

Political Representation of Women in Turkey. Institutional Opportunities versus Cultural Constraints

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Abstract: This paper analyzes both the descriptive and the substantive sides of women's representation in Turkey and argues that although the proportion of women politicians in the Turkish Parliament increased from only 4% in 1999 to 17.6% in the 2018 general elections, this has not been reflected in an increase in women MPs' effectiveness. This article mainly argues that as electoral competition increases, women candidates' chances of being elected decrease. On the other hand, more equal distributions of seats between parties positively influence women's representation. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, women's movements and grassroots demands for women's rights in Turkey, which coincided with the highly welcomed EU accession process, complemented these institutional opportunities to foster women's representation and break traditional patron-client relations. Overall, however, cultural constraints, such as high polarization between parties and the clash of Islamist and European values inhibit women MPs from cooperating on policies concerning women, and strict party discipline reduces the parliamentary effectiveness of Turkish women politicians.

Keywords: Women's Representation, Political Polarization, Party System, Majoritarianism, Turkey

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Introduction

In Turkey, the empowerment of women was first discussed in the 1980s, while the 1990s provided the foundations for transforming power relations and economic, social, and political structures for gender equality. Since the 1980s, three aspects of women's empowerment and development efforts have attracted particular attention: education, employment, and political participation (Afshar 1998; Kalaycıoğlu/Toprak 2004). In the 21st century, the evaluation of democracies requires considering the implementation of gender equality as well as economic development.¹ The political presence of women is essential, in particular for consulting with them when taking the necessary steps to protect women's and children's rights and protecting women and children from violence.

During the early Republican period of the 1930s, Turkey made reforms and implemented many modern, secular policies, which were forward-thinking even for contemporary Western societies, aimed at improving women's participation in politics, work, and senior executive positions. Thus, it is interesting that, according to the UN's development program, women's parliamentary representation now lags far behind the average for EU member states as well as some Islamic and African countries.² While the number of women MPs, spread across five different parties, increased from 4% to 17.6% between the 1999 and 2018 national elections, this is still not satisfactory. Moreover, their representation

1 Turkey, with an index value of 0.806, was ranked 59th of 189 countries and territories by the 2019 Human Development Index (HDI), ascending for the first time ever to the "very high human development category", up from the "high human development category" in the previous report. Norway maintained its top position at 0.954 in the HDI ranking, followed by Switzerland at 0.946, Ireland at 0.942, and Germany and Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region, China) both at 0.939. In the Gender Development Index (GDI), Turkey ranked 66th of 162 countries at 0.305, which revealed a loss in human development due to inequalities between women's and men's achievements. (<https://www.tr.undp.org/content/turkey/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2019/12/HDR-post-release-pr.html>, 9 December, 2019).

2 United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Reports (<http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/hdi-female>), and The World Bank Data, "Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments" (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/sg.gen.parl.zs>). In the 2018 Turkish national elections, the percent of seats held by women politicians was 17.6% compared to an EU average of 32%. Women's parliamentary representation in recent national elections was 47.3% in Sweden; 41.1% in Spain; 39.7% in France; 37.4% in Denmark; 37.2% in Austria; and 30.9% in Germany.

is largely ineffective as they fail to address women's issues, such as protecting women rights, preventing violence against women, providing support for child-care, or addressing the exploitation of domestic labor – measures that would empower women in economic and social life. Finally, some women MPs are even acting against existing women's rights on the basis that Turkish men have allegedly been disadvantaged by, for example, the ban on early marriage or indefinite alimony.³ Recently, when some Turkish women started a campaign on Twitter⁴ to create awareness of some commonly used phrases that insult women, President Erdoğan's daughter, Sümeyye Erdoğan – who is one of the founders of Kadın ve Demokrasi Vakfı (Women and Democracy Association; KADEM)⁵ – made a public declaration that “this initiative has reached the level that harms the values in which we believe” (6 June, 2020)⁶. These examples show that the social cleavage between Islamists and secularists in Turkey hampers the empowerment of women and supports the argument that pious women quit the struggle for women rights and now defend the patriarchal status-quo since they came to power in 2002 with the pro-Islamist JDP (Turam 2008).

The question, then, is why Turkish women parliamentarians have not used the opportunities of their position to cooperate on issues affecting women's empowerment, given that they currently have the highest level of representation throughout the history of the Turkish nation-state. This article aims to examine the institutional factors – such as the party and electoral systems and the candidate-nomination process – that are believed to have fostered Turkish women's involvement in parliament so far and discuss cultural and political dynamics – such as strict party discipline, clientelism, high political polarization, and the majoritarian and uncompromising attitude of the right-wing alliance – that have hindered women's cooperation in parliament on issues relating to gender-sensitive policies.

The article first reviews general literature on women's political representation and briefly analyzes women politicians since the Republican period to show how changing institutional factors and a rising feminist wave in Turkey since the 1990s have encouraged women's participation in political life. In its main focus, the paper then scrutinizes the cultural and political dynamics in

3 Some petitions were given by women MPs to the commission of the Committee on Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men (KEFEK) of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (GNAT) that tended to concentrate on two priority issues: indefinite-alimony victims and early-marriage victims (see KEFEK report 26 July 2018).

