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Economic evaluations vs. ideology: Diagnosing the sources of electoral change in Turkey, 2002–2011

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ABSTRACT

Turkish elections reflect two competing influences. One concerns a long-term increasingly conservative ideological orientation; the other, more short-term pragmatic evaluations primarily on the economic policy front. This article uses three nationwide representative surveys from 2002, 2007 and 2011 to assess the relative merits of these competing hypotheses. The findings indicate that the critical election of 2002 is not shaped by economic performance evaluations but rather by indicators of ideology at large and left–right ideology in particular. The influence of ideology appears to rise from 2002 to 2007 and 2011. Economic performance evaluations increase in salience from 2002 to 2007 but seem to have somewhat lost their power for 2011. Implications of these findings for the Turkish party system and further research questions are discussed in the concluding section.

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Since November 2002, the electoral scene in Turkey has been dominated by the conservative Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*-AKP). Although the contextual factors that affect these elections appear to have little in common together, they provide adequate reason for testing the factors influencing voting decisions as a function of long-term ideological, as well as, short-term pragmatic concerns. The main objective in this essay is to provide a comparable evaluation of support for the incumbent parties across three general elections. All three evaluations are performed on the basis of pre-election surveys conducted just prior to the election dates. The ensuing analyses show that both factors together are effective in shaping the Turkish party preferences. Depending on the political and economic contexts, one factor appears to be more important than the other. More specifically, the impact of left–right ideological shifts appears to have been most important for 2002 and this impact regained some momentum for the 2007 and 2011 elections. The economic performance evaluations in contrast, had little effect for 2002, but were markedly more

effective in 2007. For the 2011 general elections, the influence of economic evaluations appears to have declined.

1. Conceptual background to voting studies in Turkey[1]

The 2011 general election is the 16th since the first competitive and fair election in 1950. Despite this long history of an electoral tradition, largely descriptive aggregate-level analyses of election results dominate the literature in Turkish voting studies while individual-level survey based studies are few and only recently increasing. By and large, these works are inconsistent with and incomparable to the comparative political science literature and rely on an underlying claim of *sui generis* historical specificity of Turkish elections. Repeated breakdown of the democratic system in the country, weak influence of the behaviorist approach to political science in Turkey and lack

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[1] No attempt to review the vast literature on voting at large and economic voting in particular will be attempted here. See Evans (2004), Merrill III and Grofman (1999), Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier (2006), Duch and Stevenson (2008) for a comparative evaluation of voting models and economic voting literature.

of systematic data collection are all partly responsible for this development. Nevertheless, both of the main branches of inquiry in voting studies; that is, the spatial as well as the Michigan voting models, have had their reflections adapted to the historico-sociological center-periphery framework of Şerif Mardin (1973). Mardin argues that a long historical divide shaped during the Ottoman Empire was inherited by the Republican regime. Primarily cultural, this social cleavage differentiates ruling elites of the "center" from the non-elite of the "periphery". Inherently hostile to one other, this divide remains deep despite urbanization and the relatively recent adoption of a market-led economic policy that effectively opened the country to the influence of globalization trends.[2]

Çarkoğlu (forthcoming) provides an overview of the literature that reflects on both the center-periphery cleavage, as well as the spatial and Michigan models in voting studies. A relatively recent branch of contributions to this literature has been arguing that economic voting is prevalent in Turkish elections.[3] What emerges from these analyses is a competition between the short-run, campaign specific influences in the form of economic evaluations or different issue and policy preferences and longer-run ideological predispositions reflective of a particular social cleavage. However, these studies either only focus on one cross-section, or use cross-sections of data far from election periods suitable for comparative evaluations. Thus, evaluations of trends in economic voting over time remain dubious at best.

2. Historical context of 2002, 2007 and 2011 general elections

In temporal analysis of trends, the historical context that shapes the period of investigation becomes imperative. For the Turkish case as well, the domestic economic and political scenes in all three elections analyzed here were remarkably different. On the economic front in November 2002, the country was just beginning to get out of the deepest economic crisis of the Republican era. A year earlier, inflation had soared to about seventy percent and per capita income had significantly contracted with unemployment, especially urban white collar unemployment, which had been steadily on the rise. In contrast, the July 2007 election took place following five years of

continuous economic growth while inflation steadily declined with about ten percent unemployment. The global economic crisis of 2009 had its contracting effect on the Turkish economy. The global economic crisis led to retrenchment of the Turkish economy and shifted unemployment to a significantly higher level compared to the first term of the AKP government. Approaching the June 2011 election, inflation remained under control, and the unemployment rate appears to have declined. The influence of global economic meltdown has thus remained restricted upon the Turkish economy.

