



## UNDERSTANDING VOTING BEHAVIOR IN TURKEY: ETHNICITY VS. RELIGION\*

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### Abstract

This paper examines the main determinants of voting behavior in Turkey. Previous research has been divided about the relative importance of religious, ethnic, and socio-economic factors in vote choice among Turkey's citizens. Utilizing a large nationwide survey of 10,393 people conducted in 59 provinces, this study finds that even though the most important cleavages among Turkey's voters are religious (the degree of importance they place on their faith) and ethnic (the division between Turks and Kurds), when they are interacted, religiosity crosscuts the importance of ethnicity for Kurds. Also, the study shows that the voting behavior in Turkey has evolved towards ethnic -- specifically Turk/Kurd -- and secular/religious dimensions, in the last decade.

**Key Words:** Voting behavior, ethnicity, religion, Turkish politics.

## TÜRKİYE'DEKİ OY VERME DAVRANIŞLARININ ANALİZİ: ETNİSİTE Mİ DİNDARLIK MI?

### Özet

Bu çalışmada Türkiye'deki oy verme davranışlarını belirleyen faktörler incelenmektedir. Oy verme davranışları ile ilgili önceki çalışmalarda genellikle dindarlık, etnisite ve sosyo-ekonomik faktörler üzerinde durulmuştur. 10,393 kişi ile 59 ilde yapılan ulusal bir anket verilerinden faydalanarak bu çalışma, Türkiye'deki oy tercihlerinde dindarlık ve etnisitenin en önemli bileşenler olduklarını; ayrıca bunların etkileşimi sonrasında, dindarlığın, Kürtlerin oy verme davranışı bağlamında etnik kimliğin önemini kestiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Sonuç olarak bu çalışma, Türkiye'deki oy verme davranışının, Türk-Kürt ve laik-antilaik ayrışması şeklinde evrildiğini göstermektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Oy verme davranışı, etnisite, din, Türkiye siyaseti.

### Introduction

This study examines the determinants of voting behavior in Turkey. Offering a comprehensive empirical frame at the individual level, the present study addresses the factors that determine the vote choice in the last decade in the context of individuals' religious, ethnic, and socioeconomic characteristics.

The following questions are relevant to this study: what are the dynamics of interaction between ethnic divisions, socio-economic situations, and religiosity in terms of voting behavior? What does the political science literature tell us about why/when one cleavage becomes more

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important than another? Do the predictions of the political science literature on voting behavior explain what is going on at the micro level in Turkey?

Some of the previous work on voting behavior (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944, 1954; Campbell et al. 1960, 1966) postulate a link between party loyalty and social characteristics in defining voting behavior. Other scholars focusing on different regions in the world suggest that social cleavages (Lipset and Rokkan 1967), values, and socioeconomic situations also play significant roles in vote choice. With respect to Turkey, the traditional approach to the study of voting behavior discussed by Mardin (1973) supports the claim that center/periphery relations are the key factor that predicts voter's preferences. While some recent studies (e.g., Carkoglu and Hinich 2006; Baslevant et al. 2009; Ekmekci 2011; Toros 2014) posit that religiosity and ethnicity are the most significant indicators of voting behavior, some others (e.g. Esmer 2002; Sarigil 2010) highlight the importance of socioeconomic and ideological factors.

A considerable amount of these studies is unable to capture the factors that determine the voter's preferences in developing world, due to the following reasons: (1) Most studies draw inferences from a small sample size. (2) These previous studies focus mostly on either American-based voting behavior (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944, 1954; Campbell et al. 1960, 1966), or Western countries (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). For this reason, they failed to explain what was going on regarding voting behavior in developing world. (3) In the case of Turkey, most studies focus largely on the coalition periods before 2002 (e.g., Kalaycioglu 1994; Ozcan 2000; Secor 2001; Akarca and Tansel 2006). These coalition periods were seen as the core reason behind the political and economic instability in Turkey, thereby influencing the voter's decisions. (4) The studies addressing voting behavior are mainly based on the aggregate-level data, which precludes us from scrutinizing more deeply the determinants of voting behavior. In other words, considering only aggregate-level data, particularly in the developing countries such as Turkey, would omit significant part of the story in tracing the indicators of the voter's preferences.

Utilizing a large nationwide data at the individual-level, which was conducted in 2010 in 59 provinces, with 10,393 respondents, the present study shows that religiosity and ethnicity are two of the most significant indicators of the voters' preferences in the last decade. The study will also show that the voting behavior in Turkey is evolving towards ethnic -- specifically Turk/Kurd -- and secular/religious dimensions.

Today, Turkey is a partial democracy with multiple parties that advance different ideological positions and differ in their religious and ethnic attitudes. As an ethnically divided Muslim country with a partial democracy, Turkey has a special geographic position between the East and the West, has a weakly institutionalized party system, and has been ruled by the same party -- Justice and Development Party (Turkish: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) -- for almost 13 years. Therefore, it is worth considering not only politically, but also geo-strategically.

Understanding how people vote in such a country, with its highly polarized social structure, would help decision makers ease the tensions between groups that have unique ethnic, religious, and social characteristics -- thereby providing the politicians the opportunity to



generate a more stable economic and political environment. Such an investigation in the selected case (Turkey) would also yield generalizable findings pertaining to other countries of its kind.

### **The Rise of the Pro-Islamic and Kurdish Identities**

The Turkish republic implemented reforms to create a homogenous secular nation-state after 1923 (Anderson 1991; Zurcher 2004). The prominent actors of the new regime attempted to form an authoritarian ideology (Kemalism) that intended to unify one nation, and create a homogenous society. Kurdish ethnicity and some religious groups and sects such as Alevis that resisted the new regime were the first victims of this system. During this period, traditional religious schools were closed, the Gregorian calendar was adopted in place of the Islamic one, the fez (traditional hat) was outlawed by the Hat Law, the Latin alphabet was adopted, and the Islamic call for worship and reading of the Quran in Arabic was prohibited.

There has been a severe political restriction until the last two decades towards the Kurds in terms of forbidding Kurdish language to be spoken, prohibition of children to have ‘Kurdish’ names, and renaming various towns, lakes, and places with ‘Turkish’ names. These were the primary attitudes of Turkish governments against the Kurds until the end of 1970s.

Similarly, religious groups were also under pressure until the 2000s. The state excluded religious groups from the public sphere, and labeled them as threatening factor for the regime. Building upon the regime principles, the state restricted women from wearing the traditional Islamic headscarf in civil service jobs, in both public and private schools including the universities, and governmental offices.