4 The campaign #Erkeklererinibilsin (“men should know their place”) uses an adapted Turkish phrase, replacing “women” with “men”.

5 KADEM was founded in 2013. It is the incumbent Justice and Development Party's (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi; AKP) government-organized non-governmental organization (GO-NGO).

6 “Bir empati vurgusu olarak ortaya çıkan #erkeklererinibilsin akımı inandığımız değerleri zedeleyecek boyuta ulaşmıştır. Bu durumu kınıyor ve reddediyoruz.” Translated by the author.

Turkish politics that prevent women politicians from cooperating and working effectively in the parliament. In other words, the paper's first part focuses on 'descriptive representation', whereas the second part evaluates 'substantive representation'.⁷ The article concludes by discussing the future of the women's movement in Turkey under the hegemony of the right-wing alliance and the new presidential system.

The Political Representation of Turkish Women: Institutional Factors

The political representation of disadvantaged groups, such as minorities or women, is both critical for democratization and a tool that such groups can use to protect their rights. Studies of women's political representation show that women who are represented by women are more politically interested, participate more in political matters, and have a greater sense of political efficacy and political competence (Atkeson/ Carrillo 2007; High-Pippert/Comer 2008; Burns/Schlozman/Verba 2001).

On the other hand, once women enter parliament, their struggle is far from over because they enter a male domain, numerically, culturally and institutionally. The "new institutionalism" approach claims that institutions are primary determining factors in our political behaviour. Research shows that such institutional factors include both micro- and macro-level elements. While micro-level factors focus on a group's own characteristics, macro-level factors include a country's electoral system, tools, and processes. Karen Bird's (2003) analysis of the effect of institutional opportunities and obstacles for political representation is very important; however, some elements may need revision for countries such as Turkey with high political polarization, strict party discipline, high electoral thresholds, and party fragmentation. Although there are studies on the relation between the gender gap and party-based limitations, such as nomination processes for office in Turkish local politics (Yıldırım/Kocapınar 2019; Sumbaş 2020), the literature remains weak on the relationship between women's direct representation and party competition as well as on measuring and increasing women MPs' parliamentary effectiveness. The present study is, therefore, important for filling this significant gap in the literature.

7 The literature on women and public office has developed along two central strands: descriptive and substantive representation. Descriptive representation involves identifying the reasons why so few women are elected to legislative bodies and the importance of barriers (such as the electoral system), the role of party recruitment processes, and the resources and motivation that make women seek elected office. Substantive representation involves the related question of whether, once elected, women make a difference in legislative life and political leadership.

Regarding women in Turkey, political solidarity, mobilization, and candidate nomination are all significant factors influencing political representation. However, this study also reveals that while women's previous work within their party organization and election candidate rankings do not directly determine their electoral success, they do influence how effective women are once they enter parliament. As party leaders determine the election candidate list of the parties and the structure of the parties is oligarchic rather than democratic (Çakır 2013), women's being in a party organization for a long time may not always render them candidates for elections. Women who are nominated for higher rankings in the party list are naturally more likely to be elected than those who are nominated for lower rank. Besides, even if female candidates are nominated from the lower ranks in the party list, they can receive a chance to be elected with the contribution of the election system. In this case, however, it was observed that women nominated from lower ranks were less active in parliament than those elected from higher ranks.

Regarding the electoral system, proportional representation (PR) generally increases women's electoral chances compared to more competitive pluralist electoral systems. However, if competition between parties is more severe, then women candidates are less likely to be preferred. This is especially evident in local elections and rural areas. Extreme polarization between parties and strict discipline within parties hinder women's representation – the chance women will be preferred as candidates by party leaders – and hamper the collective work of women politicians. Therefore, institutional opportunities and obstacles are shaped by cultural-political patterns, which lead to limitations on the effectiveness of women MPs because of features such as intolerance, polarization, and patriarchal norms and values.

Based on these links between institutional and cultural factors and women's political representation in parliament, the following arguments will be analyzed in relation to the case of Turkish women deputies:

- 1) Candidate nomination and election
 - a) The longer women have worked in the party organization, the greater the effectiveness of that party's women MPs.
 - b) As the rank of women candidates in the party's list increases, their floor-work in parliament increases.
 - c) Women politicians nominated from large cities are more likely to gain seats in elections.
 - d) The more important patron-client relations are, the less likely women candidates are to win elections.

2) Party system and inter-party competition

- a) As party fragmentation increases, women become less likely to gain representation.
- b) As party discipline becomes stricter, women MPs have less impact in parliament.
- c) As ideological divisions and polarization increases, cooperation between women MPs decreases.

3) Electoral system

- a) Proportional representation increases women's parliamentary representation.
- b) A closed-list electoral system decreases competition between the candidates, increasing women's parliamentary representation.
- c) A closed-list electoral system makes party discipline stricter, reducing the effectiveness of women's parliamentary representation.

