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Transliteration Table: Consonants

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
ب	b		ط	ṭ
ت	t		ظ	ẓ
ث	th		ع	‘
ج	j		غ	gh
ح	ḥ		ف	f
خ	kh		ق	q
د	d		ك	k
ذ	dh		ل	l
ر	r		م	m
ز	z		ن	n
س	s		ه	h
ش	sh		و	w
ص	ṣ		ء	’
ض	ḍ		ي	y

Transliteration Table: Vowels and Diphthongs

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
اَ	a		اَ، آ، اِيَّ	an
اُ	u		اُوَّ	un
اِ	i		اِيَّ	in
آ، آَ، اِيَّ، اِيَّ	ā		اُوَّ	aw
اُوَّ	ū		اِيَّ	ay
اِيَّ	ī		اُوَّ	uww, ū (in final position)
			اِيَّ	iyy, ī (in final position)

Source: ROTAS Transliteration Kit: <http://rotas.iium.edu.my>

The Collapse of Economic Voting Behaviour in Turkish Politics

Caglar Ezikoglu*

Abstract: For voters, phenomena such as increasing feelings of nationalism, the transformation of the perception of foreign powers into a political tool by the government, and the pursuit of polarisation politics by making the opposition enemies, push the importance of the economic crisis towards the back of the list of concerns for the voters. The general elections that took place between 1980 and 2018 are examined and the economic voting behaviour is explored in this study, especially in terms of periodical developments in Turkish politics. It is obvious that the economic voting model was an important determinant on the Turkish voters in the elections until 2008. However, ideological factors, strong leadership analysis or other indicators have started to replace the economic voting model in Turkey with serious political changes after 2008. In this context, this study is aimed to make an important contribution by filling the gap in the literature on economic voting in Turkish politics.

Keywords: Economic Voting Behaviour, Turkey, AKP, Islamism, Nationalism

Abstrak: Bagi para pengundi, fenomena seperti meningkatnya perasaan nasionalisme, transformasi terhadap persepsi kuasa asing sebagai alat politik oleh kerajaan, dan mewujudkan polarisasi politik dengan mencipta pembangkang sebagai musuh, telah melemahkan kepentingan krisis ekonomi sebagai faktor penting dalam membuat keputusan mengundi. Makalah ini mengkaji keputusan pilihan raya umum antara 1980 dan 2018 dengan menganalisis tingkah laku pengundian ekonomi, khususnya dari segi perkembangan politik berkala di Turki. Jelas sekali bahawa model pengundian ekonomi merupakan penentu penting kepada pengundi Turki dalam pilihan raya sehingga 2008. Walau bagaimanapun, faktor ideologi, analisis kepimpinan yang kukuh atau penunjuk

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lain telah mula menggantikan model pengundian ekonomi di Turki dengan perubahan politik yang serius berlaku selepas 2008. Dalam konteks ini, kajian ini bertujuan untuk memberi sumbangan penting dengan mengisi kekosongan literatur mengenai pengundian ekonomi dalam politik Turki.

Kata Kunci: Tingkahlaku Pengundian Ekonomi, Turki, AKP, Islamisme, Nasionalisme

Introduction

The role of free elections is crucial for democratic countries. In this study, the article presents a comparative analysis of economic voting behaviour through the example of Turkey. The first general elections of the Republic of Turkey were held in 1935, and the early Republican period witnessed a one-party state in Turkish politics. The first election in which more than one party participated was held in 1946. Studies on voting behaviour in Turkish political science literature have since focused on the transition to the multi-party system in Turkey.

The general elections that took place between 1980 and 2023 are examined and the economic voting behaviour is explored in this study, especially in terms of periodical developments in Turkish politics. It is obvious that the economic voting model was an important determinant on the Turkish voters in the elections until 2008. However, ideological factors, strong leadership analysis or other indicators have started to replace the economic voting model in Turkey with serious political changes and developments after 2008. In this context, this study aims to make an important contribution by filling the gap in the literature on economic voting in Turkish politics.

