 10 January 2019, he made a live statement saying that he gained “very valuable anecdotes.” He also participated in a TV program with Binali Yıldırım on 16 June 2019 which must have been the first in a long time. Unlike the revanchist tendency of the government, he accepted the legacy of past administrations and promised a “new beginning.”

The emphasis on democracy became more prominent after the votes were recounted and the election was cancelled. Since then, the campaign turned into a struggle for justice and democracy. He called for moderation on social media on 8 May 2019:

The YSK made a decision and was unfair to us. He took away the election we won, which is ‘halal’ like our mother’s milk. We know them.

But it is not time for reckoning, it is time to look ahead, prepare for June 23rd, 2019. It is time to tell everyone about the votes of Istanbul, together with our citizens, that we aspire to 16 million people. None of citizens who says ‘Everything will be fine’ will not use language that distinguishes anyone on social media. Please, I ask everyone, go tonight, greet your neighbor at the İftar (the breaking of the Ramadan fast) and invite your neighbor to İftar. Do not run wild, do not discriminate against anyone. You’re welcome, I’m inviting, and your heart is full of love. Everything will be very fine.

## Conclusion

As explained above, the introduction of left-populism in politics in Turkey has remained both limited and delayed. Moreover, it was significantly interrupted in the decades following the 1970s. What we have seen in recent years is both a return to this populist language through local elections, and a populist reckoning with right-wing populism. Hence, left-populism, which we saw with the İmamoğlu campaign, is (re-)emerging.

İmamoğlu’s campaign matches the left-wing populism embracing inclusive, pluralist, and egalitarian discourses; democratic values; and social democrat projects. The unification of “the People” against polarisation, the politics of hope against politics of fear of the AKP, places an emphasis on democratic values and institutions; the recognition of subaltern identities created by neoliberal politics and the inclusion of various identities are the prominent populist discourses of his campaign. The inclusion of all segments of society and the portrayal of “the People” as a plural and heterogeneous collective subject are in contrast with the exclusionary and polarising populism of the AKP. De la Torre (2019, p. 68) claims that populists state there to be two perils to plural and democratic politics: The transformation of rivals into enemies and their subordination to a charismatic leader. Unlike populist movements, the antagonism between “the People” and the corrupted elitists or “the Enemy” is implicitly given during the campaign. İmamoğlu could win the elections without “demonizing his enemies” (Mouffe, 2018, p. 41). According to Taşkın (2019), behind the success of the opposition parties in the political sphere over the last years, there are dynamic segments of society that are discontent with the authoritarianism in Turkey and the Istanbul local elections showed that a left-populist stance in the field of economy and a post-populist stance in the field of administration and democracy can regress right-populism.

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