

# Presidents Shaping Public Opinion in Parliamentary Democracies: A Survey Experiment in Turkey

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**Abstract** Many parliamentary democracies feature a president alongside a prime minister. While these presidents have a nonpartisan status as head of state, they often have had long political careers with partisan affiliations before assuming office. How do voters react when such actors make issue statements to shape public opinion? Are such statements filtered through voters' partisan lenses, provoked by the partisan background of these actors? Or perhaps partisan reactions are not invoked, owing to the nonpartisan status of the office? We argue that voters' reactions depend on the issue domain. Partisan reactions will be invoked only when the statements are about issues outside the president's prerogatives. We provide evidence for our argument from a population-based survey experiment in Turkey.

**Keywords** Presidents · Public opinion · Partisanship · Partisan cue · Survey experiment · Turkey

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Many parliamentary democracies feature a presidential head of state who is elected directly by voters or indirectly by the parliament. In Europe today there are more directly elected presidential heads of state than monarchical or parliament-elected ones, and the institutional arrangement of a directly elected president with a prime minister responsible to the parliament is especially popular among the young democracies of Central and Eastern Europe (Schleiter and Morgan-Jones 2009; Kim 2015). While presidents in these systems have at least a nominally, if not formally, nonpartisan status as the head of state, they often have had a long political careers with well-known party affiliations before assuming the presidency.

How do voters react when these actors—presidential heads of state with partisan backgrounds—make issue statements with the intent of shaping public opinion? This combination of the essentially nonpartisan office of presidency and a partisan actor represents a theoretical puzzle. One possibility is that voters filter president's statements through their partisan lenses, provoked by his or her partisan background. If this is the case, we would expect increased support for the president's position among partisans of his or her former party (in-group effect), and conversely, decreased support among the partisans of opponent parties (out-group effect).<sup>1</sup> Alternatively, partisan reactions might not be invoked, owing to the nonpartisan status and the moral authority of the office of presidency that such actors currently occupy. The existing literature does not provide guidance on the dynamics of presidents' efforts to shape public opinion.

The role of the presidents in parliamentary democracies and their relationships with prime ministers, governments, and assemblies attracted considerable interest. Scholars have explored the structural determinants of cooperation and conflict among these actors (Baylis 1996; Shugart and Carey 1992; Tavits 2008), implications for democratic performance (Elgie 1999; Kim 2015), and president's role in cabinet formation and termination (Amorim Neto and Strøm 2006; Fernandes and Magalhães 2016; Protsyk 2005; Schleiter and Morgan-Jones 2009). Yet the questions of whether and how presidents can shape public opinion and the role of partisanship in this respect have hitherto been unexplored. These questions are especially germane to unconsolidated democracies where the distribution of prerogatives across key offices is often ambiguous and presidential-prime ministerial conflict over authority is prevalent (Baylis 1996), since the ability to shape public opinion would be a crucial asset for actors seeking to exert and expand political influence.

We argue that voters' reactions to statements from a president with partisan background would depend on the issue domain in question. In case of statements about issue domains within the prerogatives of the presidential office, the normative authority bestowed to the president by the nonpartisan, unifier status of the office will eclipse partisan considerations. Such statements will be perceived as a legitimate use of power, and hence will not lead to a partisan backlash. When the president makes a statement about an issue domain considered to be outside his or her prerogatives, however, this normative authority would not apply, and the

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of in-group and out-group effects see, among others, Brewer (2007); Greene et al. (2002); Nicholson (2012); Samuels and Zucco (2014).

partisan background of the president would weigh more heavily in voters' considerations, triggering partisan reactions. These partisan reactions could also be incited by political actors opposing the president's agenda who will cast such statements as a politically-motivated breach of constitutional powers. Thus, we assert that partisan reactions will be invoked only when the president makes statements about issue domains considered to be outside the prerogatives of his or her office.

We present evidence in support of our argument from a partisan cue experiment embedded into a nationally representative survey conducted in Turkey, a large, unconsolidated democracy. In August 2014, R. Tayyip Erdoğan, the founder and former leader of the incumbent Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP or AK Party) became the first popularly elected president of Turkey. Our experimental manipulations show that when Erdoğan makes a statement about an issue outside his prerogatives, both in-group and out-group partisan responses are invoked, just as we would expect for cues from a strictly partisan figure. In contrast, a statement about an issue domain considered to be within the responsibilities of his office does not lead to out-group bias among opposition partisans, i.e., opposition partisans do not seem to adjust their views to hold a contrary position to that of Erdoğan. Moreover, respondents with no partisan affiliations are persuaded by the statements of Erdoğan regardless of the issue domain, a result that highlights the moral authority of the office of the president, at least in the Turkish context (Heper and Çınar 1996).

Our study has significant implications for understanding the role of presidential heads of state on shaping public opinion in parliamentary democracies. Specifically, our results suggest that such actors have a unique advantage over other partisan figures in influencing public opinion, at least in certain areas. Earlier research indicates that statements from partisan actors, such as prime ministers or party leaders, typically persuade in-group members while at the same time polarizing out-group members.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, presidential heads of state, even those with strongly partisan backgrounds, can persuade some segments of the population while not polarizing others when they make issue statements in domains that are considered within their prerogatives. Our findings present evidence that the office of presidency does bestow upon holders some nonpartisan benefits by virtue of being the head of state in parliamentary democracies, which might prove an important asset when they seek to expand their political influence.

We make two additional contributions to the literature on partisan cue taking. First, recent scholarship on partisanship focused on the question of whether the effects of partisanship, a concept originated in the political context of the U.S., travels to unconsolidated democracies.<sup>3</sup> By showing that partisanship is a meaningful heuristic for how Turkish voters form issue opinions, we present yet another evidence for the relevance of partisanship beyond consolidated democracies. Second, in the U.S. context it has been shown that party-label cues and party-leader cues can evoke divergent partisan responses (Nicholson 2012), but we are not

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<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Nicholson (2012); Samuels and Zucco (2014).

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Brader and Tucker (2012); Samuels and Zucco (2014).

aware of a study conducted in an unconsolidated democracy that considers such differential influence. We focus on this distinction as well, and show that both party-label and party-leader cues exert similar partisan effects in the Turkish context.

