

RESEARCH NOTE

DETERMINANTS OF POLITICAL
BEHAVIOR IN ISTANBUL, TURKEY*Yusuf Ziya Özcan*

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the factors that determined the party preferences in the 1987 and 1991 general elections and the 1989 local election in Istanbul, Turkey's largest metropolitan city. It argues that party preference is essentially an aspect of individual political behavior, which should be explained by the characteristics of individuals who are, in turn, affected by various macro factors. Theories developed for industrialized western countries are of limited use in developing countries and in need of revision. The research finds evidence for the importance of previous voting preferences and religious attitudes for the 1987 general election and the 1989 local elections. Predictions for the 1991 general election seem to be determined by region of birth, age, media follow-up, job status, political attitudes, years of residence in Istanbul, father's education, social class, the number of steps in migrating to Istanbul and the number of income-earners in the household.

KEY WORDS ■ developing countries ■ party preference ■ political behavior ■ Turkey

Debate on political behavior in developing countries is often dominated by western concepts. This can certainly be seen in the literature on Turkey. The question is, how appropriate or valid are such approaches? This paper tackles the question by looking at the case of Istanbul. By investigating the factors that determined party preferences in the 1987 and 1991 general elections and the 1989 local elections in the metropolitan city of Istanbul, it argues that party preference is essentially an individual political behavior, which is shaped largely by the initial political socialization in the immediate environment of individuals. Reading of the western literature on voting

behavior indicate that factors determining preferences and their weights vary from election to election, and identification of certain sets of factors that determine party preferences cross-culturally and over time is almost impossible. Despite the similarities in economic and social development paths, theories developed for industrialized western countries are of limited use when applied to developing countries, which are plagued with unique problems alien to the industrialized countries.

The first section of the paper deals with the problems of studying voting behavior in developing countries. After a brief review of the literature on voting characteristics of the Turkish electorates, the paper outlines the approach used here and how it fills the gap in voting studies. A description of the sample and data is followed by the results of a logistic regression analysis. The paper concludes by discussing the findings in a wider context.

Voting in Developing Countries

Studying voting behavior in developing countries poses serious problems. First, most of the studies on political behavior have been limited to the analysis of election results and have focused on finding possible trends between elections. These macro trends are then related to micro characteristics of the electorate, which stands as one of the unresolved problems in this area (Franklin et al., 1992; Markus, 1993). Second, the majority of the studies seem to apply western theories without paying much attention to the unique political atmosphere in each country. Usage of the center-periphery approach and the appearance of claims in the direction of alignment and dealignment at almost approximate dates with the western studies are good examples.

Moreover, two general trends should be emphasized: the extremely unequal distribution of income and the lack of democracy. In the case of Turkey, income distribution studies conducted 30 years apart (Korkut, 1963; SIS, 1997) indicate almost no change in the last 3 decades. Consequently, the working class did not shrink and the middle class did not expand, which is just the opposite of the pattern observed in industrialized nations. On the other hand, there have been 55 governments and three military coups in 75 years in the republican era, which is sufficient to show the degree of political instability and democratization in Turkey.

Studies of Political Preference in Turkey

The center-periphery approach, which has been dominant in explaining party preferences and voting patterns (Mardin, 1973), argues that the center traditionally vote for liberal/left-wing parties, while the periphery favored conservative/right-wing parties (see Sayari, 1978; Özbudun, 1980; Ergüder,

1980-1; Heper, 1988; Kalaycıoğlu, 1994). Ergüder (1980-1) notes the existence of an unpolarized political center for the Turkish voter, despite the fact that left-right alignment has become an important dimension of Turkish politics. He shows that more-religious voters supported the Justice Party (JP), while the Republican People's Party (RPP) was favored by less-religious voters and ethnic groups. Kalaycıoğlu (1994) indicates that while type of settlement and socio-economic status have a weak impact, gender, formal education and religiosity have a critical role in determining party preference.

