TURKISH POLITICAL MARKET AND THE PERCEPTION OF POLITICAL PARTIES

POLITIČKA TRŽIŠTA I PERCEPCIJA POLITIČKIH STRANAKA TURSKE

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ABSTRACT[1]

This study attempts to describe the Turkish political market and determine where and how Turkish political parties are perceived by voters. The study uses a two-dimensional map to determine the voter perceptions of the parties in the Turkish political market based on a survey questionnaire applied to 400 young voters. It also investigates whether there are any major differences in the perception of parties in the political space based on voter ideologies. The study finds that young voters have clear perceptions of the positions of Turkish parties. It also finds that voter perceptions of parties vary based on voters' ideological positions.

SAŽETAK[2]

Istraživanjem se nastoje opisati politička tržišta u Turskoj te odrediti gdje i kako glasači percipiraju turske političke stranke. Za to je korištena dvodimenzionalna mapa za određivanje percepcija glasača na turskom političkom tržištu, temeljem provedenog anketnog istraživanja na uzorku od 400 mladih glasača. Nadalje, istražuje se postoje li u političkom prostoru važne razlike u percepciji stranaka temeljene na ideologiji glasača. Istraživanje pokazuje kako mladi glasači imaju jasnu percepciju položaja turskih političkih stranaka, ali i da se percepcija stranaka mijenja ovisno ideološkim pozicijama glasača.

1. INTRODUCTION

Political markets are highly competitive. A typical political market may include between two and more than a hundred political parties (PP) in a democratic country. A political market generally includes political parties with different ideological views, political values, policies, and policy positions. Some markets are more competitive than others, and they can consist of a variety of parties, some of which are very similar to each other. For instance, there are currently about 77 political parties in Turkey, and it is sometimes very difficult to distinguish one from another in terms of their world views, ideologies, policies or values. There are several parties almost in every market segment, which means that the market is very fragmented. Those parties have to compete with others from both their own and different segments. In such a fragmented market, parties have major difficulties in differentiating themselves from others, as it is not easy to create a distinguished and unique party image.

In such markets, competition takes place mostly by means of brands. A party is located in the best possible place in the market in order to occupy the most suitable and desired place in the voters' minds on the basis of its positioning and targeting decisions. Then relevant marketing strategies are applied to obtain the highest (or desired) percentage of votes. However, these do not always work because the positioning and targeting decisions are decisions made by the party itself. On the other side of the coin are the voters. Questions such as where the voters see a political party in the market and how they perceive it are equally important. In many cases, the official position of a political party in the market and the place where voters see it differ considerably. This is the issue of the difference between "reality" and "perception".

Perception is important in marketing because consumers buy goods and services based not only on their actual characteristics, but also on how they recognize them. It affects consumer satisfaction and experiences considerably (Zeithaml, 1998). Perception is an even more valid consideration for voters, who behave according to how they perceive a political subject (e.g. a party, candidate or political issue). They pay attention to assess and interpret all sorts of messages, signs, advertisements etc., based on their perceptions of the political subject. Therefore, the way a party is perceived and the perceived differences between parties are important. Moreover, the level of importance of perception increases as the similarities between parties increase. In turn, their rivalry intensifies and the perceived differences become more important.

In cases of high similarity between (political) products, the perceived differences among parties play a critical role. A political product is a complex product, and voters are little likely to compare all the features of similar products. They make decisions based on the most distinguishing features and the perceived differences, rather than the individual features of a product. Perceived differences can be observed among parties even if they occupy the same place on the continuum in ideological or policy terms (Kovačič, Hlebec & Kropivnik, 2002; Ekehammar & Sidanius, 1977). Some of the parties in the Turkish political market can provide a good example of this. For instance, despite the fact that certain pairs of parties are almost the political twins that target the same voter segments with similar ideological and political views, they have been perceived quite differently by voters. Three examples of such pairs are D(Y)P and ANAP (both central right parties), CHP and DSP (both central left parties), and MHP and BBP (both nationalist parties). Each pair has competed fiercely among themselves, and against others at the same time, for decades. In such cases, perception plays a critical role in determining the result.

In forming perceptions, special notice should be given to political ideology. Political parties are formed on the basis of ideologies, values, beliefs, world views etc. Ideology is one of the most effective determinants of voter support. It helps decision-makers locate and identify parties more

easily along the political spectrum (e.g. left, center or right). Ideology is not only important for parties, but voters as well, because it forms a part of one's identity and value system. It helps voters define and describe themselves with respect to others. It also affects how one perceives a political party. Hence, voting decisions are mostly a product of the voters' perceptions. The "perception problem" is a serious one in political markets. The more competitive the political market gets, the more serious the problem becomes.

The purpose of this paper is to determine where and how the voters perceive the political parties in the political space of Turkey. Voter perceptions are determined based on a proposed two-dimensional triangular perception map. This study considers the specific nature of the Turkish political space and makes some evaluations regarding it.

The paper is organized into five main parts. The second part presents some background information about the Turkish political market. The third part includes the material and the methodology used in the study. The fourth part includes discussions of the study's findings on voter perceptions of party positions based on an analysis of the data collected. This section also presents the perceptions of party positions in relation to the voters' positions. The last section consists of a summary and a conclusion.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1. Understanding the political market

Voters may have their own perceptions of a specific political party against its self-declared (official) political position. The party's self-declared position and the voters' perceptions may coincide or differ from each other. Since the voter uses his/her own perception in voting, this is more valid and countable than the party's self-declared position.

In understanding voter perceptions, first one should understand the political space (the market). So far, attempts to analyze the political space have mostly been limited to traditional left–right models, sometimes with some extensions; but those models do not take into account the cultural, historical, and social structures of countries, implicitly assuming that the standard model is valid for all. Therefore, those models do not consider the above-mentioned dynamics in representing the political space (Van der Brug, 1999; Lipset, 1959). That is why they are not sufficient or helpful enough to represent and understand the true nature of political markets and voter behavior in many countries; also, they have never been fully adopted in the analysis of politics in some of them, such as Turkey (Çarkoğlu & Hinich, 2006).

Academics, journalists, politicians and even political experts are often surprised by election results and have difficulty understanding how and why voters vote for a specific party. For instance, the 1995 elections in Turkey, in which the religious Welfare Party (RP) won in the first round, surprised many at the time. Besides their Western counterparts, a number of local politicians and political experts were also surprised by the results. The 2002 election results, in which the Ak Parti won with a large majority, aroused similar reactions from many experts. Similar scenes are common in many other countries around the world. Hence, the political markets of those countries and their structural elements need to be studied more carefully in order for us to better understand voter behavior.

There are a variety of elements that shape political space, with ideology, values, economics, culture and traditions to be outlined among the most influential of such elements. Of course, as a cultural item, religion also has a specific influence on shaping the political space of many, if not all, countries, but its effects seem to be neglected in the political market and political science literature. This is probably due to the fact that most of the literature is shaped by descriptions of the secular Western world, where religion is not as influential in shaping political markets and voter decisions as it is in some other parts of the world.

According to some empirical findings, religion is not the most influential factor in voting decisions (Polat & Külter, 2008) but it does carry considerable weight (Polat, Gürbüz & İnal, 2004, p. 88-89). Especially when combined with some other factors, such as social class, education, income etc., its effects may become more apparent. Religion creates a strong bond for the creation of a political identity. It has power among voters in many political markets, such as Turkey, Israel, India, Pakistan and a number of others. Religion is a responsive theme for political parties to address, and such a convenient medium that has capillary depth in the public is difficult to ignore.

Surely, this does not mean that religiosity will be a valid dimension of the political markets of all countries, but there is evidence that it is a valid and essential part of many. Research exploring religious affiliation in different countries has shown that the percentage of people who are affiliated to a religious belief is comparably much higher than that of those not affiliated to one (The Pew Research Center, 2012; Türkiye Değerler Araştırmasi - Turkey Values Survey, 2011). Therefore, any attempt that ignores the role of religion in the understanding of the political market and voter behavior will be incomplete, especially in the countries mentioned above and many others like them. However, this study is not one that explores only the role of religion in shaping political markets, but makes reference to it as a means to better understanding political markets and market dynamics.

