

# Public choice and foreign affairs: Democracy and international relations in Turkey

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## Abstract

In a democracy it is through the process of voting that people find an opportunity to register their likes and dislikes of domestic and foreign policy decisions most effectively. In Turkey, the recent national elections on 22 July 2007 provided an opportunity to observe the nexus between voters' choices and foreign policy issues. Questions pertaining to problems facing the country and the campaign issues fail to give any clue as to whether people paid attention to foreign policy in making their choices among the political parties of the country. However, a closer examination of the factors determining the vote indicates that, although party identification and satisfaction with the performance of the economy and the expectations of the government in managing the economy played major roles, attitudes towards the European Union (EU), nationalism, and globalization closely followed in magnitude those two factors in determining the voters' party preferences across the left-right spectrum. While AKP supporters had the most favorable attitude towards the EU, MHP supporters appeared highly nationalistic, and CHP voters seemed most influenced by positive orientations to openness to the world.

*Keywords: Turkish foreign relations, voting behavior, European Union, globalism, party identification, economic voting*

## Introduction

Democracy is a political regime in which the people are to run the government, usually through the agency of their representatives. In theory, and from time to time also in practice, people are to have a say in

policy matters as well. Foreign policy need not be any different from any other policy domain in a democracy where the government of and by the people rules. However, research on representative democracy — which either focuses on the role of political parties in government, or on the role of national legislatures on policy-making — have indicated that policy-making and execution are processes often determined by an interplay of many political forces: interest groups, public bureaucracies, the judiciary, and even the dictates of the socio-economic realities of life.<sup>1</sup> People, or empirically speaking the voters, also have some say in matters of policy-making, although their influence may not necessarily be very effective. The realms of defense, security, and foreign policy seem to be even more removed from the influence of the voters. They are often considered non-partisan domains, closely connected to collective interests, and these interests are not necessarily considered to be matters of political conflict. Moreover, voters are often highly parochial in orientation and show little interest or understanding in foreign policy matters. Their political interest span does not necessarily go beyond their immediate city, region or nation, although they may hold some ideas and even prejudices about their relatively immediate neighbors, even as they fail to pay attention to global affairs or international issues, which are often remote from their everyday interactions.

Occasionally, the foreign relations of the state precipitate a sudden gush of public interest, especially when a foreign development (such as war, famine, nuclear disaster and the like) come to influence or threaten the lives of a people. Turkey's foreign relations with Iraq; or those of the United States with Iraq, or Afghanistan; or, for that matter, Turkey's foreign relations with Greece, Armenia, Cyprus, and the European Union (EU); as well as domestic developments in Bosnia, Kosovo, Palestine or even Gaza gain popular interest in Turkey from time to time. However, public attention to such issues is very limited. Even when the public eye keeps vigil over such issues as oil or food prices, many neither understand the global oil or food politics, nor can draw up reasonable suggestions to press the government to act on such issues.

Nevertheless, with the advent of democracy it is possible to witness the public register opinions on the international relations of the nation-state, engage in debate and deliberation, and occasionally even take action on certain foreign policy issues. An increase in the transparency of foreign policy issues and a concomitant increase in media and press reporting, with all the differences of opinion, surfaces with the advent of

1 Alan Ware, *Political Parties and Party Systems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 349-76.

democracy. Political party programs and election campaigns also provide other venues where foreign policy issues emerge as material of party propaganda. It may even be possible to consider the public mood as a source of impact on the way in which political party groups or factions vote in the National Assembly. If there is any effective result of the demands of the people on the international relations of the country, it should be visible at the time of national elections. In this paper, I will analyze how perceptions concerning foreign-policy-related issues influenced voters' party preferences in the most recent national elections in Turkey, on 22 July 2007. In the first part of the paper, I will examine these public perceptions during the campaign period running up to these elections, while the second part will be devoted to the question whether perceptions of foreign policy issues have any impact on the vote that political parties obtain in the elections. The latter examination requires converting foreign policy perceptions into independent variables, the relative impacts of which can then be measured *vis-à-vis* a list of potential factors that influence the party preferences of the voters at the polls. Therefore, I will use a multivariate model of voting behavior in which perceptions of foreign policy play a role as an independent variable, among other variables, in determining the voter's decision to vote for one specific political party over other, competing ones.

### **Public perceptions of international relations**

At the height of the campaign running up to the 22 July 2007 elections, were the voters concerned about any foreign policy issue? Did they consider any issue pertinent to the Turkey's international relations when deciding to vote for one party over the others? The answer to these questions seems to be that voters were somewhat concerned about the developments in Northern Iraq, because of the terror campaign that the Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan (PKK) had re-launched after 2005. As public reactions increased with the soaring casualty figures, Northern Iraq also seemed to gain notoriety in the public eye, but only as the origin and hide-out of the PKK, not as Iraq *per se*. Relations with the US, again through the Iraqi nexus; relations with the EU; the seemingly perennial issue of the Cyprus conflict; and Armenian demands towards Turkey, which flare up from time to time to influence Turkey-US and Turkey-EU relations — these issues have all received wide coverage in the Turkish media. However, none of these issues seems to have a strong influences on the agenda of the Turkish electorate (see Table 1).

