

Revising the Equation: Partisan Bias and Economic Voting Hypothesis in the Turkish Context

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Abstract

Economic voting theory is one of the most powerful explanations of voting behavior of ordinary citizens and it's almost a part of democratic practice. This approach is heavily used in the Turkish context and models based on this model are very successful in estimating election results. However, there are some "revisionist" objections to basic premises of the economic voting approach. According to this approach, economic evaluations of voters are highly affected by their partisan affiliations, leading to a vicious cycle. This paper presents findings of a field research conducted in Istanbul, prior to the general elections of 2011 and aims to present how much economic perceptions of Turkish voters are biased. Findings show that economic evaluations of voters are highly biased and affected by their partisan affiliations.

Keywords: *Voting Behavior, Economic Voting, Partisan Bias, Uncertainty, Voter Preferences.*

JEL Classification: *D72 - D83.*

Özet. Denklemi Gözden Geçirmek: Türkiye Bağlamında Partizanlık ve Ekonomik Oy Verme Hipotezi

Ekonomik oy verme yaklaşımı seçmenlerin siyasi parti tercihlerini açıklamaya çalışan alternatif yaklaşımlar arasından en güçlülerinden biridir ve neredeyse demokratik pratiğin bir parçası haline gelmiştir. Dünyada olduğu kadar Türkiye'de de bu yaklaşıma dayanan çalışmalar seçmen davranışını açıklamakta başarılı olmaktadır ve bu çerçevedeki yayın sayısı da artmaktadır. Ancak seçmenlerin ekonomik algılarını nasıl belirledikleri konusu hala tartışılmaktadır ve ekonomik konulardaki olumlu ya da olumsuz algıların bireylerin iktidardaki partiyi destekleyip desteklemelerinden etkilendiği söylenmektedir. 2011 genel seçimleri öncesinde İstanbul'da yürütülen bir saha çalışması seçmenlerin ekonomik algılarını ne kadar taraflı olduğunu keşfetmeyi amaçlamıştır. Araştırma sonuçları bireylerin ekonomik algılarının kayda değer oranda parti tercihlerinden etkilendiğini göstermiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Oy Verme Davranışı, Partizanlık, Belirsizlik, Seçmen Tercih.*

JEL Sınıflaması: *D72 - D83.*

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Introduction

Economics play an important role in everyday life of ordinary citizen. It is not the sole determinant of happiness of an individual, and it is only one of necessitated capitals of Bourdieu (1984). However material needs are indispensable for one's survival.

This centric position of economics reflected itself in our vision about democracy and electoral mechanism. Basic definition of democracy includes government based on majority rule and elections are mechanisms to form this government. A responsive and responsible government idea lay at the heart of this approach. This government cares about the welfare of its citizens and citizens punish/reward the government according to performance. Different parties compete for the power by taking appraisal of ordinary citizens at the ballot box. Considering the crucial role of the economy, it is not surprising that outcome of the government is measured on the economic criteria (Downs, 1957, pp.136-137).

The economic theory of voting is based on this basic premise. It functions as an important explanation of decisions of voters. As a result of development of positive economics, economy became the science of forecasting by using sophisticated data provided by the government agencies. Not surprisingly, this abundant data and sophisticated econometric models are used to forecast a simple parameter: who will win elections?

The success of the economic voting approach as a rapidly spreading paradigm is highly based on its power to (accurately) forecast election results. As Lewis-Beck states more than 400 articles are available and models are tested on the context of a lot of countries (2007). However, basic assumptions of this approach are under attack.

As Turkey experienced a long period of economic instability characterized with higher levels of inflation, rapidly changing growth rates and at least three big economic crises; all governing parties performed poorly and following the general elections of 2002, the electorate punished all parties in the parliament. This unforeseeable intervention of the public to politics created an opportunity space for using economic voting approach to Turkey and number of scholarly works increased significantly parallel to widening popular economic interpretation of political life. Today there are macro level models of economic voting competing to forecast elections results and number of surveys including question batteries about economic evaluations increased.

At this point, we believe that ongoing discussion about the basis premises of economic voting approach has not yet been echoed in the Turkish case. Before using this approach, we need to ask questions about validity of assumptions.

The general elections of June 12th, 2011 created an important opportunity to conduct a field survey to test these arguments. This paper is based on findings of this survey conducted in Istanbul with participation of 900 voters in 150 neighborhoods. Major objective of the survey was defined as to test hypothesis of “partisan bias”, meaning that economic perceptions are affected by partisan choices; hence explaining party preferences with economic perceptions is a cyclical effort producing significant statistical coefficients, without giving any idea about the mechanism behind voter preferences.

This paper starts with a short discussion about the economic voting and its basis premises, and thenceforth a review of findings of alternative studies about the economic voting in Turkey will take place as an introductory level meta-analysis. At the final part of the paper, data collected through face to face surveys will be analyzed.

Theoretical Discussion

Economic voting approach assumes that voters’ decision in elections is based on their evaluations about the economy. The voter behaves to maximize his/her utility measured in economic terms: if the real income of the voter increases during the reign of the incumbent party she tends to vote for the incumbent. On the contrary if voter’s real income decreases, or she loses her job, she tends to punish the incumbent. This assumption is highly based on the rational voter of Downs (1957). Fiorina (1978) attempted to present this link empirically. His analysis of the National Election Surveys between 1956-1974 presented that personal economic conditions determine voting decision in presidential elections (p.440). Kinder and Kieweit challenged this approach of “pocketbook” voting, through their findings that voters who felt national business conditions had recently worsened, were consistently more likely to vote against congressional candidates of the president’s party, than voters who believed conditions had improved (1978). This brought us the distinction between sociotropic vs. pocketbook voting. According to advocates of sociotropic voting, voters care about overall economic conditions; while the second type evaluates her personal economic situation.

Another important objection was about time. Kuklinski and West (1981) argued that economic voting perspective had to employ future oriented economic evaluations than past oriented items (p.75). Their findings were one of first examples of retrospective-prospective economic voting debate. According to supporters of retrospective economic voting, voters consider the past performance of the government, while other part underlines importance of future expectations.

These theoretical distinctions have been echoed in increasing interest in the field and economic voting paradigm highly dominated as an explanation of

voting behavior. According to Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier (2007) the number of articles and books on economic and elections was over pieces. Detailed comparative studies showed that there is a strong statistical link between economic evaluations of voters and their tendencies to vote for/against the incumbent party.

Sears et. al (1983) found that self-interest of voters didn't play any significant role, while symbolic attitudes such as party identification and ideology, had stronger effects (p.679). Authors explain this situation with difficulty of defining "self-interest" as a result of complexity of the real world and uncertainty. According to them, voters may use group identity, ideology or other tools as acting as "self-interest by proxy". Meaning that, voters cannot be aware of their objective economic interests and they can use other variables to forecast these interests (p.681).

This problem of "unsophisticated" voter and uncertainty embedded in the economy creates important logical implications. According to Peffley (1984) *"the linkages between the macro economy and national politics are usually so complex that even economic experts disagree how such information should be interpreted"*. Voters solve this problem of responsibility through preconceptions formed over a long time period (p.104).

Perceptions about economic facts and above discussed uncertainty are the most problematic side of the economic voting approach. Several studies showed that respondents don't have sufficient information about the economy (Paldam and Nannestad, 1997), they learn through media and mass media may tend to over-report negative economic conditions (Goidel and Langley, 1995). As Anderson states (2007):

"Citizens take shortcuts to make sense of their environment, and they prefer to avoid inconsistencies in their behaviors and attitudes. Thus, partisans are likely to form evaluations of the state of the economy to be consistent with their previously held beliefs." (p.280).

