Electoral Politics and Geographical Indication Adoption: Evidence from Turkey

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INTRODUCTION

The shift from top-down fiscal redistribution to place-based development strategies has reshaped how states support peripheral regions (Barca et al., 2012). Geographical indications (GIs), intellectual property rights that certify product origins and restrict their use to designated geographic areas (Crescenzi et al., 2022), are a tool widely used within these strategies. In the literature, it is argued that GI designations preserve cultural heritage, support rural incomes through quality premiums, and reduce consumer information asymmetries (Belletti et al., 2017; Vandecandelaere et al., 2020). Empirical evidence confirms that GI designations can deliver broad local economic spillovers across employment, sectoral upgrading, and fiscal revenues (Crescenzi et al., 2022; Dries, 2025). Yet, despite a growing literature on the economic impacts of GIs (Mérel & Sexton, 2012), the political economy of their allocation, specifically, which regions receive designations, and why, remains understudied. This paper addresses this gap by asking whether electoral politics shapes GI adoption in Turkey. Employing a regional favouritism framework, I argue that place-based certification policy may function as distributive politics: a mechanism through which incumbents reward aligned constituencies, cultivate swing voters, and signal responsiveness to territorial audiences.

The political economy case for studying GI allocation rests on two critical grounds. First, if certification reflects political favouritism rather than product suitability or developmental need, resources will be systematically misallocated, eventually, undermining stated policy objectives. Second, understanding the political determinants of certification is essential for institutional design in middle-income countries rapidly expanding their GI programs.

DATA, EMPIRICAL CONTEXT, AND METHOD

Turkey provides a strong setting for this inquiry. TÜRKPATENT administers GI applications centrally under Ministry of Industry and Technology oversight, concentrating discretionary authority at the national level in a manner that creates clear channels for political influence. The country's well-documented patterns of distributive favouritism, spanning conditional cash transfers, welfare provision, and public employment, extend the prior probability that GI

allocation follows similar electoral incentives (Aytaç, 2014; Yörük, 2012; Çarkoğlu & Aytaç, 2015; Esen & Gumuscu, 2016).

Furthermore, GI adoption accelerated sharply after the March 2019 local elections. Between April 2019 and December 2023, 1,100 designations were registered, a 168% increase in the per-year registration rate relative to the preceding 22-year baseline, coinciding with a major electoral realignment in which Turkey's three largest metropolitan areas shifted from the ruling coalition to the main opposition.

To examine whether the post-2019 acceleration was distributed along political lines, I construct a provincial-level dataset (N = 81) by merging three sources: GI registry data from TÜRKPATENT covering April 2019 to December 2023; March 2019 electoral results from the Supreme Election Council and TURKSTAT regional controls capturing agricultural capacity, rurality, human capital, and sectoral structure. The core explanatory variables operate at two levels. First, I use province-level political alignment dummies capturing whether a province is governed by the ruling coalition or the opposition parties following the March 2019 elections. Second, I complement this with continuous vote share measures for each bloc, which allow me to test whether the effect runs along a gradient rather than switching discretely at the point of winning. Because the outcome variable is a count of GI registrations with substantial overdispersion, I estimate a negative binomial regression model with a log population offset. This specification allows me to test whether political alignment predicts GI registration counts conditional on observable regional characteristics. Planned quasi-experimental extensions include difference-in-differences exploiting provinces switching alignment across the 2019 and 2024 election cycles.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Our results show that ($\beta = 0.386$, $p < 0.01$), coalition-governed provinces register approximately 47% more GIs than opposition-governed, a pattern that persists after conditioning on agricultural capacity, rurality, and human capital. Disaggregating by political bloc, ruling coalition provinces exhibit a 51% registration surplus, while regional opposition provinces show a 55% deficit. Vote share analysis reveals that the effect operates in degree as well as direction: stronger ruling coalition margins predict additional registrations, while stronger regional opposition margins predict further reductions, which leads to an interpretation of GI registrations focus on continuous core-voter targeting logic than with discrete swing-

voter transfers. These findings are preliminary. The baseline specification does not address endogeneity, and unobservable regional characteristics, such as culinary tradition, producer organisation strength, social capital, may confound the observed alignment–GI correlation. Quasi-experimental identification strategies are required before causal inference can be drawn, and forthcoming analyses will also examine whether the timing of individual GI registrations within the post-2019 window clusters around national electoral calendar events.

CONCLUSION

This paper presents preliminary evidence that electoral alignment shapes the geographic distribution of GI designations in Turkey. Coalition-governed provinces received substantially more designations than opposition-controlled or regional-party provinces following the 2019 electoral realignment. The dose-response relationship between ruling-party vote margins and GI counts is consistent with a core-voter targeting logic, though variation in effect magnitudes across subgroups warrants further investigation.

Beyond GI policy specifically, these findings raise broader questions about the conditions under which administratively discretionary intellectual property systems become vulnerable to political capture. Future work will pursue causal identification through the planned quasi-experimental designs and examine whether comparable patterns obtain across other GI-expanding middle-income economies.

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