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Studies of Electoral Behavior in Turkey

This chapter reviews major works on electoral behavior in Turkey in order to determine which theoretical frameworks are valid for Turkey and what indigenous contexts should be taken into account. This review encompasses, more broadly, electoral *behavior* in Turkey not only because of the dearth of research on electoral *change* in Turkey but also because of the necessity to elucidate behavioral characteristics of the Turkish electorate that do not necessarily conform to the general theories of electoral behavior. Most of the literature on electoral behavior in Turkey either explicitly or implicitly draws on one of the four theoretical frameworks introduced in the foregoing literature review.

2.1. Party Identification

In Turkey, it is difficult to find works that are primarily concerned with long-term party identification. Among the few such scholars, Kalaycıoğlu and Sarıbay (n.d.) investigated factors leading to partisanship in childhood. The partisanship of one's father as well as of one's friends was found to be a major determinant of party identification.

The paucity of this genre of literature is largely due to the short lifetime of past political parties in Turkey. First, most importantly, when the military intervened in 1960 and 1980, it closed down the ruling DP (in 1960) and all the political parties (in 1981). While the Justice Party (Adalet Partisi, AP) succeeded the DP in 1961, thus maintaining the Democratic tradition, the largest two parties (the center-left CHP and center-right AP) that were disbanded in 1981 were not able to reemerge in their original form. In both cases, they were succeeded by two parties rather than one.¹ Second, the Constitutional Court, established in 1962, has also disbanded political

parties for unconstitutional activities. From 1962 to 2001, it dissolved 22 political parties.² Third, the relatively low level of party-system institutionalization in Turkey has led to the birth of splinters from the major political parties (see Appendix I and Appendix II). Özbudun (2000) also found that weakening party identification in Turkey was typical of many new democracies that suffered from voter disillusionment.

2.2. Social Cleavages

There is a relatively large body of literature examining socioeconomic structures and voting behavior in Turkey. Works explicitly dealing with social cleavages, however, only began to appear fairly recently.

Earlier studies linked socioeconomic characteristics with voter turnout and/or support for political parties. As part of a comprehensive investigation of the 1965 general election from both legal and political science perspectives, Abadan (1966) analyzed the electoral behavior of local opinion leaders with various socioeconomic attributes. Abadan and Yücekök (1967) more specifically explored the relationship between income groups and voting behavior. In nine large cities with populations of more than 100,000, Abadan and Yücekök found patterns of support by income group for particular political parties.³ They also found that between the 1961 and 1965 elections, voting turnout decreased most for the middle-income group. They interpreted this as indicating that the middle-income group was the least interested in voting.⁴ Sencer's questionnaire survey (1974, pp. 277–78) of 419 voters in metropolitan Istanbul in 1969 confirmed the pattern of party support found by Abadan and Yücekök. Sencer also discovered an important distinction among voters who did not give support to any party. On the one hand, those with *no idea* of which party to vote for consisted of lower socioeconomic groups. On the other hand, those who *intended to abstain* from voting came from higher socioeconomic groups (Sencer 1974, pp. 278–79).

The urban-rural difference is also an important determinant of electoral turnout. Baykal (1970), in his analysis of the 1965 general election, argued that the higher electoral turnout in the less developed provinces that he had discovered stemmed from the higher percentage of village populations in these provinces.⁵ Nuhrat (1971) focused on *unusual* voting in villages, meaning no turnout, low turnout (with the rate of voter turnout ranging from 1 to 10 percent), and unanimous voting (with one party or candidate gaining 95 percent or more of the valid votes), which was the most frequent among the three.⁶ When he correlated the socioeconomic indicators of villages with their voting behavior, he found that unanimously voting villages were less developed (i.e., had more landless peasants, more closed communication, a smaller population, a lower education level, etc.) than no- or low-turnout villages. Nuhrat thus inferred that, on the one hand, no or low turnout indicates a conscious articulation of grievances about the lack of infrastructure and public services. Unanimous voting, on the other hand, was thought to indicate voter mobilization by local notables in a feudalistic relationship.⁷

