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Canan Balkir <sup>a</sup>; Susan Banducci <sup>b</sup>; Didem Soyaltin <sup>c</sup>; Huriye Toker <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Dokuz Eylül University, İzmir, Turkey

<sup>b</sup> Exeter University, UK

<sup>c</sup> Lund University, Sweden

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# Expecting the Unforeseeable: The 2007 Turkish Elections in the Media<sup>1</sup>

CANAN BALKIR\*, SUSAN BANDUCCI\*\*, DIDEM SOYALTIN<sup>†</sup> & HURIYE TOKER\*

\*Dokuz Eylül University, İzmir, Turkey, \*\*Exeter University, UK, <sup>†</sup>Lund University, Sweden

**ABSTRACT** *This study presents an analysis of how the media reported the 2007 elections in Turkey. Past research on election campaign media coverage, particularly newspapers, suggests that the media can play an important role in informing voters. However, much of the research on campaign media coverage has focused on Western democracies with little attention paid to how features of the media system such as press regulations, ownership structures, journalistic practices, and partisan alignment in the press can both shape how election news is reported and its possible influence on voting decisions. In order to expand understanding of campaign media coverage outside Western democracies, this study examines how four Turkish newspapers covered parties and issues during the 10 weeks prior to the July 2007 elections.*

## **Introduction—The Electoral Context**

Events leading to an early election in Turkey were set in motion on April 24, 2007. After removing himself from consideration for the position of president, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced Foreign and Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Gül as the AKP's candidate for the presidential elections. There had been secularist protests against Erdoğan for his previously expressed Islamist views. Gül, who had steered Turkey's European Union accession, was seen as less confrontational than Erdoğan, but secularists were still concerned that if he was elected, the ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) would control the presidency, the government, and parliament. Furthermore, this move was criticized by the opposition as endangering Turkey's secularist state, given the escalating polarization of the existing cleavage in Turkey between the moderate Islamist government and the secularist establishment strongly entrenched in Ankara. The military moved forward, and an unusually harsh anti-government statement, which came to be known as the "e-memorandum," was issued on the general staff's website. This conflict between the military and the government garnered significant media coverage during the campaign. Council of Europe Secretary-General Terry

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*Correspondence Address:* Susan Banducci, Department of Politics, University of Exeter, Amory Building, Rennes Drive, Exeter EX4 4RJ, UK. Email: S.A.Banducci@exeter.ac.uk

Davis expressed his concern about the Turkish military's e-memorandum, saying: "It looks like a deliberate attempt by the armed forces to influence the election of a new president in Turkey. They should stay in their barracks and keep out of politics."

Thus Gül's nomination, the Constitutional Court's rejection of the parliamentary vote on his candidacy, and Gül's subsequent failure to win election in the second round of votes prompted the government to call an early general election for July 22, 2007. Parliament also approved an amendment to the Constitution allowing for the president to be elected by popular vote instead of by parliamentary ballot. Thus, after voting in parliamentary elections, people would then go to the voting booths in October, for a second time, to vote for the referendum on a constitutional amendment for the popular election of the president. The European Commission supported the early ballot as a way out of the crisis: "The European Commission welcomes early elections to ensure political stability and democratic development," said spokesman, Johannes Laitenberger. The EU described these events as "unfortunate" but supported the compromise of the early elections and the court ruling.<sup>2</sup>

In the general elections held on July 22, 2007, 14 parties and 700 independent candidates competed for the 550 seats in the Parliamentary Assembly. Voter turnout in the election was estimated to be around 80 percent, the same proportion that voted in the previous election held in 2002. Indeed, Turkey has been at a junction since the November 3, 2002 parliamentary elections, when the AKP, challenging the established political order of the country, won almost two-thirds of the seats in the parliament with just 34 percent of the valid votes. Therefore, the 2007 election represented the second time the people would have to decide between the "progressive" Islamists and the "conservative" secularist elite. The result was the landslide victory of the ruling AKP, leaving its rivals far behind, ensuring that it could form comfortably a single-party government.

No party other than the AKP has ever appealed to so many voters from different geographic areas of Turkey. The 2007 election outcome seems to indicate further solidification of the AKP base and an attempt to reach out to new groups of voters, such as the Kurds. Newspapers hailed the outcome as a victory for democracy. "This [result] is the people's memorandum," said the liberal *Radikal* daily,<sup>3</sup> in a reference to the April e-memorandum that had derailed the presidential election in parliament and forced the government to call for early elections. "The controversy which we witnessed about secularism versus Islam has not materialized," Sami Kohen, a columnist for liberal daily *Milliyet*, told Reuters: "The message given by the electorate is that we are happy with economic progress and European [Union] policy."<sup>4</sup>

### Effects of the Media on the Campaign

The role of the media in democratic processes such as elections has been the subject of debate among scholars, journalists, and politicians. The complexity of the links

among citizens, the print and broadcasts outlets, and the companies that own or the governments that subsidize them is reflected in the various theories that either prescribe or attempt to explain the relationship. In a responsible media model, media outlets might be viewed as providing a watchdog function, reporting on government activity, providing analysis of government policy, and uncovering waste and fraud. Citizens then use this information to hold governments and parties responsible at election time, throwing out incompetent governments. Other more critical theories suggest that through subtle framing and even propaganda the media, controlled by governments or profit-driven commercial firms, either intentionally misinform voters or fail to provide the necessary information because infotainment is more successful at increasing audience shares than underwriting serious journalism.<sup>5</sup>

