

Perceived Risk and Willingness to Vote for Marginal Parties in Turkish Electorate

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Abstract

This article focuses on the relationship between a voter's willingness to vote for marginal parties and one's willingness to accept qualitatively different forms of risk. In this study, willingness to vote for marginal parties is expressed in terms of electorate risk-taking and the main purpose of this study is to draw a relationship between willingness to vote for marginal parties and hypothesized risk-taking dimension of cognitive style. A total of three hundred subjects were run throughout the study. Main findings in this study are as follows: 1. for both genders, the general direction of the relationship between breadth of categorization and expressed willingness to vote for marginal parties is such that broad categorizers have a greater willingness to vote for marginal parties than narrow categorizers. 2. Relating willingness to vote for marginal parties to perceived differences between political parties showed distinctly different voting behavior patterns between males and females.

Key words: Perceived risk, category width, risk taking, voting behavior, marginal parties.

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A wide variety of cognitive, motivational and personality dimensions have been hypothesized to be linked to risk-taking behavior. Slovic points out (1962) the original conceptualization of risk-taking propensity was advanced as being a general personality disposition. He (1986) further stated that besides its multidimensional nature, risk taking behavior also has substantial subjective components and is susceptible to a variety of motivational and other influences.

The possible relationship between risk-taking and cognitive processes is examined in a number of studies. In their classic study Cox and Rich (1964) observed strategies used by housewives to reduce the perceived risk in a purchase and concluded that the observed consistency in people's risk reduction behavior may be a manifestation of a cognitive style. Similar results have been replicated by subsequent studies on environmental and technological risk and decision making conditions (Slovic et al., 1984, Johnson and Tversky, 1984; Kozhevnikov, 2007).

A psychological variable which fits the risk taking behavior described above is that of category width or breadth of categorization. Category width, as defined by Pettigrew's (1956) Category Width Scale, is a cognitive variable that purportedly reveals individual differences in categorization strategy. Subjects differ in terms of broadness and narrowness of judgments of category width—to what extent they will accept exemplars as good instances of a category. (Pettigrew, 1982).

In an attempt to provide a different explanation to account for consistent individual differences in category width scores, Kogan and Wallach (1964) extended Pettigrew's observation that broad categorizers are more prepared to tolerate errors of inclusion while narrow categorizers tend to favor errors of exclusion. As Kogan and Wallach note, the distinction between strategies in establishing category boundaries is qualitatively clear: "a person's possession of broader or narrower category boundaries evidently involves preferences for errors of inclusion and exclusion" (1964, s. 4).

An insight into the operation of category width comes from a study by Walker and Gibbins. They assumed that narrow categorizers are compelled to attempt the differences between stimuli while broad categorizers tend to overlook stimuli differences (Walker & Gibbins, 1989). The relationship of category width and decision making was investigated using measures of decision making performance on an auditory detection task (Rogers, 1973), on fairness perception (Singer, 1990), on expectations for subsequent task performance (Touhey, 1973), on trial of new products and a significant correlation between category width score and type I error rate for males was found (Katz & Lazarfeld, 1995, Kozhevnikov, 2007).

Electorate decisions about marginal parties can also be considered as being potentially high risk situations. This article focuses on the relationship between a voter's willingness to vote for marginal parties and one's willingness to accept qualitatively different forms of risk. In this study, willingness to vote for marginal parties is expressed in terms of electorate risk-taking and the main purpose of this study is to draw a relationship between willingness to vote for marginal parties and an hypothesized risk-taking dimension of cognitive style

The present study is based on the paradigm of potential errors in statistical decision-making, i.e., type I errors (the probability of accepting a hypothesis as true when, in fact, it is false) and type II errors (probability of rejecting a hypothesis as false when, in fact, it is true). Voters unwilling to vote for a marginal party appear to have a propensity to assume type II errors that is they reject new party politics with the purpose of avoiding dissatisfying experiences at the risk of missing some innovative ideas which would prove to be satisfactory. On the other hand, voters willing to vote for marginal parties seem to have a higher propensity to assume type I errors that is their voting behavior tends to have a risk of admitting more potentially dissatisfying experiences.