In other words, in contrast to 2002 when the Turkish economy was still suffering from the crisis of 2001, in both 2007 and 2011 elections, the macroeconomic picture appears relatively stable and favorable to mass expectations compared to the preceding decade. A closer look into evaluations of economic conditions shows clear patterns suggestive of electoral influences. In 2002, negative evaluations of sociotropic or pocketbook versions with a retrospective perspective were dominant with pessimistic evaluations in excess of 70 percent in the pre-election survey. However, looking forward, the mass evaluations appear significantly less pessimistic. In contrast, similar evaluations in 2007 show much lower levels of pessimism. Similar to 2002, in 2007 retrospective negative evaluations at around 27 percent are significantly higher than prospective negative evaluations at around 15 percent. As of the end of 2010, about six months prior to the general election, the negative evaluations were significantly higher compared to pre-election sample in 2007.[4]

However, just prior to 2011 election, economic evaluations of sociotropic as well as pocketbook versions seem to have significantly improved compared to the end of 2010 and are back at the levels observed in 2007. Again the retrospective perspective is more pessimistic than the prospective perspective. The retrospective negative evaluations, at around 29 percent as of the end of 2011, are about one third of their level in 2002. The prospective negative evaluations are about 18 percent; down from about 31 percent in both 2002 and end of 2010.[5]

3. Party choice in 2002, 2007 and 2011

The analyses presented here offer a temporal assessment of the influences of long-term ideological predispositions as opposed to short-term economic performance evaluations by using data from three nationwide representative sample election surveys conducted a few weeks prior to the general elections of 2002, 2007 and 2011. The details of sampling procedures adopted can be found in Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu (2007, 223–226) about the 2002 election survey and Çarkoğlu (2008a, 197) about the 2007

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[2] Dağı (2005), Göle (1997) and others have argued that the periphery formed its own 'parallel modernity'. The Milli Görüş (National View) movement provided the political umbrella for this branch of the periphery. The older generation leaders of the movement, under the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi-RP) banner became the larger partner of a coalition government in the aftermath of the 1995 general elections. Then following a largely unsuccessful tenure in conflict with the secularist military, the younger generation politicians of the Movement formed the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi-AKP) and became the largest party in the system with 2002 general elections.

[3] On individual-level survey analyses see Başlevent et al. (2004, 2005, 2009), Çarkoğlu (2008b), Çarkoğlu and Hinich (2006) and Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu (2007). For aggregate-level analyses of provincial elections results and influence of economic performance thereupon, see Akarca and Tansel (2006) and references therein.

[4] The 2010 survey was conducted as the International Social Survey Program (ISSP)'s environment module application in Turkey. See http://www.gesis.org/en/issp/for details.

[5] On longer term ideological shifts along the left–right continuum the main finding in the literature is a shift from the left and center positions towards the right of the center over the last two decades. See Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu (2007) and Çarkoğlu (2007b). For short-term evaluations of 2002 and 2007 elections see Çarkoğlu (2003, 2007a).

election survey. The 2011 election survey adopted a similar sampling procedure and was fielded just prior to June 12, 2011. These three surveys allow me to use the same variable definitions for a comparative analysis of support for the incumbent in three general elections. Besides demographic control variables such as gender, age, education, household income, Kurdish ethnic background, geographic location and urban residency, ideological positions on the conventional left–right scale and religious practice, issue positions concerning most important problems the country is faced with, EU membership and oppression of religious people and finally the economic evaluations are used in all three equations. Having variables on religiosity, Kurdish ethnicity, urban residence as well as education I intend to demonstrate "peripheral" longer-term influences. The left–right self-placement also captures a summary of long-term ideological positions while the economic evaluations grasp the shorter-term influences. Vote for the incumbent in the last election controls for shorter term political commitment for the incumbent and other issue positions aim to demonstrate shorter term campaign influences. See Appendix for the variable definitions.

The incumbent government for 2002 was a coalition of the Democratic Left Party (*Demokratik Sol Parti*-DSP), the Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*-MHP) and the Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*-ANAP); thus, the voters of these parties were jointly coded into an incumbent party category separating them from the rest of the competing parties. For 2007 and 2011, the AKP formed the incumbent party category. In order to focus on the simplest version of the economic voting hypotheses, the incumbent government is compared with the rest of the competing parties in binary logistic regressions.