The issue of class as a determinant of electoral behavior remains unresolved. Özbudun and Tachau (1975) predict that modernization promotes class conflict, which then leads to class-based voting. Similarly, Heper and Evin (1988), Heper (1988) and Ayata (1993) consider class and religion as the major determinants of electoral behavior in Turkey. However, there is counter evidence to such claims, as exemplified by Kalaycıoğlu (1994) and Narlı and Dirlık (1996). The latter authors not only show that politics does not work along social class lines, but also show that due to the decline of support for center-right and center-left parties there is a trend of radicalization which increases as one moves from western to eastern regions. A recent study presents evidence indicating that the party leader is more important than the party's political views, ideology, cadre, targets, program and religious views in shaping preferences of party members (Çağa et al., 1996). Interestingly enough, the religious views of the party ranks last among the factors.

Filling the Gap in Understanding Party Preferences

A careful reading of the western literature on voting suggests the absence of a set of universal factors explaining political preferences, which has led scholars to focus on short-run changes. Considerable research on alignment, realignment and dealignment shows immense efforts to capture short-run changes in preferences. Given the relatively unchanging nature of political preferences in the long run, western theories fail to explain the derivation of such differences. Disregard of long-run tendencies in preferences made some (Himmelweit et al., 1978) suggest the decreasing influence of past habits, which indeed are prominent factors determining voting behavior in the long run that explain relative stability in electoral preferences. Consequently, these theories failed to account for the difference between the short-run and the long-run preferences.

The principal assumption of this study is that earlier preferences and factors affecting the initial formation of political preferences are more important than conventional factors such as race, ethnicity, religion and social class, since conventional factors are limited in reflecting the effect of initial preferences. Thus, the political socialization by which children are introduced to certain political culture becomes important in the study of political preferences. It is the maintenance of early preferences that explains

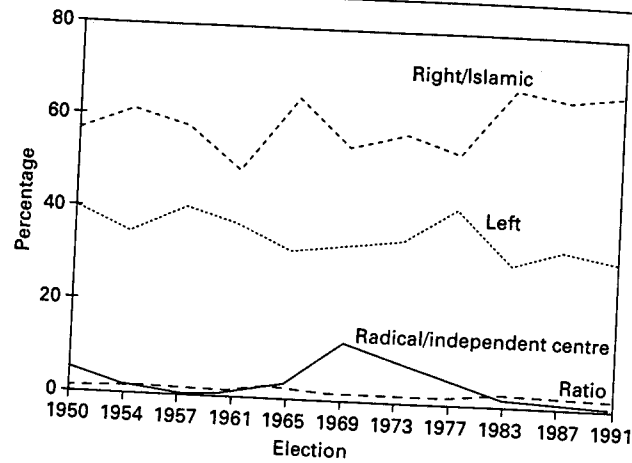


Figure 1. Part preferences in Turkish elections since 1950 (right-wing votes combined with Islamic)

the observed long-run stability. In the case of Turkey, political preferences seem quite stable in the long run. No significant change has taken place since 1950 (Kalaycioglu, 1985; Ergüder and Hofferbert 1988). Despite the fact that there have been some fluctuations between elections due to higher votes received by religious and radical parties in some elections, the ratio of right-left votes indicates almost no change (straight line in Figure 1).

Therefore, this paper argues that early preferences are the most important determinants of later preferences. It also argues that attitudes, especially religious attitudes, will be influential in shaping political preferences. Early political socialization, which is partly determined by the region in which an individual is born and raised, will also affect his/her political preferences. Following the media is important, in that it reinforces attitudes that have already been shaped. It is expected that the effect of factors such as social class and mobility, education, occupation, ethnic background and gender will be negligible.

Sampling and Data

What follows is a secondary analysis of data collected and analyzed by Boratav et al. (1993) and Boratav (1995). Data were collected from two neighborhoods in Istanbul in 1990 by employing a random sampling design through face-to-face interviews. Istanbul is the biggest metropolis (6.6 million in 1990) in Turkey, housing 11 percent of the total electorate at the time of data collection. The sample size was 800. Details of sample design and selection are available in Boratav et al. (1993).

The dependent variable is the party preference of the head of household measured by the votes cast in two different elections (the 1987 general election and 1989 local election) and by the predicted votes for the 1991 general election. The party preference is recorded as 0 for the left and 1 for the right parties. The Social Democratic People's Party, the Democratic Left Party and the Socialist Party make up the left-wing political parties, whereas the Motherland Party, the Right Way Party, the Welfare Party, the Nationalist Working Party and the Reformist Democratic Party make up the right-wing political parties. Given the prevailing dominance of left-right separation in preferences, the dependent variable is intentionally coded as binary to reflect and probe this separation.

