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Why did the AKP lose the 2019 mayoral elections in its strongholds Istanbul and Ankara while it continued its winning streak in Konya and Bursa? A voter survey analysis.

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Abstract: The empirical puzzle asks, ‘Why did the AKP lose the 2019 mayoral elections in its strongholds Istanbul and Ankara while it continued its winning streak in Konya and Bursa?’ The theoretical question this project asks is ‘Why do incumbent populist parties lose the support of the people?’ I use the Turkish mayoral elections in four cities to help answer the empirical question. August 14, 2021 officially marks the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the Justice and Development party, known as the AKP, in Turkey. Since first wielding significant power in the national assembly in 2002, the AKP has gone from being generally praised, to being widely criticized. Most of these criticisms stem from what many would call democratic backsliding as the AKP seems to be de-secularizing the country. Despite this, scholars have noted that the AKP has continued to win local and national elections with comfortable margins. However, the 2019 mayoral elections proved to be an outlier as an opposition candidate won the mayoral seats of Istanbul and Ankara, both considered to be AKP strongholds. This poses an interesting situation worth analyzing. This study tests three hypotheses which rest on the variables of religious self-identification, democratic values, and economic voting. Using the survey platform Qualtrics, 105 respondents from each of the cities of Ankara, Bursa, Istanbul, and Konya were asked to participate in this study. Relevant to my hypotheses, the results were inconclusive as the sample size of 420 total respondents was too small.

Keywords: Turkey, electoral accountability, Voting behavior, Economic voting, Democratic values, Islam, Surveys, Qualtrics, Ankara, Bursa, Istanbul, Konya, 2019 elections.

Introduction:

Turkey was originally established as a democratic and secular state. Women were allowed to vote, headscarves were banned, and a legal code contrary to that of traditional Islamic teaching was established (Arat & Pamuk, 2019). Yet despite this history, the AKP has managed to draw widespread criticism for de-secularizing the country (Arat & Pamuk, 2019; Rogenhofer, 2020; Stockemer 2019). However, time and again it has been noted that the Turkish electorate has continued to keep them in power since their founding in 2002. For almost 20 years, they have comfortably held a large voter share in local and national elections; however this changed in 2019 when the AKP lost the mayoral elections in many former strongholds. The party lost the capital city of Ankara, as well as other important cities in the March elections (Aliriza, 2019). The 2019 Mayoral election in Istanbul concluded with the opposition candidate winning 54 percent of the vote against the AKP candidate Binali Yildirim's 45 percent (Gall, 2019). This loss can be considered devastating to the AKP. It was the first time the party lost control of the city in 25 years (Ingber, 2019). The AKP lost votes in all 39 of Istanbul's districts (Aliriza, 2019) and conservative areas of the city all voted for the opposition candidate, Imamoglu (Lowen, 2019).

Stockemer (2019) states that AKP rule has 3 periods. The years 2002-2007 are considered their golden age; 2007 to 2011 are a period of stagnation in terms of economic performance and democratization; lastly 2011 up to the present day is an era of rising authoritarianism and poor economic performance. For the purposes of this paper, I specifically define authoritarianism to be when a regime favors stricter obedience to the government or in this specific case the ruling party. In this case, authoritarianism goes hand in hand with populism. I define populism to be the use of an 'us versus them' narrative as a political tool to gain power. Turkey under Erdogan and

AKP rule exemplifies both. For example, between 2008 -2011 the AKP arrested journalists who were accused of spreading terrorist propaganda (Rogenhofer, 2020). For Rogenhofer, these events were key in forming a narrative where the media is the people's enemy (Rogenhofer, 2020). In the aftermath of the 2016 coup, Erdoğan used a state of emergency to seize businesses and organizations from those who were deemed to be 'people's enemies' pushed many journalists to leave the country (Rogenhofer, 2020). According to Stockemer (2019) the resulting trials served on to tarnish the image of the military and intimidate any remaining opponents of the AKP.

To my knowledge, there does not seem to be any formal literature on what might be occurring with the AKP and its recent election losses. However, news articles seem to indicate three explanations. The first explanation seemed to revolve around the theme of securing justice and democracy. I interpret this to have something to do with a re-emergence in higher democratic values. The opposition candidate was backed by an alliance of opposition parties to specifically fight against Erdoğan's increasingly authoritarian grip on Turkey (Gall, 2019). Throughout his campaign, Imamoglu emphasized inclusivity, freedom from corruption and general need for change from conservative rule (Lowen, 2019). On the contrary, the AKP ran a polarizing campaign, effectively trying to nationalize the election campaign in the hopes that the people would back them (Aliriza, 2019). The opposition's own words seemed to reflect the strength of this explanation when he emphasized a need for a revitalized belief in an inclusive democratic Turkish republic (Gall, 2019).

The second explanation seems to fall on economic voting. Turkey's economy has contracted and economists have predicted a long recession for the country (Ingber, 2019). Erdoğan's popularity in Istanbul came from delivering services to city residents however infrastructure projects have

stalled as the economy slipped into recession (Gall, 2019). It is believed that unemployment and inflation have cost the AKP several races in major cities (Gall, 2019). On the other hand, Imamoglu was also able to tap into simmering discontent on the high level of unemployment in the city (Aliriza, 2019). The last explanation seems to be the perception of party stability. This is to say there the electorate might see party infighting as a sign that the AKP will not be able to function as smoothly as it once did. For example, former President Abdullah Gul and former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu have begun to chip away at AKP unity by deciding to start their own conservative movements (Gall, 2019).