Several conceptual and empirical problems have to be resolved in operationalizing the effect of economic evaluations for a test of economic voting hypothesis. The first is that economic evaluations of sociotropic or pocketbook type looking into the past or the future tend to be highly correlated. This creates serious multicollinearity when they are jointly used. The second is a more conceptual problem. There is no a priori reason as to why one version should be preferred over the other. These problems are handled by creating an index of negative economic evaluations. This is justifiable on the basis of factor analyses that exhibit a unidimensional factor of evaluations using all five evaluations of prospective and retrospective sociotropic and pocketbook types together with present day economic conditions (see the Appendix for details of these questions). Although the 2002 factor analysis yields a two factor solution separating the prospective from the retrospective evaluations since no such separation is observed for 2007 and 2010, the same additive index is formed for all three years ranging from 0 (no negative economic evaluation) to 5 (negative economic evaluation for all five different versions).[6] Cronbach alpha values for all three years are in excess of 0.6.

4. Results

Only about 8 percent of our sample in the 2002 sample indicated that they intended to vote for either for DSP, or for MHP or ANAP. In 2007, 59 percent and 2011, 49 percent indicated an intention to vote for the incumbent AKP. The *sui generis* nature of the 2002 due to catastrophic economic conditions, especially preceding the election, is clearly reflected in the reduced goodness of fit measures for this election. However, comparisons with the next two elections in 2007 and 2011 are not unfounded given the statistical significance of the negative economic evaluations across all three elections. Given the contextual difference in the level of economic difficulties across these three elections, reaching conclusions concerning the impact of contextual differences as reflected upon the magnitude of economic evaluations on party choice becomes possible.

Several patterns emerge from a logistic regression analysis taking the incumbent party preferences as the dependent variable. Among the demographic control variables, we see that only education and to a lesser extent age has significant impact upon support for the incumbents. While age was not significant for the 2002 election, in 2007 and 2011, older voters tended to vote against the incumbent AKP government. More educated voters tended towards the incumbent in 2002. For the last two elections, lesser educated tended to support the incumbent AKP.

The impact of issues appears to fade away for the 2011 sample while, for earlier samples – more for 2002 than for 2007, we observe some significant influence. Neither the evaluations concerning pressure over the religious people nor the support for EU membership exert a discriminating influence upon vote for the incumbent party in 2011. Similarly, religious practice, which appeared to be significant with a positive effect upon vote for the AKP in 2007, is not significant in 2002 and 2011. Geographic locations of the respondents as a control variable are jointly significant for all three elections. In 2007, as well as in 2011, the Marmara and Aegean voters tended against the incumbent AKP government.

Focusing on the negative economic evaluations index, we see that although consistently significant, the magnitude of this variable fluctuates significantly. Increasing negative economic evaluations had the highest negative influence for 2007 followed by 2011 and 2002. Fig. 1 shows the predicted probability to vote for the incumbent governments in three elections. The reference category voter for this simulation exercise refers to a 30 year old male with 8 years of education who lives in Istanbul and who cannot speak Kurdish, who is at point 5 on the left–right self-placement scale of 1–10, who goes to mosque or prays once a week with 1250 TL monthly household income. This voter is assumed to have not voted for the incumbent in the previous election, and for him, all issue effects are also set to zero. For this hypothetical reference voter the likelihood to vote for the incumbent is highest for the 2007 and lowest for the 2002 elections. Our reference voter's likelihood to vote for the AKP is lower in 2011 than in 2007 across all levels of negative economic evaluations.

We see that for this hypothetical voter without a single negative economic evaluation, the likelihood to vote for the

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[6] The fact that retrospective and prospective evaluations differ in 2002 is reflective of the economic amelioration underway at the time of our pre-election survey. While the past looked bleak in every respect, the future appeared to promise a relatively better economy.
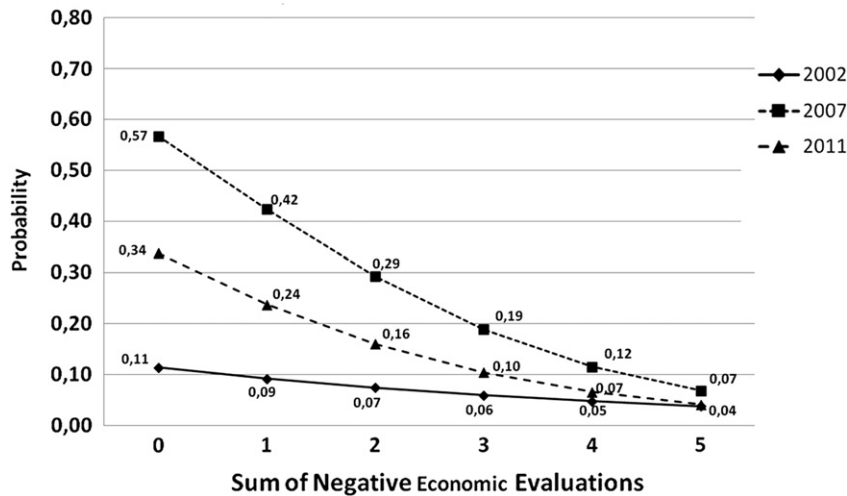
Fig. 1. Predicted probability to vote for the incumbent and economic evaluations.

