

Gender segregation in parliamentary committees of Turkey: Intermediary spaces of women's political representation

Burcu Ucaray-Mangitli^{a,*}, Senem Yildirim^b

^a University of Goettingen, Department of Political Science, Platz der Goettinger Sieben 3, Goettingen 37073, Germany

^b Bilkent University, I.D. International Advanced Studies Center, Turkey

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ABSTRACT

Do the Turkish parliamentary committees exhibit gendered appointment practices? If so, what are the driving factors behind women's limited representation in some committees? Previous studies find a division of labor in committees based on the perceived gender roles: women legislators are over-represented in low-prestige committees with "feminine" themes such as family, health, and education, whereas they are under-represented in strategically key policymaking committees. These studies —mostly on Western democracies— explain this gender bias with the appointment practices of the conservative right-wing parties. Using an original dataset of appointments between 2002 and 2020, this paper examines the partisan effects on the under- and over-representation of women on certain committees in the Turkish context. We find that all parties except the small left-wing Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) perform in a similarly biased way. We argue that parliamentary committees are *gendered institutional spaces* greatly affected by the institutional culture of political parties. Even though institutional culture is mostly shaped by ideological stances, political parties are still among institutional spaces where ideologies of masculinity are effectively shaping power relations. We conclude that institutionalizing mechanisms that enhance agential capacities and practices at the party level are vital for gender equality within the political sphere.

Introduction

On May 26, 2021, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) Deputy Hüda Kaya criticized President Erdoğan for approving an attempted attack against Meral Akşener (party leader of Good [İYİ] party (GP)). Kaya stated, "The president is threatening us. Our lives as the opposition are not safe... This country's president claimed responsibility for an act of provocation and told the opposition, 'These are your better days' through a woman politician."¹ Apart from Kaya's remark on the problematic relationship between the governing power and the opposition, where she made this remark also matters. Her criticism was expressed during one of the meetings of the Committee on Petitions of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (GNAT). This specific committee is not responsible for examining and debating the bills, but for evaluating and finalizing the decisions on the petitions sent to the GNAT. On another occasion, Sera Kadıgil, Istanbul deputy of the Workers' Party of Turkey,

criticized how "appointed" ministers ruptured the legislative process.² Her reaction was against the altered text of the animal rights draft law, which was originally 50 articles prepared by members of the Committee on Animal Rights, but ended up being redacted to only 18 articles in the final legislative proposal. Her remarks on how elected representatives were deprived of their legislative capacities as a result of "top-down" interventions were recorded in meeting minutes.

These examples support the argument that gender matters when it comes to parliamentary activity, and underrepresentation leads female legislators to use specific parliamentary tools and opportunities to make their voices heard (Akıray, 2020). Here, parliamentary committees are not only limited spheres of legislation based on expertise, but spaces for voicing demands, criticisms, and engaging in discussions. These committees might be thought of as one of the most prominent organizational elements of a representative democracy. Considering the spatial and temporal opportunities provided by these committees, this study

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: bmangit@uni-goettingen.de (B. Ucaray-Mangitli).

¹ Please see <https://www.duvarenglish.com/president-erdogan-threatens-us-our-lives-as-opposition-are-not-safe-hdp-mp-kaya-news-57639>.

² Please see <https://ilerihaber.org/icerik/sera-kadigil-hayvan-haklari-komisyonunda-konustu-tbmmnin-atanmis-bakanlara-irade-tesliminin-resmi-gibi-127880.html>.

examines whether the Turkish parliamentary committees exhibit gendered practices in appointment procedures, and investigates the effects of partisan differences on the under- and over-representation of women on certain committees, in the Turkish context.

The literature on the gendered legislative representation of women suggests that gender segregation in committee membership exists in some specific contexts, whereas in others, gender differences in committee assignments cannot be observed. There is no observed systematic gender segregation in committee assignments in cases such as Great Britain, Wales, Scotland, Mexico and Sweden (Barnes, 2014, 137). As in the case of the British House of Commons, segregation is less likely to occur when members must engage in negotiations with one another and win over their colleagues (O'Brien, 2012, 188). Moreover, in cases such as U.S. state governments and Danish local councils, variations might occur because of the different priorities of representatives (O'Brien, 2012). Studies pointing out the existence of gender bias in committee assignments find a division of labor in committees based on perceived gender roles (Baekgaard & Kjaer, 2012; Barnes, 2014; Bolzendahl, 2014; Coffé et al., 2019; Heath et al., 2005; Pansardi & Vercesi, 2017): women legislators are over-represented in low prestige committees with "feminine" themes such as family, health, and education, whereas they are under-represented in strategically key policymaking committees on "hard" topics such as defense, finance, and justice. One of the findings of these studies – focusing mostly on Western democracies – is that this gender bias stems from the appointment practices of conservative right-wing parties. Compared to left-wing parties, conservative right-wing parties tend to elect proportionally fewer women and follow a more gender-segregated pattern in committee appointments by assigning more women to social committees (Coffé et al., 2019; Pansardi & Vercesi, 2017).

This study contributes to the growing gender and representation literature by focusing on a non-Western context. Our results confirm the previous findings of gender segregation in legislative committees based on perceived levels of institutional prestige and masculinity. We find that women rarely sit on GNAT legislative committees; but when they do, they are assigned to low-prestige committees with 'feminine' themes like health, education, and petitions. The percentage of women committee members has risen from 4.3 % in 2002 to a mere 18.3 % in 2020, concomitant to the increase in the number of women legislators in GNAT.³ Still, the current number is far lower than the average number of legislative seats occupied by women in Western democracies (on average 25–30 %⁴). This gap implies a possibly more drastic effect of institutional gender segregation in non-Western contexts, given that the lower number of women representatives constrains the probability of appointing women to committees even further.⁵

To analyze the partisan sources of gender segregation in committees,

we build an original dataset of committee assignments in the Turkish parliament from 2002 to 2020. Considering such data is not readily available on the GNAT website or library, our contribution also supports the field of quantitative studies in Turkish politics. According to our findings, center and far-right parties are similarly biased when appointing committee members, while the left-wing Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), despite its small size, demonstrates a significant counter effect. A combination of a distinct women's movement arising from the Kurdish movement and institutional factors (party-level quota system) has led to the PDP appointing significantly more women to prestigious committees with masculine themes. It should be noted that the Kurdish movement is seen as having gone through a distinct political experience where political representatives have been insisting on establishing political parties despite recurring bans of their predecessors by the Constitutional Court (Ersanlı & Özdoğan, 2011). Having participated in political organizations, meetings, and protests, activist Kurdish women have been resisting the "patriarchal tribal system dominant in Turkish culture" and the centralist policies of the Turkish state (Diner & Toktas, 2010, 42). Such a distinct experience reveals that it is possible to overcome gender bias in committee appointments with pressure from a strong women's movement and its solidification through rulemaking. Until this recipe takes hold, women find themselves in a position where they strategically redefine and reshape the "soft," feminine, low-prestige spaces they are allowed to occupy as platforms of political participation and representation.

Puzzle of political representation

In their article on women's representation in German parliamentary committees, Coffé et al. (2019) ask the question: "Does it matter if women are elected to parliament?" This question is vital in terms of both descriptive and substantive representation of women at the national level. The literature on representation generally asserts that descriptive representation can only be measured and operationalized with the percentage of women within parliaments, whereas substantive representation can only be estimated by the analysis of the policy outputs regarding women's interests. Moreover, the relationship between the increased number of women and its impact on policy outputs is a "complicated one", since actors' ability to change policy outputs "is impeded by political affiliations, institutional norms, legislative inexperience, and the external political environment" (Fokum et al., 2020, 2). Differentiation of different phases, facets, and moments of representation brings about further dichotomies such as "standing for" versus "acting for" (Pitkin, 1967), and "critical mass" versus "critical acts." The "standing for" versus "acting for" debate is built on a supposed relationship between two distinct types of representation: Do women who "stand for" other women also "act for" the interests of whom they represent?