Exclusionist and eliminative discourse of the Turkish Republic has influenced the ethnic and religious compositions of society in Turkey until the last two decades. During this period, the state’s denial of Kurdish identity and suppression of Kurds was an important goal of Turkish governments. Kemalist policies of secularization and homogenization of the society and the assimilation of non-Turkish ethnic identities were maintained by the Turkish governments to prevent the rise of Islamic and Kurdish identities (Zubaida 1996, Onis 1997, Ozbudun 2000). The first attempt to challenge the Kemalist policies of secularization and homogenization of the society came from a group of Kurds under the leadership of Abdullah Ocalan that formed the Partîya Karkerên Kurdistan - the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, popularly known as PKK. This new group started to attack both civilians and military forces in many cities in southeast part of Turkey and some cities in the west part of the country. The Turkish Army launched responses to the PKK attacks during 1990s, which further escalated the tension in many regions. More than 40,000 people have been killed since start of PKK attacks against civilian and military forces.

This ethnic conflict shaped the prevailing center-periphery dimension of the political spectrum. The 1990s witnessed the emergence of pro-Islamist, ethno-Kurdish, and Turkish nationalist parties. Among these, the first pro-Islamist Welfare Party (Refah Partisi, RP<sup>1</sup>)

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<sup>1</sup> RP had its roots in the National Salvation Party (Milli Selamet Partisi, MSP) and the National Order Party (Milli Nizam Partisi, MNP). Both parties were closed down by the military regimes of 1971 and 1980. For further



continuously increased its share of votes until the late 1990s in both national and local elections. However, the Constitutional Court closed down the RP in January 1998 because of the speech of some senior figures such as Minister Erbakan, and banned them from political activity for five years. The senior figures of the RP had changed the name of the party to the Virtue Party (Fazilet Partisi, FP), and eventually this new party was closed down in June 2001 on similar grounds to those of the RP case (Carkoglu and Hinich 2006, p. 373).

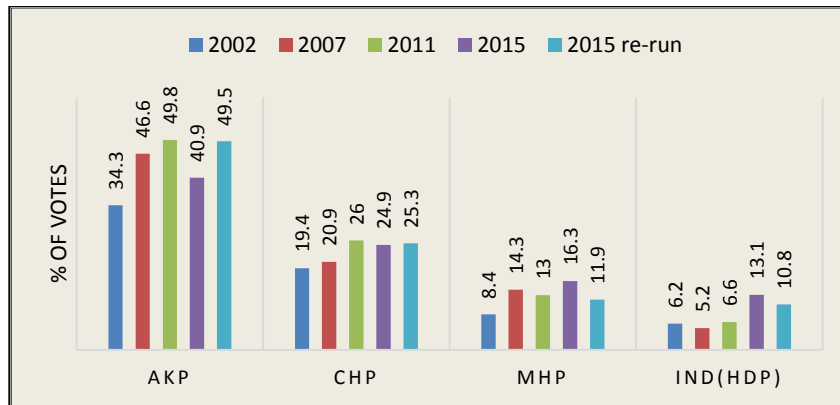
In 2002, pro-Islamic political party, called Justice and Development Party (AKP), weakened the ideological discourse of the Kemalist state, which was based on the exclusion of the Kurds and religious groups. The AKP's reformist policies and liberalist approach toward the Kurdish issue differ remarkably from the traditional secular nationalist agenda. Even though substantive reforms have been realized in the last decade because of the influence of the European Union, there was also a high tension between the PKK and the AKP governments at the same period. These changes have gradually affected the big picture of how the Kurds vote.

As the pro-Islamic and Kurdish identities have risen, the voting behavior of these reemerging identities has played a significant role in shaping the current political atmosphere of the Turkish parliament. The 2002 election was right after one of the worst economic crisis in Turkey, and the AKP enjoyed most of the votes, by gaining votes from almost all parts of the political dimensions. Since then, the AKP has been in power. During this period, the Turkish parliament has been formed by four major parties. Aside from the AKP, the secular Republican People's Party (Turkish: Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP), the Nationalist Movement Party (Turkish: Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP), and the pro-Kurdish party, the People's Democratic Party (Turkish: Halkların Demokratik Partisi, HDP)<sup>2</sup> have seats in the parliament. I should note that Kurdish candidates had run for the elections as independents due to 10% national threshold from 2002 to 2011. In 2015, however, the HDP joined the national elections as a party, not independent candidates, which shapes the political picture in Turkey dramatically. As shown in the Figure 1, the independent Kurdish candidates were under the national 10% threshold between 2002 and 2011. They would not have entered the parliament if they had joined the elections as a party-list due to the threshold. In the last general elections in 2015, the Kurdish party surpassed the threshold.

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information about Islam and politics, and political parties in the late 1990s in Turkey, see, Carkoglu and Toprak (2000), Carkoglu (2007), Heper (1997), Sayarı (1996), Toprak (1981).

<sup>2</sup> Since the names of the Kurdish political parties have been changed frequently up until today, different surveys use different names to refer the pro-Kurdish parties. Today, the pro-Kurdish party uses the name "HDP". Even though our survey data uses the name of HDP as pro-Kurdish party, we use the latest name, HDP, throughout the study.



**Figure 1: Vote Share of Parties since 2002**

Source: Compiled by the author from Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK).

### Previous Research on Voting Behavior

The following studies are of particular interest on determinants of voting behavior in the political science field: Lazarsfeld et al. (1944, 1954); Campbell et al. (1960, 1966); Horowitz (1985, 1991, 1993); Lipset and Rokkan (1967); Franklin et al. (1992); Evans (1999); Norris (2003); Norris and Mettes (2003); Bartels (2008); Schoen (2014). Many of these scholars have pursued studies focusing on the main determinants of voting behavior. Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet write two of the earlier studies on voting behavior, in 1944 and 1954. From the 1960s onwards, the theory of voter preferences developed by Campbell et al. -- which asserts that the most voters cast their ballots on the basis of their partisan identification -- influenced most of the works in the field. The findings of Campbell et al.'s study made it easier to understand the effects of social characteristics and party loyalty over time.

