

The Impact of Nationalist Action Party's Realignment with the Ruling Party on the Demography and Ideological Self-Placement of the Nap Voters: Comparison of the (June) 2015 and the 2018 Parliamentary Elections

Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi'nin Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi ile Yakınlaşma Sürecinin MHP Seçmeninin Demografik ve İdeolojik Özelliklerine Etkisi: Haziran 2015 – 2018 Parlamento Seçimleri Mukayesesi

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Abstract

The Nationalist Action Party had followed a fierce opposition against the single party government of the Justice and Development Party as of the 2002 November elections. the NAP was strongly opposed to JDP-backed policies concerning democratization, Europeanization (EU Accession process) and the Cyprus disputes. Nevertheless, the NAP realigned itself with the ruling Justice and Development Party after November 2015 parliamentary elections. Following the failed coup attempt of July 2016, the parties entered into a process of political cooperation. They formed an electoral alliance for the 2017 national referendum and 2018 parliamentary and presidential elections, under the name of "Cumhur Alliance." Moreover, the alliance turned into a quasi-coalition government helping the JDP in securing the parliamentary majority. In spite of this change in the NAP's position vis-à-vis the ruling party no analysis has been made to answer whether the demographic and ideological characteristics of voters supporting the NAP has also changed. This study aims to fill this gap in the literature on the electoral behaviour of the Turkish electorate. Considering the typical radical right voters in European democracies, this study analyses the potential impact of the change in the NAP's stance on the overlap between radical right voters in Europe and Turkey. Using CSES dataset and employing a binomial logistic regression analysis the study compares the demographic and ideological characteristics of the NAP's voters in the June 2015 and 2018 parliamentary elections. Classifying the Nationalist Action Party as a member of the radical right party family, this analysis begins by making the discussion on the demographic and ideological characteristics of radical right voters in European democracies. This discussion is followed by the formulation of hypotheses that are to be tested with respect to NAP's voters through the binomial logistic regression analysis. The analysis concludes that electoral profiles of voters who voted for NAP in 2018 elections were closer to those of typical radical right voters in Western European countries than those of voters who supported the party in the June 2015 elections.

Keywords: Voting behaviour, Radical right voting, Nationalist Action Party, the 2015 elections, the 2018 elections.

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Öz

Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (MHP) 2002 Kasım seçimleri sonrasında kurulan Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AK Parti) hükümetlerine karşı katı muhalif bir tutum sergilemiştir. AK Parti hükümetleri tarafından izlenen demokratikleşme, Avrupalılaştırma (Avrupa Birliği üyelik süreci) ve Kıbrıs politikaları MHP'nin özellikle AK Parti hükümetlerine karşı sert tutum içerisinde olduğu politika başlıkları olarak belirtilebilir. MHP'nin muhalif tutumu Kasım 2015 seçimleri sonrasında yumuşamaya başlamıştır. 2016 başarısız darbe girişimi sonrasında iki parti arasındaki iş birliği siyasal bir ittifak halini almıştır. MHP ve AK Parti 2017 ulusal referandumu ve 2018 milletvekili ve cumhurbaşkanlığı seçimlerinde "Cumhur İttifakı" adı altında seçim ittifakı kurmuşlardır. 2018 seçimi sonrası iki parti arasında bir nevi koalisyon hükümeti kurulmuş ve bu ortaklık AK Parti'nin parlamento çoğunluğunu kontrol etmesine imkân sağlamıştır. MHP'nin AK Parti'ye karşı tutumunda değişiklik olmasına rağmen seçmen davranışları üzerine olan çalışmalarda, söz konusu değişikliğin MHP'ye oy veren seçmenin demografik ve ideolojik özelliklerinde değişime yol açıp açmadığı konusu araştırılmamıştır. Bu çalışma ilgili literatürdeki bu boşluğun giderilmesine katkı sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır. MHP'yi radikal sağ parti ailesinin bir üyesi olarak sınıflandıran bu çalışma, ilk olarak Avrupa ülkelerindeki tipik radikal sağ parti seçmenin demografik ve ideolojik özelliklerini tartışmaktadır. Bu tartışmayı tipik radikal sağ parti seçmenin demografik ve ideolojik özelliklerine ilişkin geliştirilen hipotezlerin sunulması takip etmektedir. Sunulan hipotezler ikili lojistik regresyon analiz yöntemiyle incelenmiştir. 2015 Haziran ve 2018 Kasım parlamento seçimleri özelinde MHP seçmenini mukayeseli olarak inceleyen analiz, 2018 seçimlerinde MHP'ye oy veren seçmenin demografik ve ideolojik özelliklerinin, 2015 Haziran seçimindeki MHP seçmenine nazaran, Avrupa ülkelerindeki tipik radikal sağ parti seçmenin demografik ve ideolojik özellikleriyle daha fazla benzeşme içerisinde olduğu sonucuna ulaşmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Oy davranışı, Radikal sağ seçmeni, Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, 2015 seçimleri, 2018 seçimleri.