Built on the same assumption, the "critical mass" versus "critical acts" debate inquires whether an increase in the number of women has an impact on their collective and individual effectiveness as legislators. Regarding this question, the critical acts theory claims that not until becoming a considerable minority can women be effective in terms of policy outputs (Childs & Krook, 2008, 725). However, stating a cut-off number might not be sufficient to explain complex political processes and experiences. Critical acts are also vital for change in the position of minorities (Dahlerup, 1988, 296). Emphasizing the role of critical actors within the process does not completely ignore the importance of the "presence" of those actors within the political sphere but does point out a "contingent relationship" between the two (Childs & Krook, 2009, 145). As put by Mansbridge (1999, 628), there are specific contexts where descriptive representation would benefit the minority group. Among those contexts, the context of uncrystallized, not fully articulated interests and the context in which members' ability to rule has been questioned (or denied) (Mansbridge, 1999), provide a historical and institutional framework through which researchers look into the

³ This increase stems from the widespread awareness campaigns supported by feminist activists and NGOs, the EU accession process as well as the response from political parties. Taşkın (2021) emphasizes the role of the JDP's women's branches and the PDP's quota system. Yargıç (2020) follows this change through the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) committee reports.

⁴ Inter-Parliamentary Union. Women in national parliaments, as of 1 January 2022. <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=1&year=2022>.

⁵ There are examples of high legislative representation of women in non-Western contexts including Rwanda, Cuba, Nicaragua, Mexico, and the United Arab Emirates. Except for Cuba, all of these countries implement some sort of legislative quota for women (See <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/database>). Devlin and Elgie (2008) find that in Rwanda not only the women parliamentarians occupied nearly half of the seats, but they also held 30–50 % of committee seats, 60 % of vice chair and 27 % of chair positions were assigned to women (Devlin & Elgie, 2008, 244). This finding suggests a linkage between women's overall representation and their role in committees, yet exploring this linkage comparatively is beyond the scope of this paper.

benefits of descriptive representation.

Such an inquiry does not rule out Pitkin's (1967) emphasis on the importance of the representative's actions rather than their characteristics. As Phillips (1998, 4) argues, the shift from direct democracy to a representative one resulted in the prioritization of substantive, rather than descriptive, representation. Yet, as put again by Phillips (1998, 5–6), such a prioritization makes sense when the representation of different ideas, rather than the representation of different experiences and identities (such as gender, ethnicity, and race), are at stake. Especially in contexts where a specific group identity has been historically and institutionally excluded from the political experience and processes, “politics of presence” strikes back. Thus, discussions on democratic representation call for re-visiting the “idea of political presence” where descriptive representation could claim to both enhance “the representativeness of the representatives (who they are)” and “their capacity for democratic action (what they do)” (Castiglione & Pollak, 2019, 16, 19). In her recent conceptualization of recursive representation, Mansbridge (2019, 299) argues that “[r]epresentation has in practice taken a communicative turn.” This turn denotes enduring communication between the constituent and the representatives. Within this communicative context, descriptive representation reclaims its position as the facilitator of this communication initiated from below. Mansbridge (2019, 309) argues that descriptive representation “would almost certainly increase the number and quality of communicative channels for marginalized groups.”

The descriptive versus substantive representation debate is also integral to the works on gendered patterns within the organization of parliaments, and such a debate brings its own explanatory and methodological challenges (Bárcena Juárez et al., 2022). Erikson and Verge (2022, 2) emphasize the need for looking into “gendered outcomes of the political representation” within institutions, such as parliaments with “strongly masculinized organizational culture.” Concerning those outcomes, Holli (2012) argues that one should keep descriptive representation conceptually distinct from substantive representation since there is no numerical causal relation. Echoing Dahlerup (1988), she argues that cultural attitudes, type of electoral system, and committee characteristics all explain the extent of the impact of women's presence (Holli, 2012, 346, 362). On the other hand, studies focusing on important institutional changes – such as the introduction of quotas – find a causal link between two types of representation. Although these works vary in their findings, all of them emphasize the importance of institutional incorporation and design. Heath et al. (2005) argue that women, as newcomers in the legislature, are kept on the sidelines and tend to be isolated into committees that deal with women's and social issues. Barnes (2014, 154) puts a spotlight on the importance of institutional incorporation and argues that women, as newcomers, may initially be marginalized but, with time, they experience institutional socialization and learn how to become integral to the system. Barnes (2014, 137) asserts that gender differences in committee assignments are not universal. For instance, similar to findings in the US State governments and Danish local councils (see Bækgaard & Kjær, 2011; Thomas, 1994), O'Brien (2012) finds out that in the British House of Commons, committee membership composition indicates gender-neutral outcomes, and there is no evidence of marginalization of women in the selection of committee membership. In their works in the Mexican context, Kerevel and Atkeson (2013) find little evidence that women are marginalized in the Mexican Chamber of Deputies.

Differences in empirical findings call for context-specific research in addition to revisiting the already mentioned conceptual distinctions. Within this scope, Piscopo (2011) analyzes the Argentinian case, where she scrutinizes the speeches of parliamentarians who support or oppose sexual health reforms. She reconceptualizes descriptive representation as claim-making. Piscopo (2011, 452) asserts that, as opposed to substantive representation (which can be measured by policy outputs),

descriptive representation includes the moments and processes of “the deliberative and persuasive arguments that construct group interest.” With such an analysis, Piscopo (2011, 469) tries to provide dynamism to the “passive” presence attributed to descriptive representation as the process she points out includes an active description of group needs, demands, and interests. Inspired by that reconceptualization, we argue that examining gender segregation in parliamentary committees of Turkey unfolds spaces (where the deliberation takes place) and moments (when the decisions are made) of women's political participation.

The Turkish case

Gender equality and women's movement

The Mission statement of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women calls for a commitment to equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities as well as equal participation of women and men within the decision-making processes at all levels of participation (UN, 1995). Such a commitment is based on a representative democracy's universal claim of equal participation of all groups within a society. Having acknowledged the essential link between descriptive representation and substantive representation, the percentage of women's parliamentary representation would provide an insight into the nature and experience of women's political representation in Turkey. As part of the modernization project adopted by the founders of the Turkish Republic, women were granted legal and political rights during the 1920s and 1930s. As a critical part of the modernization project, women became the symbol of the Republic's success story both in westernization and democratization. Following such a vision, women were given voting rights at the local level in 1930, and they gained full suffrage rights in 1934. Yet, it has been the efforts of the women's movement rather than “state feminism” that transformed Turkish society from “unfavorable to women” to a relatively “favorable one” (Güneş Ayata & Tütüncü, 2008a, 463). By the 1980s and 90s, the introduction of identity politics and politics of difference created a challenge from Kurdish, Islamist, and LGBT+ movements; and as a result, mainstream Turkish feminism had to revise its conceptualization of the “woman question” and alter its relationship with the state (Diner & Toktas, 2010). During the 2000s, the women's movement has been influential in legislative changes including Constitutional Amendments (2001, 2004, 2010), changes in the Civil Code (2001), amendments to the Penal Code (2004), and the signing of international documents and conventions.

