

Voters' Media Consumption and Economic Evaluations in Turkey

by

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Voters' Media Consumption and Economic Evaluations in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

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Economic voting theory claims that voters hold incumbents accountable such that they reward incumbents at the polls for economic prosperity and punish for economic decline. Though, how does the media influence voters' economic perceptions and contribute to actual vote choice? I argue that despite the newspaper content analysis has been applied as a method to study various issues, the query of economic news reporting and its impact on voters' economic evaluations has analogously received less recognition from Turkish scholars. This thesis explored whether media reporting of the economy influences voters' economic evaluations and systematically analyzed the extent news reporting tones of the newspapers influence voters' economic perceptions, and whether newspaper reading frequency alters them in Turkey. Subsequently, I generated an index called the pro-government news index and applied it as the main independent variable that combines actual economic news content and newspaper reading frequency concomitantly. I argue that this approach goes beyond dividing the newspapers as pro-government and pro-opposition but focus on actual news exposure. The data of this thesis involves a systematic content analysis of newspaper reporting of the economy and a nationally representative survey. During the newspaper content analysis, the first pages and pages under the economy sections of six national newspapers (Cumhuriyet, Hürriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Sözcü, and Posta) within November 15, 2018, and February 16, 2019, were examined. I benefited the survey data to analyze economic evaluations of voters and their preferred source for receiving political information, and to link these data with the results from the newspaper content analysis. My results revealed that the pro-government news index has a statistically significant effect for all economic evaluations, but it does not show any substantial impact differentiation among economic evaluations as there is no systematically higher impact on sociotropic evaluations over pocketbook ones.

ÖZETÇE

Türkiye’de Seçmenlerin Medya Tüketimi ve Ekonomik Değerlendirmeleri
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Ekonomik oy verme davranışı kuramı, seçmenlerin ülkedeki ekonomik zayıflık için hükümeti cezalandıracağını ve ekonomik refah durumunda ödüllendireceğini savunmaktadır. Bu ilişkide medyanın seçmenlerin ekonomik algılarını ne derecede etkilediği önemli bir araştırma sorusudur. Gazete içerik analizi metot olarak çeşitli çalışmalarda uygulanmış olsa da, medyanın ekonomi haberlerini veriş şeklinin ve bunun seçmenlerin ekonomik algılarını nasıl etkilediği literatürde yeteri kadar yer bulmamaktadır. Bu doğrultuda bu tezin amacı, medyada yer alan ekonomi haberlerinin Türkiye’de seçmenlerin ekonomik algıları üzerindeki etkisini, haber tonlama ve gazete okuma sıklığını baz alarak sistematik bir şekilde incelemektir. Bu amacı gerçekleştirmek için gerçek ekonomi haber içeriğini ve okuma sıklığını eşzamanlı olarak birbirine bağlayan bir bağımsız değişken geliştirilmiştir. Bu yaklaşım, gazeteleri hükümete veya muhalefete yakın olan gazeteler olarak kategorize etmekle sınırlı kalmayıp seçmenlerin ekonomik haberlere nasıl maruz kaldığını incelemektedir. Bu çalışmanın verisi, sistematik gazete içerik analizi ve ulusal düzeyde seçmen yaşındaki nüfusu temsil yeteneğine sahip anketten oluşmaktadır. Gazete içerik analizinin devam ettiği 15 Şubat 2018 ve 16 Şubat 2019 tarihleri arasında, altı ulusal gazetenin (Cumhuriyet, Hürriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Sözcü, Posta) ilk sayfaları ve ekonomi bölümü altındaki sayfalar kodlanmıştır. İlâveten, seçmenlerin ekonomik değerlendirmelerini, siyasi haberleri hangi medya kanallarından aldıklarını ölçmek ve bu sonuçları gazete içerik analizinin verileriyle birleştirmek amacıyla anket çalışmasından yararlanılmıştır.^[P]^[SEP] Bu araştırmanın sonuçları, hükümete yakın gazete okuma indeksinin seçmenlerin bütün ekonomik değerlendirmeleri üzerinde etkisi olduğunu ortaya çıkarırken, bu tez sosyotropik ve kişisel bütçeye göre oy verme değişkenleri arasında bir farklılık gözlemediği için farklı ekonomik değerlendirmeler arasında istatistiksel olarak önemli ölçüde bir etki farkı olmadığı sonucuna varmıştır.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AKP	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)
CHP	Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party)
EU	European Union



Chapter 1:

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Question and Purpose

Economic voting theory is based on the assumption that voters select aspirant political leaders by considering their economic influence. Notably, the idea is that voters hold incumbents accountable such that they are rewarded at the polls for economic prosperity and punished for economic decline. Accordingly, the driving motivation for economic voting studies has been to investigate to what extent individuals' economic evaluations about the past or the future influence their vote choice. In 2013, Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier argued that the literature on economic voting has progressed about both country coverage and methodology by asserting that "there are economic voting studies of virtually all established democracies, and many emerging democracies" and "taken together, the articles and books on the subject number over five hundred" (Stegmaier & Lewis-Beck, 2013, p. 1).

Within the economic voting literature, one line of research focuses on the media's role in the formation of voters' economic perceptions and how these perceptions translate into actual vote choice. While some researchers claim that news reporting of the economy is unlikely to influence voters' evaluations on the economy because of the immediacy and accessibility of personal experience (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Zucker, 1978; Chaffee & Mutz, 1988), others argue that economic news reporting by the media can shape people's perceptions through mediatization, which refers to the media's capacity to set the political agenda and frame the political discourse (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Esser & Stromback, 2014). In this way, the media can have a significant impact on voting behavior (Nadeau et al., 1999; Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2000; Sanders, 2000).

Building on this scholarly discussion, the research question of this thesis is whether media reporting of the economy influences voters' economic evaluations in Turkey. Answering this question bears importance because it would contribute to our understanding of how individuals' perceptions of the economy are formed, and these perceptions are among the most important determinants of vote choice (Fiorina, 1978, 1981; Kinder & Kiewiet 1981; Paldam 1981, 1991; Kiewiet, 1983; Nannestad & Paldam, 1994). Furthermore, previous

studies highlight that Turkey has a “polarized pluralist media model,” in which the media integrates into party politics through state intervention to a significant degree (Akser & Baybars-Hawks, 2012; Çarkoğlu, Baruh & Yıldırım, 2014; Kaya & Çakmur, 2010; Oğurlu & Öncü, 2013). The literature also maintains that there is a press-party parallelism in Turkey, which indicates a high degree of alignment between a group of newspapers and a political party (Çarkoğlu & Yavuz, 2010; Çarkoğlu, Baruh & Yıldırım, 2014). These findings present Turkey as a good case study to answer the research question of this thesis, considering the close relationship between the media and politics, which can lead to the use of media for political campaigning by political parties.

Though newspaper content analysis has been used as a method to examine various issues in Turkish politics such as elite values and democratization (Somer, 2010), media’s representation of electoral campaign periods (Çarkoğlu, Baruh & Yıldırım, 2014), the representation of Syrian refugee crisis by polarized media outlets (Yaylacı & Karakuş, 2015), and media and civil society (Akboğa & Arık, 2019), the issue of economic news reporting has received relatively less attention.¹ In addition, scholars have typically designed newspaper content analysis by categorizing newspapers based on (i) a political party-newspapers alignment axis (Akboğa & Arık, 2019), (ii) socio-political camps such as religious-conservative vs. pro-secular, conservative-center vs. Kemalist-left (Somer, 2010; Toker, 2015; İşeri et al., 2016), or (iii) survey data regarding the voting intentions of their readers as conservative vs. mainstream vs. opposition (Çarkoğlu, Baruh & Yıldırım, 2014). Then, most often, they have followed framing analysis, keyword analysis, measuring news tone, and devotion of space for the particular actor or issue to answer specific research questions.

Nevertheless, I argue that there is a dearth of research that combines economic news coverage tone of newspapers with individuals’ newspaper reading frequency on a continuous scale. To address this, I developed an index that combines actual economic news coverage tone of newspapers with individuals’ newspaper reading frequency to answer the question of whether media reporting of the economy affects voters’ economic evaluations in Turkey. What is novel in this approach is that it goes beyond classifying newspapers in a binary way as pro-government and pro-opposition by focusing on actual

¹ Yağcı & Oyvat (2020) focuses on the influence of media on economic evaluations by using systematic content analysis of Turkish TV channels. I further discuss this study in the literature review chapter.

news content, and it also differentiates between a steadfast newspaper reader and less incessant reader. As a result, my approach provides a holistic way of measuring news exposure with regard to both the tone and frequency.

1.2 Overview of the Data Used

This thesis benefited from the data collected as part of the TUBITAK-funded project (No. 217K178) “Economic Voting Behavior in Turkey.” As discussed in Chapter 3, the data consist of a systematic content analysis of newspaper reporting of the economy and a nationally representative survey.

The purpose of the newspaper content analysis was to examine how the Turkish press presents economic news in Turkey. As such, the first pages and pages under the economy sections of six national newspapers (Cumhuriyet, Hürriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Sözcü, and Posta) between November 15, 2018, and February 16, 2019 were analyzed. In total, 917 news items about the economy that were reported during this period by these newspapers were coded by a research team.

As mentioned above, to achieve the purpose of examining the relationship between tone of the economic news reported by the newspapers and its influence on the economic perception of voters, this thesis also used the survey data. The main purpose of using the survey data was to measure economic evaluations of voters and their preferred source for obtaining political information, and to link these data with the findings from the newspaper content analysis. The descriptive analyses, which provide background for the research question, reveal that over 70% of the respondents think an issue related to the Turkish economy as the most important problem Turkey faces, and 86% of them consider that Turkish economy either shrinks or stagnates as of summer 2019. This finding renders the research question of this thesis particularly important, considering that economic voting literature asserts that voters tend to punish (reward) incumbents based on their economic performance.

1.3 Hypotheses and Methodology

As I am going to discuss in Chapter 4, following the previous studies I hypothesize that individuals who follow pro-government media sources have a higher likelihood to

evaluate the country's economic performance positively. In contrast, individuals who follow pro-opposition media sources should be more likely to have negative economic evaluations. These effects should be positively correlated with individuals' frequency of media consumption (H1). Furthermore, as I elaborate in the following chapters, the impact of media consumption on economic evaluations should be greater with respect to socio-tropic evaluations than pocketbook evaluations (H2).

The primary independent variable of this thesis is called the pro-government news index. As mentioned earlier, the purpose of creating this variable is to investigate to what extent news reporting tones of the newspapers influence people's economic perceptions and how newspaper reading frequency relates to this process; hence considering news coverage tones of newspapers and newspaper reading frequency simultaneously. To that end, I benefited two questions in the survey that measured respondents' newspaper preference and newspaper reading frequency. Additionally, I also used the news coverage tone data from the newspaper content analysis, all of which I demonstrate in Chapter 4. Higher values of the pro-government news index variable indicate frequent following of a newspaper with mostly positive reporting of the economy.

Notwithstanding, the survey results highlight that most individuals in Turkey do not prefer newspapers to follow political news (about 76% of respondents in the survey). To address this deficiency in the analysis due to the high number of non-newspaper readers, I exploited the fact that the majority of the respondents reported that they prefer television to receive political information. I generated a new variable called pro-government news index II that matched nine TV channels with four newspapers that was covered in the content analysis. Specifically, I matched A Haber, and TRT1 with Sabah; Halk TV, FOX and CNN Turk with Sözcü; ATV, Kanal D and Show TV with Hürriyet; NTV with Posta. Overall, my analysis included 95% of TV viewers in the survey. With this mapping, I used the same positivity scores of newspapers with the matched TV stations (i.e., A Haber is assigned the positivity score of Sabah) and combined them with the TV watching frequency information of individuals to have a measure of individuals' exposure to positive or negative news about the economy.

To test the proposed hypotheses, I generated four economic evaluations as dependent variables that are retrospective sociotropic, prospective sociotropic, retrospective pocketbook, and prospective pocketbook evaluations of Turkish voters,

which I created by using four questions from the survey. Furthermore, in consideration that there might be other factors influencing the relationship between news exposure and economic evaluations, I used nine control variables to account for some of them. These control variables are respondents' age, gender, employment status, education, interest in politics, partisanship, and whether they could speak Kurdish. All of these variables are explained in more detail in Chapter 4.

1.4 Preview of Results and Organization of the Thesis

To investigate the relationship between news coverage tone, newspaper reading frequency, and economic evaluations, I applied an ordinary least square (OLS) regression model. First, I only examined newspaper readers. The results of this analysis revealed that the variable pro-government news index has a statistically significant effect on all four economic evaluations (retrospective sociotropic, prospective sociotropic, retrospective pocketbook, and prospective pocketbook evaluations), thus confirming the Hypothesis 1. Furthermore, the impact of the pro-government news index on economic evaluations is highly similar for all economic evaluations as the coefficients are very close to each other. My findings do not indicate any substantial impact differentiation among economic evaluations except for the prospective pocketbook evaluations, where the impact is relatively weaker yet still statistically significant. Therefore, my results reject Hypothesis 2 as we do not systematically notice a higher impact of media reporting on sociotropic evaluations over pocketbook ones.

The results of a second model where I re-ran the analysis with the pro-government news index II variable (taking into account TV viewers) exhibited a very similar picture to the previous findings. My results still confirmed Hypothesis 1 and rejected Hypothesis 2.

This thesis consists of five chapters. The second chapter introduces an overview of the previous research on economic voting behavior and the influence of media reporting on the voters' economic evaluations, including evidence from Turkey. Therefore, the second chapter not only provides the theoretical background for the hypotheses but also describes how it contributes to the literature.

In the third chapter, I first present the newspaper content analysis. By doing so, I broadly describe the data collection process of newspaper content analysis by explaining the methodology applied as per the codebook by providing two concrete examples. Following the data collection process, I provide various descriptive analyses, such as the tone of the economic news and the presence of national and international comparisons. The second part of the third chapter focuses on the survey data. It provides information about how interviews were conducted, and it lays out the general characteristics of the survey sample. It also presents descriptive analyses resulted from survey data such as economic evaluations and medium of receiving political information of the respondents. The fourth chapter introduces the research question of the thesis, its purpose, and novelty as well as the hypotheses. Furthermore, it describes the methodology of the dependent variables, independent variable, and control variables. It also presents the result of two models and their implications.

The final chapter provides a review of the study and its implications. In this chapter I also discuss the limitations of the current study. Finally, the thesis is concluded with what can be achieved in future research.

Chapter 2:

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Economic Voting Behavior*

There is a wide agreement among political scientists that the state of economy influences election outcomes. Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier (2000, p. 183) argue that the economic voting hypothesis in its elementary reward-punishment version can be stated as “The citizens vote for the government if the economy is doing all right; otherwise, the vote is against.” This idea, according to Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier and Linn, Nagler & Morales (2010), takes its insight from the seminal studies of Downs (1957) and Key (1966). Anthony Downs argued that voters tend to vote for the candidate who is more likely to deliver the best economic performance, while Key asserted that voters consider elections as referenda, punishing governments had their economic performance poor. Nevertheless, it was Kramer's pioneering study in 1971 that showed a robust empirical link between economic performance and electoral outcomes. He showed a positive correlation between an increase in real income levels and the incumbent party's vote share in the U.S. congressional elections between 1896-1964. Kramer concluded that voters are likely to punish or reward the incumbent party for the state of the national economy, which refers to the aggregate phenomena he observed (Kramer, 1971).

Since then, scholars of economic voting theory sought to explain what the concept of benefit Downs (1957) referred to implies. A simple interpretation of this concept is the change in individuals' own or household economic conditions (Fiorina, 1978; Lewis-Beck, 1985). According to this view, if the economic conditions of the person or the household improve throughout incumbent period (or a shorter period when the government is in power), the person will be more inclined to vote for the government party. If their economic conditions deteriorate, then they are more likely to vote for another party. In the literature, this decision-making behavior is defined as voting according to the personal economic evaluations and generally referred to as pocketbook voting. One of the advantages of pocketbook voting is that it requires voters to have relatively little information to decide how to vote; they can rely on their first-hand economic experiences (Fiorina, 1978; Lewis-Beck, 1988).

Pocketbook economic voting has been criticized for both theoretical and empirical reasons, as scholars argued that it is limited in explaining economic voting (Kinder & Kiewiet, 1979, 1981; Kiewiet, 1983). The theoretical criticism against pocketbook economic voting is based on the argument that individuals' economic conditions can easily fluctuate at different stages of life, such as unexpected death or divorce, and that of personal economic conditions cannot be easily affiliated with economic policies of the government. Therefore, it is less likely that they would influence the voting behavior of individuals. Empirical criticisms against pocketbook economic voting behavior, on the other hand, emerged as researchers found that another decision-making behavior influences economic voting behavior more. In their seminal study, Kinder & Kiewiet (1981) showed that voters' perceptions of the national economic conditions, rather than pocketbook evaluations, played a crucial role in deciding their vote choice in American congressional and presidential elections. They further argued that voters are inclined to support incumbents more when their economic evaluations on the country's economic conditions are positive. This decision-making behavior was defined as sociotropic economic voting.

Furthermore, scholars also have been investigating that whether voters are actually voting retrospectively, that is, they punish or reward the incumbent based on past economic performance argued by Key (1966), or they take prospective expectations into considerations as well.