1. Introduction

The Nationalist Action Party (NAP) has been categorised as a member of radical right party family (Tepe, 2000; Çınar and Arıkan, 2002; Öniş, 2003; Yavuz, 2002; Taşkın, 2008; Celep, 2010). The party had been a virulent critic of the Justice and Development Party (JDP) government in Turkey since the 2002 parliamentary election. Nevertheless, signs of incipient rapprochement between the two occurred after the failed coup attempt of July 2016. Both parties agreed to pursue authoritarian-leaning policies on the grounds of ensuring national security (Yılmaz, Shipoli and Demir, 2021). The rapprochement between the two subsequently blossomed into a political alliance. Without the NAP's support, it would not be possible for the ruling party to muster enough legislative votes for holding a national referendum on the government system in Turkey. Both parties campaigned for a change to the executive presidential system from the parliamentary system in the 2017 referendum, which they won by a razor-thin margin: 51.49 % to 48.51 %. The parties formed an electoral alliance (Cumhur İttifakı) and nominated Recep Tayyip Erdoğan who won the 2018 presidential election with 52.38 % of the vote. In the 2018 parliamentary election, the JDP garnered 42.56 % (295 / 600 seats) and the NAP gained 11 % of the vote (49/600 seats). The NAP's support has been ensuring the JDP an absolute legislative majority. Given the presence of strict party discipline in both parties, the NAP's support practically undermines the legislative control over the presidential decrees.

The demography and ideological views of the voters who have been supporting the radical right Nationalist Action Party (NAP) in Turkey have received little attention in the literature on radical right voting in Europe. They were partly included in a few studies on the Turkish electorate (e.g., Aytac and Carkoglu, 2021; Kalaycioglu, 2008, 2014; Baslevant, Kirmanoglu and Senatarlar, 2005). While revealing the demographic and ideological characteristics of the NAP voters these studies do not discuss the extent of overlap between radical right voters in Turkey and those in European democracies. Therefore, this study formulates its research question as follows: Considering the demographic and ideological characteristics of radical right voters in West European democracies, in the 2018 parliamentary election in comparison to the June 2015 parliamentary election, how did the NAP's realignment with the ruling Justice and Development Party affect the overlap between radical right voters in West European countries and those in Turkey? This study acknowledges that an outcome in social sciences could hardly be boiled down to a single factor. In fact, multiple variables – including change in social structure, period effect of certain issues (e.g., growing unemployment or ethnic diversity), change in electoral rules – can lead to a change in voting preferences. Nevertheless, almost all variables, but the change in MHP's position vis-à-vis the ruling party remained constant during the period between the two subsequent elections held in November 2015 and June 2018. Using the dataset of Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES, Module 4 and 5) and employing a binomial logistic regression analysis, this study compares the demographic and ideological characteristics of the NAP's voters in the June 2015 and 2018 parliamentary elections. The November 2015 election was not included in the analysis due to the unavailability of data. The article is divided into three parts. The first part formulates the hypotheses on typical radical right voters in European democracies. The second part explains the operationalization and the re-coding of the data. The final part presents the findings and discusses the commonalities and disparities between radical right voters in European democracies and Turkey. The findings indicate that voters with the greatest tendency to vote for NAP in June 2015 elections have different demographic features and modest ideological views than those in the 2018 elections. Compared to the June 2015 elections, the demography and ideological self-placement of the NAP's supporters in 2018 were closer to those in European democracies. This difference can partly be explained as the result of the NAP's realignment with the JDP government, which has been criticized for pursuing authoritarian-leaning policies.

2. Demography and Ideology of Typical Radical Right Voters in Europe

The end of the Second World War had discredited the ethnic-nationalist political parties and save for the exceptions, such political parties received statistically negligible numbers of votes in Western European democracies during the 1950s and 60s. Nevertheless, since the mid-1980s, in various Western European countries, plenty of voters have been opting for radical right parties, which have the dubious distinction of opposing cultural pluralism; therefore, could setback a consolidated democracy (Mudde, 2007, p. 19; Rydgren, 2007, p. 243). In seven Western European countries by the year 2004, the average percentage of electoral support of the radical right parties was nearly three times as much from that of the early 1980s which had been hovering at 6 percent

(Horris, 2005, p. 8). Even in countries where the radical right parties had remained outside the national parliaments prior to 2010, the parties subsequently managed to garner parliamentary seats. For instance, with vote shares ranging from 6 percent to 21 percent, the Swedish Democrats, Finns Party (or True Finns), JOBBIK, Alternative for Germany all entered legislature in the 2010s (Pytlas, 2016, p. 3; Widfeldt, 2018, p. 771; Schwörer, 2019, p. 29). With its 12.6 percent in 2015 parliamentary election the UKIP could secure only a single seat in the House of Commons owing to the first-past-the-post system, but the party's unrelenting campaign for leaving the European Union significantly affected the result of the 2016 Brexit referendum (Norris and Inglehart, 2019, pp. 370-373). Having recovered from a plunge in vote share, radical right parties showed that their electoral support was not ephemeral. For instance, the French National Front's vote share that had plunged into 4.29 percent (from 11.3 percent) in the first round of the 2007 legislative election reached 13.77 percent in the first round of the 2012 legislative elections (Stockemer, 2017, p. 24). Both the upward drift and continuity in radical right voting turned many scholars onto analysis of the demography and ideological views of radical right voters.

