

# “Political marketing: the relationship between agenda-setting and political participation”

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## Political marketing: the relationship between agenda-setting and political participation

### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to see the differences between the election choices, and the political participation levels and to compare their accordance with agenda-setting items. The broadened concepts of marketing consist of a political candidate, idea and campaign. The research data were collected from a total of 356 valid individuals completing a set of questionnaires on political participation, participation level of country's agenda-setting items, election choices and demographic facts. The survey was done on students selected in Kocaeli University Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences in Turkey. The methodology of ANOVA was used in analyzing the data. As a result, voters backing power in party supports the agenda-setting items as more favorable. According to their political participation level, voters' attitudes were found to differentiate from each other. Voters backing power in party support agenda-setting items depending on political participation level. Participating to agenda-setting items vary as per party choice.

**Keywords:** political participation, agenda-setting, political marketing.

### Introduction

Studies have shown that the political messages on mass media affect exposed voters (Zhanga and Chiab, 2006). There are models that suggest media's influence on public behavior. For example, powerful-effect models such as the spiral of silence theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1974), the hypodermic needle theory (DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach, 1982) and the third-person effect (Davison, 1983). These suggest that under certain circumstances, mass media can have a significant effect on a large number of people. Even though the effects of agenda-setting on people's predisposition, attitude, and behavior is studied, we did not come across a previous research on the relationship between agenda-setting and election choices, which is based on participation levels.

Lasswell defines politics as "The study of influence influential" (1936/1950, p. 3). The influential are those who get the most of what there is to get without resort to violence by using the power of the state within law. These people get the power and resources of the state by political activities. Power, in this statement is the ability to get other people to do what you want them to do, and resources might be governmental jobs, tax revenues, laws in favor of you and/or your group, or public policies that work to your advantage (Barbour and Wright, 2011).

**Political marketing.** Political marketing involves efforts to influence voter attitude and behavior in a definite way by using various marketing tools. To be effective in the political arena, politicians must identify the needs and wants (dreams and fears) of the voters in order to motivate them.

Marketing is defined by American Marketing Association as "the activity, set of institutions, and

processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large" (Keefe, 2008). Political marketing, especially service marketing perspective, treats the political and commercial contexts similarly (Kotler and Kotler, 1999). Social and political marketing use the similar concepts and tools in their programs. These are assumed to be designed to influence individual behaviors with the aim of improving well-being of both the society and the individuals (Kotler and Zaltman, 1971; Kotler, 2005).

Standard marketing mix (i.e., product, promotion, price, and place) can be used for political campaigns (Ninnefeger, 1988).

The candidate, the political party or group, and the ideology are similar to product, where the voters expect to benefit from their governing services and sometimes having excitement as in a sport competition where watchers concern for their team [Birging (basking in reflected glory) and corfing (cutting off reflected failure)] (Snyder, Lassegard and Ford, 1986). Political marketing campaigns can contain diverse views and themes, but image of candidate is a central component of most campaigns (Lock and Harris, 1996; Kotler and Kotler, 1999; Smith, 2001). There also are scholars who maintain that party image is a central component of political marketing (e.g., Farrell and Wortmann, 1987; Bannon, 2003). These studies treat the political candidate, his/her party and party ideology as one political product even though they can be investigated separately up to a limit.

The promotion mix (i.e., advertising, public relations, sales incentive, and personnel selling) is the communication tool.

Political advertising is used by various political campaigns (Kaid and Holtz-Bacha, 1995; Lau,

Sigelman and Rovner, 2007; Shen, Dardis and Edwards 2011; Falkowski and Cwalina 2012). Ehrenberg, Kennedy, and Bloom (2002) and Bernard and Ehrenberg (1997) argue that advertisements often reinforce a function rather than persuading voters. In political campaigns, people tend to disregard advertising messages that do not reinforce their political views (Vakratsas and Ambler, 1999).

Public relations tools include publicity (relationship with media – TV, press, newsletter, web articles, flyers – by events – public affair, press conference, seminars, outings), lobbying (Harris and McGrath, 2012) by relationship with law makers, implementers, voters, contributors, party organization and interest groups, issue activists and organized constituencies by speeches, debates, voter activities, completion's, promotional items (Andrews, 1996) and political identity items. Moreover, candidates establish a good relation with their target audience, such as media, voters, contributors, party organization, and finally, interest groups, issue activists and organized constituencies (Sheafer, 2008). Propaganda is one other tool that it's often used in political marketing (O'Shaughnessy, 2004).

