ELECTORAL COMPETITION & CLEAVAGES IN TURKEY: A GEOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction

Turkey has the longest history of pluralistic and competitive politics among Muslim-majority countries. It has had fourteen free parliamentary elections since the transition to multiparty competition in 1950. Despite the military coups in 1960, 1971, and 1980 and the continuation of the military’s interference in politics, electoral competition has been central to the evolution of political stability and conflict. The center-right parties have historically been dominant, winning pluralities in nine of these elections. However, public support for center-right eroded throughout the 1990s reaching a historical low in the 1999 elections. The demise of center-right was accompanied with the rise of the far-right political parties that espouse ultranationalist or religious agendas. The implications of this trend were increasing polarization and instability. The consolidation of Turkish democracy was stalled. The victory of the Justice and Development Party (JDP)—founded by ex-Islamists who adopted an accommodative and centrist discourse—in the 2002 elections stopped this trend and restored the ascendancy of center-right in Turkish politics.

This paper presents an analytical understanding of the transformation of the Turkish electoral politics throughout the 1990s by offering a geographical perspective. It argues that hitherto unexplored geographical cleavages are central to electoral competition among center-right and far-right parties. This perspective is based on the observation that certain regions represent more strategic importance for some parties than other regions. Geographical cleavages are product of the interaction of salient issues, Turkish party system and electoral rules. They affect how party leaders build their platforms, design campaign strategies, and formulate policies. A geographical understanding of Turkish political cleavages provides a fresh alternative to perspectives that exclusively focus on the relationship between attitudes and values and partisan affiliation.

The paper primarily addresses two questions: 1) what factors explain the evolution of Turkish electoral politics since the early 1990s? 2) what geographical
dynamics diminish or augment the robustness of center-right that remains the pillar of Turkish democracy? It is organized in four sections. The first section provides an overview of the Turkish electoral system with a focus on the post-1980 period and the evolution of major cleavages. A brief discussion of the fundamental characteristics of the Turkish electoral politics follows. The third and fourth sections form the core of the paper and explain how Central Anatolian provinces have had disproportionate influence in the elections since the early 1990s. The paper uses ecological inference to create voter transition tables and specify political-geographical divisions. The Geographical Information Systems (GIS) software is used to generate voter-transition tables and maps that reveal the geographical characteristics of Turkish electoral politics. The data includes results from four elections (1991, 1995, 1999, and 2002) at county level, ethnographic work during the 2002 elections and survey data. In 2002, the author visited around 30 provinces, attended around two dozens political rallies and interviewed tens of JDP politicians and grassroots. The survey data is composed of three waves of World Values Surveys (WVS) conducted in Turkey (1990, 1995, and 2000).

An Overview of Electoral Politics in Turkey

According to a very influential perspective, the prevailing cleavage in Turkish politics has been the binary conflict between center and periphery (Mardin 1973). This broad cleavage was the combination of urban-rural, center-periphery, and church-state divisions identified in the Western European countries (Lipset & Rokkan 1967). It has its roots in the late Ottoman era when ambitious and upwardly mobile bureaucrats, intellectuals and professionals diagnosed popular Islam and customs as the cause of the country’s decline and engaged in a comprehensive modernization process (Hanoğlu 19945. Their exposure to secular education was the decisive factor shaping their worldview (Yalman 1973). They consolidated their rule with the establishment of the republic in 1923 and ruled the country until 1950. The forces of center generally espoused a strict understanding of secularist nationalism that severely curtailed public expressions of religious and non-Turkish ethnic (i.e. Kurdish) identities. The Republican People Party’s (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi – CHP), founded in 1922, was the main organizational channel through which these forces exerted their influence over society.
The RPP had advocated secularist, nationalistic and statist platforms for many decades before adopting leftist platforms of social justice and workers’ rights in the 1970s. While the 1980 military coup banned all parties including the RPP, the party remerged as a significant player in Turkish politics in the second half of the 1990s. The forces of periphery, in the 1950s, included nascent commercial and industrial classes and vast segments of rural and newly urbanizing urban population who remained deeply pious. While the center-right remained loyal to the secular republic, it also promoted a more inclusive understanding of secularism that is tolerant of public expression of Islam and popular Islamic orders. The party representing them was the Democrat Party (*Demokrat Partisi* – DP), which was led by politicians defected from the RPP and ruled the country from 1950 until the 1960 military intervention. The DP was victorious in three successive elections in the 1950s. It was dissolved in 1960 and its successor gradually formed the crux of center-right politics until 1980.

During the 1950s and for most of the 1960s, the grand cleavage of Turkish politics generated a relatively stable two-party system. Voter shares of the RPP and the DP were never less than 90 percent throughout the 1950s. The Justice Party (*Adalet Partisi* – JP) replaced the DP as the main party of periphery in the 1960 and 1970s. Combined voter support of the RPP and the JP was never less than 70 percent in none of the three elections held in the 1960s. The introduction of proportional representation instead of winner-take-all in elections led to greater fragmentation in the parliament. For example, the Turkish Worker’s Party (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi* – TWP) received 14 of 450 parliamentary seats by capturing 3 percent of the national vote in the 1965 elections. The absence of a national threshold and the direct translation of votes to parliamentary representation encouraged the defections from the RPP and the JP and increased the potential of coalition governments. In fact, from 1973 until the military intervention of 1980, Turkey was ruled by unstable coalition governments whose partners were espousing ideologically opposing agendas.

