

**An Analysis of the Ideological Space Underlying Turkish Party  
Preferences**

**by**

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## ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on party choice of Turkish voters. The spatial model of voting that was successfully applied in many other country contexts is adopted. The paper aims to grasp the cognitive organisation of voters' attitudes about issues and evaluations of political parties. A spatial map is derived from a recent survey of urban settlers that show a dominant cleavage between secularists and pro-Islamists. The second dimension shows the influence of recent conflict involving the Kurdish minority on rising nationalist sentiments. Given a general depiction of the spatial map of voters, implications for the Turkish party system and understanding of the structure of party constituencies from especially a demographic and self-ascribed identity perspectives are discussed.

## INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade the once marginal parties with ultra nationalist and pro-Islamist mandates continuously gained electoral support at the expense of moderate right-wing parties in Turkish politics. In April 1999 elections the extreme ends of the Turkish ideological continuum including ethnic Kurdish support of about five percent, came to receive 40 percent of electoral support. Voting analyses focusing on this recent electoral experience diagnose demographic, socio-economic, cultural and ethnic bases of party support together with a dominant impact of religiosity on individual voting decision. However, a coherent theoretical framework for explaining the individual decision of party choice does not emerge from these analyses. As a result, a *sui generis* character of the

Turkish electorate emerges leaving the Turkish electoral experience unlinked to a larger body of comparative and theoretical research on voting behaviour.

Below, we focus on the recent Turkish electoral behaviour from a spatial voting perspective. A nation-wide representative sample of the urban electorate in February-March 2001 is used to estimate the spatial positions of all major political parties along with respondent ideal points in a two-dimensional ideological space. These two dimensions are very much in line with the centre-periphery framework of Mardin (1973) reflecting pro-Islamist elements of the periphery as opposed to the secularist centre as its dominant dimension. Turkish nationalism defined largely in opposition to ethnic Kurdish identity of the late 1990s appears as a secondary dimension of ideological competition. We next present party positions along these two dimensions and offer various interpretations as to the nature of party competition in modern Turkish electoral scene.

Our simple spatial exposition of party competition accounts for the specificity of Turkish ideological competition while, at the same time, linking the Turkish experience with the spatial voting theory developed in Hinich and Munger (1984). The Hinich-Munger theory of spatial ideology is at the surface similar to the spatial ideology discussion of Downs (1957). While both theories treat the ideological space as latent, Hinich and Munger (1984) assert that the dimension(s) arises out of competition for political power by politicians, parties, and their supporters.

The latent ideological space upon which we build our ensuing analyses can be estimated from data. Strikingly, a number of studies of politics using different methods on

perceptual and attitudinal data from public opinion surveys yield latent spaces that are low dimensional. They are either one dimensional Downs type spaces or more frequently they have two dimensions. An interpretation of the meaning of these dimensions require a linkage between positions on the latent dimension(s) and issues and public goods provisions (see Enelow and Hinich, 1984; and Hinich, Khmelko and Ordeshook, 1999).<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to exploratory analyses in various forms of discriminant and factor analysis, the empirical extension of the spatial voting theory offers a direct link to a formal mathematical model of preference formation and choice. Besides the American context, these models have been tested in a variety of political contexts including Ukrain (Hinich, Khmelko and Ordeshook, 1999), Chile (Dow, 1998), Russia (Myagov and Ordeshook, 1998) and Taiwan (Lin, Chu and Hinich; 1996). These applications of the spatial voting model in different countries not only help generalise spatial theory, but also offer insights as to the country specific questions at hand about coalition potential, stability of political rhetoric and the like. The spatial techniques we use also provide an opportunity to follow potentially risky developments in ideological spaces closely so that inherent problems can be diagnosed and policy recommendations can be drawn.

### **CONTEXT AND MOTIVATION FOR A SPATIAL ANALYSIS**

The extreme right-end of the Turkish ideological spectrum has grown both in size as well as in influence over the last decade. Policy mandates and electoral bases of the rising extreme-right rely on potentially explosive social cleavages in the country. On the one hand, the confrontation between the secularist and pro-Islamist forces, has led many to

worry that a deep-rooted schism has come to the forefront of Turkish politics. On the other hand, the recent rise of MHP clearly reflects growing ethnic cleavages in Turkish society that peaked as a result of PKK's campaign of terror in the 1990s. The once encompassing and inclusive Turkish identity seems to have broken into a primordial ethnic characteristic.<sup>2</sup> The rise of Turkish nationalist agenda was certainly aided by the rise of ethnic nationalism and consequent militarised conflicts in the Balkans and the Caucasus. The ethnic based conception of nationalism is also in stark contrast to religious Islamic community conception of the pro-Islamist movement that draws on the Ottoman heritage of *millet* (nation) (see Kalaycıoğlu; 1997). While MHP was thriving on rising exclusionist ethnic fervour due to Kurdish separatist movement, RP/FP was offering an inclusive Islamic unification with a clear tone of anti-secularism that aimed to appeal to especially sizeable Kurdish vote in the East and Southeastern provinces.