Sales promotion, i.e., special programs, incentives, materials, events, and rhetoric (Koc and Ilgun 2010) can stimulate audience interest and acceptance of a party, its ideas, and its leader.

Personal selling is another tool used by politicians, which seems to be especially powerful in rural areas and in communities of rural origin in Turkey. In this situation, volunteers or paid activists are enlisted to promote the candidate and the party.

The price in political marketing is the transfer of right to rule at the ballot box. This is done by voting and the right is delivered in return for a long term individually perceived promise or expectation. This may be considered to be an exchanging of services or a service bartering, where the great majority do not have the option to govern directly but can make a choice between the offered alternatives which may be artificial in reality: There may be no alternative but the different faces and discourses. A vote is similar to services so it expires if not used properly and on time. Besides this main price there may also be some financial costs, time costs, psychological costs (cognitive dissonance), and the situational costs.

Political marketing uses available media, such as television, telephone, and Internet to spread a message faster and at a lower price.

**Political participation.** Political participation is “taking part in the process of formulation and implementation of public policy” (Parry, Moser and Day, 1992, p. 16). It also can be defined as

“individual or collective action at the national or local level that supports or opposes state structures, authorities, and/or decisions regarding allocation of public goods” (Conge, 1988, p. 247).

Two types of political participation can be mentioned:

1. Positive political participation, which includes voting intention, attempts at persuading someone using media, participation in meetings, or volunteering.
2. Negative political participation, which includes lawsuits, demonstrations, boycotts, unofficial industrial action, tax resistance, occupation of buildings. This type of political participation often results in homicide, personal injuries, road traffic accidents, loss or injury to property.

Political marketers seek ways to encourage voters to support their product (a candidate, a political party or group, and an ideology). Several models exist that specifically describe the process that voters go through. These models describe voters' behavior as passing consecutively through attention, involvement, desire, and action (Lavidge and Steiner, 1961; Rogers, 1962; Swinyard and Coney, 1978; McGuire, 1978). Also, there are other classifications of various political activities. Teorell, Torcal and Montero (2007) stress a matrix approach. In this matrix, *x* axis represents channel of expression (representational extra-representational) and *y* axis represents mechanism of influence (exit-based and voice-based). There are the four main types of political participation: voting activities, contacting activities, party activities, and protest activities.

**Agenda-setting.** The term “agenda” refers to the rank-ordered set of issues on a perceived importance scale at a given point in time (Roessler, 2008) by the media and its audiences, candidate, and the public. Agenda-setting is the transfer of salience from one agenda topic to another (McCombs, 2010) or carrying it to a higher rank in the same agenda. Severin and Tankard (2001, p. 219) propose a more comprehensive definition for agenda-setting, the function of the media. “Agenda-setting function of media refers to the media's capability, through repeated news coverage, of raising the importance of an issue in the public mind.” Agenda-setting involves processes that set the topics that the voters are exposed to how to think and even act on these issues (Cohen, 1963; Roessler, 2008).

In this study, we define agenda-setting as conscious efforts by the candidate or party to influence voters using especially mass media with repeated and coordinated messages through public relations (publicity, lobbying and neighborhood) personal selling and advertising.

Agenda-setting research began with Lippmann (1922). It was followed by a Chapell Hill study, which was on undecided voters (McComb and Shaw, 1972) and by a Charlotte study, which was concerned with media influence on the public agenda (Shaw and McCombs, 1977).

Rogers and Dearing (1988) pinpoint three major research traditions: the media agenda-setting tradition, the public agenda-setting tradition, and the policy agenda-setting tradition.

Rogers, Dearing, and Bregman (1993) did meta-analysis of 200 publications produced between 1922 and 1992. Another prominent agenda-setting meta-analysis was done by Tai (2009). He went through 1320 works published between the years of 1996 and 2005. McCombs and Shaw (1993) evaluated agenda-setting studies published between 1968 and 1999. McCombs and Shaw (1972), Dearing and Rogers (1996) found that agenda-setting depends on such features as personal, cultural, traditional variations, different periods, and political events. Iyengar and Kinder (2010) stated that traditional (first-level) agenda-setting, attribute agendas and presidential campaigns, issue agendas and public opinion are all related with each other. Harris, Fury and Lock (2006) tried to figure out the effect of news releases to build public agenda.