The Istanbul election came as a particular shock as Recep Tayyip Erdogan, arguably the most important AKP leader, had started his political career as the mayor of Istanbul for many years. So what (if anything) changed? Is this an indication of something bigger or is it just a fluke? This study holds an empirical puzzle and a theoretical puzzle. The empirical puzzle asks, **Why did the AKP lose the 2019 mayoral elections in its strongholds Istanbul and Ankara while it continued its winning streak in Konya and Bursa?** The theoretical question this project asks is **Why do incumbent populist parties lose the support of the people?** This study focused on the 2019 Mayoral election in Istanbul as a case study. This question has not been formally addressed which is why this project was able to lessen that knowledge gap and secondly contribute to the literature on voting behavior in general and in Turkey more specifically. In essence, this project was of an exploratory nature of sorts.

My method of gathering data was based on using a Qualtrics survey. It was a 26 question, multiple choice survey. I used a survey because I found it to be more efficient as opposed to traveling to Turkey to interview voters. Qualtrics gathered potential respondents in four specific cities and administered the surveys via email. Data collection happened over the course of 12

days in July of 2021. The survey was distributed to 105 people from each of the cities of Ankara, Bursa, Istanbul and Konya. This study did not aim to make the claim that the sample size is directly indicative of their respective cities as a whole. Instead, I kept my study narrow and only focus on the responses of the 420 people in this study. I had three hypotheses for each of the three variables (religious self-identification, democratic values, and economic voting). They were influenced by both the literature and what the media has reported.

The findings of my survey indicated that there was no large fundamental differences in attributes, beliefs and preferences relating to religious self-identification, democratic values, and economic voting. The findings showed that my first hypothesis was correct since religious self-identification was similar throughout all respondents in all cities. My second hypothesis was incorrect because the democratic values of all survey respondents were very similar, regardless of what city they came from. My last hypothesis was also incorrect. I believed that the respondents from Istanbul and Ankara would have exclusive similar views however all four cities held similar views when it came to economic and strategic voting.

This thesis comprises a total of eight sections. In the ‘Empirical and theoretical puzzles’ section, I asked the two main questions at the heart of my thesis. The empirical question specifically focused on the 2019 mayoral elections in Turkey, while the theoretical question more broadly revolved around public support for populist parties. Next, in the hypotheses segment, I explored my three main hypotheses. Each one pertained to a specific variable: religious self-identification, democratic values, and economic voting. Afterwards, in the methodology portion, I explained in detail why I chose to work with a survey, why I chose the questions I did, and how Qualtrics recruited respondents. Under ‘findings and interpretation’, I revealed and analyzed the data provided by Qualtrics. Finally, my ‘summary contributions, limitations, and future research’

section identified my contribution to the literature on populism and Turkey while at the same time emphasizing the limits of conducting research with surveys. This section ended by suggesting how future research can be built off of the data I have collected.

Empirical and Theoretical Puzzles:

Recall that the empirical question “why did the AKP lose the 2019 mayoral elections in its strongholds Istanbul and Ankara while it continued its winning streak in Konya and Bursa?” The first variable involved democratic values. Democratic values refers to the set of ideals liberal democracies tend to uphold. These include but are not limited to: respect for a free and independent media, a respect for a secular government, a respect for the civil rights of a country’s own citizens regardless of gender, ethnicity, and race. I now wish to define the term secular as well as non-secular. Secular or secularism simply refers to a lack of religious influence in government or government policies. Non-secular is the opposite. In this particular case, Turkey’s non-secular factions tend to be those most associated with political Islam; their opponents might go as far as to call them Islamists. In this paper, political Islam or Islamists refers to anyone who wishes to bring the Turkish government under a more religious Islamic regime. This definition is kept broad on purpose because it seems to be that politicians and political parties want this to occur to different extents. This is not to say that all proponents of political Islam necessarily want Turkey to be under sharia law, or vice versa.

A defining characteristic of Turkish politics is the secular versus non-secular dynamic. Generally speaking, secular proponents pushed for the reduction of Islamic visibility in public life (Arat & Pamuk, 2019). For the purposes of this paper, non-secular forces will refer to Turkish pro-Islamic or ‘Islamist’ political parties. These parties are characterized as rejecting Western values in favor of forming closer economic, political, and cultural ties with Middle Eastern and other

Islamic countries (Akarca, Mar.2015). In the immediate context of Turkey, devout Muslims have felt oppressed by the government (Yavuz, 2003). This in turn gave rise to the Justice and Development party (known by its Turkish initials AKP for Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) which was officially established in August 2001 (Akarca, Mar.2015) by moderate members of previous non-secular parties (Yavuz, 2003). Despite being a new party at the time, the AKP won 363 seats in parliament, taking in over 34 per cent of the votes in the general election in the 2002 elections (Arat & Pamuk, 2019). AKP success in their first ever election had multiple explanations. Karakaya (2009) believed they won due to the growth of the religious middle class. Yavuz (2003) believed it was simply because they were the only alternative to parties that had already garnered bad reputations in governance. Baslevent & Akarca (2008) meanwhile believed it had more to do with the successful reputations of mayors who joined the party after its formation.

