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The Region-of-origin effect revisited: More on the voting behavior of Turkey's internal migrants

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide further insights into how the Turkish internal migrants' party choices are influenced by the voting patterns in their places of origin. We consider the impact of several factors including the timing of the departure from the origin and the migrants' self-declared emotional attachment to their origins. Using a nationwide survey conducted before the 2011 general elections, we find that the 'region-of-origin' effect is present only among those who identify themselves with their original – rather than current – provinces. Investigations relating to the timing of departure reveal that the effect is absent for those who relocate when aged 18-to-20, i.e. around the age of discretion and the age at which many young people leave their towns to receive higher education. This interpretation is consistent our finding that the region-of-origin effect declines with the years of schooling.

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1. Introduction

The country-of-origin effect is a term used within a multitude of cultural, economic, and political contexts to describe the influence of places of origin on the attitudes and behaviors of international migrants. Country-of-origin effects have been found to be useful in explaining the effect of cross-country heterogeneity in cultural norms on such outcomes as the preferences for redistribution, fertility, savings, employment rates, and wage gaps (Luttmer and Singhal, 2008). Similarly, the region-of-origin effect refers to the influences of contexts of origin on the attitudes of internal migrants. Akarca and Başlevent (2010) use the same term in describing the association between the places of origin and the voting behavior of internal migrants in Turkey where the movement from the less developed parts of the country to the more industrialized regions during the past sixty years has led to over a quarter of the population residing in a province other than the one they were born in.

Although much of the existing migration literature dealing with origin effects focuses on the behavior of international migrants, Akarca and Başlevent (2010) argue that the concepts and theories developed for the international setting are applicable to the case of Turkey's internal migrants as well. Their argument relies on the great deal of diversity across the country in terms of demographic, linguistic, economic, social, and cultural characteristics which have been argued to lie at the root of the persistence of regional voting patterns in Turkey (West, 2005; Akarca and Başlevent, 2011). To be specific, the presence of a large ethnic-Kurdish population concentrated in the southeast with its own native language, sectarian differences among the predominantly-Muslim population, and varying degrees of Western and Islamic influences on cultural values across the nation imply that many of the factors that motivate international studies have much relevance to the Turkish case. In fact, there is already a large body of sociology literature dealing with the web of relations that account for the political behavior of Turkey's internal migrants and the prevalence of identity politics (Narlı, 2002; Kurtoğlu, 2005; Hersant and Toumarkine, 2005; Ayata, 2008).

Among the empirical studies addressing the question of whether and why immigrants have different attitudes on political issues than natives, those investigating the attitudes of inter-regional migrants in a particular country include McMahon et al. (1992), Campbell et al. (1960), Converse (1966), Brown (1981 and 1988), Gimpel and Schuknecht (2001 and 2003), and MacDonald and Franko (2008). While some of these studies find that political preferences of voters remain largely unchanged after their migration, others argue that when the political environment in the destination is different than the one in the origin, migration does have an impact on the voting behavior of a migrant. With the exception of the McMahon paper, these studies deal with migrants within the U.S., and they focus on whether the party identifications of the migrants change following their relocation by comparing voting patterns at the origin in the past, i.e. at the time of migration, with the ones prevailing at the destination at present. In contrast, Akarca and Başlevent (2010) measure the impact of current voting patterns both at the origins and the destinations in view of the cultural and socio-economic structures particular to Turkey.

The idea behind the region-of-origin effect on voting behavior is that such an effect is observed when migrants have strong emotional or economic ties with their origins or those who also migrated from the same region. As these ties weaken, migrants' voting patterns become more similar to those observed in their current locations. In order to operationalize this idea, Akarca and Başlevent bring individual and province-level data together and use the voting patterns in the origins as a proxy for all the 'hometown ties' that may be at play. They find that a positive and significant origin effect exists for most migrants, but a similarly-constructed 'destination' variable, which measures the association of their party choices with the patterns in the current province, turns out to be insignificant.

The primary aim of the present study is to utilize a survey conducted in 2011 to examine the region-of-origin effect further and determine whether its magnitude depends on several potential factors such as the timing of the departure from the origin. The findings of the present study are expected not only to complement those of the earlier study on the same phenomenon, but also contribute to the broader literature on the socio-political integration of migrants to the host societies. The next section is devoted to a description of the data used in the empirical work in relation to how the available information can be used to test various hypotheses regarding the nature of the region-of-origin effect. Sections 3 and 4 contain a summary of empirical findings and concluding remarks, respectively.