**Table 1**  
**Problems facing Turkey (2002-2007) (Open-ended questions)**

	Turkey's Problem 2002 %	Turkey's Problem 2006 %	Personal Problem 2006 %	Turkey's Problem 2007 %
Inflation	19.7	9.6	25.7	8.3
Unemployment	29.8	29.6	18.3	35.4
Economic instability	27.2	8.4	8.3	7.2
Corruption, bribery	3.4	2.8	0.6	2.1
Health, social welfare	2.3	3.9	9.2	3.3
Education	4.4	8.7	6.6	6.2
Terror and national security	—	14.9	4.3	21.4
Crime	—	2.4	1.5	1.7
Political instability	7.4	3.2	0.7	2.4
Kurdish problem	—	—	1.6	2.0
Housing, environment, etc.	—	—	2.7	—
Personal or family-related problems	—	—	5.3	—

**Sources:** Pre - Election and Political Participation Surveys of 2002 and 2007, and the Socio-economic orientations and political values survey of 2006 all of which are conducted by Ali Çarkoğlu and Ersin Kalaycıoğlu of Sabancı University. In the 2002 pre-election survey Üstün Ergüder of Sabancı University also participated as a principal investigator.

An examination of Table 1 reveals that right before the general elections on 3 November 2002 three out of four voters mentioned the economy, referring to consumer price inflation, unemployment, and economic instability, as the fount of the most important problems facing the country. In 2006, one out of two voters considered several economic issues as constituting the most important problem of the country, while terror and national security emerged as the second most important worry of the public. In fact, by 2007 unemployment, and terror and national security emerged as the two most important problems of the country, and one out of two voters still mentioned the economy as the most important issue facing the country (see Table 1). When comparing the open-ended responses from the surveys conducted in 2002 and 2007, it becomes obvious that unemployment has continued to be the most important problem facing the country.

In the 2006 national survey, we also probed regarding the most important problem facing the respondent *per se*. The responses given to this question interestingly reveal that consumer price inflation seemed

to be more influential on the personal economic affairs of the voter than unemployment, although the same respondents considered unemployment a major problem for the country, and not consumer price inflation. At the personal level, most persons were not touched by terror and national security threats, while healthcare and education emerged as much more important issues for individual voters than otherwise reported as problems facing the country.

Our findings indicate that, in the eyes of the voters in Turkey, international relations do not emerge as one of the more important problems facing the country, nor do international events involving the country have any precedence over bread and butter, or social welfare issues. Turkey's international relations and foreign policy did not emerge as realms of importance at the time of the national elections in 2002 and the 2007 (see Table 2), nor did they seem to matter during the non-election year of 2006 (see Table 1). However, even though people do not prioritize foreign policy issues and Turkey's international relations, they may still

**Table 2**  
**What is the most important issue discussed in the election campaign period of the general elections of 22 July 2007? (Open-ended question)**

Campaign issue	Frequency	Percent
Unemployment	273	13.5
Terror	237	11.7
Presidency	137	6.8
Party propaganda and ascent to power	133	6.6
Gasoline price cut	85	4.2
Economy	84	4.2
Empty promises	61	3.0
University entrance exam and education	52	2.6
Formation of the new government	38	1.9
Agriculture and farming	38	1.9
Inflation	33	1.6
Laicism	17	.8
Democracy	11	.5
<i>Türban</i>	9	.4
Other (miscellaneous domestic and local issues)	167	8.3
Don't know, no response	643	31.9
Total	2,018	100.0

Source: Pre-election survey before the 22 July 2007 general elections.

be under the influence of the country's relations with the EU, the US, Iraq, Iran, Israel, and so on, when they make up their minds to support a specific political party at the polls. Hence, I will next turn to the role that Turkey's international relations play in the party preferences of the voters at the polls.

### International relations and party preference in Turkey

In earlier research, party identification, the position of the voter on the left-right spectrum of ideologies, economic satisfaction, religiosity, and ethnicity have been identified as the main sources determining the party preferences of voters in Turkey.<sup>2</sup> In this paper, I will not attempt to specify a new model of voting behavior for Turkey, but use the model most recently specified for a conference paper,<sup>3</sup> and introduce several independent variables measuring attitudes towards and perceptions of Turkey's international relations into this model in order to re-estimate party preferences with a new specification of the same independent variables. Originally containing a few independent variables, the model of party preferences had been constructed as a causal model. However, with the introduction of new variables tapping attitudes and perceptions of international relations, the number of independent variables increased, and the causal model would become quite cumbersome to use. Instead, I propose to test the relative impact of the independent variables tapping attitudes, perceptions, and sensitivities towards international relations on party preferences, *vis-à-vis* the previously determined domestic socio-economic and political variables by means of logistic binary regression.

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- 2 For a review of research findings on voting behavior in Turkey see, Ali Çarkoğlu and Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, *Turkish Democracy Today: Elections, Participation and Stability in an Islamic Society* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), Üstün Ergüder, "Changing Patterns of Electoral Behavior in Turkey," *Boğaziçi University Journal* 8-9 (1980-81), Üstün Ergüder and Richard I. Hofferbert, "The 1983 General Elections in Turkey: Continuity or Change in Voting Patterns," in *State, Democracy and the Military: Turkey in the 1980s*, ed. Metin Heper and Ahmet Evin (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1988), Yılmaz Esmer, "Parties and the Electorate: A Comparative Analysis of Voter Profiles of Turkish Political Parties," in *Turkey: Political, Social and Economic Challenges in the 1990s*, ed. Çiğdem Balım (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), Yılmaz Esmer, "At the Ballot Box: Determinants of Voting Behavior," in *Politics, Parties, and Elections in Turkey*, ed. Sabri Sayarı and Yılmaz Esmer (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2002), Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, "Elections and Party Preferences in Turkey: Changes and Continuities in the 1990s," *Comparative Political Studies* 27, no. 3 (1994), Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, "The Shaping of Party Preferences in Turkey: Coping with the Post-Cold War Era," *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no. 20 (1999), Ergun Özbudun, "The Turkish Party System: Institutionalization, Polarization, and Fragmentation," *Middle Eastern Studies* 17, no. 2 (1981), Ergun Özbudun, *Contemporary Turkish Politics* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2000).
  - 3 Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, "Justice and Development Party at the Helm: Resurgence of Islam or Restitution of Right of Center Predominant Party?" (paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Midwest Political Science Association Palmer House, Chicago, Illinois, 3-6 April 2008).

