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Retrospective Voting in Turkey: Macro and Micro Perspectives

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Abstract

Recent studies have shown that party systems in emerging democracies do not always adequately reflect the various cleavages of society. Under such circumstances, retrospective voting may play a more important role than cleavage voting in determining electoral outcomes. For studies of retrospective voting, the choice between macro and micro level as the independent variable is a major methodological issue. Using individual-level data on Turkey, this paper addresses two major questions: (1) Are voters' decisions based on household economic conditions or national economic conditions? Do sociopolitical conditions also count? (2) Does the future evaluation of the economy affect voting decisions apart from past evaluation? Logit models are used in this research to answer these questions.

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INTRODUCTION

Recent studies have shown that party systems in emerging democracies do not always adequately reflect the various cleavages of society.[1] Under such circumstances, retrospective voting may play a more important role than cleavage voting in determining electoral outcomes. The retrospective voting model assumes that individuals make a voting decision based on previous socioeconomic gains or losses that have occurred under the incumbent.[2] Despite its potential importance, retrospective voting has scarcely been investigated in Turkey, especially on the individual level.[3] This paper provides preliminary findings that will serve to minimize this gap in research by analyzing survey data collected by Türkiye Sosyal Ekonomik Siyasal Araştırmalar Vakfı-TÜSES and Veri Araştırma in April 2002.

For single-country studies of retrospective voting, the choice between macro and micro level as the independent variable is a major methodological issue. Some scholars have argued that gains and losses are perceived not in terms of individuals, but rather in terms of the community or nation to which they belong. Analyzing individual opinion poll data, Ron Johnston and others have proposed explanations for changing geographic patterns of voting in Britain from the late 1970's to the 1980's.[4] They found that widening geographical gaps in voting behavior were associated with growing variance in socioeconomic geography. In relatively affluent (or deprived) regions, people tended to vote for (or against) the party in power when they approved (or disapproved) of the outcome of its policy in the region. Steven Reed and Gregory Brunk's time-series analysis of Japanese parliamentary elections supported the macro-criteria hypothesis.[5]

In contrast, Ian McAllister and Donley Studlar,[6] using individual opinion poll and survey data, showed that once the socioeconomic status of a constituency was controlled, effects of the constituency environment on voting behavior became insignificant. Their results indicated that for a person with a particular socioeconomic status, the probability of voting for the Conservatives would not change if he or she moved to a constituency characterized by higher or lower socioeconomic status.[7] Malcolm Brynin and David Sanders showed that voters who felt that they were in good health were more likely to vote for the incumbent than for the opposition.[8]

It would seem possible, however, to incorporate both personal and collective aspects of gains and losses in the analysis of a specific country. Gregory Markus has argued that in elections, voters take into consideration both their personal economic predicament and the nation's economic condition. His analysis of pooled individual-level survey data from eight U. S. presidential election years provided support for his hypothesis.[9] This paper shares Markus' view and adopts both macro and micro perspectives on retrospective voting. The data used for this paper is particularly suitable for investigating this issue. In February 2001, Turkey experienced an economic crisis triggered by a financial crisis and a flight of short-term capital (hot money). Massive currency devaluation (40 percent on 23 February),[10] hit an economy that for 2001, recorded the lowest per capita GDP growth rate following the Second World War (negative 9.3 percent). In the general election of November 2002, the three incumbent parties suffered serious defeats, receiving only 14.7 percent of the vote. The data collected in April 2002 thus reveals typical processes through which voters punish incumbents.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Using individual-level data, this paper addresses two major questions: (1) Are voters' decisions based on household economic conditions or national economic conditions? Do sociopolitical conditions also count? (2) Does the future evaluation of the economy affect voting decisions apart from past evaluation? A logit model is used in this research to answer these questions.