The knowledge of political markets and the positions of parties are important for the understanding of voters' perceptions, a party's ideological position, voter attitudes and behaviors towards parties, and voter transitions from party to party. This issue has for a long time been discussed in the literature, mainly that of political science, (Pelizzo, 2010; Pellikaan, Honig & Busing, 2005; Dinas & Gemenis, 2009; Hinich & Munger, 1994; Van Deth & Geurths, 1989), which includes such models as the classical Downsian (Downs, 1957) and the Horseshoe model (see Pellikaan, Vollaard & Otjes, 2007) to represent political space. For decades, it has been described in a uni-dimensional form, namely in terms of the left–right continuum (Bowen, 1975, p. 203; Laver & Hunt, 1992). This description has been accepted widely not only by politicians and academics but also by voters; many of whom describe their ideas, opinions, political identity and position based on this description. They also use the same model in perceiving and evaluating political parties, candidates and a number of other political issues.[3] The literature reports three main methods to determine parties' positions on the left–right continuum: the Manifesto Research Group (MRG) method (Klingemann, 1995; Budge, Klingemann, Volkens, Bara & Tanenbaum, 2001), the expert survey method and the voter survey method (Pellikaan et al., 2005, p. 4; see also Van der Eijk & Niemöller, 1983; Van der Brug, 1997; Shikano & Pappi, 2004). Among these, only the third method reflects the voters' own perceptions.

2.2. The Turkish political market and political tradition

Turkey, as a democratic country, has about 65 years of experience in multi-party democracy in spite of some interruptions. The Turkish experience, with its success in developing democratic institutions, an open society and a functioning democratic system, is a special case in its region that shows the integration of Islamic culture and democracy. However, behind this success lies the country's unique experience and background, which stands on its own political and cultural roots, a point that is disregarded in many research studies. Without understanding the basis on which Turkish democracy has developed, it would be difficult to draw clear conclusions. For instance, approaching the Turkish political market with traditional descriptions to be found in the literature would give us only a limited and unclear picture of it. Therefore, the country-specific features and the underlying background are needed to better understand the Turkish political market and voter behaviors.

**Graph 1:** Main political thoughts and movements in Turkish politics
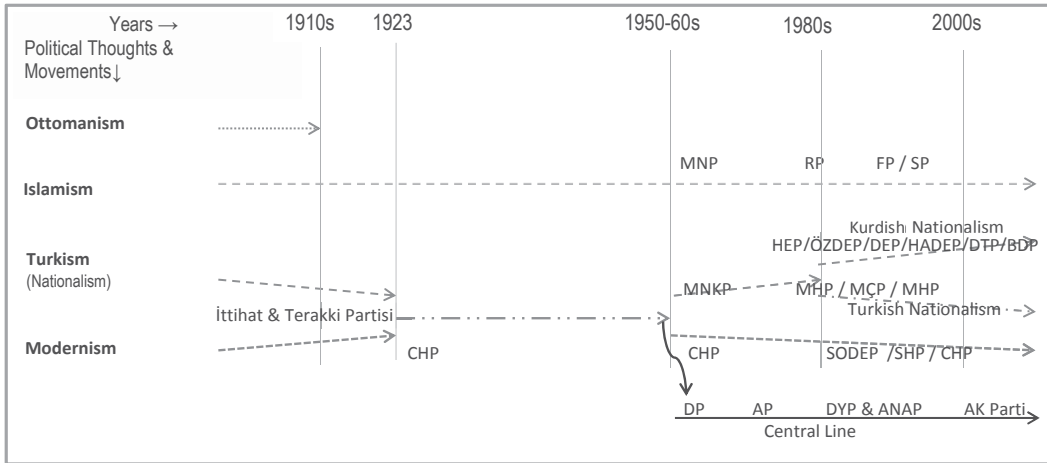
In Turkish politics, most of the current political views and traditions have roots going back to the early 1900s (toward the end of the Ottoman period), which reflects a long political experience in the modern sense. In this experiential frame, one can trace the ideological roots of almost all current parties – nationalists, socialists, social democrats and conservatives – to that time. Most of the current political streams have strong traditions that hark back to the late 1800s or early 1900s. In fact, they still maintain their existence on the current political space by shaping it. These basic political streams are Ottomanism (Osmanlicilik), Islamism (İslamcilik), Nationalism (Turkism; Türkçülük) and Modernism (Çağdaşlik/Muasirlik) (Demirağ, 2005; Helvaci, 2010; Yilmaz, 2011; Dagi, 2005) (Graph 1).

The traditional left–right dimension is also used in Turkey to present the political space despite

Graph 2: Percentage of votes in Turkish elections (2002-2011)
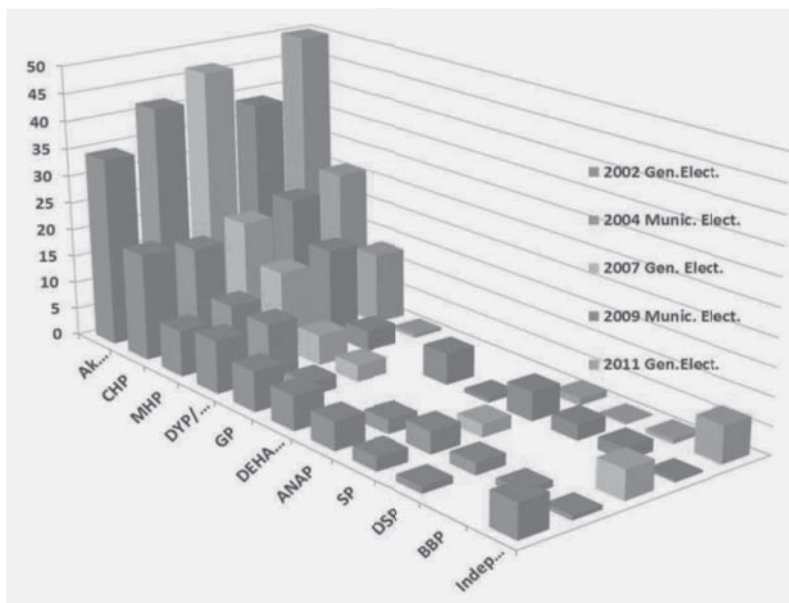
the fact that it ignores many country-specific attributes. Every country has its own political traditions that are shaped by the country's political roots, culture, social structure, and social and economic dynamics. All of these have great influence on voter behavior and cannot be ignored.

In the multiparty period (after the 1950s), there have been two main centers in Turkish politics, namely, the center-right and the center-left. The center-right is represented by the conservative right parties, including DP, AP, ANAP-DYP and Ak Parti, while the center-left is formed around the conservative CHP, the pro-Atatürk (Atatürkçülük) party, the State ideology. The votes are divided between the right and left wings of the political spectrum as 65-70% to 25-30%. The center-right has been the most influential line in the political market in the last 65 years. It is conservative in nature with Western tendencies, but has the capacity to include different non-extremist ideological colors ranging from liberals to nationalists and religious parties as well. The last link of the chain is the Ak Parti (Justice and Development Party), established in 2001 and labeled as pro-Islamist by many both inside (Boyraz, 2011) and outside the country, especially in the Western world, although it has declared itself as a conservative democratic party (Karakaş, 2007).

Additionally, the Turkish political market is highly competitive. Today, it consists of about 77 parties, many of which take part in elections. Only about five to seven of them get considerable percentages of the votes (Graph 2). The political market includes parties from different ideological dimensions, ranging from communist to ultra-nationalist and from liberals to the ultra-religious. The multiparty system is well-received and well-understood by Turkish voters. The majority of the electorate votes very consciously and are able to distinguish between parties, such as which party is situated where, as has been demonstrated by election results many times in the past.

3. METHOD

3.1. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to determine young voters' perceptions of political parties in Turkey, a country with a young population, where young voters have considerable weight in the political market. From this aspect, the purpose is three-fold: to determine (i) how young voters perceive and map the major parties in a two-dimensional political space, (ii) neighboring positions among the parties from the voters' perspective to identify possible voter transitions among parties, and (iii) whether voters with different ideological orientations perceive political parties' differently.