Rising pro-Islamist and nationalist appeal among the Turkish electorate can be taken as a reflection of strengthening peripheral forces within Şerif Mardin's (1973) centre-periphery paradigm. Following Mardin's (1973) seminal work others have also argued that Turkish politics is built around a strong and coherent state apparatus run by a distinct group of elites dominated by the military and bureaucracy. The "*centre*" is confronted by a heterogeneous and habitually hostile "*periphery*", composed mainly of peasantry, small farmers and artisans. For all practical purposes, the periphery was seen as the complement of the centre, which is built around Kemalist secular principles and follows a state run nationalist modernisation program. The periphery reflects the salient features of a subject and parochial orientation. It is build around hostile sentiments toward centralist and coercive modernisation project of the centre and includes regional, religious and ethnic groups with often-conflicting interests and political strategies.

Clearly in conflict with each other, both the pro-Islamists as well as the nationalists are posing a serious challenge to the stability of the party system by adding to its fragmentation. Is the future of Turkish politics being shaped by the rising salience of religious and nationalist cleavages reflecting traces of the centre-periphery cleavage? Did the recent crises leave the Turkish voters in a political vacuum that makes them easily swayed by charismatic and populist leadership on a few, appealing popular issues, which are open to potentially destabilising pro-Islamist or nationalist political demagoguery? Or alternatively, do we observe a robust and coherent cleavage structure in voters' perceptions? Are the apparently divisive issues of headscarf ban and education in Kurdish being reflected in the perception maps of the political space in Turkey in a coherent manner?

## **METHODS AND DATA**

The methodology used below requires a set of assumptions relating the data to a spatial model. First, the scores given to each party is asserted to be a monotonically decreasing function of the Euclidian distance between the position of the party in the space and the most preferred ideological position of the respondent. This position is called the *ideal point*. The respondent is not required to articulate that position but rather it is a latent position in the latent ideological space. Second, the constellation of the party positions in the latent space is assumed to be the same across all respondents. The only thing that differs from respondent to respondent is their personal ideal points. From the scores that we get from the respondents we first determine the dimensionality of the political space.

Next we estimate the party positions and lastly we estimate the ideal points for the individuals (See Enelow and Hinich, 1984; Hinich, 1978; Hinich and Munger, 1994).

Our data comprises a total of 1201 face-to-face interviews conducted in 12 provinces. The questionnaires were administered, between 20th February and 16<sup>th</sup> March 2001, by using a “random sampling” method with an objective to represent the nation-wide voting age urban population living within municipality borders, in which the urban population figures of 1997 census data were taken as the basis.<sup>3</sup> Since the new pro-Islamist parties, that is SP and AKP were formed in the aftermath of the closure of FP in June 2001, our data only reflects the evaluations concerning FP and not SP and AKP.<sup>4</sup>

### **A SPATIAL MAP OF ISSUE DIMENSIONS IN TURKISH POLITICS**

As a first step in our analysis we estimate the spatial positions of the seven parties evaluated by our respondents. Figure 1 presents the two-dimensional estimates of these party positions together with the voters’ ideal points in the same space. Figure 1 shows that in the minds of the voters parties are clearly differentiated on the two dimensions. The horizontal axis appears to posit the pro-Islamist FP in one extreme as opposed to the secularist left leaning CHP and the positions of the rest of the parties fit our expectations about the religious cleavage in Turkish politics. The nationalist MHP is the closest one to the position of FP on this axis. While the centrist DYP is slightly closer to the pro-Islamist end, DSP and CHP are clustered together on the opposing end of this dimension. HADEP’s perceived position on this dimension is closer to the secularist end of DSP and CHP.

**[Figure 1 about here]**

The vertical axis places the Kurdish HADEP on one extreme and the nationalist MHP and DSP on the other. While ANAP, CHP and FP are positioned close to the centre on this dimension, DYP rests closer to the nationalist MHP and DSP. FP's strong showing in the East and Southeastern provinces where the bulk of Kurdish population lives is often given as evidence of pro-Islamist appeal to the Kurdish electorate. Ideologically, FP's all-inclusive concept of *millet* is also seen to target the Kurdish vote. In the same vein, the religiously conservative Kurdish constituency is often used to assert ideological closeness of HADEP and FP. Our spatial map however, clearly shows that in the perceptions of the urban population, HADEP is not at all close to FP on the two-dimensional ideological space we derive.

HADEP and FP appear equally isolated from the rest of the parties. CHP also stands apart from the rest of the parties. While the centrist positions on the horizontal axis do not allow for much differentiation between MHP, DYP and ANAP, the vertical axis representing the nationalist cleavage separates on the one extreme HADEP from the centrist ANAP and on the other extreme DYP and MHP.