The binary dependent variable is the voter's support (one) or nonsupport (zero) for the incumbent. The independent variables include voter evaluation measured using an ordinal scale ranging from one to five (but treated as continuous in the logit model) of: (1) the household economy in the last twelve months and in the next twelve months, (2) the national economy in the last twelve months and in the next twelve months, and (3) society and politics in the last twelve months and in the next twelve months. The logit model predicts whether or not changes in the independent variable(s) significantly affect the probabilities of the binary dependent variable taking a value of one (in this case, support for the incumbent) instead of a value of zero. The effect of each independent variable is measured by the odds ratio in which unit change in the independent variable multiplies the odds of occurrence against non-occurrence.[11]

TÜSES and Veri Araştırma jointly conducted the opinion survey, and they kindly made individual survey data available to the author for research reported here. The survey was conducted across the country in April 2002 using a structured sample of 1,807. The data set included several questions and answers directly related to retrospective voting. For example, voters were asked what party they supported in the

previous general election, the party that they intended to vote for if general elections were held on the day they were interviewed, what their evaluation of the national economy was, and the evaluation of their household economy in the last twelve and in the coming twelve months. The data set also included voter evaluations of society and politics in the last twelve months and in the future. The resulting publication focused on the profile of party supporters in Turkey,[12] and it did not address the question of retrospective voting. It is thus worthwhile to use the survey data to explore relationships that have not yet been researched.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DATA

Summary statistics of the survey data are shown in Table 1. There are two major features of this data: First, public intolerance of the incumbent was very high. When asked which party they would vote for if there were general elections on that day, only 15.8 percent (*n*=215) of valid respondents[13] (*n*=1,359) chose to vote for any of the incumbent parties. The data from TÜSES-Veri Araştırma thus suggested severe electoral punishment of the governing parties in the coming general election, and in fact, the three incumbent parties together received only 14.7 percent of total valid votes in the general election of November 2002.

Second, voter evaluation of the economy and society in the recent past was generally very low. In the sample, 85.1 percent responded that their household economy had become either worse or much worse in the last twelve months, 91.3 percent indicated that the national economy had become worse or much worse, and 90.2 percent

evaluated society-politics in the same negative fashion. These very low evaluations, especially for the last twelve months, can be explained by the above-mentioned economic crisis in 2001. For the near future, more than half of the respondents thought that the household economy, the national economy, and society-politics would still be either much worse or worse.

Table 1. Summary Statistics of the Survey Data (*N*=1,807)

Dependent Variable	0: No[a]	1: Yes	Missing: Don't Know[b]	Total
Support for the Incumbent	1,144	215	448	1807
	(63.3)	(11.9)	(24.8)	(100.0)

Independent Variable	1: Much Worse	2: Worse	3: No Change	4: Better	5: Much Better	Missing: Don't Know	Total
Household economy							
Past	508	1030	211	52	6	0	1807
	(28.1)	(57.0)	(11.7)	(2.9)	(0.3)	(0.0)	(100.0)
Future	286	720	511	248	12	30	1807
	(15.8)	(39.8)	(28.3)	(13.7)	(0.7)	(1.7)	(100.0)
National Economy							
Past	651	999	87	53	14	3	1807
	(36.0)	(55.3)	(4.8)	(2.9)	(0.8)	(0.2)	(100.0)
Future	375	737	389	261	19	26	1807
	(20.8)	(40.8)	(21.5)	(14.4)	(1.1)	(1.4)	(100.0)
Society-Politics							
Past	644	986	105	52	13	7	1807
	(35.6)	(54.6)	(5.8)	(2.9)	(0.7)	(0.4)	(100.0)
Future	388	731	423	219	17	29	1807
	(21.5)	(40.5)	(23.4)	(12.1)	(0.9)	(1.6)	(100.0)

Source: Compiled by the author from the TÜSES-Veri Araştırma data set. For the original questions (translated into English by the author), see Appendix VII.

Note: Parentheses are row percentages.