If partisan affiliation of voters is related with economic evaluations; explaining voting behavior with economic evaluations means explaining voting behavior with partisan affiliation; which doesn't have any novelty. This possibility occupies an important place in today's discussion about the validity of economic voting.

A group of scholars believe that uncertainty embedded in economic perceptions of voters is too high and voters had to use several heuristics to reduce this uncertainty. One of these heuristics is ideology as Downs and some followers argued. Self-positioning of voters vis-à-vis competing political parties and distance between voters and political parties may act as a heuristic tool, and as distance between party and voter may help voter to assess its performance (Greene et. al., 2002).

Another heuristic tool may be identity based. If voters fail to calculate how economic environment will affect their personal situation; they can use their group identity as a clue. For example, if a voter thinks that the government policies hurt the middle class, and she identifies herself with the middle class, she will tend to punish the government (Duch et. al, 2000. p.638).

The role of the media is very critical. As it is assumed that voters lack sufficient information to evaluate economic developments, media coverage may act as a clue for assessing economic conditions. De Boef and Kellstedt (2004) showed that news coverage directly affects economic approval, highly correlated presidential popularity (p.647). Sanders and Gavin (2004) presents findings that more positive economic coverage leads to an increase in personal expectation (p.1261).

The prominent political scientist Lewis-Beck defines these objections to economic voting perspective as “revisionist” since these alternative explanations argue *“one’s political orientation influences how one responds to questions about the performance of the economy. In other words, the causal arrow between the economy and politics is reversed”*” (Evans and Andersen cf. Lewis-Beck et.al , 2008, p.84). Lewis-Beck and other authors argue that this causality issue has to be solved with a detailed analysis of the panel data which is rarely used for testing implications and assumptions of economic voting perspective (p.85).

Discussion between the revisionists and advocates of the economic voting approach is still inconclusive. The revisionist side emphasize on strength of partisanship effect (Anderson and O’Connor, 2000, Anderson, 2004, 2007; Evans and Andersen, 2006; Ladner and Wleizen, 2007;; Lau et. al 2008) while other party underlines validity of their findings by using cross-country data (Nadeau et. al., 2011) or using different questionnaires (Lewis-Beck and Nadeau, 2009) and field survey experiments (Tilley and Hobolt, 2011). A conceptual shift also is observable by re-introducing “positional economic voting” and “patrimony” (Lewis-Beck et. al, 2012).

At this point, we have to underline a distinction between micro and macro level test of the economic voting hypothesis. First examples of this literature were emphasized on macro level indicators such as inflation, economic growth and dependent variable of these models wasvote of the incumbent party (Hibbs, 1987; Fair, 2002; Erikson, 1989).

In his early paper, Kramer (1983) argues that *“individual-level survey data, at least when analyzed with the usual methods, are not really very useful for studying the effects of short-term economic fluctuations on individual voting decisions”* (p94) and he concludes : *“the aggregate-level estimate is reasonably successful in estimating the net effect of economic circumstances on voting behavior”* (p.106).

Difference between performances of micro and macro level analyses of economic voting depends to several factors discussed by Erikson (2004). According to him, the most important of these factors is the bias of respondents and rationalization of their survey responses according to their partisan affiliations (p.42).

Nevertheless, as this discussion shows the basic premises of the economic voting approach are questionable at least at the micro level and it is agreed on the fact that basic data drawn by public opinion surveys are not sufficient to test assumptions of this approach and the problem of causality is not solved yet.

At this point, we want to analyze discussions in the context of Turkey, where basic arguments of economic voting approach are newly transferred to the Turkish case and it seems that a consensus on validity of economic explanations.

Examples from Turkey

Economic voting approach has been extensively employed in explaining voting behavior of Turkish voters, especially after general elections of 2002. Experts seeking to understand the exceptional three-in row success of the AKP during 2000s emphasized on improved economic conditions of citizens, observed as higher rates of economic growth and lower inflation rates. This economic oriented explanation of the AKP's victory is also echoed on non-scholarly work such as public opinion. Post-election surveys and exit polls provided abundant evidence for supremacy of economic priorities on voters' decision making process¹.

Scholarly attention to economic factors as determinants of party preferences of Turkish voters is not merely new. Macro level approach using macroeconomic variables has been widely employed. Bulutay and Yıldırım (1969) is first example attempting to explain the incumbent party voting during 1950s and 1960s with changes in agricultural prices and they conclude that a minimum of 5 percent growth is needed by the incumbent party to keep its vote share (p.20). Ergüder (1981) explained support for political parties with socioeconomic variables measured at the provincial level (p.50). However, first systematic attempt to develop a general model parallel to the economic voting literature came from Çarkoğlu (1997). Çarkoğlu explained

1 Bekir Ağırır, Radikal, "Seçmenin Röntgeni", July 25th, 2007, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=227892>; Milliyet, "Oylar Kime, Neden Verildi?", July 25th, 2007, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2007/07/25/siyaset/axsiy03.html>; Metropoll, "Türkiye'de Siyasal Durum Araştırması," July 27th, <http://www.metropoll.com.tr/report/turkiyede-siyasal-durum-arastirmasi-agustos-2007>; Adil Gür, Hürriyet, "Halk Hizmeti Seçti", June 14th, 2011, <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/ShowNew.aspx?id=18026259>; Akşam, "Seçim Sonrası İlk Anket", July 2nd, 2011, <http://www.aksam.com.tr/secim-sonrasi-ilk-anket--51812h.html>; Ipsos KMG SRI, "Sandık Sonrası Araştırması", June 12th, http://www.ipsos-kmg.com/sites/default/files/Ipsos%20KMG_SRI_Sand%20B1k%20Sonras%20B1%20Ara%20C5%9Ft%20B1rmas%20B1_RAPOR_12.06.2011.pdf

the incumbent support with change in de gross domestic product, inflation and other factors and concluded that “*similar to all modern democracies, the only persistent major factor in all of the Turkish multi-party politics period has been the influence of economic problems.*” (p. 79).

Akarca and Tansel (2002) analyzed the general elections of 1995 by using provincial level data and showed that Turkish voters are taking economic developments into consideration however voters were only focusing the economic performance of the election year. In 2006, same authors enhanced their models to 25 general and local elections between 1950-2004, using time series data. By using growth rate per capita, inflation, number of years the major incumbent party and some other political and systemic level variables, they noted that growth rate of the year before the election and inflation rates directly affect the incumbent party’s vote share (s.88). Akarca (2009) used this model to estimate the AKP’s vote share in the March 29th local elections. His estimation was about 40 percent for the AKP and actual results were not different than this estimation. However, in a recent paper published just before the general elections of June 2011, he estimated the AKP’s vote as 44 percent, 6 points lower than actual results (2011). Toros (2011) also made an estimation based the performance in local elections, economic growth and a political dummy representing “political structure”. Although his model worked well in ex post facto, for previous elections; his estimation was 12 point lower than the general elections (p.1255). Reasons of this performance are numerous and need further elaboration. Nevertheless, popularity of this approach gives some idea about people’s tendency to be convinced by economic explanations.

Meanwhile, micro-level studies showing the validity of economic voting approach are very limited. Although several authors showed importance of economy as a determinant of party preference of Turkish voters; identity based explanations such as religiosity or left-right positioning were more popular (Esmer, 2002, 2007; Kalaycıoğlu, 1994, 2010; Akarca and Başlevent, 2009). Çarkoğlu and Toprak (2000) are first authors incorporating perceptions of voters as explanatory factors of voters’ choices in the general elections of 1999. Their analysis showed that as voters become angry towards economic conditions of the country, their tendencies to vote for the DSP (major opposition party) increased by two times (p.115).