Materials and Methods

The main methodology of this research is a qualitative document analysis based on secondary sources about economic voting behaviour in Turkish politics. Document analysis is a qualitative research method that involves the systematic examination and interpretation of various types of documents to gain insights and understanding about a particular phenomenon or research question. This method allows researchers to analyse existing texts, written or visual, to uncover patterns, themes, and meanings that contribute to the research inquiry. Document analysis is commonly used in social sciences, humanities, education, and other

fields to study historical events, organisational structures, policy documents, literature, and many other subjects (Bowen, 2009, pp. 27-28).

Qualitative research methods, including document analysis, are concerned with understanding the context, meanings, and interpretations of data rather than quantifying or measuring variables. Through document analysis, researchers aim to explore complex social and cultural phenomena, providing in-depth insights into individuals' perspectives, historical trends, and societal norms. The process of document analysis typically involves gathering relevant documents related to the research question or topic. Documents can include written texts, reports, policy papers, historical records, interviews, photographs, newspapers, and other visual or textual materials. Document analysis is a flexible and powerful qualitative method that allows researchers to explore various aspects of a research question. It can be used as a standalone approach or combined with other qualitative or quantitative methods to enrich the research process and provide comprehensive results (Sankofa, 2022).

At the same time, surveys conducted by IPSOS and KONDA research companies in Turkey before and after the elections have been an important data collection tool for this research. In particular, post-election surveys after the Turkish elections were examined and the reasons why the respondents voted were observed. As can be seen from these electoral surveys, the logic of voting behaviour based on economic reasons has declined in Turkish elections after 2008.

Voting Behaviour Models

Apart from economic voting behaviour, there are other different schools and models of voting behaviour. The best known of these are the Columbia School and the Psychological approach. The Columbia school, which argues that people vote according to their social class, and the Psychological (Michigan) school, which argues that voters' preference according to their party affiliation, have been insufficient in some points. In particular, these two schools fail to explain why citizens vote for a different political party in the elections. Rational (economic) voting behaviour aims to explain this phenomenon.

The rational school argues the voter's decision precisely by considering economic variables. In this school, voters support the

political party that is closest to their goals and interests in every electoral period. In this theory, voters do not have a sense of political belonging like the Columbia or Psychological school. The only expectation of the voter is their rational thinking, i.e. the only goal of the voters is to obtain “material benefits” as a result of the election. In the rational school, voters support political candidates or parties that can meet their interests. If the voter’s political party fails to achieve this goal, they decide to support another political party in the next elections (Akgün, 2007, p. 89).

Similar to the Columbia school, the rational school attributes an instrumental approach to the elections. However, the action that emerges as a result of cost-benefit calculations is individual-centred in this school. Other schools and approaches like Michigan or Psychological Schools are the opposite of the rational school due to this reason. The basic criterion of the rational choice model is that voters stress government’s responsibility of economic policies. The electoral success of the ruling party in the upcoming elections is directly related to its economic performance in the past. If it has implemented an unsuccessful economic policy, its chances of electoral victory decrease in the elections (Ünal, 2010, pp. 101-108).

The most important work of the rational voting school is “An Economic Theory Of Democracy” written by Anthony Downs in 1957. In the study where economic models are applied to political science, election areas are likened to market areas. Theoretically, the relations between voters and political parties are clear and obvious. During the election process, political parties present their political propaganda to the voters. Voters choose the political party that can bring more benefits for them at the ballot box. In other words, like the supply-demand model in economics, this school focuses on the decision-making mechanism that occurs in the individual’s mind, as opposed to the external factors that make voting preferences (Ünal, 2010, pp. 101-105).