On the other hand, studies focusing on voting behavior in Europe and other newer democracies naturally tend to examine the social cleavages and structures as well, since there are more ethnic and religious-based cleavages in such countries. For instance, the classical structural theory of voting behavior, developed by Lipset and Rokkan (1967), emphasizes that social identities formed the basic building blocks of party support in Western Europe. This theory stems from the idea that the party structure in Western countries has been 'frozen' from the 1920s until the 1960s. They investigate the regional cleavages of center-periphery, the class inequalities of workers-owners, and sectarian cleavages over church and state, in the ten Western countries, Brazil and Japan. They posit that these core social cleavages have determined the class and religious-based voting behavior in Western countries up until the 1970s.

Lipset and Rokkan's *freezing* hypothesis has been criticized by some scholars (e.g., Bartoloni and Mair 1990, Mair 2001, Franklin et al. 1992) that argue that the effect of social cleavages on party choice in Western democracies is declining, and that there are other factors that need to be examined in voting behavior. We should note that because Lipset and Rokkan focus only on Western democracies, many think that their hypothesis is inadequate to explain the



general picture of voting behavior in developing countries.

According to Norris and Mattes (2003, 3), structural theories suggest that “in electoral democracies, the basic cleavages within each society should provide cues linking voters to parties representing each major social sector, whether divisions of ethnicity, region, class, or religion.” This assertion was supported by Inglehart (1984) who argues that post-modernist values such as autonomy, trust, individualism, and self-expression may challenge social cleavages as the key determinant of vote choice. Norris and Mattes (2003) argue that, following the seminal structural theories of Lipset and Rokkan, “much of the literature has focused on the cleavages of social class, religion, and center-periphery that have long divided established democracies.” That is to say, these issues have long been discussed in developed democracies. However, the expected effects of these cleavages in developing democracies are ignored in a sense, and are worth investigating as well.

In recent years, although many studies in the field contain both developed and developing countries in analyzing the factors that determine voting behavior, only a few of them have been focused on a single country. To fill the gap, we examine the voting behavior in Turkey in this study.

With respect to Turkey, the literature on voting behavior is heavily influenced by the seminal work of Mardin (1973) who argues that the center-periphery relations are the main determinants of voting behavior. From this point of view, the center is identified with strong bureaucracy, and the periphery is identified with the lower classes and some so-called suspicious identities such as religious and Kurdish - which have to be controlled by the center - that demand more democracy. Put concisely, to Mardin, the relationship between the center and the periphery is one of the most important indicators of Turkish politics, which also plays an important role in determining the voting behavior of the citizens as well. Among other factors, the religious institution was on the borderline between the center and the periphery, and “it was increasingly identified with the periphery” (Mardin 1973, p. 172).

Since Mardin’s seminal work in 1973, many scholars have examined the determinants of voting behavior in Turkey (e.g., Sayari 1978; Heper 1985; Ozbudun 1975, 2000; Kalaycioglu 1994, 1999; Esmer 1995, 2002; Ozcan 2000; Carkoglu and Hinich 2006; Carkoglu 2007, 2008, 2012; Carkoglu and Kalaycioglu 2007; Akarca and Tansel 2006; Baslevant et al. 2009; Sarigil 2010; and Ekmekci 2011, Toros 2014).

The literature on voting behavior in Turkey is dominated by the largely descriptive aggregate-level analyses of election results, while individual level survey-based studies are few and only recently increasing (Carkoglu 2012, p. 513). Esmer (1995) posited similar opinion by stating, “The studies that explore electoral behavior are few in number and depend, almost entirely, on aggregate data” (Esmer 1995, p. 77). Similarly, Carkoglu and Hinich (2006) highlight that “a sui generis character of the Turkish electorate emerges and leaves the Turkish experience unlinked to a larger body of comparative and theoretical research on voting behavior” (Carkoglu and Hinich 2006, p. 370). One of the first studies utilizing individual-level data was



done by Kalaycioglu in 1994, and some others have followed his study, such as Kalaycioglu (1999), Esmer (2002), Baslevent et al. (2004, 2005, 2009), Çarkoglu (2008), Çarkoglu and Hinich (2006), and Çarkoglu and Kalaycioglu (2007), Sarigil (2010), Ekmekci (2011).

In one of the recent studies on voting behavior, Carkoglu and Hinich (2006) frame the traditional center-periphery cleavage as a secular vs. pro-Islamist dimension, and further claim that “religiosity, more than any other variable, is found to affect Turkish voters’ choice among competing parties” (Carkoglu and Hinich 2006, p. 374). It is worth mentioning that religion is one of the most significant variables in the large part of the literature on voting behavior, particularly in the last decade (e.g., Carkoglu and Kalaycioglu 2007; Carkoglu and Toprak 2006; Esmer 1999; Grigoriadis 2009; Kalaycioglu, 2002; Somer 2007; Hale and Ozbudun 2010; Ekmekci 2011).<sup>3</sup>

In one of the latest studies on voting behavior, Toros (2014, p. 1013) posits, “The ideological orientations, political and personal values, salient issues, media, and socioeconomic factors shape the voting behavior in Turkey”. Toros underlines that religiosity, ideology, and nationalism<sup>4</sup> are some of the most significant key factors that determine the party choice of the citizens.

Undoubtedly, the financial crisis in 2001 was the core factor that determines the result of the national election in 2002. Kalaycioglu (2007), using an individual level data conducted in 2006 in 23 out of 81 provinces with 1,846 respondents, finds that the voters cast their ballot based on their economic benefits rather than purely ideological beliefs. Further, he posits that “the stellar rise of support for the AKP in 2002 is indicative of the fact that its leadership and symbolism produced a movement of political attractiveness in the eyes of the tradition-bound, conservative masses of the Turkish right” (Kalaycioglu 2007, p. 239). Therefore, traditional left-right orientation has been inadequate to explain the general framework of the electoral behavior in Turkey since the 2002 national election.

### **Data and Method**

This study utilizes a survey dataset conducted by KONDA Research and Consultancy in 2010<sup>5</sup>, in 59 provinces, with 10,393 respondents, to investigate the determinants of voting behavior in Turkey. Traditionally, studies examining voting behavior use discrete party choice of the electorate as the dependent variable. Empirical studies in the last two decades on the determinants of the voting behavior have shown that there is a strong relationship between the

<sup>3</sup> There is an increasing trend in the literature on Islam and politics in Turkey. See, for instance; Yesim Arat (2001); Sencer Ayata (1996); Ali Çarkoglu and Binnaz Toprak (2000); Nilüfer Göle (1997); Metin Heper (1997); Serif Mardin (1989); Sabri Sayarı (1996); Ilter Turan (1991); Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito (2003).