Of particular interest for this analysis is the relationship between coverage of the campaigns and voter engagement in the election and preferences for parties or candidates. The attention paid to the events that led to the call for the early election and to the election itself suggest these factors can shape how citizens view the choices they have. One of the most interesting debates in the campaign and election literature is whether or not campaigns truly matter in determining election outcomes. In general, citizens experience the campaign in a mediated way—through news reports of campaign events, policy statements, and the horserace. Given the turbulent period preceding the election and the attempt by parties and journalists to frame the issues of the campaign and the victory of the AKP as either a victory for modernization, a setback for the secular state, or the triumph of Europeanization, it is important to examine how the media covered the electoral contest between the governing AKP and the opposition from the Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP). While the columnist Sami Kohen may have concluded that the AKP's electoral victory was based on economic progress and pro-European attitudes, the extent to which these issues were the focus of the news media during the campaign is unknown, as is a comprehensive picture of how the newspapers framed the debates in the campaign.

This essay assumes that news coverage is important in democratic elections, as it does help to translate political choices for voters. Despite the media's preoccupation with covering the horserace,<sup>6</sup> most of the electorate gathers information about the campaign from media coverage and this is no different in Turkey. A long list of studies demonstrates that there are media effects on turnout, party support, candidate choice, and candidate issue knowledge during a campaign. A substantial amount of learning about candidate and party positions occurs during a campaign.<sup>7</sup> However, in most cases, campaign effects are likely to be minimal<sup>8</sup> given that pre-campaign opinions, at least in presidential elections, tend to be well formed before the debates and the horserace.<sup>9</sup> This "minimal effect" approach suggests that though preferences are somewhat unstable during the electoral period, any campaign effect serves to enlighten voters to their predispositions by making the election salient.<sup>10</sup> Several scholars take issue with the "minimalist" model, suggesting that campaigns have many "distractions" that serve to move voters away from their "enlightened" position.<sup>11</sup>

Declining partisanship, proliferation of media sources, and the professionalization of campaign communications in most electoral democracies suggest that there is potential for the media to have a significant influence in engaging citizens in the election and shaping party and candidate preferences. Most research on media and campaigns is based on Western democracies—mostly the United States and Britain. Are there reasons to expect that campaign coverage may work similarly in different electoral contexts and media cultures? Trends that would suggest greater campaign effects are emerging in Turkey. The party system has experienced volatility and fragmentation. Over half the voters switched parties between the 1999 and 2002 elections, with 20 percent shifting ideologically.<sup>12</sup> With that degree of volatility, it would be expected that campaigns would have more influence than when party preference is more stable. However, there seems to be little trust in the media. In a Eurobarometer survey conducted in 2004 in Turkey, only 32 percent reported that they trust the press, and 47 percent reported trusting television. For purposes of comparison, in the new EU and candidate countries, 48 percent reported trusting the press, while 63 percent reported trusting television.<sup>13</sup> Comparatively, therefore, Turkey exhibits low levels of trust in print and broadcast news. If citizens are critical of these sources, the influence of newspapers and television is likely to be minimized, or at least it might be expected that citizens are more resistant to media messages.

Media culture and the media system may also caution against transferring media effects across contexts. While there is a rich newspaper and broadcast culture in Turkey, with 40 national papers and a plethora of local and regional papers, the total number of newspaper readers is comparatively low. However, the majority of readers are between the ages of 16 and 34.<sup>14</sup> There is also a high degree of ownership concentration; the two largest selling dailies, *Posta* and *Hürriyet* (both analyzed below), are owned by the Doğan group. Both papers tend to be nationalist in their leaning. The high concentration of ownership does raise questions about the independence and quality of the press. Adem Ayten suggests that the Turkish print media was favorable to the parties that had close relationships with the owners of the papers during the 2002 campaign.<sup>15</sup> Despite recent democratizing media reforms and the lack of any overt censorship, there are still instances of journalists being prosecuted for violation of the penal code prohibiting denigration of “Turkishness” (Article 301).<sup>16</sup> Pippa Norris suggests that along with press freedom, access to media is an important indicator of how well the media system serves the function of maintaining accountability in democratic systems, and she characterizes Turkey as having a non-free press but with wide access to the public.<sup>17</sup>

Lack of trust, small readership, and the possible lack of journalistic independence suggest that the media may play a more limited role in influencing voters in a campaign. However, the media may play a role in promoting particular themes of the campaign or even reflect elite positions. The aim of this study is to monitor the news content of national daily newspapers in Turkey and make comparisons across two main dimensions: outlet and time. A comparison is made regarding the ways in which four newspapers covered the campaign and how this varied over

time. The study focuses on issues of representation of election-related news in these dailies, the main items on the news agenda, the tone toward parties in the press, and the main themes of the campaign as presented in the newspapers under study.