## Presidential Heads of State, Public Opinion, and Partisanship

The institutional arrangement in which a directly elected president co-exists with a prime minister dependent on a parliamentary majority has been growing in popularity during the past two decades. Such an arrangement, which has come to be designated as a “semi-presidential” system by some scholars [e.g., (Elgie 1999)], is now the most prevalent regime type in Europe. The two most recent moves from a parliamentary system to this type of democracy in Europe have occurred in Czech Republic and Turkey, when both countries have elected their presidents by popular vote for the first time in 2013 and 2014, respectively. There is a vibrant debate on the utility of clear-cut categorizations of regime types (i.e., presidential, parliamentary, and semi-presidential) for the purpose of understanding institutional dynamics, however, and several cross-national reviews of institutional powers as described in constitutions reveal significant heterogeneity within each ideal type.<sup>4</sup>

Studies seeking to explore the impact of presidential heads of state on parliamentary governance have touched upon a range of issues. There is considerable evidence that the presence of a president with extensive institutional powers is associated with increased incidence of parliamentary dissolution and reduced longevity of cabinets and governments.<sup>5</sup> In addition, there is a positive relationship between president’s powers and number of nonpartisan cabinet members (Amorim Neto and Strøm 2006), and a member of president’s former party is more likely to be appointed as prime minister than members of other parties (Kang 2009). The implications of the mode of president’s election are another avenue of research: While Schleiter and Morgan-Jones (2009) report that popular presidential elections significantly increase the incidence of non-electoral government termination, Tavits (2008) presents evidence that direct elections do not result in politically more active and contentious presidents. From another perspective, Samuels and Shugart (2010) provide an extensive analysis of how the existence of a presidential head of state shapes political parties’ organizational and behavioral characteristics.

A missing component in this research agenda is the potential role of presidents in shaping public opinion. This question is especially important in unconsolidated democracies where the potential for power struggles across key political actors and institutions is higher. Baylis (1996) highlights that the rather ambiguous distribution of authority and the lack of established conventions on institutional boundaries in

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<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Cheibub et al. (2014); Doyle and Elgie (2016); Shugart and Carey (1992); Siaroff (2003). Conceptually our focus is not just on what some scholars would define as semi-presidential regimes, but on democracies where prime ministerial accountability to a parliamentary majority exists alongside a presidential head of state who might be elected directly by voters or indirectly by the parliament.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Fernandes and Magalhães (2016); Roper (2002); Shugart and Carey (1992); Strøm and Swindle (2002).

such regimes present incentives for political actors to try to expand their prerogatives. He argues that this is particularly true for presidential heads of state due to the discrepancy between their prestige and popularity and their constitutional powers. Accordingly, one way for presidents to exert and expand political influence would be to shape public opinion in their favor by making policy statements publicly and trying to capitalize on their prestige and popularity to rally popular support for their preferred policy choices.

The relationship between the current Czech President Miloš Zeman and Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka constitutes a recent example of a presidential-prime ministerial conflict with frequent public exchanges of policy disagreements and accusations. Since taking office in 2013, President Zeman has been criticized for trying to expand his powers at the expense of the parliament and government to push his own political and economic agenda.<sup>6</sup> Yet Zeman has been careful to gauge public support behind him to this end. While his initial political activism led to a substantial drop in his public approval ratings and a relative lull in inter-executive conflict, analysts point out that his public criticisms against the prime minister have intensified following a rise in his popularity thanks to his sharp stance on refugees.<sup>7</sup> In response, Prime Minister Sobotka accused Zeman of destabilizing the country for his own political interests.<sup>8</sup> Examples of similar conflicts between presidents and other political actors that have become an open rift are over a controversial nuclear deal with Russia in Hungary,<sup>9</sup> over media freedoms in Bulgaria,<sup>10</sup> and over the handling of the migrant crisis in Croatia.<sup>11</sup>

In this article we explore the questions of whether and how presidents in parliamentary democracies can shape public opinion by focusing on the role of partisanship, given the prominent function it plays in individuals' opinion formation. We know that the "perceptual screen" created by partisanship leads individuals to process information selectively, leading them to accept more easily what is favorable to their partisan orientations while resisting information that is in the opposite direction (Campbell et al. 1960; Zaller 1992). Extensive research, especially in the U.S. but increasingly elsewhere, has shown a strong link between party identification and issue opinions such that individuals are more likely to report issue opinions that are in line with their preferred party's position.<sup>12</sup> In addition, out-group cues, that is, endorsements of a particular issue position by a rival party or candidate, can induce partisans to further distance themselves from that position. Thus partisanship constitutes an important element of how individuals form opinions on various issues.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., <http://tinyurl.com/hjfd5jr> and <http://tinyurl.com/hzdydydk>.

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., <http://tinyurl.com/hclu3fh> and <http://tinyurl.com/j6zvvgg9>.

<sup>8</sup> See <http://tinyurl.com/jhvvw4d>.

<sup>9</sup> See <http://tinyurl.com/zrbarz4>

<sup>10</sup> See <http://tinyurl.com/z7vd4bv>.

<sup>11</sup> See <http://tinyurl.com/goumxj4>.

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., Bartels (2000, 2002); Brader and Tucker (2012); Greene et al. (2002); Lau and Redlawsk (2006); Nicholson (2012); Samuels and Zucco (2014).

The role of partisanship in the relationship between issue statements by presidents in parliamentary democracies and public opinion is far from straightforward, however. From one perspective, one might expect such statements to evoke partisan reactions from voters, because in many cases presidents were major partisan figures as party members or leaders before assuming the presidency (Fernandes and Magalhães 2016; Kang 2009). The current Turkish President Erdoğan, for example, was the founder and long-time leader of AKP and served as prime minister from 2003 to 2014. Erdoğan is not unique in this respect. The current President of Hungary, János Áder, was a co-founder of one of the major political parties, Fidesz, and served as a member of parliament for nineteen years. Other examples of veteran politicians with well-known partisan affiliations becoming president are Tomislav Nikolić of Serbia, Borut Pahor of Slovenia, and Andrzej Duda of Poland. Yet at the same time the office of the presidency in parliamentary democracies, including the ones with popular presidential elections, has a nominally, if not formally, nonpartisan status as the president acts as the head of the state representing the unity of the nation. In many countries (e.g., Turkey, Croatia, Bulgaria, Estonia) there are constitutional provisions that explicitly require the president to give up any party affiliation upon being elected.<sup>13</sup> Even in cases where such provisions do not exist or there is some ambiguity about the interpretation of the relevant clauses,<sup>14</sup> there is a strong norm and expectation that the president-elects sever their party links and “regard themselves as suprapartisan representatives of the interest of the nation and its people.” (Baylis 1996), 308].<sup>15</sup>

This combination of a nonpartisan office filled by political actor with a well-known partisan background raises the question of how voters would respond to cues originating from such an actor. One possibility is that the partisan background of the leader eclipses the nonpartisan character of the presidential office and therefore issue statements will be treated as if originating from a partisan figure. In this case the expectation would be for partisans of the president’s former party to rally behind the position articulated by him or her, and for partisans of opponent parties to distance themselves from the same position. Alternatively, however, the legitimacy and moral authority accrued to the office of the president might trump any partisan considerations and therefore partisan reactions are not invoked. This does not mean that partisans of different parties would necessarily agree with the president’s

<sup>13</sup> Tavits (2008). For example, the Turkish Constitution of 1982 stipulates, “if the president-elect is a member of a party, his/her relationship with his/her party shall be severed and his/her membership of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey shall cease” (Article 101). Similarly, the Constitution of Croatia (1991) dictates, “after the election, the President of the Republic shall resign from membership in the political party and notify the Croatian Parliament thereof” (Article 96).