Apart from the seven major parties we also asked evaluations of hypothetical candidates. The perceived position of a very religious leader for example, is estimated very close to FP while a prominent businessman is seen close to ANAP. Interestingly, a labour leader is perceived very close to HADEP and apart from the rest of the parties, especially of the left. Given HADEP's extremist left-wing rhetoric on many issues such a perceived position is not surprising.

The ideal point estimates for each individual in our sample are also given in Figure 1. Strikingly these ideal point estimates show a centrist tendency prevalent among the urban voters. Although we observe some voters dispersed towards the end points of the two dimensions, the bulk of the voters are found close to the centre of the two dimensions.

A high percentage of our respondents refuse to vote for any one of the existing parties. The positioning of these voters on our ideological map is thus quite interesting. Those who assert that they will not cast a vote (abstainers) as well as those who assert that they will not vote for any of the presently available parties are on average very close to the centre of our map. The extreme ends of our map are not particularly attractive to these voters who are on average close to ANAP and our hypothetical prominent businessman rather than any of the other major parties. Accordingly, despite apparent tensions in the Turkish political scene due to secularist vs pro-Islamist cleavage or recognition of Kurdish ethnic identity, the average alienated voter is still distant from extreme ends of our two dimensions. Despite minimal voter support it apparently receives at the time of our fieldwork, ANAP, more than any other major party, lies closer to the preferences of those voters who are yet to make up their minds about their party of choice.

So far our diagnosis about the nature of the two dimensions did not focus the content of argumentation that shape these two dimensions and remained primarily on our a priori expectations and knowledge about the nature of different parties' positions with respect to one another. Several questions about the self-ascribed identity of our respondents help us further clarify the nature of our two dimensions.<sup>5</sup> When we look at self-evaluation of religiosity we see that those respondents who consider themselves to be

very religious on a 0 to 10 scale of religiosity tend to be placed on the extreme right end side of the first dimension. Those who consider themselves to be non-religious are placed on the opposite side. Those who primarily consider themselves to be Muslims rather than Turks, Turkish citizens, Kurds or Alevis are placed very close to the same extreme right end of the first dimension. We also observe that the respondents whose ideal points lie at the right-end of the first dimension also tend to have a liberal stand on the issue of headscarves and turban in universities advocating for no restrictions on religiously meaningful attire in universities. In contrast, those who support banning of headscarves and turban at the universities are to be found on the opposing side of the first dimension. The mean of the ideal points of those who consider themselves to be primarily Alevis, lies on the complete opposite end of the first dimension suggesting that the religiosity of the pro-Islamist end reflects mainly the Sunni school.

From the perspective of simple demographic attributes of the respondents, we observe that the pro-Islamist respondents tend to come from the Eastern rather than the Western provinces. The education level of the respondents at the pro-Islamist end tends to be quite low compared to those on the opposing end. Voters between the ages of 18 and 24 are closer on average to the pro-Islamist end whereas older voters tend to lie on the opposing end. On the pro-Islamist end, shantytown dwellers are more likely to be found whereas those respondents who live in luxurious dwellings are located near the opposing end of the horizontal dimension.

Those respondents who support complete banning of education in Kurdish are on the lower end of the vertical dimension whereas those who support education in Kurdish are on average to be found on the opposing end near the position of HADEP. In line with

expectations, those respondents who consider themselves to be primarily Kurds lie towards the upper end of the vertical dimension opposing those respondents who primarily consider themselves to be Turks or Turkish citizens. Similarly, Kurdish speakers are at the upper end of the vertical dimension whereas those who can not speak Kurdish lie on the opposing end.

Our estimated map also provides clues as to the nature of ideological competition in the Turkish party system. On our map there is no party that is placed on the pro-Islamist and Kurdish nationalist quadrant. The Kurdish nationalism of HADEP is clearly placed in the minds of the Turkish electorate on the secularist end of the horizontal dimension. While HADEP is the only party on this quadrant, the secularist CHP and DSP dominate the Turkish nationalist end of the vertical dimension. It is clear in the minds of the Turkish electorate that the centrist right-wing of the Turkish party system is not taking any position near the secularist end of the first dimension and rather leaning toward the Turkish nationalist and pro-Islamist rhetoric. Four major parties (MHP, DYP, FP and ANAP) compete on the same quadrant, that is the pro-Islamist and Turkish nationalist quadrant, where the toughest competition is expected to take place.

