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Comparative Analysis of Voting Participation: The Case of Turkey's 2009 Local and 2011 National Elections

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Abstract

This study comparatively analyzes voting participation through population sizes in local and national elections in Turkey. By equating and dividing the constituencies of 2009 local elections and 2011 national elections into 13 categories according to the number of voters, the study attempts to test hypotheses, such as local elections are carried out under the influence of national politics; and voters perceive local elections as less important than national elections. The study finds a steady decline in turnout rates in local elections, but not in national elections, while turnout in metropolitan areas is higher in national than local elections.

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1. Introduction

A review of the literature on election studies demonstrates that there are much fewer studies on local elections than national elections. For example, Oliver and Ha (2007, p. 393) argue that “nowhere is this information gap greater than with respect to local elections”. They maintain that considering the fact that local “elections arguably represent the most immediate democratic experience for a majority of Americans, political scientists have little understanding of what determines vote choice in these settings” (Oliver & Ha, 2007, p. 393). This is especially significant for Oliver and Ha (2007, pp. 393-394) because “such micro-elections may be the ‘schoolrooms of democracy’ the place where citizens learn the basics of collective decision making”. Bayraktar (2011, p. 10) similarly points out that the scarcity of the studies about local elections is because of the fact that such studies have focused on the total gains of national political actors through either candidates or political parties. In much the same way, Morlan (1984: 468-469) asserts that “citizens in all countries studied perceived national elections to be more important than local ones”. This is caused by “vastly greater publicity” of national elections and by “party mobilization efforts”. However, Stewart (1996) considers relatively less interest in local politics as a result of the view that sees local governments as administrations providing some services rather than as political institutions (as cited in Çitçi, 2005, p. 35).

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Another reason for relatively less interest in local elections is the low levels of voting participation or turnout rate in local elections compared to national elections (Lipson 1984; Zimmermann, 1986; Stroker, 1988; Çitçi, 2005). Çitçi (2005, pp. 34-35) says that the first and foremost of the focus of the studies on local elections is on turnout rate. It is generally accurate that turnout level at the local elections has been below the turnout level at the national elections in Turkey. According to Turan (1986, p. 90) this is because national elections get more attention than local elections due to their high impact on political power and the power of tutelage of the national governments over local governments (as cited in Çitçi, 2005, pp. 34-35). Similarly, Sabuncu and Şeker argue that although there may be some local factors, the results of local elections present the support of national political parties (as cited in Çitçi, 2005, p. 37). Therefore, Çitçi states that local elections are rarely considered as voting for local governments. This is defined as nationalization of politics which means people's political behavior is determined by national political parties and issues at elections are put forward by national media (Çitçi, 2005, p.37). In fact, Çitçi (1989) and Sabuncu and Şeker (1996) argue that voters make their choice in local elections according to their political party preferences. According to Kiriş and Güç (2008) and Akbulut (2004), the nationalization of local elections stems from the existence of disciplined nation-wide political parties contesting at local elections. However, the empowerment of the local governments since the 1980s and increased cleavages in party system after the 1989 local elections, among others, in Turkey led to a rise in the interest of national and local actors in local politics (Akbulut, 2005, pp. 3, 6).

Many researchers assert that local elections are perceived by voters as a response to national political actors. According to Leonard and Mortimore (2005, p. 155), "many voters use local elections as means of passing judgment on the performance of the national government, and to 'send a message' to Westminster, rather than voting on the basis of which parties and candidates they would prefer to run their local council". Norris and Evans (1999) as well as Harrop and Miller (1987) also consider the results of local elections as a message to party in government (quoted in Çitçi 2005, p. 34). Akbulut (2004, p. 1) states that when local elections are held before national elections, the local ones are considered as public opinion poll for national political parties; when local elections are held after national elections the local ones are considered as a vote of critique. Accordingly he maintains that local elections are taken as a reflection of national political attitude. In addition, national elections are considered as a sign of party system, political stability/instability, and of social and political transformation in a country.