## Turkey's foreign relations<sup>4</sup>

In this paper, overall attitudes towards the world, as well as openness (extrovertness) to interactions with foreigners and foreign capital — which reflects the attitudes of the Turkish citizens toward globalism versus autarchy in socio-economic relations — constitute the first set of independent variables taken into consideration. Tables 3, 4, and 5 contain data demonstrating the extent to which voters approved or disapproved of changes in foreign and domestic policy *vis-à-vis* the EU, foreign direct investment in the Turkish market, and foreigners settling in Turkey. On the whole, voters suggested that the foreign and domestic policies of the country needed to further emphasize the importance of all of these three issues (see Table 3).

When examining the attitudes of voters towards Turkey-EU relations, one discovers that voters emphasize the importance of Turkish foreign policy towards the EU, and most voters also seem to empha-

4 The data for this study were collected in a national field survey of voter attitudes, values, beliefs, orientations, and reported behavior concerning party preferences during the general elections in Turkey on 22 July 2007, by Ali Çarkoğlu and Ersin Kalaycıoğlu of Sabancı University, İstanbul, Turkey. The aim of the study was to collect data on the voters' party preferences, as well as on voter traits, attitudes, values, beliefs, perceptions and expectations of how the macro-economic indicators of Turkey should be managed, socio-economic background, cultural orientation, and political issues of the election campaign. The aim of the study was to theorize and hypothesize about voting behavior in Turkey and unearth determinants of voting behavior in these very general elections. Our sampling procedure took a target sample size of 2,000. First, the Turkish Statistical Institute's (*Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu*, TÜİK) NUT-1 regions were adopted, and the target sample was distributed according to each region's share of urban and rural population according to registered voter records for the 2002 election. We used the TÜİK's block data and decided to take 200 blocks of equal size. Our target was to reach ten voters from each block. We applied probability proportionate to the population size (PPS) principle in selecting neighborhoods and villages from each TÜİK-1 region of urban and rural localities. All neighborhoods and villages were separated into NUT-1 regions, and PPS selection was applied to select neighborhoods and villages. For every one of these blocks, we also picked a randomly selected replacement in accordance with PPS for cases in which the ten planned interviews could not be completed in the primary selected neighborhood or village. From each of these neighborhoods, block addresses were obtained from the TÜİK. Ten addresses from each neighborhood were given to the fieldworkers. If ten interviews could not be completed after two visits to each address, the remaining interviews were completed from the replacement block via the same procedure. In rural areas, the selected villages were visited and addresses obtained from the village headman (*muhtar*). If ten interviews from a village could not be completed, its replacement village was visited and the same procedure applied. In selecting the individual to be interviewed from each household, an alphabetical list of all residents above the age of 18 was first put together. Then, the first name was selected for an interview. If this individual was not available for interview, a second individual of the household in the same alphabetical order was selected. Individuals who were replacements of the first selection were noted in the dataset for tests of significant difference. In order to take account of cancellations after the fieldwork controls, at least two interviews were conducted from the replacement lists from each urban block and village. The surveys were conducted in the month before the general elections, in the heat of the election campaign period when voter attention to political parties, candidates and political issues of the day were at their peak. A total of 2,018 prospective voters were interviewed in their households, and the resulting sampling error was +/- 2.3 %.

size that Turkish foreign policy should be so designed as to protect the country's independence in its relationship with the EU (see Tables 3 and 4). It seems that most voters were ready to support relations with the EU, as long as these do not threaten to undermine Turkey's national independence. Indeed, about 40 percent of the voters seemed to think that relations with the EU were beneficial to Turkey; another 22 percent were undecided about whether Turkey-EU relations were functional or dysfunctional for Turkey; and another 25 percent thought that Turkey-EU relations were damaging to Turkey's national interests (see Table 5). In case of a referendum, about half of the voters stated that they would vote "yes" to full membership (see Table 6), although about 70 percent thought that Turkey did not need the EU to solve its problems (see Table 7). Interestingly enough, about 90 percent of the voters held an opinion about issues pertaining to Turkey-EU relations, however meaningful or sophisticated these opinions may be.