Cem Başlevent and Hasan Kirmanoğlu’s “Economic Voting in Turkey: Perceptions, Expectations, and Party Choice” (2015) explores the effects of economic data on voting behaviour. Beginning with a brief summary of 2001 economic developments, their study reviews the literature on the economic voting school in the Turkish context and then examines the likelihood of Turkish voters’ preference for the ruling

party, Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi-AKP). Their work uses micro data from pre-electoral surveys for the 2014 presidential elections. It provides strong evidence in favour of the idea that perceptions and expectations about the economy have a significant impact on party choice in terms of economic developments in Turkey. The findings suggest that the AKP government will remain in power for at least one more term after the 2015 elections due to the high rate of voters who are satisfied with the Turkish economy (Baslevant and Kirmanoglu, 2015).

Economic Voting Behaviour in Turkey in the 1980's

As a result of the 12 September 1980 military coup, the activities of political parties were suspended in 1981. On 24 April 1983, the Political Parties Law was re-enacted together with the 1982 Constitution. In order for political parties to gain legal personality, they were required to publish their declaration of establishment according to Article 8 of the Political Parties Law of the 1982 Constitution. Parties that published their declaration of establishment could start their activities after 16 May 1983 (T.C. Official Gazette, 1983, p. 3).

Only three political parties participated in the general elections held on 6 November 1983 after the military authorised the elections. The centre-right was represented by the Motherland Party (Anavatan Partisi-ANAP) founded by Turgut Özal and the Nationalist Democracy Party (Milliyetçi Demokrasi Partisi-MDP) founded by retired General Turgut Sunalp, while the centre-left was represented by the Populist Party (Halkçı Parti-HP) headed by Necdet Calp, whose only qualification was to serve as İsmet İnönü's secretary (Ahmad, 2016, p. 260). Founded in 1983 by Özal, the Motherland Party won the general elections and became the ruling party in Turkish politics.

Özal was the most important figure in previous Süleyman Demirel's government in charge of economic policies and the chief architect of the 24 January 1980 decisions which changed the basic paradigm of Turkey's economy, springing it to life with a free-market economy approach taken before the 12 September 1980 coup. Özal was free to take any measure he saw fit «to correct the country's economic problems,» which meant floating prices to reduce inflation, restricting consumption by keeping wages low, increasing exports and bargaining with foreign

credit institutions to postpone foreign debt payments of around eighteen billion dollars (Ahmad, 2016, pp. 260-261).

The 24 January 1980 decisions were seen as a close cooperation by international banks such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank and received positive reactions. In economic terms, the favourable atmosphere created by this cooperation enabled the restructuring of foreign debts and the establishment of a payment schedule under better conditions. This meant an influx of new resources for the Turkish economy. As a result, the ban on foreign exchange was lifted and the public sector's need for domestic inflationary financing was reduced compared to previous periods. It is obvious that these developments and the external support provided played an important role in ensuring macroeconomic stability (Pamuk, 2016, p. 297). The architect of the economic recovery until 1983 was Turgut Özal, the executor of the 24 January 1980 decisions. The voters supported ANAP in the 1983 elections instead of the other two political parties supported by the military forces. The 1983 elections were a strong example of the economic voting behaviour of the Turkish electorate.

On 6 September 1987, a referendum was held to lift the 5 to 10-year political bans imposed on politicians with the provisional Article 4 of the 1982 Constitution. As a result of the referendum, political bans were lifted (Çiftçi, 2018, p. 61). Thus, political leaders in political exile would be able to lead the parties they had founded. The 1988 general elections were brought forward by one year. Özal's decision to hold early elections made it difficult for ANAP to implement its economic agenda for the elections. In the 29 November 1987 elections, the ruling party ANAP led by Özal, the Social Democrat Populist Party (*Sosyal Demokrat Halkçı Parti-SHP*) led by Erdal İnönü, and the True Path Party (*Doğruyol Partisi-DYP*) led by Demirel, whose political ban was lifted, managed to pass the election threshold. In the elections, ANAP won 292 parliamentary seats with 36.3%, SHP 99 parliamentary seats with 24.8% and DYP 59 parliamentary seats with 19.1%.