It is also important to explore the role of religion again. We know that religious identity can influence party affiliation, voting behavior, party politics, and national identity (Fox, 2013). Since its founding, secularism has been one of the cornerstones of the Turkish republic (Karakaya, 2009). The Turkish state abolished the Caliphate which could be seen as an extreme act because the Caliph was the leader of the Islamic world who represented the authority of the Prophet (Arat & Pamuk, 2019). Following this secular spirit, the Turkish state set up a new legal code that could be viewed as more western given that it significantly improved the civil rights of women (Arat & Pamuk, 2019). This is why the AKP has caught the attention of many observers. Despite presenting themselves as a moderate Muslim party akin to Christian-democrats, many believe the AKP is leading the country to a path of de-secularization. Arguably, no one has been more influential in the processes or as important to the party as Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Since his

days as mayor of Istanbul, religion has played a central element to his politics (Rogenhofer, 2020).

Erdoğan and the AKP have constantly contrasted the ‘religious masses’ against the ‘secular elites’ (Rogenhofer, 2020). Erdoğan and the AKP have implemented government recruitment policies which favor Islamic-conservatives (Somer, 2007). They have moved 800 civil servants from the Directorate of Religious Affairs to the Ministry of Education (Somer, 2007) prompting many to accuse the party of trying to bring more religious teaching into a secular school system. As a variable for this project, the questions relating to religion were crafted with Duane et al., (2006) in mind because they state that factors such as biblical literalism and church attendance can be considered valid measures of religious belief and behavior.

Additionally, it is important to discuss economic voting. Throughout my paper, I link economic voting to what Akarca calls strategic voting. This is because both emphasize the pragmatic nature of voters over their ideological preferences. Hence, whenever this paper makes note of ‘economic voting’, I am also including the use of strategic voting. I define economic voting to be when voters specifically choose *economic* practicality such as job security or inflation over ideological stances. I define strategic voting to be when voters choose *political* practicality over ideology. For examples when Turkish voters cast their ballots to resist coup threats, meet election thresholds or form single governments. Or when the AKP faced closure by the Constitutional Court fewer of its supporters left the party to demonstrate a check on the power the judiciary (Akarca, Jan. 2015).

The economic voting definition was specifically influenced by Anthony Downs’ 1957 book, “*An Economic Theory of Democracy*”. This is important in the immediate context because economic voting can help explain voter behavior. If the economy is good, the voters are happy and will

reelect their officials. If the economy is not good, they will ‘punish’ their elected officials by not voting for them again. This is based on Mark Peffley’s 1984 book “*The Voter as Juror: Attributing Responsibility for Economic Conditions*”. Peffley notes that people can rationalize a president being responsible for a bad economy because they believe the president inadvertently caused the conditions to occur, or that it is his role to correct them (Peffley, 1984). It should be noted however that Akarca states that voters use economic performance as ‘indicator for competence’ (Akarca, 2009) yet voters only take into consider that economic performance of the last year and value economic growth over inflation (Akarca, Jan. 2015).

Yasushi Hazama (2012) specifically looked at non-economic voting and incumbent strength in Turkey. According to Hazama, the literature on economic voting holds 3 variables accounting for support for incumbents. First, economic conditions prior to the election must be taken into account. Secondly, she points out the importance of the ‘cost of ruling’. Simply put, the cost of ruling emphasizes how the longer a party is in government, the less support they will have for the next election (Hazama, 2012). Lastly, Hazama states that voters will punish single-party governments more severely than coalition governments because it is easier to blame a single political party when there no coalition to hide behind.

It is now appropriate to move on the theoretical puzzle: why do incumbent populist parties lose the support of the people? The starting question before this needs to be asked: What is populism? I had previously mentioned that I define populism to be the use of an ‘us versus them’ narrative as a political tool to gain power. My definition is heavily influenced by Mudde, (2004) and Ostiguy et al. (2020). Another question that might come to mind is ‘what causes populism?’ Taggart (2004) states that, populism is an inherent reaction to a sense of extreme crisis (Taggart, 2004). Dinçşahin (2012) and Ostiguy also agree that populist actors inflame a sense of crisis,

rather than simply reacting to it. This is based on the rational calculation that they can mobilize support based on the passions of those negatively affected by a crisis (Ostiguy et al. 2020). In short, there is academic consensus that populism is a result of resentment at the establishment. (Dinçşahin, 2012).

The most referenced framework seems to come from Cas Mudde. Mudde has developed a framework of identifying and categorizing radical right populist political parties, based on three key features: nativism, authoritarianism, and populism. Erdogan and the AKP demonstrate nativism by emphasizing that the ‘real’ Turkish people are their devout Muslim followers. Authoritarianism is seen in the violent crackdowns of protestors who are framed as western-instigators. Lastly, populism is used to push the ‘us-versus-them’ narrative where the ‘us’ are the aforementioned religious followers and the ‘them’ are the proponents of a western and secular government.

Hypotheses:

Again, the empirical puzzle asked why the AKP lost elections in its former strongholds but continued to win in other cities during the 2019 mayoral elections. Due to the populist nature of the AKP, this led me to ask the theoretical question which essentially examines why people turn away from populist parties. Based on the literature review, a lot has been written on what causes a *rise* in populism but few, if any, sources address what factors lead to the *decline* in populist parties. To my knowledge, the literature is severely lacking in this area. My study seeks to contribute to this knowledge gap. I have created three hypothesis to test, based on the literature review.