incumbent was about 11 percent in 2002, 57 percent in 2007 and 34 percent in 2011. The negative influence of worsening economic performance evaluations is much higher for the latter two elections compared to 2002. Keeping the reference voter the same for both elections, we see that as economic evaluations worsen from no negative evaluations and reach their peak (at 5 on the bad economic evaluations index), the likelihood to vote for the incumbent AKP goes down from 57 percent down to 7 percent in 2007 (a loss of 50 percent) and from 34 percent likelihood to vote for the AKP down to 4 percent in 2011 (a loss of 30 percent).

Despite the fact that negative economic evaluations were at about the same aggregate levels in both 2007 and 2011, as negative evaluations rose the likelihood to vote for the incumbent AKP dropped faster in 2007 compared to 2011. The non-linear progression of these probabilities renders the differences between 2007 and 2011 less pronounced at higher levels of negative economic evaluations.[7]

The estimates on Table 1 also show that an individual is more likely to vote for the incumbent in an election (at time t) if he/she had already voted for the same incumbent party or coalition parties in the previous election (at time $t - 1$). In second round simulations, the same reference individual is used with only one additional qualification, that this individual is also one who voted for the incumbent in the previous election. The predicted vote likelihoods in this second round of simulations are higher than the ones obtained in the first round; thus reflecting positive influence of the last election vote for the incumbents upon vote

for the same incumbents in the current election. The difference between the two simulations then is only due to the influence of the vote for the incumbent in the previous election. These differential probability influences are plotted for the three elections in Fig. 2. For 2002, the influence of the vote for the incumbent coalition parties in 1999 election is statistically significant but its magnitude remains ineffective since the predicted likelihoods to vote for the incumbent DSP-MHP-ANAP coalition never goes above 50 percent.[8]

For 2007 and 2011, these influences from vote for the incumbent AKP in the previous election are of non-trivial magnitudes. The likelihood of our reference individual to vote for the AKP in 2007 increases by 38 percent if he has no negative economic evaluations and also voted for the AKP in 2002 election as well. As the number of negative economic evaluations increase, so does the magnitude of the influence due to vote for the incumbent AKP in 2002 election.[9] At moderately negative economic evaluations (in the range of 2–4 out of five economic evaluations being negative), we see that vote for the AKP in 2002 renders the likelihood to vote for the AKP a second time in a row in 2007 more than 50 percent likely keeping the other variables in the simulation at their reference levels. At the extreme end of the negative economic evaluations index with 5 out 5 economic evaluations being negative, the predicted probability to vote for the incumbent AKP is 49

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[7] For example, our reference category voter with 3 of the 5 evaluations as negative is approximately 9 percent less likely to vote for the incumbent AKP in 2011 than in 2007. The same individual with 2 of the 5 evaluations as negative however, is 13 percent less likely to vote for the incumbent AKP in 2011 compared to 2007. This difference becomes (57% − 34%=) 23 percent for those individuals with no negative evaluations.
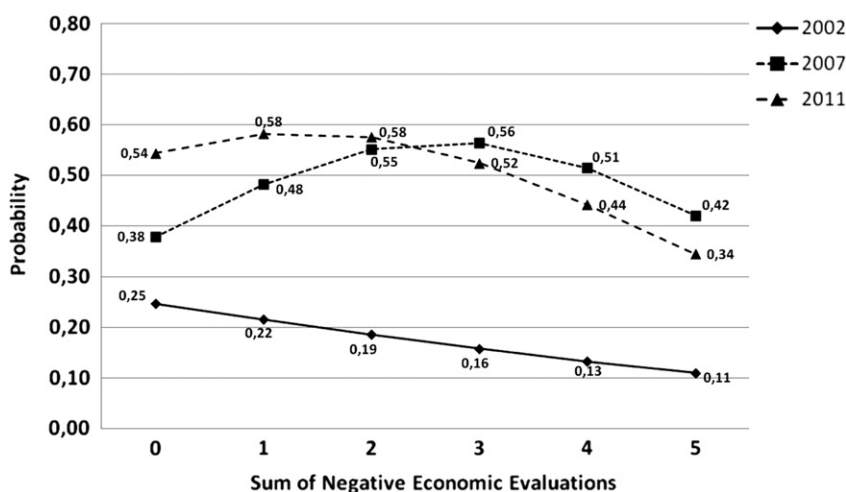
[8] The largest impact of vote for the incumbent parties in 1999 is observed at the lowest level of bad economic evaluations and raises the likelihood to vote for the incumbent parties in 2002 by about 25 percent. With increasing number of negative economic evaluations this magnitude steadily declines and reaches 11 percentage points at the maximum number of bad economic evaluations (a score of 5 negative evaluations out of 5 economic evaluations).