The economic policies implemented by Özal during his early years as prime minister brought many advantages after 1984. Since then, entrepreneurship and investments have increased with the opening to foreign markets. As the import substitution policy was replaced by

neo-liberal policies, foreign exchange was used for new investments. By the end of 1984, the share of industry in exports exceeded 70%. Turkey had begun to move from an agriculture-based economy to a high value-added, industrial exporting country. However, when the import substitution model that had dominated the Turkish economy for so many years was replaced by neo-liberal policies, the Turkish economy began to experience some problems due to its lack of industrialisation. The competitiveness of Turkish industry should be measured effectively when the economy was in a period of high inflation. In the name of liberalism, Turkish industry had started to partially implement automation and robotic technology with the idea of keeping up with the new breakthroughs. The introduction of automatics and robotics into small industries, which were not sufficiently specialised exacerbated the already problematic unemployment rate (Talas, 1993, pp. 4-6).

Structural problems started to increase the deficits in imports and current account transactions. The increase in current account deficits led to an increase in exchange rates and interest rates (Çelebi, 2013, pp. 160-161). In this period in Turkey, the population living in rural areas was marginalised; the call to boost agricultural development to increase the income of the rural population was ignored. In addition, with the 24 January 1980 decisions, the number of products supported in agriculture dropped from 24 in 1980 to 18 in 1985. With the 24 January 1980 decisions, the inflation rate was brought down to a certain level in the first years of the ANAP government, but the purchasing power started to decline with high inflation in the following years. Inflation led to an increase in the prices of essential consumption products and wages continuously declined as compared to high inflation rates between 1984 and 1988 (Şinasi et.al., 2008).

This negative perception in the Turkish economy first made itself felt in the 1987 elections. Although ANAP emerged as the first party in the elections, it lost votes compared to the previous elections. The main reaction of the electorate to the worsening economic situation was in the 1989 local elections. In these elections, ANAP received 22% of the votes across the country and lost many local governments. This again shows the impact of economic voting behaviour on the Turkish electorate in the 1980s. This phenomenon continued in the 1990's and it will be explored in the next part of this study.

Economic Voting Behaviour in Turkey in the 1990's

After the 1989 local elections, ANAP prepared for the 1991 general elections with the Özal's presidency and an economic downturn in Turkey. Özal became the President in 1989 and Mesut Yılmaz was the chairman of ANAP before the 1991 election. With the above-mentioned situation, political parties put mergers or alliances among themselves on the agenda. In the 1991 general elections, the first political alliance was between the RP (*Refah Partisi*), the Nationalist Work Party (*Milliyetçi Çalışma Partisi-MÇP*) and the IDP (*Islahatçı Demokrasi Partisi*); the second alliance was between the centre-left parties HEP and SHP; and the third and last alliance was between the Democratic Centre Party (*Demokratik Merkez Parti-DMP*), founded by some politicians who left ANAP and DYP in order to pass the electoral threshold and enter parliament (Yiğit, 2018, p. 121).

Polling results were inconclusive; ANAP – whose support had eroded steadily since the previous (1987) elections – lost its absolute parliamentary majority (ANAP received about %24 of total votes) while DYP, in line with opinion polls, increased its total. After inter-party negotiations on formation of a new Government, DYP and SHP signed a coalition pact on 19 November 1991. The Cabinet – with 11 SHP and 22 DYP members – was announced the next day, Demirel becoming Prime Minister once again and Erdal İnönü his Deputy.

After eight years of uninterrupted rule, ANAP lost huge support from voters and became the second largest party. The most important reason why ANAP lost so many votes and DYP emerged as the largest party was inflation and high unemployment rates caused by the 24 January 1980 decision. In addition, ANAP's lack of support for rural areas during its time in power and Demirel's use of this policy as election propaganda were effective in terms of rural votes. The Islamist RP, which allied itself with MÇP and IDP, together with SHP and DSP, which passed the 10% electoral threshold by a very small margin, had representatives in parliament. In the 1991 general elections, ANAP suffered humiliating loss.