<sup>14</sup> As examples for ambiguous clauses we can point to the Hungarian Constitution (2011) which states, “the office of the President of the Republic shall be incompatible with any other state, social, economic, and political office or assignment” (Article 12). Similarly, the Constitution of Poland (1997) stipulates, “the President of the Republic shall hold no other offices nor discharge any public functions, with the exception of those connected with the duties of his office” (Article 132).

<sup>15</sup> In line with this expectation, Andrzej Duda of Poland resigned from his party Law and Justice (PiS) upon being elected president. Another example is Tomislav Nikolić of Serbia, a founding member of Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), who severed his party links after becoming president.

position; however, it just implies that the out-group and in-group effects that are associated with partisan cues are not to be observed.

Our theoretical assertion is that whether statements from presidential heads of state will evoke partisan reactions crucially depends on the relationship between the domain of the issue statement in question and prerogatives of the presidential office. Specifically, statements about issue domains within the prerogatives of the office should not lead to out-group effects, i.e., such statements should not result in decreased support for the president's position among the partisans of parties in opposition to the president's former party. Public statements about issues within the prerogatives of the presidential office will be perceived as a legitimate use of constitutional powers and responsibilities. In such cases the nonpartisan character of the office will dominate partisan considerations, and the partisan background of the president will not have a polarizing effect on opposition partisans.

In contrast, we do predict partisan reactions when the president makes a statement about an issue domain considered to be outside his or her prerogatives. These types of statements will be contentious, and politicians opposing the president's agenda will not miss the opportunity to challenge such acts as politically-motivated overreach of institutional prerogatives and highlight his or her partisan background.<sup>16</sup> To give an example, Jakub Stefaniak, spokesman for the Polish People's Party (PSL), criticized the Polish President Andrzej Duda, a former Law and Justice (PiS) member, by arguing that "we are in an unusual situation where the president is not the president. He is doing the bidding of his party chief rather than putting the interests of the country and of democracy first...He is neglecting his primary, non-partisan role as the guardian of the constitution."<sup>17</sup> In such situations, the normative authority bestowed by the nonpartisan status of the presidential office would be overshadowed by a partisan controversy, leading political actors and partisan voters to align themselves along partisan lines (Zaller 1992). In this case we expect partisans of parties in opposition to the president's former party to further distance themselves from the issue position advocated by the president.

Given the central role attributed to the prerogatives of presidents in our hypothesis, we surveyed the constitutions of several "Third Wave" parliamentary democracies to have a general view of presidents' responsibilities and powers.<sup>18</sup> As expected, these prerogatives vary considerably across the states, but there are certain common, dominant elements. In general, presidents are responsible for ensuring the regular functioning of the state institutions. This broad mandate implies that

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<sup>16</sup> The mass media is likely to play a key role in this respect by setting the terms of the debate on the president's prerogatives. As indicated by Zaller (1992, 9), the framing of issues by political elites in the mass media has a powerful effect on mass opinion, and "when elites divide, members of the public tend to follow the elites sharing their general ideological or partisan predisposition," in line with theories of partisanship. We thank an anonymous reviewer for highlighting this.

<sup>17</sup> See <http://tinyurl.com/j4atuym>.

<sup>18</sup> We consulted the Constitute Project website (<http://www.constituteproject.org>) which provides English full-texts of constitutions in force for nearly every independent state in the world. The website was developed by the authors of the Comparative Constitutions Project (<http://comparativeconstitutionsproject.org>) at the University of Texas at Austin.

presidents can legitimately step in and make statements about inter-branch conflicts and institutional crises. Presidents also play significant roles in government formation and termination as well as in the appointment of judges to high courts, but their powers related to domestic politics are mostly limited to these functions. A particular policy area in which presidents are given special authority in a number of parliamentary democracies is foreign policy (Baylis 1996). Presidents have the prerogative to formulate foreign policy in cooperation with the government (e.g., Croatia, Lithuania, Poland) or are responsible for the negotiation of international treaties (e.g., Czech Republic, Slovakia).<sup>19</sup> In general, presidents as heads of state are expected to safeguard national interests, which gives them a mandate to express opinion about basic foreign policy issues. In our survey experiment conducted in Turkey, we exploit this differentiation in prerogatives across domestic and foreign policy areas to test our hypothesis.

## The Turkish Context

The Turkish case as a large, unconsolidated democracy provides an opportune setting to study the role of presidents in shaping public opinion in parliamentary democracies. Under the current constitution of 1982, Turkey is a parliamentary republic with a council of ministers responsible to the legislature and a politically unaccountable president as the head of the state who “shall represent the Republic of Turkey and the unity of the Turkish Nation” (Article 104).<sup>20</sup> This emphasis on the nonpartisan character of the presidential office is further reinforced by requirement of the president-elect to give up any party affiliation and termination of his or her membership in the assembly (Article 101).

Scholars of constitutional law highlight that the current constitution bestows considerable powers upon the Turkish president, and therefore the presidential office can be considered being beyond purely ceremonial or symbolic but short of an executive type of presidency such as in the U.S. or France (Özbudun 1988).<sup>21</sup> Among the most important constitutional powers of the president are dissolving the assembly and calling for new elections, returning laws to the assembly for reconsideration, appointing or dismissing ministers as proposed by the prime minister, signing governmental decrees, presiding over the meetings of the council

<sup>19</sup> For example, the Constitution of Croatia (1991) stipulates, “the President of the Republic and the Government of the Republic of Croatia cooperate in formulation and execution of the foreign policy” (Article 99). The Constitution of the Czech Republic states, “the President of the Republic...negotiates and ratifies international treaties” (Article 63).

<sup>20</sup> Since the writing of this article, important changes have been brought to the system of government of Turkey. On December 10, 2016 the ruling AKP submitted a constitutional amendment proposal to abolish the existing parliamentary system by introducing an executive presidency with sweeping powers. This proposal was approved in a constitutional referendum held on April 16, 2017. This change in the system of government does not affect our present study as our fieldwork was completed about two years before these amendments were on the political agenda.