Studies of the relationship between women and politics explain the political representation of women in relation to various factors. These include quotas, PR systems, the power of women's movements, party ideologies, and the level of democratization within a country. A majority of studies generally focus on women's parliamentary representation, particularly quantitative representation rates and reports as well as other written documents (Paxton/Kunovich 2003; Ballington/Karam 1998). At the parliamentary level, studies of participation highlight problems such as intra-party practices and the impact of socio-economic, political, and cultural factors (Ballington/Mattland 2004; Bari 2005). Scholars who see ideology and cultural factors as causes of unequal participation claim that women cannot participate equally due to traditional societal structures influenced by religion (Shedova 2005; Norris/Inglehart 2001).

A number of important studies in Turkey that have examined women's political participation, nomination, and the competition processes have shed light on the obstacles and opportunities faced by women in Turkish politics (Tekeli 1985; Arat 1989; Çakır 2013; Çağlayan 2007; Arslan 2019). Several studies have focused on local government and gender relations (Yıldırım/Kocapınar 2019; Alkan 2003; Sumbaş 2020), while others have investigated the level of women's political representation, how women are included in party programs and regulations, and how they are represented in the print media (Cansun 2009; Yaraman 2015). Previous studies of women deputies in Turkey are notable for analysing political representation in relation to modernist Kemalist reforms, the conservative patriarchal structure, and women's movements (Arat 1989; Tekeli 1985; Toprak 1990;

Arat 2000). However, these analyses ignore the impact of institutional factors that enable us to compare changes in the support for women politicians between political periods.

Table 1 shows the percentage of seats held by women in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (GNAT), organized by election year; the percentage of seats held by the winning party; competition between the first and second largest party; and the rate of fragmentation. Competition is measured as the vote gap between the first and the second parties and suggests that elections are competitive if the vote gap between the first two parties is lower. Its relationship to the winning party's seat percentage is defined based on the electoral system and determines the party system in general. In one-party systems, as competition is very limited, the winning party's seat percentage will be very high. In two-party systems, the vote gap is small; however, the winning party is expected to get the majority of seats in order to form a single-party government. In these systems, fragmentation (the effective number of parties, ENP) is also low – below three points. For instance, the 1950 election indicators show that the percent of women MPs in parliament went down to 0.6% of MPs despite the fact that the number of total deputies in the assembly increased. Moreover, although the vote gap between the first two parties was low (around 13%), due to the electoral system (block-vote pluralist system), the winning party received more than 85% of the seats in parliament. The ENP indicates that there were two main parties and additional small parties in parliament following the 1950 election.

Year of national elections	Total MPs	Women MPs	Women MPs (in percent)	Competition (vote gap between largest two parties in percent)	Winning party's seats (in percent)	Fragmentation (ENP)
1935	395	18	4.60	0	100	1
1939	400	15	3.80	0	100	1
1943	435	16	3.70	0	100	1
1946	465	9	2	72.30	84.90	1.29
1950	487	3	0.60	13.30	85.40	2.16
1954	535	4	0.70	22.21	94	2.14
1957	610	7	1.10	6.79	69.50	2.42

1961	450	3	0.70	1.94	38.40	3.42
1965	450	8	1.80	24.12	53.30	2.74
1969	450	5	1.10	19.51	56.80	3.30
1973	450	6	1.30	3.47	41.10	4.29
1977	450	4	0.89	4.50	41.10	3.13
1983	400	12	3	14.68	52.70	2.85
1987	450	6	1.30	11.57	64.80	4.11
1991	450	8	1.80	3.02	39.50	4.67
1995	550	13	2.40	1.73	28.70	6.16
1999	550	22	4	4.21	24.70	6.79
2002	550	24	4.40	15.02	66	5.43
2007	550	50	9.10	25.70	62	3.64
2011	550	79	14.40	24	59.40	2.99
2015 June	550	98	17.80	16.14	46.90	3.56
2015 November	550	81	14.73	24.18	57.60	2.98
2018	600	104	17.60	20	48.30	3.73

Table 1: Women MPs and party competition (1935–2018). Source: Compiled by the author.

According to these indicators, parliaments under single-party governments (those that have more than 50% of seats in parliament) include more women deputies than those existing under coalition governments or parliaments where seats are divided among several parties. In other words, the party system itself affects female representation. As the party system⁸ shifts from a multiparty system dominated by a single party or from a pluralist party system to an overly

8 "One-party system" is different from a single-party government, which gets the majority of the seats (or support) to form the government alone in a competitive system. A "two-party system" (or bipartism) is duopolistic in that two "major" parties that have a roughly equal prospect of winning government power dominate it. In this system, although a number of "minor" parties may exist, only two parties enjoy sufficient electoral and legislative strength to win government power. A multiparty system is characterized by competition between more than two parties, thus reducing the chances of a single-party government and increasing the likelihood of coalitions. Moderate pluralism exists in countries where ideological differences between major parties are slight and where there is a general inclination to form coalitions and move toward the middle ground. In Sartori's classification, for a system to qualify as a predominant party system, the same party has to win the absolute majority of seats in three or more consecutive elections.

fragmented party system – an “atomic” party system as classified by Sartori (1976) – women have fewer chances to reach higher positions in candidate lists and therefore a lower chance of being elected.