**Table 3**  
The degree to which Turkish foreign policy needs to change (2007)

Scale	Importance of Turkish foreign policy towards the EU (%)	Importance of foreign capital flow into Turkey (%)	Importance of foreigners settling in Turkey (%)
Much less important	5.1	3.4	7.0
1	2.5	1.9	4.2
2	3.0	2.6	5.7
3	3.0	3.6	5.6
4	3.8	3.9	4.3
About the same	15.9	17.2	17.4
6	7.0	7.8	7.2
7	10.6	10.2	7.0
8	13.9	13.6	10.1
9	7.1	7.9	6.1
Much more important	23.5	23.3	21.6
<i>Undecided</i>	.5	.6	.6
Don't know / no response	4.1	4.0	3.0
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total (Observations)	2,018	2,018	2,018



**Table 4**  
**Turkish foreign policy towards the EU (2007)**

Scale	Percent
Turkish foreign policy should follow the objective of developing close relations with the EU	8.2
1	5.0
2	3.9
3	4.3
4	4.1
Stay the same	16.4
6	4.4
7	6.5
8	9.5
9	7.4
Even though our relations with the EU deteriorates, Turkish foreign policy should emphasize the protection of independence	27.8
Don't know, no response	2.5
Total (%)	100.0
Total (Observations)	2,018

**Table 5**  
**How damaging or beneficial will Turkey's membership in the EU be? (2007)**

Response	Percent
Very damaging	8,8
1	3,6
2	4,6
3	5.1
4	3.4
Neither damaging nor beneficial	22.1
6	7.3
7	9.4
8	10.6
9	5.0
Very beneficial	9.9
Don't know, no response	10.3
Total (%)	100.0
Total (Observation)	2,018

**Table 6**  
**If there were a referendum today would you vote in favor or against Turkey's membership in the EU? (2007)**

Response	Percent
I would vote in favor of Turkey's membership in the EU	50.9
I would vote against Turkey's membership in the EU	36.4
Don't know, no response	12.6
Total (%)	100,0
Total (Observations)	2018

**Table 7**  
**Does Turkey need the EU to solve its problems, or does Turkey have the capability to solve its problems alone? (2007)**

Response	Percent
Turkey has the capability to solve its problems alone	71.0
Turkey would need the EU to solve its problems	17.8
Don't know, no response	11.2
Total (%)	100.0
Total (Observations)	2,018

When the cultural and political reforms undertaken to promote Turkey's EU membership are probed, a relatively complicated and even bleak picture emerges (see Table 8). Only about one third of the population of voting age approved of any reform to improve the status of Alevis in Turkey; similarly, another third approved of the abolition of the death penalty; and yet another third approved of curbing of the military's opportunities to intervene in civilian politics in Turkey (see Table 8). Enhanced opportunities for ethnic groups to learn their non-Turkish native dialects and tongues through legal reforms were approved by 47.6 percent, and increased opportunities to be exposed to mass media broadcasting in similar dialects and tongues by about 40.4 percent of the voters, with 14.5 and 16.3 percent of the voters neither approving nor disapproving these legal reforms (see Table 8). It seems that there is a relatively sharp division over the reform agenda for Turkey's EU membership in the country.

Such a picture produces several difficulties for the government and the political parties. Whatever position they will take on the issues of cultural

**Table 8: Attitudes toward the political reform laws in the negotiation process towards EU membership (2007s)**

Responses	In the process of EU membership, reforms should be undertaken to improve the status of Alevis (%)	In the process of EU membership, reform laws providing the opportunity to learn native languages have been a positive development (%)	In the process of EU membership, reform laws providing the opportunity for the media to broadcast in native languages have been a positive development (%)	In the process of EU membership, the reform laws restricting the role of the military in Turkish politics have been a positive development (%)	In the process of EU membership, abolishing the death sentence has been a positive development (%)
Totally disagree	18.5	14.4	16.5	17.8	21.6
1	4.3	4.4	4.8	6.0	6.9
2	7.1	5.8	7.5	7.4	8.0
3	5.6	5.1	5.9	6.2	5.9
4	3.9	4.6	4.1	4.6	4.5
Neither agree nor disagree	20.4	14.5	16.3	17.0	14.8
6	5.1	6.6	6.0	5.2	3.9
7	7.4	7.8	7.4	6.9	4.8
8	7.1	9.2	7.5	7.4	5.9
9	3.2	4.1	4.0	3.5	3.7
Totally agree	12.2	19.9	16.4	13.4	17.4
Don't know, no response	5.2	3.7	3.7	4.6	2.7
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total (Observations)	2,018	2,018	2,018	2,018	2,018

and political reform for the EU accession process, they will encounter a relatively large minority of voters, interest groups and the media, which can often be quite vocal, dead-set against them. Paradoxically, such a picture both threatens to undermine any initiative on political reform and at the same time relieves political parties from popular pressure, for half the voters oppose, while the other half support the EU reforms. Thus, a political party in opposition enjoys the liberty to resist the EU reforms and, once in government, to promote them, or *vice versa*. Finally, the popular sensitivities towards national independence also provide political parties with additional flexibility in opposing and supporting the EU reform process at whim. When opposing certain reform legislation, they can always argue that they are not against EU reforms, but that the legislation in question does not sufficiently protect or promote national independence or interest. When they change their position on similar legislation in the future, they can also argue that what they propose now is in agreement with the national independence and interests of Turkey.

Finally, a set of questions probed the national threat perceptions of voters in the pre-election survey of June/July 2007. A set of questions scrutinized whether voters thought that there were any states, communities or organizations that threatened Turkey, and several suggestions from which to choose were presented to the respondents. The responses given by the voters are tabulated in Table 9. Interestingly, 95 or more percent of the voters responded to each question, and 53 percent argued that the US constituted a severe threat to Turkey, followed by 40.2 percent registering an identical opinion for Israel, followed by Iraq (33.8 percent) and Christian missionaries (33.5 percent) tied in third place. Close to 30 percent also considered the EU a severe threat to Turkey, while 23.1 percent believed that Iran was a severe threat, followed by 21.1 percent identifying minorities in Turkey as a source of threat (see Table 9). Intriguing here is not that there is such a large majority who feel threatened by the US, although the source of such a development is difficult to identify, for the US is not only a NATO ally, but the most important strategic foreign asset for the governing party AKP and a major help in sorting out the financial mess into which Turkey embroiled itself in the early 2000s. It is perhaps the entanglement of the AKP government with the US in the process that led to the war in Iraq and the negative reporting about the “hood” (*çuval*) incident, with a concomitant increase in Islamism in Turkey in the 2000s, which have exposed the Turkish masses to anti-Americanism.