<sup>21</sup> This is widely attributed to the fact that the constitution of 1982 was a product of a military coup, and that the military leaders were “influenced by past political crises and envisaged the presidency as an arbitrator of future political deadlocks or troubles” [(Özsoy Boyunsuz 2016), 77].



of ministers whenever he or she deems necessary, calling the meeting of the National Security Council (NSC) and presiding over it, and appointing members of high judiciary.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, Özbudun (1988) stresses that some of these powers are rather formal than substantive in nature because they rely on the proposals or prior action by other political bodies (e.g., the prime minister or the ministers) who assume political responsibility. While the constitution stipulates that “executive power and function shall be exercised and carried out by the President and the Council of Ministers” (Article 8), Özbudun (1988) argues that the combination of a politically unaccountable president and the constitutional requirement that all decrees must be co-signed by the prime minister and the ministers concerned means that the executive function is in reality exercised by the government.

Under the 1982 constitution the president was elected for a single term of seven years by the Turkish Grand National Assembly (*Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi*, TBMM) from among its own members. In 2007, the constitution was amended to allow for direct, popular elections. Some argue that with this amendment Turkey has been transformed into a semi-presidential system,<sup>23</sup> but it should be noted that the 2007 amendment did not stipulate any changes regarding the president’s powers and responsibilities but just the mode of election.<sup>24</sup> The first direct presidential elections took place in August 2014 and R. Tayyip Erdoğan was elected as president by garnering 52% of votes in the first round.<sup>25</sup> Since his election, Erdoğan has been fiercely criticized by the opposition for acting in a partisan manner in favor of his former party and not maintaining impartiality as stipulated in the constitution.<sup>26</sup>

In our survey experiment, to be detailed shortly, we employed treatments that involved hypothetical statements on two issue areas with President Erdoğan as the source of statements. In line with our research question, we have chosen these two issue areas such that one of them could be considered within the prerogatives of the office of the president in the Turkish context while the other one is not. First, for the issue area that is outside the prerogatives of the president, we chose the

<sup>22</sup> The duties and powers of the president are specified in Article 104. A comprehensive list of president’s powers related to legislative, executive, and judicial functions is given in Özbudun (1988).

<sup>23</sup> Robert Elgie, who coined a popular definition of semi-presidentialism in Elgie (1999), considers as such, see <http://tinyurl.com/jqf6ecn>.

<sup>24</sup> For an extensive discussion of the implications of the 2007 constitutional amendment, see Özsoy (2010). One could argue that this change in the mode of election of the president put the Turkish system of government closer to the democracies of Central and Eastern Europe, contributing to the generalizability of the Turkish case for the purposes of the present study.

<sup>25</sup> It should be noted that although Erdoğan is the first directly elected president of Turkey, some of the past presidents (indirectly elected by the parliament) had strong partisan backgrounds as well (Turgut Özal and Süleyman Demirel, for example). So it is not the case that individuals with no partisan backgrounds used to fill the presidential office in Turkey before this change in the mode of election.

<sup>26</sup> For example, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, leader of the main opposition Republican People’s Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* - CHP), has urged Erdoğan either to keep his constitutional promise of impartiality or to resign (<http://tinyurl.com/jsreh9h>). Both CHP and the pro-Kurdish opposition Peoples’ Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi* - HDP) have filed complaints to the Constitutional Court ahead of the June 2015 general elections accusing Erdoğan of failing to obey the clause of impartiality in the constitution (<http://tinyurl.com/z3ccyg5>). Similar criticisms have been voiced by the nationalist opposition Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* - MHP) as well (<http://tinyurl.com/mmo3ld5>).

responsibilities and powers of local authorities in Turkey. As a strictly domestic policy issue, this issue area falls within the responsibilities of the executive branch of government (i.e., prime minister and the cabinet), and thus outside the prerogatives of the presidential office. As in many unconsolidated democracies with few precedents and established conventions for boundaries between different institutions (Baylis 1996), Turkish presidents who considered themselves powerful enough against a relatively weak government have tried to publicly formulate policies concerning strictly domestic issues, and expected the government to implement them. Yet such attempts have received fierce criticisms from the opposition as well as from the academia and media, and presidents had to pull back when they faced a determined prime minister. Heper and Çınar (1996, 493–497) present a detailed account of such dynamics during the Turgut Özal presidency (1989–1993).

Second, for the issue area that is within the prerogatives of the presidential office, we chose Turkish national interests in foreign policy. As we had mentioned previously, presidents are given special authority in formulating foreign policy in several parliamentary democracies of Eastern Europe (Baylis 1996). Although no such explicit mandate exists in the Turkish Constitution, presidents of Turkey have frequently assumed the role of setting foreign policy priorities, a role that is seen as legitimate by the other relevant actors as presidents were able to justify such conduct by referring to their status as the head of state and National Security Council (Heper and Çınar 1996). Turgut Özal, the first civilian president following the enactment of the 1982 Constitution, was particularly vocal in articulating foreign policy priorities and set a precedent. During the first Gulf War, for example, Özal stated that Turkey “should leave its former passive and hesitant policies and engage in an active foreign policy” [(Robins 1992), 70]; he also pushed for closer relations with then-newly independent Central Asian states and for regional cooperation among the countries neighboring the Black Sea (Makovsky 1999). Other presidents before Erdoğan have repeatedly voiced their views on Turkish foreign national interests as well. Abdullah Gül (2007–2014) urged “Turkey to stay on EU path,”<sup>27</sup> and similar statements have been made by Ahmet Necdet Sezer (2000–2007),<sup>28</sup> a figure with a nonpartisan background, and by Süleyman Demirel (1993–2000).<sup>29</sup> Later we provide further evidence from a public opinion poll that the two issue areas we employ in our experiment serves well for the within-prerogative vs. outside-prerogative distinction in the Turkish context.

One might question whether it is reasonable to expect the concept of partisanship to “travel” into the Turkish political context. Indeed, there are valid reasons to expect lower levels of partisanship in society and little effects of partisan cues on voters’ opinions and political decision-making in unconsolidated democracies like Turkey. The long-term continual existence of the same political parties and of a democratic system are considered as essential for the relevance of partisanship (Converse 1969). As such, unconsolidated democratic settings with relatively recent

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<sup>27</sup> See <http://tinyurl.com/zq2aopk>.

<sup>28</sup> See <http://tinyurl.com/gopu23p>.

<sup>29</sup> See <http://tinyurl.com/gS9kows>.

free and fair elections, high levels of party-system instability, and interruptions to democratic rule are hardly fertile grounds for the development of partisan attachments. Since the first competitive elections of 1950, Turkish democracy has been interrupted by a number of military coups. Parties have been closed down and new parties emerged only to witness disappearance from the electoral scene. By disrupting voters' political socialization with parties, such volatility in the party system should work against partisanship effects.