The literature on the radical right parties is not a fledgling one. It abounds with studies probing distinctive policies radical right parties have, social and economic contexts under which they win legislative seats, and the demography and ideological views of the voters they appeal to. The scope of the literature review has been set by the purpose of this study: understanding if the NAP's realignment with the ruling party prior to 2018 parliamentary elections affects the overlap between demography and ideological self-placement of the most-likely radical right voters in Europe and those in Turkey. The review has guided this study to decide which category of voters should be treated as the reference category. Studies on socio-economic and socio-cultural policies of the parties and on conducive macro-level settings consisting of public level anti-immigrant sentiments and Euroscepticism for the increase in electoral support of radical right parties are outside the review.

2.1 Hypotheses on Radical Right Voters in European Democracies

Economic deprivation approach and ethnic competition approach – predict that age should be in an inverse relation to radical right voting. Economic deprivation theory holds the view that financial predicaments fill young people with consternation and convince them to concur radical right parties in endorsing welfare chauvinism and in charging immigrant or minority population with stealing their jobs (Mierina and Koroleva, 2015, p. 187; Stockemer, Lentz and Mayer, 2018, p. 576). As a result of economic globalisation, young, unskilled and lower educated people faced competition with economically driven immigrants particularly for manual jobs. The radical right parties have successfully addressed the economic anxiety of such people in European countries (Rydgren, 2007: 247-251; Molj and Jetten, 2020: 5). Likewise, ethnic competition theory argues that by purporting to represent the demands of the common man and exploiting chauvinistic nationalist feelings, the radical right attracts the disaffected young voters. The cohort of young people who have already been frantic with anxiety about the future is expected to have been more attracted to political demagoguery (Siedler, 2011, p. 740; Miller-Idriss, 2018, p. 500-501). Particularly

in the aftermath of global economic crisis more and more middle-class voters turned to radical right parties, the demagogic leaders of which successfully whip up the anger of voters concerning rising inequality caused by financial crisis and the decreasing demand in conventional jobs due to automation in production (Molj and Jetten, 2020: 5). Whereas some scholars expect younger voters are more likely to vote for a radical right party, others suggest the opposite. They argue that older, less educated and conservative voters living in rural areas have worried concerning the salience of post-material demands (e.g., gender equality); therefore, such voters are more likely to support a radical right party that underlines the importance of traditional and religious values (Norris and Inglehart, 2019: 21). A recent meta-analysis containing forty-six studies concluded that the propensity of young people to support the radical right party was three times higher than that of elderly people (Stockemer, et. al., 2018, p. 577). Nevertheless, findings in the existing studies on the Turkish electorate are contradictory. The expectation was confirmed in terms of the 2002 and November 2015 parliamentary elections, whereas no significant relationship was found between age and voting the for NAP in terms of the 2007 and 2015 (June) parliamentary elections (Aytac and Carkoglu, 2021, p. 760; Carkoglu, 2008, p. 328; Baslevant, et. al. 2005, p. 555).

Hypothesis 1: Voters with the greatest likelihood of voting for NAP in June 2015 and 2018 parliamentary elections were those between 18 and 25 years of age.

Male voters are consistently found to have been more inclined toward radical right politics (Gidengil, Hannigar, Blais and Levitte, 2005, p. 1187; Norris, 2005, p. 139; Coffe and Voorpostel, 2010, p. 440; Harteveld and Ivarsflaten, 2016, p. 369; Coffe, 2018, p. 295). Ethnic competition theory attributes the sex gap in radical right voting to the male manual worker's domination in the industrial sector, which is deemed as the locus of the competition on the labour market between the native and immigrant workers. Focusing on the linear relationship between age and conservatism or religiosity, the psychology-driven reasoning goes that as growing older, women are apt to behave in a more conservative manner, which predisposes them toward supporting mainstream right-wing parties and being wary of the fringe parties including, radical right ones. Social Dominance Orientation theory argues that men are more inclined to support radical right parties to give vent to their dissatisfaction with the modernization process that elevated the status of women within society. Motivation to control prejudice theory suggests that women refrain from radical right parties for being supportive of the prevalence of solidarity and empathy in society; the values conflict with radical right's hawkish nationalism (Givens, 2004, p. 37-38; Gidengil, et. al., 2005, pp. 1172-1176; Immerzeel, Coffe and van der Lippe, 2015, pp. 266-267; Harteveld and Ivarsflaten, 2016, pp. 372-373; Coffe, 2018, pp. 296-297). For instance, Given (2005: 57) concludes that males represent two third of radical right voters in European countries.

Hypothesis 2: Voters with the greatest likelihood of voting for NAP in June 2015 and 2018 parliamentary elections were male.