3.2. Measuring tool

A specific questionnaire form was developed for the study, based on the literature. The form consisted of three main parts, in which the first one included five multiple-choice questions about voter demographics; the second one included two Likert-type scales and five Yes/No questions, aimed at determining the level of political interest and involvement in politics; and the third one included questions about the perceived positions of political parties and voters' self-defined political positions on a Triangular Perception Map (TPM) specifically adapted for the study in light of the discussions in the literature and Turkish political traditions to measure the voters' relative perceptions of the political party's positions (Graph 3). A table including the parties' official full names, emblems and acronyms was also provided to the respondents besides the TPM. (Before application, the form was supplied to several experts – a professor of sociology, a professor of political science and two professors of marketing, in order to check the validity. It was revised on the basis of the comments and suggestions obtained from those experts. Later, a pilot study of 30 voters was organized in order

to find out whether the form included any fuzzy expressions etc. The data from the pilot study was not included in the analyses because the purpose was just to test the instrument. After final revisions, the form was used in collecting the required data. Finally, the Likert-type items were tested for reliability and Cronbach's alpha was computed (α = 0.796). Given that, as a rule of thumb, a reliability coefficient of .80 is considered "good" in most cases, the coefficient of 0.796 suggests relatively high internal consistency).

The TMP consisted of "left–right" and "religiosity" dimensions in light of the *traditional political streams*, which have strong historical, political and cultural backgrounds in Turkey. Religion has always been an influential factor in Turkish politics, its effects on voter decisions are discussed in the literature (Çarkoğlu & Hinich, 2006; Çarkoğlu & Hinich, 2002; Kalaycıoğlu, 2007). Çarkoğlu & Hinich (2002) attempted to estimate the spatial positions of all major Turkish parties in a two-dimensional ideological space, namely pro-Islamism vs. secularism and Turkish nationalism vs. Kurdish nationalism, claiming that these dimensions are in line with Mardin's center-periphery framework (Mardin, 1973). They utilized the spatial theory of Hinich & Munger (1994), but there are not many studies yet that have utilized it to determine how religiosity affects voter perceptions.

Based on the historical political traditions, thoughts and their interrelations, the TMP has been shaped in the form of a right triangle. The left-most corner has been referred to as "communist", the right-most corner as "ultra nationalist" and the top corner as "ultra-religious". The reason the TPM is a triangle of such form is that the ideological distance between the left and the religious is greater than the distances between the left and nationalism and between nationalism and religiousness, a view which is supported in the literature. In general, the leftists are more secular than the rightists, and they are more distanced from religion than are the nationalists, a finding sustained by several public surveys in Turkey. This is represented by the hypotenuse in the TPM having the longest distance between the two corners.

The TMP has been divided into 15 sub-regions, in which point *0* represents the very political center, which is a very common phrase in Turkish poli-

Graph 3: Triangular Perception Map (TPM)
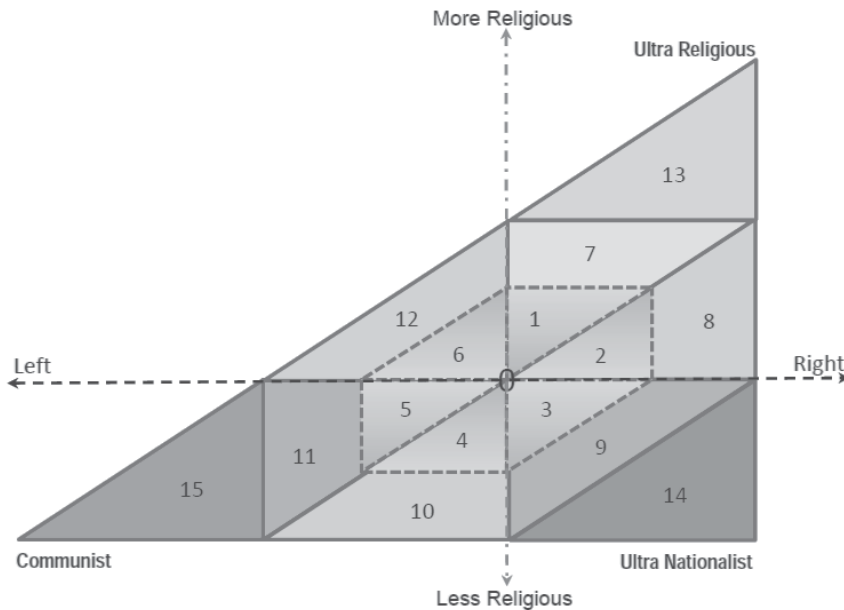
tics. In fact, point *0* is only a hypothetical center that refers to an *assumed point of reference*. In real life, the center corresponds to an area or position that can embrace and attract voters from different ideological positions.

On the TPM, while the areas 1, 2 and 3 represent the "center-right", the areas 4, 5, and 6 represent the "center-left". From this view, the center is a combination of several different ideological colors or sub-regions, which are different from each other politically but, at the same time, similar to each other in terms of the moderateness of political views. It is a mix of different colors, including left, right, religious secular etc. The center is also helpful both in terms of identifying the relevant positions of parties and being the point of balance in politics. Thus, it is not a coincidence that the center- right or cetre-left parties generally address the majority of the voters in many countries.

The corners include the most extreme ideological positions (ultra-left – area 15, ultra-right – area 14, and ultra-religious – area 13). The areas between the extremes and the center (areas 7, 9, and 11) represent political positions with strong colors but non-extremes, such as religious (7), nationalist (9) and socialist (11). Beyond those, the TMP also includes shared areas representing multi-poled views, which are frequently observed in Turkish politics, such as 'religious-nationalists' (8), the 'nationalist-left' (10) and the 'religious-left' (12), the last one being observed not as a political party but as voters in the Turkish market.

3.3. Population and data

Turkey is a country with a population of approximately 76,668,000 (as of December 31, 2013) according to the Statistics Institute of Turkey (TÜİK). The median age is 30.4; 24.6% of the population is in the 0–14 age group and 67.7% is in the 15–64 age groups, while only 7.7% is 65 or over. Finally, 50.6% of the population is under 30 years of age, and at least 80% lives in cities (Hürriyet Daily, 2014). These figures point to a very

young population. The voting age is 18, and the minimum age for election to public office is 25. The general elections are held every four years; therefore, anybody who is 14 years old or over is the natural voter in the very next elections. At least 25% of the population is in the 15–30 age group, and they can be defined as young voters. Their numbers in relation to the total population are significant enough to be able to affect the results of an entire election. That is why no party can ignore them, their preferences, demands or expectations. This makes how and where they perceive a political party as being "important".

In principle, the target population of this study includes all the young voters at Turkish universities, at which about 3 million students are engaged in formal education. However, a survey on such a comprehensive population would be too difficult to carry out with limited resources (e.g., time, labor, financing etc.). Hence, the study was designed to focus on the students at Niğde University as a case study. Niğde, a city with a population of around 115,000, is located in central Turkey and had a student population of about 14,000 at its four major faculties at the time of the study, which by Turkish standards is a large university population. Its student population is quite heterogeneous in terms of location, meaning that students come from almost all parts of the country.

To determine the sample size, the formula in Nakip (2006, p. 233) and Kurtuluş (2004, p. 191) were used. With a 95% confidence level, a 5% error rate and a 0.50% population rate, the calculation produced the required minimum sample size of 384, an acceptable figure for such a study. In choosing the sample elements, a multi-stage sampling procedure was applied. In the first stage, it was decided to choose an approximate sample of 400 voters, distributed proportionally among the faculties based on the number of students studying at each one. In the second stage, some of the classes at the faculties were chosen randomly. The data was collected on the basis of a paper-based face-to-face survey questionnaire in the chosen classes. The field work was been

carried out at the faculties just before the final general elections, which were held during the same week.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Sample characteristics

The characteristics of the sample are important in understanding and interpreting the research findings. That is why, first, some of the demographic features of the sample were determined as follows: 66% were male and 34% were female, with about 97% single respondents and 80% under the age of 23; approximately 35% came from the Economics and Administrative Sciences Faculty, 21% from the Science and Letters Faculty, 17% from the Architecture and Design Faculty, and 28% from the Education Faculty. Similarly, about 19% were first-, 36% second-, 22% third- and 18% fourth-year students, while the remaining 6% were students in their fifth year (or higher).