In a pioneering study, Downs (1957) argued that voters evaluate their expectations about future economic performance and vote for the candidate, providing them the highest expected utility. By contrast, Key (1966) claimed that voters punish or reward the incumbent on the basis of past economic performance, which Fiorina (1981) reflected implicitly. These two approaches offer understanding of what elections requisite of voters and what they mean. Scholars argued that "voters are relatively sophisticated as they must have expectations of future performance of the economy under the policy positions of the different parties" and "elections in effect become mandates for the party in power" (Linn, Nagler & Morales, 2010 p. 5). In contrast, previous studies illustrated that retrospective voting requires less sophistication, as voters only reflect on the past economic performance of the incumbents. Further, scholars also argued that elections serve as a manifestation on government performance in retrospective economic voting (Lewis-

Beck, 1988). While research on economic voting primarily concentrated extensively on the later possibility (Tufte, 1975; Fair 1978; Miller & Wattenberg 1985), scholars also focused on the prospective economic voting recently (Lewis- Beck & Stegmaier, 2000, 2007; Singer & Carlin, 2013), as some studies suggested that voters are motivated in part by prospective evaluations (MacKuen, Erikson & Stimson, 1992; Lockerbie, 1992). Chappel and Keech (1985) found that prospective expectations also influence presidential approvals, while MacKuen, Erikson & Stimson (1992) argued that voters sometimes behave more like “prospectively focused bankers than retrospective focused peasants” (p. 605).

2.2 *Prior Research on Economic Voting Behavior in Turkey*

Few studies in the Turkish literature examined the relationship between the state of the economy and its influence on the vote choice. Akarca and Tansel (2002) investigated whether the influence of economic performance has a statistically significant impact on individuals’ vote choice in 1995 general elections as they sought to explain the factors contributed to the vote share of political parties in each city through economic voting theory. As an economic indicator, they employed the GDP growth rate and examined whether the growth rate influenced political party preferences in each city. The results unveiled that Turkish voters take the state of the economy into account when they vote, but not retrospectively. Furthermore, they also provided evidence for the basic punishment (reward) hypothesis as their results illustrated that voters punish the incumbent party by changing their support to the opposition when the growth rate deteriorated.

Başlevent, Kırmanoğlu & Şenatalar (2004, 2005) examined the voter profile in Turkey by using Turkish Social, Economic, and Political Research Foundation data. They employed a multinomial logistic regression model of voting function, taking voting for AKP as a reference point. Their model included both economic indicators and sociodemographic factors. They concluded that 88% of the respondents reported that the economic conditions in Turkey had deteriorated within the twelve months preceding the collection of survey data.

Extending their 2002 study, Akarca and Tansel (2006) investigated twenty-five parliamentary and local elections between 1950 and 2004. Their results provided support for the economic voting theory as it revealed that voters consider the economic performance of the incumbent in the previous year when they vote. Moreover, while voters attributed responsibility to the major incumbent party for growth and inflation, they only hold minor incumbent parties accountable for inflation.

Çarkoğlu (2008) argued that the election victory of the incumbent party in 2007 general elections depended on two issues: long-term ideological orientations based on left-right self-placement, religiosity, and conservatism, and short-term economic performance of the government. He examined the influence of long-term ideological orientations and short-term economic evaluations on vote choice utilizing survey data disseminated before and after the July election. His results concluded that “retrospective sociotropic evaluations have the largest and most persistent impact on most party choice decisions. However, when different scenarios of variable interactions are evaluated, it is observed that education level differentiates the magnitude of influence upon party choice by retrospective sociotropic evaluations. As expected, at higher levels of education pragmatic economic evaluations are less effective than they are for groups at lower levels of education” (Çarkoğlu, 2008, p. 340)

In a follow-up study, Çarkoğlu (2012) maintained that Turkish elections reflect two rivalry influences: long-term ideological orientations, and short-term economic evaluations. To measure the impact of these competing hypotheses on vote choice of Turkish citizens, he benefited from the survey data from 2002, 2007, and 2011. His results illustrated that economic evaluations of the voters did not play a role in shaping the outcome of 2002 general elections, left-right self-placement shaped the election. Furthermore, he observed that the impact of ideology on vote choice advances from 2002 to 2007 and 2011. In contrast, though the influence of economic evaluations increased 2002 to 2007 but slightly lost their impact in 2011 general elections.

Başlevent and Kirmanoğlu (2016) investigated the influence of economic evaluations on the likelihood of Turkish voters voting for the ruling party AKP after provided a summary of macroeconomic developments that took place since 2001 in Turkey. Their empirical model included retrospective and prospective economic voting variables as well as sociodemographic indicators and religiosity. Their binary logit

estimates revealed that voters' perceptions and expectations on the state of the economy has a substantial influence on the party choice, specifically when voters were able to attribute responsibility to the government for contemporary changes in economic circumstances.

2.3 *Media Reporting and Voters' Economic Evaluations*

The relationship between economic news and individuals' economic perceptions has been the focus of academic research for a long time. It has been recognized that economic news stories could influence people's economic perceptions, henceforth have an overwhelming impact on political behavior such as vote choice (Sanders, 2000; Boukes & Damstra, 2018). Economic voting scholars generally agree that "information about economic conditions must be obtained from newspapers and television" (Kiewiet, 1983, p. 22).

Furthermore, previous studies illustrated that economic evaluations are more likely to shape electoral outcomes than real economic conditions as they argued that perceptions of the economy could matter more than the objective reality, and media has the power of distorting actual economic conditions (Nadeau et al. 1999; Hetherington, 1996; Sanders, 2000). The 1992 U.S Presidential elections have been the turning point for research into the content of economic news because studies have shown how economic news rather than real economic conditions influenced the electoral outcomes. A seminal study supporting this claim was conducted by Alvarez & Nagler (1995) as they argued that President Bush lost re-election not as a consequence of the actual state of the economy, yet based on people's perceptions of the state of the economy, which economic news coverage presented overtly. Likewise, Goidel and Langley (1995, p. 320) also concluded that "media have plenty of latitude in deciding what economic news is important, and this latitude is exercised by focusing disproportionately on bad economic news."

Therefore, scholars have argued that economic news reporting generally involves a negativity bias, which Boukes & Damstra. (2018, p. 2) defined and argued as "the tendency to systematically devote more attention to negative as compared to positive economic trends is not a stand-alone finding but reflects a rather generalizable pattern in

economic news reporting.” Furthermore, Wu et al., (2002) found negativity bias in newspaper reporting on recession news, while Soroka (2006, 2012), found on unemployment, and Harrington (1989) on inflation and growth rates. Besides, Hester and Gibson (2003) also argued that not only print media but also television broadcasts asymmetrically favor negative news when they report the state of the economy.

Previous studies also investigated as to why the negativity bias in economic news reporting consistently exists. One line of thought emphasized the media’s role as a fourth estate, which argues that traditionally, free media act as a watchdog in modern democracies by controlling and holding government accountable, as a result, enforce government to be more responsible and responsive (Whitten-Woodring, 2009). Consequently, the media emphasizes negative economic conditions more than positive ones as presenting the negative economic conditions contribute to making failed government policies public, hence holding the government accountable to the citizens.

The second line of research maintained that negative economic conditions lead to more economic news, thereby enhancing newsworthiness, and bad economy also leads to more negative economic news, while strengthening economic conditions do not result in more positive coverage, all of which increase the volume of negative news coverage (Goidel & Langley, 1995; Soroka, 2006).

Prior research also illustrated that readers are also more responsive to negative information compared to positive ones, which, in return, also contributes to the high volume of negative news coverage as newspapers respond to supply. Scholars traditionally argued that the underlying distinction between the volume and tone of economic news reporting is that while the amount affects “what people think about,” the tone influences how people perceive the economic conditions (Blood & Phillips, 1995; Boef & Kellstedt, 2014; Doms & Morin, 2004). They further concluded that while negative news steers pessimism, positive news does not lead the same level of optimism to the public (Holbrook et al., 2001; Soroka, 2006).

The extent to which news reporting of the economy by print media plays a role in forming people’s economic evaluations has been a focal point of scholarly discussions over thirty years. Some scholars claimed that real-life economic experiences, such as inter-personal communications, are supreme in shaping economic evaluations (Svensson et al., 2016). They maintained that thanks to the direct experience of economic conditions

at the individual level, such as losing a job, price increase in goods and services, and decline in well-being in local settings, people are persistently exposed to economic realities, which can impact how people evaluate the national economy. They further concluded that immediacy of economic experiences can countermeasure economic news reporting (Mutz, 1992, 1994).

Nevertheless, several studies illustrate that economic news reporting is one of the most important determinants of people's perception of the economy (Doms & Morin, 2004, Hetherington, 1996; Soroka, 2014; Soroka & Stecula & Wlezien., 2015). Conventionally, scholars used media's influence on consumer confidence to contend that economic news reporting forms people's economic perceptions. Blood and Philips (1995) was a pioneer to systematically examine how news reporting of the economy impacted consumer confidence while controlling for the impact of the real economy. Their findings revealed that the number of recession headlines in the New York Times has a profound and negative influence on consumer confidence (Blood and Philips, 1995). Doms and Morin (2004) provided evidence for Blood and Phillips (1995) as they analysed thirty newspapers covering for twenty-five years.

Most frequently cited justification of how economic news reporting influences economic evaluations is the media's agenda-setting influence. By highlighting certain subjects over others, the media has the capability of influencing economic evaluations (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). However, the impact of mediated messages becomes stronger when the accessibility of real-life examples is lower (Iyenger, Peters & Kinder, 1982; Blood & Phillips, 1995). Damstra and Boukes (2018, p. 4) claimed that "central to this theory is a memory-based model of information processing: The more attention the media devote to an issue, the more accessible the issue becomes in the minds of people." Following Tversky & Kahneman (1973), they defined accessibility as "the ease with which an issue or association can be brought to mind" (Boukes & Damstra, 2018, p. 4). Accordingly, the more newspapers report about the economy, it becomes more accessible, hence rendering it as a significant issue in people's perceptions (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Another issue previous studies investigated is whether economic news reporting has a more impact on retrospective or prospective economic evaluations by using questions from consumer confidence. Boukes & Damstra (2018) argued that people are

impacted by immediate experiences such as receiving a higher income or losing a job during the previous year. “The media, therefore, potentially only serve as a complementary source of information, besides the information already gained from one’s direct environment” for the retrospective evaluations (Boukes & Damstra, 2018, 7). Such immediate experiences and alternative sources of information are less accessible in the prospective economic evaluations, henceforth less likely to impact people’s expectations on future economic conditions in contrast to retrospective economic evaluations. Scholars further argued that when immediate experiences and alternative sources of information are less accessible, people are peculiarly more prone to mediated messages (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976; Loges & Ball-Rokeach, 1993).

Nevertheless, findings on the influence of economic news reporting on retrospective and prospective evaluations are mixed. Most recently, Boukes & Damstra (2018) found that economic news matters for people’s future assessments but not for their judgments for the last year, while Soroka (2015) found that economic news reporting affects people’s prospective and retrospective evaluations.

2.4 Economic News Reporting and Economic Evaluations in Turkey

Conventionally, scholars have adopted the newspaper content analysis methodology to investigate a variety of issues in Turkey. For instance, Somer (2010) conducted a systematic content analysis of three religious-conservative and two pro-secular newspapers in 1996-2014 to observe the relative attention given to thirteen categories such as electoral democracy, liberal democracy, social pluralism, secularism, nationalism and Islamic headscarf controversy. He concluded that there is a substantial amount of internal pluralism within both religious-conservative and pro-secular newspapers. Furthermore, he argued that “the Turkish press seems to fit the image of the polarized-pluralist Mediterranean model” (Somer, 2010, p. 574), that is “the mass media in the southern European countries were intimately involved in the political conflicts that mark the history of this region, and there is a strong tradition of regarding them as means of ideological expression and political mobilization” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 89). In another study, Çarkoğlu, Baruh and Yıldırım (2014) investigated press-party parallelism in 2011 national elections in Turkey as they defined press-party parallelism with two indicators “(I) respective “voice” given to the two leading parties, calculated as

the ratio of news that quoted sources from the incumbent Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP) to the leading opposition party Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (CHP) and (2) newspapers tones toward to AKP and CHP” (Çarkoğlu, Baruh & Yıldırım, 2014, p. 1). Their newspaper content analysis included fifteen newspapers, in which they categorized newspapers based on the voting intentions of their readers: conservative newspapers (AKP voters), mainstream broadsheets, and opposition newspapers (CHP). Similar to Somer (2010), they concluded that there is a high degree of alignment between a group of newspapers and a political party. Furthermore, they presented that internal pluralism in both conservative and opposition papers faded with respect to both voice given to respective parties and tone of news coverage.

Thus, Turkish scholars have adopted a content analysis methodology and shed light on numerous issues. The most common finding of these studies is the fact that print media is strongly affiliated with party politics, which has profound implications on news reporting in Turkey. On the other hand, though Turkish scholars acknowledge the media’s influence on political behavior (Kaya & Çakmur, 2010; Çarkoğlu, Baruh & Yıldırım, 2014; Yağcı & Oyvat, 2020), there is no substantial research that focuses on economic news reporting by print media and its influence on economic evaluations. The influence of economic news reporting on people’s economic evaluations has relatively received relatively less attention in Turkey.

One recent study, Yağcı & Oyvat (2020), examined the relationship between individual economic evaluations, partisanship, pro-government media exposure, and income growth in the last year. Their research relies on survey data disseminated in February 2018 with “face-to-face interviews from a representative sample of the Turkish voting age population, and income growth simulated from a pseudo-panel surveyed monthly through the same sample selection and questionnaire methodology over the previous year” (Yağcı & Oyvat, 2020, p.1). To assess the media influence, they focus on TV channels as it is argued that TV channels are the most common way voters access the political news. While using systematic content analysis, they identified TV channels based on time devoted to President Erdoğan or AKP if their ratio exceeds 80% as “progovernment”, and they did not include any other TV channel had the ratio not exceeded 80%.

Their results confirm not only fundamental conjecture about the economic voting models that is partisanship and media are influential in shaping economic evaluations of voters but also provided novel evidence on the formation of economic assessment. They found that income growth rate accounts for differences in individual retrospective evaluations, while the relationship is stronger for pocketbook evaluations. Furthermore, they argued that partisanship and media lead to bias, specifically for sociotropic evaluations. Lastly, it is concluded that people who prefer pro-government TV channels are more prone to have positive pocketbook economic evaluations and also more prone to consider that the economy would be much worse if the incumbent is replaced, after controlling for partisanship.

Analysing the literature, I argue that there is a lack of research on how economic news reporting by the print media influences voters' economic evaluations in Turkey. It is important to address this gap in the literature as previously mentioned, economic news reporting plays a crucial role in forming economic evaluations of voters (Soroka 2015), and that evaluations are one of the primary factors of vote choice (Sanders, 2000; Boukes et al., 2018). To address this gap, this study develops a new approach that combines economic news coverage tone of newspapers with individuals' newspaper reading frequency on a continuous scale and examines how economic news reporting influences economic evaluations by using newspaper content analysis and survey data, all of which I discuss in the following chapter.

2.5 *Political Context in Turkey*

Scholars of Turkish politics argued that the Justice of Development Party (AKP) took the governmental power in 2002 elections mostly due to the widespread public discontent with the existing parties, coalition governments, and the repercussions of the 2001 economic crisis (Çarkoğlu, 2001; Sayari 2007). Further, they argued that even though AKP has its roots in the former Islamist parties in Turkey, such as Virtue Party, Motherland Party, and True Path Party, it distinguished itself from its forerunners as it portrayed itself as a moderate, religious conservative party. In return, this approach facilitated its vote share as it attracted voters from different parts of the political spectrum (Çınar, 2016).

At the beginning of its tenure, the AKP championed Turkey's European Union cause as it enacted several legislatures that accelerated the country's accession to the European Union process, which depicted the party as pro-Western and pro-democratization (Ayata & Tütüncü, 2008). As Çınar and Sayın (2014) successfully summarized: "the AKP's pro-European Union (EU), pro-West and pro-democratization stance enabled one to engage with it in liberal-democratic terms and created an opportunity for democratic resolution of Turkey's perennial problems such as authoritarian secularism and the tutelary role of the military" (p. 365). At the same time, the AKP government showed tremendous success in overcoming the economic turmoil that the country suffered from the 2001 financial crisis. The party achieved to reach a balanced budget, enact government-sponsored healthcare and retirement systems, overcome hyperinflation, and invest in transportation infrastructure, all of which, as a result, attracted foreign direct investments, facilitated GDP growth, and a decline in the inflation rate (Patton, 2006; Aktaş, 2017). Consequently, AKP increased its vote share of 34% that the party gained in 2002 elections to 47% in 2007 and reached its climax in 2011, with approximately 50% of the casted popular votes (Gümüşçü, 2013).

On the other hand, scholars maintained that as the AKP strengthened its political power with the help of successive electoral wins, it started to show authoritarian tendencies and conflictual behavior resulted in political polarization, in which it exploited already existed secular cleavages in Turkey, specifically after the 2010 Constitutional Referendum (Çınar, 2016). As Esen and Gümüşçü argued, "the end of tutelary democracy in Turkey did not result in democratic consolidation in the country ..." (p. 1585) and "the AKP used its electoral strength – based on a cross-class coalition across both urban and rural areas – to dominate political institutions and exploit state resources in a partisan manner to block the opposition's chances of winning an election" (p. 1585). Inevitably, the country started to experience a democratic backsliding as the country's Freedom House score transitioned from the 'Partly Free' status to the 'Not Free' between 2010-2020. Some scholars have further argued that the political regime in Turkey can be considered as the competitive authoritarian: Though the nation-wide elections continue to be held, there is no widespread falsification of the results, and common exclusion of political parties, the country has continuous unfair elections, violations of civil liberties,

an uneven playing field that suffice the competitive authoritarian regime criteria (Esen & Gümüşçü, 2016).

As the ruling party AKP transited into an authoritarian nature, numerous scientists and non-governmental organizations reported civil rights violations in Turkey. One particular area of civil rights violations, which is the interest of this paper, is the government's systematic oppression of independent media. For instance, in 2014, Freedom House issued a special report to depict the degenerating state of media freedom in Turkey. The organization noted that their goal was to “investigate reports of government efforts to pressure and intimidate journalists and of overly close relationships between media owners and government, which, along with bad laws and overly aggressive prosecutors, have muzzled objective reporting in Turkey” (Corke, Finkel, Kramer, Robbins, & Schenkkan, 2014, p. 1). Consequently, it is concluded that strategies such as “intimidation, mass firings, buying off or forcing out media moguls, wiretapping, and imprisonment” were used by the government to control media (Corke et al., 2014, p. 1-2).