[a] Abstentions (*n*=306) were included here since the declaration of abstention at this stage is an explicit expression of the rejection of the incumbent (as well as the opposition).

[b] No answers (*n*=166) and "undecided" responses (*n*=282).

Probably due to the extraordinary economic conditions of the time, the response data

from the survey were not normally distributed but rather positively skewed (to the right). In both past and future evaluation data, the median value was not 3 ("No change") but 2 ("Worse"). Skewness, however, was stronger for past evaluation (Figure 1) than future evaluation (Figure 2). It would be expected that the stronger skewness in the distribution for past evaluation would make its explanatory power weaker than that for future evaluation, ceteris paribus. Since the great majority of people thought that the economy had deteriorated, there was little difference in evaluation of the past. If the variation in evaluation is very small, it cannot sufficiently account for variation in the dependent variable. Evaluation of the future was more varied and thus potentially better able to account for variation in the dependent variable, ceteris paribus.

Figure 1. Voter Evaluation of the Last Twelve Months
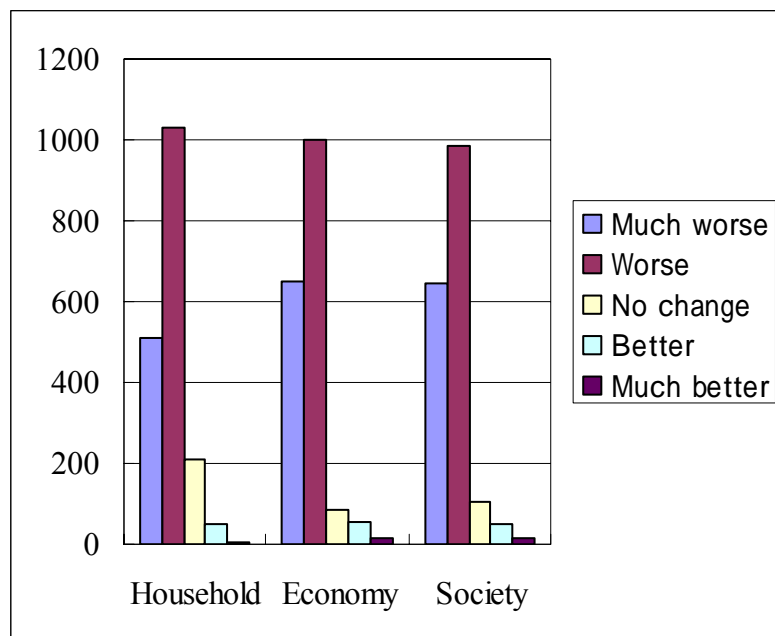
Source: Compiled by the author from the TÜSES-Veri Araştırma data set.

Figure 2. Voter Evaluation of the Next Twelve Months
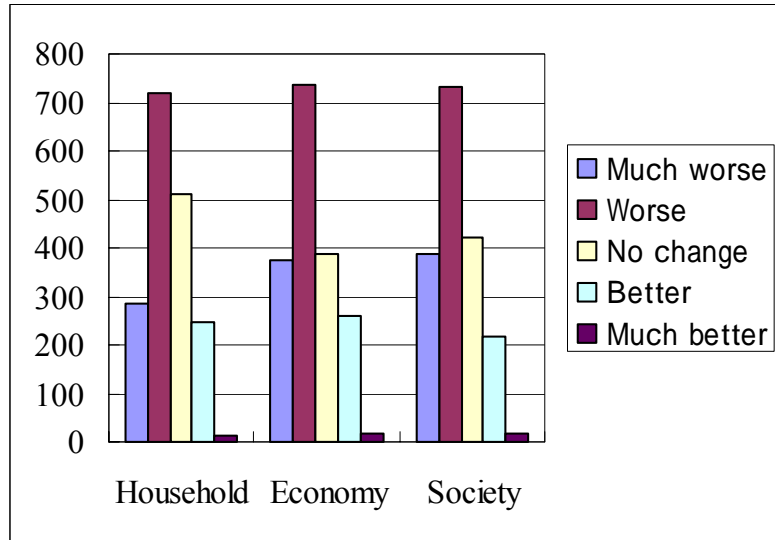
Source: Compiled by the author from the TÜSES-Veri Araştırma data set.