It is also interesting that the potential of Turkey’s next-door neighbor Iran for developing nuclear weapons still was not considered a threat in June/July 2007, while Israel was perceived as a major threat. Increasing

**Table 9**  
**Voters' threat perceptions (2007)**

Responses	USA (%)	EU (%)	Iraq (%)	Iran (%)	Israel (%)	Minorities (%)	Christian missionaries (%)
Not a threat at all	5.2	12.6	11.7	22.1	11.9	22.2	17.2
Not much of a threat	12.2	27.8	20.5	29.9	19.5	29.8	20.9
Major threat	26.7	26.2	30.4	20.5	24.1	22.8	23.4
Severe threat	53.1	29.8	33.8	23.2	40.2	21.1	33.5
Don't know, no response	2.7	3.5	3.6	4.2	4.3	4.1	5.0
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total (Observation)	2,018	2,018	2,018	2,018	2,018	2,018	2,018

Islamism and conservatism among the Turkish masses seem to prop up such an interesting contrast between Iran and Israel in the eyes of the voters. Probably the most bizarre finding yet is the popular identification of Christian missionaries as the third most severe source of threat, tied with Iraq. This must be credited to the propaganda efforts of powerful political forces in Turkey, as well as the Turkish media.

These three sets of attitudes and perceptions may best be categorized into meaningful independent variables with the help of factor analysis. In Table 10, the findings of the factor solution for the above-mentioned items probing attitudes toward Turkish foreign policy, Turkey-EU relations, attitudes toward cultural and political reforms, and national threat perceptions are presented. On close examination, four dimensions on which the above-mentioned attitudes and perceptions are loaded emerge, and they are as follows: attitudes towards extrovert Turkish foreign policy, attitudes towards EU reforms, attitudes towards and perceptions of the EU, and national threat perceptions. The corresponding factor scores per dimension, which are linearly independent of each other, were calculated and saved as four different independent variables, as represented in the column headings in Table 10. These factor scores were eventually used as four independent variables representing Turkey's international relations in the binary logistic regression model drawn up to estimate the party preferences of Turkish voters in the 2007 general elections.

**Table 10**  
**Attitudes towards Turkey's international relations (2007)**

Items	Threat	EU reforms	Attitudes towards the EU	Open-ness to the world
Importance of Turkish foreign policy towards the EU	-.005	.038	.308	<b>.660</b>
Importance of foreign capital flow into Turkey	.016	.009	-.030	<b>.784</b>
Importance of foreigners settling in Turkey	.113	-.021	-.120	<b>.752</b>
Foreign policy of Turkey should emphasize independence	.073	.060	<b>-.600</b>	.111
Vote for Turkey's EU membership in a referendum	.158	-.147	<b>-.747</b>	-.074
Turkey capable of solving its problems without the help of the EU	.010	.177	<b>.554</b>	.043
How beneficial or damaging is the EU to Turkey	-.108	.180	<b>.729</b>	.065
We need to make all sacrifices necessary to be an EU member	-.100	.335	<b>.628</b>	.036
In the process of EU membership, reforms should be undertaken to improve the status of Alevis	-.061	<b>.694</b>	.068	-.024
In the process of EU membership, reform laws providing the opportunity to learn native languages have been a positive development	-.044	<b>.859</b>	.126	.018
In the process of EU membership, reform laws providing the media with the opportunity to broadcast in native languages have been a positive development	-.051	<b>.878</b>	.098	.010
In the process of EU membership, the reform laws restricting the role of the military in Turkish politics have been a positive development	-.140	<b>.605</b>	.179	-.077
In the process of EU membership, abolishing the death sentence has been a positive development	-.129	<b>.491</b>	.181	.107
Security threat: USA	<b>.664</b>	-.017	-.122	-.086
Security threat: EU	<b>.644</b>	-.114	-.389	-.007
Security threat: Iraq	<b>.708</b>	-.022	-.124	.166
Security threat: Iran	<b>.708</b>	-.010	-.031	.236
Security threat: Israel	<b>.767</b>	-.078	-.039	.002
Security threat: Various minorities in Turkey	<b>.631</b>	-.229	-.007	-.023
Security threat: Christian missionaries	<b>.668</b>	-.093	.004	-.040

**Notes:** Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization

### Estimating party preference in Turkey: Operationalization and findings

As already suggested in the preceding pages, a binary logistic regression model consisting of independent variables, which has already been used in the voting behavior research presented above, and the newly constructed independent variables representing attitudes towards international relations and Turkey's foreign policy were used to estimate the party preferences of potential AKP, CHP and MHP voters in the following section.

The party preference for the AKP was measured as "1" for those who registered that they would vote for the AKP on 22 July 2007 in the June/July 2007 pre-election survey; all other responses were registered as "0." The party preference for the CHP was measured as "1" for those who registered that they would vote for the CHP; all other responses were registered as "0." The party preference for the MHP was measured as "1" for those who registered that they would vote for the MHP; again, all other responses were registered as "0."