The examination of the studies on local elections presents the causes of this study. The studies on local elections are scarce and mostly related to national politics or political actors. In the case of Turkey studying local elections are more significant, because such studies are rare. With the developments of local governments in Turkey since 1980 the necessity for such studies becomes more apparent. This study therefore starts with a detailed examination of turnout rates according to population size, because turnout is considered as one of the most important aspect of political participation.

2. Voting participation at local elections

Although some liberals argue against the necessity of voting participation in the name of democracy, turnout is widely considered as a sign of participation and the functionality of democracy. Higher turnout shows greater interest in politics whether local or national. Apart from presenting interest in politics, high turnout rates are also an indication of the representation of the different groups. An increase in turnout rates can be considered as voting participation of diverse groups of people. For example, in their analysis of the consequences of turnout in local elections, Hajnal and Trounstine (2005, p. 530) conclude that an increase in turnout rates "could substantially reduce black underrepresentation at the local level" in the United States. It can therefore be argued that turnout rates are important for people's interest in politics/democracy, and in turn their representation at local / national politics.

There have been arguments explaining the causes of low turnout in local elections comparing with national elections. In the case of Britain for example, Leonard and Mortimore (2005, pp. 154-155) assert that participation rate in national elections has been 70 to 85 per cent while it has been about 40 per cent in local elections. The difference of local politics from national politics, according to Kiriş and Güç (2008, pp. 106-107), in the United States of America and Great Britain arises from the existence of long lasting local government traditions and the

party systems. In some states in the United States, political parties cannot nominate any candidates for the local elections, enormously lowering the interest in local elections. According to Leonard and Mortimore, lower turnout in local elections in these two countries is because of the indifference of national political parties for local elections. They maintain that, while Labour, Conservative and Liberal contest almost in all seats in national elections, “in local elections this is not the general rule, except in the main urban areas”. Therefore, in local elections in the Great Britain the return of the number of incumbents is very high, including non-party lines. Even after the reorganization local governments in 1973-4, “regular three-party competition is far from being universal and, indeed, there are still local councils where independents or other non-party groupings hold the majority” (Leonard & Mortimore, 2005, pp. 154-155). In such societies, Morlan argues, “a large segment of the populace does not perceive election outcome to be extremely crucial” because they “do not believe that post elections change will be great or that a loss for their preferred parties or candidates will be an unmitigated disaster” (Morlan, 1984, p.464). However, Oliver and Ha (2007, p. 398) argue that “the multivariate analyses suggest that people in more racially heterogeneous suburbs are more interested in local politics”. There can be seen different aspects of local elections in some countries, but such studies are rare in Turkey.

The low interest in local elections is also reflected in the studies about the causes of voting behavior at local elections. According to Oliver and Ha (2007, p. 394), national voting has been explained through four factors: “partisan affiliation, evaluation of national economic conditions, the candidate’s stance on salient issues, and candidate likeability.” However, these factors are questioned for their validity for explaining voting behavior in local elections. With this point in mind, Oliver and Ha (2007, p.395) carry their research through “population size and the amount of internal political conflict”. They argue that “in large places, voters will be less interested or informed about local elections and thus more likely to support incumbents, in the absence of any other information... In the smaller places, voters should be more interested and informed, thus more likely to know and support challenges to office.” For Akbulut (2004, p. 5) comparatively low turnout rates at local elections are the presentation of the falsification of liberal idea seeing local governments as ‘school for democracy’. Similarly Morlan (1984, p. 462) argues that “it does not appear to be true in any one of these countries that citizens are most interested and involved in the governments ‘closest to home’”. Such an approach however does not take turnout rates in smaller communities into account. Low turnout rate in local elections, as demonstrated below in the case of Turkey, arises from complex and huge metropolitan municipalities similar to national governments. This study therefore analyzes local elections in Turkey according to population size to question voters’ perception local elections either in different sizes or in comparison with national elections.