Voters with lower educational attainment are expected to have been much more prone to vote for radical right parties than voters with higher educational attainment (Norris, 2005, pp. 132-133;

Arzheimer and Carter, 2006, pp. 421; Zhirkov, 2014, p. 293; Lubbers and Coenders, 2017, p. 111). This expectation has mainly been derived from the theory of modernization losers, the theory of cognition, and the theory of socialization. The theory of modernization losers accentuates a side effect of economic globalization in post-industrial societies; that is, the inadequacy of individual qualifications acquired in the early stages of education for job security (Betz, 1993, p. 420). Unavoidably facing competition with immigrants in the labor market with a possibility of losing their jobs, voters with low educational attainment could lean toward giving credibility to the radical right critiques of permissive immigration policies (Evans, 2005, p. 85). The theory of cognition argues that higher education enhances one's awareness of the necessity of subtle plans to cope with intricate social and economic problems (Coenders and Scheepers, 2003, p. 317). Scarcely do the radical right's oversimplified banners such as "Eliminate Unemployment: Stop Immigration" go down well with the highly educated voters, whereas such a populist strategy could appeal to those with lower educational attainment (Betz, 1993, p. 416). The theory of socialization suggests that education erodes the chauvinistic nationalist feelings while promoting interethnic engagement for bringing forth the norms such as respect and tolerance. Voters with higher educational attainment, therefore, have been expected to be open-minded personalities who are less likely to support the radical right's narrow-minded policies (Gaasholt and Togeby, 1995, p. 277). Yet, the findings are contradictory. Unlike the expectation, voters with secondary educations had the greatest propensity to cast a radical right vote in elections held in seven West European countries from 1984 to 2001 (Arzheimer and Carter, 2006, p. 429). A more recent study that covers twenty countries, however, confirms the highest propensity among the voters with no or primary education to opt for a radical right party (Lubbers and Coenders, 2017, p. 111). Likewise, in a study on the youth population in fourteen European countries those with less education are found to have been much prone to embrace exclusionary policies of the radical right politics (Mierina and Koroleva, 2015, p. 194). Ivarsflaten and Stubager (2013: 123) suggest that "education plays a prominent role for attitudes on the [authoritarian – libertarian dimension of party competition]" on which lower educated people are more likely to take a stance toward the authoritarian pole; thereby being more likely to be radical right supporters.

Hypothesis 3: Voters with the greatest likelihood of voting for NAP in June 2015 and 2018 parliamentary elections were those with maximum primary education.

Losers of modernization theory, economic deprivation theory and ethnic competition theory underpins the expectation that the blue collars are much prone to radical right voting (Norris, 2005, p. 139; Arzheimer and Carter, 2006, p. 429). Through their economic nationalism going hand in hand with intolerant, restrictive and exclusionary cultural policies against 'the others of the society,' radical right parties could easily tap the palpable effects of the competition pitting existing and prospective native workers against the immigrants or refugees (Givens, 2004, p. 48-50; Bornschier and Kriesi, 2013, p. 14; Bolet, 2020, pp. 831-832). As Given (2005: 57) notes that a distinctive feature of radical right politics is their effort in appealing to voters dissatisfied with high levels of immigration. The fear of being plunged into financial predicament, which could be compounded by the automation process, could emerge as a precursor to strong tendency among

unemployed or blue-collar workers to vote for radical right parties (Im Jae, Mayer, Palier and Rovny, 2019). Indeed, so successful has been the radical right parties in appealing to the working class over time that the left-wing parties' control of the working class has seriously been undercut (Oesch and Rennwald, 2018, p. 800; Kurer, 2020, p. 1815). This result has been found in European countries in which the traditional cleavage-based politics has been weakening whereas the issue-voting has been gaining importance (Bornschieer and Kriesi, 2013: 10). The result of a recent meta-analysis shows that the category of blue-collar voters has shown the greatest propensity to vote for radical right parties in Western Europe, followed by the category of the unemployed voters (Stockemer, et al. 2018, p. 575).

Hypothesis 4: Voters with the greatest likelihood of voting for NAP in the June 2015 and 2018 parliamentary elections were blue-collar voters.

Religiosity has usually been found as a factor diminishing the probability of radical right voting in Western European countries. The more a person believes in Christianity, the less he or she votes for radical right parties (Norris, 2005, p. 139; Evans, 2005, p. 77; Immerzeel, Jaspers and Lubbers, 2013, p. 959; Arzheimer and Berning, 2019, p. 6). This finding might come as a surprise since radical right policies, aiming to keep native culture intact, have somewhat been associated with the protection of religious values (Montgomery and Winter, 2015, p. 380). Being dubious about multicultural society, radical right parties propound that in such a society the pure elements of the native culture such as family values and traditional ways of life would wither away (Rydgren, 2007, p. 243). They argue for a strong state, upon which the task of maintaining and inculcating native culture devolves, if necessary, by meting out severe punishments, including the death penalty, to those who are labeled as the 'dregs of the society for demanding toleration for same-sex marriage, abortion and euthanasia. Also, Muslim immigrants have been the main targets of radical right's anti-immigrant policies (Immerzeel, et. al., 2013, p. 946; Marcinkiewicz and Dassoneville, 2021, p. 3) Why religious voters have tended not to vote for radical right parties is explained by norm-compliance mechanism, which emphasizes the Church's influence making its loyalties to vote for mainstream right-wing parties with religious credentials, such as the Christian Democrats. Therefore, as expressed by the phrase 'vaccine effect,' churchgoers are believed to have immunity from supporting radical right parties (Arzheimer and Carter, 2009, p. 1005; Immerzeel, et. al., 2013, p. 947) The Church's 'liberal' stance expressing contempt for xenophobia and respect for tolerance also serves as a morale booster (Montgomery and Winter, 2015, p. 380; Marcinkiewicz and Dassoneville, 2021, p. 4). For the sake of the comparison for understanding to what extent radical right voters in Turkey are similar to those in Europe, the following hypothesis has been formulated.