## Data and Methods

A systematic study of campaign news coverage in the Turkish media was undertaken for the 10 weeks prior to the election (May 7 through June 22, 2007). For the complete study, four newspapers and three TV channels were selected as the outlets for the coding of media content. This study reports the results from the analysis of the newspapers. The media outlets were selected according to the following criteria: geographic distribution, level of circulation, ideological stance, and format (quality versus tabloid). *Hürriyet*, *Zaman*, *Posta*, and *Cumhuriyet* are the dailies that were chosen from among the newspapers. *Hürriyet* is a typical mainstream, quality broadsheet with a high level of circulation. *Posta* is a tabloid enjoying the highest readership in Turkey. *Zaman* is a quality, conservative broadsheet with an Islamist inclination. *Cumhuriyet* is an intellectual, Kemalist, quality broadsheet with the lowest circulation of the dailies under investigation. All the papers are distributed nationwide and are well known among all segments of society. In this study, the front page of each newspaper was analyzed for each day, as was a randomly selected inside page.<sup>18</sup> Each story was coded on these selected pages making the news story the unit of analysis.

Each story was coded for characteristics such as length and placement, a primary and secondary topic, and whether the election was mentioned. In addition to measuring the issue agenda during the campaign, up to 10 actors were coded in each story. Actors included party leaders and candidates. The tone toward these actors, whether positive, negative, or neutral, was also coded. Furthermore, aspects of campaign themes were coded—for example, whether the campaign was portrayed as a contest between secularists and Islamists or between traditional left-wing and right-wing parties. To identify these cleavages in the news content, a search was conducted in each article for the following words: *laiklik* (secular) and *İslam*;<sup>19</sup> *milliyetçilik* (nationalism) and *liberal demokrasi* (liberal democracy); *sağ* (right) and *sol* (left); *Sosyal Demokratlar* (Social Democrats) and *Muhafazakarlar* (Conservatives); *merkezi* (central) and *bölgesel kontrol* (decentralized control); and *cumhuriyetçilik* (republicanism) and *demokrasi* (democracy).<sup>20</sup> In addition to the above, the most similar Turkish words that define these cleavages were identified in the content.

Because human coding of media content can produce bias or unreliability, a reliability test was conducted on the coding instrument. Two coders coded the same 35 stories (25 from newspapers and 10 from television) randomly selected from the overall sample of news stories. Kappa, a statistics tool commonly used for assessing inter-coder reliability, was used to calculate the degree of agreement between the two coders, which was adjusted or weighted for the possibility of agreement on the basis

of chance. The possible range for kappa is 0 to 1, with 1 indicating complete inter-coder agreement. A value for kappa above 0.8 is considered to indicate reliability,<sup>21</sup> though given the variable nature of the data under consideration some have argued against an absolute cutoff value. On 95 percent of the indicators, the Kappa ranged from 0.77 to 1. For two indicators, the Kappa was 0.64. Given the nature of the data, these are acceptable levels of inter-coder reliability.

## Results

First, the agenda in the newspaper coverage during the campaign was examined. Approximately one-third of the stories in the four newspapers during the coding period were mainly about the upcoming election. Table 1 shows the main focus of these election stories in the newspapers under study. Both the primary and secondary topics were coded, so the table displays the proportion of stories where these categories of election stories were the primary or secondary topics. Most stories had a campaign event (such as a debate, party rally, or party statement) or the party program and candidate list as the main focus. While the primary lead in the news stories was based on campaign events, all the newspapers then tended to focus on which party was ahead or behind (the horserace) or on party conflicts and/or coalition possibilities. These secondary features can be characterized as strategic considerations. This focus on strategic considerations is similar to coverage of elections in Western democracies; however, much more time tends to be spent on the horserace. The lack of horserace coverage in the Turkish media can be interpreted as the media trying to avoid the expected AKP victory. Even the opinion polls were reluctant to give the horserace results, although the AKP was generally agreed to be the frontrunner in the elections.<sup>22</sup> They transmitted the message that only the AKP, the CHP and the MHP would pass the threshold; sometimes the Democratic Party (Demokrat Parti, DP)<sup>23</sup> was included. What the parties were planning to offer to society for the next five years was nearly a hidden agenda. The party programs, if both primary and secondary topics are considered, took a third place to the more event- and strategy-focused stories. Stories about party programs could be considered to be the issue coverage of the campaign, as these stories focused on party platforms and policy positions.

Every third news story mentioned the election or politics. Among the remaining two-thirds of newspaper stories that did not focus on the upcoming elections, some other main topics of coverage stood out. Table 2 shows the newspapers' agenda of covering items other than the elections during the period of the campaign. The non-election top story topics were terrorist activity (including border conflict and funerals of soldiers), secular protests, the presidential selection referendum, court decisions, the role of religion in public life (for example, headscarves and religious schools), and matters of identity and human rights. The military, foreign policy, and education also were three of the top nine topics. Close to 90 political news topics were coded, and the nine most prominent news stories other than the elections are categorized in Table 2.