The late 1960 and early 1970s also saw the rise of viable political parties on the far-right. The first of these parties was the National Action Party (*Milliyeçi Hareket Partisi* – NAP), which was formed in 1969 and espoused an ideology of ultranationalist anti-communism combined with militant agitation (Landau 1982). Despite the fact that it
remained on the fringes of electoral politics, never capturing more than 6.5 percent of the national vote, it had disproportional political influence by participating in coalition governments in the 1970s. The party’s control of several ministries provided it with access to state patronage and its members often engaged in violence with impunity. The second important far-right formation was the National Salvation Party (*Milli Selamet Partisi* – NSP), which was founded in 1972 following the Constitution Court’s closure of its predecessor in 1971 (Sarbay 1985). The NSP promoted a holistic understanding of Islam that left no room for individual liberties and perceived politics as a zero-sum struggle between forces of Islam versus forces of Western imitators. It was sharply critical of the Republic’s modernization project and claimed to be only authentic representative of the national will. Despite its short-existence, the party performed well in the elections by gathering 12 percent and 8.6 percent of the national vote in 1973 and 1977 respectively. From a classical modernization perspective, the NSP represented the least developed and most pious segments of the population who had little benefited from socioeconomic and cultural change. The NSP served in coalition governments like the NAP, distributed state patronage and relied on religious mobilization. The lasting legacy of the NSP was the explicit politicization of Muslim identity in Turkey which continued into the 1980s and 1990s (Ayata 1996).

The rise of far right political parties and the fragmentation within the center-right eroded the dualistic competition and led to polarization in the 1970s. The fact that Turkish economy was suffering from inefficient and highly cost import substitution policies exacerbated political tensions. Street politics took over parliamentary dynamics and political violence gained a self-sustaining momentum. The conflict between extremist leftist and nationalist groups affiliated with the NAP and clandestine state-security organizations soon paralyzed the country. The 1980 military intervention was the most significant event in recent Turkish politics. The military junta dissolved the parliament, banned all political parties and unions, arrested tens of thousands and was determined to pacify the society. A new constitution that severely curtailed political freedoms and civil liberties was drafted and accepted in a referendum in 1982. The Constitution also gave extensive prerogatives to the presidency and the armed forces that would be insulated from popular pressures and the guardians of the regime. The junta
also changed the electoral law and instituted a 10 percent threshold to reduce parliamentary fragmentation. It also saw in Islam an antidote against leftist political activism and encouraged Sunni piety and augmented the state’s patronage of social religious activities.

The first post-coup elections were held in 1983 under partially free conditions. The junta disqualified most of the politicians of the previous era from participating in the elections and allowed only three parties to field candidates. The center-right Motherland Party (Anavatan Partisi – MP), who was led by a pragmatic and visionary ex-member of the NSP, Turgut Özal, emerged triumphant from the polls by garnering 45 percent of the vote. Its main competitor was the Populist Party (Halkçı Parti – PP), which took over the mantle of the RPP. The 1980 military coup initially restored the great dualism between the left and the right. The religious and nationalistic parties had weak electoral presence and collective action capacity of the left was severely crippled. Meanwhile, religiosity emerged as one of the main factors affecting party preference in the late 1980s. Higher levels of religiosity translated into higher levels of preference for right parties (Kalaycıoğlu 1994). However, by the early 1990s, centrifugal tendencies were once again prevalent in Turkish politics. A lasting impact of the military coup was the fragmentation of the center-right. The main political figures of the 1970s came back to political arena after a referendum in 1987. Süleyman Demirel, the chairman of the JP, now headed the True Path Party (Doğru Yol Partisi – DYP) that effectively challenged the hegemony of Özal’s MP. In contrast to the previous periods, the Turkish center-right was now represented by two major parties. Özal’s election as the president in 1989 inevitably undermined his party’s appeal and the TPP won a plurality in the 1991 elections. When Özal died in 1993, Demirel took his position. Their replacements lacked strong leadership abilities and the center-right entered into an era of constant decay. The absence of two prominent center-right leaders from electoral politics reinforced the process through which two center-right parties lost their pivotal position. In fact, vote share of these two parties decreased from 56 percent in 1987 to 15 percent in 2002. In the 2002 elections, neither of them was able to pass the 10 percent national threshold.