In the voting behavior research that I have incorporated in this study from a recent publication,<sup>5</sup> there are five major independent variables. These are religiosity, ethnicity, economic satisfaction, party identification and the left-right ideological self-placement of the voter. They are measured as follows:

#### Religiosity

The voters' feelings towards religion and religious observance were measured with the help of a set of questions which the respondents answered in the pre-election survey of 2007. The questions posed were listed as items submitted to a principal components factor analysis run, and they are as follows:

1. Do you belong to a religion?
2. Over the last year, other than funeral services, how often were you able to go to the mosque for worship?
3. Irrespective of how often you actually worship, how religious do you consider yourself?
4. Can people freely practice their worship in accordance with the stipulations of their religion?
5. Are religiously observant people under oppression in Turkey?
6. Would you like to see a sharia-based religious state founded in Turkey?"

5 The independent variables and their operationalization have been inserted directly from Kalaycıoğlu, "Justice and Development Party at the Helm: Resurgence of Islam or Restitution of Right of Center Predominant Party?" 6-11.

**Table 11**  
**Religiosity in Turkey**

Items	Freedom of conscience	Faith	Political Islam
1. R belongs to a religion	.046	.866	-.184
2. R attends mosque services to worship	.008	.143	.749
3. How religious the R feels	.005	.732	.413
4. R freely practices religion and/or worships	-.861	-.039	.038
5. Religiously observant people are oppressed	.830	.010	.167
6. R desires sharia-based state in Turkey	.105	-.084	.691

Notes: "R" stands for Respondent.

The items do not indicate that they load on a single dimension, for three linearly independent dimensions emerged from the factor analysis run (see Table 11). One dimension consists of freedom of conscience, another of faith in religion, while the third emphasizes sharia-based practice and rule in Turkey, which may best be referred to as political Islam. The factor scores that correspond to each dimension were separately computed and used in the following test of the religiosity hypothesis of party identification in Turkey.

### Ethnicity

For the purposes of this paper, ethnicity was measured by reference to mother tongue and knowledge of Turkish, Kırmanç or other languages. In the following tables, the respondents' first and second mentioned answers to the question "What language did you speak with your mother when you were a child?" were measured (Tables 12 and 13). Those who spoke a Kurdish dialect with their mother while growing up and who are still fluent in a dialect of Kurdish constitute about 11.9 percent of the sample. For this paper, ethnicity was measured in terms of those whose tongue is a dialect of Kurdish, versus other persons who are fluent only in Turkish. The former category of respondents who registered Kurdish as mother tongue was assigned "1" in the data set, while others were assigned "0"; they were entered as binary (dummy) variable in the following regression analysis.



**Table 12**  
Language spoken with the mother at home (first mentioned)

Language	Frequency	Percent
Turkish	1,700	84.2
Kırmanç	140	6.9
Arabic	21	1.0
Zaza	18	.9
Laz	7	.3
Other	22	1.1
No response	110	5.5
Total	2,018	100.0

**Table 13**  
Language spoken with the mother at home (second mentioned)

Language	Frequency	Percent
Turkish	48	2.4
Kırmanç	33	1.6
Arabic	2	.1
Zaza	4	.2
Laz	2	.1
Other	4	.2
Missing	1,925	95.4
Total	2,018	100,0

### Satisfaction with the Government's Management of the Economy

Literature on Turkish politics has indicated that evaluations, perceptions and reactions to the economic policies of the government are a prominent factor explaining the party preferences of voters in Turkey.<sup>6</sup> In this study, the economic expectations and perceptions of voters, which define their "satisfaction with the government's economic policies" (which will be referred to as "economic satisfaction" in the rest of this paper) was operationalized by means of a principal factor analysis of six items that tapped the following:

6 For a more detailed treatment of the role of economic variables in explaining voting behavior in Turkey see, Ali Çarkoğlu, "Ideology or Economic Pragmatism? Profiling Turkish Voters in 2007," *Turkish Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2 (2008).

1. Over the last year, how much of an impact did the economic policies of the government have upon your FAMILY's economic condition?
2. On a similar scale, could you evaluate the impact of the government policies upon TURKEY's economic condition?
3. How satisfactory is your PRESENT personal economic condition?
4. How will your FAMILY's economic condition change over the next year?
5. How will TURKEY's economic condition change over the next year?
6. In the past year, how has the economic welfare of your household fared?

The first five items were answered with the help of eleven-point scales between "very bad = 0" and "very good = 10." The last item was a five-point scale that ran between "could only survive with debt = 1" and "able to save some income = 5." After these six items were factor-analyzed through a principal components procedure, a single dimension of economic satisfaction was extracted, as shown in Table 14. Factor scores for the single dimension of economic satisfaction were computed and used in the following tests of the economic satisfaction hypothesis.<sup>7</sup>

**Table 14**  
**Perceptions of and expectations from the government's economic policies**  
**(Principal component factor solution)**

Items	Economic Satisfaction
1. Over the last year, how much of an impact did the governments economic policies have upon R's FAMILY's economic condition?	.801
2. On a similar scale, could R evaluate the impact of the government policies upon TURKEY's economic condition?	.836
3. How satisfactory is R's PRESENT personal economic condition?	.764
4. How will R's FAMILY's economic condition change over the next year?	.805
5. How will TURKEY's economic condition change over the next year?	.817
6. In the past year, how has R's household fared economically?	.421

Notes: "R" stands for Respondent.

### Self-placement of voters on the left-right spectrum

The respondents were asked if it made sense to them to place themselves on a ten-item scale that ran between extreme left, assigned the numeral "1," and the extreme right, represented by the numeral "10" (see Table

<sup>7</sup> For more details on the theoretical significance of perceptions concerning the economic performance of the government in determining the voting behavior of individual voters see, *Ibid.*: 324-25.