The general elections of 2002, following the economic crisis of 2001 provided abundant data for advocates of economic voting approach. Başlevent, Kirmanoğlu and Şenatalar (2005) used survey data, and they showed that all kind of economic voting variables are powerful and significant determinants of party preferences of voters. As their retrospective evaluations worsen, they tend to punish incumbent parties (p.558). Hazama (2006) reached to

similar conclusions by using another data set: “*The personal economy and the national economy had both independent and common effects on voting decisions. Relatively speaking, voters gave due consideration to the personal economy for retrospective voting and the national economy for prospective voting*” (p.15). Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu (2007) analyzed their own dataset and concluded that economic evaluations were insignificant as determinants of party choice, and according to them it was a result of the economic crisis pushing voters to punish all government parties (p.197).

The second electoral victory of the AKP was surprising for many; however it created a significant opportunity space for economic voting explanations. Çarkoğlu (2008) analyses different factors affecting voting preference of voters and concludes that: “*Economic issues or evaluation of the government’s economic policy performance as well as the two ideological variables appear most persistently significant in shaping voter decision*” (p.340). According to Akarca and Başlevant (2010), voters considered economic performance of the government and as satisfaction with the economy increases by 1 point, propensity to vote for the AKP increases by 1.5 points (p.12).

Although there are abundant non-scholar works attributing the third victory of the AKP in 2011, to the economic performance of the government; only one detailed study is available. A very recent piece of Yılmaz, Aygören and Özdemir (2012) shows that as voters become optimistic about prospective economic evaluations, they tend to vote for the AKP, than the CHP (p.36). We believe that number of articles including this micro level approach will increase with time.

An early signal for revisionism in the validity of economic voting approach in the Turkish context comes from Çarkoğlu (2012). In his article entitled as “*Economic evaluations vs. ideology: Diagnosing the sources of electoral change in Turkey*”, he elaborates findings of different survey research data and analyses incumbency voting for 2002, 2007 and 2011 general elections. His findings show that “*the influences of economic evaluations that clearly benefit the AKP government have declined for the 2011*”. According to him longer term ideological commitments became important factors as determinants of voting behavior (p.7).

Hazama (2012) wrote another early example of revisionism in the Turkish context. By using macro level variables (vote swing as dependent variable and economic growth as independent variable) and controlling for duration of incumbency and election type, Hazama presented a clear connection between economic and following electoral performance of the government (p.11).

Previously discussed macro-micro distinction also matters in the Turkish context. Similar to other examples, first studies used macro level data and showed a clear connection between macroeconomic performance

of governing parties and the incumbent support in the following elections. Exploitation of survey data for testing economic voting hypotheses is a merely new phenomenon and as it is observed; there is no standardized batteries for measuring economic evaluations in a comparative way and data opportunities are highly limited.

However, there is a consensus among practitioners of the discipline about measuring economic perceptions and forecasting vote share of the government party. It seems that micro level implications of economic voting dominate the analysis of voting behavior of Turkish voters and revisionism led by Anderson and others are not echoed in the Turkish context.

In the following parts of the paper, we will present some evidence for the argument that economic perceptions of Turkish voters are highly biased according to their party preferences. It is possible to use these findings to falsify economic voting hypothesis, at least in the Turkish context; and other explanations for partisan support may attract attention for scholarly work. Ideology (both in terms of left-right and religiosity dimensions) (Çarkoğlu, 2012); evaluation of voters about public services (Hazama, 2012), leader (Holmberg and Oscarsson, 2011) and media effects (Yavuz, 2012) are among other possible explanations.

Meanwhile, these findings don't lead to conclusion that Turkish voters are immune to macroeconomic developments. As it is presented by different macro level studies, economic indicators, especially economic growth gives an important clue about future electoral performance. Consequently, findings may be interpreted in a minimalist way, to ask questions about the validity of micro level measurement of economic evaluations, in other ways measuring economic perceptions of citizens through survey questions.

Findings

Methodology:

In order to test validity of basic premises of the economic voting approach, a fieldwork has been conducted in Istanbul, with participation of 900 individuals from 150 neighborhoods of Istanbul. Neighborhoods are selected through probability proportionate to size (PPS) methodology, by using population figures of 2010. Interviewees are selected through randomization, by using a specific Kish table. All interviews are completed between May 10th and 24th, 2011.

Independent Variables

In the following parts of the paper, a set of multivariate analyses will be conducted to show how economic voting approach is useful to explain party preferences of voters. Moreover, another group of multivariate analyses will

be used to show how voters' perceptions about the economy are biased and how these biases are affected by partisan choices. In these models, some basic independent variables will be employed.

First of all, demographic variables are included to models. Gender is included to test gender gap hypothesis. According to this hypothesis, women and men vote differently because their evaluation procedure is significantly different. (Ingelhart and Norris, 2000). We included age to observe whether there is a generation gap among voters. (Dalton, 2000) Finally level of education is included to the model to observe effect of education on voting preferences (Turan, 2007; Kalaycıoğlu, 1994).

Second set of variables are borrowed from different surveys. In order to make our findings comparable we didn't intervene original wording of these questions, with one exception. Left-right self-positioning stated as the most important determinant of voting behavior and religiosity as another indicator of value system of respondent (Kalaycıoğlu, 1994, 2010; Esmer, 2002, 2007) are asked in the standard format of the World Values Survey.

Average left right self-positioning of voters is 5.92 over 10 (standard error= 0.1). This score is very close to figures obtained from the last available IRI Survey in 2011², calculated as 5,68 with a standard error of 0.1. Average religiosity score is 7.12 over 10 with a standard error of 0.08; in the IRI's survey this score is 7.29 (standard error=0.1). Finally average nationalism score of participants is 7,24 (standard error=0.09), a very close score to the IRI's 7.3 (standard error=0.8). Socioeconomic status, calculated by using monthly household income and ownership changes between 0 to 14 and it has a mean of 8.7 (with a standard error of 0.11).

Measuring and Demonstrating the Power of Economic Voting

Four different types of economic voting behavior, based on two different dimensions are measured by asking evaluations of participants on economy with four different questions³.

2 The International Republican Institute conducts regular public opinion polls in Turkey. Findings of these surveys are available at the country page of the IRI-Turkey. Figures are calculated by the author by using data presented in this website <http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2011%20March%201%20Survey%20of%20Turkish%20Public%20Opinion,%20December%2018,%202010-January%204,%202011.pdf>

3 Wording of questions are available at the above link

Table 1. Economic Evaluations

| | Positive | Neutral | Negative | Average | Std. Err |
|----------------------------------|----------|---------|----------|---------|----------|
| Sociotropic-Retrospective | 47.7% | 11.7% | 40.6% | 3.06 | 0.05 |
| Sociotropic-Prospective | 42.7% | 22.6% | 34.7% | 3.10 | 0.04 |
| Pocketbook-Retrospective | 33.7% | 30.0% | 36.3% | 2.92 | 0.04 |
| Prospective-Pocketbook | 37.2% | 39.0% | 23.1% | 3.17 | 0.03 |

Emphasis on cumulative scores of evaluations shows that participants are sharply divided. Voters having a positive retrospective sociotropic evaluation form 47 percent of sample, while sum of negative answers is about 40 percent. If we emphasize on prospective sociotropic evaluations, we observe that percentage of optimists increases to 41.7 percent, while one third of voters has negative expectations. Difference between retrospective and prospective evaluations most probably stems of neutral answers. In the case of retrospective voting, percentage of neutral answers was about 12, while it increased to 23 percent when they're asked to state their future expectations. We can attribute this difference to uncertainty embedded in the future.

Comparison of answers given to pocketbook voting questions presents parallel findings. One third of respondents stated positive retrospective evaluations about their own financial situations; meanwhile another one third of them gave negative answers. Proportion of neutral answers is about 30 percent. When prospective evaluations are asked, percentage of optimists increased by 4 points and became 37 percent; percentage of pessimists declined by 13 points and became 23 percent. Such a change is also observed in the neutral answers, with an increase by 9 points, 40 percent of voters said that they don't expect any significant change in their personal financial situations. This difference also may be attributed to perceived uncertainty.