The sense of political order and tranquility imposed by the military junta was increasingly dissipated by the rise of religious-nationalism and Kurdish nationalism in the
early 1990s. The increasing fragmentation of Turkish party politics was partially reflective of the diversification of political preferences such as demands for public expressions of ethnic and religious identities became more salient (Baslevent 2004). The Kurdish guerilla organization, the Kurdistan Workers Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan – KWP) staged attacks against the Turkish state by 1984. The conflict between the guerillas and the armed forces soon intensified and the Southeastern provinces populated by the Kurds turned into a war zone by the early 1990s. The Kurdish nationalists were also seeking autonomous representation through legal means. The first Kurdish nationalist party, the People’s Labor Party (Halkan Emek Partisi – PLP), was found in 1990 by a group of Kurdish parliamentarians expelled from ranks of the center-left Social Democrat Populist’s Party (Sosyaldemokrat Halkçı Parti - SDPP), the successor to the PP. Nonetheless, the PLP run on the SDPP ticket in the 1991 elections. Twenty-two members of the PLP were elected to Parliament and made a quarter of the SDPP’s total parliamentary representation. However, the PLP’s presence in the parliament proved to be shortlived. The Constitution Court banned the PLP in July 1993 (Kocagioglu 2003) and the parliament voted to strip seven of its ex-members of their immunity in March 1994. In the highly polarized political atmosphere of the early 1990s, the PLP and its successor Democracy Party (Demokrasi Partisi) could not maintain a moderate stance and became the leading voice of Kurdish nationalism by marginalizing advocates of violence (Watts 1999). The failure of the alliance between the Kurdish nationalism and the center-left eliminated the possibility of a democratic solution to the conflict between the Kurdish guerillas and the Turkish state. The Kurdish nationalistic parties continued to participate in the elections since then but they were unable to pass the 10 percent threshold despite their wide appeal in the Kurdish-majority Southeastern regions. While the Kurdish nationalists were left without parliamentary representation, the center-left lost an important ally in balancing the rise of rightist parties. The loss of Kurdish votes was very costly for center-left parties in the subsequent elections.

The most significant development in Turkish politics throughout the 1990s was the rise of religious and nationalistic right, forces that used to be on the margins of parliamentary politics. They successfully exploited popular discontent with the major parties and directly addressed demands of the previously ignored groups. The vote share
of the far right for the first time in Turkish electoral politics exceeded that of the center-right in 1999. The electoral support for the religious Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi* – WP)—established in 1983 as the successor of the NSP—continuously increased from 1987 to 1995. The WP entered into an electoral alliance with the Nationalistic Work Party (*Milliyetçi Çalışma Partisi*, later renamed Nationalistic Action Party – NAP) in the 1991 elections. The alliance was mutually beneficial for both sides as 62 candidates affiliated with either the WP, the NAP, or their minor ally, won parliamentary seats. The rise of the WP in the first half of the 1990s was not short of being spectacular. The party broadened its ideological appeal to benefit from the decay of the two center-right parties. The success of the WP derived from its ability to mobilize urban poor and lower-middle classes, Anatolian conservative voters, and newly emerging pious middle classes with its combination of social-justice themes with capitalist development (Gulalp 2001; White 2002). The party emerged victorious from the 1994 municipal elections and gained a plurality in the 1995 parliamentary elections (21 percent). Meanwhile, the NAP performed poorly by collecting 8 percent of the votes. The WP formed a coalition government with the center-right TPP in summer 1996. However, the WP soon found itself confronted with a determined secularist alliance opposing its politicization of Muslim identity. The alliance included the armed forces, the judiciary, the center-left parties, the big business, leading media organizations and was supported by secularly oriented civil society organizations. The WP could not translate its electoral mandate into political legitimacy and was isolated. The Constitution Court dissolved the party in January 1998. Its top leadership was temporarily banned from political action. Its successor, the Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi* – VP) further moderated its political stance but suffered a serious electoral setback in the 1999 elections. The party came third with 14 percent of the vote. The younger generation openly challenged but could not end the hegemony of the old guard in the 2000 congress. A year later, the Constitution Court decided to ban also the VP mainly on the grounds for its opposition against the ban on the headscarf in public spaces including the parliament and the university campuses (Tezcür 2007a).

The conflict with the Kurdish guerillas in the 1990s generated a new wave of Turkish nationalism at the popular level. The centrist parties responded to that by
adopting nationalistic slogans and platforms and hardening their position vis-à-vis Kurdish nationalism. However, the rising nationalistic wave primarily lifted the NAP that advocated the most uncompromising stance toward the Kurds and skillfully capitalized on popular anger with the losses of the Turkish army in the conflict with the KWP guerillas (Yavuz 2002). The results of the April 1999 elections even surprised the NAP leadership. The party captured 18 percent of the elections and gained 129 seats in the parliament. Its electoral success made the party a partner in the tripartite coalition government along with the center-left Democratic Left Party (Demokratik Sol Parti – DLP) and the center-right MP that ruled the country until the November 2002 elections. Yet, the participation in the government was also costly for the NAP. Turkey experienced its worst post-WW II economic downturn in two successive crises in November 2000 and February 2001. Economy shrank by 7.5 percent in 2001, unemployment skyrocketed, economic productivity virtually ceased, and banking failures hard hit the savings of ordinary citizens. Public confidence in political parties and parliament were at historical lows. Economic troubles soon undermined the cohesion of the coalition government and the parliament decided to hold early elections in November 2002. The electoral results were disastrous for the ruling parties. Their total vote share reduced from 53 percent to 15 percent in three and half years. The Justice and Development Party, founded by ex-Virtue members in August 2001, swept the polls by receiving 34 percent of the national vote, which translated into control over 66 percent of the parliamentary seats. This was because the only other party that managed to pass the 10 percent threshold was the RPP. Hence, the 2002 elections resulted in the formation of a two-party dominated parliamentary system for the first time since the 1950s.

