

Pacification and Pacification Strategy: The Placebo Effect in Politics

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Abstract: *Pacifier and comforter political tactics, implemented in international politics, are frequently used by populist leaders in domestic politics too. Populist policies are implemented not only by leaders in power but also by opposition leaders. The main opposition party in Turkey, the Republican People's Party (CHP), changed its leader with the efforts of a group that wanted change after unsuccessful elections. However, the new leader implemented this tactic exceptionally successfully. This article is an academic study on how Özgür Özel, the new leader of the CHP, implemented this policy. A qualitative evaluation was made on this issue by analyzing the opinions of 20 social media writers who support or have not supported the CHP before. These tactics create important effects that are worth examining in terms of political psychology. These effects work mostly in the short and medium term, but they have a feature that returns to the user in the medium and long term.*

Keywords: Populism, Populist Policy, Pacifier, and Comforter Political Tactisc, placebo opposition, political psychology

1. Introduction

A pacifier is a smooth rubber or plastic object that is given to a baby to suck on to comfort it and make it stop crying. A comforter is someone or something that helps you or the baby feel less worried, upset, or frightened (Britannica). Pacifier and comforter policy tactics are known in international politics. For example, the American Secretary of State visited neighboring countries with populations that would likely react severely to the Palestinian genocide wars waged by Israel and managed to keep the reactions to a minimum. However, it could not prevent the view of people in American Universities (Tuncer 2024).

When the main opposition party and its Chairman, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, who was also the Presidential candidate of six opposition parties, suffered a harrowing defeat despite the government's significant mistakes in the 2023 Presidential elections, the discomfort that arose both within the CHP and among the voters necessitated a change within the party. Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, who did not want to give up the chairmanship of the CHP, was defeated by his opponent candidate, Özgür Özel, in the congress (Tuncer 2023, Bila 2024, Basoy 2014).

Özgür Özel's efforts to remove his glasses with eye surgery, dye his hair, and improve both his image and voice by having surgery on his vocal cords after being elected as the chairman did not receive good marks as he was the first male politician to have this done. These are not approaches that are considered correct in terms of the sociology of Turkish voters. Along with these changes, unfortunately, he started to exhibit disappointing changes and approaches in his discourses.

In the first local elections in 2024, CHP became the leading party under the leadership of Özgür Özel. Although AKP voters who did not vote for the ruling party, AKP, played a role in this success, it is clear that CHP, which won the elections in key provinces such as Ankara and Istanbul, had a critical success.

While people were wondering what AKP leader Erdoğan, who had fallen to second place against CHP for the first time,

would do, instead of making a move himself, CHP's inexperienced Özgür Özel, who did not have much political foresight or awareness and was spoiled by the find, made one after another a move that relieved Erdoğan. While the successive approaches that give legitimacy to the AKP, as if everything were normal, actually bring severe criticism to Özgür Özel, the AKP looks pretty pleased with itself.

Populist Policy

Charismatic populism and partisan degradation are the primary causes of democratic erosion. Populism degrades democracy through abuse of constitutional amendments, attacks on the separation of powers, attacks on independent liberal actors, and attacks on institutions that are part of the public sphere, such as journalism, universities, and tax audits (Ginsbureg 2018, Huq 2021).

Putin in Russia and Erdogan in Turkey are among the leading populist politicians in the World (Bechev 2022).

Although populist policies are mostly associated with the right wing, their practices are also found in left - wing parties. Left - wing populism, also called social populism, is a political ideology that combines left - wing politics with populist rhetoric and themes.

Opposition populist parties are now navigating muddier waters and are less sensitive to whether populist opposition deepens or threatens democracy (Bourne 2023).

In the Netherlands the Socialist Party has run a left - wing populist platform after dropping its communist course in 1991, in Spain the left - wing populist party Podemos achieved 8% of the national vote in the 2014 European Parliament election, in Japan Reiwa Shinsengumi, led by Tarō Yamamoto, is a representative Japanese left - wing populist movement are some samples for left - wing populists. In Turkey, the Republican People's Party (CHP) is also considered a leftist populist party in many publications (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Left - wing_populism, Bila 2020).