Hypothesis 5: Voters with the greatest likelihood of voting for NAP in the June 2015 and 2018 parliamentary elections were those with no attendance to religious services.

Voters who place themselves on the right edge of the left-right spectrum are more likely to vote for radical right parties (van der Brug, Fennema and Tillie, 2000, p. 90). This expectation is derived from the

theory of spatial voting. Considering the voters independent of political parties, the theory suggests that voters choose a political party whose positioning in the multi-dimensional electoral market, consisting of alternative opinions on various policies, is the closest to theirs (Sanders, Clarke, Stewart and Whitelaw, 2011, p. 288). The content of the issues that define left-right cleavage might differ from one country to another (Tavits and Letki, 2009). On the one hand, in terms of radical right politics in Western Europe, two political issues have been at the forefront of voter-party congruence: 1) opposition to immigration, and 2) opposition to European Integration (Norris, 2005, p. 182; van der Brug and Fennema, 2009, p. 600; Lubbers and Coenders, 2017, p. 112; Arzheimer, 2009, p. 267; Cavallaro and Zanetti, 2020, p. 324). The issue of immigration, on the other hand, has played less decisive role in achieving voter-party-congruence in the radical right politics of Central and Eastern Europe, in which opposition to European integration and hatred of ethnic minority groups have been more relevant to radical right politics (van der Brug and Fennema, 2009, p. 590). On the other hand, because of the paradigm shift in the process of European integration from an economic union to a political union, the European national governments were compelled to continue with the neo-liberal economic and cultural policies. The rising popular xenophobia among lower educated and unskilled voters and the political discontent with the established political parties predisposed voters, who felt the fear of losing their economic and cultural status, towards the radical right parties that have been taking a far-right position on immigration and European integration (Hooghe and Marks, 2018: 111). Historically speaking, party competition in Turkey has centered around the cultural cleavages that Kalaycıoğlu (2014, p. 586) deems “instrumental in helping [the Turkish electorate] define their ideological positions on a left-right spectrum.” In his study on “the nature of left-right ideological self-placement” in Turkey Çarkoğlu (2007, p. 267) concludes that “... self-placement along the L-R scale have no tangible socioeconomic basis ... but have instead bases in ethnic and sectarian differences.” The country-specific differences, however, do not change the reasoning behind the theory of spatial voting.

Hypothesis 6: Voters with the greatest likelihood of voting for NAP in June 2015 and 2018 parliamentary elections were those who placed themselves on the right edge of the left-right ideological dimension.

2. Data, Variables and Measurement

This study uses the qualitative dataset of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) modules 4 and 5, which was re-coded for the binomial regression analysis of this study. The data were collected through face-to-face interviews immediately after 2015 (June) and 2018 parliamentary elections. After excluding the missing values within the response and explanatory variables the analysis included 719 and 706 observations. The response variable is binary: whether or not the voter voted for the Nationalist Action Party. 115 respondents (16 percent) in module 4 and 55 respondents (7.8 percent) in module 5 reported that they did. These numbers can be deemed satisfactory to represent the NAP's actual electoral support levels (16.3 percent in June 2015, 11.1 percent in 2018); considering that most public surveys under-represent the radical right parties for a number of reasons, which are beyond the scope of this study (e.g., Hooghe and Reeskens, 2007, p. 181).

This analysis formulated two distinct models. Each model contains five demographical characteristics (age, sex, educational level, occupation, religiosity) and ideological self-placement of respondents. The continuous interval variable age was turned into a six-fold categorical ordinal variable: 18 – 25 (the reference category); 26 – 35; 36 – 45; 46 – 55; 56 – 64; 65 and above. The sex of the respondents was coded dichotomously: 0 for males (the reference category) and 1 for females. Respondent's education levels were grouped into four. Respondents with maximum primary education (the reference category), corresponding to five-year education, were included in the first group. Respondents with lower secondary education (eight-year education) and those with upper secondary education such as high schools or an equivalent non-tertiary education (eleven-year education) were respectively included in the second and third categories. The fourth group consists of respondents with an undergraduate degree or higher education (more than 11 year-education). To obtain a single variable covering the respondents' occupations, the two variables in the original dataset – current employment status and socio-economic status – were conflated. Then the occupations were grouped into seven nominal categories: blue collars (reference group), farmers and self-employed, white collars, unemployed, students, retired, and housewives. The religiosity of the respondents has been operationalized through ordinal categories delimited by the frequency of the respondents' attendance to religious services. This operationalization has also been adopted in some studies on radical right voting (Allen, 2017: 278; Marcinkiewicz and Dassonneville, 2021, p. 6). In line with the original dataset, this study classifies the respondents into five groups by the given criterion: never (reference group), once a year, two – to eleven times in a year, once to three times in a month, and once or more than once in a week. Finally, the respondent's self-placement on the left-right ideological dimension has been measured through an 11-point scale, where 0 = extreme left and 10 = extreme right. The scale has been divided into four categories: self-placement on the right (9 – 10); self-placement on the centre right (6 – 8); self-placement at the centre (5); self-placement on the left (0-4). The result of the binomial logistic regression analysis revealing the voters with greatest likelihood of voting for NAP in June 2015 and 2018 parliamentary elections has been given in Table 1.