All of those legal changes have contributed to gender equality within different spheres of life. This change was a collective effort of different actors, such as women's movement organizations and their members, femocrats, and parliamentarians. At the political party level, the JDP (Justice and Development Party) has been one of the major actors that has shaped the legal and political framework concerning gender issues over the last twenty years. The New Penal Code that criminalized marital rape, regulated sexual crimes as crimes against individuals rather than crimes against public morality, regarded customary killings as aggravated homicide and criminalized sexual harassment in the workplace has been amended during the JDP rule. Evidentially, the European Union (EU) accession process had a huge impact on the JDP's then stance regarding the rights and freedoms of women. The then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan held meetings with leaders of women's organizations to hear the demands of those organizations. Women's rights were seen as a safe field to show the JDP's progressive face to international actors as well as constituents who saw the JDP as a threat to the secular Republic (Arat, 2021). Yet, in one of those meetings in 2008, Mr. Erdoğan declared that he did not believe in equality between women and men, and they should complement one another (Acar & Altunok, 2013, 17). Moreover, it was the JDP, as the governing party, trying to impose its neoconservative agenda by proposing the

criminalization of adultery during the parliamentary debates on the amendment of the Penal Code in 2004. So, especially in the last twenty years, gender issues have lost their significance under the ideological debates on Islam, secularism, and westernization (Güneş Ayata & Tütüncü, 2008b). The interaction between neoliberalism and neoconservatism, embodied in the JDP's regulations and policies on community and markets in general, and sexuality, family, and reproduction in particular, instrumentalizes gender issues "to regulate the neoliberal distribution of conservative values" (Acar & Altunok, 2013; Mutluer, 2019). As put by Koyuncu and Özman (2019), within this process, the state has employed various strategies, including the transformation of women's-rights-promoting state institutions into agents that legitimize conservative policies, as well as alignment with pro-government women's rights organizations to marginalize other organizations at the same time. The systematic backsliding concerning women's rights and interests has been perpetuated by the JDP parliamentarians' effort to abandon the amended article on sexual crimes in 2019 and Erdoğan's decision to withdraw from The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) that was ratified by the parliament in the first place (Arat, 2021). Such renunciation of recent legal victories for feminist causes is seen as a prominent part of "the recent reshuffling of the gender regime", and the JDP's alignment with the current anti-feminist and anti-gender mobilization in Turkey (Ünal, 2021, 72–73).⁶

These developments make us question the effectiveness of parliament as the legislative body and women's presence and participation as legislators within the decision-making processes. In 2017, Turkey went through a referendum that marked a prominent regime change from a parliamentary system to an executive presidency (Esen & Gümüşçi, 2017). As a result, the powers of the nationally elected parliament were reduced, and it became ineffective in terms of holding the executive accountable (Kalaycıoğlu, 2019). The parliament lost the right to interpellation and impeachment was made almost impossible (Paul & Seyrek, 2017). However, as Bektaş (2021, 6) puts it, recent studies on the effectiveness of legislative institutions in authoritarian regimes⁷ reveal that legislators influence policymaking by taking part in power-sharing mechanisms and submitting substantial amendments to the content of bills. Regarding the Turkish case, committees are still seen as having the potential to fulfill "the good governance requisite of public participation since they have the power to include civil society in law making-process" (Scotti, 2021, 326). Within this context, in addition to the power of the political parties and the functioning of the parliamentary committees, individual capacities of the legislators can be counted among prominent factors shaping the effectiveness of a parliament.⁸

Women's presence in parliament

Concerning structural and systemic changes, O'Brien (2012, 202) invites women and politics scholars to be observant about times when there are "important rule changes" or "large numbers of new legislators." Important rule changes can be considered as the introduction of

quota, or substantial regime change as observed in the Turkish case. In addition to that critical change moment, the Turkish case provides researchers with a fertile field of research, because Turkey diverges from global trends in terms of women's representation ratios at the national and local levels. As opposed to statistical data worldwide, women's representation at the parliament level is higher than women's representation at the local level (Alkan, 2010). According to the data provided by the GNAT (2023), currently, the percentage of women deputies in the GNAT is 17.27 %. In 2019, 2.86 % of elected mayors were women, while 11.01 % and 3.77 % of the municipal and provincial councils were women (Sumbas, 2022). These data might suggest that the parliamentary level provides women with more opportunities in terms of representation of women's interests and the ability to voice their demands. Yet, the present ratio is below the mentioned critical threshold that is necessary to make any substantial changes within specific policy areas. Such contexts lead researchers to look into alternative spheres of representation or alternative usage of mainstream spheres of representation. Scholars focusing on gender issues have been investigating the strategies and tactics employed by women who endeavor to voice their demands and participate in socio-political processes within different spheres of life (Kandiyoti, 1988; Alexander, 1988; Gerami & Lehnerer, 2001; Beşpınar, 2010; Akyüz & Çınar, 2021).

Gender segregation in parliamentary committees: reading the Turkish case through the literature

Perhaps one of the best venues in which women can implement strategies and tactics in order to make their voice heard are parliamentary committees. Academic interest in those committees is highly related to their functions that "shadow ministries and maintain close associations with the government departments responsible for their policy area" (Ciftci et al., 2008, 307). In particular, the selection of women to committee positions provides them the chance to have an "actual effect on the decision-making process" and acts as a stepping-stone in their career advancement by providing them visibility and expertise (Pansardi & Vercesi, 2017, 63). As mentioned in *Puzzle of political representation* section, following Piscopo's line of thought, we argue that parliamentary committees might provide spatial opportunities that capture the intermediary moment between the descriptive and substantive representation. In other words, the presence of women within the legislative process, through committees, could provide us with a critical intermediary sphere where women can create alternative strategies and tactics for participation and representation.

One of the major findings of the studies focusing on the gendered distribution of political offices is that, when the number of women legislators increases, they are isolated on women's and social issues (Heath et al., 2005). This is also the case when party leaders or chamber presidents conduct the committee assignment; and when the structure of the committee system in question assigns specific committees with duties of dealing with women's issues (Heath et al., 2005). In her influential work on gender patterns in standing committees in the Norwegian and Swedish national legislatures, Towns (2003) comes up with a classification of "female" committees and "male" committees by looking into committees that consistently over-represent each gender. Within the literature, "female" committees are also referred to as "less powerful" or "less prestigious" (see Barnes, 2014; Heath et al., 2005; O'Brien, 2012). Although there might be differences for each country, resulting from distinct historical, socio-cultural, and political backgrounds, women are more likely to be appointed to committees focusing on women's and social issues rather than committees dealing with internal and external defense/affairs and budgeting.

The literature on factors determining gendered distributions of those offices refers to cultural, institutional, party-level, and individual-level factors (Pansardi & Vercesi, 2017, 64), all of which underline the importance of institutional design and incorporation. Moreover, it is also underlined that "party differences exist in gender patterns of committee

⁶ The discussion on whether and to what extent the current regime shift towards authoritarianism is related to the transnational anti-gender movements is important one but beyond the scope of this paper. As put by Ünal (2021, 73), however, 'anti-gender' has recently become an effective analytical tool that can encapsulate the JDP's masculinist claims and demands. Seeing anti-gender mobilization as "mobilizations against gender equality" including non-Western and non-Christian context, would provide conceptual and political tools to resist transnational hegemonic inequality regimes (Çağatay, 2019).

⁷ Bektaş (2021, 6) cites case studies on Vietnam, China, and Russia as examples of authoritarian regimes where parliamentary committees play an effective role.

⁸ Please see Gençkaya (2019) for literature on the effectiveness of a parliament and various factors shaping that effectiveness.

membership" (Coffé et al., 2019, 258). In the German case, the representation of women and party ideology correlate; right-wing parties have more "gender-segregated committee membership" than left-wing parties (Coffé et al., 2019, 274). Yet, even if the left-wing parties are less segregated, men are over-represented in prestigious committees as defined by party ideology and political priorities (Coffé et al., 2019). Similarly, in the Italian case, women are more likely to be appointed to "feminine committees" and this pattern is mostly observed in right-wing parties rather than left-wing parties. However, gender bias exists in left-wing parties as (unexpectedly) right-wing parties score better in terms of promoting women to "higher prestige committees" (Pansardi & Vercesi, 2017, 77).