On the other hand, scholars of Turkish politics highlight that the Turkish political scene has historically been characterized by a major cleavage that pits the nationalist and secular elites of the “center” against the ethnically diverse, conservative, and religious non-elites of the “periphery” (Çarkoğlu 2014; Kalaycıoğlu 1994; Mardin 1973). Despite several interruptions of democratic rule, major parties have continued to position themselves on one side of this central cleavage and newly established parties have traced their lineage to older ones. Therefore, partisan attachments could be transferred across generations—albeit under different party labels,—and therefore partisan effects might not be as weak as the volatile party system suggests.<sup>30</sup> Ultimately the strength of partisan effects in the Turkish context is an empirical question.

## Research Design and Data

We have embedded a partisan cue experiment into a nationally-representative face-to-face survey conducted in Turkey in late 2014/early 2015.<sup>31</sup> From a research design perspective, population-based survey experiments such as ours have the unique advantage of combining internal validity with the ability to generalize the estimated effect of interest to the target population, in our case the voting population of Turkey (Mutz 2011). While observational data could reveal specific patterns between partisan attachments and issue opinions, isolating the causal effect of the former on the latter with such data is problematic due to concerns about endogeneity and omitted variable bias.

Respondents in our survey were randomly assigned to one of the four versions of the survey instrument—three treatment versions and one control version. In each version, respondents were presented with specific policy views, separately, on two distinct issue areas, and were subsequently asked whether they agreed or disagreed

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<sup>30</sup> Kalaycıoğlu (2008) presents evidence in this direction.

<sup>31</sup> The sampling procedure starts with the use of Turkish Statistical Institute's (TUIK) NUTS-2 regions. The target sample was distributed according to each region's share of urban and rural population in accordance with current records of the Address Based Population Registration System (ADNKS). Next, TUIK's block data were used with block size set at 400 residents. Twenty voters were targeted to be reached from each block and no substitution was used. Probability proportionate to size (PPS) principle was used in distributing the blocks to NUTS-2 regions. 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 by Frekans Research ([www.frekans.com.tr](http://www.frekans.com.tr)) between Dec. 15, 2014, and Feb. 1, 2015.

with the views articulated in the prompts. The three treatment versions employed different cues as the source of the policy view; no cue was present in the control version. As randomization ensures statistical independence between treatment assignment and all potential confounders, observed and unobserved (Dunning 2012), we are able to isolate the effect of our manipulations of source cues on respondents' views and make causal inference with confidence beyond what would be possible using non-experimental survey data.

The first issue prompt focused on Turkey's national interests in foreign policy and read as follows:

One of the issues that were publicly debated during the past year was Turkey's foreign policy orientation. In this regard, [ACTOR] stated that Turkey's national interests necessitate the maintenance and further development of good relations with the U.S. and the West in general.

We manipulated the actor stated in the prompt in the three treatment versions. In the first treatment version [ACTOR] was substituted with "the former leader of AK Party (AKP) and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan." The second treatment version featured "the leader of CHP, the main opposition party, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu" as the source of the statement. And in the third treatment version the actor was "AK Party (AKP) members of parliament." The fourth, control, version featured no actor; we just used a passive voice in the form of "some views were expressed."

The choice of these specific actors serves the following purposes in line with our research objectives. The first treatment, *President Erdoğan*, is intended to address our main question of how voters would respond to statements from a presidential head of state with a partisan background. In order to emphasize Erdoğan's partisan background, we emphasized that he was the former leader of AK Party (AKP), the current incumbent party. The second treatment, *Opposition Leader Kılıçdaroğlu*, is a typical party-leader cue. Here we mentioned that Kılıçdaroğlu was the leader of the main opposition party, CHP, in order to minimize the possibility of name non-recognition or misunderstanding in the context of a face-to-face interview. And finally, the third treatment, *Incumbent Party AKP*, is intended to serve as a party-label cue. Ideally we would like to have more treatment versions (e.g., having a version with an opposition party-label cue) but limitations related with fielding a large, in-person survey with randomization forced us to have three treatment versions only.

In the second issue prompt the theme was the responsibilities and powers of the local authorities in Turkey, a strictly domestic policy issue, and the actor in the prompt was manipulated in the same manner as in the first prompt:

Another issue that was publicly debated during the past year was local authorities' responsibilities and powers. In this regard, [ACTOR] stated that local authorities should be given more powers and autonomy in areas like tax collection and providing health and education services.

The outcome questions are the same for the two prompts, and ask to what degree the respondents agree or disagree with the view articulated. Answer choices ran from "I

do not agree at all” (coded as  $-2$ ) to “I agree completely” (coded as  $2$ ) in a five-point scale.<sup>32</sup>

As in any partisan cue experiment, we expect differentiated effects of our treatments across the partisans of different parties. For this reason it is important to identify partisans in our sample. The two major parties in the Turkish political scene during the period of our study (late 2014/early 2015) were AKP and CHP. The competition between these two parties could be considered as the latest incarnation of the central cleavage in Turkish politics with AKP claiming to represent the “periphery” and CHP advocating “centrist” values (Mardin 1973). From public opinion surveys it is possible to observe that voters of these two parties diverge significantly in several issue domains. Thus in our experiment we focus on the partisans of these two major parties.<sup>33</sup> To identify partisans in the sample, we asked our respondents whether they identified themselves with a particular political party to the degree of feeling as a part of it.<sup>34</sup> We identified about 29% of the respondents in our sample as AKP partisans and about 13% as CHP partisans. Our large sample ( $N = 2334$ ) ensures that there is a sizable amount of partisans of both parties in each experimental group.

The research design we employ enables us to test our hypothesis in a rather straightforward manner. Our argument on the dynamics of statements from presidents and partisan reactions predicts that Erdoğan’s statements should result in out-group effects among CHP partisans only in the domestic policy issue. That is, CHP partisans in the *President Erdoğan* treatment should voice lower levels of support for the articulated view than their co-partisans in the control condition in the case of domestic policy statement. In contrast, no such polarizing effect should be observed in the case of foreign policy statement. Moving to AKP partisans, it is highly likely that they still consider Erdoğan as an in-group member given his strong partisan background and charismatic leadership. In this case we would expect AKP partisans to be persuaded by Erdoğan (in-group effects) regardless of the issue domain.

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics on a number of demographic and other characteristics of respondents in each of the four experimental groups. The similarity of these observable characteristics across the groups suggests that randomization was successful. A likelihood ratio test from the multinomial logit regression of treatment assignment on these characteristics is statistically insignificant (Wald  $\chi^2_{(21)} = 18.14, p < 0.64$ ).

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<sup>32</sup> Nonresponses and undecided respondents are coded as 0.