Economic reasons were among the most important factors in turning the political conjuncture in favour of the DYP. Another important achievement was the rise of RP, which reached a significant potential and demonstrated this with the alliances it established. In addition to

the unfair distribution of income among the Turkish people, foreign and domestic borrowing led to a decline in purchasing power. These are the main reasons why the Turkish voters' preference changed from ANAP to the DYP and RP in the 1991 elections.

In the 1991 elections, one of the most important issues was the effect of economic indicators on the elections. As mentioned in the economic voting model, it is an important factor that the public wants to consider their own interests from an economic perspective. Based on this factor, election campaigns are the crucial factor that will be reflected in the election results. The DYP used this factor and conducted its election campaign by highlighting economic issues that affect the Turkish people. This dominant position of the economic voting model would be repeated in the 1995 general elections.

Before the 1995 general elections, important developments had taken place in Turkish political life. The IMF and the World Bank became decisive in the Turkish economy after the 1994 economic crisis. Following this development, on 6 March 1995, a Customs Union agreement was concluded with the EU. It is an arrangement whereby all customs and other restrictive practices in trade between participating countries are abolished. Theoretically, it aims to increase the volume of trade among member countries (McCormick, 2015, p. 387). This treaty partially tied the Turkish economy to the EU without giving any assurance of the former's full membership in the EU (Akdevelioğlu & Kürçüoğlu, 2010, p. 229). As a result, the influence of the US and the EU in the Turkish economy increased.

After the 1994 local elections, the RP (*Refah Partisi*) continued to rise as an alternative party to the government in opinion polls conducted before the 1995 general elections. Çiller and Yılmaz (DYP/ANAP), who entered the elections with strong leadership cadres and were in the centre, carried out propaganda activities targeting the political ideology of the party against the RP, which was in the periphery (Balci, 2007, p. 125). The RP focused on criticising the government and the system, used social democratic slogans, and carried out election propaganda that it defined as "*Adil Düzen*" (Just Order) in order to ensure opportunity and income justice. RP's political momentum in the 1990s began when it drew a border of anti-nationalism against the secular bloc, which it held responsible for the country's problems such as political corruption or bribery (Kalaylıoğlu, 2017, p. 86).

RP's electoral programme, which it called "*Adil Düzen*," was a propaganda tool created for the Turkish electorate and was completely interwoven with economic voting behaviour that had a very pronounced impact in this period. The adoption of the "free market regime" by the Turkish economy after the 24 January 1980 decisions pushed parties such as the DYP, ANAP, SHP and CHP to use free market arguments as propaganda in the elections. The post-1980 period of crises that emerged as a result of the antagonistic division emerged as an essential response to the crisis of the existing political structure (Kalaylıoğlu, 2017, p. 86). *Adil Düzen* was not just an election manifesto that included the economy. It was a total administrative order that encompassed political, economic, religious and social life (Ersin & Yıldırım, 2015, pp. 143-145). Economic voting behaviour, which is one of the most important characteristics of the Turkish electorate and which made itself felt especially in the 1990s, raised the RP to the first party position in the 1995 general elections. Voters evaluated the developments in the economy before the elections, whether good or bad, and as seen in many examples around the world, the economic-based voting factor was effective in Turkey. Considering the inability of the parties in power to find solutions to problems such as economy, inflation, unemployment and livelihood problems, voters withdrew a significant mass support to these political parties. There were "socio-economic" reasons behind the RP's rise to the position of the first party with the support of religious, conservative, nationalist and low- and middle-income voters who had been confined to the sidelines and excluded from economic and social life for many years. The electoral argument used was reflected in the election results and RP emerged from the elections with significant vote potential. In principle, the "*Adil Düzen*" promised that all citizens would have a fair income and that social justice would be ensured for all (Karagöl & Dama, 2015, pp. 2-4). In this period, RP aimed to unite the peripheral elements of capital and working classes with the slogan of "*Adil Düzen*."