The victory of the JDP in the 2002 elections brought the erosion of the center-right to a halt. Citizens who supported the JDP tended to be pious, angry at the previous government’s economic policies, and come from lower socioeconomic groups (Kalaycioglu 2004). Although the JDP was founded and led by a group of ex-Islamist politicians, it rapidly established itself as a centrist force and categorically rejected the allegations that the party represented continuation with the NSP-WP-VP lineage. In fact, the loyal followers of Erbakan founded another party, the Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi – FP), which performed very poorly in the 2002 elections. The factors that brought the
remarkable transformation of the JDP founders were their disillusionment with the
Islamist agenda, bitter experience with the state repression, and a realistic understanding
of the Turkish electoral dynamics. Practical considerations and political learning
mutually reinforced each other. The participation of the ex-Islamists into the political
system ultimately brought their moderation and domestication. (Tezcür 2007b).

Two Patterns of Turkish Electoral Politics

This historical overview of Turkish politics reveals two recurrent patterns (also
see Sayari and Esmer 2002). The first is the persistent cleavage between the left (center)
and the right (periphery). While right parties have usually commanded a vote share of 60
to 70 percent, support for left parties have been between 30 and 40 percent. Figure 1
shows the electoral performance of major party blocs since the first free and multiparty
elections in 1950. Center-right parties generally outperformed other blocs in the
elections. The electoral hegemony of the center-right went almost unchallenged until the
late 1970s. As narrated above, the rise of the far right in the 1970s was not strong enough
to threaten the predominant position of the center-right JP. While center-right parties
temporarily extended their lead into the post-1980 period, far right parties became
gradually more assertive. The center-right’s electoral performance declined from 55
percent in 1987 to 26 percent in 1999. Meanwhile, far right parties increased their support
from 11 to 35 percent. This may partially reflect the evolving nature of partisan
identification of the Turkish public. Figure 2 shows that percentage of citizens locating
themselves on the right end of political spectrum significantly increased from 1990 to
1995 and remained stable by 2000. Citizens who choose the centrist position continued to
form a plurality though.

This development had some adverse consequences for the sustainability and
functioning of democratic politics in Turkey. Turkish democracy was most threatened
when the center-right was incapable of containing the far right, as in the late 1970s and
during the 1990s. As long as center-right parties contain far right contenders, they are
likely to win decisive pluralities in the elections. Center-left parties secured electoral
pluralities only when divisions within the right became salient. That was the case in 1973, 1977, and 1999. In the 1977 elections the RPP broadened its ideological appeal and received 41 percent of the national vote. However, divisions within the right did not always benefit center-left parties. In the 2002 elections, the center-left’s staunch advocacy of secularism in the face of the JDP’s rise did not elicit a strong public interest. The total vote share of the three center-left parties was a dismal 22 percent.

Another significant determinant factor in Turkish politics, especially in the 1990s, was retrospective voting. Voters have periodically penalized the parties that were in power in the previous term while throwing in their lot with parties that were previously away from the reins of power. Almost all parties, regardless of their ideological orientation, that served in the government lost support in the subsequent elections from 1987 to 2002. The partial exception was the center-left DLP that joined a coalition government in 1997 and increased its electoral performance from 15 percent in 1995 to 22 percent in 1999. The unique success of the DLP was mainly due to the capture of the KWP leader several months before the 1999 elections. However, the party suffered a complete reversal of fortune in the 2002 elections when its vote share decreased to 1 percent. The principal reason for the pervasiveness of protest voting was poor economic performance and severe fluctuations in GDP growth rates. Protest voting generated substantial levels of electoral volatility that were significantly higher than southern European countries and comparable to Latin American countries in the 1990s (Hazama 2003). The left-right cleavage ameliorated the effects of retrospective protest voting and within-bloc volatility has been higher than inter-bloc volatility (for two types of volatility, see Bartolini and Main 1990). Consequently, center-left parties have been less successful in capitalizing on the erosion of center-right parties as much as did far right parties.

In addition to the military interventions, the institutional characteristics of the Turkish political parties contributed to electoral volatility and political instability. Political parties have top-down structures with centralized rule with little tolerance for opposition within ranks (Michels 1962). Grassroots participation in decision-making is very limited and mostly advisory to the leaders (Çarkoğlu et al. 2000). The closed list proportional representation used since the 1995 elections reinforces the leaders’ control
over the nomination process. The rate of elite replacement is low and the identification of parties with their leaders facilitates splits and vote shifts. Parties function as mechanisms of patronage when they are in government that fosters corruption and dependence. The rapid transformation of the JDP from a nascent reformist party into a patronage-distributing mainstream party after its electoral victory in 2002 exemplified this pattern. The culture of patronage reduces ideological differences between parties and citizens quickly shift their allegiances from a losing party (leader) to a rising party (leader) (for different types of linkages parties establish with their constituencies see Kitschelt 2002). These practices also discourage educated and upwardly mobile individuals with high social and communication skills from joining parties.