The micro level data also provided evidence supporting the assumption that voters held the government responsible for economic performance. The overwhelming majority of respondents (91.3 percent, *n*=1,649) answered that the incumbent was responsible for their household economy. Of course, the national economy is more directly affected by government policy than is the household economy. Thus, although none of the questions asked whether or not the voter held the government responsible for the *national* economy, it seems reasonable that they also assumed that the government was accountable for the national economy.

In the following analysis, separate bivariate logit models were run before multivariate logit models were tested. This is because the independent variables were significantly cross-correlated (Table 2). The average Pearson *r* was 0.43 for the six cross-correlations. The cross-correlations were particularly high between evaluations of

the economy and society (r=0.80 for past evaluations and r=0.88 for future evaluations of these two variables). It is thus necessary to first gauge the effect of each independent variable at its face value before providing controls for the other variables.

Table 2. Cross-correlation of Independent Variables (N=1,759)

	Household Past	Household Future	Economy Past	Economy Future	Society Past	Society Future
Household Past	1					
Household Future	0.4383	1				
Economy Past	0.3682	0.3233	1			
Economy Future	0.2841	0.4829	0.4051	1		
Society Past	0.3614	0.2956	0.8017	0.3606	1	
Society Future	0.2973	0.4539	0.3802	0.8766	0.3935	1

Source: Compiled by the author from the TÜSES-Veri Araştırma data set.

Note: Entries are Pearson correlation coefficients. All were statistically significant at p<0.001.

RESULTS

This section shows the results of bivariate and multivariate logit models used to analyze voter perceptions of economic, social, and political conditions as well as support or nonsupport for incumbents. These results support the assumption that voters hold the government responsible not only for their personal grievances but also for macro performance.

Bivariate Logit Models

The results of six separate bivariate logit models are summarized in Table 3 and show that all independent variables are significant ($p<0.001$) predictors of voter punishment of the incumbent. For example, the odds ratio of 1.598 for the household economy in the past suggests that a unit change in the evaluation scale (such as from one to two) for the household economy increased the likelihood of the voter supporting the incumbent 1.598 times. In other words, if voter A's evaluation of the household economy in the last twelve months was one ("Very Bad") and voter B's evaluation was two ("Bad"), then voter A's probability of punishing (not supporting) the incumbent was 1.598 times higher than voter B's.

Table 3. Summary Results of Bivarate Logit Models

Independent Variable	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	z	P>|z|	N
Household Past	1.598275	0.160136	4.68	0.001	1,359
Household Future	1.508120	0.119551	5.18	0.001	1,342
Economy Past	1.509866	0.139521	4.46	0.001	1,356
Economy Future	1.515776	0.110855	5.69	0.001	1,348
Society Past	1.594628	0.145730	5.11	0.001	1,354
Society Future	1.494938	0.111778	5.38	0.001	1,344

Source: Calculated and compiled by the author from the TÜSES-Veri Araştırma data set.

Note: The dependent variable is support for the incumbent, and the independent variable is the voter

evaluation of the item in the last twelve or for the next twelve months.

At this stage, if the significant overlap among the six independent variables is accepted, it is arguable that evaluations of the household economy, the national economy, and sociopolitical conditions, both in the recent past and in the near future, affected voter decisions. The odds ratio was particularly high for evaluations of the past household economy and sociopolitical conditions. These results indicate that the evaluation of the past probably weighed more heavily on voter decisions than evaluations of the future. However, the standard error was consistently larger for any past evaluation than for any future evaluation. Thus, although the six odds ratios were statistically significant at the 0.001 level, past evaluations were slightly less statistically significant than future evaluations. It is possible that the more skewed distributions of past evaluations, compared with those of future evaluations, contributed to their larger standard errors. The next section provides a more rigorous analysis of the relative importance of individual variables by incorporating some or all of them into one equation.