Secondly, the degree of young voters' interest in politics was required in order to understand how much they are interested in political topics and pay attention to the political goings-on (activities, news, circumstances etc.) around them. Understandably, low interest means low attention to politics; however, young voters look very interested in it. According to the findings, while 55% of the voters were interested in politics at least to a medium or higher degree, 84% are interested in politics at least to some degree. In Turkey voters' interest (including that of young voters) in politics or political topics is generally quite high (Çiftçi, 2013). These findings support the existing literature.

Thirdly, the questionnaire examined whether the young voters felt closer to any political party, which could be taken as an indicator of "the degree of interest" and "the level of involvement" in politics, both of which are factors that reflect

political awareness and, in turn, affect voter perception. According to the findings, most of the voters feel closer to a political party. While about 50% of the voters feel in favor of a political party at least to a medium or higher degree, a minimum of 77% feel some degree of closeness to a political party. These findings highlight that the majority of the sample is involved at least emotionally in politics.

Fourthly, in order to understand their attitude toward and familiarity with politics, the questionnaire asked whether the young voters had already voted in a previous (local or general) election. This is meaningful for learning their degree of (i) interest, (ii) involvement, and (iii) experience in politics (to a certain extent). Voters who have already voted in an election can be assumed to be more interested, more involved and more experienced in politics (and/or political subjects and affairs) or to have higher tendency to it compared to those who have not voted before. According to these findings, about 40% of the sample had voted in an election before. This figure is considerable given that probably a major part of the young voters had not yet reached voting age in the last election. Therefore, the figure of 40% was a significant portion of young voters to have political experience, interest and involvement.

A final point to consider in this context is the significance of the ideological position of a party in voting decisions. In other words, the question was whether or not the spatial position of a party, the place where a party positions itself in political space, is important for young voters when they vote. If it does matter for the majority of the voters, it shows that voter perceptions are a major factor in voting decisions, indicating a polarized market consisting of voters with higher political drives and party perceptions that are probably less changeable in the short-term. In such a market, it would be relatively difficult for parties to gain market shares from others, because voters mostly do not change their preferences unless there is a strong cause, which is supposed to be offered by the competing parties. Producing and delivering such causes to them is obligato-

ry for competition and the responsibility of the political decision-makers; but, prior to this, their primary task has to be to determine how and where their party is perceived in the political market prior to giving clear and neat messages to produce a stronger image about the party and its ideological position. The findings indicate that for a minimum of 73% of the voters, a party's spatial position is important at least to a medium or higher degree, and only for the remaining 17% is it "only a little bit" important. When taken together, the figures add up to 90%, indicating that for the vast majority of the voters a party's political position is significant in voters' decisions. This is a noteworthy figure, and no party can ignore such a figure in its marketing decisions.

An additional point investigated was whether there was any connection between the political orientations of young voters' families and their own political inclinations. The questionnaire form included three Yes/No type questions that ask if (i) the voters' family feels itself to belong to any political line, (ii) the voter feels that he/she belongs to any political line, and (iii) that his/her political line is the same as his/her family's. The survey results indicate that, while about 60% of the voters' families are oriented toward a political party, interestingly, about the same percent of the voters are oriented toward a party. The results regarding the third subject clarify the issue further, indicating that about 69% of the voters have the same political inclinations as their families. In fact, this is not surprising because children get their first political education, experiences and information from their own families, together with a harmony of other values. Probably the degree of transferability of political values within the family is higher, and young voters are more inclined (and more likely) to accept their families' political values and preferences. The findings also show that the political conscience and awareness are very high in the sample, which is parallel to the general characteristics of the electorate in Turkey.

In a quick visual inspection of Graph 4, one sees that the voters are heavily concentrated on the right side of the map. If one looks at the dimension of religiosity, the voters are seen to be positioned in the upper corner of the triangle. These findings are consistent with the current political split in Turkey and are also supported by various public surveys performed at different times, such as Türkiye Değerler Araştırmasi (2011). According to that survey, the majority of the Turkish electorate was positioned in the right of the political spectrum, and 81% of the people defined themselves as religious. Moreover, 92% of those surveyed stated that religion was important for them.

A further point of interest was the voters' own political positions. This was relevant for three reasons: (i) to check if the findings regarding the importance of spatial position of a party in voting and that the degree of voters' political inclination toward a party are consistent, (ii) to determine how the voters describe their own political positions, and (iii) to interpret the survey results, the findings of which can only be interpreted within the voters' own frame of reference. Due to these reasons, the issue has been addressed and the results are presented in Table 1 and Graph 4.

Table 1: Distribution of the voters' self-declared political positions

Party Position	Area No	Percent
Central 1	1	5,2
Central 2	2	13,6
Central 3	3	4,8
Central 4	4	2,1
Central 5	5	3,6
Central 6	6	.3
Central (Total)		**29,9**
Religious	7	2,7
Nationalist-Religious	8	25,2
Right	9	11,5
Nationalist-Left	10	7,9
Left	11	7,3
Religious-Left	12	2,4
Radical Religious	13	4,8
Radical Right	14	5,8
Radical Left	15	2,7
Total (N=330)		100,0

In this survey, 29.6% of the voters are positioned in the center. Of these, only 6% are on the center-left (in areas 4, 5 and 6), which is primarily composed of the right-wing voters. Of all the voters, only 26.3% are on the left (in areas 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12 and 15) while the remaining 73.7% are on the right. This is consistent with the traditional left–right split in Turkey, as the last general election results (2011) show, in which the leftist CHP received 25.9% of the votes and the percentages of other leftist parties were negligible. (The sample represents the population in Turkey quite well, catching the traditional 70–75% vs. 25–30% left–right split.) Similarly, 54.2% of the voters positioned themselves in the "more religious" areas (including areas 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 12 and 13).

So far, the first results indicate that the distribution of the voters' own positions on the political spectrum is distributed unevenly, as would be expected from the traditional political split in Turkey. However, these findings may highlight some other issues regarding the perception of party positions because it is difficult to assume that the perception of parties is independent of where the voters themselves are in the political spectrum. This issue requires further investigation, but first,

where voters in general see the parties in the political market should be examined.

5. THE PERCEIVED POSITIONS OF TURKISH POLITICAL PARTIES

5.1. General picture

It has been pointed out that sometimes "how something is perceived becomes more important than what it is in reality." This is more valid for political subjects than probably many other things. Being perceived on their own terms and/or in the way they expect is very important for political parties because most of their decisions and activities are based on the assumption that the voters perceive them in the way that they anticipate. However, this assumption may or may not hold true at all. Perception largely depends on the voter, on whom the political party has very little effect, especially when he or she has some sort of established perception of it from