In Turkey, following three decades of a one-party government, the party system changed from bipartism (1950–1960) to moderate multipartism (1961–1980), moderate multipartism with one dominant party (1983–1991), extreme multipartism with no dominant party (1991–2002), and, in 2002, to a multiparty system with one dominant party (predominant party system) (Sayarı 2016). As this study argues, the structure of the party system – how fragmented and competitive it is – is a significant factor influencing women’s representation. Table 1 shows that, except for the elections held in 1957, 1977, 1995, and 2015, there is a negative correlation between fragmentation (measured as the ENP)⁹ and the proportion of women in the National Assembly. In other words, women’s representation increases when there is a stable party system.

When women first entered the Turkish parliament in 1935, through Kemalist “state feminism”¹⁰, women politicians can be successful both in national and municipal elections only via the “support of male politicians”. In the period between 1935 and 1950, which had a single-party regime ruled by the RPP (CHP), only the candidates nominated from the RPP’s list could be elected.¹¹ During this period, women’s political participation was fostered as a symbol of the Kemalist project, because as Arat (2000, 109) asserts, “women were crucial in the reinvention of the national culture [in which] women had been considered equal to men among the pre-Islamic Turks in Central Asia [and] efforts to improve women’s status were used as a means to cultivate Turkish nationalism and adopt Western notions of equality and secularity”.

In addition to the effect of the party system (which is usually determined by the electoral system), changes in the proportion of women parliamentarians are strongly correlated with changes to the electoral system. Within the period of bipartism, from 1950 to 1960, Turkish elections used the block-vote method, perhaps the most inequitable system since Turkey’s introduction of a multi-party democratic system in 1946. In this electoral system, the party that receives the

9 The effective number of parties (ENP) is a concept introduced by Laakso and Taagepera (1979) that provides for an adjusted number of political parties in a country’s party system. In a competitive democratic regime, if the ENP is lower, i.e., between 1 and 2, it is called a two-party system; around 2.5 points, it is called a two-and-a-half party system; and between 2.5 and 4 points, the system is called moderate multipartism. If the ENP is higher than 4 points, the system is called extreme multipartism.

10 The term “state feminism” refers to the fact that women’s rights are given and fostered by state (cf. Tekeli 1985).

11 Because this was a one-party regime, the ENP is given as ‘1’ for the early republican period (1935–1946). Moreover, although there were independent minority MPs within this period, they were also preferred by the ruling RPP, hence the party’s seat share is given as 100%.

highest number of votes in a constituency takes all the related seats. The number of female MPs declined radically after 1946 due to the increasingly competitive political environment. As presented in Table 1, although the winning Democrat Party's (DP) seat share was 85.4% in 1950 and 94% in 1954, the percentage of women MPs fell to its lowest level – 0.6%. This situation is interesting insofar as it shows that even though this period was remarked upon as the first stage of transition to democracy, the DP did not nominate any women, and so, democratic gains did not occur equally for women and men. Moreover, this reduction also suggests two related issues: Given the same socio-economic qualifications, women politicians are not successful in competing with their male rivals, and the end of the single-party regime demonstrated that Kemalist reforms, especially the rights granted to women, were not internalized. Turan (1984) asserts that, with the transition to multi-party politics in the 1940s, the tendency to pay heed to voters' religious preferences was considerably enhanced.

For the post-coup period of 1961–1980, characterized as a period of moderate multipartism, the percentage of women MPs remained the same, but was far lower than it had been during the single-party regime of the 1930s. Since 1961, Turkey has used a PR electoral system. Because this system also increases competitiveness, in the 1961 elections, the vote gap between the first two parties was 1.94% and women accounted for 0.7% of MPs, i.e., women politicians were not the preference of the political parties. In addition to this, determining candidates in a closed-list system encouraged excessive intra-party discipline. Accordingly, during the 1970s, the number of women MPs fell again slightly, especially when ideological conflict between left- and right-wing parties accelerated. Closed-list elections also limit the autonomy of male MPs.

When the party system changed to multipartism with a dominant party after the second transition to democracy with the 1983 elections (following the 1980 military coup), the rate of women deputies increased. In this post-1980-coup period, with the implementation of a very high 10% threshold for seats in addition to a ban on existing parties, the new right-wing Motherland Party (ANAP) succeeded in gaining the majority of parliamentary seats. When the ban on pre-coup political parties and politicians was lifted for the 1987 national elections, the dominance of ANAP ended, and the party system shifted to extreme multipartism, which continued until 2002 and led to another decline in the proportion of women politicians (to 1.3%).