<sup>4</sup> Nationalism is an important political factor in analyzing the political structure in Turkey. For details, see Akdeniz and Goker 2011; Bacik 2011; Belge 2009; Bora 2003; Grigoriadis and Ozer 2010.

<sup>5</sup> KONDA Research and Consultancy is a public opinion research and consultancy company established in 1986. For further information about KONDA, see; <http://www.konda.com.tr/en/>, and for the report of my data, see; <http://www.konda.com.tr/tr/raporlar.php?tb=3>



voting probability and party choice. This relationship is almost deterministic (Goldberg 2014, 314).

In harmony with the recent literature on voting behavior, the dependent variable will be “vote choice” in all the models in this study. *Which political party would you vote for if there were a general election tomorrow* was the question in the survey that we use for dependent variable. The variable had all of the major parties competed in the national elections, but I dropped the parties that were unable to enter the parliament because of the threshold. For that reason, I use four parties (AKP, CHP, MHP, and HDP) as the dependent variable.

Of the two key independent variables, *religion* refers to the importance of self-identification as a religious person, and is measured on a 5-point scale, in which the lowest number refers ‘not at all important’, and the highest number refers ‘very important’. *Ethnicity* is measured on a 5-point scale, ranging from ‘not at all important’ to ‘very important’. Since there are both the Turks and the Kurds together in the analysis, we use a variable named “identity”, and test this with other variables to see the interaction effect between identity and ethnicity. Identity is a dummy variable coded as 1 if the respondents were Turks, and 0 if the respondents were Kurds.

I use age, gender, education, and income as the socio-economic indicators. Gender is a dummy variable coded as 1 if the respondents are female and 0 otherwise. The age is coded as a three-category variable with values 1 (18 to 28 years), 2 (29 to 43 years), and 3 (43 and above years). Household income is measured on a 6-point scale, where the lowest level of income was TL 300, and the highest level of income was TL 3000 and higher. The education is coded on a 6-point scale as well, ranging from the lowest level of education (1= illiterate) to the highest level of education (6= higher education).

Since the dependent variable used in the study is a categorical variable, we employ multinomial logit regressions for the empirical estimation. For the calculations, STATA was used as the statistical package program. The equation for logit estimation is presented below:

$$\text{Vote choice} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{religiosity})_i + \beta_2(\text{ethnicity})_i + \beta_3(\text{identity})_i + \beta_4(\text{income})_i + \beta_5(\text{age})_i + \beta_6(\text{education})_i + \beta_7(\text{gender})_i + \beta_8(\text{democratic constitution})_i + \beta_9(\text{European Union})_i$$

### Statistical Analysis of the Results

The results of the multinomial estimation are presented in Table 1 through Table 5. Since four political parties represented in the parliament will be compared in the analysis, we demonstrate the results of the multinomial estimation in five separate tables. In total, twenty columns are needed to demonstrate the results of the multinomial logit estimation, since we use four different methods for five comparisons -- which would make the table very complicated. Therefore, we use five separate tables with four models for each comparison to make it easier to follow the outcomes.





In the tables 1, 2, and 3, we first compare the results for the CHP, MHP, and HDP relative to the AKP, respectively. For that reason, we run the models by taking the AKP as the base category. Second, the tables 4 and 5 compare the results with respect to the CHP versus the MHP and the HDP. In this estimation, we excluded the AKP from the analysis, and then ran the models by taking the CHP as the base category dependent variable. Each table has four models. The first model examines the effect of religiosity upon vote choice, controlling for socio-economic indicators and issue positions. While the second model looks at the effect of ethnicity, the third model looks at the effects of both ethnicity and religiosity on vote choice, without any interaction terms. The last model examines the effect of ethnicity and its interaction with identity upon vote choice, controlling for other variables. The results are reported below for each comparison.

#### *AKP versus CHP*

Table 1 shows the results of our models for the comparison between the AKP and the CHP. As shown in Model 3, both ethnicity and religiosity have a statistically significant effect on voting behavior, suggesting that a one-unit increase in the level of religiosity decreases the multinomial log-odds of voting for the CHP compared to AKP by 0.52. This result is consistent with the hypotheses in the recent literature (e.g., Carkoglu and Hinich 2006; Toros 2014) in which scholars show that both religious Turks and Kurds are more likely to vote for a religious-based party, namely the AKP. Similarly, ethnicity has a statistically significant and positive effect on the likelihood of voting for the CHP instead of the AKP.



**Table 1: Multinomial Logit Analysis of Vote for CHP relative to AKP**

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.
Religion	-0.40		0.05 ***	---	---	---	-0.52	0.06	***	---	---	---
Ethnicity	---	---	---	-0.06	0.04		0.21	0.05	***	0.18	0.12	
Identity	0.89	0.16	*	0.82	0.15	***	0.86	0.16	***	1.83	0.47	***
<b>Interactions</b>												
Ethnicity*id	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	-0.28	0.12	**
<b>Social Background</b>												
Age	0.20	0.06	**	0.21	0.06	***	0.21	0.06	***	0.21	0.06	***
Gender	0.25	0.09	*	0.26	0.09	***	0.24	0.09	***	0.26	0.09	***
Education	0.28	0.04	*	0.33	0.04	***	0.30	0.04	***	0.33	0.04	***
Income	0.08	0.04	**	0.11	0.04	***	0.09	0.04	**	0.11	0.04	***
<b>Issue Positions</b>												
Dem. Constitution	-3.73	0.09	*	-3.78	0.09	***	-3.72	0.09	***	-3.79	0.09	***
Support for EU	-0.08	0.04	**	-0.09	0.04	**	-0.08	0.04	**	-0.09	0.04	**
<b>_cons</b>	<b>0.68</b>	<b>0.37</b>	<b>*</b>	<b>-0.84</b>	<b>0.35</b>	<b>**</b>	<b>0.33</b>	<b>0.38</b>		<b>-1.71</b>	<b>0.52</b>	<b>***</b>
McFadden's Adj. R2	0.39			0.38			0.39			0.38		
Nagelkerke R2	0.66			0.66			0.70			0.66		
N	6221			6229			6196			6229		

Note: The models represent the results of multinomial logit regressions including unstandardized beta coefficients (B), standardized error (S.E.), and their significance (Sig.): \*\*\* p.001 \*\* p.01 \* P.05: The base category is the AKP. The models summarize the overall fit of the model provided by the Nagelkerke R2 and the percentage of cases (%) correctly predicted.

Identity has also a statistically significant and positive effect on the likelihood of voting for the CHP instead of the AKP, suggesting that being a Turk (compared to Kurd) increases the multinomial log-odds of voting for the CHP instead of the AKP by 0.86, when controlling all the other factors in the model.