Table 1. Binomial Logistic Regression Analysis on the demography and ideological self-placement of radical right voters in June 2015 and 2018 elections

	Model1: Reported vote for NAP in June 2015	Model 2: Reported vote for NAP in 2018
Reference category (18 ≤ 25 years old)		
26 ≤ 35	-.008 (.388)	1.044* (.553)
36 ≤ 44	-.074 (.437)	-.331 (.668)
45 ≤ 54	1.027** (.467)	.41 (.663)
55 ≤ 64	1.173** (.566)	.336 (.732)
65 < ...	1.403** (.606)	-1.864 (1.269)

Reference category (Male voters)		
Female voters	.085 (.367)	-.983** (.465)
Reference category (No or primary school)		
Lower secondary school	.747* (.387)	.078 (.495)
Upper secondary school	1.264*** (.333)	-.096 (.422)
Undergraduate degree or above	.891* (.469)	1.632* (.874)
Reference category (Blue collars)		
Self-employed & Farmers	.345 (.438)	-.178 (.651)
White collars	1.144** (.513)	.138 (.593)
Unemployed	.237 (.532)	1.485*** (.575)
Students	.544 (.539)	1.229 (.76)
Retired	-.013 (.473)	1.079* (.649)
Housewives	.292 (.473)	.272 (.614)
Reference category (No attendance to religious service)		
Once a year	.665 (.715)	.165 (1.11)
Two to eleven times in a year	.36 (.659)	.985 (.855)
Once or three times in a month	1.326** (.601)	.512 (1.334)
Once or more than once in a week	-.089 (.609)	.615 (.794)
Reference category (Right wing voters)		
Center – right	.131 (.282)	-.228 (.391)
Center	-.935** (.368)	-1.287*** (.496)
Left-wing	-3.944*** (.747)	-2.477*** (.77)
cons	-2.997*** (.755)	-2.895*** (1.009)
Observations / Pseudo R ²	719 / .229	706 / .166

Standard errors are in parentheses *** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.1

3. Results and Theoretical Implications

The results indicate that in the 2015 parliamentary elections the NAP's voters' demographic features and ideological self-placements bear no resemblance to those of a typical radical right voter in Western Europe. This finding confirms a study on the behavior of the Turkish electorate concluding that ideologically center-right voters voted for the NAP in 2009 and 2014 local elections (Kalaycioglu, 2014, p. 596). Nevertheless, certain similarities between radical right voters in Turkey and European democracies existed in the 2018 parliamentary elections. Earlier studies have found that voting preferences in Turkey could largely be predicted on the basis of a tradition cleavage that is between secularist and Islamist and Turkish and Kurdish nationalist (Kalaycioglu, 2012: 7). The NAP, though ideologically being classified as a radical right party, had followed a fierce opposition against the JDP – a party with Islamic credentials, thereby appealing to Islamist voters, during the elections held between November 2002 and November 2015. The collapse of center-right parties preferred by voters, who can be defined as secular conservatives, during the 1990s created a niche for the NAP to fulfill through its secular-statist stance conflicting with the anti-establishment and Islamic rhetoric of the JDP in the first decade of the millennium. The NAP's achievement in appealing to secular-conservative voters reflected the geographical distribution of the party's support across the country. The party's vote share showed a dramatic increase in West Anatolia whereas the JDP managed to steal the NAP's support in Inner and Eastern Anatolia. The figure 1 and 2 respectively show the percentage of the NAP's average electoral support in Aegean and in Central Anatolian constituencies from 1999 to 2018. As shown in Figure 1 the average percentage of the NAP's support in Aegean constituencies, in which secular-conservative electorate dwells, was higher than that in the Central Anatolian constituencies in the 2007 elections when the leading center-right parties of the 1990s, True Path Party and Motherland Party, became politically irrelevant parties. As figure 2 indicates this however, changed in the 2018 elections when the NAP realigned itself with the JDP and the former's highest electoral support average was achieved in Central Anatolian provinces in which religious-conservative voters densely reside.