By the late 1980s, women politicians had become more active, in line with growing women's movements and demands from both feminist and Islamic fundamentalist grassroots (Berik 1990). Turkish women began voicing their demands in organized marches, while protests over domestic violence against

women signalled the rise of feminist movements and made women more visible in Turkish political discourse. Finally, Turkey's attempts to become a member of the European Union forced state policies to become more sensitive to gender equality. Significantly, Turkey had a woman as Prime Minister, Tansu Çiller, from 1993 to 1996. Although Çiller had had little political experience before her recruitment by the centre-right True Path Party, she rapidly became its leader. Her selection as Prime Minister can be interpreted as reflecting gender-equality achievements during the 1980s. We can see that there is an increasing trend in the number and effectiveness of women deputies since the 1990s. During the 1990s, other women politicians with longer political careers also served as ministers. This decade is significant as four women ministers took places in the cabinet (during the Çiller and Erbakan governments). Meral Akşener served as Minister of Internal Affairs between 1996 and 1997 in the coalition government formed by the Welfare Party and True Path Party. Ayfer Yılmaz and Türkân Akyol (who had been, as of 1971, the first female minister in Turkish political history) also served as Ministers of State during this period.

The post-2000 period saw increases in women's representation in Turkey. In the 2002 elections, the JDP won 66% of the parliamentary seats with only 34% of the total votes, establishing the presently dominant features of the Turkish political system. In the 2007 and 2011 elections, the JDP again won an absolute parliamentary majority, which enabled women candidates to win seats despite being nominated lower on the party list. On the other hand, growing majoritarianism (in the parliament, commissions, cabinet, and local administrations) started to reduce the need for cooperation between parties. Moreover, the fragmentation of the political opposition and the ideological distance between the secular social-democrat RPP, the nationalist NMP, and the pro-Kurdish PDP have been obstacles to the formation of a coalition government (Sayarı 2016). However, after the 2013 Gezi protests, increased ideological camping broke new ground for reconciliation between the women deputies across different parties. As Table 1 shows, the dominant party system has positively affected the representation rate of women in parliament in general. Yet, this positive increase, both in quantitative and qualitative representation, cannot be explained only as a result of the party system.

By the 2000s, awareness of gender equality had increased, especially after Turkey's EU membership candidacy was approved in the 1999 Helsinki Submit. In 2001, 2004, and 2010, as part of the EU harmonization, various regulations and constitutional amendments were passed regarding gender equality (Müftüler-Baç 2005). In 2009, the parliamentary Commission for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (KEFEK) was established with the participation of women

and men MPs from several parties. The commission has undertaken significant studies and produced reports with the participation of academics and NGOs. The two most important were prepared between 2007 and 2013: the National Action Plan for Combating Domestic Violence in 2008 and the Gender Equality National Action Plan in 2013. Significantly, two women social-democrat politicians, Çiğdem Mercan (DSP) and Canan Kaftanoğlu (CHP), were elected as Istanbul province chairs in 2016 and 2018 respectively. In short, the conspicuous rise in the number of women MPs by the 2010s highlights the success of efforts during the late 1990s and early 2000s inspired by the rise of grassroots women's movements.

In the 2010s, women's representation benefitted from the JDP's active women's branches and the PDP's (HDP) co-presidency system, which increased its voter-mobilization potential. Indeed, the pro-Kurdish leftist PDP nominated the most women candidates in the 2015 and 2018 national elections and 2019 municipal elections. Meanwhile, the JDP nominated those women candidates who had worked actively and for a long time in the party's (mostly women) branches.¹² Half of the JDP's women MPs wear headscarves and have found their place in politics with this identity.¹³ This suggests that the claim by Yeşim Arat (1989) that women mostly enter politics through the intercession of male politicians, as window-dressing, no longer applies in Turkish politics. Although for some of them, their interest in politics can be initiated by their male kin – husbands, fathers, or, as may be the case for pro-Kurdish party members, tribal affiliations (Çağlayan 2007) – they are not recruited as window-dressing.

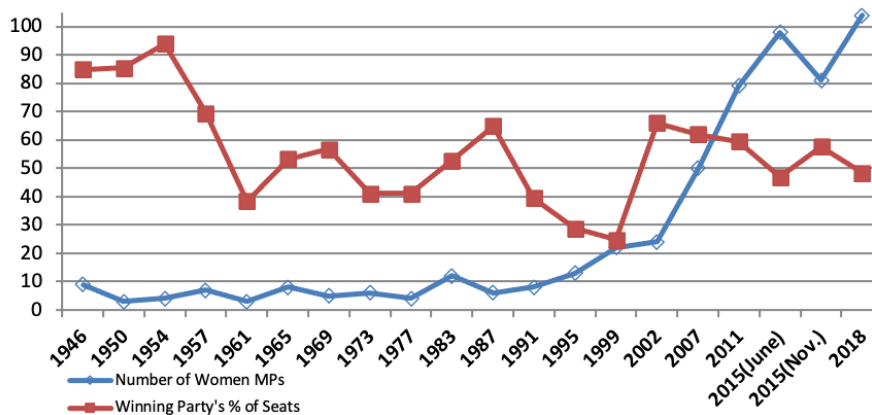


Figure 1: Number of Women MPs and Winning Party's Seat Share

12 For the 26th Parliament (from November 2015 to July 2018), some of the examples include the JDP's Kayseri deputy Hülya Nergis; Kahramanmaraş deputy Nursel Reyhanlıoğlu; Adana deputy Fatma Güldemet Sarı (who also served as the Minister of Environment and Urban Planning); Ankara deputy Jülide Sarıeroğlu (who also served as the Minister of Labor and Social Security); Ankara deputy Lütfiye Selva Çam; Antalya deputy Gökçen Özdoğan Enç; and Balıkesir deputy Sema Kırıcı.