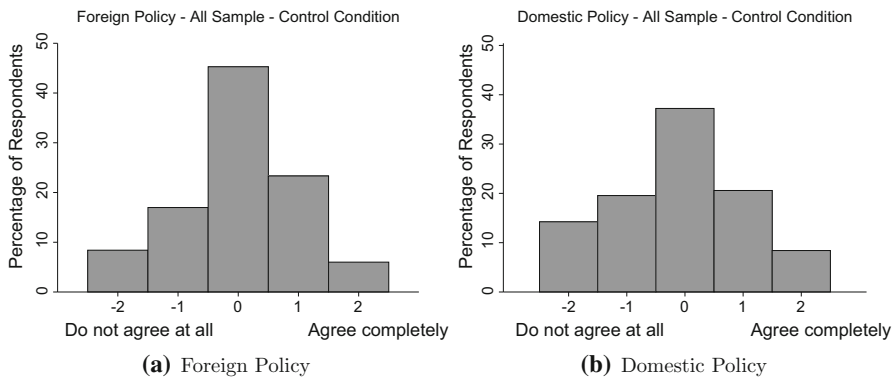
<sup>33</sup> We present an analysis of our experimental results among partisans of smaller opposition parties in the supplementary information appendix.

<sup>34</sup> As Kalaycıoğlu (2008) notes, it is difficult to translate “party identification” into Turkish. He reports that focus group discussions suggested that the concept of “*tutmak*,” with its connotations of deep and intense feelings towards an object, frequently used to indicate being fan of a sports club, best corresponds to the concept of party identification in Turkish. We adopt this concept to identify partisans in our sample.

**Table 1** Sample characteristics across experimental groups

Variable	President Erdoğan	Opp. Leader Kılıçdaroğlu	Incumbent Party AKP	Control	Overall
Female (%)	53	51	48	48	50
Age (Avg.)	41	39	40	41	40
Education (Avg.)	2.3	2.3	2.3	2.3	2.3
Kurdish-speaking (%)	21	21	19	20	20
Urban resident (%)	79	79	78	79	79
AKP Partisan (%)	28	26	32	29	29
CHP Partisan (%)	13	13	11	12	13
<i>N</i>	579	586	586	583	2334

*Education* refers to the highest level of education completed by the respondent, coded on a scale of 0–6 (0 = no formal education; 6 = post-graduate education)

**Fig. 1** Distribution of responses to outcome questions in the control condition

## Analysis

Figure 1 presents the distribution of responses to the outcome questions in the overall sample for the control condition, where no partisan cues were included in the vignettes.<sup>35</sup> We can see that the responses are not particularly skewed in any particular direction—most of them are concentrated in the middle. There are relatively few respondents who are strongly opinionated on the two issue domains.

<sup>35</sup> Replication files are available in the *Political Behavior* Data Archive in Dataverse (<https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/polbehavior>).

<sup>36</sup> See Figures A1 and A2 in the supplementary information appendix. There are no significant differences in the distribution of responses to outcome questions across AKP and CHP partisans in the control condition.

<sup>37</sup> Regression analyses using ordinary least squares (OLS) estimation are reported in the supplementary information appendix (Tables A1, A2, and A3). There are no changes in the substantive results.

This is true for AKP and CHP partisans as well so that we are unlikely to encounter floor or ceiling effects.<sup>36</sup>

To analyze our experimental results, first we focus on the foreign policy issue domain. Table 2 presents regression analyses of average treatment effects with and without covariates for AKP and CHP partisans using ordered probit models.<sup>37</sup> Positive (negative) coefficients indicate that respondents in the treatment group are more likely to agree (disagree) with the view articulated in the prompt than respondents in the control group. First consider AKP partisans (Model 1). We see that they react to all of our three experimental manipulations: they are more likely to agree with the view on the foreign issue when it is articulated by *President Erdoğan* or *Incumbent Party AKP*, and they are more likely to disagree with the same view when it is articulated by the *Opposition Leader Kılıçdaroğlu*. In contrast, only two of our three treatments have statistically significant effects among CHP partisans (Model 2). CHP partisans are more likely to agree with the view in the prompt when it is articulated by their leader, Kılıçdaroğlu, and they are more likely to disagree if the view is voiced by the *Incumbent Party AKP*. However, CHP partisans do not react to the cue that involves *President Erdoğan*: in this case they are no more or less likely to agree with the view than their co-partisans in the control condition. Our estimates for treatment effects are robust to the inclusion of a number of covariates in the regressions (Models 3 and 4).

These results provide support for our hypothesis that statements about issue domains within the prerogatives of the presidential office should not lead to out-group effects. In our experiment, a statement about foreign policy from Erdoğan did not have a polarizing effect among the partisans of the main opposition party CHP even though Erdoğan is a strongly partisan figure as the founder and long-time leader of AKP and continues to display partisan attitudes as president. This result is even more remarkable if we consider that CHP partisans do distance themselves from the articulated view if the source cue is AKP members of parliament. This observation rules out the alternative explanation that perhaps CHP partisans do not show partisan reactions to foreign policy issues—in fact they do show partisan reactions when the source cue is their rival party or their own leader, just not when the cue is Erdoğan. Partisans of AKP, on the other hand, are persuaded by the statement from Erdoğan—the treatment effect of *President Erdoğan* among AKP partisans is as large as that of the *Incumbent Party AKP* treatment. It seems that partisans of Erdoğan's former party still perceive him as an in-group member.

Next we consider the experimental results on the domestic policy domain (Table 3). In this case both AKP and CHP partisans react to all of our cues—all treatments lead to statistically significant effects. AKP partisans are more likely to agree with the view in the prompt than their co-partisans in the control condition if it is articulated by *President Erdoğan* or *Incumbent Party AKP*, and they are also more likely to disagree with it if *Opposition Leader Kılıçdaroğlu* supports the same view (Model 1). The reactions of CHP partisans are exactly the opposite of those of AKP partisans—CHP partisans are more likely to agree with the view if it is articulated by *Opposition Leader Kılıçdaroğlu*, and they took an opposite position if the statement is coming from *President Erdoğan* or *Incumbent Party AKP* (Model 2). These conclusions are robust to inclusion of covariates to the specifications

**Table 2** Regression analyses of average treatment effects on the foreign policy issue domain with and without covariates

DV: Agreement with statement (Foreign policy)	(1) AKP partisans	(2) CHP partisans	(3) AKP partisans	(4) CHP partisans
President Erdoğan	0.456*** (0.115)	−0.095 (0.169)	0.465*** (0.117)	−0.140 (0.173)
Opp. Leader Kılıçdaroğlu	−0.276** (0.117)	0.718*** (0.166)	−0.230* (0.119)	0.704*** (0.171)
Incumbent Party AKP	0.412*** (0.112)	−0.339** (0.172)	0.420*** (0.113)	−0.350** (0.176)
Female			−0.217** (0.087)	−0.038 (0.129)
Age			0.006* (0.003)	−0.002 (0.005)
Education			−0.009 (0.037)	−0.014 (0.040)
Kurdish-speaking			−0.149 (0.115)	0.219 (0.326)
Urban resident			−0.127 (0.095)	−0.432*** (0.159)
<i>N</i>	670	293	663	289

Ordered probit coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$  (two-tailed tests)

(Models 3 and 4). The crucial difference between the results on the domestic policy domain (Table 3) and the foreign policy domain (Table 2) is that CHP partisans display out-group responses to Erdoğan cues (i.e., distancing themselves from the issue position articulated by him) when the statement concerns a domestic policy issue, and they do not display such a reaction in the case of a foreign policy statement.