Within the Turkish context, all of the above-mentioned factors play a significant role in women's appointment to parliamentary committees. Apart from the historical and cultural factors that are briefly mentioned in the preceding section, institutional factors and party-level factors become salient. In Turkey, parliamentary committees⁹ are established by the Constitution, the Rules of Procedure, or by laws. There are two types of committees. Standing committees (also known as specialized committees) are responsible for examining and debating bills and preparing reports for the General Assembly to be debated in the Plenary. Some of them do not engage in discussions on bills but perform duties undertaken by laws.¹⁰ Ad hoc committees have supervisory functions, and they are obliged to give their opinion to standing committees. They are formed for a short period. The standing committee members are elected for a two-year term at the beginning of the legislative term, and the elections are renewed at the end of this period. At the start of each legislative term, the Plenary determines the number of members of the standing committees. According to the GNAT's Rules of Procedure, each political party group is represented in committees in proportion to its total number of members in the Assembly. The Speaker informs the political party groups of the number of seats allotted to them on each committee and gives them a deadline to nominate their candidates. Political party groups choose candidates for the committees. In the Plenary, the members nominated by the party groups are voted on. This procedure reflects the effects of an electoral system with a high national threshold and highly disciplined centralized political parties with strong leadership in the selection of committee members.

Republican political experience in Turkey has been categorized as "party politics" (Frey, 1965, as quoted in Özbudun, 1996, 126). Strong party leadership and the absence of intra-party democracy reinforce such strong institutionalization of political parties. One of the main features of political parties in Turkey is authoritarianism (though at different levels and types) in party structures (Ayan, 2010). A centralized party structure has a massive impact in terms of shaping the political agenda of political representatives both at the national and the local level. In fact, it might turn into a hindrance to the development of

the agential capacities of the representatives. Konak-Ünal's (2021) study on the role of gender in Turkish parliamentary debates reveals that legislative behavior differs across genders: female legislators are more likely to speak about gender equality, education, children, and family education compared to male legislators. In such a context, party ideology also becomes important in terms of the representation of women's interests. As put by Bektaş and İşsever-Ekinci (2018, 4), left-wing parties prioritize gender equality more when compared to right-wing parties that underline the complementarity of each gender and the role of women as mothers within the family.

Within this context, we ask the following questions: Do the Turkish parliamentary committees exhibit gendered appointment practices? If so, what are the driving factors behind women's limited representation in some committees that are deemed more "prestigious"? In line with these questions, we examine the effects of party differences on the under- and over-representation of women on certain committees in the Turkish context.

Research hypotheses

In this section, we summarize our research expectations and related hypotheses based on the literature and the specifics of the Turkish case. First, we focus on gender segregation in committees based on committee prestige and the perceived "femininity" or "masculinity" of the issue areas. Then, we turn to partisan effects on gender-biased committee appointments. We generate hypotheses based on party identities in Turkey and their change over the period of this study (2002–2020).

Hypothesis 1. The more prestigious a committee is considered to be, the fewer women members of parliament (MPs) are likely to occupy seats in them.

As stated earlier, committee positions can open new doors in politics for MPs by increasing their skills and overall visibility. Not all committees, however, are created equal: some are deemed more prestigious than others. MPs tend to regard committees on "high politics," including those on economic planning and security, as more prestigious and compete vigorously for a seat (Heath et al., 2005). Given the patriarchal system in Turkey, we expect to find fewer women MPs in these highly competitive positions.

Hypothesis 2. The more feminine a policy area is considered to be, the more likely women MPs will be appointed to the committee of that policy area.

As the findings in the literature highlight, the allocation of committee seats is directly correlated to traditional gender roles. Women are more likely to be appointed to committees that work on the so-called more "feminine" policy issues such as inequality, human rights, and social issues (e.g., family, youth, education, and health). This finding underlines the perceptions of women as caregivers and their involvement and reign over the "private" sphere of life in traditional societies (Bolzendahl, 2014; Ridgeway, 2011). We test this hypothesis to see if it is replicated in the Turkish context.

Hypothesis 3a. The left-wing parties are more likely to appoint women MPs as committee members.

Hypothesis 3b. The right-wing parties are less likely to appoint women MPs as committee members.

Hypothesis 3c. The left-wing parties are more likely to appoint women MPs as members of high prestige and/or "masculine" committees.

Hypothesis 3d. The right-wing parties are more likely to appoint women MPs as members of low prestige and/or "feminine" committees.

Ultimately, it is the party leadership that decides the allocation of committee positions. That means political parties are the gatekeepers of

⁹ For relevant information of establishment, structure and functioning of committees, please see <https://global.tbmm.gov.tr/index.php/EN/yc/icerik/19>; <https://komisyon.tbmm.gov.tr>.

¹⁰ Standing committees in the GNAT are the Committee on the Constitution, Committee on the Justice, Committee on the Internal Affairs, Committee on the National Defense, Committee on the Foreign Affairs, Committee on the Plan and Budget, Committee on the Settlement, Development, Transport, and Tourism, Committee on the Environment, Committee on the Health, Family, Employment, and Social Affairs, Committee on the National Education, Culture, Youth, and Sport, Committee on the Industry, Trade, Energy, Natural Resources, Information, and Technology, Committee on the Agriculture, Forest, and Rural Affairs, Committee on the Petitions, Committee on State Economic Enterprises, Committee on the Human Rights Inquiry, Committee on the EU Harmonization, Committee on the Equal Opportunity for Women and Men, Committee on the Security and Intelligence. The standing committees with different duties are Committee on the Petitions, Committee on State Economic Enterprises, Committee on the Human Rights Inquiry, Committee on the EU Harmonization, and Committee on the Equal Opportunity for Women and Men.

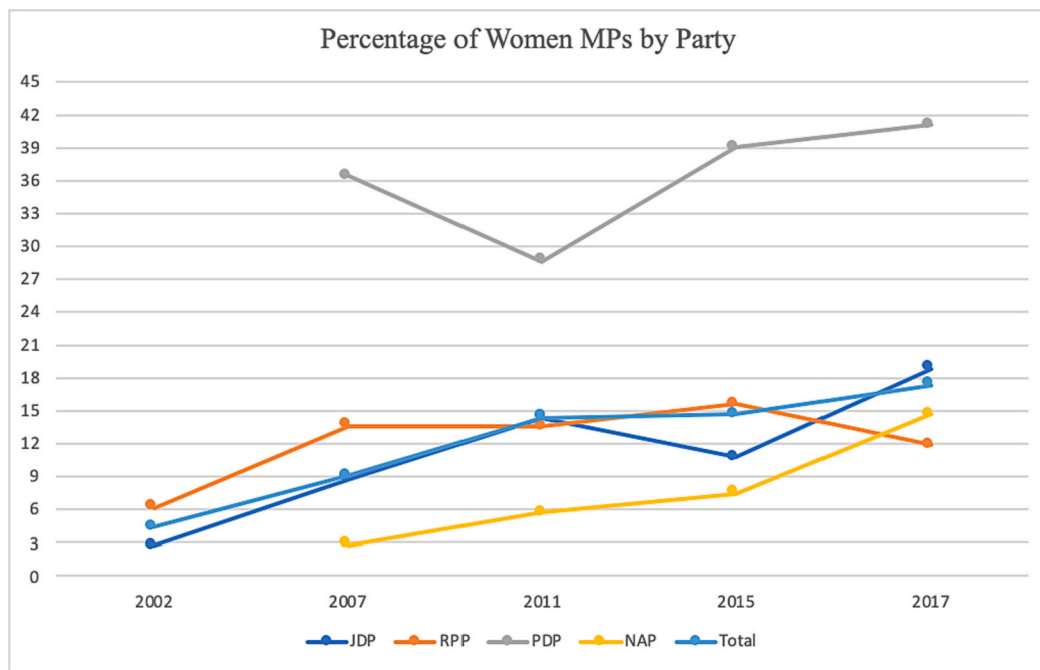


Fig. 1. Percentage of women MPs by party.
Sources: GNAT website.

this system (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995). As our review of the committee appointment system in the GNAT shows, this is especially true for the Turkish case. How do political party leaders decide on committee memberships? Do they consider gender as a factor in their decision-making? We assume that party ideology and the position of the party on the left-right spectrum affect a party's likelihood to appoint women MPs to committees. The literature on party ideologies indicates a tendency of left-wing parties to be both more gender-aware internally and more supportive of policies promoting gender equality (Kittilson, 2011; Krook, 2009; Manow, 2015).