Compared to individual methods, mass media seems to be working more efficiently in reaching and influencing the voters. However, due to sociological and psychological factors, voters will not have the same reaction to the media messages. This variation in the voter responses may be the subject of another political marketing research.

## 1. The sampling, procedure, and measures of the research

**1.1. Sampling and procedure.** This article describes the increased concern in research agenda-setting related to political marketing. Agenda-setting investigate current views within, and between, the 4 Ps: political communication, political marketing. This research focuses on the scope to which patterns used in goods and services marketing carry over to the agenda-setting of political party or campaigns, how agenda-setting alterations are procedure to comprehend matters in political marketing and voter behavior. This paper tries to clarify how agenda-setting in the country is affecting the decisions of voters. Our research questions are how agenda affects voter behavior.

A total of 356 valid (acceptable) individuals completed a set of questionnaires on political participation, participation level of country's agenda-

setting items, election choices, and demographic facts (age, gender and monthly income).

The research was done in Kocaeli University School of Economics and Administrative Sciences Business Department in Turkey; and the data were collected from 356 ( $n = 356$ ) business students of the same university. *Stratified random sampling* is based on the list of all students in the business department ( $N = 1316$  students). Sample male participant ratio is 58,4% (208) and the overall percentage of male business-major students is 53% (703). Therefore, the sample is sufficient for interpretations and generalization for the population.

Demographic statistics can be summarized as follows:

1. Age of all participants varied from 18 to 27. 77.5% of them were between 18 and 24 years old, the rest (22.5%) was between 24 and 30 years old.
2. Monthly income was 2147 TL (Turkish Lira) with the standard deviation of 1332 TL.

**1.2. Measures.** *1.2.1. Political participation.* We studied political participation scales designed by Vecchione and Caprara (2009), and Fu, Mou, Miller, and Jalette (2011). We also investigated some large sample researches such as American National Election Studies (ANES), political participation and equality in seven nations and participant America, Political action studies (PAS), citizen participation study (CPS), innovation in the citizen, roper studies, and general social survey (GSS). After studying and adopting the mentioned methods, we developed our own scale to measure political participation. This consists of eight statements by which the participants were expected to rank each statement from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". As a result of factor analysis, this scale consists of two dimensions. Total explained variance was 68,401. Internal consistency of political participation scale was found to be highly reliable, high criterion valid, and appreciable for correlations with established measure; Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was 0.91.

The eight statements are:

1. Politics is a very important subject for me.
2. Politics plays an important role in my life.
3. I am interested in political subjects.
4. I have high level of knowledge in political issues.
5. I often talk about political issues with people around.
6. People care about my ideas on politics.
7. I actively participate in political movements, volunteer in parties.
8. I accomplish duties expected from all the citizens and vote in elections.

The obtained answers were arranged into three participation levels: low, medium and high.

**1.2.2. Agenda-setting.** To determine the agenda-setting data, we conducted a qualitative research. The subjects of agenda-setting items were compiled for a month (May 1-31, 2010), and ten most prominent news were selected from the three most popular TV channels and newspapers in Turkey. For this research, we created a focus group which was asked to rate the importance of these ten agenda-settings items as to their perceived importance. The four most important agenda items, obtained as a result of the focus group interviews are listed below:

1. Ankara’s policies related to Cyprus dispute.
2. Ankara’s policies on dealing with the global economic crisis.
3. Ankara’s policies related to the European Union.
4. Ankara’s debates on constitutional amendments.

**1.2.3. Election choice.** To determine the election choices, the respondents were asked the following: “Which party will you vote for if the election takes place next Sunday.” In 2010 three political parties were able to pass the 10% threshold required by the Turkish law. Therefore, we provided five options for these questions:

1. The Justice and Development Party (Turkish abbreviation, AKP).
2. The Republican People’s Party (Turkish abbreviation, CHP).
3. The Nationalist Movement Party (Turkish abbreviation, MHP).
4. Other parties that haven’t reached the electoral threshold.
5. Not to vote or boycott.

Justice and Development Party (AKP) is a center-right political party and is the leading one in Turkey since 2002. The Republican People’s Party (CHP) is

the major opposition in the Turkish Grand National Assembly. It describes itself as a “Republican People’s Party, loyal to the Republic’s founding principles and contemporary a social democratic party.” The Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) is the third largest parliamentary group, which is perceived by many as a nationalist political party, but loyal to globalization, free market capitalist system, deregulation and privatization of public businesses, and European Union.

