Justice and Development Party at the Helm: Resurgence of Islam or Restitution of Right of Center Predominant Party?[*]

by

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Introduction

General elections of July 22, 2007 witnessed a very rare occasion in Turkish politics. The Justice and Development Party (AKP), which had been in government since the November 3, 2002 elections managed to increase its votes from 34.3 percent in the 2002 general elections to 46.5 percent in the 2007 general elections, and again obtained an overwhelming majority in the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA). It had occurred twice before in Turkish politics: When the Democrat Party (DP) increased its vote share from 52.7 in the 1950 general elections to 57.6 percent in 1954 and again when the Republican People's Party (CHP) received the plurality of the vote by 33.3 in the 1973 elections and then increased its vote share to 41.4 percent of the national vote in the 1977 elections. What is remarkable with the performance of the AKP is that it is not readily considered as one of the right or left-of-center parties. The leader and the front bench of the AKP started their political careers in the political Islamist National Outlook (*Milli Görüş*) movement, from which they had split when the political Islamist Virtue Party (FP) was banned from politics for its anti-secular and thus anti-Republican activities by the Constitutional Court of Turkey in 2001. The old guard of the FP established another of the *Milli Görüş* parties, the Felicity Party (SP), while the "Young Turks" within the former FP steered away from the *Milli Görüş* movement and established the AKP on August 14, 2001. With immaculate Islamist credentials, and what looked less like an ideological split from the Milli Görüş movement, for example in the style of German Social Democrats had experienced in the late 1950s, which culminated in the Bad Godesberg declarion, but more of an expediency and a slight change of style rather than substance, the AKP was formed as another conservative party with strong Islamist references. Therefore, the electoral victories of the AKP in the 2000s have been interpreted by the international media and some pundits as the demise of secularism and resurgence of Islam in Turkey. Now that the AKP has managed to increase its vote share and win the general elections again it is warranted to ask what this all means for Turkish politics. Has 46.5 percent of the Turkish electorate voted for political Islam in the July 22, 2007 elections? Is it religious credentials of the AKP or its leader and the front

bench that have attracted the voters in droves to the support of that party at the polls, or are there some other factors at play?

In order to tackle the preceding questions, it is necessary to examine how the Turkish voters voted in the 2007 and also in the previous 2002 elections. If we discover that the overwhelming motive behind the Turkish voters' decision to vote for the AKP is religion, and most specifically Sunni Islam and the allure of political Islam, then it would be warranted to conclude that indeed the AKP represents a sharp deviation from the secular part in Turkey. However, if we discover that such motives either does not play any role or fail to play a significant role, then it would not be warranted to argue that the AKP's stellar rise to power and its sustained performance in government is not an indication of a revolution of political Islam, but it should be interpreted along secular political lines. In the following pages of this paper, first a model that explains how the Turkish voter decides and votes will be developed. The hypotheses of the model of Turkish voting behavior will be tested using survey data collected in June and July 2007, that is, within a month prior to the 2007 general elections. In the final section of the paper conclusions to be drawn from the hypotheses testing and the conjectures that can be made on the basis of the findings will be presented.

Turkish Voter at the Polls

Studies of the Turkish voting behavior since the 1990s seemed to indicate that there are two major phenomena at work in determining how the Turkish voters' sort out their preferences across the parties that participate in the election campaigns in the general elections in Turkey.[1] Turkish voters seem to utilize a left – right ideological orientation to the party system to locate themselves and the major political parties in the system.[2] It seems as if the first approach of the Turkish voters toward the political parties occur through such an ideological prism, which enables the voters to trim those political parties, which they will never consider to vote, on the one hand, and also select a few political parties which they consider as potential preferences at the ballot box. Upon the ideological screening of potential parties for the election as the voter's preference at the polls, the voter seems to shift emphasis from ideology to *real politik* and consider the economic prospects that his or her

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[1] For research findings from field surveys utilizing individual level data on Turkish voting behavior see Ersin Kalaycioglu (1994) "Elections and Party Preferences in Turkey: Changes and Continuities in the 1990s," *Comparative Political Studies*, vol. 27, no. 3 (October): 402-424. Ersin Kalaycioglu (1999) "The Shaping of Party Preferences in Turkey: Coping with the Post-Cold War Era," *New Perspectives on Turkey*, (Spring), vol. 20: 47-76. Yilmaz Esmer (2002), "At the Ballot Box: Determinants of Voting Behavior," in Sabri Sayari and Yilmaz Esmer (eds.) *Politics, Parties, and Elections in Turkey*, (Boulder, London: Lynne Rienner): 91-114. Ali Çarkoğlu and Ersin Kalaycioğlu (2007), *Turkish Democracy Today*: *Elections, Participation and Stability in an Islamic Society*, (London: I. B. Tauris): passim.
[2] For a detailed analysis of the self-placement of Turkish voters on a left – right ideological spectrum and also of the main political parties of the country see Ali Çarkoğlu (2007), "The Nature of Left – Right Ideological Self-placement in the Turkish Context," *Turkish Studies*, vol. 8, no. 2: 253 -271.

selection of a party over ideologically similar other parties would bring to the country, or to his family, or him or herself. It is a two stage process the first of which is almost exclusively dependent upon ideological factors, which are shaped by the voter's values, beliefs and attitudes which define the contours and substance of his or her "image of good society". The second stage is overwhelmingly determined by cost – benefit considerations centering round economic prospects for the country, family and self. However, we should also take note of the fact that a third process may also be at work. Depending upon the socialization experiences that the voter possesses, s/he would also get strong cues from the parents to develop strong psychological attachments or affiliation with a political party as well. Under the circumstances, the voter would have a distinct propensity to act upon his or her party identification, and do not enter the second stage of decision-making where cost – benefit calculations, rational, or other considerations, such as perceptions of the prospects for the economy under a certain party in government.