On the other hand, high voting participation in some local elections is explained by national politicization of local elections “in terms of both issues and party activity” (Morlan, 1984, p. 463). The research carried out by Lee, Karnig and Walter (1977) and Alford and Lee (1968) demonstrated that turnout at local elections was higher when they were held concurrently with national or state elections in the United States (as cited in Morlan, 1984, p.463). Besides, Oliver and Ha (2007, p. 398) state that people whose elections were concurrent with the national elections of 2004 were less interested in local politics, less likely to know a candidate personally or be mobilized. They also argue that “people who live in places that had mayoral elections are more likely to be interested in politics and be contacted by local organizations” (Oliver & Ha, 2007, p. 398).

Some researchers point out the effects of election system on voting behavior. Morlan (1984, p. 463) for example argues that proportional representation “may contribute to higher turnout (at local elections) because of a more prevalent feeling that one’s vote is more likely to count significantly in the outcomes”. Similarly, Blais and Carty (1990) found that proportional representation increased turnout by 5 to 7 per cent while Arend Lijphart (1997) “estimated turnout boost of 9-12 per cent due to proportional representation” (quoted in Milner and Ladner, 2006: 29). In much the same way, Milner and Ladner (2006, p. 30) find the positive effects of proportional representation on turnout in smaller municipalities. The effects of election system on voting participation can be presented in the case of Turkey, as mentioned below, since Turkey uses proportional representation and majoritarian systems together in local elections.

Another reason mentioned relatively high rate of turnout in local elections is the interest of national political parties in local elections. Milner and Ladner (2006, p. 30) consider the presence of the national parties as a reason

for higher turnout in municipalities with proportional representation. According to Milner and Ladner (2006, p. 31), their research “suggests that in order fully to explain the difference, we will need to look beyond political institutions in the localities to what we term ‘cultural’ factors, that is, factors related to cantonal and regional political culture.” Turkey is a significant example of strong presence of national political parties in local elections. Along with partisan voting, this can be considered as a reason of high rates of turnout at local elections, but this does not mean that there are no differences between local and national elections.

It is argued that partisan voting also has positive effects on turnout. Oliver and Ha (2007, p. 398) assert that “people who live in places with partisan ballots are far more likely to be mobilized during the campaign”. This is because “in places with more articulated conflict (i.e., more socially diverse suburbs with mayoral and partisan elections), we expect political campaigns to be more active, candidates and political groups to be more visible, and voters to be more interested in the elections and mobilized by partisan groups”. On the contrary, “in places with less articulated conflict (i.e., more homogeneous suburbs with reform-style institutions), voters are probably less likely to be interested or aware of local political controversies, more likely to support incumbents, and be less informed by issues position” (Oliver & Ha, 2007, p. 395). Besides, Morlan (1984, p. 463) argues that partisan elections cause the presence of the same political parties at both local and national elections, like in the West European countries. Karning and Walter (1977) in their analyses of municipal elections in the United States found out that “turnout ... was consistently higher in cities using partisan local elections than in those with nonpartisan elections (36 percent versus 17 percent in 1975)”. Due to low turnout in Britain, Leonard and Mortimore (2005, p. 156) believe that the direct accountability of mayors to voters is amplified. Although the effects of partisan voting are beyond the interest of this study, it should be mentioned that Turkey presents an aspect of the direct election of mayors by voters.

For the differences between urban and rural areas in terms of turnout, Verba and Nie (1972) developed ‘mobilization model’ and ‘the decline-of-community model’. According to the mobilization model, political participation is comparatively higher in urban areas because “people at or near the centers of population concentration have a higher rate of social interaction.” According to the decline-of-community model on the other hand, political participation in small communities is higher because “people in small communities have a stronger sense of political effectiveness, can see results more quickly, know whom to contact, and can form action groups more easily” (as cited in Morlan, 1984, p. 459). This study would analyze the decline-of-community-model in the case of Turkey through turnout rates according to population sizes.