Above table also shows significant differences between sociotropic and pocketbook evaluations. Difference between sociotropic and pocketbook retrospective positive evaluations is 14 percent, and it's about 5 point in the case of prospective evaluations. Neutral answers also declined by 19 and 17 points, in evaluating sociotropic economic conditions. The role of uncertainty in the relationship between retrospective and prospective, sociotropic and pocketbook explanations of economic voting is complex and beyond the limits of this paper.

There are a lot statistical alternatives to estimate partisan choice by using a multivariate model. In order to keep it as simple as possible, we preferred to use logistic regression model in which dependent variable is whether respondent stated party X or not, as his/her party preference in the forthcoming general elections.

Table 2. Explaining Party Choice (AKP and CHP)- Logistic Regression Results

| Variable Set | Definition | AKP | | CHP | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------|------|--------|------|
| | | Exp(B) | Sig. | Exp(B) | Sig. |
| Gender | Male=1 | 0.95 | 0.84 | 0.87 | 0.61 |
| Age | Age | 1.00 | 0.70 | 1.01 | 0.39 |
| Education | | | 0.27 | | 0.41 |
| | Less than primary | 1.15 | 0.88 | 2.47 | 0.38 |
| | Primary and Secondary | 1.97 | 0.06 | 0.66 | 0.28 |
| | Lycee | 1.38 | 0.37 | 0.89 | 0.73 |
| Socioeconomic Status | | 0.94 | 0.10 | 1.14 | 0.02 |
| Values | Turkish Nationalism Scale | 0.91 | 0.04 | 1.27 | 0.00 |
| | Left-Right Self Positioning | 1.25 | 0.00 | 0.58 | 0.00 |
| | Religiosity Scale | 1.29 | 0.00 | 0.73 | 0.00 |
| Economic Voting Variables | Retrospective-Sociotropic | 1.66 | 0.00 | 0.62 | 0.00 |
| | Prospective-Sociotropic | 2.07 | 0.00 | 0.81 | 0.15 |
| | Retrospective-Pocketbook | 1.19 | 0.17 | 1.00 | 0.99 |
| | Prospective-Pocketbook | 1.52 | 0.01 | 0.87 | 0.41 |
| Constant | | 0.00 | 0.00 | 23.3 | 0.00 |
| | | | | | |
| Nagelkerke R-Square | | 0.61 | | 0.61 | |
| Percent Correct | | 83,8 | | 83,3 | |

Above table shows results of logistic regression analysis in which tendency to vote for the AKP in June 12th general elections is dependent variable. Figures presented in the table are odds ratio and significance scores of variables. Odds ratios indicate relative probability of voting for the AKP when independent variable equals to a given score; to probability of voting for another party. For example, odds ratio of gender is 0.96, meaning that probability of voting for the AKP for a male participant is 0.95 times of a female one. In other words, women more inclined to vote for the AKP. However, as the last column shows this score is not significant (probability of being equal to 0 is 85 percent) and statistically nonexistent. Age also is another insignificant determinant of voting tendency for the AKP ($\exp(b)=1$). Level of education has an overall significant effect on this preference, however above table shows that graduates of primary and secondary school tends more

to vote for the AKP (1.97 times higher) compared to university graduates. As socioeconomic status of respondent increases by 1 points, her propensity to vote for the AKP declines by 5 percent.

When we emphasize on values, we observe that self-perception as a Turkish nationalist reduces tendency for voting for the AKP. One point increase in this scale leads 0.09 points decline in the probability for voting for the AKP. If voters locate themselves in the right of political spectrum, they tend more to vote for the AKP. One point difference towards the right end of the continuum increases probability of voting for the AKP by 24 percent. Finally and not surprisingly more religious voters have more tendencies to vote for the incumbent party. Odds ratio is 1.30, showing that one point difference in the religiosity scale results to 30 percent increase in this probability.

Table also shows that economic evaluations have a direct effect on the choice of voters. All coefficients except retrospective-pocketbook voting are statistically significant and substantially contribute to probability of voting the AKP. As prospective-sociotropic voting increases by 1 point, probability of voting for the AKP doubles. Contribution of retrospective-sociotropic voting is 67 percent increase while one point difference in prospective pocketbook voting is 50 percent. These scores are considerably high presenting clear evidence for the validity of economic voting.

Observed difference between sociotropic and pocketbook voting may be explained by some cultural characteristics such as altruism or communitarian values. And, higher explanatory power of prospective economic voting vis-à-vis retrospective voting may be attributed to the baseline effect. Since the world economy experienced and still experiences a longitudinal crisis, voters have more reasons to be hopeful about relative improvement in their future welfare. However, this discussion is beyond the scope of this paper.

Economic voting approach also functions well in explaining voting for the CHP, the major opponent party. Demographic variables –including education– don't have any statistically significant effect, except socioeconomic status. As socioeconomic status increases, one's tendency to vote for the CHP also increases. Since the CHP is accepted as a leftist party, it's not surprising that left oriented voters tend more to vote for the CHP. One point shift to right in the political spectrum leads 42 percent decline in probability of voting for this party. However, strong relation with Turkish nationalism scale is more surprising. As one voter perceives himself more Turkish nationalistic by one points, his probability for voting for the CHP increases by 27 percent. Replication of this finding at the national level will give an important clue about leftist orientation of this party. As a clear indicator of the secularist position of the constituency, there is a negative correlation between religiosity of voter and propensity to vote for the CHP.

Perceptions of voters about the economic situation are not equally powerful with above discussed values dimension. Sole significant relationship exists between retrospective-sociotropic voting and tendency to vote for the CHP. If a voter has a positive evaluation about economic performance of the country for last five years, his/her tendency to vote for the CHP declines by 37 percent. Prospective-sociotropic voting has also a negative effect; however this score is not statistically significant.

Table 3. Index of Economic Evaluations

| | Factor Loadings |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| Retrospective-Sociotropic | 0.83 |
| Prospective-Sociotropic | 0.83 |
| Retrospective-Pocketbook | 0.79 |
| Prospective-Pocketbook | 0.78 |
| Explained Variance: | 64.9% |

In order to use in the following sections of the paper, a single dimension highly correlated with economic evaluations is obtained and it is used as index of positive economic evaluations. As voters have positive evaluations, this index comes closer to 3 and negative economic evaluations are represented in negative numbers with a lower limit of -3.

Measuring Bias in Economic Evaluations

In order to show partisan bias in economic evaluations we asked a couple of questions about the economic situation. These questions were about inflation, unemployment, poverty and economic growth. There is no reason to assume that voters have perfect knowledge about complex statistical figures. However, we assumed that each voter can have an idea about the direction of economy, and even economic performance indicators; and he can give a rough answer to questions about direction.

Table 4. Inflation of the Last 4 Years and Party Preference⁴

| | AKP | CHP | BDP | MHP | Overall |
|---------------------------------|--------|-------|-------|-------|---------|
| Less than or equal to 100 Kuruş | 37.7% | 9.0% | 18.0% | 8.2% | 21.4% |
| 101-120 Kuruş | 31.8% | 20.6% | 15.5% | 27.6% | 25.9% |
| 121-140 Kuruş | 11.8% | 28.3% | 26.3% | 23.4% | 18.8% |
| More than 140 Kuruş | 8.7% | 34.7% | 37.5% | 32.4% | 23.0% |
| Don't Know | 10.00% | 7.40% | 2.80% | 8.50% | 10.90% |

Table presents evaluations of voters about inflation rates of the last 4 years, showing that 21 percent voters believe that prices declined or didn't change since 2007. About one fourth of voters answered as between 101 and 120 Kuruş, indicating a lower level of inflation. Percentage of those said 121 to 140 Kuruş is about 20 percent. One quarter of respondents said that they would pay more than 140 Kuruş and 11 percent didn't give any answer. Considering that consumer prices index increased by 27 percent during this period, it's clear that voters have no clear idea about inflation rates.