Attitudes, which were used for the first time in Turkey, are measured by the responses given to nine pairs of statements formulated on three different subjects: liberal economy, welfare state and religion/women. Each pair contained two statements and was coded as 0 for left-wing and 1 for right-wing attitudes; pairs were added up, which produced three scales with a range between 0 and 3. Following a reliability check, one pair was excluded from each scale (statement numbers 1, 6 and 9) to improve the reliability. The resulting three scales comprise two pairs each ranging between 0 and 2. Since the only statement about women is excluded, the religion/women scale is renamed as REL hereafter. Note that the scale measures attitudes about religion and not religiosity itself. The statements used in the scales are as follows.

Liberal economy (LEC)

- 1(a) A free market creates well-being and realizes the nation's development.
- (b) A free market leads to the economic oppression of the majority and, therefore, the state should intervene on the market.
- 2(a) Public enterprises being unproductive and wasteful should either be closed down or sold.
- (b) Since they are people's property, they cannot be transferred to private persons, but should be reformed instead.

Welfare state (WLF)

- 3(a) University education should be organized by charging costs to students so as to improve the quality.
- (b) University education should be free, since providing education is the state's duty.
- 4(a) Inflation is caused by high wages demanded by workers.
- (b) Inflation is caused by economic policies followed by the government, not by high wages.

Religion and women (REL)

- 5(a) Religious education in schools is insufficient and its scope should be further extended.

- (b) Religious education in schools should not be compulsory, since Turkey is a secular state.
- 6(a) Parents should provide religious training to their children at home.
- (b) Parents should refrain from influencing their children on their religious behavior. (Boratav et al., 1993: 155-6.)

Table 1 summarizes the percentage distribution of party preferences and political attitudes. Panel A reveals a rather unexpected finding: heads of households take contradictory positions with respect to attitudes on different scales. Bivariate correlation coefficients between the three scales support this observation (Pearson correlation coefficient for LEC-WLF is .17, for LEC-REL it is .02 and for WLF-REL it is .04). Differential location of the respondents on the three scales prevented collapsing them into one overall scale.

Explanatory variables are grouped under three headings.

Family-environment-related variables

- Father's education (FAEDUC)
- Mother's education (MAEDUC)
- Father's occupation (FAOCP, coded by using ISCO (International Standard Classification of Occupations))
- Father's social class (FACCLASS, borrowed from Boratav et al. (1993))
- Mother's working status as a proxy for unprobed mother's occupation (MAWORK)

Household-related variables

- Size of the family (FAMSIZE, total number of individuals in the family)
- Number of income earners (INCEARN)
- Average household spending (HHSPEND)
- Amount of household items (HHITEM)

Table 1. Frequency distribution of political attitudes and preferences in Istanbul (%)

	Left (0)	Centre (1)	Right (2)
A. Political attitudes			
1 Liberal economy (LEC)	69.9	21.5	8.6
2 Welfare state (WLF)	93.4	5.5	1.0
3 Religion/Women (RELWOM)	18.0	19.8	62.2
B. Political preferences			
1 1987 general election (ELEC87)	42.0		58.0
2 1989 local election (ELEC89B)	50.0		50.0
3 1991 general election (ELEC91)	42.1		57.9

Respondent-related variables

- Type of settlement that respondent was born into (BSETYPE)
- Migration status (MIGSTA: migrant or not)
- Number of steps in migrating to Istanbul (MIGSTEP)
- Years lived in Istanbul (ISTYEAR)
- Dependence on village (VILDEPT, the degree of relation with village)
- Region of birth (REGBIRTH, five geographical regions and foreign country births)
- Marital status (MARSTAT)
- Age (AGE)
- Sex (SEX)
- Education (EDUC)
- Occupation categories (OCP, ISCO codes)
- Social class standing (CLASS, borrowed from Boratav et al. 1993)
- Job status (JOBSTAT, self-employed, waged/salaried, retired, unemployed)
- Unemployment status (UNEMPSTA, employed, unemployed)
- Ethnic identity (ETHNIC, has ethnic identity or not)
- Media follow-up (NEWSREAD, newspaper readership)
- Social mobility status (SOCMOB, downward, immobile, upward)
- Attitudes measured by liberal economy scale (LEC), by welfare state scale (WLF) and by religion scale (REL)

Two different variables were used to measure occupational status of both household heads and their fathers. The first was to test the hypothesis of class-based voting in Turkey while the second was to make cross-country comparisons possible.