Morlan (1984, p. 459) points out that the assumption of low turnout in local elections compared to national elections is widely shared. Yet, he argues that “there is no agreement as to whether turnout is generally higher in small towns or large cities –or more broadly, in rural compared to urban areas”. He maintains that “most studies touching on this question deal with turnout in local areas for national elections, which may be very different from turnout for local elections” (Morlan, 1984, p. 459). Moreover, Morlan argues that there are several studies that have examined national elections in terms of turnout rates according to population size and that have found higher turnout in smaller communities while there are still others that found no substantial differences. Differences in the political cultures of various countries are seen as the major cause of this result. The differences arose from “legal barriers or encouragement such as registration requirement or stipulation of compulsory voting” as well as “the closeness of identification between political party systems and the principal social cleavages of the society” (Morlan, 1984, p. 459-460). However, in his analysis of turnout in local elections according to populations size Morlan (1984, p. 465) conclude that “there is a declining rate of turnout from the smallest to the largest population group and that this decline is usually (but not in every instance) at a fairly steady rate”. This steady decline however is not perceived by Morlan (1984, p. 467) as “local issues in small towns are perceived as more significant than those in the larger cities, although individuals may feel their votes to be more effective when part of a smaller pool”. This study therefore analyzes the influence of population sizes on turnout rates by comparing local and national elections in the case of Turkey.

Although turnout has been the most studied feature of local politics, it can be said that these studies are still not enough. However, as argued by Morlan (1984, p. 459) as well, these studies have ignored turnout rates at different population sizes. In other words, the analysis of turnout rates according to population size in either alone local elections or comparing local with national elections ought to be carried out. One of such studies, Oliver and Ha

(2007) stress the importance of population size in explaining low turnout rates in local elections. They argue that voters in “smaller suburbs are generally more interested in politics, more likely to recognize local candidates, and more likely to know a candidate personally” (Oliver & Ha, 2007, p. 398). In contrast, they state that “people in larger suburbs are, on average, less interested in politics, less knowledgeable of city council candidates, and are less likely to be mobilized during campaigns”. This is because “residents of smaller places are also more likely to be mobilized by a political organization or candidate” (Oliver & Ha, 2007, p. 398). Similarly, Johnston (1974, p. 418) states that information passes among citizens “from person to person, usually by word of mouth, during formal and informal contacts at workplace, in voluntary organizations, or in social intercourse”. Johnston (1974, p. 419) argues that according to ‘the ‘friends and neighbors’ effect’ “information about a candidate emanates from his home, so that knowledge of him declines with distance”. He maintains that “such interpersonal knowledge is expected to attract support for the candidate, with electors voting for the person rather than for the cause he represents. This hypothesis proposes that people abandon traditional party affiliation to support a known candidate (Johnston, 1974, p. 419). As a result these researches present the significance of examining elections by population size. This study would test the accuracy of this hypothesis by categorizing constituencies in accordance with population sizes in the case of Turkey.

Regarding the effects of population size on turnout, Kiriş and Güл (2008, p. 112) state that there are not many occasions for political participation other than voting in smaller communities, and thus, voting becomes more important. Kiriş (2005, p. 79) argues that voting participation may be also high in small communities due to the effects of ‘face to face relations’ and of opinion leaders. Similarly, Bayraktar (2011, p. 20-21) explains comparatively higher voting participation in the periphery of city-centre through the intensity of social control in smaller places, personal relations with candidates such as being neighbor, friend or relative, social groups with ethnic, religious or fellow countryman and comparatively less number of voters at poll district. He also argues that turnout decreases in places where a party is very dominant whereas turnout goes up in places where there are competing parties (Bayraktar, 2011, pp. 21-22). Although these arguments may help explain the differences between smaller and larger places, they do not explain voting behavior at local and national elections in similar size of communities. This study thus attempts to compare the turnout rates in 2009 local and 2011 national elections in Turkey.

3. Method and scope of the study

Although voting in Turkey is compulsory making the analyses of turnout in elections a cautious reading, it is believed that a country-wide analysis of turnout can still serve to examine the differences between local and national elections. This is because compulsion is applied to both local and national elections and in turn the study of turnout at both local and national elections let us to scrutinize either the meaning of local elections or the differences between them. With this caution in mind, a nation-wide analysis of local and national elections of Turkey in terms of the number of voters as a reflection of population size is carried out in this paper.