Socioeconomic characteristics and voting behavior can be interpreted in a developmental context as well. Özbudun (1976, 1980) demonstrated the hypothesis that as societies develop economically, class-based participation replaces individual or communal-based participation, using socioeconomic indicators and election results across provinces and some sub-provinces in the 1960s and early 1970s. He also found the answer to a paradoxical form of voting behavior in Turkey; voter turnout was higher in the less developed regions than in the more developed regions. He argued that in the less developed regions, mobilized voting was prevalent while in the more developed regions, people voted more autonomously.⁸ Ergüder and Hofferbert (1988)⁹ mainly substantiated Özbudun's findings. Their pooled-factor analysis of party voting percentages across provinces during a similar period elicited three factors that explained voting variations, i.e., "periphery-center," "left-right," and "anti-systemic." Their results, however, did not point to a major electoral realignment during the period (p. 94), in contrast to Özbudun's observation of Turkish politics in the 1970s.

Beginning in the late 1980s, the social cleavage model began to be more consciously adopted for the analysis of Turkish politics. This is due not only to the development of political research in Turkey but also to scholarly awareness of the transformation of social cleavages in the post-1980 period.

The major research agenda in more recent years has included the relationship between the party system and the cleavage structure. Çarkoğlu (1998), assuming that party platforms reflected social cleavages, attempted to use them to explain electoral volatility and fragmentation in the Turkish party system. He found that parties in the post-1980 Turkey tended to change their issue profiles more frequently than in the earlier period. His factor analysis of party platforms also elucidated a new cleavage structure that incorporated market-economy and civil-society dimensions. By contrast, Tosun (1999) found that parties, not voters, had changed. He argued that political parties in post-1980 Turkey had deviated from their original cleavage structure. He attributed the erosion process of the center-right and center-left parties in the 1990s to their inability to effectively represent voters in terms of ideology and organization.

Other scholars shed light on voter profiles, including religiosity and class, and party support. Kardan and Tüzün (1998) asserted that Turkish society in the mid-1990s was divided into anti-Islamists represented by urban, better educated, higher-income citizens, and pro-Islamists represented by suburban, less-educated, lower-income citizens. At the same time, they argued that there was no significant difference in socio-demographic attributes between *center-left* voters and *center-right* voters.¹⁰ Boratav (1995) contended that class was an important explanatory variable for party support (pp. 106–10). The large sample size ($N = 8,024$) of his questionnaire survey enabled class subcategories to show differences in party preference.¹¹ For the relative weight of these variables, Özcan (2000) demonstrated that religiosity was the strongest determinant of the left-right preference of the Istanbul voters (for the 1989 general local elections) *after* controlling for previous voter preferences (for the 1987 general election).¹²

Apart from social cleavages, there are other recent findings concerning socioeconomic characteristics and voting behavior. Erdoğan's research (1991, 1992), while

focusing specifically on the Southeastern Anatolian region in the 1970s and 1980s, discovered that there was a *positive* relationship between socioeconomic development and voting turnout in the sub-province. He also found that in terms of socioeconomic characteristics, unanimously voting villages were not significantly different from the other villages in the region. These are the clear indications that what Nuhurat (1971) and Özbudun (1976) had found for the 1960s was undergoing a significant transformation.

Erder's two waves of opinion polls (1996, p. 150; 1999, p. 106) pointed to a growing rate of protest votes. Protest votes were measured as the number of respondents answering that they would abstain from voting or cast an invalid vote if an election were held on that day. Protest votes did *not* include undecided votes. The rate of protest votes to total responses increased from 19.4 percent in April 1996 ($N = 2,396$) to 30.2 percent in May 1998 ($N = 1,800$).¹³ Urban voters more frequently expressed the intention to cast a protest vote than did rural voters (Erder 1999, p. 112).¹⁴ Another study that encompassed a shorter period (from 1996 to 1998) reported an increase in people defining themselves as neither right-wing nor left-wing (from 28.2% to 35.1%) while there was a slight decline in the percentage of those on the left (from 15.5% to 14.4%) and almost no change in the percentage of those on the right (from 41.2% to 41.1%) (Erder 1999, p. 54, table 2.1).¹⁵

2.3. Retrospective Voting

Despite its potential importance, research into retrospective voting has been limited in Turkey. At the individual level, Sencer (1974, pp. 171–80) earlier found that people were more likely to consider the past than the future when voting. His results showed that people voted for a party more because they liked its performance (23.7%) than because they liked its program (16.1%) (pp. 171–72). A large majority of voters (82.8%) decided which party to support *before* the electoral campaign rather than during or after it (pp. 173–75).