[9] Vote for the AKP in 2002 increases the likelihood to vote for the AKP in 2007 by 48 percent at one negative out of five economic evaluations level, then by 55 percent at two negative out of five economic evaluations level, 56 percent at three out of five bad economic evaluations level.

Table 1
Determinants of support for the incumbent government, 2002–2011.

	2002			2007			2011		
	B	Sig.	Exp(B)	B	S.E.	Exp(B)	B	S.E.	Exp(B)
Demographic variables									
Women = 1	−0.07	0.73	0.93	0.16	0.34	1.17	0.25	0.16	1.28
Kurdish = 1	0.13	0.73	1.14	−0.18	0.50	0.83	−0.01	0.98	0.99
Urban Dwellers = 1	−0.04	0.85	0.96	0.27	0.13	1.31	−0.02	0.93	0.98
Age	−0.01	0.35	0.99	**−0.04**	**0.00**	**0.96**	**−0.02**	**0.00**	**0.98**
Education	**0.06**	**0.05**	**1.07**	**−0.10**	**0.00**	**0.90**	**−0.06**	**0.05**	**0.95**
Household Income Level	0.00	0.47	1.00	0.00	0.72	1.00	0.00	0.55	1.00
Ideological positions									
Left–Right self-placement	**0.30**	**0.00**	**1.35**	**0.20**	**0.00**	**1.22**	**0.32**	**0.00**	**1.37**
PID Incumbent	**1.48**	**0.00**	**4.40**	**2.57**	**0.00**	**13.10**	**2.68**	**0.00**	**14.62**
Religious practice (0–6)	−0.03	0.66	0.97	**0.26**	**0.00**	**1.30**	0.05	0.32	1.06
Issues									
Oppression	**−0.52**	**0.01**	**0.59**	**0.65**	**0.00**	**1.91**	−0.05	0.83	0.95
EU	−0.11	0.61	0.90	**0.55**	**0.00**	**1.73**	0.21	0.26	1.23
Unemployment	**−0.66**	**0.00**	**0.52**	−0.22	0.26	0.81	−0.28	0.22	0.76
Income growth	**−0.45**	**0.04**	**0.64**	−0.40	0.09	0.67	**−0.56**	**0.04**	**0.57**
Inflation	**−0.70**	**0.00**	**0.50**	−0.22	0.33	0.81	**−0.74**	**0.00**	**0.48**
Political instability	−0.58	0.06	0.56	−0.36	0.34	0.70	0.17	0.78	1.18
Social issues (health/education)	−0.03	0.92	0.97	−0.25	0.23	0.78	−0.07	0.80	0.93
Economic evaluations									
Sum of negative economic evaluations	**−0.24**	**0.00**	**0.79**	**−0.58**	**0.00**	**0.56**	**−0.49**	**0.00**	**0.61**
Geographic location		**0.05**			**0.00**			**0.05**	
Aegean	−0.13	0.73	0.88	**−1.02**	**0.00**	**0.36**	**−0.93**	**0.01**	**0.39**
Mediterranean	0.63	0.15	1.88	−0.49	0.11	0.62	−0.30	0.41	0.74
South Eastern Anatolia	0.83	0.07	2.28	0.58	0.12	1.79	−0.34	0.39	0.71
Western Anatolia	−0.14	0.71	0.87	−0.35	0.28	0.70	−0.42	0.25	0.66
Marmara	−0.25	0.50	0.78	**−0.81**	**0.01**	**0.45**	**−0.72**	**0.01**	**0.49**
Black Sea	−0.03	0.94	0.97	−0.13	0.71	0.88	−0.42	0.24	0.66
Central Anatolia	−0.81	0.10	0.44	−0.47	0.24	0.63	−0.03	0.93	0.97
Eastern Anatolia	0.22	0.72	1.24	−0.02	0.96	0.98	0.20	0.59	1.22
Constant	**−3.51**	**0.00**	**0.03**	−0.34	0.58	0.71	**−1.45**	**0.04**	**0.23**
Model summary									
Log likelihood		838.46			1057.48			937.58	
Cox & Snell R Square		0.09			0.48			0.49	
Nagelkerke R Square		0.20			0.65			0.65	
Overall correctly predicted (%)*		92.27			84.78			85.00	
Correctly predicted occurrence (%)*		4.20			88.57			85.83	
Hosmer and Lemeshow Test (Sig.)		0.18			0.84			0.74	
N =		1810			1505			1300	
% for Incumbent		8			59			49	