In view of the conjectures we have so far been able to draw from the findings of earlier research it is warranted to hypothesize that socio-cultural cleavages of Turkish politics, which are determined by attitudes toward religion (Sunni Islam) versus secularism, and ethnicity (Kurdish versus Turkish *ethnies*), in turn help to shape the self – placement of the voters on a self – defined left – right spectrum in their own minds. Those who consider themselves secular tend to place themselves on the left of such an ideological space, and those who consider themselves to be pious Sunnis place themselves on the right of the left – right spectrum. Kurdish ethnic nationalists tend to place themselves on the far left and the Turkish ethnic nationalists, on the contrary, tend to place themselves on the far right.[3] Those political parties that are perceived to be on the left are then rarely preferred by those who place themselves on the right, and those parties that are perceived on the left are rarely picked by the voters who place themselves on the right of the ideological spectrum. Religiosity and ethnicity function as exogenous factors and determine the ideological positioning of the voters, which in turn help the voters to sift through party propaganda and orient themselves to the political parties on the same ideological dimension of left and right. Under such influences party identification can also be determined in adulthood.[4] Therefore, it is plausible to assume that party identification is both determined by parental party identification, or when such an influence is absent, by socio-cultural cleavages instead.

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[3] See Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, "The Shaping of Party Preferences in Turkey: Coping with the Post Cold War Era" *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no. 20, (Spring 1999): 47-76 for the relationship between ethnicity and religiosity with left – right ideological spectrum in Turkish politics.
[4] On party identification in Turkey see Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, "Partisan Affiliations of the Turkish Voters in the 2000's" (Unpublished paper presented at the Workshop on "Turkish Elections – 2007" in Istanbul, Turkey, at Istanbul Policy Center and Sabanci University, November 30 – December 1, 2007).

Another exogenous variable that influences party preference, and should be expected to boost is the cost – benefit calculations made by the voters. The voters do not only need to search for political parties that are ideologically akin to where they stand open a left – right spectrum. In Turkey, due to several historical, political, and socio-cultural reasons there is more than one single political party that occupies a certain ideological position on the left – right spectrum. Therefore, the voter needs to make a further choice between the ideologically similar or identical parties. Such a preference cannot be based upon ideological differentiation, instead cost – benefit analysis of some sort enters the picture. The voter deciphers information about the leaders, cadres, and the policy suggestions and then infers which of the political party organizations is more likely to be beneficial for the country, his / her family and/or personally to the voter.

Such an analysis points to a causal model, where religiosity, ethnicity, party identification of the parents of the current voter, and economic expectations and prospects function as exogenous variables, and voters' self placement on the left - right spectrum, and current voter's party identification functions as endogenous variable to explain the final endogenous variable of the model, which is also the dependent variable of this study, the party preferences of the voters at the general elections of July 22, 2007 (see Figure 1 for an illustration of the causal model).


Figure 1 about here

The Data and the Setting

The data for this study are collected in a national field survey of voter attitudes, values, beliefs, orientations, and reported behavior concerning party preferences during the July 22, 2007 general elections in Turkey. Our sampling procedure took target sample size as 2000. First, Turkish Statistical Institute's (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu-TUIK) NUT-1 regions are adopted and the target sample was distributed according to each region's share of urban and rural population according to registered voter records for 2002 election. We used TUIK's block data and decided to take the 200 blocks of equal size. We targeted to reach 10 voters from each block. We applied probability proportionate to population size (PPS) principle in selecting neighborhood and villages from each TUIK-1 region of urban and rural localities. All neighborhoods and villages are 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 a replacement in accordance with PPPS for cases where the 10 planned interviews could not be completed in the primary selected neighborhood or village. From each of these neighborhoods block addresses are obtained from TUIK. 10 addresses from each neighborhood were given to the

fieldworkers and all addresses were asked to be reached. When 10 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