Local governments in Turkey include municipalities, provincial private administrations (city council) and villages. Municipalities are also divided into metropolitan municipalities and the other municipalities such as city municipalities, sub- metropolitan municipalities and town municipalities. Local elections in Turkey are held once in 5 years according to the 1982 Constitution while national elections in 4 years unless the Turkish Grand National Assembly would decide early elections. It should also be stressed that elections for all local governments are held together nationwide. According to the Local Elections Law Numbered 2972, the election of city council and municipal council is carried out through proportional representation with 10 per cent threshold for each constituency while mayoral elections is carried through the ‘first-passed-the-post’ or majoritarian system. The constituencies of city councils encompass city and sub-city provinces while those of mayoral and municipal councils are determined by the law for each municipal area. Thus, local elections in Turkey let us to compare the effects of election systems on voting participation as well. That is to say that the differences of turnout rates between city council and mayoral elections would also demonstrate the effects of proportional representation and majoritarian systems. The system of national elections in Turkey on the other hand, is based on proportional representation (d'Hondt) with 10 per cent

country-wide threshold. Except Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, each province is taken as a constituency for national elections. Constituencies of national elections are quite similar to those of city councils rather than those of mayoral elections. Although administrative units are the base of constituencies of city council and mayoral elections as well as for national elections the constituencies of municipalities are comparatively smaller than those city council and national elections. For comparing local and national elections, the differences between their constituencies has to be overcome.

For the comparison of local elections with national ones in terms of population sizes, constituencies are to be equated. In other words, for comparison, the differences between the constituencies of local and those of national elections are to be overcome. The study will therefore firstly equate both constituencies of city councils and those of national elections with those of mayoral elections. By the equation it is meant that the ballot boxes of each municipality are taken as base constituency first and then both ballot boxes of the city councils and those of national elections are determined in accordance with those of the municipalities. In other words, while determining constituencies, the ballot boxes in the city councils and national elections not voting for mayoral elections are put aside. This work is carried out for all 2901 municipalities in both 2009 local and 2011 national elections. After equation, constituencies are divided into 13 groups of places according to the number of voters as the reflection of population size. The equation includes all (2.901) municipalities in Turkey. The first category as seen in Table-2 includes the places with the number of voters below 500, while the last category is composed of the ones with over 400.000 voters. This examination will allow us to compare either between small and larger communities or between local and national elections. Although there have been some studies entertaining this question, as mentioned above this study compares the change of turnout rates according to population size at both local and national elections. This analysis will allow us to go further into and make some comments on turnout rates at different level of communities. The examination is restricted to the local elections of (March) 2009 and the national elections of (July) 2011. The restriction arose from the fact that country-wide results of local ballot boxes can be merely found for the 2009 local elections. The equation and categorization of the constituencies in these elections allow us to analyze voting participation between smaller and larger communities as well as make comparison between local and national elections. Accordingly, the hypotheses are tested. There are 3 hypotheses: 1) Local elections occur under national elections; 2) Turnout rates in local elections are below those in national elections; and 3) Voters perceive local elections / politics comparatively less important than national elections. Before examining 13 categories, nation-wide turnout rates are briefly presented and discussed.

4. Voting participation in Turkey

4.1. Comparing local and national turnouts

The comparison of local elections with national ones shows in the case of Turkey, as seen in Table-1, that there are differences in terms of turnout rates. The turnout rates in 1994 and 2009 local elections were higher than those in national elections. Until 1994 turnout rates in local elections at three levels (city council, mayoral and metropolitan) were below those in national elections. Starting with the 1994 local elections however, turnout in local elections have at least been very close to those in national elections. Turnout at both national and local elections in 1999 when both elections were held together were very close to each other. Kösecik (2005, pp. 262-263) explains the differences in 1999 elections by 10 per cent threshold applied in the national elections. One also has to take into consideration the compulsory nature of participation in elections in Turkey.