2. The Data and Descriptive Statistics

The data we work with is drawn from a survey conducted by Yönelim Araştırma, an Istanbul-based research company, in 36 of Turkey's 81 provinces about one month prior to the General Elections of 12 June 2011. In addition to basic socio-demographic characteristics and views on the state of the economy, the data set contains information about the intended party choices of the respondents in the upcoming elections. From the full sample of 1,800 observations, 167 observations involving undecided respondents and the 151 'no answer' cases had to be eliminated. The exclusion of another 50 observations due to missing information on economic evaluations meant that the econometric work would be carried out on a sample of 1,432 electors.

The survey provides useful bits of information relating to the examination of the way individuals' party choices are influenced by their places of origin. First of all, the questions on province of birth and province of current residence allow the identification of the so-called 'life-time migrants' and the 'natives' (or non-migrants). However, some of the life-time migrants have responded to another survey question as having lived in the same province throughout their lives. Since these people do not appear to be considering themselves as migrants, they have been classified as non-migrants, which means that the working sample has a migrant share of $(380/1432=)$ 27 percent.

The survey includes two other questions that make it possible to carry out the novel aspects of the empirical work of the present paper. The first one of these inquires about the age at which respondents have left the province they were born in. In light of socialization theories that emphasize the role of personal experience and socio-economic background in the formation of social values and attitudes, it is plausible that the amount of time spent at the origin has an impact on the extent to which individuals' political views are influenced by that context.

The second survey item we expect to be relevant to our analysis questions the geographic area the respondents cite when they are asked to identify themselves with a location. The exact wording of the survey question in Turkish is "Kendinizi nereli hissediyorsunuz?" which can be literally translated as "Where do you feel that you come from?". Some respondents identify themselves with geographical regions (which are made up of provinces), districts (which make up provinces), or even villages, but most people cite their original or current province. It turns out that 58 percent of the migrants in the working sample feel more attached to their original province. In the empirical work, we examine whether this distinction has to do with the magnitude of the region-of-origin effect.

3. Empirical results

In examining the voting behavior of Turkey's internal migrants, we focus on the three-way choice made between the Justice and Development Party (AKP) – the ruling party since 2002 – , the Republican People's Party (CHP) – the main opposition since 2002 – , and the rest of the parties. The AKP is the choice of nearly half of the respondents in the working sample, and another 26 percent claim to be supporters of the CHP. With respective vote shares of about 50 and 26 percent in the June 2011 elections, these two parties dominate the political scene and, for the purposes of the present study, it seems appropriate to aggregate the remaining parties into a single entity, keeping in mind that this category comprises ideologically dissimilar parties that were combined due to their small sample sizes.

Examination of the behavior of Turkish voters in the joint sample of migrants and non-migrants reveals that some differences are present between the party choices of the two groups. Multinomial logit estimates (unreported here) reveal that the AKP is statistically significantly more popular than the CHP among migrants whose original provinces are in the north and south of the country, and that the magnitudes of the effects of gender, age, and religiosity on the three-way choice are somewhat different for migrants than they are for non-migrants. (See Table 1 for the means of explanatory variables by migrant status and party choice.)

To test our hypotheses relating to the region-of-origin effect, we once again examine the 3-way party choice, but focus on the subsample of migrants and add a new explanatory variable to the estimated model. This variable, named Origin, is an alternative (or choice)-specific variable – i.e. a factor whose impact does not vary across the alternatives

being compared – that measures the relative strength of the three alternatives in the respondent’s original province. To be specific, the variable contains three different bits of information: (i) ‘the AKP vote share at the origin’ defined as the deviation from the AKP’s nationwide vote share of 48.9%, (ii) ‘the CHP vote share at the origin’ defined as the deviation from the CHP’s nationwide vote share of 25.9%, and (iii) a figure computed in a similar manner for the ‘Other’ alternative.¹ The use of the deviation from the mean is necessary in our context so that we have comparable figures for the three alternatives.

Table 1: Sample shares and means by migrant status and party choice

| | Sample share (%) | | | Sample mean | | | | |
|-------------------|------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | AKP | CHP | Other | Female | Age | Schooling | Economy | Religiosity |
| Non-migrant | 46.7 | 25.2 | 28.1 | 0.486 | 38.7 | 8.15 | 1.99 | 2.98 |
| Migrant | 47.9 | 27.6 | 24.5 | 0.497 | 39.5 | 8.71 | 2.01 | 2.82 |
| <i>All sample</i> | <i>47.0</i> | <i>25.8</i> | <i>27.2</i> | <i>0.489</i> | <i>38.9</i> | <i>8.30</i> | <i>2.00</i> | <i>2.94</i> |
| | Migrant | | | Female | Age | Schooling | Economy | Religiosity |
| AKP | 27.0 | | | 0.536 | 39.8 | 7.17 | 2.61 | 3.14 |
| CHP | 28.4 | | | 0.492 | 40.0 | 9.88 | 1.33 | 2.61 |
| Other | 23.9 | | | 0.404 | 36.3 | 8.74 | 1.56 | 2.91 |
| <i>All sample</i> | <i>26.5</i> | | | <i>0.489</i> | <i>38.9</i> | <i>8.30</i> | <i>2.00</i> | <i>2.94</i> |