On the other hand, when ethnicity is interacted with identity, as demonstrated in Model 4, the effect is statistically significant and negative, suggesting that the effect of ethnicity decreases as identity (for Turks) increases. This result simply suggests that as the importance a Turkish respondent gives ethnicity increases, the probability of voting for the AKP decreases, and the probability of voting for the CHP increases.



**Table 2: Multinomial Logit Analysis of Vote for MHP Relative to AKP**

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.
Religion	0.09	0.06		---	---	---	-0.07	0.07		---	---	---
Ethnicity	---	---	---	0.25	0.05	***	0.27	0.06	***	0.20	0.28	
Identity	2.38	0.32	*	2.35	0.32	***	2.35	0.32	***	2.26	1.06	**
<b>Interactions</b>												
Ethnicity*id	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	0.02	0.28	
<b>Social Background</b>												
Age	-0.32	0.07	**	-0.31	0.07	***	-0.31	0.07	***	-0.30	0.07	***
Gender	-0.31	0.10	*	-0.32	0.10	***	-0.31	0.10	***	-0.32	0.10	***
Education	0.19	0.05	*	0.20	0.05	***	0.20	0.05	***	0.20	0.05	***
Income	0.02	0.05		0.02	0.05		0.03	0.05		0.02	0.05	
<b>Issue Positions</b>												
Dem. Constitution	-3.26	0.11	*	-3.25	0.11	***	-3.24	0.11	***	-3.24	0.11	***
Support for EU	-0.36	0.04	*	-0.36	0.04	**	-0.36	0.04	***	-0.36	0.04	***
<b>_cons</b>	<b>-0.91</b>	<b>0.51</b>	<b>*</b>	<b>-1.52</b>	<b>0.49</b>	<b>***</b>	<b>-1.36</b>	<b>0.52</b>	<b>***</b>	<b>-1.35</b>	<b>1.09</b>	
McFadden's Adj. R2	0.39			0.38			0.39			0.38		
Nagelkerke R2	0.66			0.66			0.70			0.66		
N	6221			6229			6196			6229		

Note: The models represent the results of multinomial logit regressions including unstandardized beta coefficients (B), standardized error (S.E.), and their significance (Sig.): \*\*\* p.001 \*\* p.01 \* P.05. The base category is AKP. The models summarize the overall fit of the model provided by the Nagelkerke R<sub>2</sub> and the percentage of cases (%) correctly predicted.

### *AKP versus MHP*

Table 2 shows the results of the models for the comparison between AKP and MHP. Religiosity has no impact in any of the models, whereas both ethnicity and identity have a statistically significant and positive effect. This result suggests that Turks are more likely than Kurds to vote for the MHP instead of the AKP. This result is consistent with the theory that the MHP, as a Turkish-nationalist party, is popular among Turks who give importance to their ethnicity. Besides, the results for identity suggest that being a Turk, compared to being a Kurd, increases the multinomial log-odds of voting for the MHP instead of AKP by 2.35, which indicates approximately more than 90% probability. Not surprisingly, the MHP is much more popular among Turks than Kurds.



**Table 3: Multinomial Logit Analysis of Vote for HDP Relative to AKP**

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.
Religion	-0.23	0.07	***	---	---	---	-0.68	0.10	***	---	---	---
Ethnicity	---	---	---	0.50	0.08	***	0.82	0.10	***	0.64	0.09	***
Identity	-5.00	0.29	*	-5.16	0.29	***	-5.09	0.29	***	-1.65	0.97	*
<b>Interactions</b>												
Ethnicity*id	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	-0.91	0.26	***
<b>Social Background</b>												
Age	-0.11	0.10		-0.08	0.10		-0.09	0.10		-0.07	0.10	
Gender	-0.27	0.14	*	-0.28	0.15	*	-0.27	0.15	*	-0.29	0.15	**
Education	0.13	0.06	**	0.20	0.06	***	0.17	0.06	***	0.20	0.06	***
Income	-0.21	0.07	*	-0.16	0.07	**	-0.20	0.07	***	-0.17	0.07	**
<b>Issue Positions</b>												
Dem. Constitution	-2.43	0.17	**	-2.51	0.17	***	-2.51	0.17	***	-2.57	0.17	***
Support for EU	0.20	0.07	*	0.16	0.07	**	0.18	0.07	***	0.16	0.07	**
_cons	2.23	0.55	*	-0.84	0.56		0.62	0.60		-1.36	0.59	**
McFadden's Adj. R2	0.39			0.38			0.39			0.38		
Nagelkerke R2	0.66			0.66			0.70			0.66		
N	6221			6229			6196			6229		

Note: The models represent the results of multinomial logit regressions including unstandardized beta coefficients (B), standardized error (S.E.), and their significance (Sig.): \*\*\* p.001 \*\* p.01 \* P.05. The base category is the AKP. The models summarize the overall fit of the model provided by the Nagelkerke R<sub>2</sub> and the percentage of cases (%) correctly predicted.

### *AKP versus HDP*

Table 3 reports the results of the comparison between the AKP and HDP. Model 1 shows the results of the effect of religiosity on vote choice, without controlling the effect of ethnicity. This result shows that religiosity has a statistically significant and negative effect, suggesting that if a person's self-identified degree of religiosity were to increase by one unit, the multinomial log-odds for the HDP relative to the AKP would be expected to decrease by 0.23 unit while holding all other variables in the model constant. On the other hand, when ethnicity is interacted with identity, as seen in Model 4, the effect is statistically significant and negative, suggests simply that the Kurds prioritizing their ethnic identity are more likely to vote for the HDP compared to the AKP. These results also suggest that those who support for a new democratic constitution are less likely to vote for the HDP, and those who support



for the membership of the European Union are more likely to vote for the HDP compared to the AKP.