Graph 4: *Distribution of young voters' self-declared political positions*
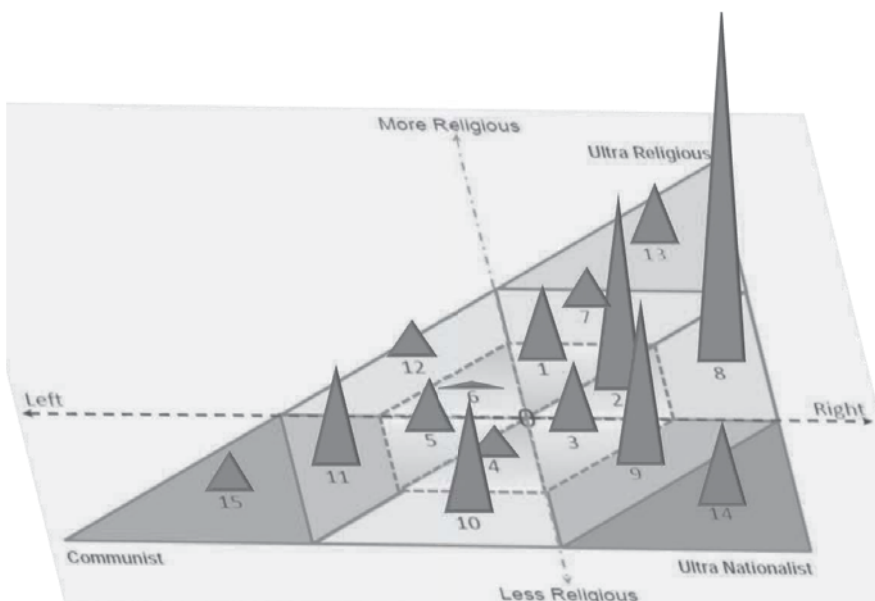
the start. However, how and where a party is perceived to stand has some concrete effect on the political decision-makers such that they may or may not be able to deliver their messages to voters effectively, or they may devise right/wrong strategies and decisions accordingly. Moreover, if voters perceive the political position of a party to be ideologically unacceptable to them, they may not vote for them at all. Based on the importance of the issue, detailed positional graphs for each of the parties whose political positions are seen clearly in the political space are presented below.

voters who position it in different areas are relatively high and its main characteristic is its "religiosity", but it is not seen as a "radical" party. That positions are mainly spread over the "0–13–14 sub-triangle" can be seen both in the perceived differences existing in the minds of young voters and in the span of the voter base of the party in the right dimension (see also Table 3 in the Appendix). At the moment, Ak Parti is the only party that is able to combine "religious", "nationalist–religious", "nationalist" and "liberal" voters in its membership at the same time. The fact that

**Graph 5:** Perceived positions of the Ak Parti (Justice and Development Party)
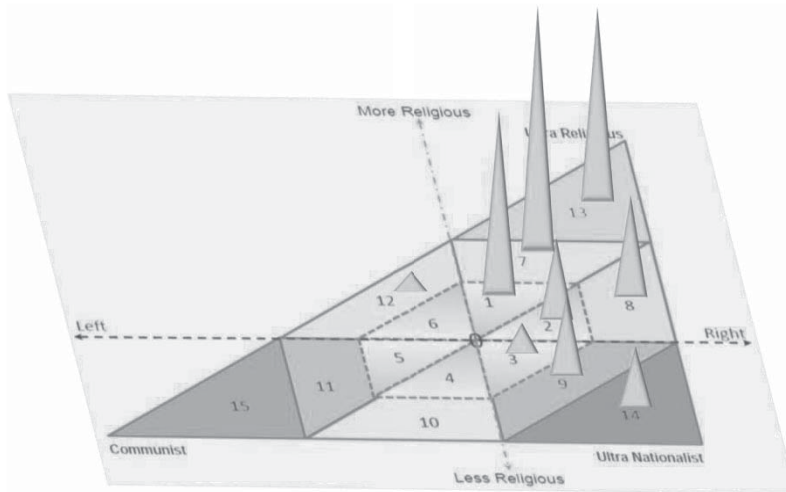
Graph 5 shows the ruling Ak Parti's perceived positions. The party is seen as completely on the right by young voters. In fact, it is seen on three different axes. The first is the axis running through areas 0, 1, 7 and 13, which corresponds to the "religious line", on which the degree of religiosity increases from 0 to 13. The second axis is the line running through areas 0, 2 and 8, which corresponds to the "nationalist–religious line". The third is the axis running through areas 0, 9 and 14, which corresponds to the "nationalist line". The strongest is the religious axis, while the weakest is the nationalist axis. The graph indicates that the voters' minds are very clear and neat about the Ak Parti. It is perceived as being located on the "right", the percentage of the

it won almost 50% of the votes in the 2011 elections testifies to this.

Graph 6 shows where CHP is perceived on the political map. The voters' perceptions are very clear-cut when it comes to the CHP, as well. They perceive it mostly along the axis running through areas 0, 5, 11 and 15. The majority of the voters surveyed identify it as a leftist party (placing it in area 11), while a considerable number perceives it either as a center-left or even a radical-left party (see also Table 3 in the Appendix). A similar situation is also valid for the Ak Parti, which is considered a "radical religious" party. A noticeable number of voters also identify the CHP as a nationalist-left party (area 10), and the

Graph 6: Perceived positions of the CHP (Republican People's Party)
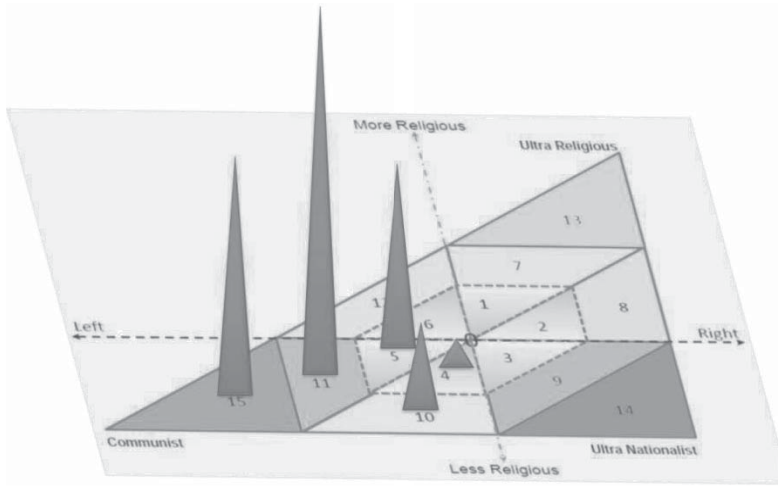
CHP has indeed had such a mission in its recent history. It is difficult to expect that all the voters perceive a specific party only in a certain area, in which case such a party would only be an ideological one with hard lines, but such a situation would be very difficult for mass parties, such as the CHP or the Ak Parti. In general, the voter perceptions of the CHP look very specific, clear, combined, and well-determined.

Graph 7 is about the MHP, which is known as an ultra-nationalist party. It is perceived along two main axes: the 0–2–8 axis and the 0–9–14 axis. Surprisingly, the former is stronger than the latter, which means that by a large portion of the voters perceive the MHP as a "nationalist–religious" party rather than a purely nationalist one. In this regard, the voters' perceptions are similar to those of the BBP, a party that separated from the MHP in 1992 due to claims of ideological differences, some of which became more apparent later, such as the MHP's being more religious. The BBP is considered a "nationalist–religious" party. In this regard, the MHP and the BBP are

Graph 7: Perceived positions of the MHP (Nationalist Movement Party)
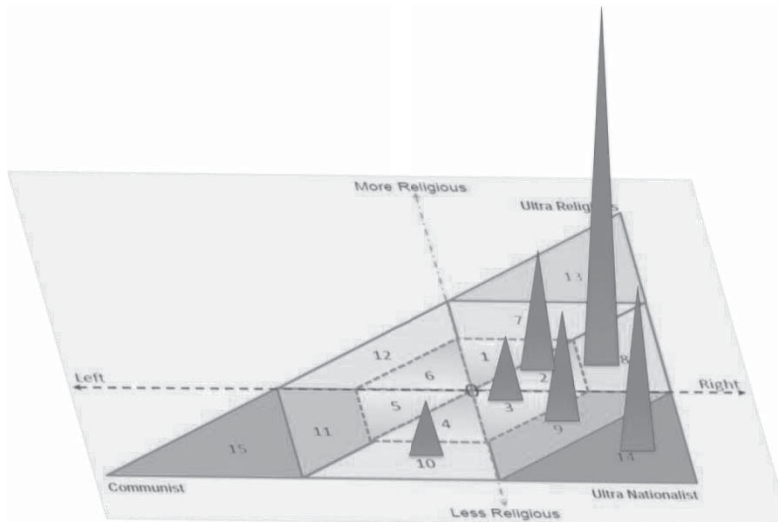
Graph 8: Perceived positions of the DTP/BDP (Democratic Society Party / Peace and Democracy Party)
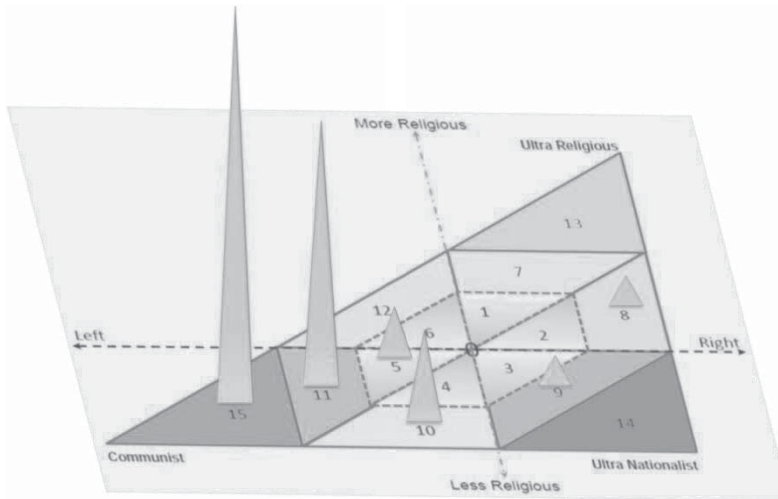
perceived as being similar to each other, and the MHP has not distinguished itself from the BBP yet (or vice versa). (No graph for the BBP has been included here for reasons of space.).