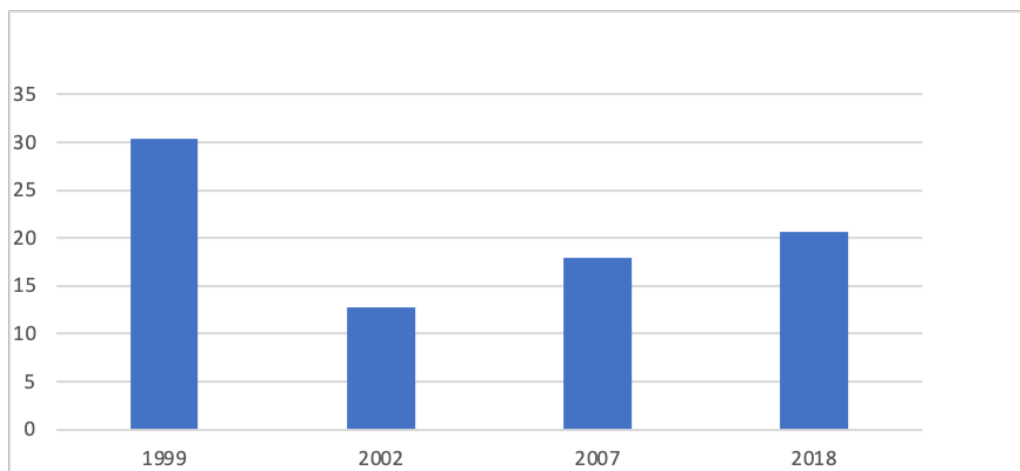


Figure 1: The Average Level of Electoral Support for NAP in Aegean Constituencies (in %)

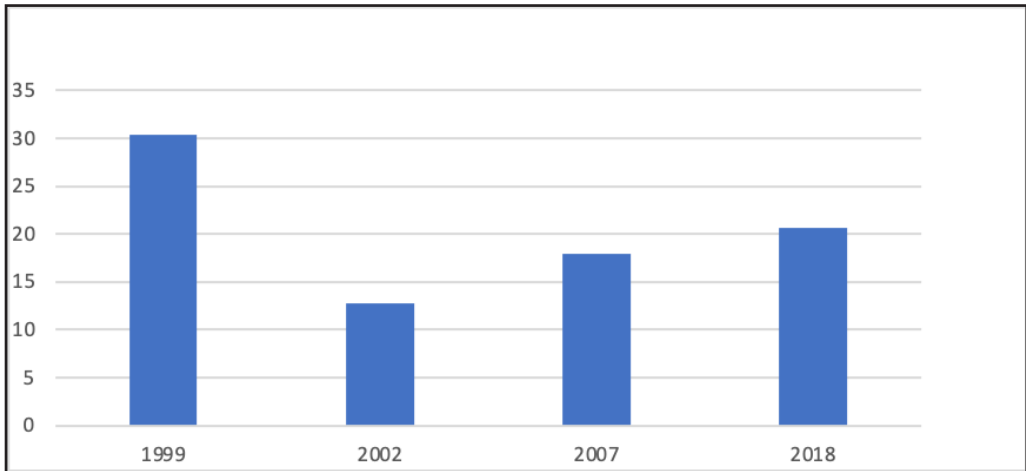


Figure 2: The Average Level of Electoral Support for NAP in Central Anatolian Constituencies (in %)

Before beginning the discussion of the results in terms of the hypotheses, this study notes that there is substantial sociological difference between Turkey and European democracies. Whereas a new politics of European democracies, representing a cleavage on post-material issues (such as immigration, same-sex marriage, abortion) and gaining importance over traditional class-based cleavage year by year, is still far away from being an influential dimension shaping electoral preferences. In Turkey, as mentioned earlier, the center-periphery dimension is still very influential for most voters in choosing the party to vote for. This difference, however, does not hinder the comparison between demographic features of radical right voters in Turkey and in European democracies. In line with the hypothesis that radical right parties are supported by voters placing themselves towards the right edge of the left-right spectrum, voters with a far-right ideological view were the most likely group to vote for the NAP in 2018. This change should be the outcome of the NAP's realignment with the JDP's government in Turkey where the signs of inchoate tendency towards competitive authoritarianism has been noted since the late 2013 (Ozbudun, 2014; Kalaycioglu, 2015; Esen and Gumuscu, 2016; Castaldo, 2018). Contrary to hypothesis predicting that voters between 18 and 25 years of age should have the highest tendency to vote for NAP, those who were 45 or above showed greater propensity in the 2015 elections. Those who were 65 years old and above were the most likely to opt for the NAP in 2015. This finding concurs with the conclusion of a study on the voting behaviour of the youth population (consisting of those between 18 and 25 years of age): the first-time voters is the least likely group choosing the NAP (Kayaoglu, 2017, p. 10). Nevertheless, in terms of the 2018 elections voters who were 65 years old and above emerged as the least likely group voting for NAP. For that election, the age category involving those between 26 and 35 years old has been found to be the most likely group voting for NAP. This finding partly confirms the hypothesis predicting an inverse relationship between age and radical right voting. The other finding indicating that