In the elections held in the 1990s, the crises in the Turkish economy had a direct impact on voter preferences. The economic voting behaviour of the Turkish electorate was behind the rise of the Islamist RP in the 1990s. The last example of this situation would occur in the 2002 elections, and after the 2002 elections, the economic voting behaviour of the Turkish electorate would decrease. This phenomenon will be discussed in the next part.

The Collapse of Economic Voting Behaviour in Turkey in the 2000's

The last elections in Turkish politics in which economic voting behaviour was clearly observed were the November 2002 elections. Established in 1999, the DSP-MHP-ANAP coalition faced a major economic crisis, especially with the deterioration of macroeconomic stability. When the tripartite coalition came to power, the Turkish economy was involved in “globalisation efforts,” which led to difficult times. In 1999, the effects of the “stand-by” agreement with the IMF were visible in 2000 and 2001. The “state crisis” between President Sezer and Prime Minister Ecevit affected the Turkish economy. The crisis of 2001 was triggered by the 24 January 1980 decisions that had fully embraced foreign capital and demolished customs walls. The 2001 crisis was precisely the lack of “foreign exchange-hot money” in the Turkish economy. In 1989, the current account deficits caused by the hardening of capital markets had disrupted the inflow of “foreign exchange-hot money” (Çarkoğlu, 2002, p. 125).

On 14 April 2001, the new IMF-financed economic stabilisation programme was announced to the public by Kemal Derviş who was appointed by Ecevit and his government for resolving the economic crisis. The programme was described as a “transition to a strong economy” and included the enactment of 15 laws. Immediately after the programme was announced, Turkey and the IMF signed the 18th “stand-by” agreement. The attitude towards the coalition government during the crisis was different from other economic crises. In the 2000-2001 crisis, there were violent demonstrations, and tradesmen or artisans were directly involved in the demonstrations. The main agenda item of the state was replaced by the economy instead of “security and politics.” As the main agenda of the summits held at the state focused on the economy, the military and judicial bureaucracy, which prioritised the statist economy, experienced a change of mind (Tuncel, 2010, p.175).

The demonstrations during this period directly affected the upcoming general elections. With the economic crisis in the country and the deteriorating health of Ecevit, the prime minister of the coalition government, discussions on early elections began. Upon these developments, MHP's leader Devlet Bahçeli found a solution to the

discussions about early elections. The date of the early elections was set for 3 November 2002.

The previous coalition government received 52.98% of the votes in the 1999 general election (DSP 22%, MHP 17.98%, ANAP 13%). In the 2002 elections, the total vote share of the coalition partners DSP, MHP and ANAP was 14.47%. When both elections are compared, the coalition partners lost a total of 38.51% of the votes. The main reason for this loss was the economic crisis in 2001. On the other hand, the AKP, which reacted harshly to the economic crisis and was founded after the division in the *Milli Görüş* Movement, was the winner of the elections. The AKP was established in 2001 and won the elections in November 2002, with a winning coalition that included both domestic and external supporters such as European countries and the United States, liberal intellectuals within the country, moderate Islamist groups like the Fethullah Gülen Movement, conservative citizens of Turkish society – as their votes significantly influence who is elected – centre-right voters, faith-based non-profit organisations, Western-style business institutions like TÜSİAD (*Türk Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği*) and conservative business interests among many others (like MÜSİAD) when the party first assumed power in 2002. An analysis of the AKP's broad winning coalition also reveals the support of important representatives of the economic sector. This is another indication of the validity of economic voting behaviour, especially when the AKP came to power (Ezikoğlu, 2021).

In all elections held after 2002, which allowed the AKP to survive in Turkish political life, economic voting behaviour weakened and different reasons for voting emerged. Leaders or political parties consolidated their power by minimising their winning coalition against threats to their survival. AKP has faced two significant threats: the 2007 military coup attempt and the 2008 closure trial. After surviving these threats, the AKP chose to consolidate its power by fighting against secular Kemalist elites. This phenomenon affected the 2007 election and AKP increased its votes up to 47 percent in this election.