Figure 1: A Causal Model of Voting Behavior in Turkey
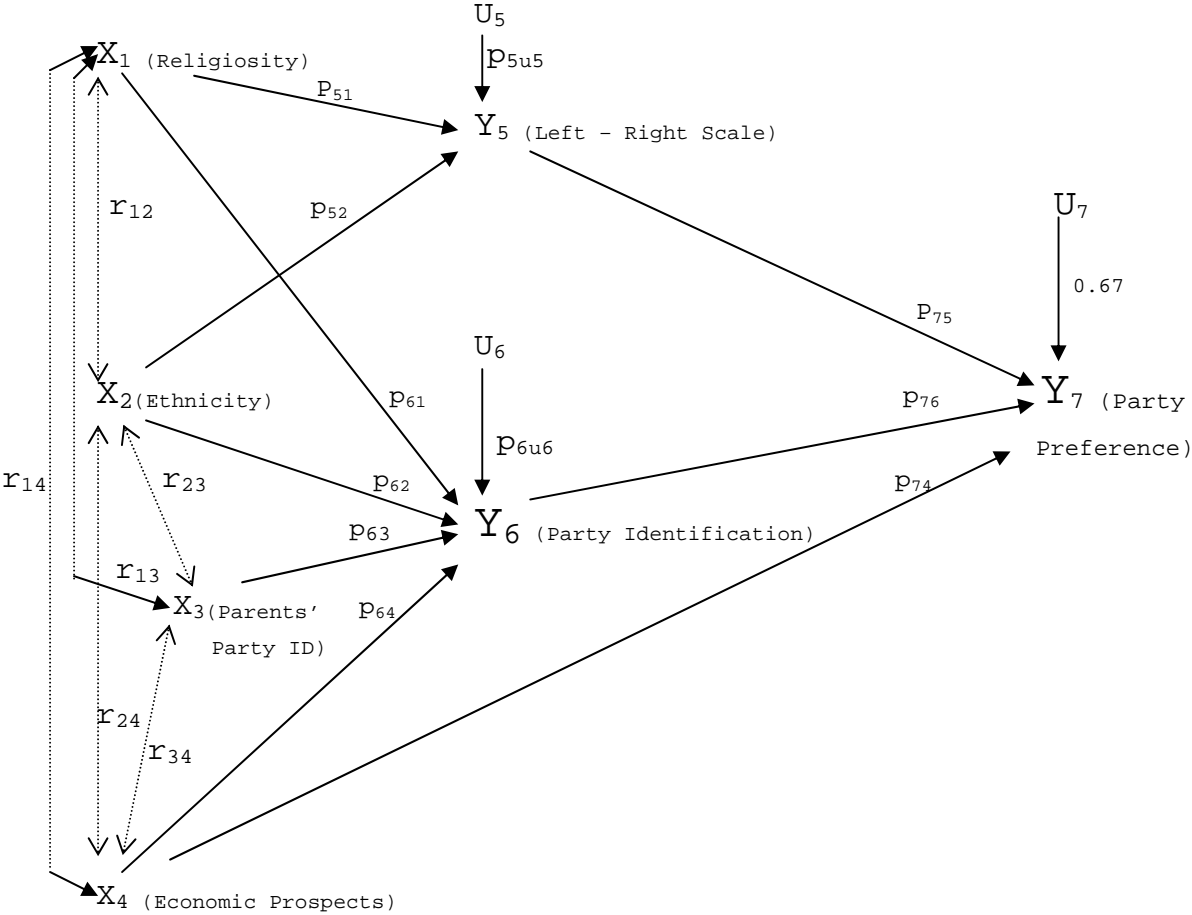
Simultaneous Equations:

$Y_7 = p_{74} X_4 + p_{75} Y_5 + p_{76} Y_6 + p_{7u7} u_7.$

$Y_6 = p_{61} X_1 + p_{62} X_2 + p_{63} X_3 + p_{64} X_4 + p_{6u6} u_6.$

$Y_5 = p_{51} X_1 + p_{52} X_2 + p_{5u5} u_5.$

selected villages were visited and addresses were obtained from the village headman (*muhtar*). If 10 interviews from a village cannot be completed its replacement village was visited and the same procedure was applied. In selecting the individual to be interviewed from each household an alphabetical list of all residents above the age of 18 was first formed. Then the alphabetically the first name was selected for interview. If this individual was not available for interview in the household a second individual in the same alphabetical order was selected for interview. 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 the voter attention in political parties, candidates and political issues of the day was at a peak. A total of 2018 prospective voters were interviewed at their households, and the resulting sampling error was +/- 2.3%.

The Dependent Variable(s): Party Preferences

In this study three versions of the same dependent variable will be operationalized, for the aim of this study is to unearth the factors that were at play in motivating voters to choose the AKP at the polls. Therefore, first we will estimate the effect of each independent variable in predicting those who voted for the AKP as opposed to the voters who did not on July 22, 2007. Therefore, those who claimed to be inclined to vote for the AKP during our survey are coded as "1", and all other voters are coded as "0" in the following analysis. Secondly, to be able to predict the effects of the same independent variables in determining the CHP vote we recoded those who claimed to be prepared to vote for the CHP on July 22, 2007as "1" and all the rest as "0". Thirdly and similarly all those who claimed to be inclined to vote for the MHP on July 22, 2007 were coded as "1" and all the rest as "0". Each of the three dependent variables were introduced in the following data analysis separately to observe the performance of the independent variables in predicting the AKP, CHP and MHP voters and the salient factors in their decisions.

The Independent Variables

In the causal model as outlined in Figure 1 there are six independent variables, four of which are exogenous to the model. The four exogenous variables are religiosity, ethnicity, parental party identification, and economic prospects. First their measures are presented, and later the measures of the two endogenous variables of left – right self placement of the voters and party identification of the current voters will be presented.

Religiosity

The feelings toward religion and religious observance of the voters are measured through a set of questions that the respondents answered in the pre-election survey of 2007. The questions posed are listed as items that were 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 mosque for worship?