Among these, ‘buying off or forcing out media moguls’ requires special attention for this thesis. Several studies argue that the AKP government in Turkey has a hegemony over both the state and private media (Çarkoğlu & Yavuz, 2010; Kaya & Çakmur, 2010; Esen & Gümüşçü, 2016). Furthermore, The Media Ownership Monitor, the global research project investigating media ownership and government control over media in countries, reveals that out of ten most-read newspapers, nine owned by the people known to be affiliated with the government. The same applies to the TV channels as well as it is reported that out of ten most-watched TV channels, nine belong to the individuals that are affiliated with the government (Media Ownership Monitor, 2019).

Consequently, the aforementioned discussions accentuate that even though the Justice and Development Party was founded on pro-Western and pro-democratic ideals, it took an authoritarian turn, specifically after 2010. In return, this trend has various ramifications on the political and economic life in Turkey, such as the oppression of free media and civil rights.

Chapter 3:

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter focuses on the data and methodology of the thesis. I first lay out the data collection process and then provide descriptive statistics gathered from the data that serve the research question and purpose. The data used in this thesis were collected as part of the project *Economic Voting Behavior in Turkey and consisted of* a systematic content analysis of newspaper reporting of the economy and a nationally representative survey.² In the following I present an overview of the data from these two sources.

3.1 Newspaper Content Analysis

In addition to myself, two graduate and three undergraduate students at Koç University worked for the newspaper content analysis between November 15, 2018, and February 16, 2019 with the purpose of exploring how the Turkish press gives economic news in Turkey during this three-month period. To achieve this purpose, six newspapers (Cumhuriyet, Hürriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Sözcü, and Posta) were selected, and the first pages and pages under the economy sections of these newspapers were coded in a way that every newspaper was coded by two people. The main criteria behind the selection of the newspapers were circulation rates and having diverse ideological positions to capture a representative picture of press-society relations in Turkey. For the coding process, while the Koç University Library provided physical copies of Posta and Sözcü newspapers, team members accessed the print pages of Cumhuriyet, Hürriyet, Milliyet, and Sabah online.

Given that the purpose of the analysis was to examine how economic news influence economic evaluations of citizens, the coders were instructed to code only economic news that was not sector-specific or future-oriented. Economic news could be in the form of news articles, including reports or analyses, opinion columns, or interviews.

² The principal investigator of the project was Asst. Prof. Selim Erdem Aytaç and it was funded by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (Project no: 217K178).

Though the news could be in these formats, their content could also vary since there are different economic indicators, which might influence voters' economic evaluations. To account for content differences, the codebook had fifteen main news categories.³

Team members coded news that had no specific emphasis but touched upon the general sentiment of the economy in the general economic news category. Though other categories are relatively clear, the international developments category requires further explanation. If the main topic of the news was not related to the Turkish economy but covered economic developments in other countries, this news was coded in this category. For example, a piece of news that mentioned rising unemployment rates in the US and actions taken by the US government had to be coded as international development and not as unemployment, since the subject of coverage was not Turkish economy. For news that fell under this category, the coders have also coded which country or group of countries were mentioned in the news piece.

Having decided on the content of the news, coders had also to consider various other variables such as the tone of the news and whether there were any comparisons involved. How newspapers reflect economic developments in a country bears importance, considering that it can influence voters' perceptions of the economy and that voters' sentiment on the economy is one of the most important determining factors of vote choice (Hetherington, 1996; Duch, Palmer & Anderson, 2000; Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2000; Soroka, 2006). Therefore, to determine the tone of economic news coverage was one of the main criteria of the coding. Team members coded the tone of news coverage in four ways: negative, positive, mixed, neutral. Coders coded a piece of news coverage as having a negative tone when the narrative of the piece was negatively framed or when the coverage heavily reflected the negative aspects of the economy. The same processes applied for the positive news, and for news to be categorized as mixed, both negative and positive narrative should have taken place. Neutral news were the ones that had no predominant negative or positive narration and directly stated the facts.

Recent studies in the economic voting literature suggest that voters might evaluate the economy in a comparative perspective, that is, how the economy performs relative to

³ These categories were general economic news, growth, inflation, unemployment, foreign exchange rates, interest rates, public budget & public debt, current account deficit, income inequality & household debt, production & industry & agriculture & services, wage & minimum wage, privatization & expropriation, taxation, investment, international developments.

past outcomes in the country or in a cross-national perspective (Kayser & Peress, 2012; Aytaç, 2018). For this reason, the coders also paid attention to whether economic news entailed any comparisons. They did this by considering two factors. The first one was whether the news item involved any comparison that compared current economic developments with past outcomes. For instance, if a piece of news that reports the current unemployment rate in Turkey also narrates the unemployment rate in Turkey in the past year or four years ago, coders categorized this news as having a national comparison. The second point coders considered regarding comparisons was the presence of international comparisons. Following the example of reporting the unemployment rate in Turkey, if news coverage points out the unemployment of any other country in the news as well, this news was categorized as having an international comparison. Of course, some news could have both national and international comparisons. For instance, if a news coverage reports Turkey's current unemployment rate in comparison with the unemployment rate of the US while adding a chart of Turkey's five-year unemployment rate, this news belongs to both national and international comparison category per codebook. Hence, there were four categories when asked about the comparison of the news: no comparison, national comparison only, international comparison only, both national and international comparison. If a coder decided that a piece of news involved a comparison, then the coder had also to decide which era of Turkey or/and the international actor the subject at hand was in comparison.

To make the coding process of newspaper content analysis more concrete, two news items that team members coded during the coding process, one having no comparison and one with a comparison, are presented below as an example.

The first example belongs to the Cumhuriyet newspaper. On January 23, 2019, the newspaper reported news with the headline "The market is on fire" ("*Çarşıda yangın var*"). Here "fire" figuratively describes that prices of goods in the markets/bazaars increased to a point that induces concern among experts and the public. The news story argues that both working and retired people struggle to provide enough livelihood for themselves. The newspaper reports that the inflation rate is highest in the food industry. To illustrate their points, reporters visit bazaars in Ankara and reveal that spinach costs five Turkish Liras and even double of that in markets, lettuce costs four Turkish Liras, and eggplant starts from fourteen Turkish Liras – prices that are very expensive for a

country like Turkey. Both customers and suppliers complain about the unprecedented price increases.

According to the codebook, this news item needs to be coded. The first thing to decide is the format of the news, which is a news story. Next is to determine the main topic of the news. Since the news story focuses on the elevated cost of living, the main topic of the news should be inflation. The reporters frame the news as something that causes social uneasiness, where customers and suppliers complain. Furthermore, words that have negative connotations such as “fire,” “destructiveness,” “expensive,” and “unprecedented increase in the latest years,” are also repeated. Considering this framing, the tone of the news is negative. Finally, the reporters do not compare the inflation rate in Turkey with any country or with past inflation rates in Turkey while reporting. Therefore, this news story does not have any comparison. This is how this news coded during the newspaper coding process.

The second example is the news with the headline “Turkish economy has unique advantages” (“*Türk Ekonomisi’nin Eşsiz Avantajları Bulunuyor*”) from the Hürriyet newspaper on January 26, 2019. The story directly quotes the speech given by Berat Albayrak, the minister of Treasury and Finance of Turkey, on the 50th annual meeting of the World Economic Forum at Davos, Switzerland. Albayrak argues that Turkey is the only country that has economic stability in its region. Regarding the construction sector, the debt ratio of Turkey is lower by twenty-eight percent compared to the other countries in the region. Similarly, concerning the household debt to GDP ratio, Turkey only has seventeen percent household debt to GDP ratio, whereas this ratio is around sixty percent in the global economy that makes Turkey’s debt very minimal. Albayrak states that the Turkish economy, both the public and private sectors, improved greatly compared to the summer of 2018. Despite experiencing a struggle, the Turkish economy recovered quickly, Albayrak notes, and is now more immune to fluctuations. He concludes that given that Turkey has a competitive youth population and strong export network, the Turkish economy has unique advantages.

As per the codebook, this news story is in the scope of newspaper content analysis and requires coding. The format of the news is a news story; the main topic of it is in the general economic news category since the speech touches upon several aspects of the Turkish economy. The next issue a team member should decide is the tone of the news.

Given that Albayrak highlights positive developments regarding the Turkish economy, the tone of the news story is positive. What differentiates this news from the previous is that this news story has two comparisons, whereas the earlier one does not have. During his speech, Albayrak compares the Turkish economy both with its neighboring countries and the global economy. Moreover, he also draws attention to the current improvement of the economy in contrast to the previous summer. Hence, coders should code this news as having both national and international comparisons according to the codebook. Since there is a comparison, the team members should also decide the main topics, tones, actors, and periods of comparison. Applying the rules of the codebook, the main topic of the national comparison belongs to the general economic news category given that Albayrak does not specify any aspect of the Turkish economy but narrates it in a general manner. Moreover, considered from the current perspective, the comparison presented as positive; the comparison period is summer 2018, and comparison has no secondary main subject. Regarding the international comparison, the main topic of the news is again general economic news given that Albayrak compares economic stability, construction sector, household debt to GDP ratio, and immunity of the Turkish economy with several actors. When considered from Turkey's perspective, the comparison again is presented as positive. The actors the Turkish economy contrasted are neighbors of Turkey and the world (general).

Based on this logic, team members studied the codebook. Before starting the actual coding process, a trial period took place. During this period, every team member coded the same seven newspapers pages. The intercoder reliability result of the trial news coding was successful as Krippendorff's alpha coefficient was found to be 0.81.⁴ The actual coding process started on November 15, 2019, and coders completed all the coding as of February 16, 2020. During this period, the project team coded six newspapers for ninety-four days, which corresponds to a total of 564 newspaper-days.

Following the coding process, data cleaning phase took place. In the first stage of data cleaning, we focused on news items that were coded by one coder only (recall that each newspaper was assigned to two coders). In such circumstances a third coder, which did not code the newspaper at hand, decided which news the project team should include to the final dataset. In the second stage of the data cleaning process, we focused on news

⁴ The lowest acceptable score is $\alpha \geq 0.667$ (Krippendorff 2004, p. 241).

items that were coded differently by the coders. Again, a third coder decided which version of the coding should be included in the final dataset based on the rules of the project codebook.

3.1.1 Descriptive Results of Newspaper Content Analysis

This section presents some descriptive results that emerged from the newspaper content analysis. Some of the questions addressed are: How often do newspapers report economic developments on their pages? What type of economy news do newspapers give space the most? What is the percentage of positive, negative, and neutral news on newspaper pages? To what extent does the tone of news overlap with the economic developments in the country? Are there systematic differences between news reporting tones of the newspapers? To what degree do international developments take place in newspapers? The rest of this section answers these questions.

The coding process resulted in 917 news items about the economy during the period of analysis. As Figure 3.1 below illustrates, Cumhuriyet has the most observations with 255 economic news. Sözcü and Milliyet follow Cumhuriyet with 204 and 197 news, respectively. Posta, on the other hand, has the least number of observations in the dataset.

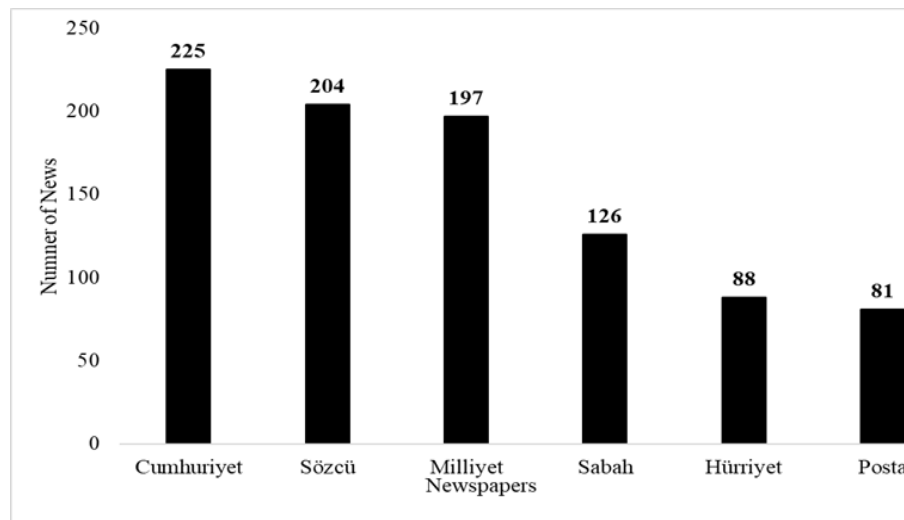


Figure 3.1: Total number of news by newspapers

What type of economy news do newspapers give space the most? As mentioned above, there were 15 main topics categories within the scope of the newspaper content analysis. Figure 3.2 below presents the distribution of these economic news categories by newspapers. During the period of analysis, the inflation category was the most mentioned issue with 113 news. Foreign exchange rates category follows it with 101 news, current account deficit with 98 news, general economic news with 98 news, and wages category with 77 news. On the other hand, the newspapers mentioned the categories of taxes, income inequality, interest rates, and production, industry, agriculture groups relatively less during this period. Given that inflation, foreign exchange rates, and current account deficit were highly salient for the Turkish economy during the coding period (15 November 2018 - 16 February 2019), it is reasonable to conclude that the news in the newspapers has been in parallel with the economic developments of the country.

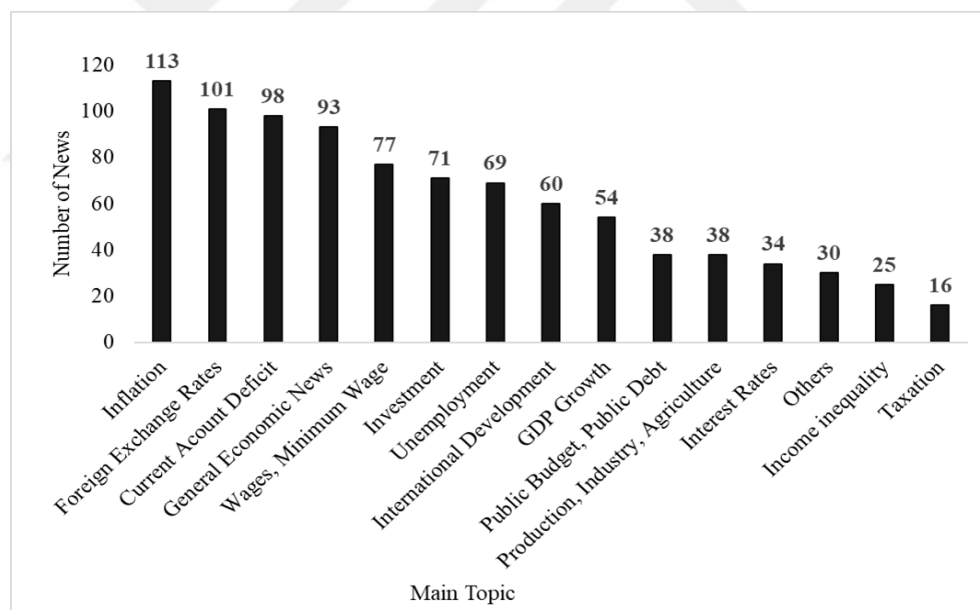


Figure 3.2: The number of news by main topic

Does the distribution of the topics covered in the economic news vary among newspapers? To provide an answer to this question, the distribution of the three most mentioned issues other than the general news category, which were inflation, foreign exchange rates, current account deficit, in each of the newspapers is presented in Figure

3.3. As it can be seen, Cumhuriyet had 23 news about inflation, 17 about foreign exchange rates, and 20 about current account deficit while these numbers vary in the other newspapers. For instance, as Hürriyet had 15 news in the inflation category, Milliyet, Posta, Sabah, and Sözcü newspapers respectively had 18, 11, 18, 28 news. A similar variation is also visible in the foreign exchange rate category. Though Hürriyet only had 8 news about foreign exchange rates, this number is nearly four times bigger in Milliyet (31) and Sözcü (28). Furthermore, newspapers also differ in reporting the current account deficit. While Milliyet had the highest number of news in this category (25), Sözcü (12) and Hürriyet (10) newspapers had nearly three times less news. These results indicate that there were visible distinctions among newspapers regarding topic distribution.

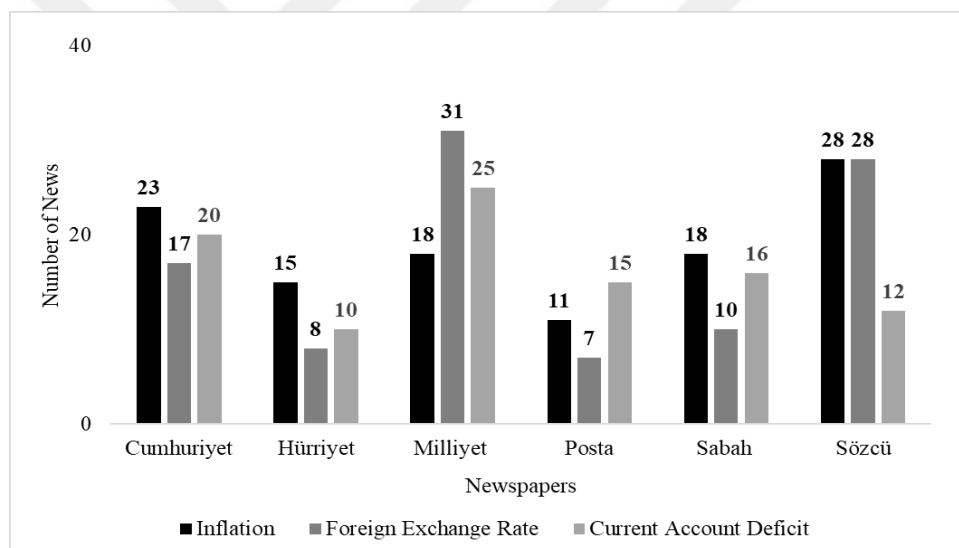


Figure 3.3: The top three main topics by newspapers

Newspapers not only decide which aspect of the economy to report but also how they deliver the news to the audience. For instance, one newspaper can report positive news more often while the other can focus on negative issues more. Considering this, is there a systematic variation among news reporting tones of the six newspapers? Figure 3.4 illustrates that while Cumhuriyet and Sözcü, the newspapers that are known as pro-opposition, predominantly report economic news negatively. In Cumhuriyet, for example, about 82% of all coded news items has a negative tone, and this figure is 71% for Sözcü. These two newspapers have also given very limited space to positive news (Cumhuriyet

with 5% and Sözcü with 10%). Sabah, known to be a pro-government publication, generally presents news in a positive tone (78%). Furthermore, Milliyet, Hürriyet, and Posta, the newspapers usually classified as government-leaning, also report the economy on a positive tone (Hürriyet 55%, Milliyet 53 %, Posta 58) but not as strong as Sabah.