H1: I hypothesized that when comparing Istanbul and Ankara with Konya and Bursa, all would have answered the questions on faith in a similar fashion. In essence, religious self-identification would be the same in all cities. I believed this because of the fact that it was reported that the AKP actually lost voters even in religious districts such as Fatih and Eyup (Aliriza, 2019). Therefore, I had strong reason to believe that whatever is going on, superseded religious faith.

H2: I believed that the largest differences between the cities would be in how survey participants answered questions regarding democratic values. I believed this because according to the literature review there were many sources from the media that framed the election of the opposition mayor as a 'win for democracy'. In my mind, this implied that the media believed the opposite as well: if the opposition loss, democracy would have suffered a set-back of sorts. Hence, testing democratic values seemed to be of large importance.

H3: Lastly, I believed that when comparing answers to questions related to economic voting, I would find that voters in Istanbul and Ankara would have perceived a threat to their economic interests more than voters in the other two cities. In essence, I believed the responses in Istanbul and Ankara would be similar and that the responses from Bursa and Konya would be similar, but that there would be no collective uniformity. I believed this because the literature had shown how influential the economy could be when voting in elections. Additionally, sources such as Aliriza (2019) noted that economic factors like job security played an important role in this specific election, since the opposition candidate specifically made that a prominent piece of his platform. Thus, I reasoned that if the AKP lost in Ankara and Istanbul but won in the other cities maybe it would involve the economical situations or the perceived economic beliefs of their respective cities and voters.

Methodology:

It is important to understand the reasoning behind the methodology. Public opinion can be a deciding factor in removing or reelecting their officials (Tomz & Weeks, 2013). The use of an online survey was chosen because online surveys are more practical (e.g. less expensive and less time intensive) (Miller, 2020). Additionally, online surveys can theoretically limit any ‘response effects’. The services of the survey platform Qualtrics was contracted to recruit participants, translate the survey and administer said survey to the participants. Qualtrics respondents can be recruited through ads, word of mouth, social networks, online and mobile games, affiliate marketing, banner ads, TV and radio ads (Miller, 2020).

I used the survey company Qualtrics to distribute a survey to a total of 420 people in Turkey. Specifically, 105 participants within the city of Ankara, 105 participants within the city of Bursa, 105 participants within the city of Istanbul, and 105 participants in the city of Konya were specifically targeted. Istanbul was selected because of its historical importance to Erdogan; he was the mayor of Istanbul which helped launch his career. Ankara was selected due to its long history of AKP mayors. Bursa and Konya were chosen out of practicality given that both had large populations to draw participants from. All cities have had AKP mayors since 2004. However, the AKP won the 2019 Konya and Bursa mayoral elections while they lost in the 2019 Istanbul and Ankara mayoral elections. To be eligible to participate, participants had to be above the age of 21 to guarantee that they were of voting age in the 2019 elections. This survey consisted of 26 questions that aimed at testing the respondent’s religious beliefs, democratic values, and economic voting factors relating to the respondent. General demographic questions and questions on how they plan to vote in the next Turkish election were also asked. Qualtrics selected and recruited survey takers. According to Eric Alvarez, my contact at Qualtrics, each panel has its own method of recruitment. Respondents can choose to join a panel through a

double opt-in process. Upon registration, they enter some basic data about themselves (e.g. demographics, hobbies). Whenever a survey is created that that individual would qualify for based on the information they have given, they are notified via email and invited to participate in the survey for a given incentive. Incentives are most often given on a point system. Those points can be pooled and later redeemed in the form of gift cards, sky-miles or credit for online games.

The survey did not ask for participants to identify themselves. According to Alvarez, Qualtrics does not allow for the collection of PII (Personally Identifiable information) which keeps participants anonymous. They have a unique participant ID that allows each response to be tracked while keeping the participant anonymous. The data is stored on secure servers. The data is kept as long as I maintain a live license with Qualtrics. Through another contact at Qualtrics, Brad Schramm, Qualtrics ensures data quality by implementing attention checks and speeding checks. Respondents who failed either quality check were excluded from the final samples. Qualtrics charged the investigator \$7.00 for each completed survey response requested.

The data reported in this study was collected according to the University of Chicago's Institutional review board approved protocols with the study number for this specific project being IRB21-0949. Participants were warned in a consent agreement prior to starting the survey that the survey might induce very minimal amounts of stress based on the nature of the political questions. There was minimal amounts of invasion of privacy. For example, there was a question that asks how much income a survey taker makes, what region of the country they lived in, or what is the age range of the survey taker. Due to the nature of the questions themselves, there was no way to minimize how stressed a participant was. The most that was done ahead of time was to make the questionnaire multiple choice for the convenience of the survey taker. The

survey taker had the option to stop taking the survey and exit the survey completely at any time. Data collection occurred over a period of 12 days in July 2021.

Findings and Interpretation:

H1: I hypothesized that when comparing Istanbul and Ankara with Konya and Bursa, all would have answered the questions on faith in a similar fashion. In essence, religious self-identification would be the same in all cities.