Multivariate Logit Models

Which variables are relatively more important than others in determining voter decisions? Answers can be found in a preliminary multivariate logit model that incorporates all six independent variables (Model 1), and a final multivariate logit model (Model 2), that drops the statistically insignificant independent variables using a backward selection procedure.

Model 1 (Table 4) shows the effect (odds ratio) of each independent variable when the other variables are controlled for. In this model, the effect of cross-correlations or superficial relationships is minimized. Results show that perceptions of the household economy in the last twelve months are the single most important determinant of voting behavior relative to incumbents (p=0.047). This is followed by perceptions of household economy in the future (p=0.085). Other potentially important variables are perceptions of society and politics in the last twelve months (p=0.106) and the national economy in the next twelve months (p=0.136). The other two variables are far below the conventionally most lenient 0.10 level of statistical significance. These results indicate that voters are more concerned with their own economic conditions than with the national economy and sociopolitical conditions when deciding whether or not to support the incumbent.

Table 4. Multivariate Logit Model 1: Full Model

Independent Variable	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	z	P>|z|
Household Past	1.262714	0.148303	1.99	0.047
Household Future	1.183282	0.115698	1.72	0.085
Economy Past	0.936174	0.152300	-0.41	0.685
Economy Future	1.256139	0.192101	1.49	0.136
Society Past	1.291575	0.204730	1.61	0.106
Society Future	1.044479	0.160617	0.28	0.777

Source: Calculated and compiled by the author from the TÜSES-Veri Araştırma data set.
Note: The dependent variable is support for the incumbent, and the independent variable is voter

evaluation of the item in the last twelve or for the next twelve months.

Number of Obs. = 1331

LR $\chi^2(6) = 51.14$

Prob $> \chi^2 = 0.001$

Log Likelihood = -554.69618

Pseudo $R^2 = 0.0441$

Caution should be used in interpreting these results. In particular, the unconditional inclusion of all independent variables, some of which are highly cross-correlated, substantially reduces the odds ratios of these variables. It may be recalled that evaluations of the national economy and society and politics are highly cross-correlated, both for the "past" ($r=0.80$) and for the "future" ($r=0.88$) (See Table 2). It is thus necessary to eliminate from the model one of the two variables that are strongly correlated with one another. Removing one of the two variables increases the odds ratios of the other variable that has been retained.

The final model, Model 2 (Table 5), was estimated by eliminating irrelevant independent variables using a backward selection procedure while performing the logit model. The backward selection procedure, one of three versions for independent-variable selection, starts with a full model that contains all independent variables. It then removes from the model the independent variable whose partial regression coefficient, or partial odds ratio for the logit model, is least significant. It repeats this process until the model ends up with only the independent variables that are above a given level of statistical significance.

Using the 0.05 level of significance as the criterion, Model 2 retained three independent variables. These included perceptions of the household economy in the last twelve months, the national economy in the next twelve months, and sociopolitical

conditions in the last twelve months. These three independent variables had stronger explanatory power than the three variables removed from the full model. These findings are consistent with those obtained in the separate bivariate logit models reported earlier.