**A Geographical Understanding of Turkish Electoral Politics**

Scholars have acknowledged the importance of geographic dynamics but not systematically analyzed their implications in Turkish politics (for an early study, see Çarkoğlu & Eren 2002). A geographical perspective that combines left-right cleavage with protest voting behavior sheds light on the peculiar evolution of Turkish politics since the 1990s. More specifically, it provides a novel understanding of the demise and restoration of the center-right and the stagnation of the center-left during the 1990s.

In some electoral systems, certain electoral districts have more strategic importance than others. This is most evident in American congressional and presidential elections where parties identify some states and electoral districts as swing and concentrate their energies and resources in winning them. In contrast, a single party has historically dominated other states and electoral districts and real competition takes places within party ranks rather than between parties. For instance, the Democrats completely dominated the Southern states dominated before the 1964 alignment (Carmines & Stimson 1981). Since then, the ability of Democratic presidential candidates to win in the Southern states has been crucial to our electoral victories. In fact, the two successful Democratic candidates since the 1960s, Carter and Clinton both hailed from the south, Georgia and Alabama respectively (Walton Jr. 2002). It is also possible to identify the regions key to the electoral results in Turkey by the help of electoral maps and employing ecological inference techniques.
While Turkish elections have had around six competitive parties at the national level (two center-right, two center-left, two far right) since the early 1990s, electoral support for these parties have exhibited great variance across regions. Additionally, the support for Kurdish nationalist parties has been heavily concentrated in certain regions. Outside of areas with significant Kurdish presence, these parties have had little electoral appeal. Their inability to reach more moderate segments of the Kurdish vote and build viable electoral coalitions made them uncompetitive at the national level. Center-left parties have had little presence and visibility in the conservative and pious Central Anatolian provinces historically dominated by parties of the right. In those provinces, they have drawn considerable support from Alevis, members of a heterodox Islamic sect not sharing some of the cultural habits of their Sunni neighbors (for Alevis, see Dressler 2003). Electoral support for far right parties has also been regionally skewed during the 1990s. The WP remained a minor political player in the Western parts of the country; the NAP’s appeal in the Kurdish southeast and the West Coast was nil. In contrast, center-right parties have historically been competitive in all provinces with few exceptions such as Tunceli, a small province in Eastern Anatolia populated by Alevis and Kurds. As a result, center-right parties are in a geographically advantaged position vis-à-vis parties of center-left and far right. They won 9 of 14 elections since 1950. They simply appeal to larger pool of potential voters spread all over the country than their competitors. Given the persistence of the left-right cleavage, center-right parties are mostly likely to secure electoral pluralities as long as they contain far right parties in regions characterized by exclusive competition among right parties. Conversely, their failure to protect their flank to assaults from far right is likely to deliver to electoral victories to the center-left, the far right or both.

[Map 1 about here]

Map 1, which was created by ArcGIS software, demonstrates the geographical distribution of the average vote share of far right parties in the elections of 1991, 1995, and 1999 in counties. These parties are the WP, its successor VP, and the NAP. New counties were created throughout the 1990s and Turkey had 920 counties by 2002. The electoral data is obtained from the Turkish Statistical Institute. Several patterns are prominent in the map. First, the support for the far right parties are concentrated in
conservative Central and Eastern Anatolian provinces such as Erzurum, Kayseri, Konya, Maraş, Sivas, and Yozgat. It appears that a significant portion of center-right voters shifted their allegiance to the far right parties in those provinces. Second, the far right parties have limited penetration into the Western, coastal, and predominantly Kurdish provinces. In particular, they virtually have no presence in the Thracian peninsula to the northwest, the Aegean region to the west, and the Kurdish provinces to the southeast. In those regions, center-right parties mainly preserved their voting base partially because center-left parties remained stagnant. It appears that the crux of electoral competition between the center-right and the far-right take place in the conservative Sunni Central and Eastern Anatolian provinces.

[Table 1 about here]

Table 1 gives further basis to this observation. It compares the parliamentary representation of three party blocs in 24 Central Anatolian provinces with national averages for the five elections from 1987 to 2002. Approximately one-fifth of parliamentary seats are allocated to these provinces. Center-right parties were clear winners of the 1987 elections. Two main center-right parties controlled 78 percent of the parliamentary seats and 89 percent of the 99 seats allocated to 24 Central Anatolian provinces. Yet, center-right parties had lost Central Anatolian provinces to far right parties during the 1990s. The center-right’s control of Central Anatolian seats decreased from 89 to 18 percent from 1987 to 1999. Meanwhile, center-left parties remained marginal players in these provinces. Their electoral performance in Central Anatolia was always inferior to their national average. Apart from traditional Alevi support to the RPP, they had no sustainable and strong voting base in the region. The electoral alliance between the religious WP and the nationalist NAP in 1991 captured almost half of the seats from these provinces (46 percent) while it only gained 14 percent of the parliamentary seats nationwide. In the 1995 elections, the WP single-handedly won 48 percent of the seats from Central Anatolia. The 1999 elections saw the complete collapse of the center-right in Central Anatolia. The two far right parties together controlled 73 of the parliamentary seats from the region.