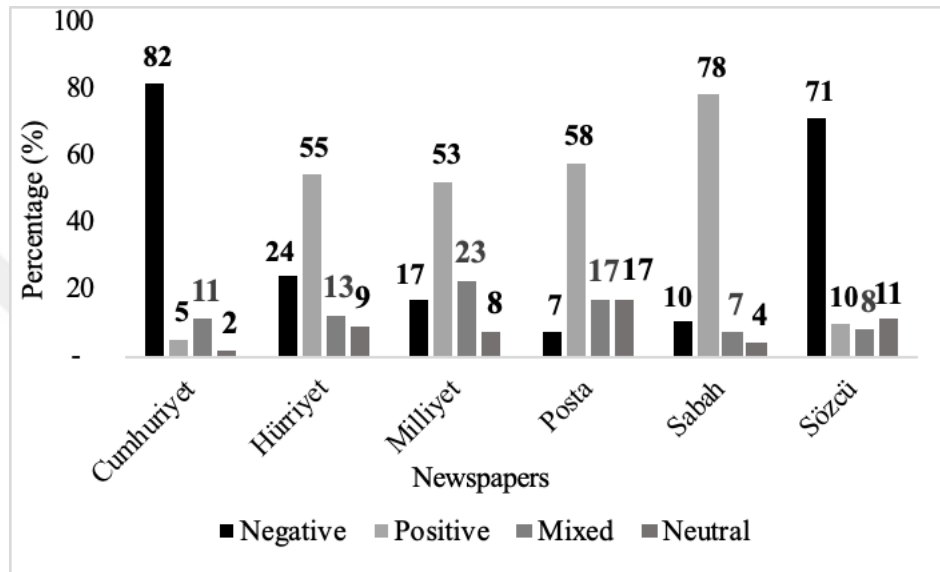


Figure 3.4: The tones of the news by newspapers

These findings indicate that although the tone of news mostly overlaps with the economic circumstances in the country since 44% of the news stories are negative, there is a significant variance on how different newspapers present the economy to the public. This means that citizens who rely on pro-government or government-leaning publications mostly encounter with positive aspects of the economy, whereas people who regularly read pro-opposition newspapers come across the negative sides of it.

The project team also coded the news stories that cover economic developments in other countries in addition to news that focuses on Turkey's economy. Figure 3.5 displays that there is a total of 60 news under this category, which constitute 6.5% of the total news. Figure 5 also reveals that the six newspapers most frequently covered the USA in their international news stories, following news about the world economy in general and

developments in China. Considering the size of the American and Chinese economies, their frequency in the economic pages of newspapers is expected. Furthermore, the number of news stories that cover the economic developments in the EU or European countries such as Germany or France is also frequent. Again, considering that the EU is the most significant trade partner of Turkey, observing news stories that cover economic developments in these countries is not unexpected.

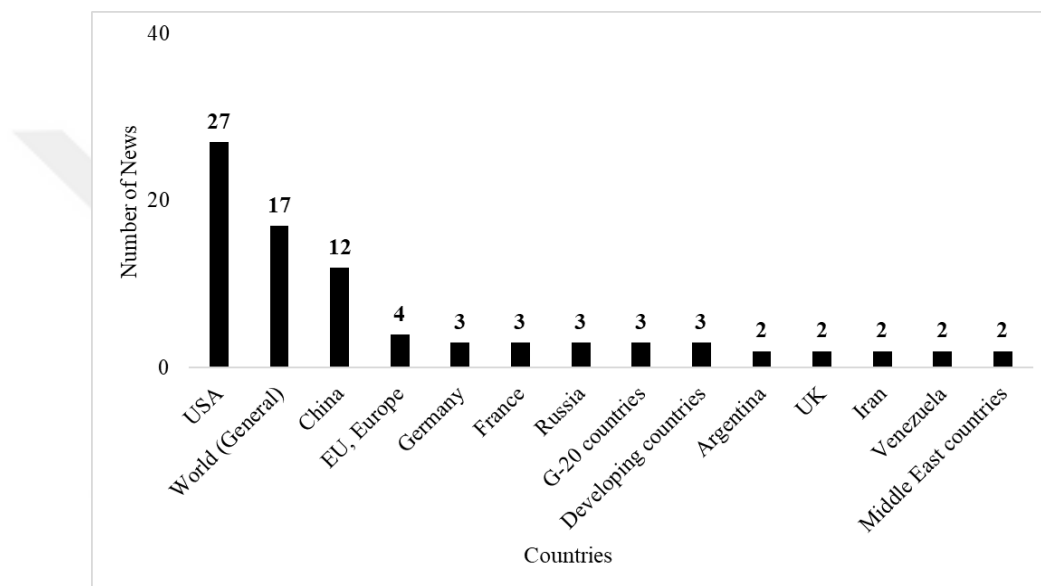


Figure 3.5: The most mentioned countries or country groups in news stories

A further issue that might influence voters' economic perceptions is comparisons (or benchmarking). In the literature there are studies showing that voters' economic perceptions can be affected by how the economy performed relative to past periods in the country or in a cross-national perspective (Kayser & Peress 2012, Aytaç 2018). Recalling the earlier example of reporting the unemployment rate in Turkey, a piece of news can report the current unemployment rate of Turkey while also mentioning the unemployment rate in the past year or four years ago. Even though the unemployment rate might be relatively high in Turkey, if it is presented to be lower than in the past, voters can evaluate the state of the economy positively. Similarly, recalling the earlier example of comparing the unemployment rate of Turkey with the USA, news coverages can also report the

current unemployment rate in Turkey in comparison with the employment rates of other countries, which in return can influence voters' economic evaluations as well. Even though the unemployment rate in Turkey is high, if newspapers present it as lower than in other countries, voters can evaluate the state of the economy positively.

To account for the possible influence of comparison on economic evaluations, the project team also coded whether the news coverages compare the current state of Turkish economy with any period within the country (national comparison) or compare it with any other country (international comparison). Figure 3.6 presents the ratio of newspaper stories that include such comparisons to the total number of news. The most common comparison category for each newspaper is domestic comparison given that 59% of the stories in Cumhuriyet included domestic comparisons, which is 50% for Hürriyet, 61% for Milliyet, 64% for Posta, 48% for Sabah and 46% for the Sözcü. This statistic reveals that while reporting, newspapers present most current economic developments of Turkey in comparison with the earlier periods within the country. On the other hand, the number of news with international comparisons only is relatively low with the percentage of such news items not exceeding 10% in any newspaper. Furthermore, the ratio of news that has no comparison varies between 29% and 45%.

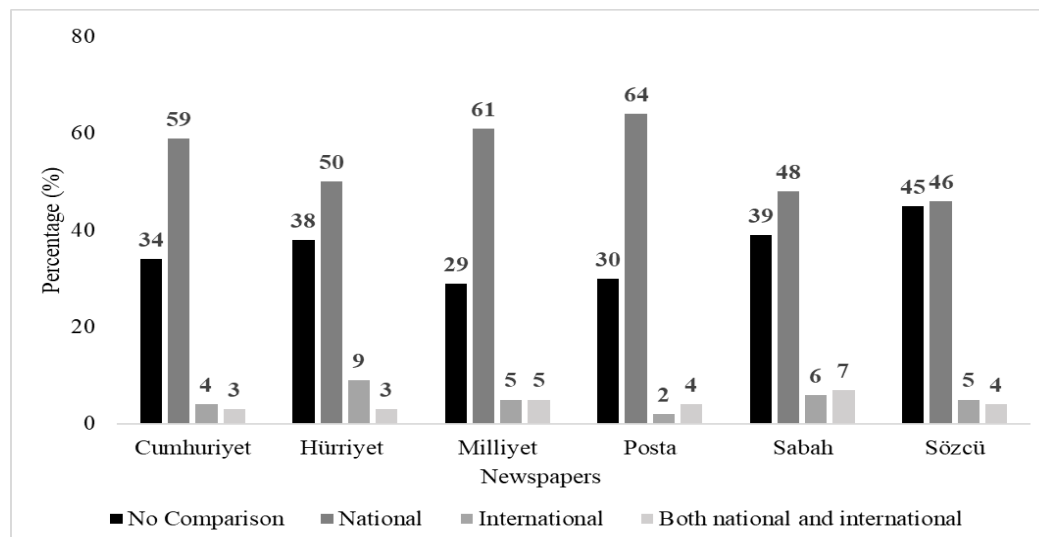


Figure 3.6: The proportion of news with comparisons by newspapers

What are the most prominent topics in news coverage that includes comparison? Do these topics show any differences from others? Figure 3.2 above presented the main topic spread of all news coverage by newspapers. Figure 3.7 illustrates the distribution of main topics of economic news that has only national comparisons. When the two distributions are compared, there is no significant variation; for example, the most frequent three issues, which are current account deficit, inflation, and foreign exchange rates, are the same in the two distributions. Likewise, there are no differences when the least common topics are compared. Both income inequality and taxation categories are the least mentioned topics.

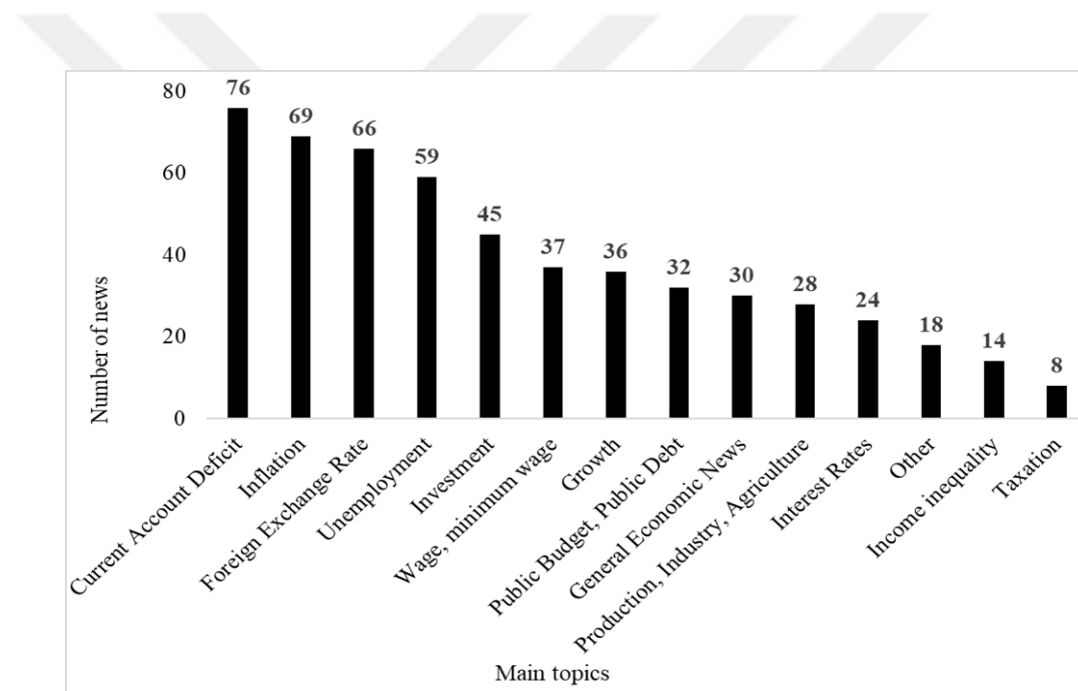


Figure 3.7: The main topics of national comparison

How about the news that includes international comparison, which compares developments in the Turkish economy with other countries or economies of a region? What are the most prominent topics in them? Which country or region do they mention? What kind of tone does this news coverage have? The following three figures answer these questions. Figure 3.8 below presents the main topic distribution of economic news with international comparison. Even though foreign exchange rates and current account

deficit are again in the top three frequent categories, the inflation category falls back to sixth place in the international comparison graph in contrast to Figure 3.3 and Figure 3.7. The fact that the countries other than Turkey did not experience a significant rise in inflation rates during the coding period might partially explain this observation.

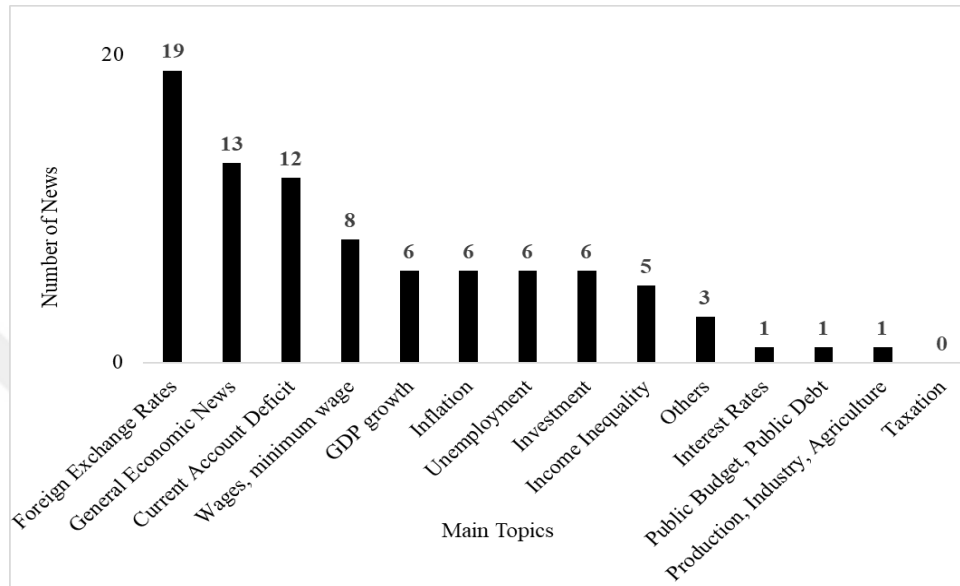


Figure 3.8: The main topics of international comparison

Figure 3.9 presents the countries and regions that newspapers compare the economic developments of Turkey while reporting. Newspapers mostly compare economic developments in Turkey with the economic developments in the world in general, and the EU and European countries follow it. While the third frequently compared category is developing countries, newspapers compare the Turkish economy with the USA and EU countries such as the UK, Germany, France, and Italy.

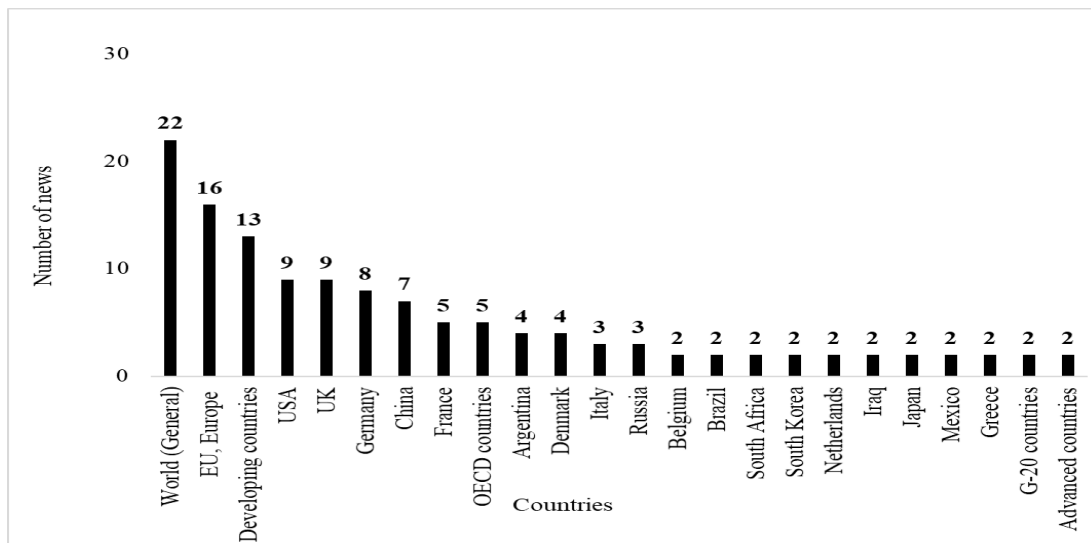


Figure 3.9: Countries or continents mentioned in the news that include international comparisons

In sum, the newspaper content analysis reveals that:

- The main topics of newspapers are in parallel with the economic developments of the country.
- Nonetheless, the general tone of the newspapers is pointedly distinct from each other. While positive news is overwhelmingly omnipresent on pro-government newspapers, pro-opposition ones mostly focus on the negative aspects of the economy in their stories. Hence, the tone of the news voters exposed to is highly contingent upon the newspapers they read. This finding is also in line with previous research (Çarkoğlu, Baruh & Yıldırım, 2014).
- Newspapers give relatively little space to news that focuses on international developments. But when they do, they mostly report economic developments that take place in the USA and China, the countries that have massive economies, and the EU, which is the biggest trade partner of Turkey.
- Newspapers mostly report the current economic developments of Turkey in comparison with the past economic performance of the country. The number of news that compares the Turkish economy with other countries or regions is

relatively low. But when encountered, the tones of newspapers are considerably different from each other when reporting the international comparisons.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, this thesis brings together the data of the newspaper content analysis and results from a nationally representative survey. The remainder of this chapter focuses on the survey and provides descriptive results that form the background of analyses and results of this study.