Table 1. Turnout Rates in national and local elections: 1983-2011

Elections	1983	1984	1987	1989	1991	1994	1995	1999	2002	2004	2007	2009	2011
National Elections	92,3		93,3		83,9		85,2	87,1	79,14		84,2		83,20
Local Elections													
City Council		91,1		81,5		92,2		86,9		76,3		85,2	
Mayoral		85,6		78,0		90,5		85,2		73,3		84,2	
Metropolitan		85,4		72,5		89,3		84,1		70,6		83,2	

Source: Compiled From the Statistic Bureau of Turkey.

Table-1 displays the turnout rates and changes in these turnout rates, giving us some perspectives regarding turnout rates at national and local elections and an opportunity to compare the turnout rates in the elections at the two levels. The empowerment of local governments since the early 1980s seems to have increased the interest in local governments and in turn in participation in local elections. Therefore; the hypothesis stated as “turnout rates in local elections are below those in national elections” needs to be reconsidered. However, voting participation according to different population sizes would tell us more about the differences between local and national elections.

4.2. Turnout rates according to voter/population size

After equating the constituencies of city councils and national elections with those of mayoral elections, as seen in Table 2, Turkey's 2.901 local districts is divided into 13 groups of places according to the number of voters as a reflection of population size. The categories will demonstrate the differences between smaller communities and larger ones in terms of turnout rates in both local and national elections. If there are any differences, we could conclude that voters' perception of elections differs according to population size. We also examine the differences between local and national elections in the same sizes.

A brief overview of Table 2 shows five findings. First, there is a steady decline in turnout rates at both city council and municipal elections. Second, there is no similar trend seen in the 2011 national elections. Third, in city council elections voting participation in municipal areas is higher than even those in villages until the category 5 (below 5.000 voters) while that is the case just until the category 3 in the municipal elections. Fourth, the turnout rates at city council elections are slightly higher than those in municipal elections in each category. Fifth, the highest turnout rates in the local elections of 2009 occurred in small communities while it was the case for larger/metropolitan places in the national elections.

Table 2. Turnout rates according to the number of voters: 2009 local and 2011 national elections, %

Size of Electoral Districts	The Percentage of Each Category Within the Total Voters 2009	Number of Municipalities 2009	City Council	Mayoral elections	National Elections
			Turnout Rate 2009	Turnout Rate 2009	Turnout Rates 2011
Turkey	100,00	2901	85,19		
Municipalities	82,65		84,26	84,2	
Villages	17,35		89,60		89,07
Below 500 Voters	0,05	47	92,57	91,88	86,06
500-999	0,88	451	90,86	90,28	84,76
1.000-1.999	3,88	1048	89,66	89,28	84,39
2.000-4.999	5,26	699	89,69	89,42	86,33
5.000-9.999	4,26	240	87,33	86,94	86,19
10.000-19.999	4,35	124	85,65	85,77	85,47
20.000-39.999	6,68	94	85,32	85,24	86,37
40.000-59.999	6,44	53	84,84	84,79	85,99
60.000-79.999	4,69	27	84,17	84,14	87,28
80.000-99.999 (*)	3,79	17	85,18	85,11	88,05
100.000-199.999	17,82	48	83,44	83,39	87,12
200.000-399.999	30,94	44	82,50	82,44	87,15
Above 400.000	10,95	9	82,48	82,43	87,04
Metropolitan Municipalities		16	83,11	83,17	

Source: Compiled From the Figures of the Statistic Bureau of Turkey.

(*The municipalities in this category are those: Arnavutköy, Silivri, Çekmeköy (İstanbul), Derince, Körfez, Darıca, Gölcük (Kocaeli), Karaman Centre, Bolu Centre, Nazilli (Aydin), Düzce Centre, Ordu Centre, Tekirdağ Centre, Bandırma (Balıkesir), Tokat Centre, Edirne Centre, Palandöken (Erzurum)

The mismatch between the community size and turnout rates in the local elections of 2009 lead us to question the argument raised by Akbulut (2004) that criticizes the liberal approach seeing local governments as school for democracy. He bases his argument on the comparatively lower turnouts in local elections than those in national elections. Although national turnout rates in local elections may be less than those in national elections, as the case of the 2009 local elections presents this is not valid in relatively smaller communities. As Table 2 demonstrates, turnout rates in local elections increase as the number of voters decreases. Therefore it can be argued that instead of just examining country-wide turnouts in both elections alone, turnout rates should be analyzed according to population sizes.