The rise of the JDP in 2002 restored the ascendancy of the center-right in the region. The party carried Central Anatolia in addition to having a strong showing in
coastal and Western regions. Far right parties were left out of the parliament. Electoral maps and regression analyses not shown here did not detect a significant relationship between level of development and vote for the JDP at county basis. Instead, the JDP core support was supported in Central Anatolian provinces. In that area, the JDP received more than 40 percent of the vote in the 2002 elections. The northern boundary of the area starts at the eastern suburbs of Istanbul and has a bow shape that reaches Erzurum 800 miles to the east. The southern boundary starts south of Bursa, the metropolis on the south of Marmara Sea, bends towards the southwest until it reaches Konya, the previous bastion of Welfare-line parties. There, it continues towards east until it reaches Elazığ, the province bordering the Kurdish regions on the further east. The JDP had very strong appeal in the area between these two lines, which roughly corresponds to Central-Anatolian provinces shown in Table 1. These provinces tend to be more conservative, pious and nationalistic than other provinces of Turkey. For this reason, far right parties have greater potential in Central Anatolia than anywhere else. The viability of center-right hegemony in Turkish electoral politics depends on their ability in containing the rise of far right in the conservative Central Anatolian regions.

**Ecological Inference Analysis**

Voter-transition tables and maps created by using ecological inference methods further confirm the strategic importance of Central-Anatolian provinces in the Turkish electoral politics. Ecological inference involves making inferences about individual level behavior or characteristics by using aggregate level data. It may result in ecological fallacy because of the practice of generating estimates about unobserved parameters of interest at the individual level (Robinson 1950). The publication of King’s book that promises an innovative and more reliable solution to the problem of ecological fallacy has generated scholarly interest in ecological inference method across disciplines (King 1997; Annals of the Association of American Geographers 2000; King et al. 2004a). King’s suggestion combines Goodman’s regression and creating bounds limiting the variance of the estimates. He also recognizes the importance of contextual knowledge in making valid ecological inference (King, 21). While King’s technique is criticized for making unrealistic assumptions about the data (Cho 1998), it provides a promising way to
identify voter transitions between Turkish elections in the absence of survey data collecting information about same individuals over time. The technique is applied to voter transitions in Italian elections (Wellhofer 2001) and voter transitions in the Weimar Republic and socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of the Nazi supporters (King at al. 2004b).

King’s technique is originally designed for 2XC tables, and extending it to RXC tables poses unprecedented difficulties and complexities. A sophisticated statistical technique that estimates the cells of RXC tables simultaneously without iteration has been recently developed (Rosen et al. 2001). However, this method involves complicated calculations and is not very practical. King advises dividing RXC tables into 2x2 tables and iterating the technique until all parameters of interest are estimated. The iteration technique in voter transition analyses, where for each step the vote share of parties other than the party of interest is subsumed under a residual category, creates new, unforeseen difficulties in King’s original analysis. Specifically, aggregation of different parties’ vote under a residual category causes an aggregation bias that is not quite detectible by the diagnostic graphs suggested by King. A feasible alternative is including relevant covariates in the analysis to alleviate the aggregation bias due to the creation of residual categories (Ferree 2004). Covariates chosen on the basis of the researcher’s prior knowledge of unit of analyses contributes to the robustness of the ecological inference analysis and diminishes the pernicious effects of aggregation bias.

Table 2, which is created by *EI: A Program for Ecological Inference* developed by Gary King, shows voter transitions between major party blocs from 1991 to the 2002 elections in the Central Anatolian provinces. While the results may not be very precise given the relatively high scope of computational errors, they provide an informative account of the changes took place in Central Anatolia in four elections. The results are consistent with the author’s qualitative knowledge of the provinces, ethnographic observations during the 2002 electoral campaign and theoretical expectations. The magnitude of voter defections from the two major center-right parties (MP and TPP) consistently increased from 1991 to 2002 in Central Anatolia despite the shrinking size of their voting base. In the 1995 elections, 39 percent of the voters who had supported the
center-right parties defected to other parties. A third of these voters switched their support to the religious WP, and around 11 percent to the nationalistic NAP. The electoral victory of the WP in 1995 was partially a function of the party’s increasing appeal among the erstwhile center-right supporters. Before the 1995 elections, the TPP received the lion share for the economic problems because it was a senior partner in the coalition government. Turkey had a serious economic crisis in 1994. The MP was not in a position to benefit from the TPP’s troubles partially because of its leadership adopted a liberal position that was at odds with the preferences with the conservative Sunni voters of Central Anatolia. In the 1999 elections, the decline of the center-right parties continued with greater magnitude. Around half of the citizens who voted for the MP and TPP in 1995 did not vote for them again in 1999. The NAP happened to be the great beneficiary of this mass defection from the center-right in Central Anatolia by receiving the vote of 40 percent of this group. The NAP’s uncompromising stance against Kurdish guerillas, its image as the party that could lift the ban on the headscarf without provoking the secular establishment and its effective grassroots organizations in the region helped the party to replace religious right as the address of discontented center-right votes. The VP suffered from a leadership crisis and could not replicate the success of its predecessor WP. Less than 10 percent of center-right voters switched to the VP. While the religious right had benefited from the decline of the center-right in 1995, the nationalist right became the main attraction for discontent center-right voters in 1999.