Macro-level studies consist of cross-sectional and time-series analyses. Earlier cross-sectional research was hampered by a lack of economic data at the provincial level. Bulutay and Yıldırım (1969) used statistics on agricultural products as proxies for income statistics. They demonstrated, for 20 selected provinces in the 1950–65 period, that in those provinces where farm incomes had risen sharply, the incumbent party fared better in the upcoming election than it did in other provinces.¹⁶ This second-best approach made sense when the majority of the population lived on agriculture.¹⁷ No major cross-sectional studies have been published since. Çarakoğlu (1997) more explicitly dealt with retrospective voting. His time-series analysis showed that unemployment and inflation had a negative effect on the vote for the governing party/parties during the 1950–95 period. He tried to maximize the number of time points (observations) by including not only general elections but also Senate elections, general local elections, and by-elections.

2.4. Values

Value change has recently become a part of the research agenda in Turkey.¹⁸ The Turkish Values Survey, conducted in Turkey in 1990 and 1997, formed a database for several works.¹⁹ Esmer (1995) described five major political parties with the socioeconomic and value characteristics of their supporters. Kalaycıoğlu (1994) found that the dominant portion (75 percent) of the Turkish electorate remained moderate (either center-right or center-left) in terms of both party preference and ideological identification. According to him, “the ideological composition of the Turkish electorate has been quite stable since the 1970s” (p. 416). His later study suggested that the Turkish electorate had moved rightward on the left-right continuum and that cultural values, rather than socioeconomic attributes, had come to determine party preference in the late 1990s (Kalaycıoğlu 1999). Esmer (1999, pp. 53–58) also reported that between 1990 and 1997, all seven of his indices of left-right measurement had moved in a rightward direction, five in a statistically significant way.²⁰ Another study that encompassed a shorter period (from 1996 to 1998) reported an increase in those people who defined themselves as neither right- nor left-wing (from 28.2% to 35.1%) while there was a slight decline in the percentage of left-wingers (from 15.5% to 14.4%) and almost no change in the percentage of right-wingers (from 41.2% to 41.1%) (Erder 1999, p. 54, table 2.1).

Most other works concerning values in Turkey involve research at one point in time. Şeker (1995) looked at the perception of members of the Turkish electorate with different socioeconomic attributes. Based on his 1994 survey ($N = 3,500$), he found among other things that Turkish voters with certain employment statuses entertained common values. For example, farmers tended to have greater confidence in the state and politics but to feel less favorably toward democracy, women, and secularism than did other categories of voters. Public servants felt more favorably toward work and economic liberalism compared to other voters.

2.5. Summary

The preceding literature in review suggests, first, that social cleavages, retrospective voting, and values can provide certain clues to electoral behavior in Turkey. Second, voting in Turkey was not, in Özbudun’s terms, always voluntary, or autonomous. It thus is necessary to scrutinize voting data to look for the possibility and extent of mobilized voting, while taking into account spatial and temporal differences in voting behavior. Third, few of the reviewed studies explicitly examined electoral change and volatility in Turkey. The relatively abundant amount of research based on the (broadly defined) social-cleavage model has provided a rather static explanation of Turkish voting behavior; it has not analyzed change in the cleavage structure over time. Studies based on the retrospective voting model or the values model would be more attuned to a longitudinal and dynamic analysis, but such research is rare.