Hypothesis 4. The JDP was more likely to appoint women to highly prestigious committees before 2008.

Party leaders do not only consider issue salience or party ideology when deciding on committee appointments. Appointment of women MPs to high prestige committees can become a strategic choice based on the re-election plans and international relations of the party leadership. For example, the accession talks between Turkey and the EU may have led the JDP to appoint more women to prestigious committees in its early years. We can also expect this effect to disappear as Turkish-EU relations cooled down and the JDP discourse on gender equality has changed.

Hypothesis 5a. The PDP is more likely to appoint women committee members.

Hypothesis 5b. The PDP is more likely to appoint women committee members to "prestigious" and/or non-social issue committees.

Studies in the field also emphasize a link between the percentage of women MPs in parties and how often they are appointed to committees. Even though Coffé et al. (2019) show that CDU/CSU in Germany is an example of the contrary (low allocation of committee seats to women despite the high number of women MPs), the proportion of women elected to a party can affect the gendered allocation of seats. In Turkey, the only political party with a quota for women is the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), which increased it from 40 to 50 % in 2015 (Demir, 2015, 42). Fig. 1 shows the percentages of women for each major party

since 2002.¹¹ Because of its quota for women, the PDP diverges significantly from the JDP, the Republican People's Party (RPP), and

Pertinent to this difference, we expect the PDP to adopt a more gender-equal policy in committee appointments. On the other hand, considering its history and ideological stance, the PDP can also go one step further and break down gender segregation by appointing women to committees that are regarded as outside of the women's traditional gender roles.

Data

To test these hypotheses, we collected membership data of 19 standing parliamentary committees of the GNAT between 2002 and 2020 (from the 22nd to the 27th period of the GNAT). We selected this time frame because the 2002 elections represent a breaking point for Turkish politics. Following the 2001 economic crisis, not only has the JDP come to power but also all other parties except the RPP have remained below the electoral threshold. The aftermath of the 2002 elections also marks a period of remarkably accelerated negotiations between Turkey and the EU. As mentioned before, the resulting reform wave may have affected gender equality standards within political institutions, including parliamentary committees.

Our data sources include GNAT proceedings, legislative proposals, and committee websites.¹² In the Plenary, proposed committee appointments are read out loud and put to a vote. For these election years,¹³ we have full lists of the committee members. For the non-election years, we have used the lists attached to the legislative proposals of the 19 committees. If and when parties replace committee members, we include both the old and new members of the seat for the

¹¹ The PDP was established in 2012. For 2007 data, we used data from its predecessor, The Democratic Society Party.

¹² <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/ihitas-komisyonlari/Liste>.

¹³ These election years are 2002, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2018.

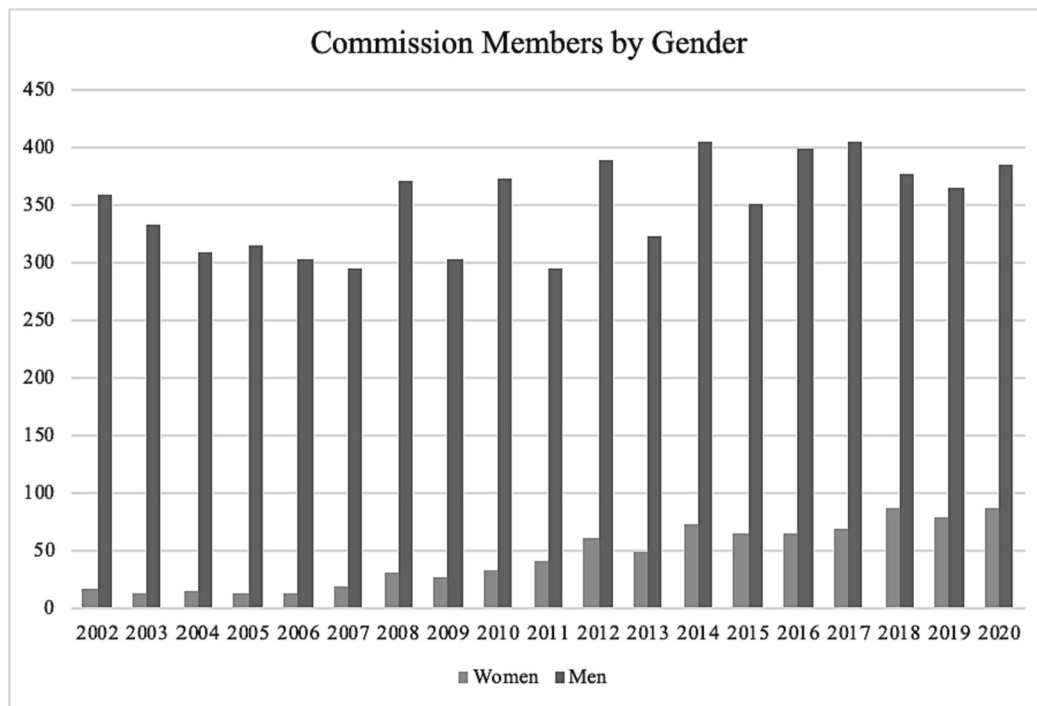


Fig. 2. Commission members by gender.
Source: Authors.

year where that change occurred. We used the committee websites for the year 2020, as they only publish the most recent member lists.¹⁴

The data is organized by year and committee. Because one MP can occupy more than one committee position, our data has 7523 observations. Women MPs constitute 11.4 % of these observations. Fig. 2 shows the total number of committee members by gender between 2002 and 2020. We attribute the relative increase in the number of women committee members, starting from 2008, partly to the establishment of the Committee on the Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in 2009 (Act no. 5840).¹⁵ Per the second article of the Act, women MPs and human rights experts are given priority in the elections for this committee seats. Hence, this is the only committee whose membership includes consistently and overwhelmingly more women than men.¹⁶

The following variables are coded for each observation: committee member's name, party, gender, whether the member is a chair, vice-chair, or spokesperson of the committee, and finally the source of the observation. In addition, we coded each committee according to the prestige- and gender-type categorization in Table 1. We follow Krook and O'Brien's (2012) classification of cabinet ministers by policy area, as done by others in the literature (Pansardi & Vercesi, 2017; Prihatini, 2021). For committees dealing with multiple issues, we code according to the dominant issue area (e.g., for NECYS, education; for HFLSA, health). We diverge from the original classification of Krook and O'Brien when evaluating only three of the 19 committees. In the Turkish context, we classify the committees on Justice and Constitution as masculine-high prestige rather than neutral-medium prestige. We also consider the issue area of Agriculture neutral rather than masculine. Finally, two committees that are unique to Turkey – EU Integration and Petitions –

Table 1

Categorization of committees according to their prestige- and gender-type.

Prestige type	Gender type		
	Masculine (0)	Neutral (1)	Feminine (2)
High prestige (3)	Justice		
	Constitution		
	Foreign Affairs		
	Security and intelligence		
	Home affairs		
Medium prestige (2)	National defense		
	Planning and budget		
	EU integration	Environment	National Education, Culture, Youth and Sports (NECYS)
	Public works, construction, transportation, and tourism	Human rights	Health, Family, Labor, and Social Affairs (HFLSA)
	State owned enterprises	Agriculture, forestry and rural affairs	Equal Opportunities for Women and Men
	Industry, trade, energy, natural resources, and information and technology		
	Digital mediums		
Low prestige (1)			Petitions

are categorized as masculine-medium prestige and feminine-low prestige, respectively. We argue that the EU Integration committee could be regarded as a “doing” space because of the accession talks and the concomitant reforms. “Doing” and action are perceived as more masculine in Turkish society. On the other hand, the Committee on Petitions receives and answers the inquiries of citizens – a task that can be regarded as “secretarial,” and therefore more feminine and low impact.