[Map 2 around here]

The 2002 election was a watershed in Turkish politics because the center-right was regrouped under the banner of the JDP. At a time when both the center-right and far-right parties were discredited, the voters flocked to the JDP. In a sense, the far right parties also became the victim of protest voting that had initially worked to their advantage. More than one-third of the citizens who supported either the MP or TPP in 1999 opted for the JDP in 2002 in Central Anatolia. Map 2 visualizes voter defections from the center-right to the JDP at the national level. The magnitude of defections was the highest in Central Anatolian provinces, but also substantial in Western provinces where no far right party had had strong presence earlier. The JDP remained weakest only in Thrace and Kurdish southeast. The national appeal of the JDP reflected the centrist and
the accommodative tone adopted by the party’s leadership before and during the elections. The JDP campaigns generally avoided inflammatory and polarizing discourse and sidestepped divisive issues the ban on the headscarf and Kurdish demands. The JDP portrayed itself as the only party that can effectively cope with economic mismanagement and widespread corruption.

Beyond the common themes of economic mismanagement, poverty and corruption, the JDP campaign messages were tailored to incorporate regionally salient and sensitive issues. In Kurdish regions, the JDP expressed its commitment to the EU-demanded reform packages and avoidance of ethnic Turkish nationalism. The JDP leadership was aware of that their main competitor, in Central Anatolia, was the NAP, which had been the leading party in the region in 1999. The restrictions on public expressions of Islam and the ongoing struggle with the Kurdish nationalism were high on the agenda of Central Anatolian voters. The JDP leadership criticized the NAP for betraying its promises to execute the captured KWP leader and to end the ban on the headscarf. After three and a half years in government, not only had the NAP failed to end the ban on the headscarf, but its attempts to execute the guerilla leader had also come to nothing. The JDP exploit its opportunity to brandish its nationalistic and conservative credentials in the eyes of Central Anatolian voters. The JDP addressed to the concerns of these voters by framing the issues of the headscarf and religious issues as matters of individual rights. This strategy served to the two goals. On the one hand, it reminded the conservative-religious voters that the JDP was attentive to their demands and would find a solution without polarizing the political landscape. On the other, it ensured the JDP would not only address a religious constituency but would pursue policies that would increase the scope of individual rights, as well as religious, ethnic, and political ones. This enabled the JDP to simultaneously appear credible to religious voters, moderate enough to those center-rightist voters who shun religious parties, and less threatening to the secular establishment, which fostered deep suspicions about the JDP.

Table 3 shows voter transitions within the right between the 1999 and 2002 elections at the national level. It reveals that the JDP drew substantial support from right oriented voters. Three-fourths of the VP voters in 1999 voted for the JDP in 2002, and
just 13 percent remained loyal to the FP, the VP’s de facto successor. In Central Anatolia, almost 90 percent of citizens previously voted for the VP preferred the JDP to FP in 2002. The JDP also attracted around three-fifths of the citizens who had voted for the NAP in 1999, and generated the electoral downfall of the nationalistic party. Apparently, the JDP’s campaign strategy effectively undermined the NAP especially in Central Anatolian regions where the NAP had been the strongest. Finally, around one-third of the MP and TPP voters chose the JDP at the ballot box in 2002. The relatively diverse basis of the JDP points to the party’s ability to appeal to conservative and religious voters without alienating typical center right voters. In this sense, the JDP simultaneously overcame the traditional weakness of the center-right and far right parties. The JDP was conservative enough to be a viable alternative to both religious and nationalistic right in the eyes of Central Anatolian voters. Meanwhile, the party’s skillfully crafted centrist platform drew a wedge between the JDP and religious parties of the past. In the 1995 elections, center-right and center-left parties capitalized on voters’ popular anxiety with the rise of the WP and partially succeeded in limiting the WP’s appeal. This was hardly the case in 2002. The JDP managed to mobilize the mainstream right-leaning voters who had been beyond the reach of religious-populism in 1995. In Western provinces where the WP had had hardly any significant presence, the JDP became the leading party.