Findings in support: When respondents were asked to describe their feelings about the Quran 86 (81.9%) respondents in Ankara believed the Quran word for word, as did 84 (80%) of the respondents from Bursa, and 86 (81.9%) of the respondents from Konya. When asked if respondents fast during Ramadan, only Ankara and Konya had more than two thirds or more of respondents responded that they did fast during Ramadan with 70.5% and 81% respectfully. When asked if they believed Turkish laws should be based on Sharia law, 46.7 of respondents from Ankara, 51.4% from Bursa, 65.7% from Istanbul and 37.1% from Konya disagreed. In terms of asking if they think a time for prayer should be mandated in schools, respondents from Ankara, Bursa and Istanbul each had the highest percentage of people indicate that they disagree with that idea (44.8%, 45.7% and 56.2% respectfully). When asked if it was important for a candidate in their local or general election to be religious, the largest percentage from respondents from Ankara, Bursa, Istanbul and Konya all indicated that it was not at all very important (46.7%, 50.5%, 62.9%, 48.6% respectfully).

Findings not in support: Unlike the other cities, a far fewer percentage of respondents in Istanbul had a literal interpretation of Quran with 70 (66.7%) respondents feeling this way. Unlike Ankara and Konya, lower percentages of those who fast during Ramadan came from Bursa and

Istanbul. This was 66.9 and 65.7% respectfully. In terms of asking if they think a time for prayer should be mandated in schools, respondents from Konya were the only ones where the percentage of those who disagree (30.5%) was the smallest.

Inconclusive findings: In terms of how many times respondents prayed, there did not seem to be a uniform answer as was expected. Ankara and Konya each had 45.7% of respondents who prayed 5 times a day, while Bursa and Istanbul had 34.3% and 33.3% respectfully who said they prayed 5 times a day. When asked about their views of Turkish society, only Konya had a clear finding: 44 (41.9%) respondents believe Turkish society stayed the same. All other cities had percentages too close to each other to make a significant interpretation.

Interpretation: Based on the findings I can say that my first hypothesis was correct. Generally speaking, all respondents tended to answer the same way when it came to asking questions about religion and their religious faith. These findings seem to indicate that the respondents are very devout or religious yet still maintain a respect for a separation between religion and public policy. Take for example how a large percentage of respondents have a literal word for word interpretation of the Quran yet significantly oppose having Turkish laws be based on Sharia law. The respondents of Istanbul seemed to be less religious given that their responses for some questions were not as close to the other cities. Take for example how 66.7% of respondents from Istanbul held a literal interpretation of the Quran while in the other three cities, the percentage of respondents who believed in a literal interpretation was in the 80s. Additionally, Istanbul and Bursa both had the highest numbers of respondents who did not fully fast during Ramadan. I believe this to build on the literature in general (and Akarca in particular) that highlighted how the western side of Turkey is the most 'liberal' while the further east you go, the more conservative the people become. This can also be exemplified by the fact that respondent from

Konya, the furthest eastern city, had the lowest number of people who disagreed that time for prayer should not be mandated in schools. This implied that a larger number of respondents did.

Inconclusive findings: There were some findings here that I could not use to make conclusive interpretations from. Take for example the question that asked how many times a day a respondent prayed. There did not seem to be a uniform answer as was expected. Ankara and Konya each had 45.7% of respondents who prayed 5 times a day, while Bursa and Istanbul had 34.3% and 33.3% respectively who said they prayed 5 times a day. This may serve to reinforce the 'east vs west' divide on religiosity but further research would be needed. Another question asked respondents about their views of Turkish society, only Konya had a clear finding that showed that 44 (41.9%) respondents believe Turkish society stayed the same. All other cities had percentages too close to each other to make a significant interpretation. Take for example Ankara, where 29.5% of respondents believed Turkish society stayed the same but 28.6% believe it became too religious.

H2: I believed that the largest differences between the cities would be in how survey participants answered questions regarding democratic values.

Findings in support: When asked if elections are carried out freely and legally in Turkey, Bursa was the only city where the majority of respondents (53.3%) said elections were not free or legal. It should be noted that the second highest percentage of respondents to say no was from Istanbul where 41.9% of respondents said no.

Findings not in support: When asked if a more authoritative political figure was needed, Bursa had 37.1% who said yes versus 50.5% that said no, Istanbul had 28.6% that said yes versus 50.5% that said no, and Konya had 31.4% that said yes versus 52.4% that said no. When asked if

ethnic minorities preserve and develop their customs and culture, 70.5% respondents in Ankara said yes, as did those in Bursa (82.9%), Istanbul (73.3%), and Konya (73.3%). When asked if elections are carried out freely and legally in Turkey, in Ankara, 65.7% said yes, in Konya, 57.1% said yes, and in Istanbul 48.6% said yes. Participants were asked where they believed authority should come from. In Ankara, 67.6% said so, as well as 71.8% from Bursa, 71.3% in Istanbul, and 71% from Konya.

Inconclusive findings: When asked if a more authoritative political figure was needed, Ankara was the only city where respondents' answers were too similar to make a significant interpretation from them. This was because 41% said yes while 45.7% said no.

Interpretation: Based on the findings I can say that my second hypothesis was not correct.