*The cut value is 0.50.
Bold values represent $P < 0.05$.

Fig. 2. Economic evaluations and impact of the previous vote for the incumbent party ($t − 1$) upon predicted probability to vote for the incumbent (t).

percent and 42 percent of this predicted likelihood is due to vote for the AKP in the previous 2002 election.

In 2011, the predicted probability to vote for the incumbent AKP for our reference individual who voted for the AKP in 2007 and who is at the maximum level of negative economic evaluations, remains at 39 percent. Unlike 2007, the influence of the vote for the AKP in the previous election upon predicted probability to vote for the incumbent for a second time in a row is higher at lower levels of negative economic evaluations. Taking Figs. 1 and 2 together, it is clear that unless the influence of the vote for the AKP in 2007 is taken into account, the likelihood to vote for the incumbent AKP in 2011 remains below 50 percent for all levels of negative economic evaluations. In 2011 rather than in 2007, the previous election's vote for the AKP played a more important role. However, in 2007, even at high levels of negative economic evaluations, a large positive influence of the previous election vote for the AKP in 2002 was reflected upon the vote decision. In 2011, our reference voter's decision to vote for the incumbent AKP government had a larger impact from the previous election vote for the AKP in 2007 at lower levels of negative economic evaluations. As the number of negative economic evaluations increases, the positive influence from previous vote for the AKP in 2007 declines resulting in an overall lower likelihood to vote for the AKP in 2011.

Taken all together, what these findings imply is that the AKP is increasingly building a group of supporters who are committed to vote repeatedly for their party of choice in subsequent elections. The AKP is successful in getting its supporters to repeatedly vote for the party despite the negative influences of deteriorating economic performance evaluations. As negative economic evaluations weaken the likelihood to vote for the AKP in both 2007 and 2011, the voters who voted for the party in the previous elections still remain highly committed to support the AKP raising their likelihood to support the incumbent AKP. This partisan commitment appears to have increased in 2011 compared to 2007.[10]

A comparable depiction of predicted probabilities to vote for the incumbent is also produced for the left–right self-placement scale (see Fig. 3). For this simulation the negative economic evaluations are set equal to 0. As such, the probabilities on left–right scale equaling 5 correspond to starting probabilities in Fig. 1 where the economic evaluations index is set to zero. We observe that keeping all other factors constant, at all points along the left–right self-placement scale the likelihood to vote for the incumbent is highest in 2007 and lowest in 2002 keeping the 2011 case in between. However, movements along the left–right ideology scale produce varying degrees of change in the likelihood to vote for the incumbents. The ideological move from the left-most position to the right-most position renders our typical individual more and more likely to vote for the incumbents in all three elections. Left wing ideological orientation has the lowest tendency to support the incumbents for all three elections. However, the magnitude

of this influence is largest for 2011 and lowest for 2002 keeping the 2007 case in between.

In 2002, the largest shift in the likelihood to vote for the incumbent controlling for the other factors occurs at point 9–10 on the left–right scale where the likelihood to vote for the incumbent DSP-MHP-ANAP coalition increases by about 6 percent. Taking the fact that the nationalist MHP remained most powerful of the three-party coalition in 2002, this result is not surprising. A similar ideological shift produces about 4 percent increase in 2007 and 7 percent increase in 2011. However, only a small group of about 5 percent of the voting age population appears on point 9 of the left–right self-placement scale in 2011. At point 5 on the left–right scale this figure is about three times larger at 15 percent. As we move from point five to six on the left–right scale, the likelihood to vote for the AKP increases from 34 to 41 percent in 2011 and from 57 to 62 percent in 2007.