**Table 4: Multinomial Logit Analysis of Vote for MHP Relative to CHP**

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.
Religion	0.51	0.05	***	---	---	---	0.47	0.06	***	---	---	---
Ethnicity	---	---	---	0.31	0.05	***	0.06	0.06		0.02	0.27	
Identity	1.51	0.33	*	1.55	0.33	***	1.51	0.33	***	0.44	1.03	
<b>Interactions</b>												
Ethnicity*id	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	0.29	0.27	
<b>Social Background</b>												
Age	-0.51	0.06	**	-0.51	0.06	***	-0.51	0.06	***	-0.51	0.06	***
Gender	-0.54	0.09	*	-0.58	0.09	***	-0.53	0.09	***	-0.58	0.09	***
Education	-0.08	0.05	*	-0.12	0.04	***	-0.08	0.05	*	-0.12	0.04	***
Income	-0.05	0.04		-0.08	0.04	**	-0.05	0.04		-0.08	0.04	*
<b>Issue Positions</b>												
Dem. Constitution	0.46	0.11	**	0.53	0.11	***	0.47	0.11	***	0.53	0.11	***
Support for EU	-0.28	0.04	*	-0.28	0.04	***	-0.28	0.04	***	-0.28	0.04	***
_cons	-1.79	0.50	*	-0.78	0.48		-1.87	0.51	***	0.31	1.06	
McFadden's Adj. R2	0.37			0.36			0.37			0.36		
Nagelkerke R2	0.60			0.59			0.60			0.59		
N	3104			3113			3093			3113		

Note: The models represent the results of multinomial logit regressions including unstandardized beta coefficients (B), standardized error (S.E.), and their significance (Sig.): \*\*\* p.001 \*\* p.01 \* P.05. The base category is CHP. The models summarize the overall fit of the model provided by the Nagelkerke R<sub>2</sub> and the percentage of cases (%) correctly predicted.

### *CHP versus MHP*

Table 4 reports the results of the comparison between the CHP and the MHP. An interesting result comes out when we examine the effect of ethnicity without controlling for religiosity. As shown in Model 2, ethnicity is statistically significant only if we add religiosity into the model. This result denotes that religiosity is the key predictor of vote choice when it comes to compare the CHP and the MHP. This is partly because both parties get their votes mostly from the Turks, not Kurds; therefore, there is not much variance between the two parties in terms of ethnicity. This result is also consistent with the theory that the CHP is not a popular political party among religious groups.



**Table 5: Multinomial Logit Analysis of Vote for HDP Relative to CHP**

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.
Religion	0.01	0.10		---	---	---	-0.25	0.12	**	---	---	---
Ethnicity	---	---	---	0.32	0.10	***	0.45	0.13	***	0.38	0.11	***
Identity	-5.95	0.31	*	-5.95	0.30	***	-5.93	0.31	***	-3.75	0.99	***
Interactions												
Ethnicity*id	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	-0.58	0.27	**
Social Background			**									
Age	-0.44	0.15	*	-0.42	0.15	***	-0.44	0.15	***	-0.42	0.15	***
Gender	-0.42	0.22	**	-0.38	0.22	*	-0.39	0.22	*	-0.38	0.22	*
Education	-0.23	0.09	**	-0.18	0.09	*	-0.22	0.10	**	-0.17	0.09	*
Income	-0.28	0.09	*	-0.26	0.09	***	-0.28	0.09	***	-0.27	0.09	***
Issue Positions			**									
Dem. Constitution	1.53	0.25	*	1.43	0.25	***	1.56	0.25	***	1.44	0.25	***
Support for EU	0.31	0.09	*	0.28	0.09	***	0.29	0.10	***	0.28	0.09	***
_cons	2.49	0.78	*	1.07	0.77		1.68	0.82	***	0.86	0.79	
McFadden's Adj. R2	0.37			0.36			0.37			0.36		
Nagelkerke R2	0.60			0.59			0.60			0.59		
N	3104			3113			3093			3113		

Note: The models represent the results of multinomial logit regressions including unstandardized beta coefficients (B), standardized error (S.E.), and their significance (Sig.): \*\*\* p.001 \*\* p.01 \* P.05. The base category is CHP. The models summarize the overall fit of the model provided by the Nagelkerke R2 and the percentage of cases (%) correctly predicted.

### *CHP versus HDP*

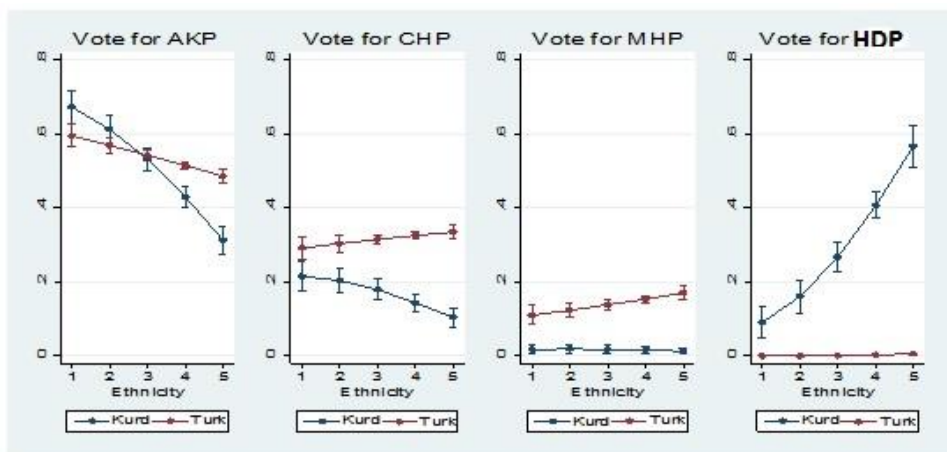
The results of the whole equation without any interactions in Model 3 in Table 5 show that religiosity has a statistically significant and negative effect, suggesting that if a person's self-identified level of religiosity were to increase by one point, the multinomial log-odds for the HDP relative to the CHP would be expected to decrease by 0.25. With respect to identity, it has a statistically significant and negative effect in all models, suggesting that the Turks are less likely than Kurds to vote for the HDP instead of the CHP. Again, this result confirms the theory that the HDP is more popular party than both the CHP and MHP among Kurds. When ethnicity is interacted with identity, as seen in Model 4, the effect is statistically significant and negative, suggests that as ethnicity increases, Turks are more likely, and Kurds are less likely to vote for the CHP.



### *Plotting the Results*

Some of the covariates are not fixed, we therefore use predictive margins instead of conditional margins to show the probabilities of voters' preferences. As underlined by Cameron and Trivedi (2010, 502), “The *margins* (in STATA) can be used to compute the average predicted probability of a given outcome, along with an associated confidence interval.” Thus, we show the results by plotting the predicted margins of the predictors of vote choice. These plots are based on the last margins command run. Since we utilize multinomial estimation, we first ran our multinomial logit regression model to predict all outcomes for the each party. We then specify the desired values (adjusted) for each covariate in the model. By so doing, we compute the adjusted predictions for individuals who have those values. This estimation gives us predictive margins of responses for specified values of covariates, as well as their 95 percent confidence intervals, p-values, and standard deviations.