3. Irrespective of how often you actually worship,
   how religious do you consider yourself to be?

4. Can people freely practice their worship
   in accordance with the stipulations of their religion?

5. Are the religious people under oppression in Turkey?

6. Would you like to see a *Şeriat* (Sharia) based religious state
   founded in Turkey?"

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 1). One dimension consists of freedom of conscience, another consists of faith in religion, and the third one emphasizes Şeriat based practice and rule in Turkey, which may best be referred to as political Islam. The factor scores that correspond to each dimension are separately computed, and used in the following test of the religiosity hypothesis of party identification in Turkey.

Table1: Religiosity in Turkey

Items	Freedom of Conscience	Faith	Political Islam
1. Belong to a religion	,046	**,866**	-,184
2. Attend mosque services to worship	,008	,143	**,749**
3. How religious does the R feel	,005	**,732**	,413
4. Freely practice religion or worship	**-,861**	-,039	,038
5. Religious people are oppressed	**,830**	,010	,167
6. Desire Şeriat state in Turkey	,105	-,084	**,691**

Ethnicity

In this paper ethnicity is measured by reference to mother tongue and knowledge of Turkish, Kırmanç or some other language. In the following the respondents' answers to the question on what language they spoke with their mother as

children at home are presented (see Tables 2 and 3). Those who spoke some Kurdish dialect with their mother while growing up and who are still fluent in some dialect of Kurdish constitute about 11.9 percent of our sample. In this paper ethnicity is measured as those whose tongue is some dialect of Kurdish versus others, who overwhelmingly are fluent only in Turkish. The former category of respondents is assigned "1" in the data set, while the others are assigned "0".

**Table 2: Language Spoken with Mother at Home
(First Mentioned)**

Language	Frequency	Percent
Turkish	1700	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	2018	100,0

**Table 3: Language Spoken with 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	1925	95,4
Total	2018	100,0

Parental Party Identification

Party identification of the parents of the current voters constitutes the independent variables of the socialization hypothesis presented in the preceding parts of this paper. If Turkey had parties that had been in existence without interruption for a few generations, then it would be possible to observe the association between the party identification of the parents with a certain party and of their offspring as the current voter under analysis with the same political party. However, since such political continuities do not exist in Turkish party politics, all we can observe is the connection

between left, center, and right wing parties the parents had been identified with in the past and the party that their offspring and our respondent identifies with today.

A close examination of Table 4 indicates that majority of the respondents can name what they recall as their mothers' or fathers' party identification. Interestingly enough the plurality of responses indicate that the Republican People's Party (CHP) which had been around for sixty years in Turkish politics had been identified the most by their parents.

Table 4: Remember if mother or father identified with a political party? If so which one?

Parties	Frequency	Percent
CHP / DSP (left of center)	347	17.2
MSP / RP /FP (Milli Görüş)	100	5.0
CKMP / MHP (Ülkücü)	72	3.6
Others	665	33.0
Don't Know / No Response	834	41.2
Total	2018	100.0

The parental party identification is also introduced into the data analysis for the AKP voters as those current voters who reported that their parents had identified with the Milli Görüş parties as "1" and all the rest as "0". Similarly, for the CHP voters all those current voters who claimed to know that their parents had identified with a left – of – center party in the past as "1", all tohers as "0", and finally for the MHP voters all those who declared that their parents had identified with an Ülkücü party in the past as "1", and all the others as "0".

Satisfaction with the Government's Management of the Economy

Evaluations, perceptions and reactions to the economic policies of the government are operationalized by means of a principal factor analysis of six items that tapped the following:

> "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 TURKEYS economic condition?
>
> 3. How satisfactory is your PRESENT personal economic condition?
>
> 4. How will your FAMILYs economic condition change over the next year?
>
> 5. How will TURKEYs 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 eleven point scales that ran between "very bad = 0" and "very good = 10". The last items was a five point scale that ran between "could only survive with debt= 1" and "able to save some income = 5". When these six items were factor analyzed

through a principal components procedure a single dimension of economic satisfaction was extracted, as shown in Table 5. Factor scores for the single dimension of Economic Satisfaction were computed and used in the following tests of the economic satisfaction hypothesis.

Table 5: Perceptions and Expectations from the Government's Economic Policies

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

Self-placement of the Voters on the Left – Right Spectrum

The respondents were asked if made sense to them to place themselves on a ten item scale that ran between the most left "1" and the most right "10" (see Table 6). Only 4,1 percent were unable to place themselves on the scale and were eliminated from the analysis. In their place the mean scores were inserted.

Table 6: The Self-placement of the 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	2018	100,0

Party Identification

In the survey the respondents were asked to register whether they identify with a political party,[5] and if so, name the political party they identify with. In Table 7 those respondents who declared identification with political parties in Turkey are presented.

Table 7: The Party the Respondent Declares Identification With

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		2018	100,0

In the following data analysis of the causal model party identification is also measured specifically per dependent variable. For example, for the estimation of the path coefficients for the voters whose choice is AKP, those who claimed to identify with the AKP are recoded as "1" and all the rest are recoded as "0", and similarly for the CHP and MHP potential voters and identifiers same dichotmoous operational variables are constructed.