Our data shows that there is a clear difference between parties' constituencies about estimated inflation rates. AKP voters have a very positive perception about inflation rates. 40 percent of them said that consumer prices didn't change or declined during the AKP rule, while one third envisioned significant low levels of price change. Only 12 percent of them accomplished to give the correct answer.

On the contrary, voters of major opposition parties are much more pessimistic. 35 percent of CHP voters believe that the country experienced a cumulative inflation rate of 40 percent during last four years. 28 of them gave the correct answer and percentage of optimists became about 30 percent. Similarly, one third of MHP voters answered this question as more than 40 percent, while proportion of optimists remained about 35 percent. This picture is similar for BDP voters.

A simple statistical test shows that there is a significant relationship between party preferences and inflation estimations. Chi-square is calculated as 150.1 and Cramer's V indicating power of the relationship is 0.20.

⁴ Wording of question is as follows: "How many *kuruş* do you pay today for a good you would buy at 100 *kuruş* in 2007?"

Table 5. . Perceptions about Unemployment and Party Preference⁵

| | AKP | CHP | BDP | MHP | Overall |
|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---------|
| Declined | 56.4% | 19.2% | 25.2% | 21.4% | 38.8% |
| Increased | 38.6% | 80.2% | 69.6% | 77.3% | 54.2% |
| Don't Know | 5.1% | 0.6% | 5.2% | 1.3% | 7.0% |

According to the figures of the Central Bank, unemployment ratio didn't change and remained at 9.2 percent while number of unemployed people increased to 2.85 million in 2011 from 2.11 million in 2007 as a result of increase in working age population⁶. Meanwhile, above table shows that a significant proportion of voters observed a decline in unemployment. 40 percent of voters answered this question as "declined". This score is 56 percent among AKP voters presenting a very optimistic voter base. Voters of opposition parties are not optimistic to this degree. Proportion of those observed a decline is about 20 to 25 percent among voters of the CHP and the MHP. Chi-square is calculated as 222.1 and Cramer's V is 0.24 indicating a moderate relationship.

Table 6. Perceptions about Poverty and Party Preference⁷

| | AKP | CHP | BDP | MHP | Overall |
|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---------|
| Declined | 66.1% | 13.5% | 17.1% | 20.2% | 37.9% |
| Increased | 30.2% | 83.8% | 79.5% | 75.5% | 58.1% |
| Don't Know | 3.7% | 2.6% | 3.4% | 4.3% | 4.0% |

Poverty is another economic dimension in which we tried to learn voters' perception about performance of the government. We asked participants whether the poverty in our country declined during last five years or not.

Compared to inflation and unemployment, voters' perceptions about poverty are more pessimistic. About 60 percent of voters believe that poverty in our country increased, while remaining 40 percent thinks that it declined. There is no single and widely accepted indicator of poverty, however the official statistics show that poverty declined or remained same between 2007 and 2009⁸. Last two years of economic crisis might lead a significant increase

⁵ Wording of question is as follows: "Do you think that unemployment in our country increased or decreased since 2007?"

⁶ Data available at <http://evds.tcmb.gov.tr/>

⁷ Wording of question is as follows: "Do you think that poverty in our country increased or declined since 2007?"

⁸ According to the last available official statistics, food based poverty remained same at 0.48 percent; income based (less than 4,35 USD per capita per day) poverty declined to 4,35 percent from 8,41 percent and relative poverty remained same. The Poverty and Income Statistics, http://www.tuik.gov.tr/PreHaberBultenleri.do?id=6365&tb_id=1

in poverty; however we can still talk about a perception gap in this dimension.

There is a significant difference between perceptions on poverty of different party bases. Two third of the AKP supporters think that poverty declined during last four years, almost doubling average score of voters. Meanwhile, 84 percent of voters of the CHP and 76 percent of supporters of the MHP believes that poverty increased since 2007, under the rule of the AKP. This difference is statistically significant with a Chi-square score of 221 and Cramer's V of 0.25 showing a moderate relationship.

Table 7. Perceptions about Economic Growth and Party Preference⁹

| | AKP | CHP | BDP | MHP | Overall |
|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---------|
| Shrank | 12.7% | 50.3% | 30.4% | 41.9% | 23.0% |
| Grown | 82.5% | 44.9% | 56.4% | 53.2% | 68.4% |
| Don't Know | 4.8% | 4.8% | 13.2% | 4.9% | 8.6% |

The last economic dimension, in which we tried to measure perceptions about the government performance, is economic growth. More than half of voters believe that economy of Turkey grown since 2007, under the rule of the AKP, meanwhile 30 percent of voters disagree with this argument. According to data provided by the Central Bank, Turkish economy has grown by 13 percent (fixed prices) and 57 percent (current prices) between 2007 and 2011.

By using perceptions about major economic dimensions such as inflation, economic growth and poverty, we developed a single scale. Answers are recoded to measure level of bias. If respondent's has a better expectation than official figures, his/her score became positive; in the opposite case this score was negative. Correct estimations are recoded to 0.

Table 8. Results of Factor Analysis of Economic Estimations

| | Factor 1 |
|-----------------------------|----------|
| Inflation Estimation | 0.68 |
| Unemployment | 0.78 |
| Poverty | 0.82 |
| Economic Growth | 0.67 |
| Explained Variance | 53% |

A factor analysis of data allowed us to produce a single dimension with

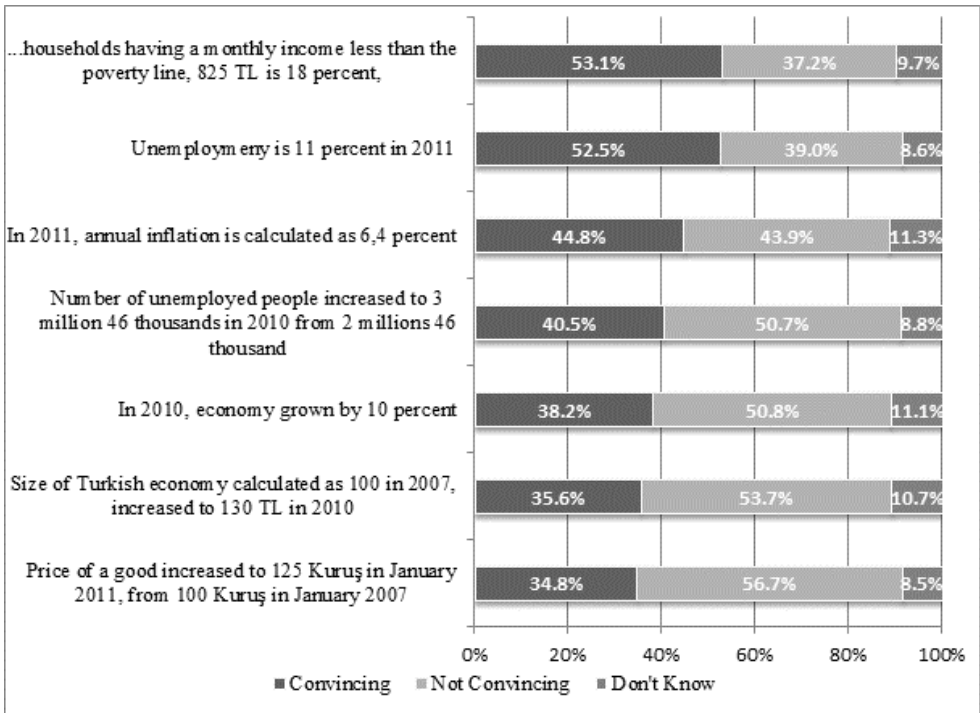
⁹ Wording of question is as follows: "Do you think that economy of our country grown or shrank since 2007?"

an explained variance of 53 percent. Factor loadings shows that almost all variables have equal loadings to this new dimension which we are labeling as “Optimistic Bias” since higher scores represent more optimistic stands on economic issues and lower scores indicates more pessimistic estimations.