A decision maker might arrive at a choice through a variety of choice rules, and decision weights play a crucial role in most of these (Bettman, Johnson & Payne, 1991; Payne, Bettman and Johnson, 1992; Svenson, 1992). In a study that focuses on the relationship between values and choices (Verplanken and Holland, 2002), it was found that political parties might be associated with different values, and a voting decision might thus be dependent on the perceived importance of these values. It is supposed that a voter's party preferences are determined in part by the match between their attitudes toward main political issues and their perceptions of parties' attitudes toward these issues (Krosnick, 1988). In light of Pettigrew's hypothesis concerning the risk-taking strategies employed by broad and narrow categorizers, it is assumed that a voter's willingness to vote for a marginal party is also determined by his/her perception of the party's politics. Consequently, the present study was designed to test the following hypotheses:

1. There is a linear relationship between willingness to vote for marginal parties and breadth of categorization: broad categorizers will be associated with a greater will be associated with a greater willingness to vote for marginal parties than narrow categorizers.
2. There is a linear relationship between breadth of categorization and perception of qualitative differences between political parties: broad categorizers will be associated with perceptions of smaller differences between political parties than will narrow categorizers.

Method

Data were obtained under controlled conditions at Mersin University. Participants were 150 male and 150 female voters in Mersin vicinity. After gaining rapport with the subject, the investigator invited the subject to be seated at the table. The investigator seated himself on the opposite side of the table facing the subject.

The questionnaire which measured breadth of categorization was introduced under the guise of a research project conducted in another university. Upon completion of the category width scale, the investigator indicated that they would now proceed with the work for Mersin University.

Allegedly as part of a study on electorate voting patterns, subjects were required to give their opinions of a number of different voting situations. They were told to assume that there was an election soon and they were going to vote for a party in this election. Then they were inquired about whether they knew the ideology of each party well enough to differentiate them. After these conditions were met, subjects were asked to rate different parties in terms of their willingness to vote for them. They were to indicate their willingness to vote for each party for seven major political approaches. After indicating willingness to vote, subjects were asked to rate four qualitatively different party groups for each of seven major political issues.

Completion of this form terminated the study. At the end of the study, each subject was debriefed as to the intent of the study and was given an opportunity to question or comment. Before dismissing the subject, the investigator asked the subject not to divulge the content or purpose of the study to anybody. As far as is known, subjects cooperated fully in this regard.

Measures

Pettigrew's category width scale was selected for use as the gauge of breadth of categorization. This 20-item, objectively scored, pencil and paper device was selected on the basis of its demonstrated reliability and criterion validity as well as on the basis of its simplicity in administration and scoring. Before conducting this study, reliability analysis and item analysis for the Pettigrew's category width scale were performed. Data showed that test-retest reliability coefficient is satisfactory ($r = .847$, $n = 300$).

The test requires subjects make estimates of the maximum and minimum ranges of a wide variety of phenomena. Four alternative responses are provided for each of the maximum and minimum estimates, each weighted as a function of the extent to which it deviates from

the central tendency value stated in the item. A person's score was derived by summing the weights of the chosen alternatives for all items: higher scores reflected broad categorization, lower scores reflected narrow categorization.

Since there was no a priori reason to expect breadth of categorization to relate differently for different products, it was believed that a consistent direction of the relationship would provide added support to the hypotheses. In order to test the generality of the relationship, a measure of willingness to vote was obtained for each of seven main political approaches: party politics on joining European Union, willingness for bipartisan approach, democratization, new ideas on economic development, human rights, women issues, social security. Political approaches were selected in a manner to sample a wide variety of ideas.

For each of seven main political approaches, subjects were required to indicate their willingness to vote for each of four qualitatively different political party groups. As described in the questionnaire, parties differed in either their marginality of ideas themselves or in the voter's familiarity of the political party's position in the political platform (i.e., right or left). Two levels of political approach (marginal vs. central) and two levels of political position (right vs. left) were factorially crossed as to produce descriptions of four qualitatively different party groups for each main political approach:

Party Group A: Central Right

Party Group B: Central Left

Party Group C: Marginal Right

Party Group D: Marginal Left

Figure 1

	Familiarity	Marginality
	Central	Marginal
Right	Central – Right (A)	Marginal – Right (C)
Left	Central – Left (B)	Marginal – Left (D)

Figure 2

Definitions of Willingness to Vote Difference Scores

W_1	$C - A$	(willingness to vote for marginal right – willingness to vote for central right)
W_2	$D - A$	(willingness to vote for marginal left – willingness to vote for central right)
W_3	$B - A$	(willingness to vote for central left – willingness to vote for central right)

Subjects recorded their responses on 11-point rating scales with poles labeled: “extremely willing to vote” and “extremely unwilling to vote” scored one to eleven, respectively.