The relationship between identity and the importance both the Turks and Kurds give their ethnicity is important to explain the vote choice. Thus, the predictive margins with 95 percent confidence intervals by ethnicity are shown for Turk and Kurd respondents in Figure 2. As seen in the left plot, every one-unit increase in the level of ethnicity decreases the probability of voting for the pro-Islamic AKP for both Kurd and Turk respondents. Besides, as ethnicity increases, the CHP and the MHP get more votes from Turks, whereas the HDP gets more votes from Kurds. These results suggest that while 67.4 percent of the Kurds who score at the lowest level of ethnicity vote for the AKP, whereas 31.3 percent of the Kurds who score at the highest level of ethnicity vote for the AKP. That is, the pro-Islamic AKP loses 36.1 percent of its votes, as the level of ethnicity increases from 1 to 5. By contrast, the HDP increases its votes by 47.6 percent, as the level of ethnicity increases from 1 to 5.



**Figure 2: Probabilities of Vote Choice related to Ethnicity/Identity with 95% CIs**

As discussed in the theoretical chapter, religion is one of the most important determinants of voting behavior in Turkey (Heper 1988; Ayata 1993; Kalaycioglu 1994;



Carkoglu and Hinich 2006; Toros 2014). How the effect of religiosity on vote choice changes between Kurds and Turks is also worth examining. Therefore, the predictive margins with 95 percent confidence intervals by the level of religiosity are shown for Turk and Kurd respondents in Figure 3. As seen in the left plot, both Kurds and Turks tend to vote for the AKP as religiosity increases. This result is consistent with the theory that religiosity is the key factor that affects voters' choice (Carkoglu and Hinich 2006, p. 374). With respect to Kurds, the HDP gets 68.2 percent of the votes from Kurds who score at the lowest level of religiosity, and gets 29.8 percent of the votes from Kurds who score at the highest level of religiosity. Therefore, the HDP loses its votes by 38.4 percent as the level of religiosity increases from 1 to 5.

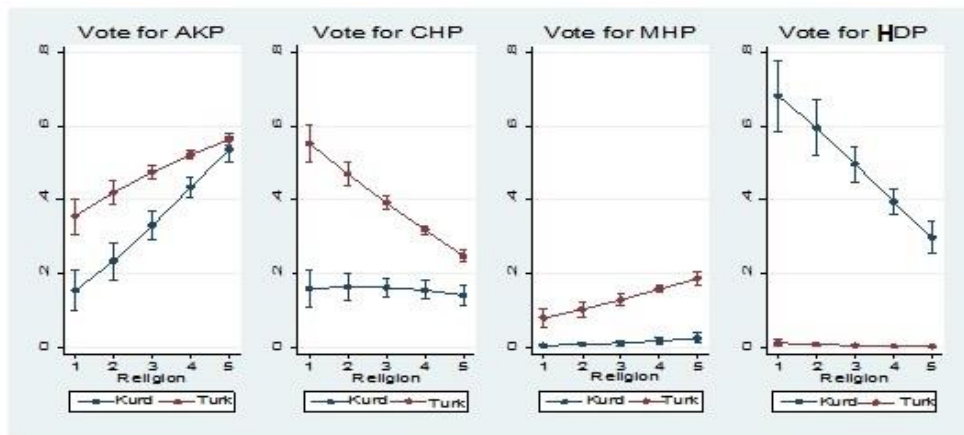


Figure 3: Probabilities of Vote Choice related to Religion and Identity

We also report the predictive margins in regards to the voting pattern of the least religious and the most religious respondents, and its interaction with the levels of ethnicity in Figure 4. Without interactions, as the level of ethnicity increases from 1 to 5, the AKP loses its votes from Kurds by 37 percent. When ethnicity is interacted with the least and highest levels of religiosity as seen in the left plot in Table 4, we see that as ethnicity increases, the expected differences between the least religious and most religious individuals become much larger. This indicates that for religious Kurds, the level of ethnicity is not very important.

With respect to the HDP, when ethnicity is interacted with religiosity, the difference between the least and most religious Kurds become much larger, therefore religiosity crosscuts the importance of ethnicity. Regardless of the importance the respondents give their ethnicity, religious Kurds tend to vote for the AKP, whereas the non-religious Kurds tend to vote for the HDP. The policy implications of these results tell us that religiosity could be used to reduce the ethnic tension between the Kurds and the Turks. In sum, ethnicity does matter in vote choice of both Kurds and Turks. This result is consistent with the structural theories suggesting that ethnicity causes a strong direct impact on voting behavior in ethnically segmented and developing societies (Norris and Mattes 2003; Horowitz 1985, 1993).



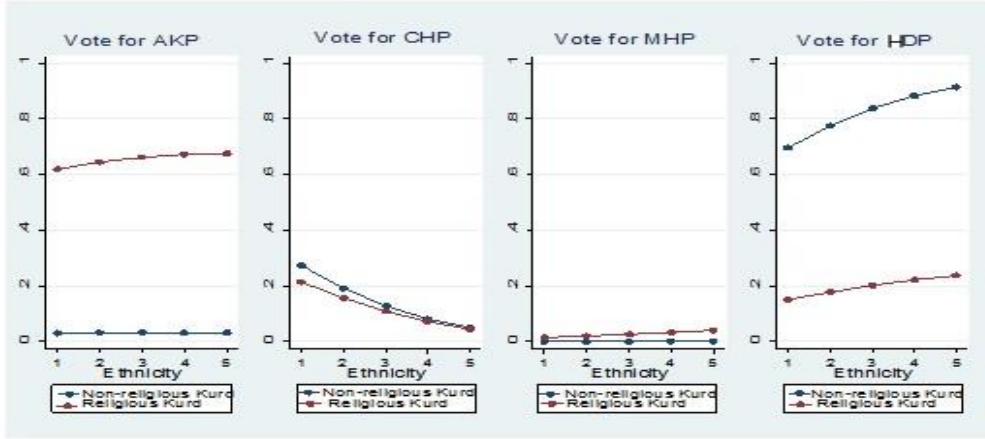
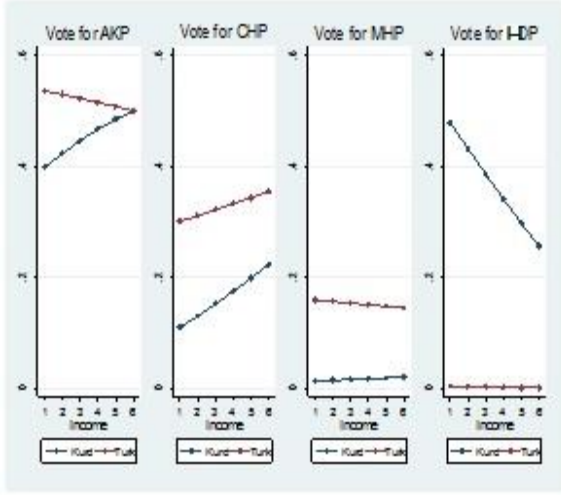