During its second and third terms, the AKP broke that broad voting coalition from its founding philosophy and eliminated its partners one by one. The distinguishing feature of these coalition partners is that they defined themselves as specifically secular. As the tension with

the secularists grew from 2007, the AKP had to assume policies that were more populist to retain the large nominal electorate. Hence, the impending question is, how did the AKP gain the support of the majority of voters? At this point, the AKP carried out a populist strategy between secular and conservative citizens in Turkey and consolidated the support of conservative voters between 2011 and 2014 (Ezikoğlu, 2021).

After the 2014 presidential elections, the AKP and Erdogan's policy line evolved into a new way. With these elections, Erdogan was convinced that the Kurdish movement and the Fethullah Gülen Movement could become a threat to his political survival. The AKP government needed a new paradigm to put this struggle into political expediency to console the electoral base and increase its votes in the elections (Ezikoğlu, 2016). At this point, Turkish nationalism, which started to rise in the Kurdish peace process, will seek help from the AKP and Erdogan. In the Erdogan leadership of the AKP government, the effort to combine Islamism and nationalism will also be one of the independent variables to explore the survival of the AKP. As can be seen, there are many factors other than the economy that contributed to the AKP's increased voting potential. On the other hand, there is a positive correlation between the deterioration of economic data and the increasing trend of AKP's votes in Turkish elections.

Leaders or ruling parties should redistribute wealth to maintain their supporter base and should pay their followers just enough to support them. Although there is an increase in poor people from the lower-classes in Turkey, these people have continued to support Erdoğan's leadership.

Even though Turkey's \$800 billion economy is among the 20 biggest in the world, the IMF recently warned that it is not built on a sustainable model and remains too vulnerable to dangers outside its borders. Likewise, Standard & Poor's noted that the boom in consumer credit had become a serious risk for Turkish leaders. Turkey, which has one of the biggest current-account deficits in the world— 7.9%% of GDP in 2013— was particularly vulnerable. By way of comparison, the current account deficit of South Africa is 5.3%% of GDP, Brazil is 3.6%% of GDP, Indonesia is 3.3%% of GDP, and India is 2.6% of GDP (Eligür 2014, pp. 174-175).

Despite poor economic performance, AKP and Erdogan seemed to receive approval from the electorate. Eligür (2014) opines:

However, this worsening economic picture led to an increase in support for the AKP government. Gallup surveys show that many poor Turks have seen improvements in their living standards under Erdogan's watch, a likely factor in his high popularity among this group. While living standards in Turkey have generally improved since 2008 thanks to a quick recovery after the global economic crisis, the poorest 20% of Turks are particularly likely to have grown more satisfied with their living standards—possibly related to considerable spending on social assistance programmes under Erdogan's AKP government. In 2008, 28% of the poorest Turks were satisfied with their standard of living, rising to 48% in 2014 (2014, p. 175).

People who could not find a job and whose living standards were dropping voted AKP in the elections. One of the cases of this phenomenon was the March 2014 local elections. Deniz Derviş who volunteered as a ballot monitor in Okmeydanı for the 30 March 2014 local election reported:

I volunteered as a monitor in Okmeydanı (a poor, mixed district of Istanbul). The ballot box I monitored had 120 AKP votes, 95 CHP (main opposition) and 53 HDP (leftist, pro-Kurdish opposition). Yes, there may well have been vote rigging during these elections, in particular in Ankara. But I don't think the total rigged votes could exceed 1% for the whole country. So, we are faced with economic problems with Gezi and the 17 December corruption tapes but at least 40% of people are still happy with the AKP. We should also note that the voter-turnout was 90%, whereas it was 85% in 2009 (Derviş, 2014).

In explaining this phenomenon, Tillman (2014) writes:

Data from an exit poll conducted during the 30 March 2014 local elections demonstrates a negative relationship between income and support for the AKP. Those in the lowest income group (less than 700 Turkish Lira per month) voted AKP over the CHP by a 42% to 18% margin. However, 40% of those in the highest income bracket (more than 3,000 Turkish Lira per month) voted for the CHP, compared to 30% for the AKP (Tillman 2014, p. 4).