Another Method to Measure Bias

In order to measure partisan bias in economic evaluations, another group of questions are asked to participants. Some official figures about the economy are red out –randomly to prevent a possibility of response set- and respondents are asked to state whether they found each figure convincing or not. Answer set was a 4 item scale from 1 “Totally not convincing” to 4 “Totally convincing”. Descriptive statistics are presented below. In each item 8 to 10 percent of respondents failed to give any answer.

Figure 1. “How Convincing the Official Statistics are?”



Some official statistics about the economy are not found convincing by voters. 60 percent of voters don't believe in inflation index showing 25

percent inflation between 2007 and 2011. More than 50 percent doesn't find convincing 30 percent economic growth. About 50 percent of voters don't believe in official figures about economic growth and number of unemployed people. Ironically once percentages are replaced with real figures and an anchor is included, statistics become more convincing with an increase of 12 percent. Figures about households living under the poverty line are accepted as the most convincing one with unemployment rates.

Considering the fact that only official figures are presented to participants, such a high level of denial leads us to think about validity of economic perceptions. If people don't believe in official statistics –and a small manipulation changes their idea as it is observed above- how do they interpret economic situation? A possible answer is that since majority of voters don't have enough information to interpret sophisticated economic figures, they can replace it with a heuristic tool and party affiliation is the most prominent candidate for this heuristic tool.

Table 9. “How Convincing Official Statistics are” and Party Preference (Averages over 4)

| | AKP | CHP | BDP | MHP | Overall |
|---|-----------------------|-------------------|------|------|---------|
| | A | B | C | D | |
| Price of a good increased to 125 Kuruş in January 2011, from 100 Kuruş in January 2007 | 2.73 | 2.67 | 2.73 | 2.56 | 2.70 |
| Size of Turkish economy calculated as 100 in 2007, increased to 130 TL in 2010 | 3.18 ^{b,c,d} | 2.21 | 2.34 | 2.28 | 2.65 |
| Number of unemployed people increased to 3 million 46 thousands in 2010 from 2 million 46 thousand | 2.43 | 2.73 ^a | 2.67 | 2.46 | 2.57 |
| In 2010. economy grown by 10 percent | 3.20 ^{b,c,d} | 2.12 | 2.01 | 2.09 | 2.56 |
| In 2011, annual inflation is calculated as 6,4 percent | 2.73 ^{b,c,d} | 2.04 | 2.16 | 2.14 | 2.36 |
| Unemployment is 11 percent in 2011 | 2.73 ^{b,c,d} | 1.83 | 1.91 | 2.00 | 2.25 |
| ...households having a monthly income less than the poverty line, 825 TL is 18 percent, | 2.66 ^{b,c,d} | 1.79 | 1.92 | 1.92 | 2.19 |

- Superscripts show statistically significant differences in bi-party comparisons, (t-test, with $p. < 0.05$)

Comparing different party constituencies on their opinions about official statistics puts interesting results. First of all, table shows that there are no

significant differences in ideas about inflation rate between 2007 and 2011. In the case of unemployment, the AKP constituency is highly convinced by figures presented in percentages, but when real figures replace percentages they become equally suspicious. Another ironic finding is that talking about real numbers affected opposition parties' supporters positively. In the first case average score was 1.83 for the CHP and 2 for MHP voters; in the second formulation both scores increased to 2.73 and 2.46 respectively. We can attribute this shift to conception of "unemployment" on the eye of voters; however it needs further elaboration and perhaps some experimental field work.

In the remaining indicators, voters of the AKP seem to be much more convinced by official statistics compared to other parties' bases. Difference in the case of economic growth is about 1 point and it decreases to 0.7 points in the case of poverty.

Second method to measure bias is derived from answers given to questions about convincingness of the official statistics. In order to keep inter-party variation, question about unemployment giving real figures has been excluded from analysis. Factor analysis produced a single dimension explaining 44 percent of total variation.

Table 10. Results of Factor Analysis: Accuracy Bias

| | Loadings |
|---|----------|
| Price of a good increased to 125 Kuruş in January 2011, from 100 Kuruş in January 2007 | 0.49 |
| Size of Turkish economy calculated as 100 in 2007, increased to 130 TL in 2010 | 0.72 |
| In 2010, economy grown by 10 percent | 0.74 |
| In 2011, annual inflation is calculated as 6,4 percent | 0.62 |
| Unemployment is 11 percent in 2011 | 0.69 |
| ...households having a monthly income less than the poverty line 825 TL, is 18 percent, | 0.68 |
| Explained Variance | 67% |

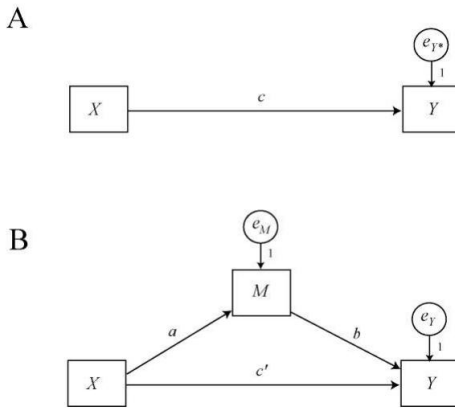
Almost all variables have similar factor loadings to this single dimension. We labeled it as "Accuracy Bias" since higher scores in this factor indicates that voter is convinced by the official statistics and the lower end means the opposite.

Determinants of Optimistic and Accuracy Biases

Our descriptive and preliminary analyses of data gave noteworthy impression about existence of a partisan bias in evaluating economic performance of the government, hence the economic oriented voting behavior of voters. In order to conduct multivariate analyses and to draw a causal link

we preferred to make a statistical mediation analysis with structural equation modeling. Major objective of this method is to discover direct and indirect effects of variables employed in the model on a given dependent variable (Preacher and Hayes, 2008; Hayes, 2009; Imai et al, 2010). First of all, we need to present a general picture of mediation analysis of our paper.

Figure 2. Statistical Mediation Model



Basic mediation model is presented above. Y stands for independent variable where X is independent variable and M is mediating variable. There are alternative ways of estimating these coefficients however a series of regression analyses may be useful by using these three equations:

$$(1) M = i_1 + aX + e_M$$

$$(2) Y = i_2 + c'X + bM + e_Y$$

$$(3) Y = i_3 + cX + e_Y$$

By using above notation (c) stands for “total effect” of X on Y, presenting c point increase as a result of 1 point increase in X. (c’) measures same increase, but after controlling for M, the mediating variable and it is defined as “direct effect” meanwhile (b) in the same equation means 1 point change in the mediating variable results on (b) points change in dependent variable. Finally (a) shows how independent variable affects the mediating variable with 1 point change. “Indirect effect” of X is calculated as the product of (a) and (b) and presents how X influences Y through M (Hayes and Preacher, 2012; p.9).

In this simple model, quantities of interest and possible scenarios are as follows:

1) (c') and (b) are statistically significant but (a) is insignificant, meaning that both X and M affect Y but M doesn't play any moderating role;

2) (c') is statistically insignificant but (a) and (b) are significant, it means that all effect of X on Y is through M;

3) All coefficients are significant, showing that X has both "direct" and "indirect" effects on Y. In this case, ratio of indirect effect to total effect deserves special attention.