Figure 4: Probabilities of Interactions between Religion and Ethnicity (Kurds)

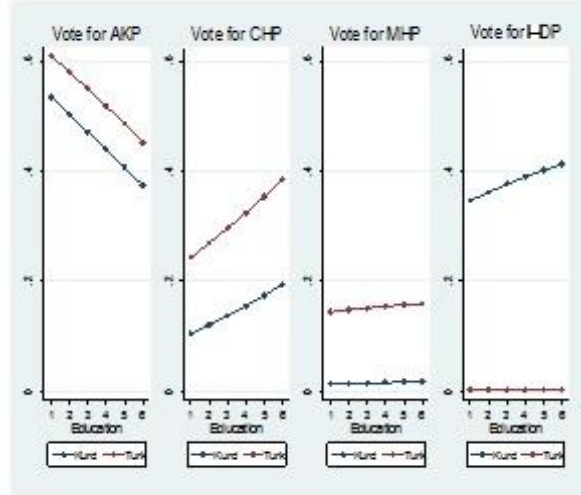
We have demonstrated so far that both ethnicity and religiosity have a strong effect on vote choice. Now, we show how the effects of these two predictors on vote choice change when they are combined with socioeconomic indicators: income and education. In Figure 5 and 6, the predictive margins by the level of education and income are shown for Turk and Kurd respondents in each age category.

The results of the combination between identity and education level are shown in Figure 5. These results suggest that increasing education level increases the vote share of the CHP, and decreases the probability of vote for the AKP in terms both of Turk and Kurd respondents. The secular CHP gets votes from the better educated Turks and Kurds, and is the most popular party among better-educated individuals. Conversely, the AKP is the most popular party among the less educated groups.

Figure 6 shows the results of the combination between identity and the level of income. The effects of income and education seem quite similar for CHP with respect to both Turk and Kurd respondents. That is, every one-unit increase in the level of income increases the probability of vote for CHP. On the other hand, the AKP loses its votes coming from the Turks to CHP, as the level of income increases. However, the AKP increases its votes coming from the Kurds, as the level of income increases. This is probably because those Kurds who have higher income tend to reward the incumbent party; the AKP.



**Figure 5: Probabilities of Vote Choice related to Education and Identity**



**Figure 6: Probabilities of Vote Choice related to Income and Identity**

### Conclusion

This study investigated the main factors that determine voting behavior in Turkey. The findings of the multinomial logit estimation confirm that both religious Turks and Kurds are positively associated with the religious-based party, and both secular Turks and Kurds are negatively associated with the religious-based party, namely the AKP. These results prove that in addition to the significant effects of religiosity and ethnicity on vote choice, identity has also statistically significant effect in all models. The AKP is the most popular party among both the religious Turks and the religious Kurds, whereas the CHP is popular among those who score at the lowest level of religiosity. When ethnicity is interacted with religiosity, the difference between the least and most religious Kurds become much larger, therefore religiosity crosscuts the importance of ethnicity. Regardless of the importance the respondents give their ethnicity, religious Kurds tend to vote for the AKP, whereas the non-religious Kurds tend to for the HDP.

In addition, the pro-Kurdish HDP is the most popular party among less religious Kurdish groups. This result is consistent with the theory that “the level of religiosity differentiates AKP and HDP from CHP and MHP voters” (Toros 2014, p. 1025). Besides, these results confirm the theory that the religiosity has a significant effect in determining party preferences of the voters (Heper 1988; Ayata 1993; Kalaycioglu 1994).

Using a large individual survey data compared to previous research, this study showed that religiosity and the importance an individual gives ethnicity are two of the important predictors of voters’ preferences in Turkey. Considering the general picture of the Turkish parliament in the last decade, I concluded that the voting behavior in Turkey has evolved towards ethnic -- specifically Turk/Kurd -- and secular/religious dimensions.



Practically, a new four-party system has emerged in Turkish parliament in the last decade, in which the AKP represents the Islamist and middle-class groups, the CHP represents secular, elite, and center-left groups, the MHP represents the Turkish nationalists, and the HDP represents the Kurdish nationalists. In sum, the emergence of the pro-Islamist and ethno-Kurdish identities has shaped the prevailing center-periphery dimension of the political spectrum. Therefore, the literature on voting behavior has to consider these new dimensions in understanding voter choice.

This study makes two major contributions to the study of voting behavior: (1) Most studies draw inferences from a small sample size. However, we utilize a large nationwide survey data that includes most of the electoral districts, and that has different ethnic groups. (2) Much of the previous work on voting behavior focuses on the established democracies, which precludes us to make inferences regarding the voting behavior in developing world. We examine this issue in Turkey, which is a proper example of an ethnically divided developing country. An intrastate ethnic conflict is one of the biggest problems that an ethnically segmented country could face. Understanding how and under what conditions people vote in such a country would help decision makers ease the tensions between groups that have unique ethnic and religious characteristics, thereby providing the politicians the opportunity to generate a more stable economic and political environment.

There are some limitations in this study. First, the data was collected in a particular snapshot in time. Therefore, it is not possible to draw conclusions regarding any changes over time. The second important limitation in this study could be that there was no specific question in the data regarding the ideological positions of the respondents. Thus, we were unable to control the effect of ideology on voting behavior. For further research, I suggest including district and national level data such as unemployment rate, GDP per capita, and inflation rate to employ multilevel analysis on voting behavior. Such an analysis could provide more general picture regarding the determinants of the voting behavior in a single country. In addition, a multilevel analysis could reveal the effects of the state-level predictors, and the effects of the interaction between the state-level and individual-level predictors. On the other hand, future research could investigate the determinants of voting behavior in some other developing countries that have ethnically divided social structure as Turkey. Hence, using cross-national data, we could see if the findings of this study show any differences or similarities between these countries. This type of research could provide important insights about the robustness of a single country study.

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