Another party to point out is the DTP/BDP, a so-cial(ist) (democratic) and nationalist Kurdish eth-nic party (Graph 8). The voters place it along the single 0–5–11–15 axis, the leftist line. (This is the same axis that the CHP is on, but this is an eth-nic party, and its voters have always been able to distinguish it from the CHP. However, extra tools are needed to distinguish these two parties on this map.). In fact, this is the estimated line for that party, and young voters are quite clear in their minds about this.

The final party is SP, an ultra-religious party (Graph 9). The voters place it on the axis run-ning through areas 0, 1, 7 and 13, the "religious line". While almost half of the voters perceive this party as "ultra-religious", the other half see it as

Graph 9: Perceived positions of the SP (Felicity Party)
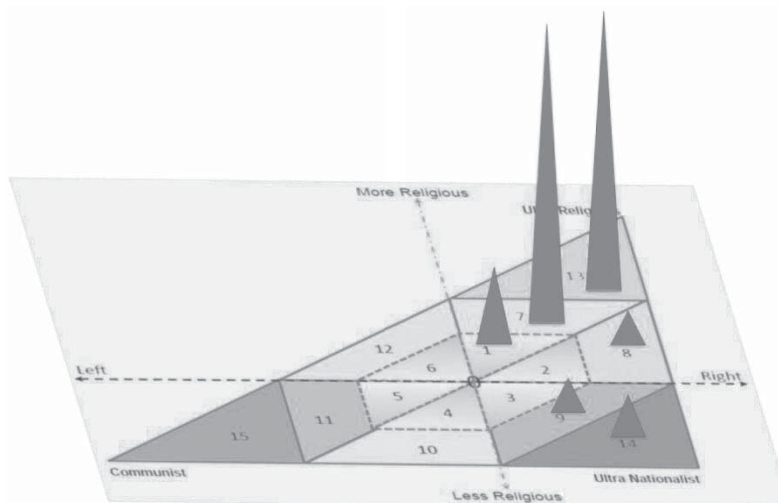
"moderately religious". In general, the voters are very clear in their minds about this party, too. It is possible to analyze the other parties that exist in today's political arena as well, but these main parties are sufficient for the purpose of this study.

The results demonstrate that the parties are not evenly distributed on the map, which indicates that voters have different positional perceptions of them. To put it more clearly, young voters properly distinguish every single party from each other and suitably place them in the political space. They recognize all the parties in different locations. This indicates that the voters have very clear perceptions of political parties in their minds and are very aware of their ideological positions in the market.

5.2. Party positions according to voters' political positions

Up to this point, this article has discussed where voters perceive Turkish political parties on a two dimensional map, but the discussions have focused on the analyses of the whole sample. In other words, the graphs reflect the sample's average perceptions. But it is not known yet if the perceptions of the voters with different political orientations show any differences from the average. To clarify this point, the data was investigated further, taking a closer look. *Voter positions vs. perceived party positions* were cross-tabulated in order to detect where voters with specific positions perceive the parties.

Graph 10 presents the perceptions of the Ak Parti by voters with different political positions. It is clear that voters who have different political alignments perceive the Ak Parti quite differently from each other. For instance, while the voters who declared themselves as in the political center see it mostly in areas 1 and 7 (central 1 and religious), voters who declared themselves in the "nationalist–left" and "left" categories see it in areas 7 and 13 ("religious" and "ultra-religious"). (The six areas indicating the political center in the TMP are already combined together as "center" in the analyses for our purpose and for simplicity.). Surprisingly, most of the 'radical religious'

Graph 10: Perception of the Ak Parti (the Justice and Development Party) based on voters' positions
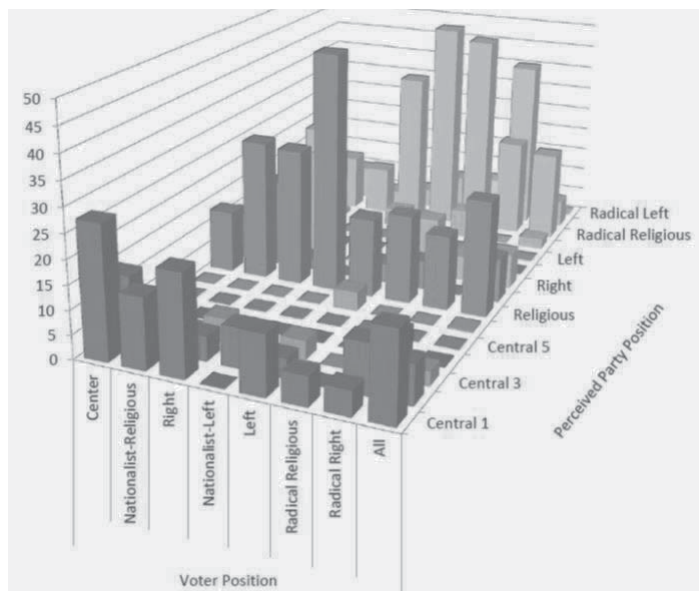
voters also see the Ak Parti in areas 7 and 13, which is parallel to the perceptions of the "leftists" and the "nationalist–leftists". These groups probably see the Ak Parti in the same positions for different reasons, the former probably feeling far from the Ak Parti, and the latter feeling closer to the Ak Parti. (Detailed figures are given in Table 2.1 in the Appendix).

Likewise, a similar picture is also valid for the CHP (Graph 11) and the other parties. For those as well, voters evaluating their own positions differently evaluate the positions of parties differently from each other. For instance, voters in the center mainly see the CHP in areas 5 and 11 (center and left), while those on the right see it mostly in area 11. Voters who themselves are located in area 10 (nationalist–leftists) see the CHP in 10 and 11. Moreover, voters in 11 also see it mostly in 5 and 11, as those in the area 13 (radical–religious) see it mostly in 10 (nationalist–left) and 11 (left). In fact, the majority of the voters see the CHP in its main locations, but there are also some major differences between where voters see it based on their own positions. The corresponding ta-

bles (2.2 to 2.6) for the other major parties should be read accordingly.

6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study has investigated young voters' perceptions of political parties in the Turkish political market based on a two-dimensional triangular perception map. Evidence has been drawn from an original survey conducted on young voters at a university in Turkey as a case study. The analyses were performed based on both the aggregate level and voters' self-defined positions. The study sample has produced very close results to the left–right split in Turkey in terms of voter positions (70–75% right and 25–30% left). The sample looks like a good approximation of the population.