3.2 Survey Data

In order to examine how successful economic voting theory is in explaining the voting preferences of Turkish citizens, a nationally representative survey was fielded as part of the project. The principal investigator of the project developed the questionnaire to be used in the interviews, and a training to the pollsters was given on June 18, 2019. To select the households to be visited for the interviews, first the target sample was distributed according to each TUIK NUTS-2 region's share of urban and rural populations in accordance with their population. Next, randomly chosen household addresses (twice the number of target sample) were obtained from TUIK for each of the NUTS-2 regions. The selection of individuals in households is done on the basis of reported target population of 18 years or older in each household according to a lottery method. If for any reason that individual could not respond to our questions in our first visit, then the same household is visited up to three times until a successful interview is conducted and no substitution was applied.

The interviews were conducted between 24 June – 2 August 2019, and Table 3.1 represents the general characteristics of the sample. The survey dataset includes 2,027 respondents from 45 provinces of Turkey. The women population forms 51.9% of the survey sample and the average age of respondents is 42.2. On the other hand, the average household size of the sample is 3.7. Considering the education levels, 15.2% of the respondents hold university degrees, while 41.8% of them received elementary education or below. Regarding the residential and economic information, while 85.3% of the survey sample reside in urban areas, the average monthly household income is 2.911 Turkish Liras. Further, while approximately 23% of the respondents feel very close to the AKP,

nearly 13% feel very close to the CHP. In our data, about 32% of the respondents do not feel close to any political party.

Table 3.1: The general characteristics of the survey sample

Total number of interviews	2.027
Women (%)	51,9
Age (average)	42,2
Household number (average)	3,7
College graduate (%)	15,2
Primary education and below (%)	41,8
Urban Population (%)	85,3
Household income (average, TL)	2.911
AKP Partisanship (%)	22,29
CHP Partisanship (%)	12,66
No Party Identification (%)	32.07

As the central theme of the thesis is to understand the relationship between economic news reporting and voters' economic evaluations, this section provides answers to questions that focus on economic evaluations and newspaper reading/television watching habits of Turkish voters. Some relevant questions about economic perceptions are: What is the ranking of the economy amongst the most important problems of Turkey according to voters? Which aspect of the economy (GDP growth, unemployment, inflation, etc.) do the voters deem the most important? How do voters evaluate the current state of the Turkish economy? How do they assess their economic situations? And some relevant questions about media exposure of individuals were: How frequently do voters rely on newspapers to receive political information? What is the percentage of respondents that read the six newspapers coded in the newspaper content analysis? What is the proportion of people that prefer TV channels to obtain political information? To understand where voters place the economy among the most important problems of Turkey, the fieldwork team asked the following question open-endedly: "What is the most

important problem facing Turkey today?” Open-ended here means that the fieldwork team did not provide interviewees with any choices but rather reported the answers directly. Following the data collection, research assistants went over these answers and place them into several categories.

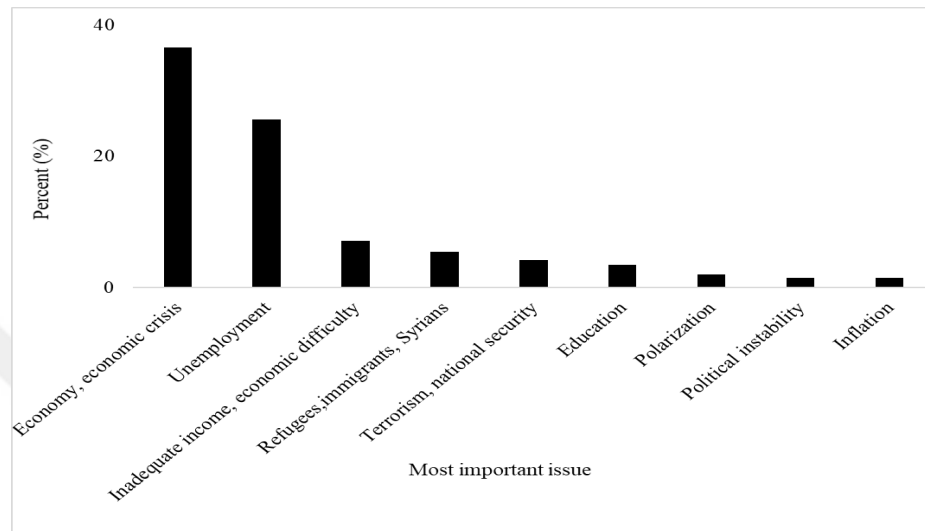


Figure 3.10: The most important problems of Turkey

Figure 3.10 indicates that over 70% of the respondents consider the economy or an issue related to the economy as the most important problem of Turkey as of summer 2019. While 37% percent of them report that they consider the economy in general or economic crisis as the most important problem, 26% consider unemployment, 7% inadequate incomes or economic difficulties, and 1.5% inflation as the most significant problem of Turkey. Following the economy are issues related to refugees/immigrants/Syrians, terrorism/ national security, education, polarization, and political instability categories with 5%, 4%, 4%, 2%, and 1.5%, respectively. Though when calculated, the total percentages of categories other than the economy category does not exceed 30%, which emphasizes the importance of the Turkish economy during this period.

Figure 3.11 details the sociotropic economic evaluations of Turkish voters. The pollsters first asked the respondents how they would assess the situation of the Turkish economy in the last twelve months. Right after that, they asked about their opinions on the Turkish economy in the next twelve months. Figure 13.3 reveals that 39% of the respondents argue that the economy has gotten much worse, while 32% contend that the

economy has gotten somewhat worse, and 21% of them consider that the economy stayed about the same. Overall, 71% of respondents report that the economy of Turkey deteriorated, which is a concerning statistic. On the other hand, 7% of respondents state that the Turkish economy has gotten somewhat better, and only 1% of them declare that the economy of Turkey was gotten much better.

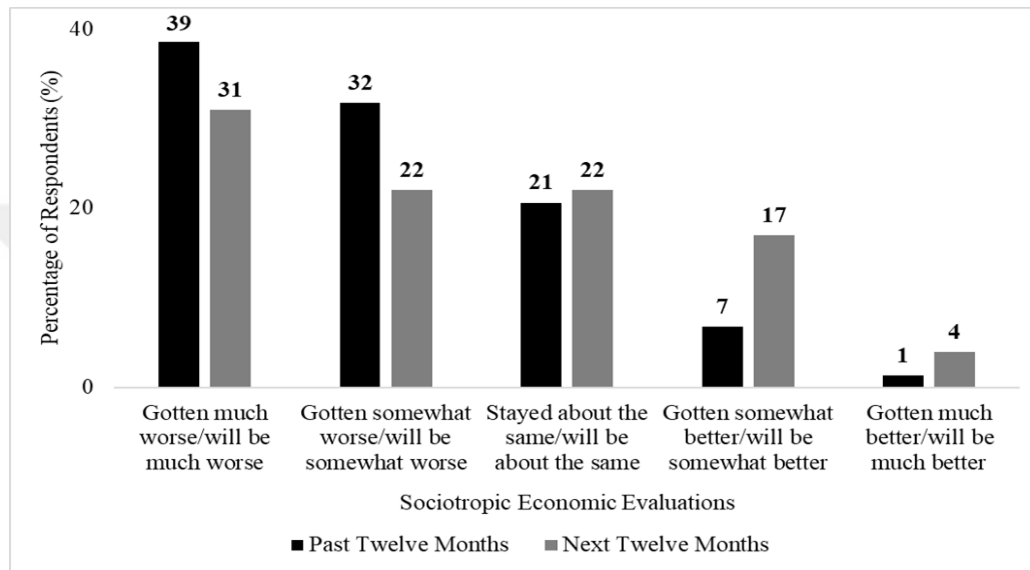


Figure 3.11: Sociotropic economic evaluations of Turkish voters

Considering the prospective sociotropic economic evaluations of the voters, while 31% report that the economy will be much worse, 22% consider that it will be somewhat worse. When compared with retrospective evaluations, prospective sociotropic evaluations of citizens are relatively better given that only 53% think the economy will deteriorate in the next year, while this ratio is 71% in the retrospective economic evaluations. Likewise, 21% of voter anticipate that the economy will be better in the next year, whilst this percentage is only 8 when asked about the last year.

Another question in the survey asked which of the following best described the state of the Turkish economy: that the economy is (i) shrinking rapidly, (ii) somewhat shrinking, (iii) stagnant, (iv) somewhat growing, and (v) growing rapidly. Figure 3.12 summarizes the answers of the respondents. While 30% of them consider the Turkish

economy as shrinking rapidly, 26% of them thought that it was somewhat shrinking, and 30% report that it is in a stagnation period. Though 9% think that the Turkish economy somewhat grows and 2% assumes it grows rapidly, overall, 86% of the survey sample reckon that the Turkish economy either shrinks or it stagnates. These results confirm that the economic opinions of the Turkish citizens overlap with the economic situation of the country in the summer of 2019, the period that the Turkish economy struggled.

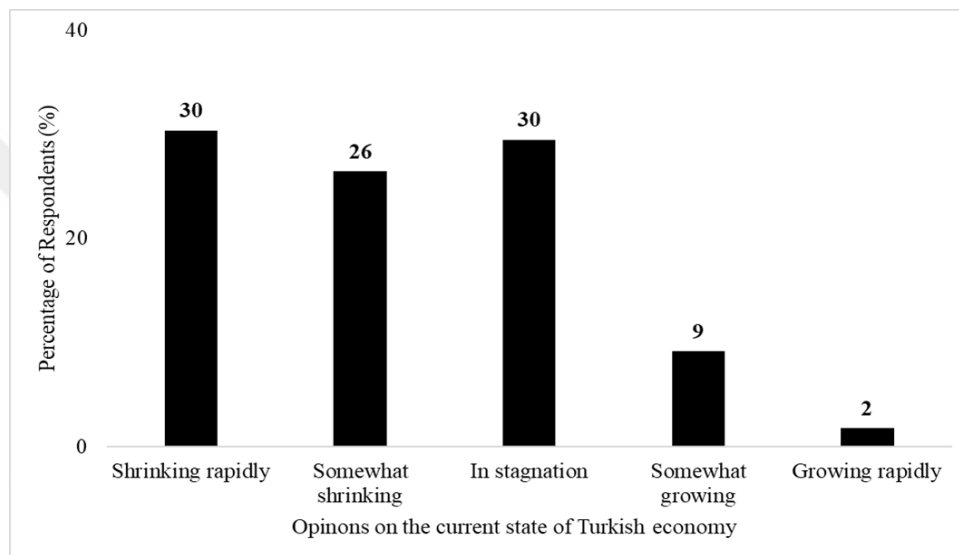


Figure 3.12: Opinions on current state of Turkish economy

Which economic issues do voters consider as the most urgent to respond? To understand this, the pollsters provided several economic policy options, which were reducing inflation, reducing unemployment, reducing income inequality, increasing GDP per capita, and reducing interest rates, to the respondents and asked to choose one. Figure 3.13 displays that while 20% of the respondents opt for reducing inflation, 38% of them prefer reducing unemployment, 20% favor reducing income inequality, 8% weigh increasing the GDP per capita, and 8% to reduce interest rates. Recalling from Figure 10 that the unemployment is one of the specific issues related to the Turkish economy that respondents deem as most challenging, observing that they also designate it as the most urgent issue to respond is in parallel with the earlier findings.

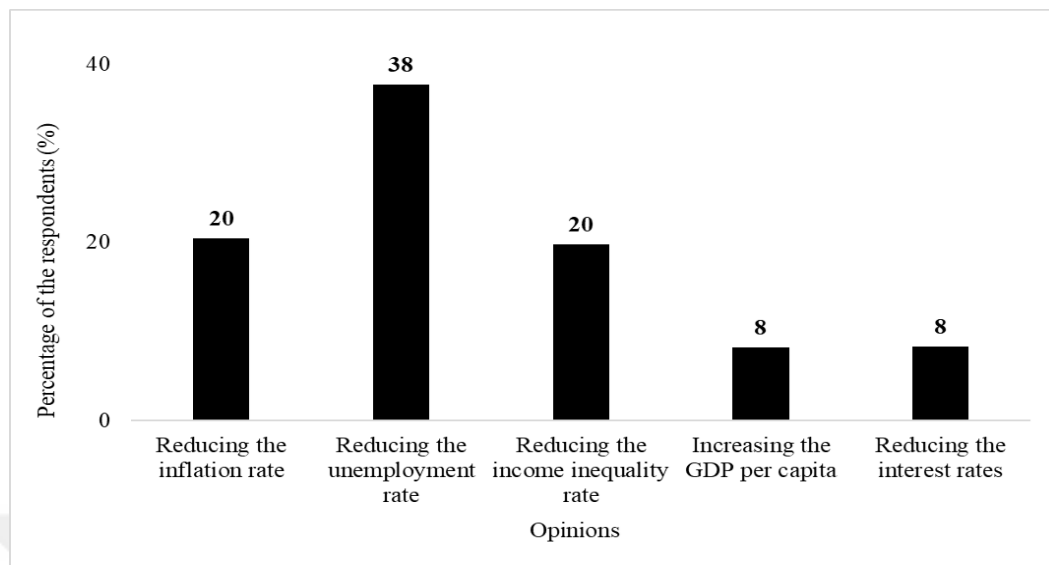


Figure 3.13: Opinions on priorities for the economy

The participants hold more positive pocketbook evaluations in both the retrospective and prospective levels, in contrast to the sociotropic evaluations. Figure 3.14 depicts that 33% of respondents report that their economic situation got much worse; 32% of them evaluate their financial situation as slightly grown worse. While 25% of the participants consider that their economic situation stayed about the same, only 8% of them think that their financial situation got either better or somewhat better. Regarding the prospective pocketbook evaluations, while 38% of the respondents consider that their financial situation either will be much worse or somewhat worse, 27% of them think that their situation will be about the same. On the other hand, 33% of them anticipates that they will be either somewhat or much better in the next year.

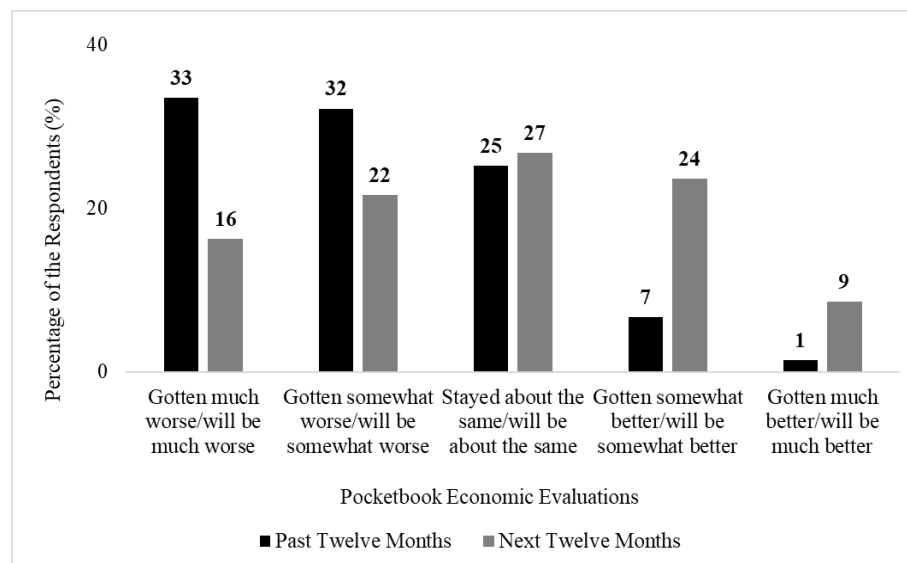


Figure 3.14: Pocketbook economic evaluations of Turkish voters

Another indicator of pocketbook economic evaluations is to ask respondents whether they were able to save any money, or they had to get a loan to cover their costs in the last twelve months. To measure this issue, the pollsters asked the participants to choose any of the categories in Figure 3.15. While 50% of the respondents declare that they were not able to save money to emphasize they barely covered their expenses, 24% report that they had to get a loan. Moreover, 13% of them indicate that they had to run up their savings, and 7% had to both get a loan and run up their savings. Only 6% of the respondents were able to save money. These results also illustrate the degree the Turkish economy strived during the past 1.5 year.

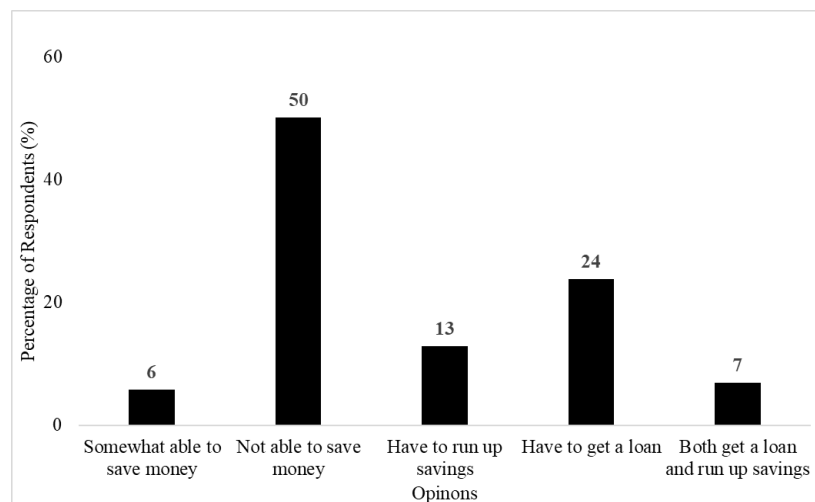


Figure 3.15: Personal economic situations of respondents in the last year

Besides retrospective and prospective evaluations, the respondents were also asked about their satisfaction with their current economic situation. The pollsters asked them to locate their answers on a scale from 0, for not satisfied to 10, for very satisfied. Though the most preferred category is “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied,” the majority of the answers scatter through the left side of Figure 3.16, which means that 50% of the participants consider their economic situation as not satisfying. Meanwhile, only 24% of them report that they are satisfied with their finances, which reveals that people that were not happy with their economic situation are twice as the ones that satisfied. Hence, the results presented in Figure 3.16 also affirm the earlier findings.