Table 1 shows no neutral-high prestige or feminine-high prestige categorizations. This gap reflects the gender segregation at the GNAT. Furthermore, these two types are negatively correlated with each other with a correlation coefficient of -0.60 . As shown in the table, high, medium, and low prestige are coded with the numerical values of 3, 2,

¹⁴ When no source is available for a given year and committee, observations are coded as missing. In addition, we include committees only after their establishment. For example, the committee on Digital Mediums enters the dataset in 2020 when it was first established.

¹⁵ The name of this committee was shortened to “Gender Equality” in figures and tables in this paper.

¹⁶ Our results hold even when we exclude this committee from our analysis.

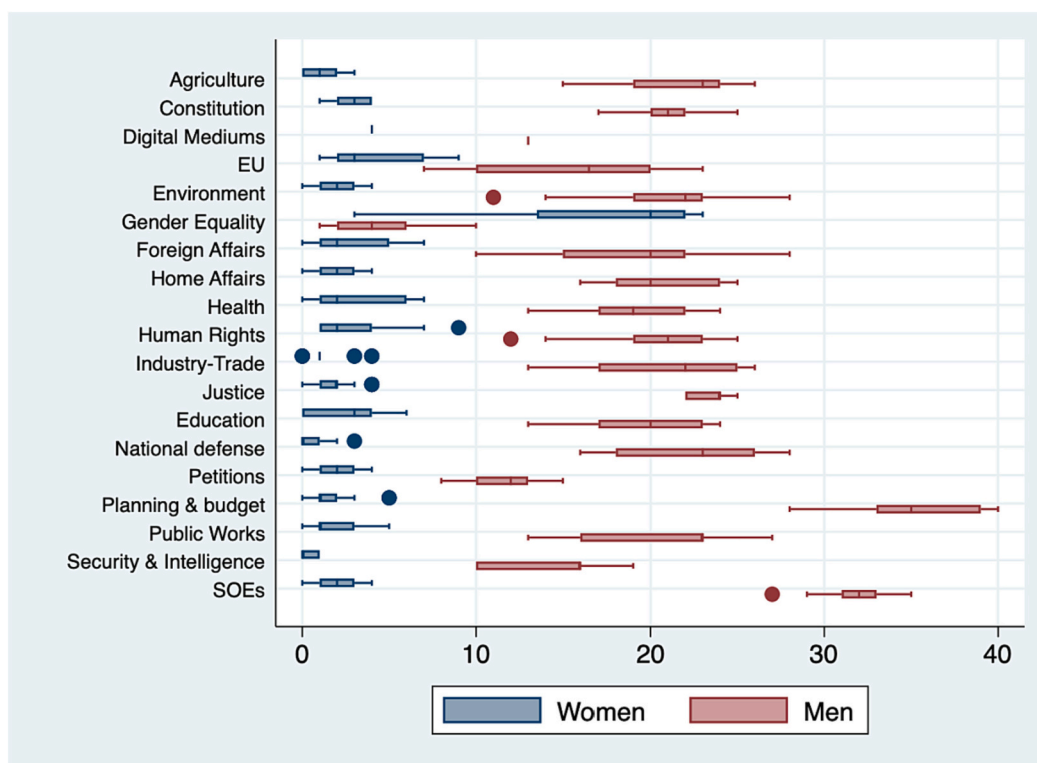


Fig. 3. Boxplot of men and women in permanent committees.
Source: Authors.

and 1. The Masculine-Neutral-Feminine scale, on the other hand, is coded as 0-1-2 respectively, so that higher values suggest issue areas perceived as more feminine and less masculine. The negative correlation coefficient indicates that committee prestige increases as its femininity decreases.

How do committees differ from each other regarding the women to men ratio on average? Fig. 3 is a boxplot that compares committees using the mean number of men and women members as well as the distribution over the 19 years. In all but one committee, the average number of men almost doubles the average number of women. The exception is the aforementioned Committee on the Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. Even though the gap between men and women members is much larger for some committees (e.g., Planning and Budget), overall, we can say that it is always apparent, even in the social-issues committees.

This difference reflects the low number of women in the GNAT, which increased from 4.4 in 2002 to 17.38 % in 2020 (Fig. 1) – a figure still far from the critical mass threshold. How did the increase of women MPs over time affect committee appointments? Fig. 4 shows the change in the number of men and women holding committee positions from 2002 to 2020. Here, we observe slight increases in the number of women in recent years, especially in the EU Integration, Foreign Affairs, Health, and Human Rights committees. On the other hand, the large gap between the two remains constant for the committees on Agriculture, Constitution, Justice, National Defense, Security and Intelligence, Planning & Budget, and State-owned Enterprises.

Finally, we turn to the political parties and their appointment practices. Fig. 5 compares the percentages of men and women MPs according to their party affiliations. In this pooled histogram, men are denoted with 0 and women with 1. First, the two largest parties, the JDP and the RPP, have behaved similarly in their appointments despite their ideological differences. Both parties use approximately 90 % of their committee slots for men. Secondly, the two nationalist right-wing parties,

the NAP and the GP, appoint slightly fewer women than the JDP and the RPP. We note that the GP was established in 2017, mostly by former NAP members, and it has been led by a woman, Meral Akşener since its foundation. Thirdly, the PDP and its predecessors (Peace & Democracy P., Democratic Society P., and Democratic Regions P.) tend to appoint more women committee members than other parties. This divergence reflects the quota rule implemented by the PDP (Fig. 1) and the ideological position of this party on women's rights.

Results and discussion

Our first dependent variable is the gender of the committee member. We use a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 if the committee member is a woman. This variable stands as a proxy for the appointment decision of women MPs. It does not differentiate between the supply- and demand-side of the appointment decisions.¹⁷

The independent variables include the party of the MP, prestige type of the committee, gender type of the committee, and the place of the political party on the left-right ideological spectrum. The variables Left and Right are created as categorical variables for all appointing parties on one or the other side of the scale. We coded the RPP, PDP, WPT, Democratic Society Party, and the Peace and Democracy Party as Left. The JDP, NAP, GP, FP, and MP were all counted as Right. Because some of these independent variables are correlated with each other, we use different models to avoid multicollinearity.

Across all models in Table 2, gender type or “femininity” of the committee is a significant and positive predictor of whether or not a

¹⁷ Because the number of women committee members is so low, we also repeated our logit estimations with the re-logit package written by King and Zeng (2001). Even though the appointment of a woman into a committee can be considered a rare event, the re-logit estimation results are not different from our logit results.