Findings
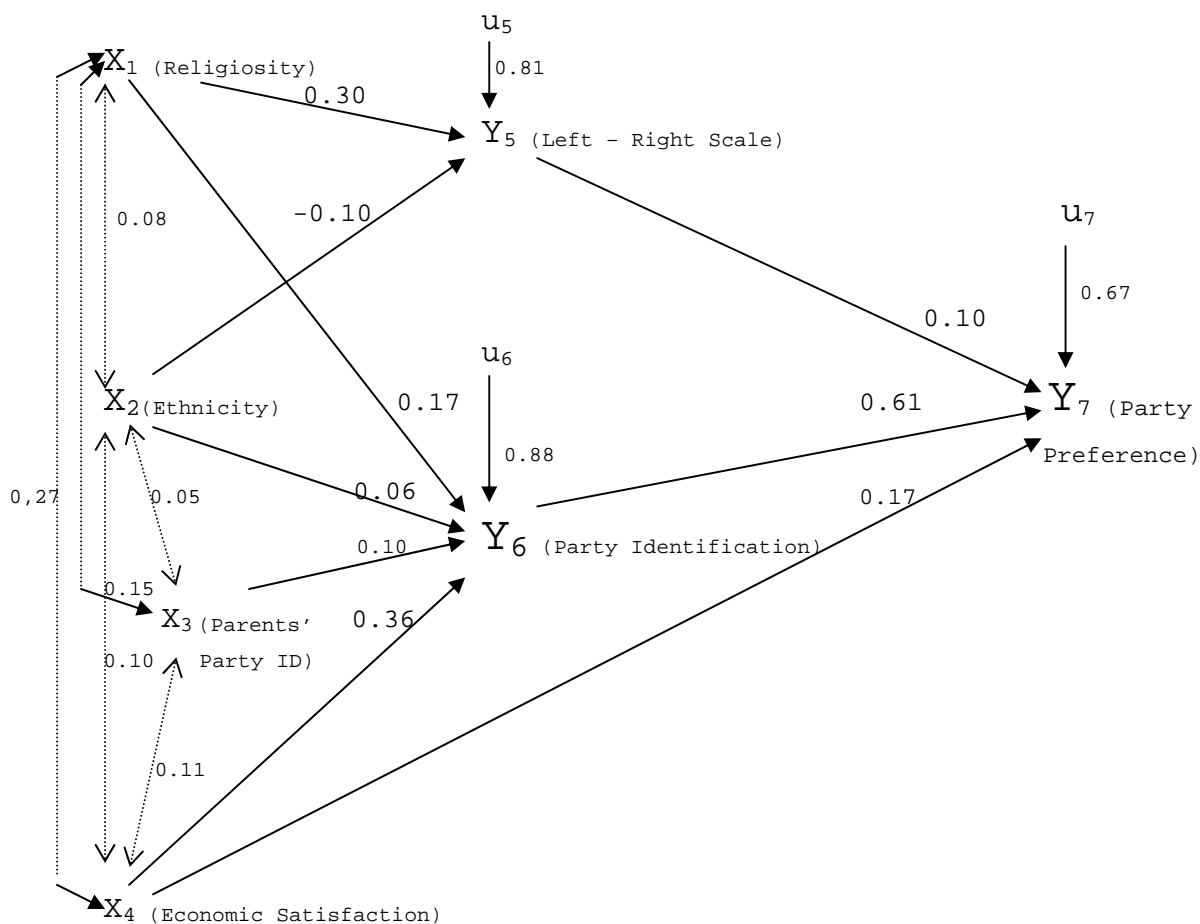
The AKP Vote and Voters

The path coefficient measuring the relative impact of the independent variables on the voters' choice for the AKP indicate that party identification played a major role followed by economic satisfaction, which in turn not only influences party

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[5] The question we posed was "*Siz bugün herhangi bir siyasal partiyi tutuyor musunuz*?" which translates into English as "As of today (currently) are you a fan of a political party?" The concept of "party identification" is hard to translate into Turkish, for the concept of identification does not exist in colloquial Turkish. It is possible to translate identification as "*özdeşleşme*", which we employed in focus groups, and the standard reaction we received was a blank look and "*buyur*?" (excuse me?) It became apparent after a few focus groups that we needed a concept that better communicated the phenomenon of identification and the closest we could find was "*parti tutmak*", which has been in usage for a very long period of time, and "tutmak" connoted deep and intense feelings felt for an object, such as sports club. Since party identification also refers to intense positive orientation and strong attachment to a political party and what it stood for, we believe that "parti tutmak" functions as the equivalent of party identification in the Turkish context.