A similar example was the 2018 general elections, when the Turkish economy was about to experience a serious crisis. Ezikoglu states that:

An ongoing steep fall in the value of the Turkish lira, coupled with warnings of an overheating economy and a widening current account deficit, threaten the popularity of the AKP, which has often banked on a healthy and growing economy as a key element of its popular strength (2021).

In February 2018, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) warned Turkey about its increased vulnerabilities, such as large external financing needs, limited foreign exchange reserves, increased reliance on short-term capital inflows, and high corporate exposure to foreign exchange risk (IMF, 2018).

Despite these negative developments in the Turkish economy, it was observed that voters voted according to the rise of nationalist ideology rather than economic voting behaviour. Ezikoglu points out that:

This nationalist sentiment, which AKP and leader Erdogan focused on, was not only campaigned during the elections but was also turned into an electoral coalition with the MHP. The amendments to the electoral law that the government rushed through Parliament only one month prior to the elections allowed political parties to band together – a move by the AKP designed to circumvent the 10 per cent electoral threshold for its ally MHP and retain the parliamentary majority as a bloc. This plan would be successful in the June 2018 Elections. The winners of this election were Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Justice and Development Party. Thus, by obtaining 52.5 per cent of the vote, Erdoğan became the first President under the new system, while the AK Party received 42.6 per cent of the vote and obtained 295 seats in the parliament (2021).

Altun (2018) claims that, “under the leadership of Erdoğan, by forming the People’s Alliance (Cumhur İttifakı) with the Nationalist Action Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP), the AKP laid the way for a strong parliamentary coalition” (pp. 89-103).

Conclusion

The main argument of this research is the erosion of economic voting behaviour in Turkey. Accordingly, in the first phase of the study, elections

in the 1980s and 1990s and voting behaviour in these elections were analysed. As a result of these analyses, economic indicators are behind the rise of ANAP in the 1980s and RP in the 1990s. Both of these parties came to power by turning the economic crises that preceded them to their favour. In these periods, the parties or actors held responsible for the crisis could not hold on to the political arena.

The AKP's rise to power in the early 2000s was similar. However, in the elections that followed, it is observed that economic voting behaviour started to lose its relevance in Turkish politics. The final part of this study attempted to explore this phenomenon. Despite the recent economic crisis and with inflation soaring, the 2023 election results demonstrated that the AKP government has not suffered a serious loss of votes.

Before the 6 February 2003 earthquake that hit 10 provinces in Turkey, polls showed that the AKP government's share of the vote in the parliamentary elections was between 35% and 40%. The observation that the People's Alliance could win a majority in parliament with the votes of the MHP, another partner of the People's Alliance, shows the magnitude of the erosion of economic voting behaviour. For the voters, phenomena such as increasing feelings of nationalism, the transformation of the perception of foreign powers into a political tool by the government, and the pursuit of polarisation politics by antagonising the opposition push the importance of the economic crisis for the voters towards the back of the list. This phenomenon confirms the main argument of this study although there were many studies in the literature that economic voting behaviour could end the AKP rule before the 2023 elections.

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Journal Article

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The Qur'ān

In-text:

(i) direct quotation, write as 30:36

(ii) indirect quotation, write as Qur'ān, 30:36

Reference:

The glorious Qur'ān. Translation and commentary by A. Yusuf Ali (1977). US: American Trust Publications.

Ḥadīth

In-text:

(i) Al-Bukhārī, 88:204 (where 88 is the book number, 204 is the ḥadīth number)

(ii) Ibn Hanbal, vol. 1, p. 1

Reference:

(i) Al-Bukhārī, M. (1981). *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr.

(ii) Ibn Ḥanbal, A. (1982). *Musnad Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal*. Istanbul: Cagri Yayinlari.

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