**Table 1.** Election News Coverage by Newspaper

	<i>Hürriyet</i>		<i>Zaman</i>		<i>Posta</i>		<i>Cumhuriyet</i>	
	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary
Campaign Event	74.0	9.5	62.7	22.9	58.5	52.4	58.9	53.5
Party Program/List	10.9	5.8	14.7	17.1	20.9	7.1	23.2	12.8
Horse race/Strategy	1.7	20.4	0.7	7.7	0.3	5.6	1.7	2.3
Inter- and Intra-Party Conflicts/Coalitions	4.2	26.3	8.4	20.7	18.2	33.3	14.2	25.6
Court Decisions (Election-Related)	4.2	11.0	10.6	13.2	2.2	1.6	1.1	2.3
Other	5.0	27.0	3.0	18.4	0.0	5.6	0.9	3.5
Number of Stories	238	137	407	310	325	126	353	172

The results shown in Table 2 reveal that terrorist activities dominated the coverage of every newspaper except *Zaman*. The high percentage of coverage of terrorist activities during the election campaign, two times more visible than the second theme, was due to the sudden rise in terrorism during the whole campaign period. After a period of calm, in spring 2007 funerals for terror victims became almost a daily ritual. The government was under pressure after the escalation of terrorist attacks. News stories tended to portray the situation as a battle between the prime minister and the military, with the military urging the government to decide on a military operation and the prime minister wanting to hold off until after the election. The coverage of the funerals focused on the mourners and their sentiments at military funerals, which in the extreme suggested that the government was collaborating with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). “Murderer PKK, collaborator AKP!,” they shouted. “Government out!,” the mourners chanted as several senior AKP ministers and members arrived at one of the funerals. “This government, Prime Minister Erdoğan, is the most important obstacle in front of Turkey’s fight against terrorism,” CHP leader Deniz Baykal told reporters. The MHP’s Devlet Bahçeli, in a written statement, argued that Erdoğan blocked the path of the security forces, noting: “The architect of today’s dark and bloody situation is Prime Minister Erdoğan.”<sup>24</sup> Bahçeli’s infamous speech in Erzurum, during which he waved a hangman’s noose—his preferred solution to the Kurdish insurgency in the southeast—was a clear indication of the reigniting of the Kurdish conflict during the election period.<sup>25</sup> Demands to enter Iraq in retaliation for a bombing in Ankara on May 22, 2007, were still loud on the agenda when on May 25 a freight train was attacked by the PKK in the province of Bingöl.

**Table 2.** Main Newspaper Agendas during Campaign (as Percentage of Non-Election-Related Political News)

	<i>Hürriyet</i>	<i>Zaman</i>	<i>Posta</i>	<i>Cumhuriyet</i>
Terrorist Activities	25.7	20.8	34.1	22.6
Secular Protests	5.6	5.2	6.7	7.8
Presidential Selection	4.2	4.3	10.5	7.2
Court Decisions (Other than Campaign-related)	8.4	3.2	7.0	8.5
Politics of Identity and Human Rights	4.2	2.9	2.7	4.4
Religion and Public Life	2.8	2	5.9	3.4
Foreign Policy	3.7	4.6	4.8	8.3
Military	3.7	5.2	3.2	1.2
Education	2.3	4.3	5.9	4.1
Other Topics Related to Turkey	0.5	1.2	0.3	0.9
Turkish Membership in EU	0.9	6.6	1.9	3.4
All Economic Topics	10.8	10.7	6.5	9.5
Other Topics	27.1	29.1	10.5	18.7
Number of Stories	214	347	372	566

By focusing on the four most frequent topics in the news stories, Figure 1 shows how the agenda of the campaign news shifted over time. This can be seen through the plotting of the percentage of stories on given issues appearing in the newspapers in each week. Clearly, secular protests were the focus of a great deal of coverage during the initial part of the campaign. Following the military’s memorandum, Kemalist circles organized huge demonstrations to protest against the prospective president. The “April 14 Republic Rally” in Ankara was considered a “landmark” event. It was organized by the Association of Atatürkist Thought (ADD), but the demonstration brought together supporters of many non-governmental organizations, women’s groups, political parties, labor unions, and professional groups.

Turkey’s constitutional standoff over the election of a new president deepened when the second “Republican Meeting,” planned by dozens of non-governmental organizations, took place in Istanbul’s Çağlayan Square on April 29, 2007. “No imams in the presidential palace,” chanted the crowd in one of the largest rallies in Istanbul’s history. Other rallies took place in İzmir on May 14, the Black Sea port city of Samsun on May 21, and Denizli on May 28.<sup>26</sup>

The weeks of May 13 and May 20 were devoted to secular demonstrations; the demonstrations on secularism held in İzmir and other cities were widely covered in the newspapers. The coverage was full of slogans allegedly against the AKP, such as “Turkey will remain secular forever” and “Be careful whom you vote for, tomorrow might be too late.” The AKP’s position on the EU membership and liberal reforms were part of the coverage, but the focus was on the Islamic background of the AKP and its potential threat to the secular state. The newspapers covered President Ahmet Necdet Sezer as a defender of secularism in the country. There was

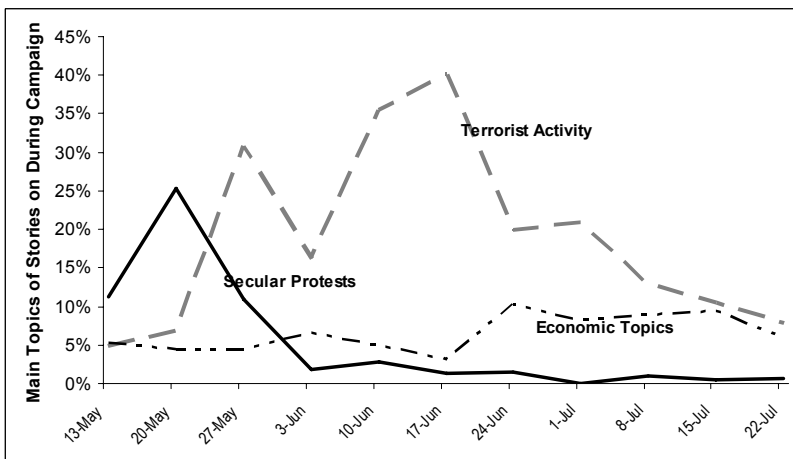


Figure 1. The issue agenda during the campaign: percentage of political news stories covering topics.