A separate rating scale was administered on which subjects indicated the degree to which the party groups qualitatively differed. Responses were recorded on 11-point rating scales with poles labeled: “no differences at all” and “extremely high differences”, scored one to eleven, respectively.

Results

Table 1 supports the predicted relationship between willingness to vote and breadth of categorization. It should be pointed out that the effect of using the difference scores was to make negative correlations support the hypothesis; low difference scores (greater willingness to vote for a marginal party) when paired with higher category width scores (broad categorization) produce a negative correlation.

All correlations for both male and female groups were consistently in the predicted direction. For the male sample (N= 150), all of 21 correlations were negative, that is in the predicted direction. Significance at the .01 or higher level was obtained for 20 out of 21 correlations. In the female sample (N= 150) 19 out of 21 correlations were negative, 15 out of 21 were significant. Correlations in both groups were high; a total of 35 correlations were found to be significant at the .05 level.

Table 1
Correlations of Willingness to Vote and Category Width

Major Political Issues	W ₁		W ₂		W ₃	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Politics on European	-.44 ^c	-.30 ^c	-.41 ^c	-.26 ^c	-.32 ^c	-.15 ^b
Bipartisan Approach	-.30 ^c	-.53 ^c	-.25 ^c	-.49 ^c	-.28 ^c	-.25 ^c
Democratization	-.45 ^c	-.02	-.42 ^c	-.03	-.19 ^c	-.22 ^c
New Ideas on Economic	-.30 ^c	-.44 ^c	-.20 ^c	-.38 ^c	-.11	-.11
Development						
Human Rights	-.39 ^c	-.50 ^c	-.35 ^c	-.49 ^c	-.17 ^c	-.11
Women Issues	-.30 ^c	-.53 ^c	-.25 ^c	-.49 ^c	-.28 ^c	-.25 ^c
Social Security	-.35 ^c	-.05	-.28 ^c	-.14 ^b	-.14 ^b	-.05

^a p<.05 ^b p<.01 ^c p<.001 (two-tail)

As seen in Table 2, there appear to be marked differences between sexes in the perception of qualitative differences among major political issues parties present as a function as a function of category width. For men, as predicted, the relationship was consistent with the hypothesis that broad categorizers are associated with perceptions of smaller differences than narrow categorizers. The relationship was reversed for women. The direction of the signs of these measures was consistent within sex groups.

Table 2

Correlations of Category Width and Perceived Differences

Major Political Issues	Male	Female
Politics on European Union	-.28 ^c	-.38 ^c
Bipartisan Approach	-.30 ^c	-.58 ^c
Democratization	-.25 ^c	-.29 ^c
New Ideas on Economic Development	-.23 ^c	-.46 ^c
Human Rights	-.37 ^c	-.44 ^c
Women Issues	-.30 ^c	-.58 ^c
Social Security	-.21 ^c	-.47 ^c
Average of Perceived Difference	-.31 ^c	-.57 ^c

^c p<.001

Table 3 showed a significant relationship between willingness to vote for marginal right and perceived differences in major political issues. For women, it appeared that a greater willingness to vote is associated with perceptions of larger differences between politics of parties on major political issues, while for men, a greater willingness to vote for marginal right was associated with perceptions of smaller differences between politics of parties on major political issues.

Table 3

Correlations of Willingness to Vote and Perceived Differences

Major Political Issues	W₁		W₂		W₃	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Politics on European Union	.23 ^c	-.09	.38 ^c	.01	.12	-.14 ^b
Bipartisan Approach	.10	-.48 ^c	.07	-.44 ^c	.08	-.08
Democratization	.21 ^c	-.08	.27 ^c	.02	-.03	-.04
New Ideas on Economic Development	.05	-.42 ^c	-.07	-.40 ^c	.01	-.08
Human Rights	.28 ^c	-.23 ^c	.24 ^c	-.39 ^c	.19 ^c	-.13 ^b
Women Issues	.10	-.47 ^c	.09	-.44 ^c	.08	-.08
Social Security	.24 ^c	-.16 ^b	.33 ^c	-.15 ^b	-.01	-.04