NAP's supporters in the 2018 elections became more similar to radical right voters in Europe is about the sex gap. Unlike the expectation of the related hypothesis, female voters showed slightly higher propensity to choose NAP in the June 2015 elections. Nevertheless, as the hypothesis predicts, with a statistical significance at the 0.05 level, female voters were less likely to vote for NAP in the 2018 parliamentary elections. Along with retired voters, blue collars were less likely to vote for NAP than those who were in other occupation categories, unemployed and students in the 2015 election when the white collars with a statistically significance at the 0.05 level showed the highest proclivity towards radical right voting. This finding completely contradicts the hypothesis predicting that blue collars should have the greatest likelihood of voting for NAP. Nevertheless, white collars were replaced by the unemployed voters as being the most likely group to support NAP in 2018. Economic deprivation theory, losers of modernization theory, or ethnic competition theory arguing that native workers or unemployed might vote for radical right parties as a way of venting their frustration on immigrants seems to be less convincing at the presence of the findings in the literature showing that the issue of immigration, which could have been a salient issue due the flow of Syrians into Turkey, was not a determinant of the voting preferences in the 2018 elections (Fisunoglu and Sert, 2019, p. 307; Altindag and Kaushal, 2021, p. 170). Instead, the NAP's realignment with the ruling party might have helped the NAP to appeal to unemployed voters; considering the highly pervasive clientelism and patronage in the country, which have been effectively used by the JDP governments (Sayari, 2014: 664; Yildirim, 2020, p. 84). The findings about the relationship both between education level and radical right voting conflict with the expectation. Voters with maximum primary school education did not emerge as the most likely group opting for NAP both in June 2015 and 2018 parliamentary elections. Unlike the expectation of the hypothesis, those with an undergraduate degree showed greater propensity than the reference group in voting for the NAP. Those with upper secondary school corresponding to maximum 11 years of education showed the greatest likelihood of voting for NAP in 2015, whereas the same category emerged as the least likely group supporting the party in the 2018 elections. So, the findings clearly conflict with the expectation of the reverse relationship between education level and radical right voting in Turkey. Nor the findings support the adverse relationship between religiosity and radical right voting. Unlike the expectation, voters with no attendance to religious services emerged as the least likely group to vote for the NAP. In fact, this is not a surprising finding given the NAP's nativism conflating Turkish and Muslim identities; reflected in the party's historical slogan: "We are Turkish as the Tengri Mountain and as Muslims as Hira Mountain" (Cinar and Arikan, 2002, p. 27).

4. Conclusion

The Nationalist Action Party, a member within the radical right party family, has played an important part in Turkish politics since its foundation dating back to the late 1960s. The NAP became part of different coalition governments both in the late 1970s and in the late 1990s. Though suffering a setback owing to receiving less than ten percent electoral threshold in 2002, the party managed to survive and came back to legislature in the 2007 elections with 71 seats (out

of 550) in return for more than 14 percent of electoral support. Since then, the NAP has been able to emerge as a parliamentary party from each legislative election. Both in the 2010 national referendum and in the 2014 presidential election the NAP took a position against the Justice and Development Party. Nevertheless, the signs of rapprochement between the parties came in early 2016 which subsequently yielded a political alliance. The NAP's support ensured the success of the JDP in changing the parliamentary system to executive presidential system in the April 2017 referendum. Since the 2018 elections the NAP's support has enabled the JDP to control the legislative majority. Considering the strong party discipline in Turkey, this enables the JDP to prevent possible legislative vetoes over presidential decrees.

Contrary to its importance, the literature on radical right voting in Europe has paid little attention to the demography and ideological view of the voters with the greatest likelihood of voting for the NAP. A few studies on voting behaviors in Turkey has revealed individual features of the NAP's supporters with respect to local and parliamentary elections prior to November 2015 elections. Nevertheless, these studies do not discuss the similarities and differences between the most-likely radical right voters in Europe and Turkey in terms of demographic features and ideological self-placements. This gap in the literature has also left the other important question unexplored: whether or not the NAP's realignment with the JDP after early 2016 changed the most-likely supporter of the NAP, which can be measured through a comparison of the demography and ideological self-placement of the most likely NAP's supporters in June 2015 and 2018 elections. Making a binomial regression analysis using the data of the fourth and the fifth modules of the Comparative Studies of Electoral Systems (CSES) this study aimed to address the gaps. The analysis found that demography and ideological self-placement of radical right voters in Turkey in June 2015 elections were substantially different than those of a typical radical right voter in Europe. This situation changed in the 2018 parliamentary election when some demographic features (i.e., age, gender, occupational status) of the NAP's supporters conform with those of radical right parties in Europe. Likewise, in 2018 the most-likely NAP voters were the ones placing themselves on the right-edge of the left-right ideological dimension. What caused this change should be the emergence of the political alliance between the NAP and JDP since early 2016.

Finally, the necessity of future studies revolving around a couple of questions should be noted. First studies on radical right voters have noted differences in individual determinants behind radical right voting in West Europe and Central and Eastern countries (Allen, 2017). This study mostly limits itself to hypotheses that have been tested in studies on Western European countries. Second, this study's finding that voters placing themselves at the center-right of the ideological spectrum showed lesser tendency to vote for MHP in the 2018 elections compared to the June 2015 election is striking. For a better understanding of this change a comparison of the individual-level determinants of voting for NAP and those for the Good Party is needed. The latter was established in October 2017 under the strong influence of a dissident group within the NAP who were reproaching NAP's leadership cadre for eradicating intra-party democracy, glossing over the party's fall in electoral support in the November 2015 elections, and realigning the party with the JDP. The Good Party claiming to be the best alternative for center-right voters received

almost 10 percent of the votes in the 2018 elections. In addition, due to the lack of available data this study could not include the snap parliamentary elections of November 2015. The inclusion of this election will certainly enhance the understanding of the process in which the most likely NAP supporters seem to have changed.

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