choice directly, but also helps to determine party identification of the AKP voters as well. Parental influences of the determination of party identification is minimal, although there is a positive effect of parental identification with a party from the National Outlook (*Milli Görüş*) movement and party identification of the current voter. Substituting right – of – center parental identification with the *Milli Görüş* party identification of the parents of the current voters did not cause any changes in the role played by parental influences on party identification of the current AKP voters. It seems as if the current AKP voters are inclined to identify with the AKP on const – benefit calculations based upon satisfaction with the performance of the macro economic indicators under the AKP government of 2002 – 2007 (see Fig. 2). Thus, the AKP election victory seems to be less influenced by ideological factors, such as the left – right spectrum, but more from the improvement in the economic growth and the rapid decrease in the three decades long, stable high consumer price inflation under the AKP rule in Turkish politics (see Fig. 2). Such cultural factors as religiosity and ethnic identity seemed to play a relatively minor role in determining the voters' choice for the AKP. However, the impact of both cultural factors on the left – right self placement of the current voters are as expected, positive for religiosity and negative for ethnic identity, which indicated that the pious Sunni and Turks tended to place themselves on the right of the left – right spectrum, and Kurds tended to place themselves on the left (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 about here

Figure 2: A Causal Model of Voting Behavior in Turkey
(Estimation for AKP Voters, 2007)

Simultaneous Equations:

$$Y_7 = 0.17\ X_4 + 0.10\ Y_5 + 0.61\ Y_6 + 0.67\ u_7,\ [R^2 = 0.55]$$

$$Y_6 = 0.17\ X_1 + 0.06\ X_2 + 0.10\ X_3 + 0.36\ X_4 + 0.88\ u_6.$$

$$Y_5 = 0.30\ X_1 - 0.10\ X_2 + 0.81\ u_5.$$

N = 2018

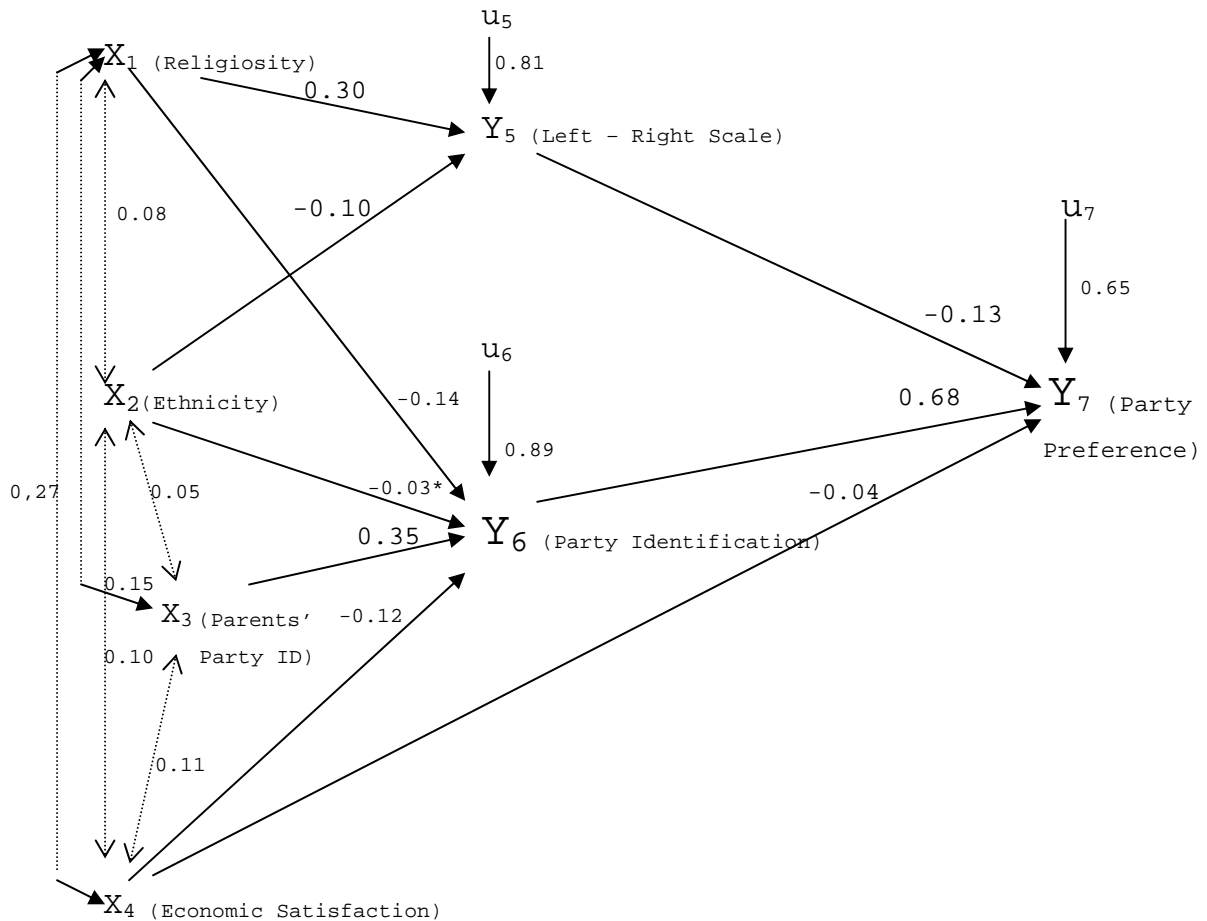Notes : Arithmetic means were inserted in place of missing values.