Table 5. Multivariate Logit Model 2: Final Model

Independent Variable	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	z	P>|z|
Household Past	1.338328	0.148611	2.62	0.009
Economy Future	1.374629	0.110663	3.95	0.001
Society Past	1.246398	0.130600	2.10	0.036

Source: Calculated and compiled by the author from the TÜSES-Veri Araştırma data set.
Note: The dependent variable is support for the incumbent, and the independent variable is voter evaluation of the item in the last twelve or for the next twelve months. Independent variables lower than the 0.05 level of statistical significance were removed using the backward selection method.
Number of Obs. = 1331
LR $\chi^2(3) = 47.94$
Prob > $\chi^2 = 0.001$
Log Likelihood = -556.29588
Pseudo $R^2 = 0.0413$

Comparisons among these three independent variables do not make sense because estimates of parameters are susceptible to the effects of significant cross-correlations. The relatively low odds ratio and statistical significance for evaluation of past sociopolitical conditions is probably due in part to its relatively high cross-correlations with evaluation of past household economy (r=0.3614) and with the evaluation of future national economy (r=0.3606). The cross-correlation between evaluation of past household economy and future national economy was lower (r=0.2841) than the above

two cross-correlations.

CONCLUSIONS

Relying on individual survey data, two major issues regarding retrospective voting have been addressed in this paper: (1) whether voter decisions are based on household economic conditions, national economic conditions, or other sociopolitical conditions, and (2) whether or not the future evaluation of the economy affects voting decisions, apart from past evaluation. Separate bivariate logit models and the multiple logit models both provided consistent answers to these questions. First, evaluation of the household economy, the national economy, and society-politics were all important determinants of voter support for the incumbent, whether cross-correlation was controlled for or not. Second, evaluation of the past was more important than evaluation of the future for the household economy and sociopolitical conditions. Evaluation of the future was more important than evaluation of the past for the national economy only.

These findings revealed important features of retrospective voting that could only be analyzed at the individual level. 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. Further, both the economy (personal and national) and sociopolitical conditions were influential in deciding whether or not to vote for the incumbent. While there were substantial correlations between the evaluation of the national economy in the near past or future and evaluations of sociopolitical

conditions in the near past or future, each variable nevertheless had a significant independent effect on voting decisions.

ENDNOTES

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[1] Ergun Özbudun, "Institutionalizing Competitive Elections in Developing Societies," in *Competitive Elections in Developing Countries*, eds. Myron Weiner and Ergun Özbudun (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1987); Robert H. Dix, "Cleavage Structures and Party Systems in Latin America," *Comparative Politics* 22 (1989), 23-37; Herbert Kitschelt, "Formation of Party Cleavages in Post-Communist Democracies: Theoretical Propositions," *Party Politics* 1 (1995), 447-472; Herbert Kitschelt et al., Post-*Communist Party Systems: Competition, Representation, and Inter-Party Cooperation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Kay Lawson, Cleavages, Parties, and Voters," in *Cleavages, Parties, and Voters: Studies from Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Romania,* eds. Kay Lawson et al. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999); Scott P. Mainwaring, *Rethinking Party Systems in the Third Wave of Democratization: The Case of Brazil* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999); Arthur H. Miller et al., "Emerging Party Systems in Post-Soviet Societies: Fact or Fiction?" *The Journal of Politics* 62 (2000), 455-490.

[2] Fiorina initially formulated the retrospective voting model. Using American national election data from 1956 to 1976, he demonstrated that retrospective evaluations not only had a direct effect on voting decisions but also an indirect effect on party identification, concerns with issues, and future expectations. See M. P. Fiorina, *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981). For a review, see Niemi and Weisberg, *Controversies in Voting Behavior*, 137-151. For the most recent and comprehensive treatment of the theme, see Han Dorussen and Michael Taylor, eds., *Economic Voting* (London: Routledge, 2002). In contrast, cleavage voting is based on the proposition that individuals vote for parties that reflect their cleavage groupings. Both models are ideal types. It would be appropriate to assume that voters take both government performance and cleavage affiliation into

consideration.