Contrary to what I was expecting, respondents across all four cities generally held similar democratic values. A large number of respondents from almost *all* the cities did not think a more authoritative political figure was needed. Similarly, a large number of respondents across all cities said they believed ethnic minorities should be able to preserve their own customs and language. This finding was actually surprising to me given the ethnic tensions that effect the eastern side of the country where large numbers of Kurdish people live. The fact that respondents from the furthest eastern city of Konya held similar beliefs on this issue as the furthest western city of Istanbul speaks to a strong shared sense of democratic belief in the Turkish republic. The fact that the majority of respondents believed elections in Turkey are free and fair paired with the fact that more than two thirds of each city's participants said authority should come from the people (as oppose to religious texts or the military) builds on the strong sense of democratic faith.

The only data I found to support my hypothesis was the fact that Bursa was the only city where the majority of respondents (53.3%) said elections were not free or legal. I have no explanation that could explain why respondents in the city felt this way. Istanbul produced what I would consider ‘questionable’ findings because when respondents were asked if a more authoritative political figure was needed, Ankara respondents’ answers’ were too tight (41% said yes versus 45.7% who said no) to make a significant interpretation from them. Yet the fact that a very slight majority do not want an authoritative figure also hinted at a slight leaning towards favoring the Turkish republic’s democratic tradition.

H3: Lastly, I believed that when comparing answers to questions related to economic voting, I would find that voters in Istanbul and Ankara would have perceived a threat to their economic interests more than voters in the other two cities. I reasoned that the responses in Istanbul and Ankara would be similar and that the responses from Bursa and Konya would be similar, but that there would be no *collective* uniformity.

Findings in support: The twenty fourth question asked participants to rank the following six topics in order of importance. A ranking of ‘1’ indicated it was very important while a ranking of ‘6’ indicated least important. The topics were: economy/job security, corruption, the Kurdish question, religion, state of democracy, and foreign relations. All respondents from all cities indicated that the economy/job security were the most important topics to them, followed by corruption. However, the results from between Istanbul and Ankara in regards to the level of importance the next four topics were, were very similar. Respondents from both cities believed the Kurdish question to be third most important, religion as fourth, the state of democracy as fifth, and foreign relations as sixth.

Findings not in support: Istanbul, Bursa and Konya all have a similar percentage of respondents who do not think their country is on the wrong track (74.3%, 72.4%, and 69.5% respectfully).

When asked what the primary aim of Turkish voters should be, the results from Ankara were not similar. For the respondents of Istanbul, 59.8% said the primary aim should be to check the power of the incumbent ruling party; as did the respondents from Bursa (57.8%) and Konya (51.2%).

Inconclusive findings: No inconclusive findings.

Interpretation: Based on my findings, I can say that my third hypothesis was not correct. There was minor evidence to support that the findings from Istanbul and Ankara would be similar or that the findings from Bursa and Konya would be similar. Two of the three questions asked actually demonstrated a more common sense of economic/strategic voting. Take for example how respondents from Konya and Bursa, cities with continued AKP leadership, said that their country is not on the right track. This was more in line with the percentage of respondents in Istanbul, a city that voted against AKP mayoral rule. Similar, there is another situation where the respondents from Istanbul agreed with the respondents from Bursa and Konya that the primary aim of voters should be to check the power of the incumbent ruling party. Both of these situations are genuinely odd to me given that voters from Istanbul and Ankara rejected the AKP in their last elections while the voters of Bursa and Konya continued to embrace them. I can only try and reconcile this by assuming that the issue is not in the respondents, but in the number of questions pertaining to economic and strategic voting. This will be addressed later on.

Summary Contributions, Limitations, and Future Research:

First, I believe this project has contributed to generally understanding current Turkish politics. I specifically think I helped flesh out what Stockemer would consider to be the third stage of AKP rule. Also, by virtue of simply conducting a project with the 2019 mayoral elections at its heart, I have built upon the works of Akarca who himself has conducted many analyses on Turkish elections for the last few election cycles. I specifically recall him mentioning how the political geography of Turkey could be split online a west-east divide where the west is less conservative but become more conservative the further you go east. Some of my survey questions were able to speak to that such as when respondents of Konya were found to be the most supporting of a mandating prayer time in schools.

Secondly, I believe this project has helped build on the scholarly literature relating to religion, democracy, economic/strategic voting and populism. Fox (2013) had specifically mentioned how religious identity can influence party affiliation, voting behavior and party politics. My project specifically built on those ground when I established questions asking for the demographics of respondents. Fox seemed to focus on how religion can influence political voting patterns, and my project specifically focused on examining that connection when I examined the secular versus religious dynamic. I also believe my project made genuine attempts to contribute to discussions relating to economic and strategic voting literatures. I specifically thought of Downs (1957) as well as Peffley (1984) and how they emphasized how voters made decisions on elections based on how good or bad the economy way. Although this section of the survey was limited to three questions, I believe it was enough to at least help build future hypotheses. This will be further discussed in the future research section.