^a p<.05^b p<.01^c p<.001

(two-tail)

Discussion and Conclusion

The data tend to support the hypothesis on breadth of categorization and willingness to vote for marginal parties, but as clearly seen in Table 3, marginality is in favor of right parties. Considering only the magnitudes of correlations between willingness to vote for marginal right and category width, one might well conclude that the relationship is a strong one. As noted, the correlations are generally high and most of them differ significantly from zero in the predicted direction. Correlations are consistent in indicating a relationship that portrays broad categorizers a more willing to vote for marginal parties than narrow categorizers. The general uniformity of the direction of the correlation plus the direction of significant correlations leads to the conclusion that there is an association between propensity to vote for marginal parties and category width a predicted.

Above findings may be translated into terms of voter-risk taking behavior as follows: voters willing to commit errors of inclusion seem to be more willing to accept marginal political parties than individuals who are willing to commit errors of exclusion. The apparent differences in disposition to

marginal right parties may have an effect on actual voting behavior, but this cannot be assessed from the data of the present study. The high and significant correlations observed, would predict a strong transfer from rating behavior to actual voting behavior. And also the consistency of the direction of correlation leads to the speculation that perhaps under appropriate environmental conditions and for certain political parties there would be a high degree of transfer of the relationship to the ballot.

The conclusion drawn from this data is that, for a given political party, individuals tend to be consistent in their expressed willingness to vote for marginal parties. That is they are willing to vote for a marginal party in terms of seven political issues, even though this relation is not static over seven main political issues. An individual willing to vote for a marginal right party for social security issue will not necessarily be willing to vote for human rights or woman issue. It is observed that this relationship does not appear to be different for sex groups.

Results of the correlations of category width and the extent to which qualitative differences were perceived between political party groups do not uniformly support the hypothesis. For men, data show a consistent negative correlation as predicted; for women, however, the correlations are positive in sign. In view of the apparent sex differences in the extent to which qualitative differences were perceived between political parties judged, it might also be expected that the same reversal would manifest itself in correlations between willingness to vote and perception of differences. Data support this expectation: the majority of correlations for men are positive and for women they are negative. Not only are there differences in the signs of the correlations for both sexes but there also appear to be differences in the significance of the correlations for the various political parties rated. It appears that men are not willing to vote for a marginal party unless they perceive the differences between political parties on the bipartisan approach, new ideas on economic development and women issues. Perception of large differences on bipartisan approach, new ideas on economic development, women issues and social security, however, seem to lead women to vote for a marginal party.

The relationship between categorizing behavior and willingness to vote for a marginal party thus cannot be explained uniformly as a function of differences in perception. For men, the explanation seems to hold true: broad categorizers perceive smaller differences between stimuli than narrow categorizers. The narrow categorizer seems to contrast the stimuli, the broad categorizer seems to assimilate the stimuli. For women, however, the perception of small qualitative differences between stimuli seems to accompany narrow categorization.

One plausible explanation of the apparent sex differences indicated above would be following. It might be expected that, given the conservative or passive role women generally play in life, they might tend to rely on habituated rather than innovative responses in their behavior (Simon and Ruhs, 2008; Hutcherson, at. all., 2008). It might be argued that any change or deviation from this habituated response would have to be justified by sufficiently valid reasons. One way to do this may be to perceive wide differences between political parties.

The exploration of category width as a dimension of electorate risk-taking behavior leads to following tentative conclusions: For men and women the general direction of the relationship between breadth of categorization and expressed willingness to vote for a marginal party is one which associates broad categorizers with a greater willingness than narrow categorizers. The relationship, as seen above, is strong and appears to be consistent. For men, there is a tendency for narrow categorizers to be associated with perceptions of smaller differences between political party groups while broad categorizers are associated with perceptions of larger qualitative differences. Females were shown to exhibit behavior which related broad categorization with perceptions of smaller qualitative differences between political parties while narrow categorization was associated with perceptions of large differences. Relating willingness to vote for a marginal party to the extent which differences were perceived between political parties showed distinctly different directions between males and females. Males tended to be more willing to vote for marginal party when the differences between marginal and central party were perceived as being rather small. Women, on the other hand, displayed behavior which related a higher willingness to vote for a marginal party when perceptions of qualitative differences between central and marginal parties are large.

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