Similar to the analysis depicted in Fig. 2 above, we see that taking the previous vote for the incumbent into account together with other variables in our simulation exercise, the likelihood to vote for the incumbent increases significantly. Moving from left-most positions towards the right end of the scale, the differential influence of the previous vote for the incumbent declines for both 2007 and 2011 elections, but increases for the 2002 election. If one places himself, as our reference voter, on 1–4 along the left–right scale, the additional likelihood to vote for the AKP in 2011 due to having voted for the AKP in 2007 ranges between 55 and 59 percent. This additional likelihood to vote for the AKP continuously declines and reaches 26 percent for an individual at the right-most position on the left–right scale. In other words, for right-wing voters, the additional likelihood to vote for the AKP due to previous election support for the AKP is smaller than the case for the left-wing voters.

A very similar picture appears for the case of religious practice and predicted probability to vote for the incumbent.[11] Religious practice is insignificantly linked to the vote for the incumbents in both 2002 and 2011. However, in 2007, we observe slight increases in the likelihood to vote for the incumbent AKP government as religious practice increases. However, the likelihood changes do not appear to be large enough to create party switching for the hypothetical voter for whom these simulations were run.[12] The fact that the religiosity measure does not appear to be very effective even in the critical elections of 2002 as well as in 2011 is a significant observation. It appears that left–right ideology rather than religiosity is more effective as a long-term ideological variable. This is hardly surprising since left–right ideology is clearly more comprehensive and thus reflective of not only the dimension of belief and religious practice but also views on the economy, social issues, stances on specific domestic as well as international affairs which are better captured by the left–right ideology scale.

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[10] See Çarkoğlu (2008a,b) and Kalaycıoğlu (2008) on party identification influences upon vote decision in 2007 election.

[11] Unreported due to space constraints.

[12] In this simulation all variables were kept at their original simulation values as before. The left–right scale is set at 5 and sum of negative evaluations was set at 0.
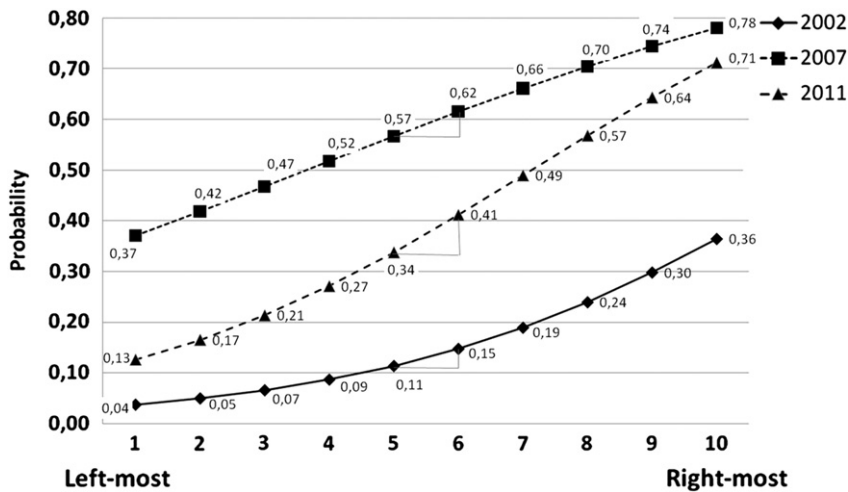
Fig. 3. Predicted probability vote for the incumbent and left–right self-placements.

5. Conclusions

The historical context of 2002 election that followed the deepest economic crisis Turkey has ever faced and the relatively stable economic conditions for the latter two general elections in 2007 and 2011 offers an opportunity to compare the salience of economic evaluations across different economic environments. The influence of negative economic evaluations appears significant in all three contexts covered in Turkish elections. However, these results suggest that in a critical election shaped primarily by economic disasters where a new party emerges with a winning majority with changing patterns of electoral cleavages, the influence of economic evaluations upon incumbent party vote is likely to be smaller compared to normal or maintaining elections where cleavage patterns and vote shares of the parties remain stable. It appears that due to severe economic crisis in 2001 as well as longer term loss of credibility on the part of the center-right and center-left parties in the preceding decade, the vote for the incumbents in 2002 are only mildly affected by negative economic evaluations.[13]

