Conclusions

This study analyzed the persistent electoral volatility in Turkey in terms of party-system institutionalization mainly during the 1961–2002 period. In order to distinguish the different vote swings underlying the electoral volatility, the author divided electoral volatility into: (1) cleavage-type volatilities based on social cleavages; and (2) retrospective-type volatilities based on voter punishment of the incumbent. The two types of volatilities were analyzed using two separate regression models. The results showed, first, that deep social cleavages increased electoral volatility in the past, but that since the 1990s, they have begun to stabilize voting behavior. The party system in Turkey has thus recently become anchored into its major social cleavages. Second, electoral volatility as a whole remained high because of a growing trend toward retrospective voting. Low economic growth and high unemployment were the major reasons for this. In sum, the apparent instability in the party system stemmed not from a lack of representation in parliament of major social groups but from the poor performance of the government. This chapter first summarizes the major arguments and findings of the preceding chapters and, second, draws some conclusions that may help to answer the questions raised in the introductory chapter. Finally, the implications and limitations of this study are discussed.

Summary

In the Introduction the current study posed the major research question: whether persistent electoral volatility in Turkey reflected a lack of institutionalization in the party system. The author contended that electoral volatility should be decomposed into subcategories in order to understand its implications for party-system stability.

Chapter 1 through Chapter 3 laid the ground for the current study with a literature

review and research design. The review of the literature on electoral change in Chapter 1 suggested that across countries, social cleavages, retrospective voting, and values provided clues to electoral change in general while party identification had little explanatory power outside the United States. Both cleavage and values approaches assumed that the party system represented an underlying cleavage/value structure. Thus, it is possible to regard these two approaches as representational accounts. While representational accounts explained relatively long-term volatility, the retrospective voting approach was concerned with short-term volatility. Electoral change thus stemmed from the search by voters for better representation as well as from their resentment toward incumbent governments.

The literature review on electoral change in Turkey in Chapter 2 suggested, first, that social cleavages, retrospective voting, and values provided certain clues for understanding electoral behavior in Turkey. Second, voting was not, in Özbudun's terms (1976), always voluntary, or autonomous. It thus seemed necessary to scrutinize voting data 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 the post-1980 period. Though relatively abundant research based on the social cleavage model provided fairly static explanations of Turkish voting behavior, it did not analyze change in the cleavage structure over time. Studies that adopted a retrospective voting model or values model were more attuned to a longitudinal and dynamic analysis, but it was found that such research was rare.

Chapter 3 defined, both conceptually and operationally, the dependent and independent variables. The present study used these variables to test, at the national and/or provincial level, relationships: (1) between social cleavages and cleavage-type volatilities; and (2) between economic conditions and change in the incumbent vote.

Two major hypotheses were formulated, as follows:

(1) Strong social cleavages stabilize the relationship between cleavage groups and political parties. Consequently, those provinces with stronger social cleavages have smaller cleavage-type volatilities (left-right and systemic volatilities) than do those with weaker social cleavages.
(2) Voters punish the incumbent according to the most recent economic performance prior to a general election. Thus, the worse the economic conditions prior to the election, the greater the loss of votes for the incumbent party/parties.

These two main hypotheses were further elaborated and operationalized in the relevant chapters (Chapter 6, Chapter 8, and Chapter 9).

Before testing the above hypotheses, the current study demonstrated in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 that Turkey could be an appropriate example for the analysis of electoral democracy. In this vein, Chapter 4 examined the choice of Turkey as a case of electoral democracy. Competitive elections under universal suffrage have been the norm since 1950 despite two brief military interventions.

Chapter 5 investigated the extent to which electoral participation was voluntary, or autonomous. This was necessary because the concept of electoral volatility implicitly assumes that voters cast a ballot of their own will. In the rural areas of Turkey,

mobilized voting was once prevalent. During the post-1980 period, however, the negative relationship that formerly existed between socioeconomic development and voter turnout disappeared. Voter turnout is now higher in the more developed than the less developed provinces. It was also found that the relationship between socioeconomic development and voter turnout at the provincial level depended on the level of national voter turnout. High national voter turnout, due either to democratizing elections or to compulsory voting, led to an increased weight of autonomous voting.