**2. Research findings and hypothesis testing**

**Study 1.** We compare in order to see the differences of the election choices, and the political participation levels and to compare their accordance with Ankara’s position on Cyprus dispute, we conducted an analysis of variance of 4 x 3 [election choices (AKP, CHP, MHP, Other parties) x political participation level (low, medium, high)].

Results indicated a significant effect for the political participation factor,  $F(2, 318) = 13.071, p < .001, \eta^2 = .08$ . As hypothesized, those who saw the political participation in the agenda of Cyprus dispute at the low participation mean = 3.344, medium participation mean = 2.997 and high level political participation mean = 2.453. There was also an significant effect for the election choices,  $F(3, 318) = 16.452, p < .001, \eta^2 = .14$ . Means of election choices in descending order: AKP = 3.642, CHP = 2.774, MHP = 2.538 and the other parties = 2.771.

The two main effects were qualified, however, by a significant interaction between the two factors,  $F(6, 318) = 5.219, p < .001, \eta^2 = .09$  indicating that the political participation levels were not necessarily in accordance with each other. See Figure 1 for graphical representation. There are two homogeneous subsets Tukey’s Multiple comparison procedure tests disclose that “AKP” has a difference compare to “CHP”, “MHP” and “Other parties” ( $p < .001$ ).

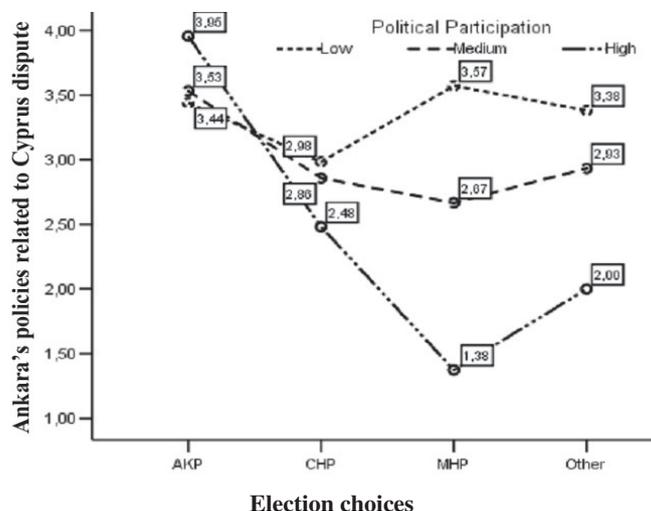


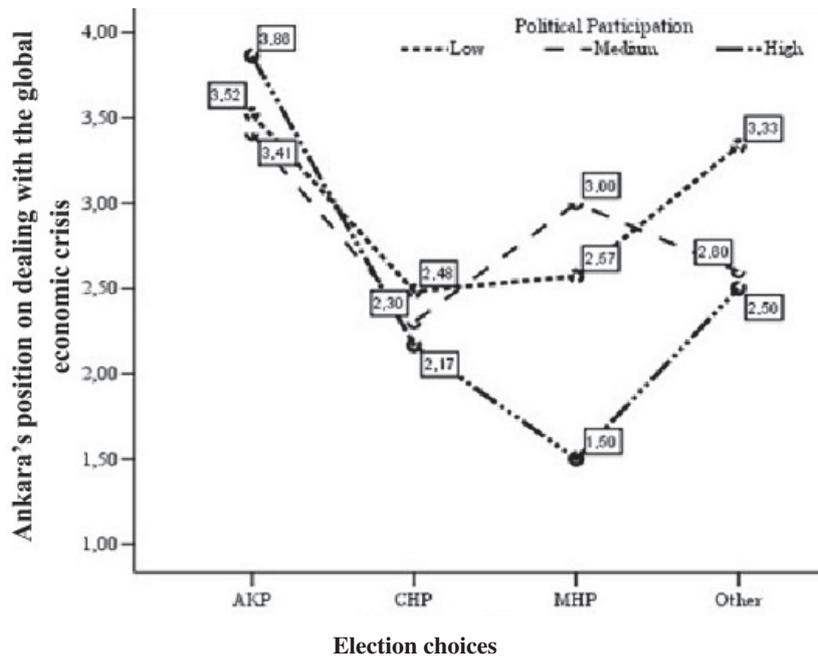
Fig. 1. Shows interaction effect respondents the mean values for the agenda of Cyprus support and election choice

**Study 2.** We compare in order to see the differences of the election choices, and the political participation levels and to compare their accordance with Ankara’s position on global economic crisis.