The CHP Vote and Voters

The path coefficient estimates for the CHP voters indicate that they are also mostly influenced by party identification, yet the party identification of the CHP voters is overwhelmingly determined by their parental party identification. It seems as if the CHP voters come from a long line of CHP supporters, and they get their first cues about party politics at home, and their families seemed to have played a crucial role in their political socialization. We should hasten to add that the current CHP claims to be the continuation of the oldest political party in the system, the roots of which go back to the establishment of the Republic in Turkey and its founder was none other than Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. However, AKP emerged out of the debris of the last National Outlook movement party banned by the Constitutional Court in 2001. The AKP was not the only party that emerged after the ban, the Felicity Party (SP) also emerged to claim the current banner of the National Outlook movement. Therefore, the AKP seems to be more a brand new party, with some but frail ties with any previous party or movement in the eyes of its voters, even though its front bench has immaculate National Outlook credentials.

It is also clear that it is the economically dissatisfied that voted for the CHP, and ideology played more role, for it was supported more by the left – of – center voters as well. However, since our findings indicate that there is a marked decline of those voters who consider themselves to be on the left, which is now around 16 percent of the voting age population only (see Table 6), the ideological posture of the voters who support the CHP fail to provide much support for that party. The AKP voters seemed to vote on economic satisfaction and expectation, while the CHP voters seemed to vote on ideological grounds and through psychological attachment to that party (see Fig. 3). It also seems as if the CHP is the choice of those who felt that they have lost because of the performance of the economy under the AKP government of the last five years (see Fig. 3). Interestingly enough, there seemed to be not many of those who felt as if they had lost economic benefits and those who expected a downturn under a prospective AKP government. Path coefficients connecting economic satisfaction to CHP vote are negative but barely statistically significant, which also indicate that such considerations failed to play any major role in the decisions of the CHP supporters.

Figure 3 about here

Figure 3: A Causal Model of Voting Behavior in Turkey
(Estimation for CHP Voters, 2007)

Simultaneous Equations:

$$Y_7 = -0.04\ X_4 - 0.13\ Y_5 + 0.68\ Y_6 + 0.65\ u_7,\ [R^2 = 0.57]$$

$$Y_6 = -0.14\ X_1 - 0.03^*\ X_2 + 0.35\ X_3 - 0.12\ X_4 + 0.88\ u_6.$$

$$Y_5 = 0.30\ X_1 - 0.10\ X_2 + 0.81\ u_5.$$

N = 2018

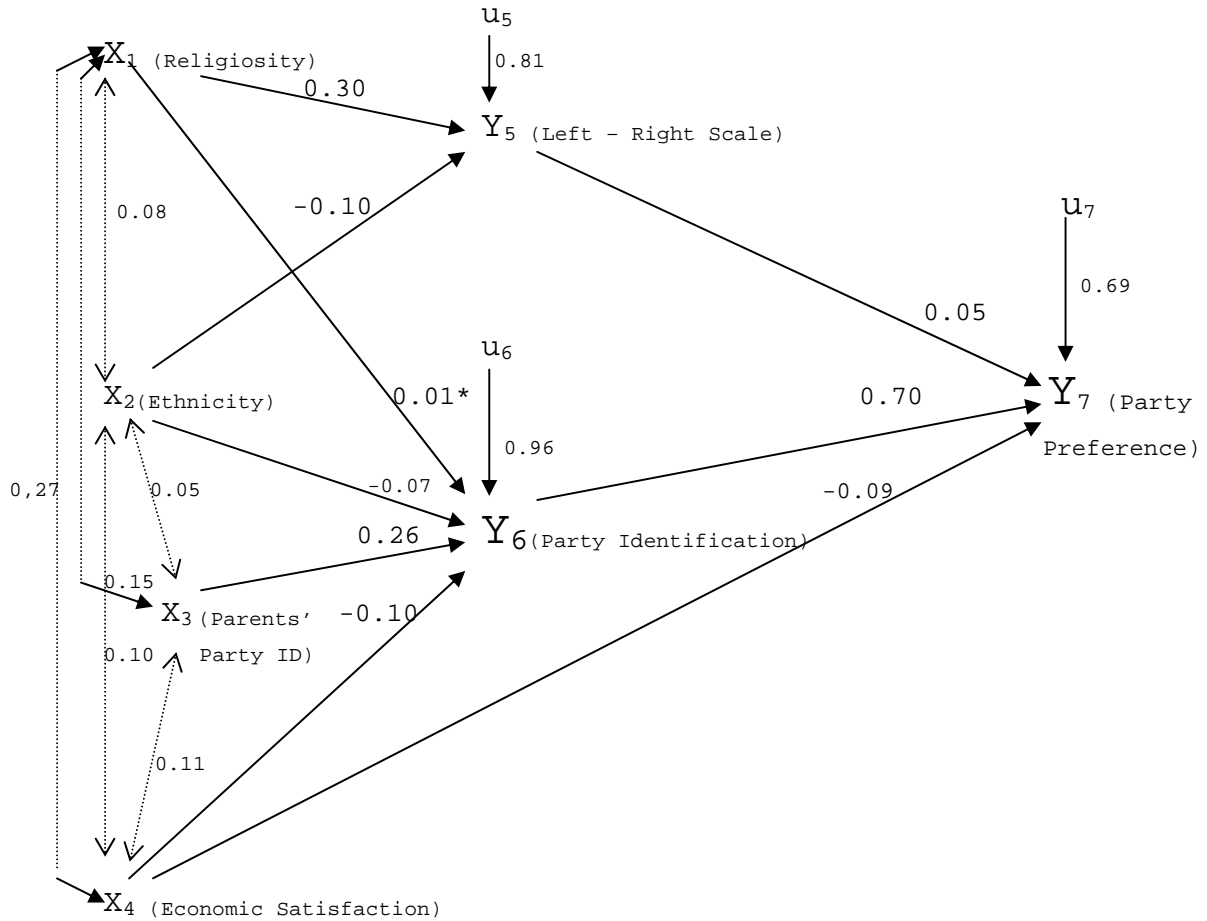**Notes** : Arithmetic means were inserted in place of missing values.
* Statistically insignificant at 0.05 level of statistical significance.