15). Only 4.1 percent of the respondents were unable to place themselves on the scale and were eliminated from the analysis. In their place, the mean scores were inserted.

**Table 15**  
The self-placement of voters on the left-right spectrum

Scale items	Frequency	Percent
1 Most left	116	5.7
2	56	2.8
3	102	5.1
4	68	3.4
5	498	24.7
6	148	7.3
7	194	9.6
8	304	15.1
9	121	6.0
10 Most right	328	16.3
Don't know, no response	83	4.1
Total	2,018	100.0

### Party identification

The last independent variable incorporated in the following analysis is party identification, which has emerged as the most important variable determining voters' party preferences in Turkey.<sup>8</sup> The respondents (potential voters) were asked to register whether they identified with a

**Table 16**  
The party with which the respondent declares identification

Codes	Party	Frequency	Percent
5	AKP	729	36.1
8	BBP	3	.1
2	CHP	250	12.4
4	DP/DYP	57	2.8
3	GP	49	2.4
7	MHP	154	7.6
6	SP	19	.9
1	DTP	27	1.3
0	Independent/Other	685	33.9
Missing	No response	45	2.2
Total		2,018	100.0

8 See, Kalaycıoğlu, "Justice and Development Party at the Helm: Resurgence of Islam or Restitution of Right of Center Predominant Party?"

political party,<sup>9</sup> and if so, to name that political party. In Table 16, those respondents who declared identification with political parties in Turkey are presented.

### Findings: Do Turkey's international relations matter to the voter?

The most important determinant of the voter's preference for the AKP over other political parties is the party identification of the voter in question, closely followed by economic satisfaction. A distant third determinant consists of the attitudes of voters towards the EU, closely followed by religiosity (see Table 17). It seems that, among the four independent variables that tap international relations and foreign policy, favorable attitudes towards the EU are a good indication that the voter in question will vote for the AKP. However, a large proportion of the variance in the preference for the AKP at the polls is determined by party identification and economic considerations (see Table 17).

**Table 17**  
The AKP vote in the 2007 general elections

Independent variables	B	Sig.	Exp(B)
<b>Party (AKP) identification</b>	<b>3.446*</b>	.000	31.368
Ethnicity	-.531	.067	.588
<b>Overall religiosity</b>	<b>.159*</b>	.009	1.172
<b>Economic satisfaction</b>	<b>.805*</b>	.000	2.238
Self-placement on the left-right spectrum	.007	.341	1.007
International threat perception	.017	.856	1.017
EU reforms	.039	.686	1.040
<b>Attitudes towards the EU</b>	<b>.316*</b>	.001	1.372
Openness to the world	-.037	.702	.964
Constant	-1.921	.000	.146

Notes: (\*) Statistically significant at the 0.01 level of significance.

The CHP vote is also overwhelmingly determined by party identification, remotely followed by economic dissatisfaction, secularism (anti-religiosity), and positive attitudes towards openness to the world (see Table 18). Again, attitudes towards foreign policy and international relations, this time through extrovert orientations in foreign policy, seem to play a relatively humble role in determining the preference for the CHP at the polls. Once more, a large proportion of the variance in the prefer-

9 The question we posed was: "Siz herhangi bir siyasal parti taraftarı mısınız / tutar mısınız?" The concept of "party identification" is hard to translate into Turkish, for the concept of identification does not exist in colloquial Turkish. For a more thorough analysis of party identification in Turkey, see, Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, "Attitudinal Orientation to Party Organizations in Turkey in the 2000s," 9, no. 2 (2008).

ence for the CHP at the polls is determined by party identification and economic considerations (see Table 18).

**Table 18**  
The CHP vote in the 2007 general elections

Independent variables	B	Sig.	Exp(B)
<b>Party (CHP) identification</b>	<b>4,299*</b>	<b>,000</b>	<b>73.625</b>
Ethnicity	-.746	.154	.474
<b>Overall religiosity</b>	<b>-.266*</b>	<b>.007</b>	<b>.766</b>
<b>Economic satisfaction</b>	<b>-.546*</b>	<b>.001</b>	<b>.579</b>
Self-placement on the left-right spectrum	-.053	.098	.948
International threat perception	-.233	.095	.792
EU reforms	.207	.139	1.230
Attitudes towards the EU	-.022	.879	.979
<b>Openness to the world</b>	<b>.409*</b>	<b>.004</b>	<b>1.505</b>
Constant	-3.176	.000	.042

Notes: (\*) Statistically significant at the 0.01 level of significance.

The MHP vote is overwhelmingly determined by party identification, remotely followed by economic dissatisfaction, and attitudes towards the EU, which are overwhelmingly negative among the MHP supporters at the polls (see Table 19). Attitudes towards foreign policy and international relations, in the guise of attitudes towards the EU, seem to play a role in determining voter preference for the MHP at the polls. However, these attitudes were overwhelmingly negative for the MHP. Again, a large proportion of the variance in the preference for the MHP at the polls is determined by party identification and economic considerations (see Table 19). Religiosity, an independent variable that plays a role in determining the voters' preferences for the AKP and the CHP, fails to play any role among MHP voters. Interestingly, attitudes towards the EU seem to play a relatively more important role in determining preference for the MHP at the polls. Anti-internationalist attitudes seem to be more pronounced in the determination of the preference for the MHP than is the case for the CHP as well.