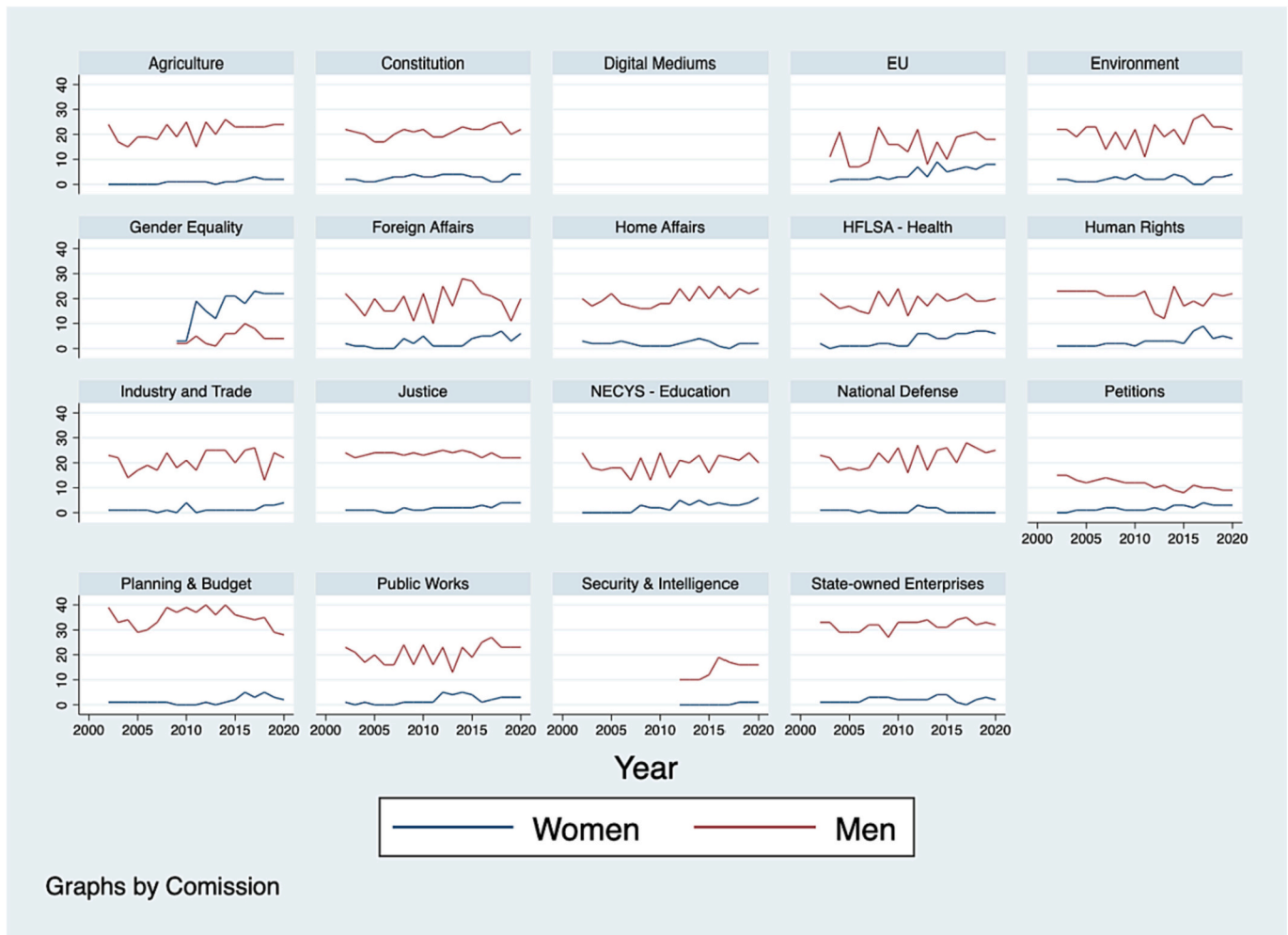


Fig. 4. Number of women and men committee members by committee and time.
Source: Authors.

woman is selected for that committee. The logistic coefficients are log odds-ratios; they are meaningful but difficult to interpret, as their effect is conditional on the other predictors.¹⁸ Using the *margins* package of Stata 16, we estimated that a woman MP is 16.8 % more likely to be appointed to a “feminine” committee than a “masculine” committee.¹⁹ The finding provides strong statistical support for [Hypothesis 2](#). The GNAT permanent committees are gender-segregated along with the perceived gender roles of men and women.

The committee prestige, on the other hand, is only significant when it is used without the gender-type variable. This can stem from the correlation between the two variables. In Model II, the appointment of a woman seems to be negatively associated with the prestige of the committee. A woman is 6.9 % less likely to be appointed to a high-prestige committee compared to a low-prestige committee. Noting that this effect does not hold in other models, we are reluctant to argue that we find enough empirical evidence for [Hypothesis 1](#).

Our findings on the left-right partisan scale also confirm the results in the literature. Leftist party affiliation is a positive and significant predictor for being appointed on a committee as a woman (Model IV), while rightist parties show the opposite (Model III). These findings support

[Hypotheses 3a and 3b.](#)

Finally, at the political party level, we see no significant effect being a JDP or RPP member has on the likelihood a woman occupies a committee seat. On the other hand, being a PDP MP increases the probability of a woman being appointed to a committee by 23 %. This statistically significant and positive finding holds across different models and fits with what we have already seen in the descriptive statistics. As expected in [Hypothesis 5a](#), the PDP is more likely to appoint women to committees compared to other parties.

A few questions remain: Does the PDP appoint women MPs to highly prestigious and/or “masculine” committees? Do leftist and rightist parties select women for specific committees? Is there a difference between the JDP's first term and later periods regarding committee appointments? To answer these questions, we created a new binary dependent variable by pooling together women in medium- and high-prestige committees (i.e., 1 for prestigious committees and 0 for non-prestigious committees). Redefining this categorical variable in this way, we could illustrate more clearly the contrasting practices when it comes to appointing women to prestigious committees. [Table 3](#) summarizes our results.

Contrary to our expectations in [Hypothesis 4](#), the JDP was less likely to appoint women to prestigious committees in its first term. This effect is quite small and only significant at the 0.05 level: being a JDP member decreases a woman's likelihood to be appointed to a prestigious committee by 2 %. This effect disappears in the JDP's post-2008 period.

¹⁸ Unless otherwise said, we report only robust standard errors.

¹⁹ The change from a neutral to a “feminine” committee increases a woman's appointment by only 0.4 %.

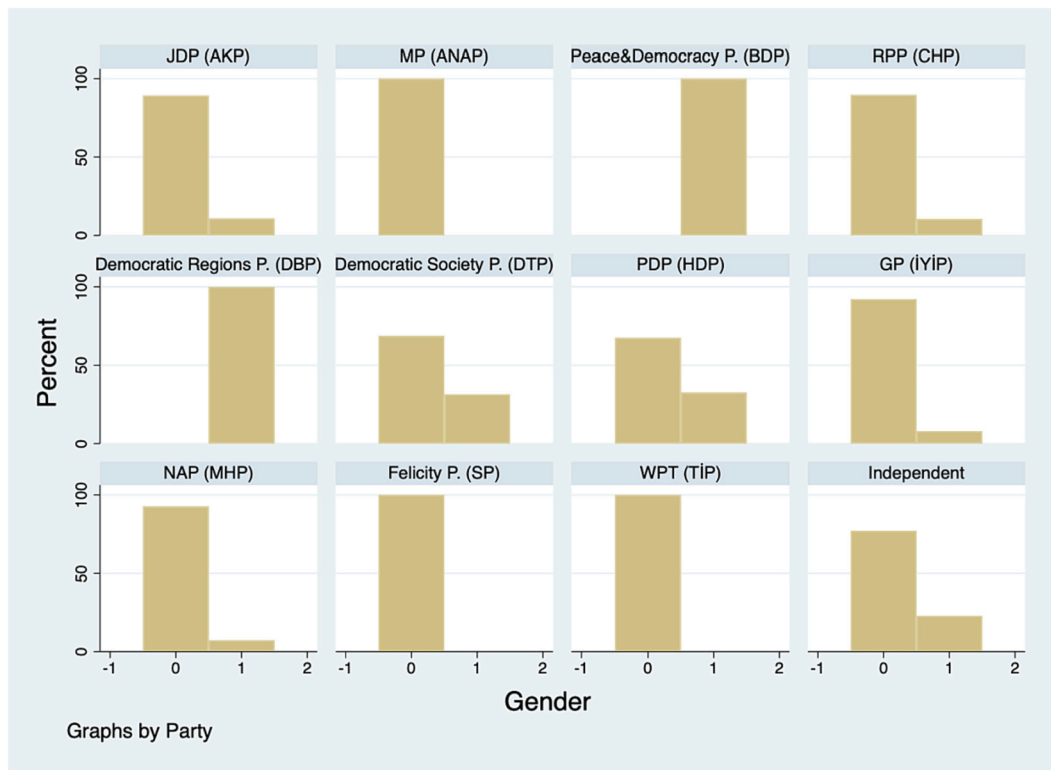


Fig. 5. Percentages of women and men appointees of political parties.
Source: Authors.

Given the rhetoric on the JDP's early and late-term policies, we are surprised to find that no such temporal difference exists, at least in gendered committee appointments.²⁰

When it comes to the PDP, accounting for partisan politics, the results are in line with our expectations. Leftist parties are more likely to appoint women to prestigious committees compared to rightist parties (Hypotheses 3c and 3d). The PDP does not only appoint more women to committees but also sends them to more prestigious ones (Hypothesis 5b). As stated earlier in the introduction, the partisan effect stems from PDP's ideological position nourished by its distinct political experience as a legitimate political actor of Kurdish movement; its recent claim to appeal to a varied constituency including voters who lean left of Turkey's dominant political orientation²¹; and the powerful women's movement arising from that ethno-political movement.