Lastly we consider the effects of our experimental manipulations on the views of nonpartisan voters, who constitute about 36% of our sample (Table 4). First we note that nonpartisan voters react neither to the party-leader cue (*Opposition Leader Kılıçdaroğlu*) nor to the party-label cue (*Incumbent Party AKP*)—nonpartisans assigned to these treatments are no more or less likely to agree with the views in the prompts compared to nonpartisans in the control group. This is expected as there is no reason for partisan cues to exert an effect on views of nonpartisans; an observation that bolsters our confidence that the results discussed previously are driven by partisanship. In contrast, nonpartisans are persuaded by *President Erdoğan* in both issue domains. Heper and Çınar note that the office of presidency possesses a “special aura” in Turkish polity, commanding moral authority and respect [(Heper and Çınar, 1996), 492]. This status of president might have led nonpartisans in our sample to be influenced by Erdoğan’s views, even in a domain that is outside his prerogatives.



**Table 3** Regression analyses of average treatment effects on the domestic policy issue domain with and without covariates

DV: Agreement with statement (Domestic policy)	(1) AKP partisans	(2) CHP partisans	(3) AKP partisans	(4) CHP partisans
President Erdoğan	0.335*** (0.117)	-0.348** (0.166)	0.328*** (0.119)	-0.343** (0.169)
Opp. Leader Kılıçdaroğlu	-0.419*** (0.115)	0.423** (0.179)	-0.472*** (0.118)	0.441** (0.181)
Incumbent Party AKP	0.212* (0.111)	-0.595*** (0.173)	0.194* (0.113)	-0.577*** (0.175)
Female			-0.025 (0.088)	0.243* (0.132)
Age			0.005* (0.003)	-0.004 (0.005)
Education			0.030 (0.038)	-0.024 (0.042)
Kurdish-speaking			0.422*** (0.120)	0.193 (0.360)
Urban resident			0.496*** (0.098)	-0.158 (0.159)
N	670	293	663	289

Ordered probit coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$  (two-tailed tests)

One question on the interpretation of our experimental results is whether the issue domains we employ in our treatments (domestic vs. foreign policy) matches well with the within-prerogative vs. outside-prerogative distinction in the context of Turkish presidential office. Earlier we have provided qualitative evidence in this direction from the behavior of former presidents and the reactions they received from other political actors. In order to further substantiate our claim that there is a stark difference between the issue domains that we selected in terms of whether they are considered within the prerogatives of the Turkish president, we have implemented a follow-up survey on an independent sample of 501 respondents recruited through an online panel.<sup>38</sup> We presented respondents with the two exact hypothetical issue statements that we employed in the survey experiment, and asked whether they considered the domain of the statements to be within or outside the prerogatives of the president. Figure 2 displays the distribution of answers for the two domains. In line with our expectations, a large majority of respondents (about 74%) hold the view that the foreign policy statement is within the prerogatives of the Turkish president. Opinions on the domestic policy statement constitute a sharp

<sup>38</sup> Participants in this follow-up survey were recruited from <https://benderimki.com/>, a web-based convenience panel with about seventy thousand active users throughout Turkey. More information about the sample is presented in the supplementary information appendix.

**Table 4** Regression analyses of average treatment effects on policy issue domains with and without covariates—nonpartisan respondents only

DV: Agreement with statement	(1) Foreign policy	(2) Domestic policy	(3) Foreign policy	(4) Domestic policy
President Erdoğan	0.192* (0.101)	0.239** (0.105)	0.184* (0.103)	0.203* (0.106)
Opp. Leader Kılıçdaroğlu	−0.025 (0.102)	0.165 (0.104)	−0.056 (0.103)	0.134 (0.105)
Incumbent Party AKP	−0.112 (0.099)	0.023 (0.103)	−0.130 (0.102)	−0.003 (0.104)
Female			−0.041 (0.077)	0.201*** (0.077)
Age			0.002 (0.003)	−0.002 (0.003)
Education			−0.068** (0.028)	−0.018 (0.027)
Kurdish-speaking			−0.320*** (0.090)	0.124 (0.097)
Urban resident			−0.014 (0.101)	−0.084 (0.108)
<i>N</i>	840	840	825	825

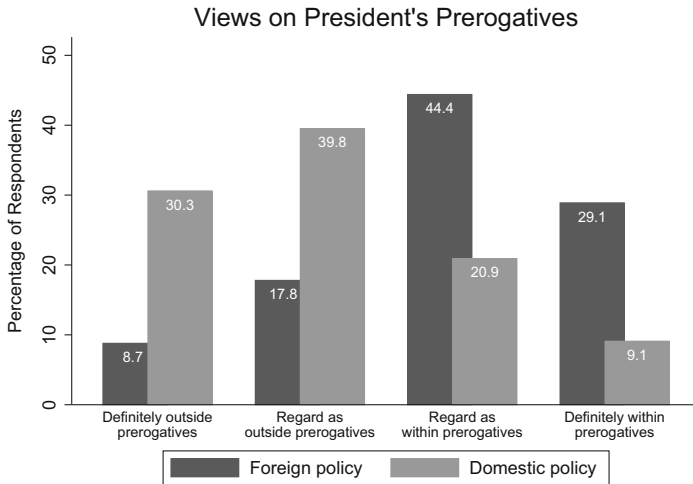
Ordered probit coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$  (two-tailed tests)

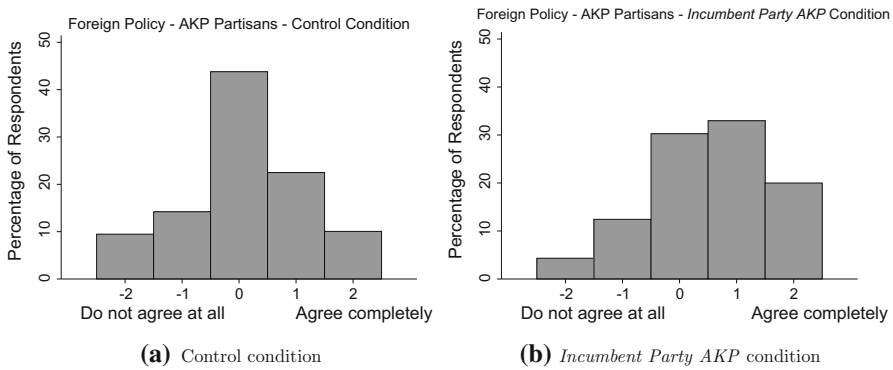
contrast—in this case about 70% of respondents consider the domain of the statement as *outside* the prerogatives of the president.<sup>39</sup> These results provide further evidence that the issue domains we employ correspond well to the within-vs.-outside distinction with respect to the prerogatives of the president in the Turkish context.