In terms of limitations, it should be first noted that this project had a very small sample size of 420 respondents. This alone is very limiting in that it is difficult to make larger implications of

what the Turkish electorate feel or think for the AKP. This leads directly into my second limitation. The very nature of the project had that of an experimental approach. This is to say that survey was built and administered in a way that did not set out to have the responses of individual participants represent their respective city as a whole. Bluntly speaking, I make no claim that the respondents from Istanbul, Konya, Bursa or Ankara directly or proportionally represent the political mood of the city as whole. Instead, this project aimed to be more of a guide for future projects on what variables to test or what cities to invest time into. Lastly, the work of Leege & Lyman (2016) have informed me of the many limitations of conducting survey work specifically with religion. For instance, simply asking if they attend mosque services does not always have a straight and simple response for the participant as institutional worship does not necessarily entirely equate with sincerely held faith, devotion or practice (Leege & Lyman, 2016). Additionally, it is impossible to determine if participants may have decided to over report socially valued behavior, or if they answered any question through faulty memory, willful distortion or wishful thinking (Leege & Lyman, 2016).

I believe a lot of future research can be made in order to build upon my last two variables: economic/ strategic voting as well as democratic values. I singled these two out specifically because the hypotheses relating to them were not correct. The most noticeable aspect of my project has to be the fact that questions relating to the third variable (economic/strategic voting) were very few in number. I believe it is necessary to add more questions to test this variable in future works. Due to financial constraints, I had to limit questions relating to that topic to only three. Generally speaking, my data shows: participants in all cities believe the economy is on the wrong track, elections should be used to check the power of the incumbent party and that corruption is the most important issue on their minds right now. Future research can specifically

examine *why* participants think the economy is on the wrong track and what role they think the AKP play in ‘correcting’ it. Another question to ask is why is corruption at the front of participants’ minds? Do respondents believe that the AKP has *become* a corrupt force or is it the case that they think the AKP is still inherently good but just *unable* to curb corruption? Either way, has the cost of ruling caught up to the AKP in terms of economic and strategic voting?

Next, I think there is still much in terms of democratic sentiment among the Turkish people to analyze for future works. In almost every city, almost one in three respondents believe power should come from elected officials instead of from the people. Further research can ask why this is the case. Is there a general mistrust amongst the Turkish people and if so, who is that mistrust directed towards? Is it on ethnic lines or political ones? Likewise, the question can be asked in reverse: why do such large majorities in every city believe power should be derived from the people and not elected officials? Is there an inherent distrust in *government institutions in general* or is it a mistrust of placing too much power in the *AKP in particular*?

Lastly, I still believe more hypotheses that do not relate to the original variables can be built on the information I have collected. For example, published work from Akarca have indicated that women are generally more likely to vote AKP than men. Instead of focusing on a city-by-city approach, another scholar could focus on understanding any differences in voting preferences by gender. Aside from gender, I believe education is another aspect that needs to be looked at. I found it very interesting that almost a third of all Bachelor’s degree holders and half of all Master’s degree holders voted for the AKP. I believe further research should focus on understanding how the AKP was able to convince a significant minority of well-educated participants to vote for them. Did these intellectuals vote for the AKP out of ideological commitment or economic pragmatism? Or is it the case that these educated individuals favored

the AKP only because the other parties were subpar for them? These are questions that can be analyzed for further research.

Conclusion:

The incumbent AKP power has been in power for almost two decades; an unprecedented feat in Turkish history. This project sought to ask two questions. The empirical puzzle asked “why did the AKP lose the 2019 mayoral elections in its strongholds Istanbul and Ankara while it continued its winning streak in Konya and Bursa?” The theoretical question this project asked “why do incumbent populist parties lose the support of the people?” My first hypothesis proved correct as religious self-identification was similar throughout all respondents in all cities. My second hypothesis was incorrect. Contrary to what I believed, the democratic values of all survey respondents were very similar, regardless of what city they came from. My last hypothesis was also incorrect. I believed that the respondents from Istanbul and Ankara would have exclusive similar views however all four cities held similar views when it came to economic and strategic voting.

Generally speaking, the results seemed to indicate that there was no large fundamental differences in attributes, beliefs and preferences relative to the variables that were set out within this paper. The only time the respondents of Konya and Istanbul seemed to be at significant odds with each other was when analyzing the questions relating to religion. There, I observed what other Turkish scholars had noted on how folks in the eastern party of Turkey seem to be more religious while the opposite is true. Limitations were discussed where I highlighted the small sample size, the design of my methodology as well as the known problems of working with human subjects and surveys.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

1. Consent form:

University of Chicago Online Consent Form for Research Participation

Study Title: Understanding Turkey: Erdogan, the AKP and the 2019 Mayoral Elections

Researcher(s): Alan Rojas

Sponsor: Matthias Staisch

Description: I am a researcher at the University of Chicago doing a research study about voting behavior in the 2019 Turkish Mayoral election. Participants will have been recruited by the survey platform Qualtrics. Participants must be above the age of 21; one hundred people must come from Istanbul, one hundred from Ankara, one hundred from Bursa and one hundred must come from Konya. This study will ask personal demographic information such as income, level of religious self-identification, level of belief in democratic values, as well as voting preferences in Turkish elections. These questions are very personal and may be upsetting to a small degree. Participation should take less than 15 minutes. Your participation is voluntary.

Incentives: You will not be paid in cash for your participation. Incentives for participation are given out by the survey platform Qualtrics. Incentives are most often given on a point system. Those points can be pooled and later redeemed in the form of gift cards, sky-miles, credit for online games, etc.

Risks and Benefits: Your participation in this study does not involve any risk to you beyond that of everyday life. Taking part in this research study may not benefit you personally, but we may learn new things that could help others. Specifically, we may learn new things on voter behavior, populism and democratic values and religiosity of the Turkish electorate.