Notes

- 1 The Motherland Party (Anavatan Partisi, ANAP) and the True Path Party (Doğru Yol Partisi, DYP) represented the center-right tradition, and the Social Democratic Populist Party (Sosyal Demokratik Halkçı Parti, SHP)/CHP and the Democratic Left Party (Demokratik Sol Parti, DSP) the center-left tradition. For a genealogy of post-1980 parties in Turkey, see Appendix II.
- 2 Out of the 31 referrals, 22 were accepted and 9 were rejected. From a document provided to the author by the Constitutional Court on August 5, 2002.
- 3 The lower income group supported the center-right AP and the conservative Nation Party (Millet Partisi, MP), which were relatively pro-Islamic, while the upper income group supported the CHP and the Turkish Labor Party (Türkiye İşçi Partisi, TİP), which shared a staunch secularism.
- 4 This finding, however, showed *only* that members of the middle-income group had decreased their propensity to vote the most among the three income groups, *not* that their turnout rate had been the lowest. Their original data, in fact, refuted this contention. A recalculation of the original data by the author showed that the mean turnout rate in the nine cities was the lowest for the upper- and not the middle-income group in both general elections. The mean turnout percentages for the upper-, middle-, and lower-income groups were 73.8, 79.6, and 77.7 for the 1961 election and 66.4, 69.6, and 70.4 for the 1965 election.
- 5 He showed that if electoral turnout was examined for the province as a whole, turnout was (slightly) higher in the nine least developed provinces than in the nine most developed provinces. A different picture emerged, however, when turnout was examined separately for cities, boroughs, and villages. For each of the three categories, turnout was higher in the more developed provinces than in the less developed ones. At the same time, turnout was higher in villages than in boroughs, and higher in boroughs than in cities.
- 6 While the total number of villages with no turnout and with small turnout was 128 and 215, respectively, in the five lower- and upper-house elections during the 1961–69 period, the total number of unanimously voting villages was 5,338 (Nuhurat 1971, pp. 220–21).
- 7 One might wish, however, that Nuhurat had also demonstrated how the socioeconomic characteristics of the three types of villages had differed from the rest of the villages (randomly sampled, if the number was too large). One would assume that the three types of *unusually* voting villages were, as a whole, less developed than usually voting villages given the fact that 71 out of 128 of the no-turnout villages, 99 out of 215 of the low-turnout villages and 3,750 out of 5,338 of the unanimously voting villages were found in eastern (including southeastern) Turkey (Nuhurat, pp. 222–24).
- 8 Since Özbudun's work is a major milestone in Turkish electoral studies, the following section of this study examines it in more detail.
- 9 For a similar analysis that encompassed the 1950–1999 period, see Çarkoğlu and Avcı (2002) and note 5 of Chapter 6.
- 10 These conclusions drew on a nationwide survey of 2,396 voters conducted in June 1996, shortly after the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi, RP) won the December 1995 general election (Kardan and Tüzün 1998, chap. 4).
- 11 In brief, support for the two center-right parties (ANAP and the DYP) came from the large and medium-sized bourgeoisie, pensioners, young workers at small firms with a low education level, and (especially for the DYP) large and medium-sized farmers, than from other

groups. The center-left SHP found relatively more support from public- and private-sector white-collar workers with a high educational level and poor villagers than from other groups. The other major center-left party, the DSP, competed with the pro-Islamic RP for support from blue-collar workers and people with an intermediate level of education in the urban area as well as middle-income voters in rural areas. The RP also attracted more votes from a large section of employers than from other groups. Boratav's class subcategories ranged widely. Urban households were categorized into nine groups and rural households into eight groups (pp. 5–12).

- 12 Özcan performed a secondary analysis of the data used in Boratav (1995).
- 13 In the book published in 2002, Erder did not use the concept of protest votes but reported undecided voters (15.6%), abstentions (16.9%), and no replies (9.2%). See Erder (2002, p. 60).
- 14 One may find the cause in a higher level of education and a more individualized way of life in cities than in villages (Erder 1999, p. 113).
- 15 Erder's survey in 2002 introduced a new "nationalists" category. Out of the total respondents, 34.0 percent answered as such. Most of the former "neither left- nor left-wing" respondents probably chose this category. See Erder (2002, p. 106).
- 16 See also Bulutay (1970).
- 17 The percentage of the rural population to the total population was 68.1 in 1960, 61.6 in 1970, and 56.1 in 1980 (SIS, *Statistical Yearbook*, various years).
- 18 It is worth noting in this connection that the 1990–91 World Value Survey results showed Turkey's postmaterialist values to be high for its per capita GNP. See Inglehart (1997, p. 151, figure 5.7).
- 19 Another large-scale survey was conducted in 1998 under the auspices of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (İstanbul Mülkiyeliler Vakfı Sosyal Araştırmalar Merkezi [1999]).
- 20 Esmer's scaling consisted of (1) egalitarianism-entrepreneurialism, (2) private-public ownership, (3) individual-social responsibility, (4) competition-cooperation, (5) accommodativeness of interests, (6) status quo-change, and (7) old-new ideas.