Ecological inference analysis provides evidence to the argument that the center-right was faced with a serious challenge from the religious and nationalistic right in Central Anatolia during the 1990s. Given the geographical distribution of party blocs’ electoral performances, center-right erosion directly benefited far right and contributed to the polarization of Turkish politics. These parties had initially capitalized on widespread discontent with the MP and TPP and attracted protest votes. However, protest voting also negatively affected the far right parties after they took part in coalition governments in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Consequently, the JDP entered into political void and emerged as a center-right party mobilizing citizens disillusioned with the performances of center and far right parties.
Conclusion

The left-right (center-periphery) cleavage has been central to the evolution to the Turkish electoral politics since the 1950s. Protest voting has become widespread in the 1990s and brought the demise of successive incumbent parties until the 2002 elections. The geopolitical perspective elaborated in this paper explains how the great cleavage of Turkish politics interacts with protest voting and affects the electoral fortunes of right parties. It appears that Central Anatolia has been a battleground between the center-right and far right since the early 1990s. For this reason, this region has special strategic importance for the center-right in Turkish politics. The viability of the center-right in turn is essential for the consolidation of Turkish democracy. Center-right parties were instrumental in the integration of marginalized conservative and pious citizens into the legal and electoral system in the 1950s and 1960s. The existence of robust center-right parties also checks the rise of religious and nationalistic parties. The increasing polarization and instability of Turkish politics was directly related to the erosion of the two major center-right parties governed by ineffective and incompetent leaders. From this perspective, the revitalization of the center-right in the shape of the JDP has been a positive development for the sustainability of Turkish democracy. The economic crises of 2000 and 2001 did not translate into support for political radicalism in the 2002 elections.

The key to the JDP’s success was the coalition it built among conservative Sunni voters of Central Anatolia and mainstream center-right voters in coastal and Western, lower middle and working class citizens of big cities. The difficulty of simultaneously satisfying all components of this coalition made the JDP leadership cautious and inadvertently limited its reformist agenda. In particular, the JDP failed to break the deadlock in the Kurdish question despite its repeated promises of equal rights for all citizens regardless of ethnicity, religion, and regional residence. The party leadership’s reluctance to be more receptive to the Kurdish demands might partially reflected its concern with the reactions from its support base in Central Anatolia. After all, the party partially owed its spectacular success in the 2002 elections to its ability to attract NAP voters in Central Anatolia. It might not afforded to be seen weak on “Kurdish secessionism” in the eyes of these citizens.
The data is compiled from election results published by the Turkish Statistical Institute (Türkiye İstatistik Enstitüsü - TSI). The graph is created by calculating all parties’ vote shares participated in the elections since 1950.

Source: World Values Surveys Conducted in Turkey
Table 1: The Distribution of Parliamentary Seats in Central Anatolia & Nationwide (1987-2002)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>CA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center-right</td>
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<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td>Center-left</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Far-right</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>48</td>
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</table>

All numbers are in percentages. CA stands for the percentage of parliamentary seats from Central Anatolia, NA stands for the percentage of parliamentary seats nationwide. Central Anatolian provinces are Adıyaman, Amasya, Çankırı, Çorum, Elazığ, Erzincan, Erzurum, Gümüşhane, Kayseri, Kırşehir, Konya, Malatya, Maraş, Nevşehir, Niğde, Sivas, Tokat, Yozgat, Aksaray, Bayburt, Karaman, Kırıkkale, and Osmaniye.

The total number of seats gained by three party blocs may not equal to the total number of parliamentary seats because of independent candidates’ winning seats. The number of parliamentary seats was increased from 450 to 550 before the 1995 elections. Central Anatolian provinces had 99, 100, 121, 120, and 117 seats in the 1987, 1991, 1995, 1999, and 2002 elections respectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Center Right 91</th>
<th>Center Right 95</th>
<th>Center Right 99</th>
<th>Average</th>
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<td>33 (.01)</td>
<td>50 (.01)</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Right 95</td>
<td>33 (.01)</td>
<td>08 (.02)</td>
<td>38 (.03)</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationalistic Right 95</td>
<td>11 (.01)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Center Right 99</td>
<td>50 (.01)</td>
<td>08 (.02)</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Center Right 02</td>
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<tr>
<td>JDP 02</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Far Right 02</td>
<td>Negligible</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Numbers in parentheses are the standard errors from the ecological inference analysis. Other numbers are in percentages. Average stands for blocs national vote shares. Summation of values in each row may be short of or more than 100 percent because of computational errors and not all voter transitions are shown in the table.
Table 3: Voter Transitions between the Right Parties between 1999 and 2002 (in %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>NAP 02</th>
<th>FP 02</th>
<th>Average</th>
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<td>(.00, .84)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>13 (.00)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.00, .98)</td>
<td>(.00, .16)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAP 99</td>
<td></td>
<td>61 (.02)</td>
<td>32 (.00)</td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.00, .95)</td>
<td>(.00, .45)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
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</table>

Numbers are in percentages. Numbers in the first parentheses are the standard errors from the ecological inference analysis. Numbers in the second parentheses give the confidence estimates. Summation of values in each row may be short of or more than 100 percent because of computational errors and not all parties are included in the analysis. Parties with marginal vote shares are omitted. Only cells that are points of interest and plausible are calculated. For example, there is no point in focusing on the voter transition from the VP to the NAP between 1999 and 2002, because it is practically zero.


Map 1: The Electoral Performances of the Far Right Parties between 1991 and 1999

The average vote for the WP, NAP, and VP in three elections between 1991 and 1999 (in %)
Map 2: Voter Transitions from the two Center-Right Parties to the JDP between 1999 and 2002