The MHP Vote and Voters

Finally, when we turn to the MHP voters, we observe a pattern that is very similar to that of the CHP. It seemed as if both opposition parties received their support on ideological grounds, and from those with strong partisan affiliations to the parties in question, which are feelings that are inculcated in the minds and hearths of the voters at a relatively early age, for the main source of the current party identification seems to be the party identification of their parents. For the MHP voters the party identification is a feeling most strongly caused by the similar attitudes of their parents. As opposed to the CHP, the MHP voters are rightists (see Fig.4), however, such a culture bound ideological orientation seemed not to play a role that is as significant as party identification. Economic concerns also indicated dissatisfaction and lack of expectation from the AKP for the MHP voters. All path coefficients connecting economic satisfaction with party identification and party preference are negative, which clearly indicate that it is the economically dissatisfied who tended to vote for the MHP. The MHP seemed to be able to attract the support of the economically dissatisfied right wing voters, while the CHP seemed to attract the support of the economically dissatisfied left wing voters.

Figure 4 about here

Figure 4: A Causal Model of Voting Behavior in Turkey
(Estimation for MHP Voters, 2007)

u_5

0.81

X_1 (Religiosity)

0.30

Y_5 (Left – Right Scale)

0.08

−0.10

u_7

0.69

0.05

X_2 (Ethnicity)

u_6

0.01*

0.70

Y_7 (Party Preference)

0.96

0.05

−0.07

0,27

−0.09

0.26

Y_6 (Party Identification)

0.15

X_3 (Parents' Party ID)

−0.10

0.10

0.11

X_4 (Economic Satisfaction)

Simultaneous Equations:

$Y_7 = -0.09\ X_4 + 0.05\ Y_5 + 0.70\ Y_6 + 0.69\ u_7,\ [R^2 = 0.53]$

$Y_6 = 0.01\ X_1 - 0.07\ X_2 + 0.26\ X_3 - 0.10\ X_4 + 0.96\ u_6.$

$Y_5 = 0.30\ X_1 - 0.10\ X_2 + 0.81\ u_5.$

N = 2018

Notes : Arithmetic means were inserted in place of missing values.
* Statistically insignificant at 0.05 level of statistical significance.

Conclusions and Conjectures

The findings of this paper indicate that the performance of the AKP at the polls in 2007 depended mainly on its economic performance in government between 2002 and 2007. It was under the AKP government that three decade old chronic stable high consumer price inflation decreased to single digits. Most voters were favorably impressed from the decrease in the consumer price inflation, which in the past had been identified as the most important problem of the country over and over again, during the political reign of the AKP in government. It is small wonder that such an economic record is rewarded by the voters at the polls in July 2007. Our findings clearly indicate that although party identification seemed to play a major role for the voter preferences for the AKP, even party identification seemed to depend upon the economic performance of the AKP government. It may also be the case that the voters chose to support the AKP not only as a reward to its past economic performance but also to prolong the AKP's economic program, that is expected economic stability out of the AKP at the helm of the Turkish economy.

The rank and file members of the AKP, as well as its front-bench are from relatively pious members of the Turkish society, some of whom also have a long and immaculate record of being attached to the National Outlook (Milli Görüş) movement, which in turn is well established in political Islam (*Islamcılık Cereyanı*) in Turkey. However, we have scant evidence that the AKP voters turn to support the AKP on religious grounds any more than the supporters of another right wing party, the MHP preferred that party for religious reasons at the polls. The path coefficient for the impact of left – right spectrum on the AKP vote is a mere 0.10, whereas the same path coefficient for the MHP vote is a smaller yet again positive 0.05. Both of them are less than the impact of economic factors, and therefore negligible when compared with the impact of both party identification and economic satisfaction on the decisions of the Turkish voters (see Figures 2 and 4). Economy seemed to have played a much more important and salient role in the 2007 elections than cultural, primordial and ideological factors, except for party identification.

All three causal model estimations indicate a very good fit (see Figures 2, 3, and 4). The three variables that are used to estimate the party preferences of the current voters indicate that they can explain a little more than 50 percent of the variance in the dependent variable, party preference. Most of that explanatory power rests with one independent variable, party identification. It seems as if party identification is also the most important determinant of voters' choice in Turkey, and economic factors that contribute to it, or otherwise complement it come second. Our findings seemed to indicate that the Turkish voters are not moved by primordial or cultural conditioning, or a new religious awakening, but economic cost – benefit calculations, along pragmatic and rational concerns in the 2007 general elections.