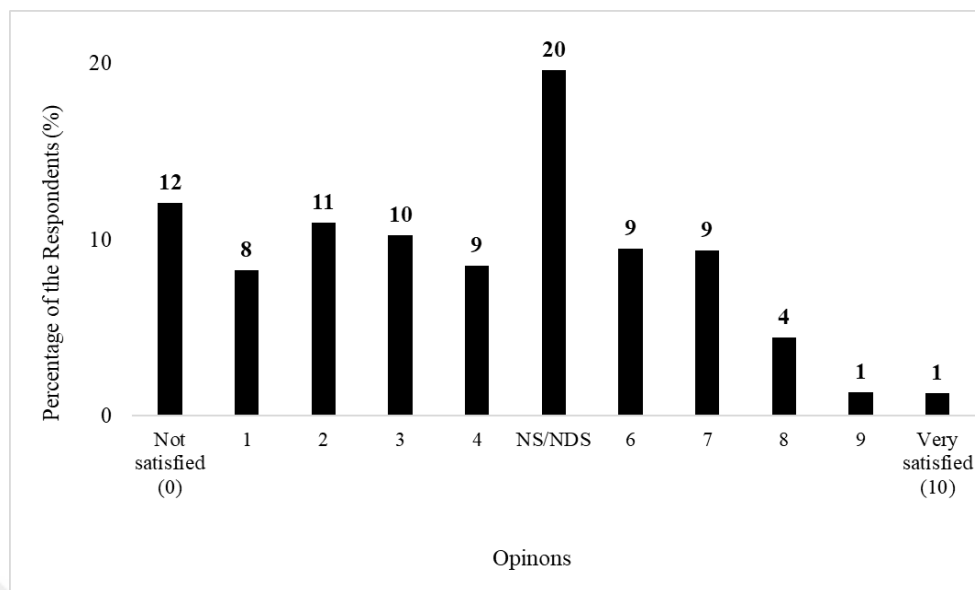


Figure 3.16: Personal Economic Satisfaction of Turkish Voters

The survey results discussed so far can be summarized as follows: in parallel with the economic deterioration the Turkish economy experienced beforehand, and through the fieldwork period, the majority of the respondents deem the economy as the most important problem the country had. Though they especially consider decreasing the high level of the unemployment rate as most urgent to respond, they also report that they were aware of the fact that the Turkish economy is shrinking. Furthermore, they also find the situation of the Turkish economy and their finances were gotten worse compared to the previous year. Nevertheless, their opinions regarding the next year are comparatively more positive than retrospective ones in which the majority of them were not able to save any money and not satisfied with their economic situation.

To measure how economic news reporting fits into these discussions, or in other words, how news reporting influences the economic evaluations of the citizens discussed above, the newspaper reading habits of the respondents were also analyzed. Figure 3.17 presents the distribution of the newspaper reading habits of Turkish voters to obtain political information. The data reveal that 67% of the respondents do not read newspapers at all to receive political information, and only 33% of them prefer reading newspapers: 11% of voters read newspapers every day to be informed about political issues, while 8%

read two or three times a week, 5% once a week, 4% two or three times a month, and 5% once a month.

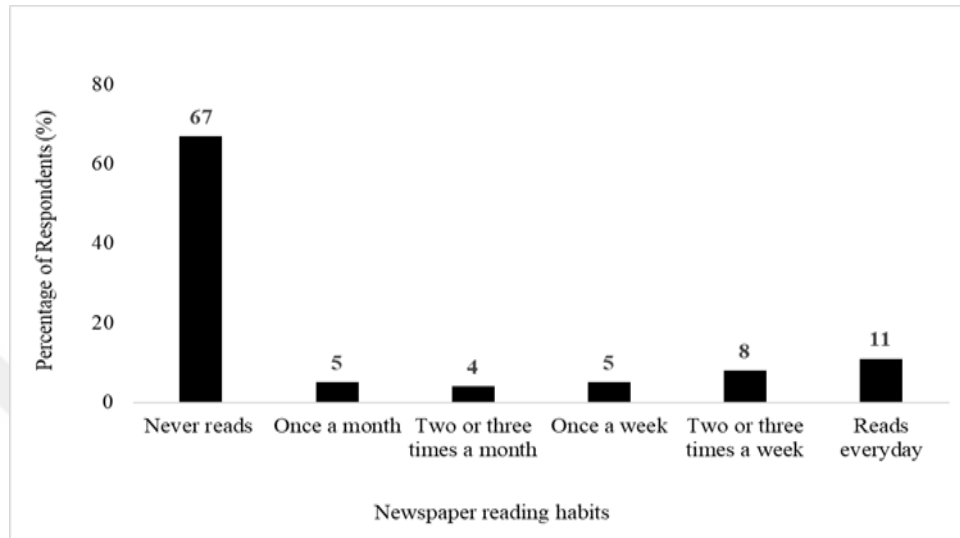


Figure 3.17: The distribution of Turkish voters that prefer newspapers to receive political information

What percent of this 33% read the six newspapers analyzed in the newspaper content analysis? As indicated in Figure 3.18, 64% of the respondents, who read newspapers to receive political information, prefer one of the publications of the content analysis. While 24% of the respondents read Cumhuriyet to get political information, 3% of them read Sözcü, 3% read Milliyet, 12% read Hürriyet, 11% read Posta, and 11% read Sabah.



Figure 3.18: The distribution of Turkish voters that read six newspapers to receive political information

On the other hand, since the main object of the thesis is to explore how news reporting influences voters' economic evaluations, having such a huge portion of respondents that declare that they do not read a newspaper to receive political information could be a disadvantage. To account for this issue, we analysed newspaper reading habits of the respondents. Unlike newspaper-reading data, the majority of the respondents declare that they prefer TV channels to be informed about political developments considering that only 7% report they do not watch TV. Among the remaining 93%, 72% watch TV every day to receive political information while 13% watch two or three times a week, 4% once a week, 1% two or three times a week, and 2 % once a month as Figure 3.19 illustrates.

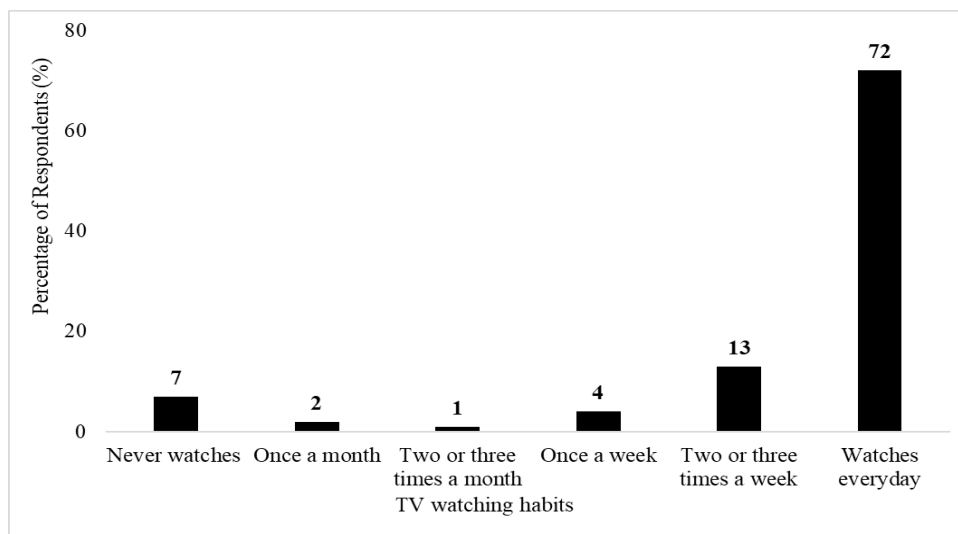


Figure 3.19: The distribution of Turkish voters that prefer television to receive political information

3.3 Conclusion

This chapter laid out the methodology of data collection and some descriptive results from the data collected in the study. While it detailed the newspaper content analysis, which was conducted to examine how print media reports economic news, with examples, it also introduced fundamental descriptive analyses resulted from it. The results reveal that the main topics of the newspapers are in line with the economic developments of the country. Furthermore, the news coverage tone of the newspapers is different from each other in a way that while pro-government or government-leaning newspapers mostly give space to the positive news, pro-opposition ones frequently report negative developments in the country. To understand voters' economic evaluations and their medium of political information receiving, this chapter also focused on the survey and its results. The general findings of the survey exhibit that the respondents hold negative evaluations about the Turkish economy at large. While over 70% of the respondents consider an issue related to the Turkish economy as Turkey's most important problem, 86% of them think that the Turkish economy either shrinks or stagnates. Finally, the results indicate that the television appears as the most preferred medium of receiving political information of Turkish citizens in contrast to newspapers considering 93% of the respondents assert that they watch TV to receive political information.

Chapter 4:

THE EFFECT OF MEDIA EXPOSURE ON ECONOMIC EVALUATIONS

The previous chapter revealed that there is a notable variation among newspapers in Turkey with respect to news about the economy: People who follow pro-government or government-leaning newspapers come across mostly positive aspects of the economy while people who regularly read pro-opposition newspapers face the negative sides of it. This situation, in turn, renders the tone of the news voters are exposed to highly contingent upon the newspapers they read. Furthermore, the findings of Chapter 3 exhibited that the majority of the respondents (70%) consider the economy or an issue related to the economy as the most important problem of Turkey as of summer 2019. Concerning the respondents' media consumption behavior, it appeared that even though only 33% of them report that they read newspapers to receive political information, the six newspapers examined in the content analysis form 64% of the total newspaper readers.

How does media reporting of the economy influence voters' economic evaluations in Turkey? The purpose of this chapter is to analyze whether news reporting tones of the newspapers influence people's perception of the economy, and whether newspaper reading frequency plays a role in altering these perceptions. As I discussed both in the introduction and literature review chapters extensively, there is no substantial research that links the news coverage tone of newspapers to the newspaper reading frequency on a continuous scale. To address this issue, I developed an index that takes into account actual news content and newspaper reading frequency simultaneously. This approach goes beyond categorizing newspapers dichotomously as pro-government and pro-opposition but instead focuses on actual news exposure. Furthermore, it enables us to differentiate between a faithful newspaper reader and less frequent reader, which overall provides a holistic review of news exposure in terms of both the tone and frequency.

In the remainder of this chapter, I first present the hypotheses of this study. After that, I describe the dependent variable, which is economic evaluations of Turkish citizens, independent variable (pro-government news index), and control variables. Following the variables section, I provide analyses and conclude with a discussion of the results.

4.1 Hypotheses

As discussed in the literature review, contemporary studies point out that Turkey has a polarized pluralist media model, where the media integrates into party-politics (Kaya & Çakmur, 2010; Akser & Baybars-Hawks, 2012; Oğurlu & Öncü, 2013; Çarkoğlu, Baruh & Yıldırım, 2014). Furthermore, recent research also shows that Turkey has a strong press-party parallelism, which paves the way of alignment between a group of newspapers and political party at large (Çarkoğlu & Yavuz, 2010; Çarkoğlu, Baruh & Yıldırım, 2014). We also know that the degree of being exposed to positive/negative news coverage, or namely the frequency, influences economic perceptions of citizens (Hetherington, 1996; Soroka, 2006, 2015). Following these findings, I hypothesize that:

H1: Individuals who follow pro-government media sources have a higher likelihood to positively evaluate the country's economic performance, while individuals that follow pro-opposition media sources are more likely to have negative economic evaluations. These effects should be positively correlated with individuals' frequency of media consumption.

Previous studies also illustrated that people are likely to receive information about economic conditions through newspapers and television (Kiewiet, 1983), and the media can influence their economic evaluations by framing and priming (Langley, 1995). Furthermore, the media profoundly focuses on the national economy (Nadeau et al., 1999; Hetherington, 1996; Sanders, 2000). Accordingly, I hypothesize that

H2: The impact of media consumption on economic evaluations is greater on socio-tropic evaluations than pocketbook evaluations.

To test these hypotheses, I developed different models, where I generated four economic evaluations as dependent variables, the pro-government news index as the independent variable, and nine control variables, which are presented next.

4.2 *Dependent Variables*

The dependent variables of this study are the economic evaluations of Turkish voters. To measure voters' economic evaluations, I employed four questions from the survey described earlier. The goal of these four questions was to examine voters' economic evaluations both in the sociotropic and pocketbook levels and to consider retrospective and prospective observations. As discussed in the literature review chapter, sociotropic economic evaluations focus on individuals' perceptions about the state of the country's economy while pocketbook evaluations concern their own household finances. To that end, my dependent variables consist of four economic evaluations, which are retrospective sociotropic, prospective sociotropic, retrospective pocketbook, and prospective pocketbook evaluations.

In order to create retrospective sociotropic economic evaluations, I used the question "Now, I would like to ask you some questions about the economy. Do you think the economic situation of Turkey gotten much worse, somewhat worse, stayed the same, gotten somewhat better, or gotten much better in the last year?" Respondents were presented with five answer choices ranging from "gotten much worse" (coded 1) to "gotten much better" (coded 5). In order to measure prospective sociotropic economic evaluations, I employed the question "If you consider the next year, do you think the economic situation of Turkey will be much worse, somewhat worse, will stay the same, will be somewhat better, or will be much better?" Again, the respondents were presented with five answer choices ranging from "will be much worse" (coded 1) to "will be much better" (coded 5).

Moving to pocketbook evaluations, to measure retrospective pocketbook economic evaluations, I benefited from the question, "We also would like to learn about the individual economic situations of people. How is the economic situation of your family and you today compared to the last year? Has it gotten much worse, somewhat worse, stayed the same, gotten somewhat better, or gotten much better?" Similar to the sociotropic economic evaluation variables, respondents were presented with five answer choices, which range from "gotten much worse" (coded 1) to "gotten much better" (coded 5). Finally, to measure prospective pocketbook economic evaluations, I used the question "If you consider the next year, do you think the economic situation of your family and you will be much worse, somewhat worse, will stay the same, will be somewhat better,

or much better in the last year?" Again, the respondents were presented with five answer choices, which extent from "will be much worse" (coded 1) to "will be much better" (coded 5).

Respondents' average retrospective sociotropic evaluation score was 2.0 on the 1-5 scale, highlighting that the majority of respondents thought that the economic situation of Turkey gotten worse in the past year. Their prospective sociotropic evaluations were slightly more favorable with a mean of 2.4. The average retrospective pocketbook evaluations of the respondents were also below the mean of the scale at 2.1, indicating that most respondents' household financials had deteriorated in the past year. Respondents hold the most positive evaluations for prospective pocketbook evaluations with a mean of 2.9. Thus, the majority of respondents thought that their household financials would either stay about the same or improve in the coming year.

4.3 Independent Variable

The main independent variable of the analysis is the pro-government news index. The idea behind this variable is whether news reporting tones of the newspapers have an impact on people's perceptions of the economy and whether newspaper reading frequency plays a role in these perceptions as well. The intention was to bring news coverage tones of newspapers and newspaper reading frequency together to create a continuous scale that went beyond classifying newspapers dichotomously as pro-government and pro-opposition but concentrated on actual news content. To that end, I used two questions that measure newspaper preference and newspaper reading frequency of the respondents as I benefited from the survey. Furthermore, I also utilized the news coverage tone results of the newspaper content analysis, which I explain further below.

To create the pro-government news index, first, I use the question, "Which newspaper do you most often read to follow political news?" in the survey to identify the readers of the six newspapers covered in the content analysis. After that, by using the news coverage tone percentages of newspapers, which I had gathered from the newspaper content analysis presented in Chapter 3, I subtracted the percentage of positive news from 50% for each newspaper. Recalling from Figure 4 from Chapter 3, Cumhuriyet had 5%, Hürriyet 55%, Milliyet 53%, Posta 58%, Sabah 78%, and Sözcü had 10% positive news. Using these percentages, we generated a positivity score variable by assigning -45 if the

newspaper is Cumhuriyet ($5-50 = -45$), 5 if it is Hürriyet, 3 if it is Milliyet, 8 if it is Posta, 28 if it is Sabah, and -40 if it is Sözcü.

Besides, to add the newspaper reading frequency into the equation, I used the question, "How often do you read a newspaper to follow political news?" in the survey with possible answers "never," (coded 0) "once in a month," (coded 1) "2-3 times in a month," (coded 2) "once a week," (coded 3) "2-3 times in a week," (coded 4) and "every day" (coded 5). I incorporated this frequency of reading information into the analysis by multiplying it with the positivity score and dividing the resulting variable by 100 to normalize the results. The resulting value constitutes the pro-government news index. For example, if a respondent declared that she or he read Posta once a week, her or his pro-government news index would be ($8*3/100=0.24$). Here (8) refers to the positivity score of Posta and (3) refers to reading frequency of "once a week." All respondents who declared not reading any newspaper get a pro-government news index score of 0.

Table 4.1 below gives the distribution of the pro-government news index. The table spans from -2.25 to 1.4, in which the value -2.25 corresponds to people that read Cumhuriyet newspaper every day, while the value 1.4 corresponds to people that read Sabah newspaper every day. As the values get closer to zero, the newspaper reading frequency decreases for Cumhuriyet and Sözcü newspapers. For instance, the negative values start from -2.25 and 2, and these equal to people that read Cumhuriyet and Sözcü newspaper every day. It continues with -1.8 and -1.6, which represents the readers of Cumhuriyet and Sözcü newspapers both 2-3 times in a week while two values before zero, -0.45 and 0.4, represent people read Cumhuriyet and Sözcü newspapers once in a month. In contrast, as the values move away from zero and get close to 1.4, the newspaper reading frequency increases for Milliyet, Hürriyet, Posta, and Sözcü newspapers. Overall, the pro-government news index ranges from the most frequent negative news exposure to the most frequent positive news exposure.