13 Until 2013, women MPs were forbidden from entering parliament with a headscarf. The headscarf was banned in public institutions in accordance with the "public clothing regulation" issued after the 1980 coup and began to be implemented in a radical way after the 1997 military memorandum.

Earlier, I argued that the number of women MPs declines as electoral competition increases (i.e., as the vote gap between the first two parties decreases). However, figure 1 shows that, in Turkey, the number of women MPs increases when seats are shared more proportionally between many parties rather than when the winning party gains a substantial parliamentary majority. If the largest party's seat share is higher than 50%, one should expect a single-party government to be formed. Although fragmentation decreases as the share of the votes obtained by the governing party increases, the system diverts to a more majoritarian and authoritarian character. Conversely, if the largest party holds less than 50% of the vote, a coalition government will likely be formed. Hence, for the Turkish case, existing theory suggests that, except in the 1950s (the period of transition to a competitive democratic regime and rising authoritarianism of the DP), women's representation increases under the rule of single-party governments (compared to periods of coalition government). Yet, the democratic parliamentary representation of more parties under a single-party government (when the winning party's seat share decreases) enhances the likelihood that women will be elected. In other words, it is stable and pluralist rather than majoritarian political systems that foster women's parliamentary representation.

Parliamentary Effectiveness: Substantive Representation under Cultural Constraints

Research shows that the presence of even one woman can change the behaviour of her male colleagues. However, long-term significant change is most likely when there is a substantial number of women in parliament who are motivated to represent women's concerns and not only "stand as" women but also "act for" women (Phillips 1995; Bellington/Karam 1998).

Although more women from a range of parties have become MPs in Turkey since the 1990s, this improved descriptive representation has not been reflected in the form of substantive representation. This is primarily due to cultural and social factors, such as the clash between Islamic and European or secular values, the ideological distance between parties, high social polarization and strict party discipline. This has prevented women MPs, especially pro-Islamist JDP members, from effectively acting for women. They do not discuss problematic policies and abuse of women as issues in parliament and they rarely criticize the government for violations of women's and children's rights.¹⁴ This ineffec-

¹⁴ While, in 2019, conservatives campaigned against the Istanbul Convention that pushed the JDP for withdrawal, in February 2020, JDP women MPs opposed president Erdoğan's proposal to amend the Istanbul Convention (BBC Türkçe, 28 February 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-51667766>)

tiveness of women politicians who came from women's branches to parliament supports Çakır's study, which says that parties' women's branches, "rather than being places that prepare women for politics, [...] are considered to be helpful places to bring the mass of women into the party" (2001, 407).

While strict party discipline is a more prominent obstacle for the JDP's women deputies, all women politicians share one problem: Their opportunity to actively participate in politics usually comes later than men's due to family responsibilities. Furthermore, parties tend to expect and relegate women branches to only express interest in women's issues (Arslan 2019). Women participate in politics either "before they get married or when they get older", even if they are better educated than their male counterparts (Çakır 2013, 229). Even when they are active, women's greater engagement with family responsibilities continues to hinder their political participation and excludes them from decision-making processes because crucial party decisions are taken at gatherings in restaurants or hotels (Arslan 2019).

Another influential institution that hinders women politicians in Turkey is the patron-client relationship. Patronage relations and clientelism have developed in particular in Turkey's rural areas, where land ownership is heavily concentrated in the hands of a relatively small and powerful group that can monopolize wealth, political power, education, and means of communication (Sayarı 1977). Kemalist reforms in the early Republican era, which were often secularist, widened further the gap between the centre and the periphery (Turan 1984). The periphery's dependence on the centre encouraged personal dependencies in the form of accepted clientelism that proliferated until the first competitive elections of 1946 (Ayata 1994). Patronage is more commonly understood as the distribution of state resources by office holders. In short, finding jobs is a very important function of clientelistic networks, and in a study by Arat (1989, 103), one male politician suggests that "being an MP is an arduous task. A woman cannot endure this. A voter [,] for example, cannot tell a woman that he is unemployed. He won't believe that the woman can shoulder the necessary fight. Also, man is more of a demagogue."