The examination of turnout rates in national elections according to population sizes presents that there is no steady decline seen in local elections. The turnout rates in the 2011 national elections shows that turnout rates in national elections are comparatively lower than those in the local elections in smaller communities. Such a finding let us to make comments on the voters' perception of local and national elections. It can therefore be argued that in smaller communities, the residents conceive local elections as more important than national elections.

High turnout rates in smaller communities as well as steady decline in local elections allow us to argue that voting participation is comparatively more important in smaller places than those in larger/metropolitan areas. Bearing this in mind, the findings of this study are consistent with neighborhood effect, because there are comparatively closer relations between voters and candidates in local elections especially in mayoral elections than those in national elections arising from the area of constituencies. Comparatively higher turnout in local elections in the case of Turkey can be due to the election of the head of neighborhood (*muhtar*) which may push people close to him / her to go to ballot boxes. Consistent with the first finding, considering differences in the turnout rates between local and national elections until the 4th category, which are around 5 per cent, it can also be argued that local elections is viewed in these places more important than national elections.

Another finding reached here is that turnout rates in city council elections until the 5th category (below 5.000) and in mayoral elections until the 3rd category is higher than those in villages. This can be considered as that neighborhood is more influential in small municipalities than villages. However, comparing these turnout rates with those in larger places can be taken as signs of neighborhood effects. Overall it can be argued that neighborhood effects do work differently in local and national elections.

Another conclusion is related the effects of election systems on turnout. As seen in Table 2, turnout rates in city council elections are slightly higher than those in mayoral elections. Bearing the effects of other national (political or cultural) factors in mind, the difference of turnout rates between city council and mayoral elections can be considered as the demonstration of the influence of election systems. In Turkey, as mentioned above, in city council elections proportional representation is applied, while in mayoral elections majoritarian system is used. It can thus be concluded that election system of local governments seems to influence turnout rates.

Another finding presents the differences in voters' approach to local and national elections. Considering the decline in turnout rates in 2009 local elections, the size of constituency seems to lose its effects on voting participation in national elections. Since the presence of national political parties at both elections is similar, such differences can arise from voters' perception of elections. Voters in smaller places perceive local elections comparatively more important while those in larger/metropolitan areas see them comparatively less important. Voters' perception of national elections on the other hand is comparatively higher in metropolitan areas than those in smaller places. Finally, as seen in Table 2 the relatively highest turnout rates occurred in larger/metropolitan places in national elections while the relatively highest turnout rates was observed in small communities in the local elections.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, in the cases of 2009 local elections and 2011 national elections in Turkey it can be argued that without merely looking at winners and losers in mayoral elections or at nation-wide turnout rates, voters' perception of local elections started to differentiate from that of national elections after 1990. This is firstly presentable in higher rates of turnout occurred in the 1994 and 2009 local elections. The turnout rates in both local elections are higher than those in national elections held before and after them. Therefore the hypothesis saying that the turnout rates in local elections are below turnout rates in national elections requires reconsideration. The steady decline of turnout rates from smaller to larger districts, especially in local elections, can be taken as another difference of voters' perception of local elections. The residents in smaller communities perceive local elections more important while those in larger ones perceive national elections more important. Relatively higher turnout rates in smaller municipalities than in villages should also be taken into account. These findings show that neighborhood effects play an important role in local elections. Yet, the election systems seem to be the major cause of the higher rates of turnout in city council election than in mayoral elections. The findings still need to be tested through the comparison of voting participation in a historical perspective and according to socio-economic variables or rural-urban settings.

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