[3] For a study that used macro level data, see Ali Çarkoğlu, " Macro Economic Determinants of Electoral Support for Incumbents in Turkey, 1950-1995," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 17 (Fall 1997), 75-96. Studies that used micro-level data have tended to focus on voter profiles. Yılmaz Esmer, "Parties and the Electorate: A Comparative Analysis of Voter Profiles of Turkish Political Parties," in Çiğdem Balım et al., *Turkey: Political, Social, and Economic Challenges in the 1990s* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995); Yılmaz Esmer, *Devrim, Evrim, Statüko: Türkiye'de Sosyal, Siyasal, Ekonomik Değerler* (Istanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Sosyal Etüdler Vakfı-TESEV, 1999); Yılmaz Esmer, "At the Ballot Box: Determinants of Voting Behavior," in *Politics, Parties, and Elections in Turkey*, eds. Sabri Sayari and Yılmaz Esmer (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002); Necat Erder, *Türkiye'de Siyasi Parti Seçmenlerinin Nitelikleri, Kimlikleri ve Eğilimleri* (Istanbul: Türkiye Sosyal Ekonomik Siyasal Araştırmalar Vakfı-TÜSES, 1996); Necat Erder, *Türkiye'de Siyasi Parti Seçmenleri ve Toplum Düzeni* (Istanbul: Türkiye Sosyal Ekonomik Siyasal Araştırmalar Vakfı-TÜSES, 1998); Necat Erder, *Türkiye'de Siyasi Partilerin Yandaş/Seçmen Profili (1994-2002)* (Istanbul: Türkiye Sosyal Ekonomik Siyasal Araştırmalar Vakfı-TÜSES, 2002); Cem Başlevent, Hasan Kirmanoğlu, and Burhan Şenatalar, "Voter Profiles and Fragmentation in the Turkish Party System," *Party Politics* 10 (2004), 307-324. The last study included a retrospective voting perspective, but it was used as a determinant of support for the pro-Islamic Justice and Development Party (AKP).

[4] R. J. Johnston, C. J. Pattie, and J. G. Allsopp, *A Nation Dividing, The Electoral Map of Great Britain 1979-1987* (London: Longman, 1988). See also R. J. Johnston and C. J. Pattie, "Local Economic Contexts and Changing Party Allegiances at the 1992 British General Election," *Party Politics* 3 (1997), 79-96. R. J. Johnston and C. J. Pattie, "Composition and Context: Region and Voting in Britain Revisited during Labour's 1990s' Revival," *Geoforum* 29 (1998), 309-329.

[5] Steven Reed and Gregory G. Brunk, "A Test of Two Theories of Economically Motivated Voting, the Case of Japan," *Comparative Politics* 17 (1984), 55-66. Their study did not seem to reject the individual-criteria hypothesis as they claimed. They found that only for the post-oil shock period did their model show a significant relationship between the voting for the incumbent and macroeconomic indicators. They argued that the insignificant relationship during the consistent economic-growth period (1960-1973) suggested that personal grievances, which

had definitely existed at the time, had not affected the incumbent vote. The last point may support the macro-criteria hypothesis but does not necessarily reject the individual-criteria hypothesis.

[6] Ian McAllister and Donley T. Studlar, "Region and Voting in Britain, 1979-87: Territorial Polarization or Artifact?" *American Journal of Political Science* 36 (1992), 168-199.

[7] Nevertheless, they found that government performance had significantly influenced voting behavior.

[8] Malcolm Brynin and David Sanders, "Party Identification, Political Preferences and Material Conditions," *Party Politics* 3 (1997), 53-77.

[9] Gregory B. Markus, "The Impact of Personal and National Economic Conditions on the Presidential Vote: A Pooled Cross-Sectional Analysis," *American Journal of Political Science* 32 (1988), 137-154.

[10] On that day, Turkey abandoned the predetermined crawling peg system that had been introduced in January 2000 as a part of the disinflation program, and reverted to a floating exchange regime.

[11] Barbara G. Tabachinick and Linda S. Fidel, *Using Multivariate Statistics*, 4th ed. (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2001), 548-549.

[12] Necat Erder, *Turkiye'de Siyasi Partilerin Yandaş/Seçmen Profili (1994-2002)*.

[13] Valid responses did not include those indicating "Don't know."