In addition to providing evidence for our argument on the dynamics of presidential statements and partisanship, our experimental results make two additional contributions to the literature on partisanship. First, we present evidence that partisanship is an important causal factor in the opinion formation of Turkish voters. The magnitude of the effects is not trivial. For example, Figure 3 displays a comparison of the distribution of responses to the foreign policy question by AKP partisans in the control condition (left panel) and in the *Incumbent Party AKP* treatment condition (right panel). When we do not offer any partisan cues, about 33% of AKP partisans agree with the statement in the prompt while about 24% disagree. Just mentioning that the source of the statement is members of *Incumbent Party AKP* makes a significant difference towards pushing opinions in the positive direction; in this group the proportion of AKP partisans who agree with the view jumps to 53% while dissenters fall to 17%. In this respect, our results are in line

<sup>39</sup> For both questions about 3% of respondents chose the “don’t know” option. The reported figures do not include these respondents.



**Fig. 2** Distribution of responses as to whether the domain of the issue statement is within or outside the president's prerogatives



**Fig. 3** Distribution of responses to foreign policy question by AKP partisans in the control (left) and Incumbent Party AKP (right) conditions

with other recent studies in the literature that show that the political relevance of partisanship is not limited to consolidated democracies.<sup>40</sup>

Second, Nicholson (2012) presents evidence that party-leader cues have a larger effect on opinion formation than party-label cues in the U.S. He argues that party leaders might be more “vivid” and emotionally involving to voters in comparison to the abstractness of party labels, and therefore elicit more reaction. In the Turkish case, it seems that party-label cues are as effective as party-leader cues when it comes to evoking partisan responses. Due to the limitation of fielding three experimental versions, we were able to include one party-leader cue, *Opposition Leader Kılıçdaroğlu*, and one party-label cue, *Incumbent Party AKP*, in our survey.

<sup>40</sup> See, e.g., Brader and Tucker (2012) on Hungary and Samuels and Zucco (2014) on Brazil.

Both of these cues were effective in producing statistically significant effects on the views of AKP and CHP partisans in expected directions. To the best of our knowledge this is the first empirical evidence showing that political leaders can function as polarizing as well as persuading cues in unconsolidated democracies.

## Conclusion

In this paper we have sought to explore the dynamics of how presidential heads of state can shape public opinion in parliamentary democracies. As directly elected presidents have become more prevalent across European democracies over the past two decades, questions about the roles of these actors on governance have grown in importance. While there is a growing literature on presidential powers and their implications for interactions with other political actors in parliamentary governance, we were struck by the relative scarcity of studies focusing on the role of presidents in public opinion formation. The fact that many presidents have often been major partisan figures before assuming the “suprapartisan” (Baylis, 1996) presidential office adds an intriguing aspect to this question—how do voters react to statements from such actors?

Our conjecture for this question was relatively simple: partisans of the parties in opposition to the president’s former party have to weigh the partisan background of the president against the moral authority and legitimacy accrued to the nonpartisan office he or she currently occupies. We argue that the domain of the issue statement will determine which of these two factors will be more dominant. In the case of president making statements about issue domains outside the prerogatives of the office, a partisan controversy will ensue on whether he or she ventures to step beyond his or her constitutional powers. This would lead to partisan reactions from the opposition partisans whereby they distance themselves from the position articulated by the president. No such partisan backlash is expected when the president makes a statement about issues within his or her prerogatives.

We have turned to a population-based survey experiment fielded in Turkey to test our hypothesis. The research design we employ allows us to circumvent the difficulties associated with establishing causal inferences on partisanship from observational data and at the same time to generalize our results to Turkish voting population. Turkey is an opportune setting to study our research question as R. Tayyip Erdoğan, a strongly partisan figure, recently became the first popularly elected president of Turkey, a constitutionally nonpartisan office at the time of our survey. The results of our experiment provide strong support for our hypothesis. We observe out-group bias among the partisans of CHP, the main opposition party to Erdoğan’s former party AKP, when Erdoğan makes a statement that is outside the prerogatives of the office of Turkish president. In contrast, a statement about Turkey’s national interests in foreign policy, an issue domain within the prerogatives of Erdoğan, did not lead CHP partisans to distance themselves from the position articulated.

Institutional crises and intra-executive conflicts such as those between presidents and prime ministers are frequently observed in unconsolidated democracies (Shugart and Carey, 1992), and publicly aired policy disagreements often become part of these conflicts.<sup>41</sup> From this perspective, our study heeds calls of scholars for studies that “look closer detail at the different incentives of elected presidents and how they may moderate...the potential for conflict” [(Fernandes and Magalhães, 2016), 77]. An important implication of our results is that presidential heads of state seem to have a certain advantage over other partisan figures in shaping public opinion because they can persuade some segments of the population (partisans of their former party and nonpartisan voters) while not polarizing others (opposition partisans) on issue domains that are considered within their prerogatives. Given the importance of the prerogatives of the president for how voters would take sides in intra-executive crises, it is not surprising to observe such conflicts turning into debates on prerogatives with presidents seeking to define their prerogatives broadly while opponents trying to convince the public that the president has stepped out of his or her constitutional powers.

Our findings highlight a need for further research on how presidential heads of state can shape public opinion in parliamentary democracies. By focusing on the role partisanship and the president’s prerogatives, we have taken the first important steps towards this direction. As we have presented evidence from a single country, however, further research should contribute to validate our claims among a larger set of countries. Studies conducted in different countries would also help to delineate the potential effects of different institutional arrangements, party systems, and issue domains on the relationship between presidents and public opinion dynamics. Such a research agenda would result in a better understanding of presidents’ role in parliamentary governance that goes beyond inter-branch relations.

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<sup>41</sup> See Baylis (1996), and the accounts referenced in footnotes six to 11.

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