In the 1990s, Tansu Çiller became the first female politician to successfully manipulate political patronage to maintain her position (Ağduk 2000). Çiller joined the True Path Party (DYP) in 1991 at party leader Demirel's request before then serving as Minister of the Economy. Within two years, she was elected as party leader and became Turkey's first woman Prime Minister in 1993, despite Demirel's opposition. Ümit Cizre (2002) suggests that Çiller's modern, Western lifestyle enabled her to influence both the West and Turkey. Çiller strengthened relations with the United States to secure her position, tried to

use patronage-based support within the party, and removed members close to Demirel from the party. Moreover, she adopted populist policies by promising “a house and car” for each voter. Her ability to utilize patron-client ties just like male politicians shows that Çiller, acting and promising as a woman, tried to overcome the disadvantage of being a woman in politics as it had been highlighted by Arat (1989, 28) for the women politicians of the earlier periods. In addition, she adopted a militarist attitude to fighting the terrorist organization PKK during the 1990s, which made her seem more like other, male politicians (Ağduk 2000). She also preferred labels such as ‘sister’ (bacı) or ‘mother’ (ana) to suppress any perceived sexual aspect to her femininity. This gender neutralization of women’s visibility in public and politics supports Çakır’s (2013) conclusion that political parties, regardless of their ideological differences, tend to preserve the patriarchal structure and traditional division of labor.

Clientelist politics remains more common in rural areas than in the cities, especially in the southeast and eastern regions, where tribal or clan systems are still dominant and mobilize mass blocs of votes or nominate members of the same tribe for different parties. However, this began to change with the pro-Kurdish PDP’s (BDP-HDP) co-president policy. Nowadays, women politicians from the southeast and eastern regions dominated by Kurdish voters are being nominated with high percentages in both national and municipal elections. Nevertheless, without internalizing equality policies or incorporating women’s perspectives into politics, political representation alone will not strengthen equality.

The ranking of women candidates, also determines how women MPs work in parliament. Until 2007, women politicians were focused on so-called women’s issues such as child rearing, health, and education policies (except for DTP deputies). Even today, women politicians are still usually allocated to the Family Ministry or sometimes the Education Ministry, concerned with the well-being of families and children. Except for a few examples from the 1990s as mentioned earlier, women are still not being appointed to more technical, political, or economic positions related to transportation, finance, the economy, foreign affairs, or internal affairs. Thus, despite taking power with the largest share of the vote ever (46.58%), the JDP did not nominate any women MPs at the top of its lists. In the 2015 election, only three of 34 women MPs were chosen from the first rank and only five took the floor. The JDP gained 53 women MPs after the 2018 elections, of whom 24 were nominated from the first three ranks in the list. With the transition to a presidential system, there are only two women ministers who work in the JDP government’s 17 ministries: Labor, Social Services, and Family Minister Zehra Zümrüt Selçuk and Trade Minister Ruhsar Pekcan.

Figure 2 shows the uneven distribution of women MPs across Turkey's 81 provinces. Although women increased their share of parliamentary seats from 14.4% to 17% in the 2015 national elections, 37 provinces (marked black) had no women MPs at all. These provinces are concentrated in the conservative and nationalist Black Sea and Central Anatolia regions. Conversely, women were more likely to be elected in major cities, such as Istanbul, Ankara, Bursa, Adana, İzmir, and Kayseri. Figure 2 also shows that economic development does not necessarily predict women's political representation. Specifically, East and Southeast Anatolia elected women MPs despite being economically less developed than provinces on Turkey's European side, such as Tekirdağ, Edirne, and Çanakkale, which did not elect any women. The main reason for this is the PDP's (HDP) electoral success based on its nomination policy whereby one woman and one man are nominated as co-presidents. Research into political participation by Kurdish movement parties (Çağlayan 2007; Arslan 2019) indicates that these parties' so-called "women's councils" are independent units whose decisions are not discussed in mixed units. This shows that women's branches positioned as "subsidiaries" in other parties are not a place that "refuses to make real politics" for women in pro-Kurdish parties.



Figure 2: 7 June 2015 National Elections. Provinces with/without Women Deputies. Source: Bianet.org. Purple provinces have women MPs, Black provinces have no women MPs.

As outlined earlier, the substantive representation of JDP women MPs has been hindered by strict party discipline and tensions between Islamist and secular values. In addition to the pre-dominant party system discussed above, deep social and political cleavages in Turkey have also prevented cross-party cooperation between women politicians. Table 2 compares the proportion of women MPs from each party after the 2015 and 2018 elections to the number of written and oral parliamentary questions (interpellations) they asked (26th term and 27th term first session respectively).¹⁵ After Turkey shifted to a presidential

¹⁵ A parliamentary question is a way of obtaining information from the Prime Minister or a minister through a motion on matters concerning the duties and activities of the government. Questions can be oral or written, depending on the required form of reply.

system in 2018, the authority to issue an oral interpellation in parliament was eliminated. As table 2 shows, the PDP (HDP) had the largest proportion of women MPs after both elections, followed by the ruling JDP. Both the JDP and PDP increased the percent of MPs who were women between 2015 and 2018, whereas the percentage decreased for the secularist PRP. The (nationalist right-wing) Good Party only ran in the 2018 election.