2. Methodology

The evaluation was based on the following titles on the YouTube channels of six opposition journalist writers: two writers whose side is unclear and four pro - government journalists with their columns in the media and television programs they participated in. A total of 25 articles and programs were examined, and opinions on the following main topics were summarized.

- 1) Soft attitude towards immigrants and his opposition to taking down signs and advertisements written in Arabic by Municipalities of CHP. The reason for this is that he explains Arabic as the language of the Quran.
- 2) Meeting with Erdoğan, leader of the ruling party and President
- 3) Explaining his actions as normalization when nothing is standard in the country
- 4) A candid meeting in his office with a pro - government troll who insulted the opposition and the Republic

3. Results

The opinions of Pro - Journalists are summarized below;

- 1) With the right messages he gives, his emphasis on the normalization process, his attitude towards nepotism in the appointment in municipalities, and his ability to attract attention, Özgür Özel has evolved from chairman to leader.
- 2) Özgür Özel should be a presidential candidate in 2028.
- 3) It is right to embrace immigrants.
- 4) Arabic is known as the language of the Quran, and the reaction to Arabic - written advertisements and signs is adverse; Özgür Özel is acting correctly.
- 5) Özgür Özel should also support the New Constitution.
- 6) Özgür Özel entered as party chairman in his first local elections, which shows his correct approach.

The views of opposing journalist writers are summarized as follows;

- 1) Normalization cannot be discussed in an abnormal environment where the constitution is violated, human rights are disregarded, and no law exists.
- 2) The heavy reaction of the Government on May 1, Labor Day, right after the meeting between the President and Özel, shows that normalization cannot be achieved.
- 3) Özgür Özel has turned CHP into a placebo opposition. He uses tactics to stall CHP voters. Yılmaz Özdi, one of the opposition journalist writers, used the definition of placebo opposition for CHP.
- 4) During the studies on the new constitution, while the attitudes taken against secularism, which is the basic principle of modern Turkey, and the Turkish language were apparent, Özgür Özel's protection of Arabic and his use of the Quran by emphasizing religion created profound dissatisfaction and disappointment.
- 5) While pensioners struggle to survive below the poverty line and people are trying to survive in poverty, Özgür Özel's discussion of being a football champion and participating in song contests, just like the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) does, draws a reaction.
- 6) The fact that he does not speak out against illegal immigrants, especially when their negative impact on the healthcare system and their negative effects on social life

is obvious, creates disappointment in the voters. (Tuncer 2022).

- 7) Özel's approach, which he calls normalization, without ever bringing early elections to the agenda, serves no purpose other than legitimizing the AKP and Erdoğan government (Tuncer 2023, DOI: 10.21275/SR23606180135).

4. Discussion

The populist approaches Özgür Özel follows cannot go beyond pursuing a pacifier policy for a substantial segment of the CHP and its voters who want change (Bechev 2022).

The ruling party is trying to create a placebo opposition to eliminate Ekrem İmamoğlu, the Mayor of Istanbul, who defeated Erdoğan three times in the elections. Ekrem İmamoğlu seems like the strongest candidate for the 2028 Presidential election.

For now, it seems that President Erdoğan can successfully manipulate the new CHP Chairman Özgür Özel, whom he has influenced, to create an environment in which he can extend his presidency until his death and win the next election with the new constitutional amendment. Whether this initiative will succeed depends on how soon Özgür Özel wakes up from his dream, sees the reality, puts his feet on the ground, and acts like a mature politician. It seems that he needs advisors who guide him in the right direction by giving him accurate information and staying away from some not - so - well - intentioned politicians gathered around Özgür Özel.

It is felt that the change in CHP is no different from a placebo and plays a pacifier and comforter role.

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