Confidentiality: The only identifiers in this study are the demographic questions. No names, addresses, or any such specific identifiers will be used. Data and identifiers in the study will be used by the researcher to help build a critical analysis. No information will be shared outside of the research team. All information will be secured on a password encrypted Qualtrics account, on a password encrypted laptop. Any PDF file with data from the study downloaded from the Qualtrics account as well as any word doc with data from the study will be saved on uchicagobox. Following the conclusion of the study, the data will be securely kept on my Qualtrics profile. If you decide to withdraw from this study, any data already collected will not be saved. Identifiable data will never be shared outside the research team. The information collected as part of this research will not be used or shared for future research studies, even if all identifiers are removed.

Contacts & Questions:

If you have questions or concerns about the study, you can contact the researcher Alan Rojas at (773)621-8185 and arojas@uchicago.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, feel you have been harmed, or wish to discuss other study-related concerns with someone who is not part of the research team, you can contact the University of Chicago Social & Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office by phone at (773) 702-2915, or by email at sbs-irb@uchicago.edu.

Consent:

Participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate or withdrawing from the research will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled.

Consent will be given via a multiple choice question before starting the main survey. By clicking “Agree” below, you confirm that you have read the consent form, are at least 18 years old, and agree to participate in the research. Please print or save a copy of this page for your records.

- I agree to participate in the research
- I do NOT agree to participate in the research. You will be taken to a screen that exits them from the survey and will be thanked for your consideration.

2. What city do you live in?

- Ankara
- Bursa
- Istanbul
- Konya

3. What is your ethnicity?

- Turkish
- Kurdish
- Arab
- Zaza
- Other

4. What is your age group?

- 18-29

- 30-49
 - 50-64
 - 65 years and older
5. What is your gender?
- Male
 - Female
 - Other
6. What is your yearly Income?
- TRY 700 or less
 - TRY 701 - 1200
 - TRY 1201 - 2000
 - TRY 2001 - 3000
 - TRY 3001 - 5000
 - TRY 5001- or more
7. What is your highest level of education?
- Less than secondary school
 - Secondary school
 - Associates degree
 - Bachelor's degree
 - Master's degree
 - Doctorate
8. Did you vote in the 2019 mayoral elections?
- Yes
 - No
 - I can't remember
9. What party did you vote for in the 2019 mayoral elections?
- Justice and Development party (AKP)
 - Republican People's Party (CHP)

- Nationalist Action Party (MHP)
- Democratic People's party (DEHAP) / Social Democratic people's party (SHP), Democratic Society Party (DTP) / Peace and Democracy party (BDP) Peoples democratic party (HDP)+ BDP/ People's democratic Party (HDP)
- Other parties
- Independents

10. Which of these statements comes closest to describing your feelings about the Quran?

- The Quran is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word
- The Quran is the inspired word of God but not everything in it should be taken literally, word for word
- The Quran is an ancient book of fables, legends, history, and moral precepts recorded by men

11. About how often do you pray?

- Five times a day
- Three - four times a day
- Once or twice a day
- Only Fridays
- Only during religious holidays
- Never

12. Do you fast during Ramadan?

- Yes
- Partially
- No

13. Turkish laws should be based on sharia law:

- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree

14. Do you agree that a time for prayer should be mandated in schools?

- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree

15. Is it important to you that in local or general elections that the candidate is religious?

- Very Important
- Somewhat Important
- Not at all important

16. It is said that very important and useful reforms/innovations/legal changes have been implemented during AKP rule. Do you find these claims to be correct or wrong?

- Correct
- Wrong
- No opinion

17. In the last decade (2011-2021), Turkish society has:

- Become not secular enough
- Become too secular
- Stayed the same
- Become too religious
- Become not religious enough

18. Given the state of current political affairs, a more authoritative political figure is needed:

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

19. “In our country, is it the right of ethnic minorities such as Kurds, Circassians and Arabs to preserve their customs and traditions, to use their own language and to develop their culture?”

- Yes
- No

20. Are elections carried out freely and legally in this country?

- Yes
- No
- No opinion

21. Authority should come from:

- Elected officials
- The people
- Religious figures / religious texts
- The military
- None of the above

22. Is the economy on the “right track” or on the “wrong track”

- Right track
- Wrong track

23. Voters in Turkey should primarily aim to:

- Help create a single party government
- Check the power of the incumbent ruling party
- Check the power of the military
- Check the power of the Judiciary
- None of the above

24. During the 2019 mayoral elections, what were the most important issues for you? Please rank in order of most importance to least importance (1 is the most important and 6 is the least important).

- Economy / Job security
- Corruption
- The Kurdish Question
- Religion
- State of democracy
- Foreign relations

25. Generally speaking, I think government policies in the last 10 years has improved my quality of life:

- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree

26. If the 2023 elections were held tomorrow, what party would you vote for?

- AKP (Justice and Development Party)
- CHP (The Republican People's Party)
- MHP (National Action Party)
- IYI (Iyi Party)
- HDP (People's Democracy Party)
- DSP (The Democratic Left party)
- FAZILET (The Virtue Party)
- DYP (The True Path Party)
- ANAP (The Motherland Party)
- GP (Genc Parti - Young Party)
- HaDeP (People's Democracy Party)