Household consumption is substituted for household income. A household-item index was created ranging from 0 for a household having none of the items to 100 for a household having all items.

Two variables on migration were included in the analysis due to the high percentage of migrants (85 percent) in the sample and the likelihood that migrant status causes drastic changes in the lifestyles and attitudes of migrants.

Multivariate Analysis

The model developed here assumes a direct effect of all variables on party preferences. Although such a model disregards indirect influences through independent variables, it will clearly indicate their direct effect (if any) on party preferences. Due to the binary nature of the dependent variables, binomial logistic regression (Hosmer and Lemeshow, 1989; Menard, 1995) was used to explore the relationships between the dependent and independent variables.

Table 2 indicates the factors that are influential in shaping preferences in

Table 2. Factors affecting party preferences in 1987 Turkish general election^a

Independent variables	b	Std error	p	Exp. (B)
REGBIRTH				
Foreign country	-.14	.38	.68	.05
Southeastern	-.06	.48	.89	.87
Central/East	.67	.28	.02	.94
Mediterranean	-1.71	.99	.09	1.95
West/Istanbul	.87	.33	.009	.18
AGE	.03	.01	.03	2.39
NEWSREAD	.38	.18	.04	1.03
LEC(Left)	-.26	.13	.04	1.47
REL(Less religious)	-1.23	.17	.0001	.77
JOBSTA			.02	.29
Waged/salaried	-.12	.21	.55	.88
Self-employed	.71	.24	.003	2.03
Retired	-.31	.31	.32	.74
Constant	-1.95	.71	.006	

^aDependent variable = ELEC87

Model: G = 107.4 (.0001); R_L^2 ; RL^2 = .11; R^2 = .20; p = .25; percent correctly classified = 74.0

the 1987 general election as: region of birth of the respondent, age, media follow-up, job status, and political attitudes as measured on the liberal economy and religion scales. As the sign of the logistic regression coefficient points out, the probability of preferring a right-wing political party increases if the respondent was born in the Interior/East, West/Istanbul or Black Sea regions, reads the newspaper and owns his own business. On the other hand, propensity to support right-wing parties decreases if he was born in the Mediterranean region, is waged/salaried or retired and has left-wing political attitudes on both the economy and religion scales.

It is interesting to note that region of birth still exerts an influence on party preference, reflecting differential political socialization among the regions. Given the fact that a great majority of the respondents were migrants and had left their respective regions a long time ago, the influence of region of birth does show the strength of early political socialization, which is maintained through kin relationships and marriage. In short, early childhood socialization continues to influence all aspects of life, including political preferences. In this sense, party preference becomes a social act shaped in relations with others, as claimed by the proponents of the Expressive Theory.

Regarding job status, the 1980s witnessed relative deprivation of the waged/salaried group more than other groups in Turkey (Boratav et al., 1993). Retirees were in a similar condition in terms of benefiting from the policies of the so-called Özal's era. It is reasonable to think that their deprivation, in relative terms, is the primary reason for their disagreement with

the political party and its policies, which pushed them to side with the opposing political views. The group that benefited most from the Özal's liberal policies was the self-employed who, due to their businesses' heavy dependence on government policy, took the side of the policy-makers: they supported the party that 'battered their bread'. This was obvious in the donations they made before the elections to the political parties that had completely different and even opposite political recipes for running the country. Party preferences of the self-employed in this country certainly confirm arguments of the Instrumental Theory. The relationship between attitudes and party preferences is as expected: those respondents who have left-wing economic attitudes and are less religious are less likely to favor right-wing political parties.

Two models were developed for the 1989 local election (Table 3). The first includes all the variables employed so far, while in the second one the preference of the respondents in a previous election was added. Region of the respondent's birthplace, media follow-up, political attitudes measured on the liberal economy and religion scales, and years lived in Istanbul are the factors that determined party preferences in the 1989 local election. The first four variables also appeared in the model developed for the 1987 election, with exactly the same effects in direction. Two possible explanations for this similarity are: that these four variables were essentially the most important in determining party preference, and that the short period (2 years) between the two elections did not entail a change in the preference of the respondents.