Chapter 6 through Chapter 9 form the core of this study. Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 developed the argument of the relationship between social cleavages and electoral volatility. Chapter 6 showed that social cleavages were becoming less responsible for electoral volatility. Three major social cleavages in Turkey have, on the whole, increased rather than reduced cleavage-type volatility during the last four decades: (1) Sunni religiosity raised systemic volatility and (2) Kurdish ethnicity raised both left-right and systemic volatilities; while (3) Alevi sectarianism reduced left-right volatility. These relationships, however, have changed over time. It appears that during both the pre-1980 (1961–77) period and the post-1980 (1987–2002) period, repeated elections following each civilian transition mitigated this general tendency by strengthening the ties between political parties and cleavage groups. Although the 1980 military intervention aborted the earlier development of the party-cleavage nexus during the pre-1980 period, the post-1980 period witnessed a stabilization of the relationship between cleavages and political parties, especially after the late 1990s. In other words, social cleavages and the party system in Turkey seem to be heading toward convergence.

Chapter 7 started with two questions that arose from the findings of the previous chapter: (1) why the relatively short period (1980–83) of suspension of party politics in Turkey seriously damaged the embryonic link between political parties and social cleavages; and (2) why the recent party system in Turkey became better able to represent Sunni religiosity and Kurdish ethnicity. A qualitative analysis revealed, first, that the military government's plan to make a radical break with the past and to institute a stable two-party system not only failed but had a temporary negative effect on party system institutionalization. The bans on the former politicians and parties, though lifted ahead of schedule in 1987, were sufficiently long to force former politicians into retirement and to weaken the organizations of the disbanded parties as well as to encourage the development of factional splits within the former political parties. Second, the pro-Islamic party that was formed in 1970 was unable to quickly consolidate its support from devout Sunnis, who tended also to vote for the largest possible center-right party that could form a government. Only after the pro-Islamic party became the first party in the parliament in 1995 did it stabilize its relationship with the devout Sunnis. For the pro-Kurdish party, both the Turkish public's recognition of the Kurdish issue and international attention given to the Kurds prior to and during the Gulf Crisis/War opened political opportunities for organizing a political party. In contrast with the pro-Islamic party, the pro-Kurdish party swiftly consolidated its relationship with its core supporters since no other party could seriously compete with it for the same constituency.

Chapter 8 and Chapter 9 dealt with how economic conditions affected votes for the incumbent. In order to validate the basic assumptions underlying the macro-level analysis in Chapter 9, in Chapter 8 the author performed a micro-level analysis of economic voting using the individual survey data. It was found that first, the personal economy and the national economy both had independent and common effects on voting decision. Voters gave more consideration to the personal than the national economy for *retrospective* voting and more to the national than the personal economy for *prospective* voting, relatively speaking. Second, both the economy (both personal and national) and sociopolitical conditions mattered in decisions on whether to vote for the incumbent or not. While there was a very strong correlation between the evaluation of the national economy and sociopolitical conditions, each variable still had a significant independent effect on voting decisions.

Chapter 9 investigated the relationship between changes in macroeconomic variables (real per capita GNP, unemployment, and inflation) and change in support for the incumbent party/parties. The results showed that in a time-series analysis during the 1950–2002 period, change in real per capita GNP and unemployment, but not inflation, affected change in votes for the incumbent, when years in incumbency and the number of parties were controlled for. In the cross-sectional analysis during the 1977–99 period, retrospective voting was only observed in those cases in which major assumptions for the retrospective voting model (such as diminishing incumbent votes and full or long incumbency) were met. Overall, the retrospective voting model demonstrated the importance of government economic performance in explaining the vote swing against the incumbent party/parties.

Conclusions

The introductory section posed the question of whether the persistently high electoral volatility for Turkey signified a low level of party-system institutionalization or whether it had something to do with measurement. In conclusion, the problem lies with the level of measurement, but not with measurement itself. When electoral volatility was broken down into politically relevant inter-bloc volatilities, a clear picture emerged. It was demonstrated that when divided into major inter-bloc volatilities, electoral volatility revealed two parallel processes in party-system institutionalization, i. e., declining cleavage-type volatilities and growing retrospective-type volatilities.