The study reveals findings that are worth noting, as follows:
The majority of the Turkish political parties investigated appear to be very successful at market

Graph 11: *Perception of the CHP (the Republican People's Party) based on voters' positions*
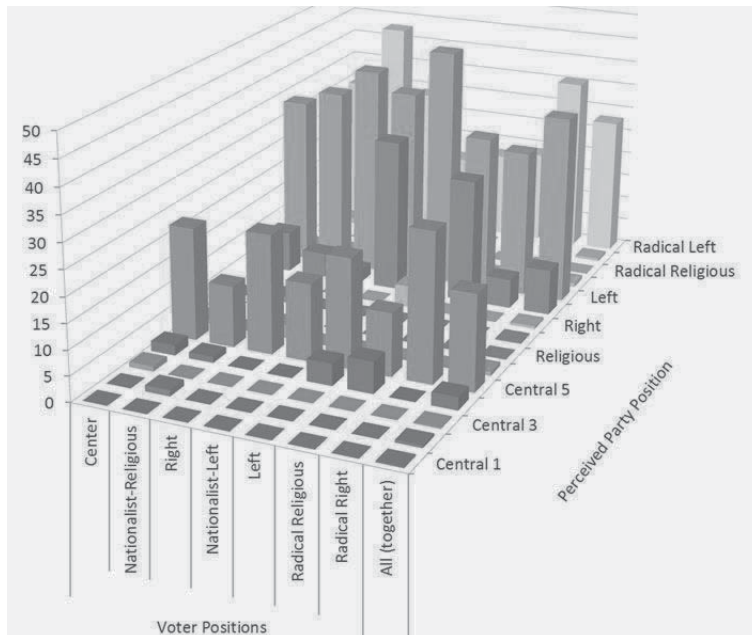
positioning, so they are well represented in the minds of young voters who have high political awareness. The perceived positions of these parties are very clear and neat in the minds of voters. This is a reflection worth noting for the political parties, especially when one takes into account that there are more than 75 parties in the Turkish political market. In such a competitive market, it is a real success for parties to have such clear pictures of their political positions.

The findings also reveal that voters with different ideological positions have different perceptions of the other parties. This means that voters position political parties based on their own individual political orientation. In other words, voters' perceptions of parties are subject to the political views of those voters. Therefore, a party must have a good understanding of how it is perceived by voters with different political orientations, and thus it must develop its strategies accordingly. This finding alone is an important contribution to documenting the perceptional differences among voters with different ideological points of view.

Young voters in Turkey are highly interested in politics. They have their own ideas about and attitudes toward different political parties. They are capable of appropriately placing the parties in on the map. In general, they are very clear and neat about the ideological positions of even similar parties, and are able to distinguish even the smallest differences among them.

The Turkish political market also has its own specific features, just as any other country does. In order to understand a political market sufficiently, the country-specific factors should not be ignored in the market representation. In this study, a two-dimensional TPM has been used to present the voters' perceptions of the political market. The clear and neat pictures of party positions that were obtained show that the map used is a suitable reflection of the Turkish political space. Therefore, besides the uni-dimensional "left–right" continuum, "religiosity" should also be added to the dimensions of the political

space in order to better understand the Turkish political market (as well as others like it).

The study also produced important findings and suggestions, especially for political decision-makers, political strategists and political marketers. These are given below:

o A great majority of young voters are already oriented towards a political party. The political inclinations of young voters appear to be closely related to the political preferences and orientations of their families. Political marketers need to develop long-term strategies and accordingly make long-term investments in the market in order to be able to change voter preferences, because in such markets that consist of voters with higher political drives and strong party images, party perceptions are probably less changeable in the short-term. Therefore, it would be relatively difficult for parties to quickly win market shares from other parties because voters for the most part do not change their preferences unless there is a strong cause, which is compulsory for competition and producing it is the responsibility of the political decision-makers.

o The Turkish political market is highly polarized and multi-poled, and young voters appear very sure and determined about the (other) political players in the market. The political decision-makers should develop strategies that address and satisfy the voters, especially those in the neighboring areas on the TPM, where voter transitions among parties are much more likely.

o Party perceptions appear to be a major factor in young voters' decisions. Therefore, political marketers should make sure, while remaining sensitive about it, that their parties have clearly and correctly perceived positions in the minds of voters.

o Political marketers primarily have to determine how their party is perceived in the political space and compare it to the party's (official) ideological position. If there is any gap between these two positions, this points to a serious perceptual problem that complicates

the messages sent to the voters and weakens their power, thereby producing a blurred and complicated image of the political product and never yielding the desired outcomes. In such a case, political marketers should develop the necessary strategies for corrective shifts that will bring the party's (official) ideological and perceived positions together so that the party can deliver clear and concise messages to voters.

Finally, this is a case study carried out on university students in order to detect and represent voter perceptions in a political market. The findings are probably difficult to generalize, but are quite sufficient to draw a general picture of the political market and to present a new approach to handling such an issue. Repeating the study on a larger sample from different universities in different regions would be both more beneficial and advisable.

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APPENDIX

Table 2. *The table of voters' perception of party positions according to self-declared voter positions*

Table 2.1. *Justice and Development Party (Ak Parti)*

	Party Positions														
	Central 1	Central 2	Central 3	Central 4	Central 5	Central 6	Religious	Nationalist-Religious	Right	Nationalist-Left	Left	Religious-Left	Radical Religious	Radical Right	Radical Left
Center	27,55	14,29	5,10	,01	,01	,01	13,27	10,20	3,06	,01	,01	5,10	18,37	3,06	,01
Nationalist-Religious Right	14,81	4,94	1,23	,01	,01	,01	29,63	18,52	9,88	,01	,01	1,23	12,35	7,41	,01
Nationalist-Left	21,05	5,26	5,26	,01	,01	,01	28,95	2,63	23,68	,01	,01	,01	10,53	2,63	,01
Left	,01	8,33	,01	,01	,01	,01	50,00	,01	,01	,01	,01	4,17	33,33	4,17	,01
Radical Religious	12,50	4,17	4,17	,01	,01	4,17	16,67	4,17	,01	,01	,01	,01	45,83	8,33	,01
Radical Right	6,25	,01	,01	,01	,01	,01	18,75	6,25	12,50	,01	,01	6,25	43,75	,01	6,25
Radical Left	5,26	10,53	,01	5,26	,01	,01	15,79	,01	5,26	,01	,01	,01	21,05	36,84	,01
All (together)	18,39	8,29	3,11	,26	,01	,52	24,35	9,59	7,51	,01	,01	2,33	19,43	5,96	,26

N = 330

Table 2.2. *Republican People's Party (CHP)*

	Party Positions														
	Central 1	Central 2	Central 3	Central 4	Central 5	Central 6	Religious	Nationalist-Religious	Right	Nationalist-Left	Left	Religious-Left	Radical Religious	Radical Right	Radical Left
Center	,01	,01	1,02	2,04	22,45	1,02	,01	,01	1,02	8,16	33,67	,01	,01	1,02	29,59
Nationalist-Religious Right	,01	1,22	,01	1,22	12,20	,01	,01	1,22	,01	4,88	36,59	,01	,01	,01	42,68
Nationalist-Left	,01	,01	,01	,01	23,68	2,63	,01	,01	,01	2,63	42,11	,01	,01	,01	28,95
Left	,01	,01	,01	,01	15,38	,01	,01	,01	,01	30,77	38,46	,01	,01	,01	15,38
Radical Religious	,01	,01	,01	4,35	21,74	,01	,01	,01	4,35	4,35	47,83	,01	,01	,01	17,39
Radical Right	,01	,01	,01	6,25	12,50	,01	,01	,01	,01	25,00	31,25	,01	,01	6,25	18,75
Radical Left	,01	,01	,01	,01	29,41	,01	,01	,01	,01	5,88	29,41	,01	,01	,01	35,29
All (together)	,26	,52	,26	2,60	19,01	,78	,01	,26	,52	9,11	37,50	,78	,01	,52	27,86