Table 4.1: The distribution of pro-government news index

Pro-Government News Index	Frequency	Percentage	Pro-Government News Index	Frequency	Percentage
-2.25	12	0.67	0.1	5	0.28
-2	72	4.02	0.12	3	0.17
-1.8	4	0.22	0.15	21	1.17
-1.6	51	2.85	0.16	14	0.78
-1.35	2	0.11	0.2	24	1.34
-1.2	9	0.5	0.24	13	0.73
-0.9	2	0.11	0.25	27	1.51
-0.8	14	0.78	0.28	16	0.89
-0.45	3	0.17	0.32	20	1.12
-0.4	13	0.73	0.4	18	1.01
0	1359	75.96	0.56	7	0.39
0.05	13	0.73	0.84	13	0.73
0.06	2	0.11	1.12	18	1.01
0.08	11	0.61	1.4	20	1.12
0.09	3	0.17	Total	1789	100

One issue that needs attention is the large percentage of respondents in the survey who do not prefer newspapers to follow political news (75.96%). To compensate for the pitfall resulting from the high frequency of non-newspaper readers, I created a new variable and named it pro-government news index II. To that end, I matched four newspapers with nine TV channels considering that 93% of the respondents in the survey prefer television to receive political information. To analyze TV channel preferences, I used the question, "Which TV channel do you most often watch to follow political news?" from the survey. To match newspapers with TV channels, I first identified newspaper reading preferences of TV viewers. Table 4.2 below summarizes the TV channel preferences of the readers of six newspapers. As analyses revealed, people who prefer A Haber and TRT1 channels most frequently prefer the Sabah newspaper. At the same time, most commonly, CNN Turk, Halk TV, and FOX viewers read the Sözcü newspaper. Furthermore, while ATV, Kanal D, and Show TV viewers most often read the Hürriyet newspaper, people that prefer the NTV channel to receive political news choose the Posta newspaper at large. As a result, I matched A Haber and TRT1 with Sabah, CNN Turk,

FOX, and Halk TV with Sözcü; ATV, Kanal D, and Show TV with Hürriyet; NTV with Posta. Altogether, our analysis included 95% of TV viewers in the survey.

Table 4.2: Newspaper preferences based on TV channel selection

Newspapers/T V Channels	A Haber	ATV	CNN Turk	FOX	Halk TV	Kanal D	NTV	Show TV	TRT 1
Cumhuriyet (%)	0	1	0	4	32	0	0	0	0
Hürriyet (%)	13	23	6	9	0	21	20	45	14
Milliyet (%)	0	9	0	2	0	8	5	0	3
Posta (%)	11	14	18	12	0	4	30	18	9
Sabah (%)	27	21	6	4	0	21	10	9	29
Sözcü (%)	4	0	24	44	55	4	5	9	0
Others	31	25	22	11	13	17	25	10	35
NA/NO	14	7	24	14	0	25	5	9	11

After matching the newspapers with TV channels, I created the pro-government news index II in a similar way as the pro-government news index variable. That is, I used the positivity scores of TV channels from their matched newspapers, and multiplied these scores with respondents' frequency of watching TV in the same scale as for the newspapers. This variable is applied to only those respondents who declared not reading a newspaper at all. For example, if a respondent declares that she or he does not read newspapers but watches A Haber every day, his or her pro-government news index II score would be $28 \times 5 / 100 = 1.4$.

Table 4.3 represents the distribution of the pro-government news index II variable after matching newspapers and TV channels below. Though this distribution shares the same logic with the previous one, the number of non-zero observations increased substantially with the addition of TV channel viewers, henceforth, enabling us to capture an overarching picture⁵.

⁵ The correlation coefficient between the pro-government news index and pro-government news index II is 0.43.

Table 4.3: The distribution of pro-government news index II

Pro-Government News Index II	Frequency	Percentage	Pro-Government News Index II	Frequency	Percentage
-2.25	25	1.4	0.1	6	0.34
-2	405	22.64	0.12	3	0.17
-1.8	6	0.34	0.15	26	1.45
-1.6	109	6.09	0.16	14	0.78
-1.35	5	0.28	0.2	52	2.91
-1.2	35	1.96	0.24	14	0.78
-0.9	2	0.11	0.25	130	7.27
-0.8	22	1.23	0.28	17	0.95
-0.45	3	0.17	0.32	25	1.4
-0.4	19	1.06	0.4	29	1.62
0	257	14.37	0.56	10	0.56
0.05	17	0.95	0.84	31	1.73
0.06	2	0.11	1.12	84	4.7
0.08	11	0.61	1.4	427	23.87
0.09	3	0.17	Total	1789	100

4.4 Control Variables

Considering that there might be other factors that can influence the relationship between news exposure and economic evaluations, I used control variables to account for some of them. These include age, gender, employment status, education, interest in politics, partisanship, and speaking Kurdish.

Though the age variable is straightforward, the gender variable is a dummy variable, where I coded 1 for women and 0 for men. Furthermore, I utilized the question "What is the highest education level you attained?" to create the education variable. There were six categories for the question provided by the pollsters, which are no education (1), primary school (2), secondary school (3), high school (4), either dropped out of college/continuing college (5), and university or higher degree (6). As for the unemployment variable, I used the question, "Which of the following that I will indicate is most suitable for you?" The answers provided by the pollsters were unemployed but

would like to work if found (1), student (2), apprentice, receiving vocational education (3), ill, disabled, handicapped (4), retired (5), housewife (6). To generate the unemployed variable, I created a dummy variable, where I assigned 1 if the answer is unemployed, but would like to work if found, and 0 for the rest.

Recalling from Table 3.1 from Chapter 3, while women constitute 51,9% of respondents, the average age of the sample is 42,2, and among those, 15,2% is college graduate, albeit 41,8% received primary education or below. About 10% of the respondents are unemployed and actively looking for a job.

Several studies in the literature suggest that political interest is one of the primary motivations behind news consumption; hence it can influence attentiveness to political information and alter economic evaluations (Ondercin, Garand & Crapanzano, 2011; Mondak, Mutz & Huckfeldt, 1996; Stromback, Djerf-Pierre & Shehata, 2012; Boulianne, 2011). To account for the possible influence of political interest on media consumption and economic evaluations, I generated a political interest variable. While doing so, I used the question, "In general, how close do you follow news about Turkish politics?" The answers to this question scale from 0 (do not follow) to 5 (very closely follows). About 6% of respondents stated that they do not follow news about Turkish politics at all (1), 16% said that they do not follow political news closely (2), 42% stated that they slightly follow political news (3), 23% stated that they follow political news (4), and 12% reported that they follow political news very closely (5).

Another issue contemporary research pointed out is that people self-select into media outlets, where partisanship can influence both newspaper-TV channel selection and economic evaluations (Evans & Andersen, 2006; Gerber & Huber, 2009; Çarkoğlu, Baruh & Yıldırım, 2014; Yağcı & Oyvat, 2020). I created a partisanship variable to control the impact of partisanship on media outlet selection and economic evaluations. In the process of creating the partisanship variable, I used the questions, "Which party do you feel closest?" and "Do you feel very close to this party, somewhat close, or not very close?" I first created a dummy variable and assigned 1 for people that feel closest to the AKP. After that, among those people, we identified the ones that feel very close to the AKP and assigned 1, otherwise 0. Therefore, our partisanship variable is a dummy

variable, where people who feel very close to the AKP takes the value 1, corresponding to about 22% of the respondents.⁶

To test the argument that partisanship might influence media outlet selection, I also created CHP partisanship and no partisanship (Independents) variables in addition to the AKP partisanship variable. The process of creating the CHP partisanship variable was the same as generating the AKP partisanship variable described above. On the other hand, to create the Independents variable, I utilized the question, "Do you feel close to any political party?" and created the no partisanship variable such that it is dummy, where people that do not feel close to any political party take the value of 1, and the rest is 0. About 13% of the respondents feel very close to the CHP, while 32% of them do not feel close to any political party.

After creating these two variables, I first analyzed the influence of partisanship on newspaper selection. The analysis shows a sharp distinction between AKP and CHP partisans as to their newspaper preferences to follow political news. As Table 4.4 indicates below, about 58% of AKP partisans reads a newspaper that is either pro-government or government leaning (Sabah, Hürriyet, Milliyet, or Posta) to follow political news, this percentage is drastically lower for CHP partisans (14%). On the opposite side, about 68% of the CHP partisans prefer either Sözcü or Cumhuriyet, the newspapers prominently known as pro-opposition, to follow political news while only 1% of AKP partisans prefer these newspapers. Furthermore, the newspaper selection of people that do not identify themselves with any political party does not designate meaningful association with any particular newspaper but instead spread along four newspapers. Henceforth, Table 3 exhibits that our results support the previous studies, which advocate that partisanship has an impact on media outlet selection of voters (Evans & Andersen, 2006; Gerber & Huber, 2009; Çarkoğlu, Baruh & Yıldırım, 2014; Yağcı & Oyvat, 2020).

⁶ I also generated a past vote choice variable to control for partisanship. I operationalized it as a dummy variable, in which people who voted for AKP in the Parliamentary election of June 2018 took the value 1 and all the other 0. The results of my analyses remained the same as the partisanship variable.

Table 4.4: Newspaper selection and partisanship

Newspapers	AKP partisans (%)	CHP partisans (%)	Independents (%)
Sabah	30	0	13
Hürriyet	13	3	15
Milliyet	2	3	2
Posta	13	8	12
Sözcü	0	63	17
Cumhuriyet	1	5	3
Other newspapers	28	8	22
NA/NO	13	11	17

I also investigated whether the claim that partisanship can play a role in news outlet selection is valid when examined through TV channels. Thereby I analyzed the most frequent TV channel selection of AKP and CHP partisans as well as of independents to follow political news. Table 4.5 shows similar findings as of Table 4.4 in the sense that AKP and CHP partisans prominently differ in TV channel selection as to be informed about political news. About 73% of the respondents, who feel very close to AKP, follow a TV channel (ATV, A Haber, TRT 1) that is conspicuously known as pro-government, albeit this percentage is only 4% among CHP partisans. Despite the contrary, about 88% of the respondents who strongly associate themselves with CHP prefer a TV channel (FOX, Halk TV) that is recognized as pro-opposition while only 3% of AKP partisans to do so. The analysis also indicates that 41% of the people that do not feel close to any political party prefers FOX TV to follow political news. Hence, we can conclude that the claim previously made by earlier studies that partisanship can influence news outlet selection holds accurate when analyzed for TV channel selection. As a result, accompanied by newspaper selection results, our analyses provide substantial support for earlier studies that upheld the influence of partisanship on media outlet selection.

Table 4.5: TV channel selection and partisanship

TV Channels	AKP partisans (%)	CHP partisans (%)	Independents (%)
A Haber	28	1	6
ATV	34	2	13
TRT 1	11	1	8
Kanal D	3	1	8
Show TV	4	3	4
NTV	2	1	3
CNN Turk	3	1	2
FOX	3	80	41
Halk TV	0	8	2
Other TV channels	12	1	9
NA/NO	1	2	5

Finally, to account for the ethnic cleavages in Turkey, we generated a dummy variable, in which we coded 1 for individuals speaking Kurdish and 0 for everyone else. About 16% of respondents in our sample declared speaking Kurdish.

4.5 Analyses

To examine the relationship between news coverage tone, newspaper reading frequency, and economic evaluations, and to test the proposed hypotheses, I utilize ordinary least square (OLS) regression model. Primarily, the results of the first model, which we only examined newspaper readers, are presented. Subsequently, the results of the second model, which we added TV viewers to the previous model, are shown.

4.5.1 Newspaper readers

Table 4.6 reveals that the variable pro-government news index has a statistically significant effect on all economic evaluations, which are retrospective sociotropic, prospective sociotropic, retrospective pocketbook, and prospective pocketbook evaluations, notwithstanding the impact is slightly weak for the latter. The AKP partisanship variable, on the other hand, is statistically significant at 0.001 level for all economic evaluations, albeit the variable political interest is only significant for the retrospective sociotropic evaluations. Similar to the political interest, gender variable is also only statistically significant for the retrospective sociotropic evaluations as women tend to more negatively evaluate the economic situation of Turkey in the previous year by .10 compared to men, all else held constant. Though age is statistically significant for both retrospective sociotropic and prospective pocketbook evaluations at 0.05 level, the impact is near zero.

Table 4.6: The impact of newspaper exposure on economic evaluations

VARIABLES	(1) Retrospective Sociotropic	(2) Prospective Sociotropic	(3) Retrospective Pocketbook	(4) Prospective Pocketbook
Pro-government news index	0.25*** (0.04)	0.28*** (0.05)	0.26*** (0.04)	0.16** (0.06)
AKP partisanship	0.86*** (0.06)	1.24*** (0.07)	0.81*** (0.06)	0.57*** (0.09)
Unemployed	-0.08 (0.08)	-0.10 (0.10)	-0.13 (0.08)	0.23* (0.12)
Education status	0.01 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	0.01 (0.03)
Gender	-0.10* (0.05)	-0.01 (0.06)	-0.02 (0.05)	0.003 (0.07)
Age	0.003* (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	0.005* (0.002)
Speaking Kurdish	-0.11 (0.07)	-0.12 (0.09)	-0.13 (0.07)	-0.11 (0.10)
Interest in politics	-0.06** (0.02)	0.01 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.07* (0.03)
Constant	1.82*** (0.15)	1.98*** (0.18)	1.74*** (0.15)	2.64*** (0.21)
Observations	1,310	1,279	1,310	1,284
R-squared	0.20	0.24	0.18	0.06

OLS regressions with standard errors in parentheses.

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

The results of the regression indicate that when all else held constant, the more frequently people read pro-government newspapers, their economic evaluations tend to become more positive; thus, confirming hypothesis 1. Furthermore, the impact of the pro-government news index on economic evaluations is very similar for all economic evaluations as the coefficients are very close to each other. This suggests that despite news coverage tonality and newspaper reading frequency has a statistically significant

influence on all economic evaluations, our findings do not indicate any substantial impact differentiation among economic evaluations except for the prospective pocketbook evaluations, where the impact is relatively weak yet scientifically significant. As a result, these results reject hypothesis 2 since we do not systematically observe higher impact on retrospective evaluations over prospective ones.

Furthermore, our findings confirm the contemporary studies, which assert that partisanship plays a role in citizens' economic evaluations (Evans & Andersen, 2006; Gerber & Huber, 2009; Çarkoğlu, Baruh & Yıldırım, 2014; Yağcı & Oyvat, 2020). All else held constant, the more people closely identify themselves with AKP, the more they likely to evaluate the economy positively. Again, the impact is different for sociotropic and pocketbook evaluations as AKP partisanship variable unravel. The coefficient of the AKP partisanship variable is, on average higher in sociotropic evaluations than in pocketbook evaluations, which might be explained by the fact that voters can be more likely to associate the economic performance of the country to the ruling party than their economic situations.

As discussed above, recent scholarship contests that political interest is one of the essential inspirations driving news consumption, and consequently impacts attentiveness to political information and modifies economic evaluations (Ondercin, Garand & Crapanzano, 2011; Mondak, Mutz & Huckfeldt, 1996; Stromback, Djerf-Pierre & Shehata, 2012; Boulianne, 2011). Our results, nonetheless, stipulate that political interest has a statistically significant impact only on retrospective sociotropic economic evaluations. As all else held constant, the more people closely follow news about Turkish politics, the more they tend to negatively assess the economic condition of Turkey for the previous year by .06.

In sum, our analysis concludes that positive news exposure has a statistically significant influence on people's economic evaluations even after controlled for partisanship, unemployment, education, gender, age, speaking Kurdish, and political interest.

4.5.2 *Newspaper readers and TV viewers*

As clarified earlier, due to the high frequency of non-newspaper readers, we matched four newspapers with nine TV channels to add TV viewers into the equation and re-ran our analyses.

As indicated in Table 4.7, our analyses reveal a very similar picture with the earlier results. The variables pro-government news index and AKP partisanship are still statistically significant in all observations, and age variable is still significant in retrospective sociotropic and prospective pocketbook economic evaluations, despite the impact is near zero. The results indicate that when all else held constant, people, who come across to positive news more frequently, are more likely to hold positive economic evaluations at every level, both retrospectively and prospectively; thus, still confirming hypothesis 1, yet the impact is weaker for prospective pocketbook evaluations. Furthermore, regardless of the fact that the impact is weak, what is intriguing for us is that people that are unemployed are more likely to positively evaluate their own economic situation for the next year by .23 in contrast to employed people, when all else held constant according to Table 6.

Table 4.7: Results of pro-government news index II and economic evaluations

VARIABLES	(1) Retrospective Sociotropic	(2) Prospective Sociotropic	(3) Retrospective Pocketbook	(4) Prospective Pocketbook
Pro-government news index II	0.20*** (0.02)	0.25*** (0.03)	0.20*** (0.02)	0.09** (0.03)
AKP Partisanship	0.69*** (0.06)	1.03*** (0.08)	0.64*** (0.07)	0.51*** (0.09)
Unemployed	-0.09 (0.08)	-0.11 (0.10)	-0.14 (0.08)	0.23* (0.12)
Education Status	0.01 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	0.01 (0.03)
Gender	-0.07 (0.05)	0.03 (0.06)	0.01 (0.05)	0.02 (0.07)
Age	0.004** (0.001)	0.002 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)	0.005* (0.002)
Speaking Kurdish	-0.02 (0.07)	-0.01 (0.09)	-0.03 (0.07)	-0.06 (0.10)
Political Interest	-0.06** (0.02)	0.01 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.07* (0.03)
Constant	1.88*** (0.14)	2.05*** (0.18)	1.81*** (0.15)	2.69*** (0.21)
Observations	1,310	1,279	1,310	1,284
R-squared	0.23	0.26	0.20	0.06

OLS regressions with standard errors in parentheses.