Results represented narrow margin significant main effect for the political participation factor,  $F(2, 318) = 3.058, p = .048$ . As hypothesized, those who saw the political participation in the agenda of dealing with global economic crises politics three levels: low participation mean = 2.977, medium participation mean = 2.827 and high political participation mean = 2.508. There was also a significant main effect for the election choices,  $F(3, 318) = 25.730, p < .001, \eta^2 = .20$  (see Figure 2 for

graphical representation). Ordered election choice to party means are  $AKP = 3.592, CHP = 2.317, MHP = 2.357$  and the Other parties = 2.811. Tukey’s multiple comparison procedure: there is significant difference between election choice “AKP” and “CHP”, “MHP”, “Other” parties. Also “CHP” and “Other” parties are different from each other.

The two main effects were qualified, however, by a significant interaction between the two factors,  $F(6,318) = 2.470, p < .05, \eta^2 = .045$  indicating that the political participation level effects were not the same for the four different party election choice conditions according to dealing with global economic crises.



**Fig. 2.** The mean values for the agenda of Ankara’s position on dealing with the global economic crisis and election choice

**Study 3.** We compare in order to see the differences of the election choices, and the political participation levels and to compare their accordance with Ankara’s position related to the European Union politics.

Results indicated significant main effect for the political participation factor,  $F(2, 318) = 6.484, p < .05, \eta^2 = .04$ . As hypothesized, those who saw the political participation in the agenda of European Union politics three levels: low participation mean = 3.104, medium participation mean = 2.564 and high political participation mean = 2.475. There was also a significant main effect for the election choice of party,  $F(3, 318) = 24.222, p < .001, \eta^2 = .19$ . See

Figure 3 for graphical representation. There are two homogeneous subsets. Using Tukey’s multiple comparison procedure, there is significant difference between election choice “AKP” and “CHP”, “MHP”, “Other parties”. Also, “CHP” and “Other parties” are different from each other. Ordered election choice of party means are  $AKP = 3.495, CHP = 2.253, MHP = 2.446$  and the Other parties = 2.663.

The two main effects were qualified, however, by a significant interaction between the two factors,  $F(6,318) = 2.07, p = .06$ , indicating that the political participation level effects were not the same for the four different party election choice conditions according to European Union politics.

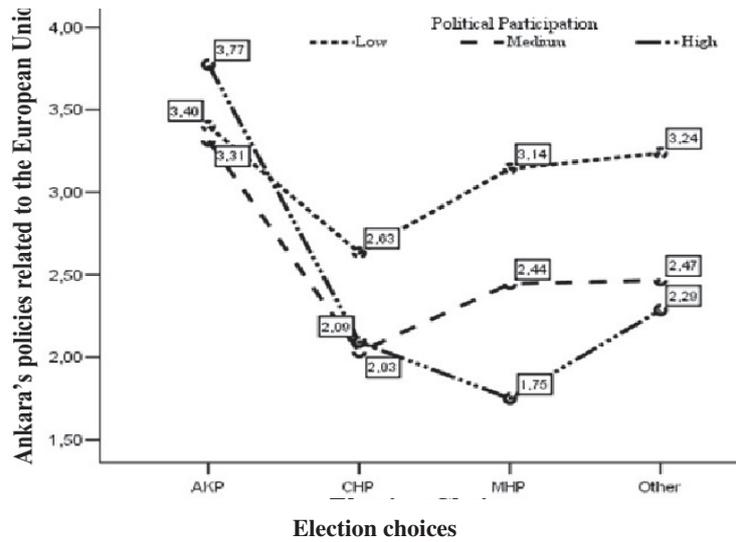


Fig. 3. The mean values for the agenda of Ankara's policy related to the European Union politics and election choice

**Study 4.** In order to see the differences of the election choices, and the political participation levels and to compare their accordance with Ankara's position related to debates on constitutional amendments.