Table 3. Factors affecting party preferences in 1989 local election

Dependent variable	Independent variables	b	Std error	p	Exp. (B)
A. ELEC89	REGBIRTH			.02	
	Foreign country	-.51	.35	.14	.60
	Southeastern	-.03	.47	.95	.97
	Central/East	.65	.27	.02	1.91
	Mediterranean	-1.18	.98	.23	.31
	West/Istanbul	.45	.32	.16	1.56
	NEWSREAD	.47	.19	.01	1.59
	LEC (Left)	-.32	.13	.01	.73
	REL (Less religious)	-1.31	.19	.0001	.27
	ISTYEAR	.02	.01	.03	1.02
	Constant	-1.28	.40	.001	
B. ELEC89	REL (Less religious)	.78	.23	.0008	.46
	ELEC87 (Left)	-1.76	.16	.0001	.17
	Constant	.78	.23	.0008	

Model A: G = 107.05 (.0001); R_L^2 = .19; R^2 = .21; p = .41; percent correctly classified = 70.4

Model B: G = 247.8 (.0001); R_L^2 = .45; R^2 = .55; p = .73; percent correctly classified = 86.3

Since the interpretation has already been given for these common variables in connection with the 1989 election, they will not be repeated here. Regarding the new factor – years lived in Istanbul – analysis reveals that the longer the respondents live in Istanbul the higher is the probability that they prefer right-wing parties. This result is not in agreement with the findings of earlier studies, which indicated that left-wing parties receive more support in urban areas. It seems that left-wing parties lost their reservoir in the urban places traditionally fed by the votes of the poor and the less privileged.

In the second model, interestingly enough, only two factors appeared: respondent's party preference in the previous election and his/her religious attitudes. Since preferences in general do not change over short spans of time, it is easy to understand the effect of the earlier party preference. However, simultaneous appearance of the religious attitude of the respondent in the model with earlier political preference indicates the importance of religion in shaping the political preference, which confirms our expectation about the role of religious attitudes in molding behavior in general and political preference in particular. More interesting is the observation that the religious attitudes factor only occurred in this model. Thus, it is quite realistic to claim that party preferences align more than other factors with religious attitudes in Turkey. The fitness of the model, which is significant, and a high of 55 percent variation in party preference can be explained by knowing the respondent's party preference in the earlier election and his attitudes on religion.

Results of the two logistic regression models developed for the 1991 general election are given in Appendix A, since party preferences for the 1991 elections are only predictions rather than actual preferences. However, it is useful to mention the factors that seem to affect party preferences in the upcoming election. In the first model, the number of income-earners in the household, the respondent's job status, father's education, and attitudes on the liberal economy and religion seem to have been important factors for party preferences for the election of 1991. Respondents from households with more income-earners, primary-school dropouts or university graduates, waged/salaried and who have left-wing attitudes on a religious scale are less likely to prefer right-wing political parties. On the other hand, primary-school, junior-high and high-school graduates, the self-employed and retirees are likely to vote for right-wing political parties.

In the second model (where the respondent's preference in the 1989 election is included), the factors determining party preferences appeared as father's education, respondent's social class, the number of steps in migrating to Istanbul, economic and religious attitudes and party choice in the 1989 election. Respondents whose fathers are primary-school dropouts and graduates; unemployed, retired, highly qualified, blue-collar workers and small business employees; who migrated to Istanbul directly or in two moves; who have left-wing attitudes on both the economy and religion scales

and who preferred left-wing parties in the 1989 elections are less likely to prefer right-wing parties. On the other hand, respondents with junior or high-school education, who work in white-collar jobs, are service workers and self-employed, and who migrated to Istanbul in more than three moves support right-wing political parties.

Political attitudes appearing in both models developed for the 1991 elections confirm the earlier finding and our expectations about the effect of attitudes on political behavior. Father's education, which occurs in both models, signifies the role of socialization within the family. Social class, which did not appear in any one of the earlier models, seems to have an effect in predicting the upcoming 1991 election results. This is also true for the migration variable. Existence of these variables in the model in the presence of the powerful variable of earlier party preference should not be taken lightly.