Notes: Sample size is 1,432. Religiosity is measured on a scale of 1 to 4 such that larger values imply more religiosity. Economy refers to evaluations regarding the macroeconomic conditions during the year before the survey and is measured on a scale of 1 to 3 such that larger values imply a more favorable assessment. The age and years of schooling figures were obtained by applying commonly-used conversion schemes to the categorical information provided in the data.

The introduction of an alternative-specific variable into the model necessitates the application of the conditional logit model. In our case, the definition of Origin as an alternative-specific variable implies that larger values of this variable may increase or decrease the likelihood that the party for which the large value was observed will be chosen, and also that the magnitude of this effect does not vary across the parties. Therefore, inferences made using this variable will not pertain to a specific party, but to parties in general. The results of the conditional logit model are presented in the first panel of Table 2. Since the AKP is defined as the reference category, positive coefficient estimates for the individual-specific variables are interpreted as a positive association between the variable and the likelihood of choosing the party in question over the AKP.

¹ The vote shares used here are official election figures available for all 81 provinces (as opposed to sample shares which are available for only 36 provinces).

Table 2: Conditional logit estimates of the 3-way party choice

| | Specification 1 | | Specification 2 | | Specification 3 | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | CHP vs. AKP | Other vs. AKP | CHP vs. AKP | Other vs. AKP | CHP vs. AKP | Other vs. AKP |
| <i>Individual-specific variables</i> | | | | | | |
| Female | 0.348 (0.133) | -0.662 (0.030) | 0.292 (0.246) | -0.701 (0.034) | 0.338 (0.151) | -0.671 (0.029) |
| Age | 0.029 (0.007) | -0.025 (0.058) | 0.029 (0.005) | -0.025 (0.055) | 0.030 (0.003) | -0.025 (0.060) |
| Schooling | 0.183 (0.000) | 0.120 (0.009) | 0.180 (0.000) | 0.125 (0.017) | 0.193 (0.000) | 0.125 (0.005) |
| Economy | -1.948 (0.000) | -1.516 (0.000) | -1.917 (0.000) | -1.499 (0.000) | -1.975 (0.000) | -1.510 (0.000) |
| Religiosity | -0.430 (0.078) | 0.037 (0.831) | -0.557 (0.018) | -0.121 (0.436) | -0.379 (0.095) | 0.001 (0.993) |
| Constant | 1.642 (0.039) | 2.667 (0.000) | 1.994 (0.010) | 3.049 (0.000) | 1.421 (0.091) | 2.719 (0.000) |
| <i>Alternative-specific variables</i> | | | | | | |
| Origin | 0.022 (0.003) | | | | | |
| Age<18×Origin | | | 0.017 (0.011) | | | |
| Age18-20×Origin | | | 0.001 (0.921) | | | |
| Age>20×Origin | | | 0.038 (0.000) | | | |
| Feel closer-Yes ×Origin | | | | | 0.032 (0.000) | |
| Feel closer-No ×Origin | | | | | 0.003 (0.772) | |
| Number of obs. | 380 × 3 = 1,140 | | 371 × 3 = 1,113 | | 380 × 3 = 1,140 | |
| Pseudo-R ² | 0.3443 | | 0.3450 | | 0.3555 | |

Notes: Base category is the AKP. In parentheses are the p-values of the coefficients which were obtained using robust standard errors adjusted for clustering at the province level. Origin contains the vote shares of the AKP, CHP, and Other (in %) in the June 2011 elections at the province of origin, each of which expressed as deviations from nationwide averages. The reason for the large number of observations for the conditional logit model is that its estimation in STATA requires the expansion of the data set to three observations per individual.

It turns out that being younger, less educated, more religious, and having more favorable views about the economy increase the likelihood of voting for the AKP over the CHP, and being female, older, less educated, and having more favorable economic evaluations increase the likelihood of voting for the AKP over the remaining parties. The positive coefficient on Origin implies that, after correcting for personal characteristics and the relative strengths of the parties at the national level, migrants are more likely to support the party which is stronger in their original provinces than the other parties. Marginal effect computations (made in STATA) reveal that, on average, if the vote share of a party exceeds its nationwide average by 10 percentage points in a given province, then the probability that this party will be chosen by a migrant originating from that province increases by about 5 percentage points. What makes this estimate particularly interesting is that it is roughly the same as the one obtained in Akarca and Başlevent (2010) using data for the 2007 general elections in Turkey.