In our context, both Optimistic and Accuracy Biases play a mediation role between party preference and economic evaluations. It is so far argued that economic evaluations are significantly biased as a result of several factors from difficulties in attributing responsibility of economic developments, impact of media and other information channels as frame makers and uncertainty embedded in outcomes of economic policies. Under this highly uncertain conditions party affiliation of a typical voter functions as a heuristic tool. By using terminology of statistical mediation analysis we expect (c) and (c') coefficients to be statistically significant. Meanwhile, partisan affiliation also affects interpretation of economic data, and voters interpret available economic data in a highly biased manner. In our model, it means statistically significant a coefficient for partisan preference. Finally we think that biased information affects economic evaluations, voters having more optimistic perceptions about economy (Optimistic Bias) and tended to perceive the official data more accurate (Accuracy Bias); have more positive evaluations about the economy. Consequently, it is expected to have statistically significant b coefficients, showing how much mediating variable affect outcome.

It is possible to present our model as follows:

$$(4) Y = i_1 + c'X + b_1M_1 + b_2M_2 + \sum_1^j d_jW_j + e_1$$

$$(5) M_1 = i_2 + a_1X + \sum_1^j d_jW_j + e_2$$

$$(6) M_2 = i_3 + a_2X + \sum_1^j d_jW_j + e_3$$

$$(7) Y = i_4 + cX + \sum_1^j d_jW_j + e_4$$

where

Y= economic evaluations

M₁= Optimistic Bias

M₂= Accuracy Bias

X= Party preferences

W= Covariates

Since we measured party preference as a categorical variable, we need to use a specific version of mediation analysis with an algorithm developed by Hayes and Preacher (2012), called MEDIANE. This algorithm allows us to employ categorical variables as independent variables in the model by transforming them to dummies and it can calculate direct and indirect effect precisely, compared to other alternative tools. We run a set of analyses including both dimensions of biases as mediating variables and some other demographic and ideological variables as covariates.

Table 11. First Stage of Mediation Model for Economic Evaluations: Optimistic and Accuracy Biases are Dependent

| Variable Set | Economic Evaluations (Total Effect) | | Optimistic Bias Dependent | | Accuracy Bias Dependent | |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|------|---------------------------|------|-------------------------|------|
| | B | Sig. | b | Sig. | b | Sig. |
| Constant | -0,91 | 0,00 | 1,43 | 0,00 | -0,33 | 0,26 |
| AKP Voter | 0,94 | 0,00 | 0,70 | 0,00 | 0,69 | 0,00 |
| CHP Voter | -0,27 | 0,02 | -0,30 | 0,01 | -0,46 | 0,00 |
| MHP Voter | -0,35 | 0,01 | -0,35 | 0,01 | -0,36 | 0,02 |
| BDP Voter | 0,03 | 0,88 | -0,01 | 0,95 | -0,33 | 0,17 |
| Dummy Male | 0,10 | 0,18 | 0,15 | 0,04 | 0,11 | 0,19 |
| Age | -0,01 | 0,05 | 0,00 | 0,36 | 0,00 | 0,11 |
| Education | 0,07 | 0,15 | 0,07 | 0,14 | 0,03 | 0,59 |
| Turkish Nationalism | -0,01 | 0,61 | 0,00 | 0,88 | 0,00 | 0,77 |
| Left-Right | 0,05 | 0,00 | 0,04 | 0,00 | -0,01 | 0,72 |
| Religiosity | 0,02 | 0,31 | 0,00 | 0,59 | 0,03 | 0,14 |
| Socioeconomic Status | 0,03 | 0,00 | 0,03 | 0,00 | 0,02 | 0,08 |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| Adj. R-Square | 0,43 | | 0,34 | | 0,27 | |
| F: | 35,11 | | 24,80 | | 17,79 | |

First stage of mediation analysis is presented above. First column presents total effects of party preference (c) where economic evaluations of voters is

dependent and mediating variables are not included. If we analyze total effect column starting with demographic variables, it is observed that there is no difference between men and women. As age increases, participants tend to be less positive in terms of economic evaluations with a slope of 0.01. If one's position in the political scale shifts towards right, her positive perception about the economy increases by 0.05 points. Religiosity is not significant while socioeconomic status has a positive effect on positive economic evaluations.

According to this model, other things being equal, an average voter of the AKP has a more positive perception about the economy. This difference is more about 1.2 points with a CHP supporter (0,94-(-0,27)) and 1.3((0,94-(-0,35)) points with a MHP voter. Such a significant difference indicates partisan differences in economic evaluations.

Third column shows that partisan differences (a_1) explain variation in the Optimistic Bias. Voters of AKP are much more optimistic than CHP and MHP voters by 1 point. This significant difference shows partisan bias on our first moderating variable, meaning that (a_1) coefficient is statistically significant. Among demographic and socioeconomic covariates we can see that there is significant difference between man and woman in terms of optimism. Reasons of this significant change is a matter of discussion and beyond the limits of this paper, however we can speculate about the existence of a gender gap in optimism. Age and education have no significant effect showing that the Optimistic Bias; while as socioeconomic status of one increases she tends to be more optimistic. Meanwhile, rightist people are more optimistically biased than other voters.

Determinants of the Accuracy Bias are presented in fifth column of above table. When we emphasize on its determinants, interparty differences dominate the model, meaning that there are significant differences between different party voters. AKP voters are significantly more tended to believe in the accuracy of official statistics, while CHP and MHP voters are more suspicious about them (differences are 1,25 and 1,15 points). It shows explanatory power of independent variable on the second mediating variable (statistically significant (a_2) coefficients). None of political or demographic variables are significantly effective as determinants of the Accuracy Bias; except socioeconomic status of the respondent.

Above analyses showed that our model produced statistically significant (c), (a_1) and (a_2) coefficients by using terminology of statistical mediation analyses. Independent variable (party choice) has a total effect on dependent variable (positive economic evaluations) and it also affects both mediating variables (Optimistic and Accuracy Biases). We need a further analysis to understand whether this effect disappears after including mediating variables. Findings are presented below.

Table 12. Mediation Model for Economic Evaluations: the Optimistic and Accuracy Biases are Mediating Variables

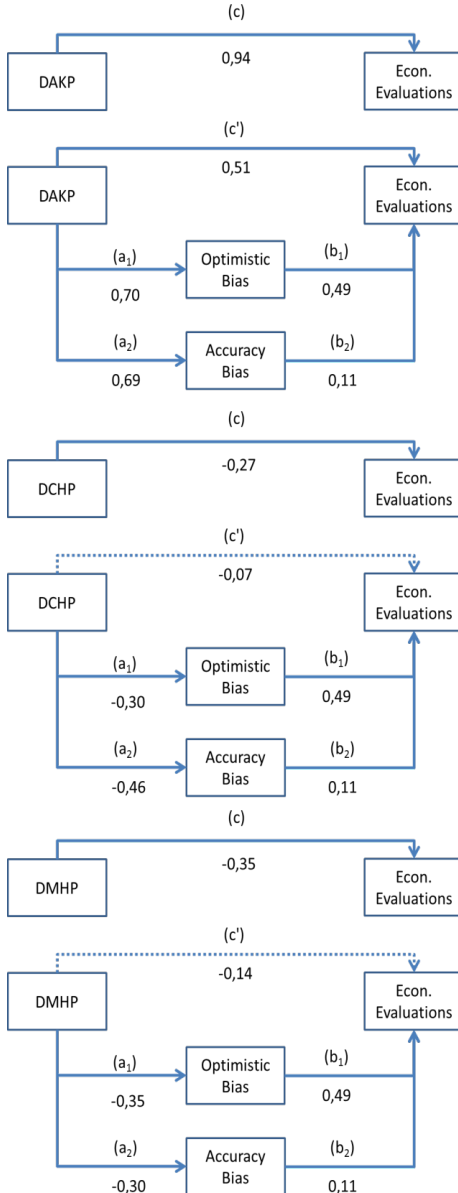
| Economic Evaluations (Direct Effect) | | |
|---|----------|-------------|
| Variable Set | B | Sig. |
| Constant | -1,58 | 0,00 |
| AKP Voter | 0,51 | 0,00 |
| CHP Voter | -0,07 | 0,48 |
| MHP Voter | -0,14 | 0,23 |
| BDP Voter | 0,07 | 0,67 |
| Dummy Male | 0,01 | 0,84 |
| Age | 0,00 | 0,12 |
| Education | 0,03 | 0,44 |
| Turkish Nationalism | -0,01 | 0,63 |
| Left-Right | 0,02 | 0,07 |
| Religiosity | 0,01 | 0,50 |
| Socioeconomic Status | 0,01 | 0,18 |
| Optimistic Bias | 0,49 | 0,00 |
| Accuracy Bias | 0,11 | 0,00 |
| Adj. R-Square | | 0,60 |
| F: | | 59,91 |