Party	Women MPs	Women MPs (in % of party seats)	Women MPs with interpellation	Number of deputies with no interpellations	Total interpellations
JDP (AKP)	32 / 53	10.76 / 18.28	4 / 0	28 / 53	22 / 0
RPP (CHP)	21 / 18	14.5 / 12.5	21 / 8	0 / 10	1,887 / 13
PDP (HDP)	19 / 26	35.19 / 38.81	18 / 10	1 / 16	2,051 / 27
NMP (MHP)	3 / 4	8.33 / 8	3 / 1	0 / 3	191 / 6
GP (İYİ P.)	- / 3	- / 7.3	- / 0	- / 0	- / 0

Table 2: Parliamentary Contribution of Women MPs in the 26th (bold) and 27th Terms. Source: Compiled by the author based on the GNAT archive by the author. Bold numbers refer to the 26th parliamentary term.

Table 2 shows that secular left-wing women MPs (PRP and PDP) were more active than their counterparts from the nationalist conservative alliance (the JDP and its partner NMP). Women's issues and the role of women and men in the private and public sphere create the main ideological difference and conflict between the parties. Thus, despite being led by a woman, the Good Party both nominated and elected the fewest women MPs. None of its women deputies offered any written questions during the first parliamentary term. The NMP, which contrary to other parties has no procedures for equal representation in its charter, has often been called the "men's party". Yet, its three women deputies were more active compared to JDP's women MPs. Despite having the most women MPs, in the 26th term, only four of the JDP's women MPs asked questions, and among the total 22 interpellations (10 of which were given by Istanbul deputy Bihlun Tamaylıgil), only six were related to women's issues. Although women MPs are expected to fight more for women's and children's rights, some might have political attitudes that do not see improvement in these areas as necessary. This inactiveness on women's issues can be a deliberate choice. JDP's women MPs

do not oppose their party leader Erdoğan's claim that gender equality means "different in nature, but equal in rights". That is, they believe that "to be equal" means "to be identical".¹⁶ Again, JDP's KADEM adopts the concept of "gender justice" instead of "gender equality".

Another critical question is whether women politicians "act for women". Of the 4,314 interventions by women MPs during the 26th term (4,241 written; 72 oral), only 300 (7.6%) concerned issues directly related to problems of women and children. For the first period of the 27th term, only 5 out of 46 written questions concerned women issues. These were all asked by the PDP's Istanbul MP Filiz Kerestecioğlu Demir. Other questions given by PDP women MPs mostly concerned regional and economic problems, class inequality, and relations between the state and Turkish citizens of Kurdish origin. Yet, many opposition MPs have been stripped of their title and some remain under investigation or in custody. This makes it neither easy nor scientifically meaningful to collect data on their parliamentary work and it is not reasonable to expect them to be able to "act for women".¹⁷

Conclusion

This study of Turkey's experience reveals that women politicians have begun to break down traditional patron-client ties as their parliamentary representation has increased since the late 1990s. The study also finds that institutional factors, such as inter-party competitiveness, the party and electoral systems, and candidate nomination procedures, determine the collective descriptive representation of women in the Turkish parliament. However, substantive representation is more directly determined by cultural and political factors, such as strict intra-party discipline and deep Islamist-secularist divisions. In Turkey, traditional Islamist-secularist and Turkish-Kurdish ethnic divisions deepened further following the 2013 Gezi Park protests, the 2014 Kurdish Kobani uprising, the 2015 ISIS and PKK terrorist attacks, the 2016 abortive coup, and the 2018 de-jure transition to the presidential system. Despite a significant increase in women MPs since 2015, these social and political developments have prevented women representatives from cooperating to address women's issues.

The statistical data on the relationship between women's representation and the party system and inter-party competitiveness is significant. The transition to

16 "Erdoğan: 'Kadın kadın ile koşar, erkek erkekle koşar'", (Sözcü, 23 November 2018, <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2018/gundem/erdogan-kadin-ve-adalet-zirvesinde-2754881>)

17 Between November 2016 and November 2018, 16 of the Peoples' Democratic Party's (HDP) MPs were arrested. The party's joint leaders, Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ, have been detained along with the other MPs because of their reluctance to give testimony for crimes linked to "terrorist propaganda". They are also accused of harbouring sympathies for the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and of acting to further its interests.

a presidential system in Turkey has led to the formation of electoral alliances, transforming the party system into a bi-polar structure in which two competing blocs (pro-presidential/pro-Erdoğan and anti-presidential/anti-Erdoğan) exist in parliament. The ruling right-wing JDP-NMP alliance, which represents the Turkish-Islamic synthesis, has alienated and excluded other parties from decision making and introduced an intolerant, uncompromising political attitude toward opposition parties. Moreover, with its inside and outside institutions (such as the committee KEFEK and the GO-NGO KADEM), the JDP have reemphasized the image of Turkish women as wives and mothers. Hence, a more pluralist and tolerant political approach is necessary to reduce political polarization in both Turkish society and parliament to create a peaceful bridge with room for women politicians to cooperate across party lines.

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