Discussion

Closer inspection of the literature on Turkey clearly reveals that most studies employ western theories. Consider the center-periphery approach, which is basically a cleavage explanation that has been used for a long time to explain the party preferences of individuals and to predict election results. However, because of changes that took place in Turkey, especially after the 1950s, which altered the traditional composition of both the center and the periphery, the utility of the approach has been challenged by political scientists. However, no explanation or theory has been advanced about how social and economic changes affect voting behavior or party identification.

Similarly, the concepts of alignment, realignment and dealignment are borrowed from western theories without questioning their applicability to Turkey. Some argued for western-style, class-based voting, which cannot be shown with aggregate data, the only data available to most of them. Since they focused mostly on the description of alignment and dealignment processes between elections, a remarkably stable ratio between left-wing and right-wing votes in the period 1950–90 escaped their attention. These studies also failed to explain why the bulk of votes switched from left or right to radical parties in developed provinces and regions in the recent elections.

The contribution of the western theories to an understanding of voting preferences in developing countries is limited. They have neglected the initial and early formation of political preference, which, once established, tends to last throughout life. The influence of earlier preferences are much stronger in developing countries than they are in developed countries.

Important themes in the western literature, such as issue or candidate voting, are not relevant to developing countries due to the relative strength of the earlier preferences. Rather, voters vote for parties without even knowing their candidates. Issue voting is even less relevant in developing

countries. This difference, we believe, is related to the degree of rationality of the electorate and prevailing political culture in respective countries. Recent western theories on voting assume the rationality of the electorate, which does not hold in the case of developing countries. The successive election of the same political leaders who are considered unsuccessful by the majority is a phenomenon unique to developing countries. Western theories should soften the assumption of rationality in order to understand preferences of the electorate in developing countries.

The implication of these considerations is clear: any theory that claims to explain voting behavior in developing countries should accommodate factors that determine the initial formation of political preferences, such as affiliation of the family and dominant political tendencies in the area of residence. They should also be less stringent about assuming rationality in voting preferences. The consistent appearance of the earlier preference in all models developed for the three elections for Istanbul certainly confirm the need to modify the existing theories on voting.

Note

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Appendix

Table A1. Factors affecting party preferences in the 1991 general election

<i>Dependent variable</i>	<i>Independent variable</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>Std error</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Exp. (B)</i>
A. ELEC91	INCEARN	-.28	.16	.08	.75
	FAEDUC			.07	
	Primary dropout	-.15	.39	.69	.86
	Primary	.08	.40	.85	1.08
	JHS/HS	1.72	.69	.01	5.56
	JOBSTA			.03	
	Waged/salaried	-.16	.21	.44	.85
	Self-employed	.43	.26	.09	1.54
	Retired	.55	.27	.04	1.74
	LEC (Left)	-.55	.15	.0003	.58
	REL (Less religious)	1.31	.21	.0001	.27
	Constant	.05	.48	.92	
	B. ELEC91	FAEDUC			.003
Primary dropout		-.94	.60	.12	.39
Primary		-.32	.60	.60	.73
JHS/HS		4.28	1.23	.0005	73.48
CLASS				.02	
Unemployed		-.87	1.02	.39	.42
Retired		-.88	.52	.09	2.04
Highly qualified		-2.74	1.02	.008	.06
White-collar		1.60	.73	.03	4.94
Service worker		.63	.51	.21	1.88
Blue-collar		-.65	.46	.15	.52
Self-employed		1.37	.52	.008	3.92
Small employer		-.46	.94	.63	.63
MIGSTEP				.12	
Directly to Istanbul		-.20	.52	.70	.82
2 steps		-.11	.66	.87	.90
3 steps		2.40	1.14	.03	11.02
REL (Less religious)		.99	.24	.0001	.39
LEC (Left)		-1.21	.33	.0003	.30
ELEC89B		-2.15	.25	.0001	.12
Constant	.78	.23	.19		

Model A: $G = 99.9$ (.0001); $R_L^2 = .21$; $R^2 = .21$; $p = .42$; percent correctly classified = 71.6
 Model B: $G = 252.1$ (.0001); $R_L^2 = .58$; $R^2 = .61$; $p = .76$; percent correctly classified = 88.3