Above table shows how including mediating variables affected relationship between our independent and dependent variables. Among demographic variables only self-positioning in left-right scale is statistically significant, meaning that including mediating variables made effects of socioeconomic status and age insignificant.

The most striking finding of the above analysis is that inclusion of mediating variables changed statistical significance of party dummies. Voters of the AKP are more optimistic than other party voters and this difference is statistically significant, despite it declined to 0.51 points from 0,94 in the total effect model. However, partisan effect of CHP and MHP voters on positive economic evaluations disappeared after including both dimensions of biases. It means that including (b) coefficients to the model, produced statistically insignificant (c') coefficients for CHP and MHP dummies. It shows that all effect of partisan bias on positive economic evaluations is through Optimistic and Accuracy Biases.

Both dimensions of biases have a positive and statistically significant effect on positive economic evaluations. As voters become more biased, they tend to have more positive economic evaluations about the economy. It also means that both (b) coefficients are statistically significant indicating mediating role of biases.

Figure 3. Stylized Presentation of Mediation Analysis



Above figure presents findings of mediation analyses in a stylized way, where covariates are excluded to simplify the picture. According to this picture partisan preferences works in different mechanisms in different party constituencies. Being an AKP voter leads to have more positive economic perceptions. Meanwhile, partisan choice for the AKP also means having more optimistic perceptions about economy and believing in the accuracy of official statistics. Partisan effect of the AKP works directly and indirectly. Direct effect of this dummy is 0,51 (55 percent of total effect) and it has an indirect effect of 0,35 (36 percent) through the Optimistic Bias and 0,08 (9 percent) through the Accuracy Bias. These figures shows that bigger part of the partisan effect comes directly and indirect effect through the Optimistic Bias is higher than Accuracy Bias.

This mechanism is different for CHP voters. Our statistical mediation analysis showed that being a CHP voter has not a direct effect on positive economic evaluations and majority of total effect of the CHP dummy comes through the Optimistic and the Accuracy biases. Indirect effect of this dummy through the Optimistic Bias is -0,15 (55 percent of total effect) and it is -0,05 (19 percent) through the Accuracy Bias. It means that the CHP voters have more pessimistic perceptions about the economy and they tend to deny accuracy of the official statistics; hence they have more negative economic evaluations than other party voters. Partisan bias works through perception biases.

Partisan effect for the MHP also works in a similar way. The MHP dummy has a total effect of -0,35 and 50 percent of this effect comes through the Optimistic Bias and 10 percent comes through the Accuracy Bias. Direct effect of this dummy is statistically insignificant and accounts for 40 percent.

Discussion

It's so far argued that the economic voting approach is widely used to explain voting preferences of voters. A rational voter seeking to maximize his/her utility and responsive governments continuously trying to satisfy expectations of voters are two pillars of an economic point of view of democracy. According to this approach, parties compete to attract voters through offering a better live and voters prefer the most promising one. Since voters are looking to maximize their utilities (in terms of material benefits) they tend to vote unsuccessful politicians whose term characterized with economic failures. In this way, electoral regime functions as a selection mechanism allowing survival of the fittest politicians and elimination of weaker ones.

Empirical findings show that voters emphasize on past performance of governments instead of future promises; and sociotropic economic evaluations

overcome selfish pocketbook ones; this electoral selection mechanism functions better and almost promises a better life for all.

Of course, the economic voting approach is something more realistic than this bold picture. However, above described mechanism forms a good fundamental and several studies provided abundant data verifying expectations of this approach. Lewis-Beck counted more than 400 articles and books and more than 20 different comparative studies. This approach sounds bold with its structure allowing estimating election results; such a power of estimation is accepted as the most important indicator of its scientific nature. Moreover, sophisticated statistical techniques empower this approach giving scholars to replicate findings of each other and finding new methods of interpretation.

Nevertheless, basic premises of this approach are under question. First wave of this approach extensively used macro-level data such as gross domestic product, inflation and popularity of government and produced robust statistical models. While the second wave attempted to echo macro-level findings at the individual/micro level, it had to face with enduring problems of opinion polling. Respondents may give answers without needing sufficient information by using a lot of heuristics. Especially in evaluating economic indicators, voters have limited information and cognitive capacity to interpret them and linking with government's policies. Hence, heuristic tools become more important.

The "revisionist" attack heavily uses this weakness of the economic voting to explain micro level attitude formation. Several studies showed that partisan affiliations of voters are very definite determinants of public sentiments about the economy, as media coverage or group identification. Nowadays, scholarly discussion has been widened by increased use and availability of panel data and experimental works.

While the economic voting approach is under attack of the "revisionist" school, the picture in Turkey is very different. Although economic factors are widely used to explain success or failure of competing political parties, micro-level analysis is merely new. Our short review showed that comparable evidence is only available for the last three general elections and majority of academic works don't employ standard tools allowing us to make generalizations. On the other hand, the victory of the AKP is heavily explained by its success in the economic sphere.

Our survey showed that the classical economic voting questions are very good predictors of party preference of voters. However, same survey also shows that voters have biased perceptions about dimensions of economic life. Majority of them fails to estimate basic indicators such as employment, economic growth, poverty and inflation and this bias is highly differentiated between party constituencies. Moreover, voters tend to refuse or accept

official statistics according to their party preferences.

Statistical mediation analysis showed that there is a partisan effect on positive economic evaluations, but this mechanism works in different ways in each party's constituencies. There are significant differences between different party constituencies and voters of the AKP have more positive economic evaluations than other parties' voters. According to our analysis, being an AKP voter is sufficient to have better evaluations, however AKP voters tend to have more optimistic perceptions about the economy and they tend to believe in the accuracy of official statistics. Hence, they are using this information to reinforce their positive evaluations.

On the other hand, voters of major opposition parties seem to have a different mechanism. Our analysis showed that voting for the CHP or the MHP has not a statistically significant direct effect on positive economic evaluations. These voters tend to have more pessimistic perceptions about the economy and to deny accuracy of the official statistics then they have more negative economic evaluations. In this mechanism, our mediating variables are acting as full mediators and account almost all of the partisan effect on economic evaluations.

These findings lead us to ask questions about the causal direction: If partisan affiliation explains the bias and as bias determines economic evaluations; how can economic evaluations define partisan choice?

Unfortunately no one can provide an accurate answer since we don't have data or methods to answer it. Parallel to discussions abroad, we need panel data including all kind of alternative questions or experimental work to test basic assumptions of this approach. Moreover, mediation analyses showed the need to understand mechanisms in the evaluation of economic situation, creating an opportunity space for experimental work. Without these tools and further evidence; economic explanations of the third victory of the AKP are invalid as other explanations, at least at micro level.

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