Results indicated marginally an significant main effect for the political participation factor,  $F(2, 318) = 4.004, p = .026$ . As hypothesized, those who saw the political participation in the agenda of Ankara's debates on constitutional amendment studies three levels: low participation mean = 3.027, medium participation mean = 2.712 and high political participation mean = 2.530. There was also a significant main effect for the election choice of party,  $F(3, 318) = 81.301, p < .001, \eta^2 = .434$ . See

Figure 4 for graphical representation. Tukey's multiple comparison procedure; there is significant difference between election choice AKP and CHP, MHP, Other parties. Also, CHP and other parties are different from each other Ordered election choice to party means are  $AKP = 3.407, CHP = 1.87, MHP = 2.282$  and the Other parties = 2.798.

The two main effects were qualified, however, by a significant interaction between the two factors,  $F(6, 318) = 6.603, p < .001, \eta^2 = .096$  indicating that the political participation level effects were not the same for the four different party election choice conditions according to Government's new constitution amendment studies.

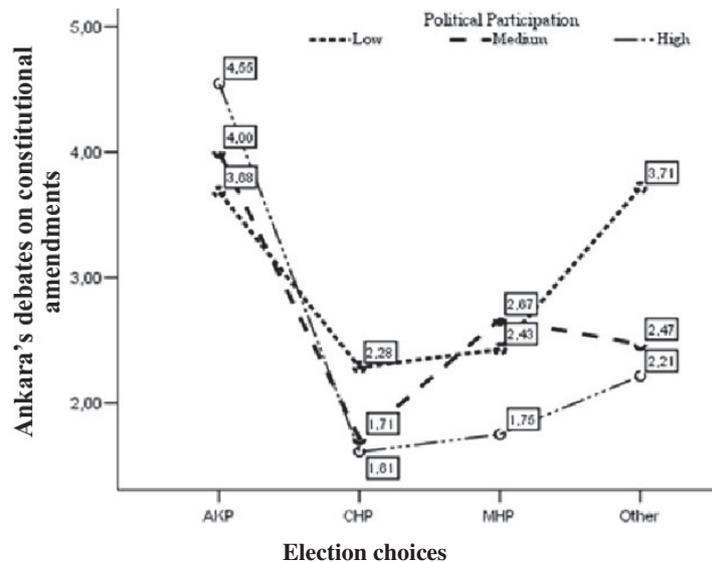


Fig. 4. The mean values for the agenda of Ankara's policy related to debates on constitutional amendments

**General discussion and conclusions**

Political leaders can use types of strategies. One strategy is to reinforce existing attitudes; the other is to try to change them. There is no question that

reinforcing existing attitudes is easier than changing them. Political marketers should try to find attitudes in their favor and should attempt to maintain and reinforce these in their political campaigns.

Strategies to reinforce attitudes may be easier to implement, but that will not always be possible if the perceived image of the required number of supportive voters is not favorable for the candidate and the party. In this case changing attitudes and improving the image of the candidate and party may be necessary.

Reinforcing voters' positive attitudes by agenda-setting in favor of the leader and the party can be an effective tool if used properly.

When the participation level is low, voting behavior is easier to change than when it is at medium and high levels. Low-level participants are easier to manipulate because they most probably are not yet committed to a political party. When voters have a high level of participation, this will imply that they are already aware of the political alternatives and have decided to vote for a candidate.

An intention to vote for parties to alter the agenda of the country is extreme. Nationalist agenda items in the country (European Union policy and the Cyprus problem) are issues of differentiation according to the level of political participation for MHP voters. We see that the agenda-setting items of the party in power are not supported by most of the high political participation MHP voters. The spread of

support is much wider than for the AKP and CHP political party voters according to political participation level. We see items of the party in power supported by the electorate.

MHP and "Other parties" have different responses that are related to level of participation and to different agenda items. Such group of people can be expected to vote for "Other parties" according to their different levels of political participation.

The high participation MHP voters do not support the agenda items and participate at different levels according to the agenda-setting items. The "Other parties" group has less spread in support of the agenda setting items than the MHP voters. But still the low political participation MHP voters will support fewer of the agenda-setting items than the high political participation voters.

For the AKP and CHP parties, the spread of the support of the agenda-setting items for high political participation voters and low political participation voters is narrow. The AKP, the party in power voters, support the agenda setting items at a much higher rate for all political participation levels. The CHP party has a narrow spread between high and low participation. The support of the agenda-setting items is lower than that of AKP, the party in power.

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