Given the relative stability of economic conditions as well as the same incumbent party in both 2007 and 2011 elections, comparisons of relative significance of different factors that shape party choice becomes more pertinent. Despite the fact that the Turkish economy performed much better in comparison to the 2002 election, the 2007 election was primarily shaped by economic concerns rather than by ideological concerns. However, the economic performance evaluations in 2007 primarily served as the basis for a reward mechanism for the AKP since the overall evaluation levels were quite optimistic in those times. The advantageous position of the AKP facing the electorate appears to have continued as the country approached the

2011 election. However, the influences of economic evaluations that clearly benefit the AKP government have declined for the 2011. Instead, longer term ideological commitments and their influence upon support for the incumbent appear to have grown compared to previous elections. In consequence, the AKP appears to have gained more by relying on longer term ideological commitments of mostly centrist voters and the constituency of voters who voted for the AKP in 2007. Taken together, we observe shifting salience of influences between shorter term economic evaluations and longer term ideological orientations and partisan commitments upon the incumbent vote. Such a broader characterization of salient influences upon party choice across different historical contexts reveals a fuller account of the electoral dynamics compared to a narrow focus upon either one of these factors in isolation.

The implications of these findings for the way Turkish electoral politics will evolve in the future are substantial. In the short-term, the governing AKP appears to potentially benefit from reduction of the economic evaluations influence over vote choice for the incumbent party. By effectively keeping the campaign debate away from the economy, the AKP was able to emphasize ideologically loaded issues and appeal to their core constituency who actually has already cast their vote for the AKP in previous elections. The increasingly conservative Turkish electorate stands more to the right-of-the-center than to the left and thus exerts a maintaining influence over the party preferences at large and more specifically upon the support for the incumbent. Since long-term change in ideological preferences of the Turkish electorate is slow in changing, the only potent factor that can change the emerging balance in the Turkish party system appears to be due to the management and performance of the economy. As long as the perceptions of favorable economic performance do not take a turn for the worse, changes in the incumbent AKP's electoral fortunes are likely to remain tenuous.

[13] See Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu (2007, 142–151, 196–197) for a similar argument.

Appendix. Variables used and their definitions.

Demographic variables	
Women	Dummy variable equaling 1 for women and 0 for men.
Kurdish	Dummy variable equaling 1 for citizens of Kurds origin and zero for others.
Urban	Dummy variable equaling 1 for those who settle in urban setting and 0 for men.
Age	Age in years for the respondents.
Education	Education in years of schooling
Income	Household income (000 TL)
Ideological positions	
Left–Right self-placement	In politics people sometimes talk about the left and the right. Where would you place your own views on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means the left-most and 10 means the right-most position?
PID Incumbent	Vote for the incumbent party or coalition parties in the previous election
Religious practice index	Over the last year, other than funeral services how often were you able to worship? 6 = More than once a week, 5 = Once a week, 4 = Once a month, 3 = In the month of Ramadan and "kandil" (one of the five Islamic holy nights when the minarets are illuminated), 2 = During religious vacations, once or twice a year, 1 = Less than once a year, 0 = Never, almost never.
Issue positions	
EU	Dummy variable for those support membership in the EU
Oppression	Dummy variable for those who assert that religious people are oppressed in Turkey
Unemployment	Dummy variable = 1 for those who mention Unemployment as one of the top two most important issues
Inflation	Dummy variable = 1 for those who mention Inflation mentioned as one of the top two most important issues
Income growth	Dummy variable = 1 for those who mention Income growth as one of the top two most important issues
Social issues	Dummy variable = 1 for those who mention Social issues such as health or education problems as one of the top two most important issues
Political instability	Dummy variable = 1 for those who mention political instability as one of the top two most important issues
Economic evaluations	
Sum of negative economic evaluations	An additive index showing the number of negative evaluations among the five economic evaluations
Retrospective pocketbook (SOCIOTROPIC)	Over the last year how much of an impact did the government's economic policies have upon your family's (Turkey's) economic condition? Please evaluate this on a 0 to 10 scale. "0" meaning a very bad impact, "10" meaning very good impact. On a similar scale could you evaluate the impact of the government policies upon Turkey's economic condition?
Present economic conditions	How satisfactory is your present economic conditions? How will your family's economic condition change over the next year? Evaluate this on a 0 to 10 scale. "0" meaning will be very bad, "10" meaning will be very good.
Prospective pocketbook (SOCIOTROPIC)	How will your family's (Turkey's) economic condition change over the next year?
Geographic location	
Region 1	Aegean
Region 2	Mediterranean
Region 3	South Eastern Anatolia
Region 4	Western Anatolia
Region 5	Marmara
Region 6	Black Sea
Region 7	Central Anatolia
Region 8	Eastern Anatolia

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