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Additionally, the impact of the pro-government news index and AKP partisanship variables became less robust in all economic evaluations considering the decrease in the coefficients of both variables. However, the results are still in line with recent studies, which attest that partisanship influences citizens' economic evaluations⁷ (Evans & Andersen, 2006; Gerber & Huber, 2009; Çarkoğlu, Baruh & Yıldırım, 2014; Yağcı & Oyvat, 2020)

⁷ When we added CHP partisanship and left-right self-placement variables into our models, the results remained substantively similar though the impacts on prospective evaluations are weaker, as presented in the appendix.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to examine the relationship between media consumption and voters' economic evaluations in Turkey. Considering that there is no substantial amount of research that combines the news coverage tone of newspapers and newspaper reading frequency on a continuous scale, I developed a pro-government news index that uses data from newspaper content analysis and the survey described in Chapter 3. This index provides a novel approach since it takes into account actual news content and newspaper reading frequency concurrently. On the other hand, one pitfall of this model was the lower percentage of people who prefer newspapers to receive political news is. To compensate for the high number of non-newspaper readers, I developed another index and named it pro-government news index II.

Both of our analysis showed that although the partisanship is an essential determinant of media outlet selection and economic evaluations, news coverage tone and newspaper reading frequency plays a crucial role in altering citizens' economic assessments in Turkey. Notwithstanding, what is important to note that contemporary research highlights that people self-select into media outlets, where partisanship can influence both newspaper selection and economic evaluations (Evans & Andersen, 2006; Çarkoğlu, Baruh & Yıldırım, 2014). Despite the fact that we controlled for partisanship and last vote choice, our models might not capture all relevant self-selection mechanisms since this thesis is not an experimental study. Therefore, our results require cautious interpretation.

Chapter 5:

CONCLUSION

5.1 *Overview of the Study and Implications*

Economic voting theory holds that economic conditions in a given country play a crucial role in the voting behavior of people. The fundamental idea behind the economic voting theory is that voters are more likely to vote in favor of the incumbent when the economy prospers than when it suffers. Furthermore, scholars from various backgrounds have investigated how the media influences voters' economic perceptions and contributes to actual vote choice. This is because economic news reporting by the media can influence people's perceptions and their vote choice thanks to media's ability to set the political agenda and frame the political discourse (Nadeau et al., 1999; Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2000; Sanders, 2000).

On the other hand, this thesis argued that despite the achievements of political communication studies in Turkey as they used newspaper content analysis as a method to contemplate numerous issues in Turkish politics, the inquiry of economic news reporting and its influence on voters' economic evaluations has received relatively less attention. To tackle this issue, this thesis investigated whether media reporting of the economy influences voters' economic evaluations in Turkey. Accordingly, it systematically analyzed to what extent news reporting tones of the newspapers influence voters' economic perceptions, and whether newspaper reading frequency alters them. To do so, I introduced an index, and employed it as a main independent variable, which combines actual economic news content and newspaper reading frequency to study the research question of how media reporting of the economy influences voters' economic sentiments. What this approach brings novel in comparison to the previous studies, I argued in Chapter 4 thoroughly, is that it transcends bifurcation of newspapers as pro-government and pro-opposition but pivots on actual news exposure. To create the pro-government news index, I utilized both news coverage tone results of the newspaper content analysis and two survey questions, which measure newspaper preference and newspaper reading frequency of the respondents in the survey.

On the other hand, the survey results exhibited that the majority of the respondents do not prefer newspapers to follow political news (about 76%), which can be considered

as a possible limitation of the study considering that the pro-government news index only includes 14% of the respondents that as a result can restrict the ability to draw generalizable conclusions. Though I discuss this issue in the next section at large, to address the shortcoming resulted from the high frequency of non-newspaper readers, I created a new variable and named it pro-government news index II, in which I matched four newspapers with nine TV channels based on the survey results indicate that the respondents prefer television to follow political news overwhelmingly (about 93%). After I matched newspapers with TV channels, I executed the same process to generate the pro-government news index II as I did with the pro-government news variable.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the data of this study composed of a systematic content analysis of newspaper reporting of the economy and a nationally representative survey, both were disseminated as part of the TUBITAK-funded project (No. 217K178) Economic Voting Behavior in Turkey. While the newspaper content analysis aimed to examine how economic developments in Turkey reflected by the print media, the primary purpose of utilizing the survey data was to discern economic evaluations of voters and their medium of political information.

Among the prominent descriptive findings of newspaper content analysis is that there is a notable variance on how different newspapers present the economy to the public in a way that voters' who prefer pro-government or government-leaning publications frequently confront with positive aspects of the economy, whereas voters' who regularly read pro-opposition newspapers encounter with the negative sides of it For instance, Cumhuriyet and Sözcü, the newspapers that are mostly classified as pro-opposition, massively present economic news negatively (Cumhuriyet with 82% and Sözcü with 71%) and give little space to positive news (Cumhuriyet with 5% and Sözcü with 10%) Sabah, a pro-government newspaper, generally reports news in a positive tone (78%). Also, Milliyet, Hürriyet, and Posta, the newspapers are generally known as government-leaning, also reflect the economy in a positive tone (Hürriyet 55%, Milliyet 53 %, Posta 58) but not as strong as Sabah. Correspondingly, these findings also supported the earlier studies, which advocate that there is a press-party parallelism in Turkey, in which newspapers and political parties align together to a high degree (Çarkoğlu & Yavuz, 2010; Çarkoğlu, Baruh & Yıldırım, 2014).

To examine the relationship between news coverage tone, newspaper reading frequency, and economic evaluations, and to test the hypotheses, I applied ordinary least square (OLS) regression model. First, we only examined newspaper readers as we run our analysis with the pro-government news index variable. The results unveiled that the pro-government news index has a statistically significant effect for all economic evaluations, which are retrospective sociotropic, prospective sociotropic, retrospective pocketbook, and prospective pocketbook economic evaluations, hence confirming the hypothesis 1. Notwithstanding, the findings do not show any substantial impact differentiation among economic evaluations since the coefficients are very close to each other except the prospective pocketbook economic evaluations, in which the impact is relatively weaker but still statistically significant. Hence, the results reject hypothesis 2 as we do not systematically observe a higher impact on retrospective evaluations over prospective ones, and sociotropic evaluations over pocketbook ones. Furthermore, the results of our second model, in which I re-ran the analysis with the pro-government news index II variable (including TV viewers), still confirmed hypothesis 1 and rejected hypothesis 2, hence displayed a similar picture to the findings of the first model.

In sum, this thesis concludes that positive news exposure has a statistically significant impact on people's economic evaluations even after controlling for partisanship, unemployment, education, gender, age, speaking Kurdish, and political interest. The econometric models we I considered illustrate that the more frequently people follow pro-government media sources, the more positive their economic evaluations tend to become. These effects are positively correlated with individuals' frequency of media consumption when all else held constant.

There are at least two implications of the results of this thesis that require further discussion. First, as argued in the literature review chapter, the AKP government has a strong control on state and private media in Turkey (Çarkoğlu & Yavuz, 2010; Kaya & Çakmur, 2010; Esen & Gümüşçü, 2016). Similarly, recalling from the literature chapter, out of ten most-read newspapers, nine owned by the people that are known to be associated with the government, which is the same for the TV channels as out of ten most frequently watched TV channels, nine belong to the individuals that have close ties with the government (Media Ownership Monitor, 2019). Besides, the descriptive findings of this thesis unveiled that among the six most-read newspapers, four of them generally

represent the economic news positively. This thesis also concluded that the economic news reporting of the newspapers has a statistically significant impact on influencing the economic perceptions of people. This finding has a particular implication for economic voting behavior studies as it suggests that Turkish voters could punish the government relatively less over economic decline, because newspapers frame the economic developments in the country positively based on their political affiliations with the government.

Second, the descriptive analyses of this thesis presented that people, who feel very close to the AKP either read a newspaper (about 58%) or watch a TV channel (85%) that is prominently known as pro-government or government leaning. In contrast, people that feel very close to the CHP either read a newspaper (about 68%) or watch a TV channel (87%) that is prominently known as pro-opposition. Adding this to the earlier finding of large discrepancies among newspapers as to how they present the economic news based on their political affiliations, this parallelism between readership/viewership and media outlets can further steer the political polarization as media outlets present different economic realities.

5.2 *Limitations of the Study and Future Research*

Four issues can be considered as the possible drawbacks of this thesis. The first one is the high frequency of non-newspaper readers in the first analysis, the second is the limited time of the newspaper coding period, and the third is the economic content differentiation among newspapers, and finally, the self-selection into media outlets. In the remainder of this chapter, I first explain these problems and ultimately conclude with a remark on the future research.

As discussed previously, to compensate for the high frequency of non-newspaper readers in the survey, I had matched the positivity scores of four newspapers with nine TV channels based on the survey result that the vast majority of the respondents prefer TV to follow political news. One issue about this is that the contents of the newspapers might not reflect the actual content of their respective matched TV channels, as the reporting of A Haber, and TRT 1, for example, might not necessarily overlap with that of Sabah. Nevertheless, given that there is a media ownership concentration in Turkey, that is newspapers, and TV channels are owned by large media companies such as Turkuvaz

Media owns Sabah, ATV, and A Haber; Demirören Group owns Milliyet, Hürriyet, Posta, Kanal D, and CNN Turk, it is likely that newspaper and TV channel contents commonly overlap, but this study did not measure it particularly.

The second limitation is that the newspaper content analysis period took place between November 15, 2018, and February 16, 2019, in which newspapers were coded only for three months, and the total data included 917 observations. It can be argued that the newspaper content analysis period covered a limited period. Hence its results might represent period-specific economic developments and not reveal a long-term pattern, which could have a more substantial impact on vote choice.

One other limitation is that this study did not measure how much different newspapers devote space to the economic news. It can be considered a possible shortcoming because, for instance, Posta newspaper might only have five economic news in a day, but Cumhuriyet newspaper can cover ten economic news daily. In that case, the exposure to the economic news is not the same for a person who reads Posta every day, and for another person that reads Cumhuriyet daily. This differentiation, in return, can influence their economic evaluations.

Fourth, contemporary scholarship advocated that people self-select into media outlets, in which partisanship can impact both newspaper-TV channel selection and formation of economic evaluations (Evans & Andersen, 2006; Gerber & Huber, 2009; Çarkoğlu, Baruh & Yıldırım, 2014; Yağcı & Oyvat, 2020). This premise is particularly significant for this thesis, as it can produce an endogeneity problem. To investigate the argument that whether partisanship influences media outlet selection, I created AKP partisanship, CHP partisanship and no partisanship (Independents) variables, and analyzed the influence of partisanship on newspaper and TV channel selections as explained in Chapter 4. Correspondingly, our analysis provided substantial evidence for earlier studies that maintained the influence of partisanship on media outlet selection.

Nonetheless, to control for the possible impact of partisanship on media outlet selection, I created an AKP partisanship variable by using the questions "Which party do you feel closest?" and "Do you feel very close to this party, somewhat close, or not very close?", in which people who feel very close to the AKP took the value of 1 and the rest 0. I added this variable to both of the regression models, and the results exhibited that the pro-government news index and pro-government news index II still have a statistically

significant impact on all four economic evaluations even after controlled for partisanship, even though the AKP partisanship variable is also statistically significant.

Furthermore, I also created a past vote choice variable to control for the possible influence of partisanship on media outlet selection. I generated it as a dummy variable, in which people who voted for AKP in the Parliamentary election of June 2018 took the value 1, and all the other 0. The results of my analyses remained the same as the results of the previous partisanship variable and this thesis concluded that despite the partisanship is a significant determinant of media outlet selection and economic evaluations, news coverage tone and newspaper reading frequency plays a crucial role in altering citizens' economic assessments in Turkey.

On the other hand, these mechanisms do not fully account for the possible influence of partisanship over media outlet selection and economic evaluations. As explained above, the partisanship variable I created is a dichotomous one, but the strength of the partisanship can be continuous, in which it can influence the newspaper reading/TV watching frequency and economic evaluations. For instance, an AKP partisan can read Sabah every day because she feels closer herself to AKP than the other AKP partisan read Sabah once a week, who still feel close to the AKP, but not as much. Nevertheless, the economic evaluations of that person who read Sabah every day can be more positive than the person read Sabah once a week not because of the high frequency of Sabah readership, but because of her strong AKP partisanship. Therefore, it is highly important to note that this thesis is not an experimental study, and our models have limited capability of capturing all relevant self-selection mechanisms, which obligates that the result of this study should be interpreted cautiously.

In conclusion, even though various studies in literature argue that long-term ideological orientations based on left-right self-placement is more salient in influencing vote choice of Turkish voters' than the short-term evaluations of the economic performance of the incumbent (Çarkoğlu, 2008; Çarkoğlu 2012), there is an abundance of prior research in economic voting literature advocating that the economy is one of the decisive factors of voting behavior. Furthermore, this thesis showed that news reporting of the economy by media outlets influences past and future economic evaluations of the respondents both in the country and individual levels. On the other hand, this thesis did not examine how these perceptions turn into actual vote choice. Considering that the

Turkish economy has been suffering significantly since 2018, and the results of this thesis revealed that more than 70% of the respondents consider an issue related to the economy as the most important problem Turkey faces in the summer of 2019, it can be worthwhile to revisit how ideological dispositions and economic evaluations influence the vote choice of Turkish citizens. Further, future studies can operationalize newspaper reading frequency differently. In this study, we measured newspaper reading frequency such that we assigned 0 for people never read newspapers, 1 for people reading newspapers once in a month, 2 for two-three times in a month, 3 for once a week, 4 for two-three times in a week, and 5 for every day. Nevertheless, we did not take into account, for instance, the ratio for reading newspapers in a week to reading newspapers every day. Future studies can develop models that closely capture this difference in frequency and weight the frequency variable accordingly. Moreover, it still remains unclear the endogeneity problem emerged from the possible influence of partisanship over media outlet selection and economic evaluations. The results of this research exhibit that partisanship in fact play statistically significant role in determining economic evaluations of the respondents as the variable is significant for all four economic evaluations. Acknowledging that the overwhelming majority of the AKP partisans (CHP partisans) prefer newspapers/TV channels that are associated with pro-government (pro-opposition), there is a need of generating new models to understand the relationship between partisanship, media outlet selection, and economic evaluations as I hope the findings of this thesis will be deliberated in further research.

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Appendix A: Results of pro-government news index and economic evaluations with left-right self-placement and CHP partisanship variables

VARIABLES	(1) Retrospective Sociotropic	(2) Prospective Sociotropic	(3) Retrospective Pocketbook	(4) Prospective Pocketbook
Pro-government news index	0.12* (0.05)	0.11 (0.07)	0.14** (0.06)	0.01 (0.07)
AKP partisanship	0.59*** (0.07)	0.81*** (0.09)	0.65*** (0.08)	0.34*** (0.10)
Unemployed	-0.01 (0.10)	-0.10 (0.12)	-0.10 (0.10)	0.21 (0.14)
Education Status	0.02 (0.02)	0.03 (0.03)	0.04 (0.02)	0.03 (0.03)
gender	-0.06 (0.06)	0.09 (0.07)	0.00 (0.06)	-0.04 (0.08)
Age	0.01** (0.002)	0.01 (0.002)	0.01 (0.002)	0.01* (0.002)
Speaking Kurdish	-0.10 (0.08)	-0.08 (0.11)	-0.14 (0.09)	-0.09 (0.12)
Interest in Politics	-0.05* (0.03)	0.05 (0.04)	0.00 (0.03)	-0.05 (0.04)
Left-Right Self-Placement	0.07*** (0.01)	0.09*** (0.02)	0.03** (0.01)	0.04** (0.02)
CHP Partisanship	-0.27* (0.09)	-0.39*** (0.12)	-0.25** (0.10)	-0.24 (0.13)
Constant	1.35*** (0.19)	1.26*** (0.25)	1.54*** (0.20)	2.35*** (0.27)
Observations	980	961	978	961
R-squared	0.28	0.30	0.20	0.08

OLS regressions with standard errors in parentheses.

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Appendix B: Results of pro-government news index II and economic evaluations with left-right self-placement and CHP partisanship variables

VARIABLES	(1) Retrospective Sociotropic	(2) Prospective Sociotropic	(3) Retrospective Pocketbook	(4) Prospective Pocketbook
Pro-government news index II	0.14*** (0.03)	0.17*** (0.04)	0.17*** (0.03)	0.03 (0.04)
AKP partisanship	0.51*** (0.08)	0.71*** (0.10)	0.55*** (0.08)	0.32** (0.11)
Unemployed	-0.04 (0.10)	-0.13 (0.12)	-0.14 (0.10)	0.21 (0.14)
Education Status	0.02 (0.02)	0.03 (0.03)	0.04 (0.02)	0.03 (0.03)
Gender	-0.04 (0.06)	0.11 (0.07)	0.03 (0.06)	-0.04 (0.08)
Age	0.01** (0.002)	0.004 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)	0.01* (0.003)
Speaking Kurdish	-0.04 (0.08)	-0.01 (0.11)	-0.06 (0.09)	-0.08 (0.12)
Interest in Politics	-0.05 (0.03)	0.05 (0.04)	0.00 (0.03)	-0.05 (0.04)
Left-Right Self-Placement	0.05*** (0.01)	0.07*** (0.02)	0.02 (0.01)	0.04* (0.02)
CHP Partisanship	-0.26** (0.09)	-0.36** (0.12)	-0.24** (0.10)	-0.23 (0.13)
Constant	1.45*** (0.19)	1.38*** (0.24)	1.67*** (0.20)	2.37*** (0.27)
Observations	980	961	978	961
R-squared	0.29	0.32	0.22	0.08

OLS regressions with standard errors in parentheses.

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05