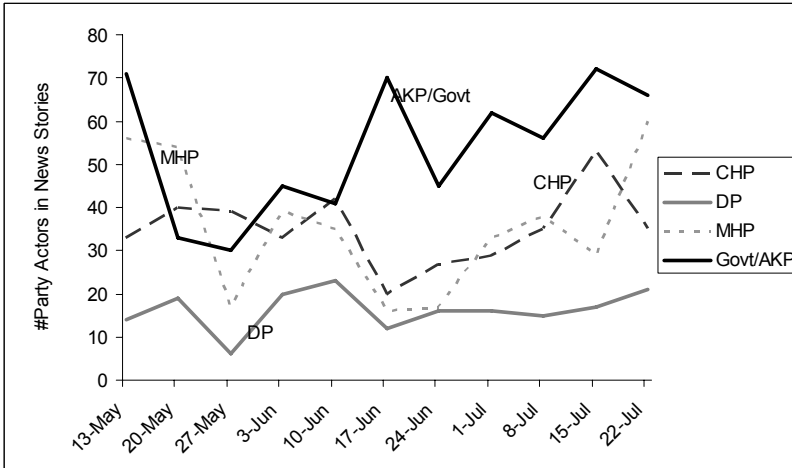
positive coverage mentioning the CHP–DSP coalition and their turnout at the secular demonstrations. Another commonly used slogan in the demonstrations, “Neither the United States, nor the EU, fully Independent Turkey” (*Ne ABD, Ne AB, Tam Bağımsız Türkiye*), shows that the secularist demonstrations had also strongly nationalist, pro-military, anti-USA and anti-EU discourses. While not prominent, these foreign policy issues were also election campaign material for some political parties.

There was also wide coverage of the way the international press covered these demonstrations. On May 23 and 24, 2007, the bombing in Ulus (Ankara) occupied the headlines and the whole front page of *Posta*. Inside pages were devoted to Turkish Chief of General Staff Yaşar Büyükanıt, who blamed Europe for supporting terrorist groups. The relationship between security and democracy was the topic of heated debates regarding how to fight terror in a way that does not disturb democratic rights and freedoms.

Relative to the topics listed in Table 2, the EU and the economy were comparatively absent. EU-related news was also coded during the election campaign. Of the over 2,500 stories coded in the four newspapers, only 53 either were primarily or secondarily about the EU. Of these, approximately half were about Turkish membership in the EU. It was observed that political parties thought twice before mentioning the EU, and EU issues were included in the foreign policy sections of the party election programs. The AKP was the only party with a positive approach to the EU. A common stance in the majority of party programs was: “We don’t need the EU; we can do it by ourselves.” Economic topics (as diverse as the budget, taxes, businesses, and the stock market) were the main focus in approximately 10 percent of the stories. Less than half of these stories were related the reporting on the state of the economy. This indicates that neither the EU nor the economy were high on the press agenda.

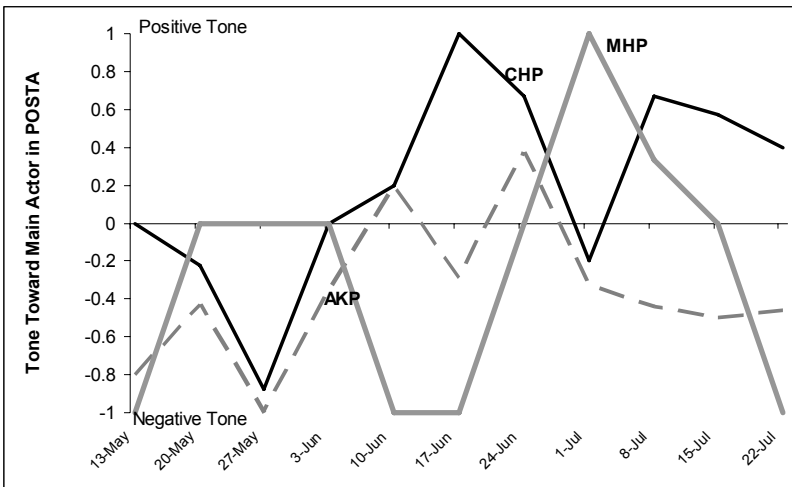
The election campaign period did not occur at the best time regarding Turkish–EU relations. An idea floated by France’s Nicolas Sarkozy, a Mediterranean Union, aimed at diverting Turkey from its EU path gained attention in Turkey, as negotiations have been on a slow track since Turkey’s refusal to implement a customs union pact with EU-member Cyprus, which Ankara does not recognize. In June 2007, Ankara faced another impasse in EU negotiations, as France and Cyprus maintained their reservations concerning the opening of the chapters at the accession conference on June 26. Finally, the European Union agreed to extend membership talks with Turkey to two new policy areas, or chapters, but stopped short of opening discussions on the key area of economic and monetary policy. Nonetheless, on June 30, 2007, in an interview with Reuters, Olli Rehn called Turkey an “anchor of stability in the most unstable region of the world” and a “benchmark of democracy for the Muslim world from Morocco to Malaysia.”