The CHP and DSP voters therefore are estimated to lie close to those that consider themselves not religious and supportive of the ban on headscarves and turban at the universities. Interestingly, the left secularist-end of the first dimension does not seem to have a clear primary identity preference other than Alevi. The secularist end is also not very much supportive of the EU membership while its opposing end is very much supportive of Turkey being part of the “Islamic world” and clearly considering themselves to be primarily Muslim. ANAP and DYP voters tend to have a moderate

view on turban and headscarf ban at the universities as well as on education in Kurdish. However, FP voters are closer to the most liberal end of the turban issue while the MHP voters occupy the extreme positions supportive of the ban on the education in Kurdish. As such, the issue space fits our expectations almost perfectly.

## CONCLUSIONS

Our analysis presents several important results. The first is the low dimensionality of the Turkish issue space. As such, the Turkish case is yet another evidence of the low dimensional nature of ideological spaces in modern democracies. We show that two dimensions dominate the ideological competition in the Turkish party system. The first and the relatively more dominant dimension is the secularist vs. pro-Islamist cleavage which largely overlaps with the centre vs. periphery formations in Turkish politics and also the left-right orientations similar in many respects to the Western European traditions. The second dimension is the ethnic based nationalist cleavage placing the Turkish and Kurdish identities opposing one another.

Secondly, we observe that simple identity questions help to differentiate different electoral groups from one another. Religiosity and country targets with which Turkey should develop closer ties in the minds of the Turkish electorate help differentiate the parties and their electorate on the horizontal dimension. Alevi and Kurdish primary identification as opposed to Turkish primary identities differentiate voters on the vertical dimension.

Thirdly, we observe an overwhelming centrist character of the Turkish electorate. However, the disenchantment of the electorate from the existing parties is also evident from this picture. While the voter ideal points are in the centre of the two-dimensional space, the measured party positions are at the relatively more extreme ends. In the minds of the Turkish voter, there seems to exist a centrifugal force that pushes the parties to the margins of the ideological space. The alienated voters, who assert that they are not going to cast a vote to any one of the existing parties or simply abstain from voting, comprised the largest segment of the electorate at the time of our fieldwork. This alienated segment lie at the centre of the two dimensions. Perhaps surprisingly, but certainly relieving from the perspective of potential conflict implications, this segment of voters who refuse to vote for the existing parties are not close to hypothetical leaders from the potentially extremist labour or pro-Islamist movements. Equally importantly this segment is also just as distant to the nationalist MHP positions. Consequently, there seems limited ground for a politically extremist movement to be born out of this group of disenchanting segment of voters.

However, the heart of political competition seems to be shaped around Turkish nationalism blended with varying doses of pro-Islamism. The overwhelming majority of the Turkish electorate is located around the centre of these two dimensions. The traditionally state centred Turkish left is still quite distant to such argumentation and occupies positions that predominantly reflect secularist stands opposing the pro-Islamists. The two important minority groups that overlap in some geographic locations of the country, that is the Alevi and the Kurdish communities are isolated on the Turkish ideological map. CHP, who in 1991 unsuccessfully brought the Kurdish representatives into the Parliament, still is the closest party to both of these groups. The pro-Islamist FP

is the most distant party to both. Such a distant position of FP to both Alevis and Kurds leave the pro-Islamist and ethnic Kurdish space unoccupied in the Turkish ideological scene.

Given the potentially chaotic economic crisis in the country, the inherent centrist stability of the Turkish ideological orientations could change. Where to, in that case, would the alienated masses move? Would a leader having some business credentials mobilize them or would they be attracted to a traditionally centrist party such as ANAP or an alternative that aims to replace it? Would the cumulative disenchantment of the masses with the inability of the parties to respond to basic needs and expectations of the electorate lead to abandonment of the centrist tendencies? How fast would this movement to one of the extreme ends be? How would the existing parties and the powerful state bureaucracy react to these developments? Future developments and analyses will have to answer these questions.

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## Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> A theoretical model of how the latent ideological space links with issues was first made by Hinich and Pollard (1981) and then extended by Enelow and Hinich (1984) and Hinich and Munger (1994).

<sup>2</sup> See Kirişci and Winrow (1997) and Barkey and Fuller (1998) on the rise of Kurdish conflict and identity politics in Turkey.

<sup>3</sup> The distribution of the sample to the 12 provinces are as follows: 77 interviews in Adana, 172 in Ankara, 54 in Antalya, 59 in Bursa, 58 in Diyarbakır, 66 in Erzurum, 359 in İstanbul, 146 in İzmir, 62 in Konya, 24 in Manisa, 74 in Samsun and 50 in Trabzon. Details of the sampling procedure can be obtained from the authors. The target population of the sample was voting age urban settlers. Under the restrictive assumption of simple random sampling, a sample size of 1201 is expected to have a confidence interval of 95% with an error margin of  $\pm 2,8\%$ .

<sup>4</sup> The wording of the questions used in our analyses to obtain an estimate of each respondent's cardinal evaluation of parties can be obtained from the authors.

<sup>5</sup> The specific wording of these questions can be obtained from the authors.