**Table 19**  
**The MHP vote in the 2007 general elections**

Independent variables	B	Sig.	Exp(B)
<b>Party (MHP) identification</b>	<b>4.654*</b>	.000	104,997
Ethnicity	-.749	.390	.473
Overall religiosity	.011	.921	1.011
<b>Economic satisfaction</b>	<b>-.597*</b>	.000	.551
Self-placement on the left-right spectrum	-.002	.896	.998
International threat perception	.301	.079	1.351
EU reforms	-.177	.257	.838
<b>Attitudes towards the EU</b>	<b>-.421*</b>	.023	.656
Openness to the world	-.016	.911	.984
Constant	-3.957	.000	.019

Notes: (\*) Statistically significant at the 0.05 level of significance.

## Conclusion

International relations and foreign policy rarely capture the attention of voters in Turkey; most voters are oriented towards the major political parties through party identification and economic concerns. Most voters also consider bread and butter, as well as social welfare issues the most pressing concerns of the day. When terrorism emerges as a political weapon of the Kurdish nationalists in Turkey, security concerns also re-surface. However, it is uncertain whether PKK-incited terror campaigns are considered domestic or international, or even both by the voters.

The most important variable determining voters' party preferences is party identification, a psychological trait determined by the political socialization experiences of the Turkish voters. Party identification is shaped by family background, political conditioning at home, in school, at the workplace, and through social interactions with peers and others in his or her reference group. Party identification is relatively constant and not likely to change from one election to the next. Our data indicates that about six out of every ten voters identify themselves with a political party. The rest of the voters are independents and shift their votes on the basis of several socio-economic and political factors. In fact, the economy emerges as the most important of these factors for the independents and perhaps even some of the party identifiers as well.

Therefore, if there is a single most important issue that determines the election outcome, it seems to be the economy. The image or expectations of the voter regarding how well the government has been handling and will go on handling the Turkish economy determines the voter's party preference in the national elections. If the image so determined is

positive, the voter tends to prefer the government over the opposition. If otherwise, the voter tends to support the opposition.

Nevertheless, such a finding does not mean that attitudes and perceptions of foreign policy and international relations do not play a role in the context of a democratic environment. On the contrary, especially attitudes towards the EU seem to play a role in determining the voters' party preferences, and probably also the overall images of political parties, as well as how voters orient themselves to politics and parties.

This paper has not dealt with the status and role of international relations and foreign policy in the media and, through them, in the political agenda of the country. However, it goes without saying that a relatively small but still important part of the press and media coverage of current issues have always been about the international affairs of Turkey. Several editorials appear every day, and almost all TV networks run programs covering the international developments of the day, as they often occur close to Turkey, in the Middle East, the Caucasus, or the Balkans. Such developments often have repercussions in Turkey, for as a nation-state built upon the legacy of the Ottoman Empire, various nationalities and communities who live in those turbulent regions have cultural, economic and even political linkages with Turkey. No major party can afford to ignore the plight of the Turkmen and the Kurds in Iraq, the Turks in Bosnia, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Kosovo, and elsewhere, for the risks can be quite high at the polls. Such communities have interest groups in Turkey, who are ready to pressure the government and the main opposition party to engage in the affairs of their brethren whenever they find themselves under threat in the regions surrounding Turkey. Therefore, not a day passes without the Turkish media reporting about the developments of various communities in and around the country.

In fact, in the run up to the local elections of 29 March 2009, suddenly the plight of the Palestinians emerged as a major campaign issue, immaculately exploited by Prime Minister Recep T. Erdoğan and his AKP. AKP and Felicity party (SP) politicians connected the fighting in Gaza in December and January of 2009 to Sunni Islamic solidarity, on the one hand, and racism, anti-Semitism, and anti-westernism among the Turkish right-wing voters, on the other hand. One may even get the impression that Gaza is a province of Turkey and that the local elections also extend to there. The Gaza issue then seems to play a role in changing the political agenda, diverting the voters' attention from the downturn in the economy and the political corruption charges leveled against PM Erdoğan and the municipalities under AKP control, while simultaneously reinforcing the Islamist/conservative image of the PM

and his AKP. What the Gaza issue appears to have accomplished is to show us, once again, as with the Bosnia issue earlier, that there are many ways in which international affairs can be made to influence domestic and even local politics in a democratic regime. It is also interesting that the foreign policy actions of the Turkish PM, the President and the Foreign Ministry seem to have come under the influence of the plight of the Palestinians for domestic political reasons, namely through the local elections of 29 March 2009. One cannot but wonder whether such an issue would have come into the limelight of domestic Turkish politics with such force, had Turkey not been going through a local elections campaign perceived as a matter of life and death by the governing AKP. It appears as if a whole new research agenda has emerged here, tackling a myriad of influences of Turkey's international relations on domestic politics and foreign policy decision-making. The role of domestic political concerns in foreign policy-making, as well as the impact of international crisis and relations on Turkey's domestic political agenda, discourse, and behavior, is waiting to be analyzed in further studies.

In a general sense, Turkey's international affairs have been part of the public debate and constitute a constructive part of the political discourse in and outside the Turkish Grand National Assembly, and hence the political communication and agenda of the country. The stand of the political parties on foreign relations and related issues of the day may not constitute the most important determinant of their success or failure in Turkish politics; however, the voters' perceptions of the political parties are somewhat determined by their stance on foreign relations, and this has a bearing on how people vote at the polls. Among these issues, the relations with the EU currently occupy a major role, which should come as no surprise, for Turkey is involved in highly stressful accession negotiations with this international entity and market.

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