N = 330

Table 2.3. *Nationalist Movement Party (MHP)*

| | Party Positions | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
	Central 1	Central 2	Central 3	Central 4	Central 5	Central 6	Religious	Nationalist-Religious	Right	Nationalist-Left	Left	Religious-Left	Radical Religious	Radical Right	Radical Left
Center	,01	20,83	7,29	3,13	,01	1,04	1,04	28,13	12,50	7,29	,01	,01	,01	16,67	2,08
Nationalist-Religious	,01	17,50	3,75	2,50	,01	,01	1,25	42,50	10,00	6,25	,01	,01	2,50	13,75	,01
Right	,01	2,63	13,16	,01	,01	,01	,01	39,47	21,05	2,63	,01	,01	,01	21,05	,01
Nationalist-Left	,01	4,17	,01	,01	,01	,01	,01	50,00	25,00	4,17	,01	,01	,01	16,67	,01
Left	,01	8,33	8,33	,01	,01	,01	,01	37,50	16,67	4,17	,01	,01	,01	25,00	,01
Radical Religious	,01	,01	18,75	,01	,01	,01	6,25	12,50	6,25	25,00	,01	,01	,01	25,00	6,25
Radical Right	,01	,01	5,26	,01	,01	,01	10,53	52,63	10,53	,01	,01	,01	,01	21,05	,01
All (altogether)	,01	13,00	7,43	1,59	,27	,53	1,86	37,40	12,47	5,84	,01	,01	,53	18,04	1,06

N = 330

Table 2.4. *Democrat Party (True Path Party) DP/DYP**

| | Party Positions | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
	Central 1	Central 2	Central 3	Central 4	Central 5	Central 6	Religious	Nationalist-Religious	Right	Nationalist-Left	Left	Religious-Left	Radical Religious	Radical Right	Radical Left
Center	1,05	,01	23,16	2,11	4,21	3,16	1,05	4,21	38,95	3,16	6,32	1,05	3,16	6,32	2,11
Nationalist-Religious	,01	,01	17,33	,01	2,67	1,33	1,33	,01	53,33	8,00	5,33	,01	,01	2,67	8,00
Right	,01	,01	13,51	,01	,01	,01	,01	2,70	62,16	5,41	5,41	5,41	,01	2,70	2,70
Nationalist-Left	,01	,01	21,74	,01	4,35	,01	,01	4,35	52,17	,01	4,35	4,35	,01	8,70	,01
Left	,01	,01	12,50	,01	,01	,01	,01	4,17	58,33	4,17	4,17	8,33	,01	8,33	,01
Radical Religious	6,25	6,25	6,25	,01	,01	,01	,01	,01	25,00	6,25	6,25	6,25	,01	37,50	,01
Radical Right	,01	,01	6,25	,01	,01	,01	,01	6,25	50,00	6,25	6,25	,01	6,25	6,25	12,50
All (together)	,55	,55	17,63	1,10	2,20	1,38	,83	2,75	47,66	3,86	5,79	1,93	1,38	8,54	3,86

N = 330   *Although DYP was converted to DP., the voters had very strong image of DYP at the time of research and that is why they were taken together.

Table 2.5. *Democratic Society Party / Peace and Democracy Party (DTP/BDP)***

| | Party Positions | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
	Central 1	Central 2	Central 3	Central 4	Central 5	Central 6	Religious	Nationalist-Religious	Right	Nationalist-Left	Left	Religious-Left	Radical Religious	Radical Right	Radical Left
Center	,01	3,75	1,25	1,25	7,50	1,25	,01	5,00	6,25	10,00	18,75	2,50	,01	2,50	40,00
Nationalist-Religious Right	,01	,01	,01	1,69	1,69	,01	1,69	1,69	3,39	8,47	28,81	1,69	,01	3,39	47,46
Nationalist-Left	,01	,01	3,03	,01	3,03	,01	,01	3,03	,01	12,12	33,33	,01	,01	,01	45,45
Left	,01	,01	,01	,01	10,53	,01	10,53	,01	5,26	5,26	21,05	,01	,01	5,26	42,11
Left	4,35	4,35	,01	,01	,01	,01	,01	13,04	,01	13,04	13,04	4,35	,01	,01	47,83
Radical Religious	18,75	12,50	12,50	6,25	,01	,01	,01	,01	,01	,01	18,75	,01	12,50	,01	18,75
Radical Right	,01	,01	,01	7,69	,01	,01	15,38	,01	,01	,01	30,77	15,38	,01	7,69	23,08
All (together)	1,30	1,95	1,63	1,63	5,21	,98	1,95	2,93	2,61	8,79	26,06	1,95	1,63	2,28	39,09

N = 330 * In fact these should not be taken as individual parties but as a line of parties of a specific political movement because it established a new party every time after its party was closed down by the court. Since the political movement has a strong political identity, its voters recognizes the party easily.

Table 2.6. *Felicity Party (SP)*

| | Party Positions | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
	Central 1	Central 2	Central 3	Central 4	Central 5	Central 6	Religious	Nationalist-Religious	Right	Nationalist-Left	Left	Religious-Left	Radical Religious	Radical Right	Radical Left
Center	7,37	4,21	2,11	2,11	1,05	,01	41,05	2,11	2,11	,01	,01	,01	34,74	3,16	,01
Nationalist-Religious Right	10,67	1,33	,01	1,33	1,33	,01	28,00	4,00	5,33	,01	2,67	,01	40,00	5,33	,01
Nationalist-Left	7,89	2,63	,01	,01	,01	,01	34,21	10,53	,01	,01	2,63	2,63	23,68	15,79	,01
Left	13,04	,01	,01	,01	,01	,01	43,48	,01	8,70	,01	,01	,01	30,43	4,35	,01
Left	4,35	,01	,01	,01	,01	,01	39,13	4,35	4,35	4,35	,01	,01	43,48	,01	,01
Radical Religious	6,25	6,25	6,25	,01	,01	,01	31,25	6,25	,01	6,25	,01	6,25	25,00	6,25	,01
Radical Right	5,56	,01	,01	,01	5,56	,01	27,78	,01	16,67	,01	5,56	5,56	33,33	,01	,01
All (together)	8,52	1,92	1,10	1,37	1,10	,01	35,44	3,85	3,85	,55	1,10	1,37	34,07	5,22	,55

N = 330

Table 3. *The percentages of perceived party positions designated (in triangle) by young voters*

Party Positions	Justice and Development Party	Republican People's Party	Nationalist Movement Party	Democrat Party	Democratic Society Party /Peace and Democracy Party	Felicity Party	Democratic Left Party	Grand Unity Party
	Ak Parti	CHP	MHP	DP	DTP/BDP	SP	DSP	BBP
1	18,39	0,26	0,00	0,55	1,30	8,52	0,00	1,43
2	8,29	0,52	13,00	0,55	1,95	1,92	0,27	8,29
3	3,11	0,26	7,43	17,63	1,63	1,10	1,09	2,00
4	0,26	2,60	1,59	1,10	1,63	1,37	1,64	2,86
5	0,00	19,01	0,27	2,20	5,21	1,10	11,75	1,14
6	0,52	0,78	0,53	1,38	0,98	0,00	1,91	2,00
7	24,35	0,00	1,86	0,83	1,95	35,44	0,00	5,14
8	9,59	0,26	37,14	2,75	2,93	3,85	0,27	40,00
9	7,51	0,52	12,20	47,66	2,61	3,85	0,82	15,43
10	0,00	9,11	5,84	3,86	8,79	0,55	7,38	4,29
11	0,00	37,50	0,00	5,79	26,06	1,10	48,36	3,14
12	2,33	0,78	0,00	1,93	1,95	1,37	0,82	0,29
13	19,43	0,00	0,53	1,38	1,63	34,07	0,27	4,57
14	5,96	0,52	18,04	8,54	2,28	5,22	0,55	6,57
15	0,26	27,86	1,06	3,86	39,09	0,55	24,86	2,86

Endnotes

[1] The paper was partially presented at the 2nd International Symposium on New Communication Technologies in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, May 2-4, 2012

[2] Rad je djelomično prezentiran na 2. International Symposium on New Communication Technologies, od 2. do 4. svibnja 2012, u Biškeku, u Kirgistanu

[3] Readers may refer to Lipset (1959), Campbell et al. (1960, p. 160), Sartori (1966, p. 153), Middendorp (1978), Sani & Sartori (1983), Himmelweit, Humpherys and Jaeger (1985), Van Deth & Geurts (1989), Van der Brug (1997), and Pellikaan et al. (2005) for a comprehensive discussion of the left–right continuum and can see the evolution of the discussions through time.