We repeat these estimations with another dependent variable created to pinpoint women in "masculine" committees. We find no significant results for the JDP appointments before and after 2007. The other results are similar to those in Table 3, so we omit them in our findings. As expected, leftist parties are more likely to appoint women to "masculine" committees, and this finding is mostly driven by the PDP. Even though these results are statistically significant, we note that women in "masculine" committees are a rare event. Only 5.3 % of these

²⁰ We have also run similar temporal comparisons for the RPP and the NAP. We find that a woman legislator from the center-left wing party RPP was more likely to be appointed to prestigious committees before 2008; after 2008, this effect disappears. This change cannot be explained by the leadership change in 2010. On the other hand, the NAP has no women legislators in committees before 2008. After 2008, a woman legislator's membership to this right-wing, nationalist party decreases her chances of committee appointment significantly. Because PDP was established in 2012, no such temporal comparison was possible.

²¹ Please see Overstreet (2019).

Table 2

Explaining committee appointments of women MPs.

	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV	Model V
Committee gender type ("femininity")	0.65*** (0.04)		0.69*** (0.06)	0.68*** (0.06)	0.69*** (0.06)
Committee prestige		-0.59*** (0.06)	0.08 (0.09)	0.08 (0.09)	0.08 (0.09)
JDP	0.10 (0.14)	0.10 (0.13)			0.10 (0.13)
RPP	0.07 (0.15)	0.07 (0.14)			0.07 (0.15)
PDP	1.54*** (0.18)	1.51*** (0.18)			1.54*** (0.18)
Left				0.32*** (0.08)	
Right			-0.37*** (0.07)		
Constant	-2.68*** (0.13)		-2.47*** (0.24)	-2.83*** (0.24)	-2.90*** (0.27)
No. of obs.	7523		7523	7523	7523
Pseudo R2	0.061		0.047	0.046	0.061

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Notes: Logistic coefficients with standard errors (SE) in parentheses.

seats are occupied by women MPs. As a robustness check, we use a rare event logit estimation model and find no fundamental differences (King & Zeng, 2001).²²

²² We have also conducted other robustness checks using post-estimation techniques. For example, the overall rate of correct classification is estimated to be 88.7 % for Model I and 89.1 % for Model X. Even though there are surely other underlying factors that affect the committee appointment of women, our models show considerable goodness of fit. The LROC tests, for both models, are also above the 50 % line, meaning they have predictive power.

Table 3
Explaining appointments of women MPs to prestigious committees.

	Model VI DV: women in prestigious committees (before 2008)	Model VII DV: women in prestigious committees (after 2008)	Model VIII DV: women in prestigious committees	Model IX DV: women in prestigious committees	Model X DV: women in prestigious committees
JDP	−0.47 (0.22)	−0.07 (0.08)			0.03 (0.82)
PDP					1.41*** (0.14)
Left			0.32*** (0.08)		
Right				−0.35*** (0.07)	
Constant	−2.76*** (0.16)	−1.8*** (0.06)	−2.20*** (0.04)	−1.86*** (0.06)	−2.21*** (0.06)
No. of obs.	2010	5109	7523	7523	7523
Pseudo R2	0.006	0.0002	0.0033	0.0038	0.017

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Notes: Logistic coefficients with standard errors (SE) in parentheses.

Conclusions

Theoretical debates on the political representation of women reassert the importance of how gendered interests and issues are included in governance (Waylen et al., 2013). The process of change has two components: Women and women's movement as agents of institutional change; and decision-making institutions, such as parliaments, as the targets of change (Waylen et al., 2013). At this point, depicting the gendered structure of such institutions, by scrutinizing to what extent women are “present” within the organization of these institutions, becomes important. In our inquiry, we acknowledge that there is a substantial yet challenging relation between descriptive and substantive representation of women, i.e., their actual presence and policy outputs. Yet, we argue that intermediary spaces and moments of representation require women's actual “presence” as active agents of transformation and put descriptive representation forward. Herein, we present parliamentary committees as one of these intermediary spaces where women can be ‘present’, be active in politics, and participate in the decision-making process. To depict the gendered patterns within parliamentary committees, we investigate gendered appointment practices and examine the effects of party differences on the under- and over-representation of women on certain committees.

Our analysis of the Turkish case finds gender segregation of parliamentary committees to be a persistent institutional attribute, despite the recent increase in the number of women MPs. Women tend to be under-represented in highly prestigious committees where economic and security policies are made. Our study also suggests that the prestige and “femininity/masculinity” of committees do not always overlap, even though they are closely related. These institutional properties are distinctly context-specific. More research focusing on different parliaments and time frames is, therefore, necessary to expand our perspective on how gender segregation is institutionalized worldwide. On the other hand, our findings are similar to the literature's findings on the partisan roots of gender segregation: left-wing parties of Turkey are less gender-biased in their committee allocations compared to the right-wing parties. Parties on the left side of the political spectrum do not only appoint proportionally more women to committees, but they also send women to prestigious and “masculine” committees. Moreover, our study points out varieties of attitudes and practices among left-wing parties.

At the party level, we see that the patriarchal system trumps even the left-right spectrum to some degree. Despite claiming to be on the other end of the ideological scale, the RPP fails to differentiate itself from the JDP when it comes to appointing more women to committees, in general, or targeting “high politics” committees. The party leadership of both the JDP and RPP function under traditional premises of the

patriarchy. Contrary to our expectations, we also did not find a temporal effect on the JDP's gender bias. In its first term of office, the JDP leadership is considered to be more engaged with non-state and international actors, especially women's organizations and the EU. As we stated, the JDP's gender discourse started to change after this period. We did not find a similar change in committee appointments in the JDP. On the contrary, the JDP made more gender-biased appointments before 2007. The PDP seems to be the only party that focuses deliberately on avoiding gender segregation and takes steps to institutionalize it. Our findings show that the PDP consistently appoints more women and especially allocates them to prestigious committees. The mechanisms behind this strong effect may include the quota rule implemented by the PDP, the issue of gender equality for the PDP voters, and the cultural pressure from the Kurdish women's movement that monitors and shapes party politics. It should be noted that our research and findings are limited to quantitative data on committee membership and the position of women in the organizational structure of the parliament. Even though such data are seen as vital and complementary to identify institutional culture and gender segregation, further qualitative research should be conducted to reveal personal experiences and the agential capacities of women within political processes. In addition to the formal norms and procedures, prospective research should look into informal rules and norms embedded in intersubjective experiences in the legislative process.

Last but not least, we conclude that parliamentary committees are “gendered institutional spaces”²³ greatly affected by the institutional culture of political parties. Even though institutional culture is mostly shaped by ideological stances, political parties are still among institutional spaces where ideologies of masculinity are effectively shaping power relations. As the case of the PDP shows, institutionalizing mechanisms that enhance agential capacities and practices at the party level is vital for gender equality within the political sphere. Moreover, RPP's recent efforts to adopt a 50 % compulsory party quota,²⁴ and its consistent emphasis on gender equality in the party program and by-laws²⁵ clearly show that institutional design and institutional incorporation are vital but insufficient unless such principles are put into practice.

²³ Please see Acker (1992) and Palmieri (2019) on gendered institutions and parliaments as gendered institutional spaces respectively.

²⁴ Please see <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/chp-kadin-kotasini-kadinlar-a-sordu-kota-yuzde-50-olsun-kadin-kollari-kaldirilsin-haber-1501816>.

²⁵ Please see <https://chp.azureedge.net/1d48b01630ef43d9b2edf45d55842cae.pdf> for RPP's party program; and https://content.chp.org.tr/file/chp_tuzuk_10_03_2018.pdf for RPP by-laws.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

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