Persistently high (total) electoral volatility in Turkey does not mean that its party system is not generally accepted by the society. Cleavage volatilities revealed that its party system has come to accommodate major social cleavages more firmly than before. The resentment of the voters was thus directed not against the system but against the incumbent. It is not clear yet whether the growing propensity for the electorate to punish the incumbent in the post-1980 period was due primarily to the deterioration in economic conditions, as was shown in Chapter 9, or to other more fundamental political changes. In all, however, these results appear to find analogy with the world trend of declining trust in government and growing trust in democratic

and party systems (Nye, Zelikow, and King 1997; Norris 1999).[1]

The consolidation of a cleavage-based party system may be a sign of the emergence of parochial politics, but this possibility is conceivable only when the distribution of public opinion is polarized, according to the logic of spatial models of party competition (Downs 1957). Given a sizable group of median voters, a cleavage party has to broaden its electoral base to the middle of the road if it seeks to build a single-party government. This was the strategy adopted by the primarily nationalistic but also pro-Islamic MHP in 1999 and the dominantly pro-Islamic AKP in 2002, with a claimed shift to a more center-right position helping to realize the largest vote increase in each party's electoral history. If the party emphasizes its ideological position, on the other hand, the best it can hope for, in all likelihood, is to form a coalition government, with the alternative being to remain in opposition. The pro-Kurdish party (HADEP and its successor DEHAP) is closer to this type although it does not explicitly advocate Kurdish nationalism.

Implications and Limitations

It is true that disruptions in Turkish political institutions, including military interventions and the disbanding of political parties, restrict the research fields to which conventional theories can be applied. This does not mean, however, that conventional frameworks are useless. On the contrary, one can find idiosyncratic factors *after* trying out the conventional explanations. This study was an attempt to test the general concepts of electoral volatility, social cleavages, and retrospective voting in the Turkish context and to discover what remains to be explained.

The overall results basically confirmed the validity of these concepts. Electoral volatility made sense when it was divided into inter-bloc volatilities. The social-cleavage and retrospective-voting models, at the outset, did not produce the same results as for other democracies. The differences, however, arose not from the models but from their parameters. In Turkey, the party system was not sufficiently representative of social cleavages before the 1990s. Economic growth was so erratic that the electorate could not judge the performance of the incumbent for the single year prior to an election. However, the process of parameter revisions created an opportunity for the researcher to model the specific political and economic environment for that country. The two models used in this study thus helped to elucidate the political and economic characteristics of Turkey while demonstrating their general explanatory power. More generally, for comparative politics, this study provided evidence that low electoral volatility is a satisfactory, but not necessary, condition for party-system institutionalization. Whereas low volatility can be sufficient evidence of institutionalization, high volatility (lack of electoral stability) can be attributed only partly (and more decreasingly so recently) to immaturity in the party system.

Admittedly, there are clear limitations to this study. The degree of representation of social groupings was measured based on vote percentages at a time when parties that received less than 10 percent of the total votes nationwide were barred from the

parliament. In addition, pro-Islamic parties and pro-Kurdish parties have been prosecuted and disbanded several times. Nevertheless, consistent popular support for a few parties that failed to clear the 10-percent threshold and the reemergence of once disbanded parties underscored the resilient representative function of cleavage-based parties outside the parliament as well as their solid social bases.

The independent variables may need more effective operationalization. While there is no easy solution to the problem of the scarcity of socioeconomic data at the provincial level, the recent release of economic data at the sub-provincial level by the State Institute of Statistics will enable the testing of certain hypotheses at a lower level of aggregation.[2] Some important issues remain to be explored in future research. In particular, Turkey's already high electoral volatility doubled from 1999 to 2002. One may ask whether this indicates an electoral realignment or whether it is simply an aberration due to the serious policy failure of the incumbent, such as the economic crisis in 2001.[3] It will require more than one general election to answer this question.[4]

Notes

1 The possible reasons for the declining trust in the incumbent are multiple but elite polarization, negative media coverage, and post-materialist values have relatively robust findings while the evidence for a general economic slowdown is mixed.
2 Socioeconomic data at the sub-provincial level exists but it consists of a sample for one year (Dinçer 1996).
3 Campbell (1966, p. 74) argued, however, that realigning elections were generally induced by great national crises.
4 Turkish political scientists seem to agree on this point. See Tosun (2003) and Turan (2004).