In order to assess the comparative visibility of the political parties in the press, the party actors in each of the news stories were identified. The analysis of the trends in party visibility over the campaign period reveals that the AKP or AKP politicians and candidates were the most visible actors in newspaper coverage,



**Figure 2.** Visibility of party actors during the campaign.

peaking at the beginning and the end and having visibility above other party actors during the whole campaign period (see Figure 2). The MHP and the CHP were the next most visible parties in the press coverage but were still well below the visibility of the AKP. That the AKP was most visible is not surprising given its status as the governing party. However, strong visibility did not provide a positive tone for the AKP; on the contrary, the tone towards the AKP and AKP politicians was highly critical and negative, which is clearly shown in Figure 3. The results of the election show that nearly every second person in Turkey cast his/her vote for the party most



**Figure 3.** Tone towards main (first mentioned) actors in *Posta*.

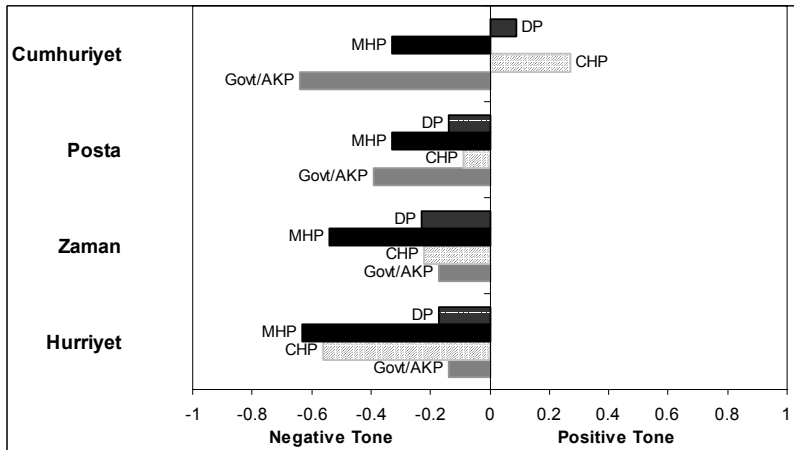


Figure 4. Tone towards main party actors in a news stories by newspaper outlet.

criticized by the media during the election campaign. Therefore, to claim that the news either mirrors society or that voter opinion is influenced by the media is too simple an account of media in society. The coverage received by the AKP tends to reflect a negativity bias in the press overall but an ideological bias in the pro-secularist press (Cumhuriyet). It is known that readers do tend to pay attention to media messages that are closer to their own opinions, which minimizes the impact of this negativity bias and minimizes the overall impact of the news media.

When the focus was on the visibility of the main party actors in news stories, the AKP was clearly distinguished, showing more visibility and fluctuation than the other political parties. It is easy to make the claim that the AKP was the most prominent actor generally; however, for the week of June 3 visibility was very low. When the situation is further analyzed, using the headlines in *Posta* (the most widely read daily), it can be seen that the whole week was devoted to party mergers on the right, a possible DYP–ANAP coalition, and war cries on the topic of the crises in northern Iraq and between the United States and the Turkish army. After June 6, the coverage of terror increased, with soldier–martyr funerals and especially pictures of the sons or daughters of these soldier–martyrs depicted in the pages. June 6 was the day of suicide bombing news in Tunceli. That day the AKP was mentioned but in a negative tone, concerning the candidate crises within the party. Coverage on June 7 again focused on the terrorist bombing, and funerals were in the headlines; this news was accompanied by the northern Iraq crisis.

The news coverage displayed the anger of the people attending funerals towards both the United States and the AKP government and pointed to both parties as being responsible for the issue. Even the pictures were chosen deliberately in order to touch emotions. The media seemed to be trying to punish the government for being too calm towards PKK terrorism, while the comments of the other political parties on the right were positively mentioned. On June 8, 2007, media coverage was

devoted to the Siirt attack following the attack in Tunceli, still with a negative tone towards the AKP government. The EU was mentioned but in an adverse situation concerning Turkey's aims to renegotiate the Berlin Plus Agreement, withdrawing its commitment to contribute its air and naval units to the EU's joint battle group in a move to protest the 27-nation union for excluding Turkey from the decision-making bodies of NATO–EU cooperation.<sup>27</sup> The news related to the election was about the possible coalition of the CHP and the DSP. On the other hand, on June 10, funerals were again on the front page.

The peak week for coverage of the AKP was June 10–17, 2007, but again the overall tone of the coverage was not positive. Soldier funerals were in the headlines, and on June 17, the front page coverage included an emotional, sad poem for the soldiers. The same front page showed Erdoğan mentioning a possible government coalition with Kurdish DTP independent candidates. June 16 again featured coverage of soldier funerals, and the AKP was blamed for not responding properly.