In the last step of the econometric work, we estimate alternative specifications of our model to gain more insights regarding the nature of the region-of-origin effect. Our aim is to see if the effect is related with some of the key variables in the data. This can be accomplished by interacting Origin with the variable under examination. Two of these exercises (not reported in tables) involve the age and years of schooling of the respondent. Our finding with respect to age is that it has no significant influence on the magnitude of the region-of-origin effect. With respect to education, however, we find that the effect declines with the years of schooling. The coefficient estimates imply that the effect is about twice as large for someone with no schooling compared to someone with 10 years of schooling. Assuming that education endows people with a better understanding of economic and social developments and distances them from identity politics, it does not come as a surprise that more educated people form their party choices in a more independent manner.

Moving on to the exercises that constitute the novel aspects of the present empirical study, we begin with an examination of the potential impact of the timing of departure from the original province. To operationalize the idea that more time spent at the origin means a stronger origin effect, we compute the magnitude of the effect for respondents who left their original provinces before the age of 18, between the ages of 18 and 20, and after the age of 20 (See the second panel of Table 2). These cut-off points were chosen after experimenting with a large number of alternatives many of which produced puzzling patterns. We finally determined that the region-of-origin effect was statistically significant in all age groups except the 18-to-20 interval which accounts for 18 percent of all migrants. There are two plausible reasons why the effect is absent in this subsample. The first one is that 18 is the age of discretion, and it is likely that some of those who have chosen to relocate shortly after reaching that critical age are individuals whose attitudes and preferences were atypical for their environments. Apparently, this discrepancy manifests itself in political preferences as well.

The 18-to-20 category also comprises the ages at which many young people leave their towns to receive higher education. In fact, the share of those with at least a university

degree is 24 percent in this subsample as opposed to only around 15 percent among the rest of the migrants. In view of the earlier finding that the region-of-origin effect declines with the years of schooling, it is not very surprising that the effect is absent in this age group. Finally, the finding that the coefficient estimate for the over-20 category (making up 24 percent of all migrants) is twice as large as that of the less-than-18 age group is consistent with the idea that hometown ties are stronger when more time is spent in the places of origin.

For our final exercise, we observe whether the strength of the region-of-origin effect differs between those who identify themselves with their original provinces and those who do not. As shown in the third panel of Table 2, the effect is found to be present only in the former group of migrants. Although this not a very surprising finding in light of the results presented earlier, it is remarkable that a simple question which seems to have nothing to do with politics does a good job of distinguishing people who exhibit a certain type of voting behavior. It is also worth noting that the matter of self-identification is not independent from the timing of relocation issue examined above. The share of migrants who identify themselves with their original provinces is 70 percent among those who have left their towns after the age 20, whereas it is 54 percent among the rest of the migrants. This relationship brings to mind the question of which one of the two is the more decisive factor. A model that includes the interaction of the two variables reveals that the region-of-origin is present among those who feel attached to their origins despite having relocated between the ages of 18 and 20, suggesting that identification with the origin has precedence over the timing of departure.

4. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to further examine the previously-documented region-of-origin effect on the voting behavior of Turkey's internal migrants. Making use of a survey conducted shortly before the 2011 elections, we found that the strength of the effect varies according to the years of education of the migrant, the amount of time spent at the original province, and the emotional ties the migrant claims to have with his/her origins. The empirical findings added to our understanding of the nature of the effect and provided justification for further analysis of the links between political outcomes and the socio-economic structure of Turkish cities with large migrant populations. For example, one aspect of the region-of-origin effect story this paper has not been able to deal with is whether the effect reflects only the influence of emotional and economic ties a migrant has with friends and relatives remaining in the origin or also those between fellow-townsmen who share common interests in a common destination. The available information has allowed us to test the effect of only the first kind of 'hometown ties'. Specially-designed future surveys that inquire about – among other things – the frequency of contact with fellow-townsmen living back home and in the current locations are likely to shed light on this important point.

From a broader point of view that goes beyond Turkish politics, our findings suggest that there could be much to infer from the attitudes and preferences of migrants with respect

to their assimilation into the host societies if the empirical methodology allows for an explicit testing of the possible links with the places of origin. Given that assimilation is a multi-dimensional phenomenon (Glazer and Moynihan, 1963; Gordon, 1964), the presence and absence of various origin effects that deal with the social, economic, political, or cultural characteristics of the same sample of migrants could be informative as to which types of assimilation precede others.

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