The Doğan media group is the largest media conglomerate in Turkey, owning more than 70 percent of the media. It has different dailies that target different segments of society. Thus *Posta*, the most widely read newspaper, criticized the AKP with a strongly negative tone, while *Hürriyet* displayed very little negativity, even less than *Zaman*. *Posta* and *Hürriyet* had almost the same negative tone towards the MHP, although *Zaman* had a clear strongly negative tone towards the MHP, which shows the cleavage between the nationalists and the Islamists. It is not understood why Doğan media, through its most widely read newspaper, *Posta*, delivered a negative tone towards the AKP, despite its alleged close economic ties to the AKP government. Although nearly all newspapers have used a negative tone towards the MHP and the AKP, the election results showed those parties to be the winners in 2007.

The stories show how the citizens were confronted everyday with funerals and the possibility of a cross-border operation into Iraq by the Turkish army. Erdoğan was highly criticized for stating that politics should not be made by the blood of martyrs. On June 13, 2007, Erdoğan's reluctant behavior to engage in a cross-border operation was the headline and was pictured with soldier funerals. The emotional level of the funeral coverage was amplified as election day grew closer. On June 20, Erdoğan's words regarding the soldiers as martyrs and going to heaven after death were covered with an extremely negative tone. It was only on June 22 that the party programs of the AKP and the CHP were mentioned, along with the usual cross-border operation issue. In a way, the media pressed all the political leaders to take sides on the issue of cross-border operations.

If the issue agenda in the press focused on terrorist activities and cross-border fighting, it might be asked how the press tended to frame the major debate or themes of the election campaign. It could even be asked to what extent the election was portrayed as a contest between competing party programs, values, or issue positions. The figures in Table 3 show the results of the analysis of the major themes of the campaign coverage as presented in the press. One notable feature of the coverage in this respect is that the *Posta* and *Cumhuriyet* did not tend to use any of the themes

**Table 3.** Main Campaign Themes by Newspaper

	<i>Hürriyet</i>	<i>Zaman</i>	<i>Posta</i>	<i>Cumhuriyet</i>
Secularism/Islam	14.9	15.4	1.3	4.7
Nationalism/Liberal Democracy	9.4	10.6	0.7	0.8
Left/Right	2.0	2.3	0.3	1.1
Social Democrats/Conservatives	0.5	1.0	2.3	6.1
Central/Decentralized Control	2.0	2.0	0.7	1.7
Republicanism/Democracy	7.4	8.1	0.3	1.1

Numbers indicate the percentage of election stories that mentioned one of the themes.

listed in Table 3. The lack of analytical frames and references in the more popular *Posta* fits with traditions of the tabloid press. However, the lack of these themes in *Cumhuriyet* is surprising given its representation of an intellectual, Kemalist tradition. In *Hürriyet* and *Zaman* there were three common themes: secularism/Islam, Republicanism/liberal democracy, and nationalism/liberal democracy. The latter two themes might be considered to reflect concerns about civil rights in a liberal democracy and the protection of the secular state through a strong republic. Overall, these themes were more pervasive than the traditional left/right division based on traditional social class or economic cleavages. This relative invisibility of the left/right debate is consistent with the lack of visibility of economic issues in the news.

## Conclusion

Despite different ownership structures and ideological leanings, it may be notable that there is consistency across the newspapers in terms of some aspects of campaign news. While there is some variation, there is a great deal of overlap in terms of how the campaign was covered. For example, contrary to media coverage in Britain and the United States, the horserace—or who is ahead in the polls—does not occupy most of the stories about the campaign. As a primary focus of the story, the horserace never reached more than 3 percent. However, there was a great deal of focus on campaign events. It is suggested that this reflects a possible tendency of the pro-secularist press to avoid reporting polls that showed AKP in the lead. An additional factor is likely to be that newspapers, in order to reduce costs, tend to rely on wire reports and party press releases rather than have their own journalists do the reporting.

In addition to what was on the agenda, it is also important to consider the issue that did not make it onto the agenda in the campaign. The relative absence of economic stories and stories about Turkey's EU membership is telling in that the AKP's two strong issues garnered the least coverage. While economic stories hovered around 10 percent of the coverage, over half of these stories were devoted to business and other news, not to analysis of the state of the economy (for example, inflation, jobs, or economic growth). Furthermore, the newspapers, when framing the debates in the campaign, did not portray the major debate in the election as the

traditional left/right ideological divide that represents economic cleavages. Therefore, if voters were paying attention to the press coverage they would not have been primed to think in terms of rewarding the AKP for a strong economy.

While a descriptive account of what was covered in the news leading up to the election is presented in this essay, claims about what factors shaped individual voters' decision processes cannot be made. However, if it is assumed that the media influenced the voters or primed them to think about particular issues, they were not thinking about the state of the economy or the EU. Yet according to a survey organized by the International Republican Institute (IRI), a US-based group promoting global democracy, Turkish voters rated unemployment as the dominant issue for the July 22, 2007 national elections, followed by the economy and terrorism.<sup>28</sup> This begs the question about media effects during an election campaign in a country where the press lacks the trust of the citizens. There seems to be little direct evidence of the influence of the media when the newspaper coverage focused on the debate over secularism and on terrorist activity while voters claimed to have made choices on the basis of economic performance.

## Notes

1. This is a revised version of a paper prepared for presentation at the Workshop on Turkish Elections, 2007, November 30–December 1, 2007, Sabancı University, Karaköy Communication Center, Istanbul.
2. Ian Traynor, *Guardian Unlimited*, May 2, 2007.
3. *Radikal*, July 23, 2007.
4. Reuters, July 23, 2007.
5. For a review of media theories see Dennis McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2005, 5th edn).
6. Henry Brady and Richard Johnston, "What's the Primary Message: Horse Race or Issue Journalism?" in Gary R. Orren and Nelson W. Polsby (eds.), *Media and Momentum* (Chatham: Chatham House, 1987); Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Joseph Capella, *Spiral of Cynicism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
7. Stephen Ansolabehere and Shanto Iyengar, *Going Negative: How Political Ads Shrink and Polarize the Electorate* (New York: Free Press, 1995); R. Michael Alvarez, *Information and Elections* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998).
8. See, for example, Diana C. Mutz, Paul M. Sniderman, and Richard A. Brody, *Political Persuasion and Attitude Change* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).
9. Larry M. Bartels, "Messages Received: The Political Impact of Media Exposure," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol.87, No.2 (1993), pp.267–85.
10. Steven Finkel, "Re-examining the 'Minimal Effects' Model in Recent Presidential Campaigns," *The Journal of Politics*, Vol.55 (1993), pp.1–21; Andrew Gelman and Gary King, "Why Are American Presidential Election Campaign Polls so Variable When Votes Are so Predictable?" *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol.23, No.4 (1993), pp.409–51.
11. Richard Johnston, Michael Hagen, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *The 2000 Presidential Election and the Foundations of Party Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Daron R. Shaw, "A Study of Presidential Campaign Events from 1952 to 1992," *The Journal of Politics*, Vol.61 (1999), pp.387–422; Daron R. Shaw, "The Effect of TV Ads and Candidate Appearances on State-wide Presidential Votes, 1988–1996," *American Political Science Review*, Vol.93(1999), pp.345–61; Daron R. Shaw, "The Impact of News Media Favorability and Candidate Events in Presidential Campaigns," *Political Communication*, Vol.16 (1999), pp.183–202.

12. Ali Çarkoğlu and Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, *Turkish Democracy Today* (London: I.B Taurus, 2007), p.35.
13. Renaud Soufflot de Magny, *Eurobarometer 62.0: Standard European Trend Questions and Sport*, October–November 2004 (computer file). ICPSR04289-v1 (London: TNS Opinion & Social [producer], 2004). Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (distributor), October 26, 2005. (These figures are identical to another Eurobarometer survey conducted just prior to the election (*Standard Eurobarometer 67: National Report Turkey*, European Commission, [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb67/eb67\\_tr\\_nat.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb67/eb67_tr_nat.pdf), downloaded 20 February, 2008).
14. European Journalism Centre, “Media Landscape—Turkey,” 2006, available online at [http://www.ejc.net/media\\_landscape/article/turkey/](http://www.ejc.net/media_landscape/article/turkey/) (accessed November 26, 2007).
15. Adem Ayten, “Media: Democracy Relations and the Reflection of Turkish Parliamentary Elections in the Turkish Print Media,” Working Paper, Istanbul University, available online at <http://cim.anadolu.edu.tr/pdf/2003/17.pdf> (downloaded 22 September, 2007).
16. Freedom House. *Freedom of the Press: A Global Survey of Media Independence* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).
17. Pippa Norris, “Global Political Communication: Good Governance, Human Development, and Mass Communication,” in Frank Esser and Barbara Pfetsch (eds.), *Comparing Political Communication: Theories, Cases and Challenges* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
18. Inside pages are coded in order to gain of an understanding of non-front-page news. Limited resources did not allow coding all inside pages; therefore, the random inside page serves as a representative sample of news beyond the front page.
19. Mustafa Akyol in the *Turkish Daily News* on May 2, 2007, commented on the division in Turkey between Islamists and secularists and argued that the sides are rather different. “On one side, there are Islamic conservatives (not ‘Islamists’) and secular liberals whose motto is ‘democracy.’ On the other side, there are illiberal secularists whose motto is ‘the Republic.’” It is the former, liberal or democratic secularism, which Olli Rehn, Commissioner for EU Enlargement, speaking at the meeting of the Finnish–Turkish Business Guild in Istanbul, suggested was the driver for Turkey’s process to join the European Union (*Turkish Daily News*, June 7, 2007).
20. One can ask what the big difference is between democracy and republic, as both terms loosely mean “rule by the people.” However, in Turkey the real divide is between those who believe that democracy and secularism go hand-in-hand and those who want the military to impose a secular state, which would prevent public displays of religion, for example.
21. See Klaus Krippendorf, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004, 2nd edn).
22. When Tarhan Erdem predicted the clear victory of the AKP based on KONDA’s polling results, he was roundly criticized by Kemalist circles, although after the election he was congratulated for his predictions.
23. The unification of the Motherland Party (ANAP) and the True Path Party (DYP) under the roof of the Democrat Party (DP) was not realized.
24. Canan Balkır, “The July 2007 Elections in Turkey: Test for Democracy,” *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol.12, No.3 (2007), p.417.
25. *Ibid.*, pp.422–23.
26. *Ibid.*, p.416.
27. NATO and the EU reached an agreement called “Berlin Plus” in 2002, in which Turkey’s sensitivities regarding the exclusion of Cyprus were respected. However, the EU in recent years violated the Berlin Plus Agreement and tried to exclude Turkey from joint operations where NATO’s capabilities are used.
28. Reported by Reuters, June 23, 2007.