

EXCERPTED FROM

**Party Politics and
Social Cleavages
in Turkey**

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1

The Party System and Social Cleavages in Turkey

TURKEY PRESENTS AN INTERESTING CASE FOR THE COM-parative study of political parties. It is a “second wave” democracy,¹ where multiparty competitive politics has been going on since the mid-1940s, preceded by an authoritarian, single-party system between 1925 and 1946.² Since 1946, the Turkish party system has displayed many forms and characteristics. The period between the transition to multiparty politics and the military intervention of 1960 was a textbook example of a two-party system. The retransition to democracy in 1961, after a relatively short period of military rule, led to a fragmentation of the party system, or the proliferation of political parties. Thus, the period between 1961 and the military coup of 1980 can be characterized as a multiparty system displaying certain features of an “extreme” or “polarized” system as described by Giovanni Sartori.³

With the semicompetitive elections of 1983 (see Chapter 3), which ended the three-year period (1980–1983) of military government of the National Security Council (NSC) regime, the Motherland Party (ANAP) was able to win the absolute majority of the National Assembly seats and to form a single-party government in two consecutive elections (1983 and 1987). Thus, the number of parties represented in parliament declined, partly due to the effects

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of the 10 percent national electoral threshold introduced by the military regime. However, with the erosion of the ANAP's popular support starting from the 1991 elections, another period of extreme multipartyism emerged. This period also witnessed the rise of the Islamist-inspired Welfare Party (RP), which contributed to increased polarization in the party system. The end result of this polarization was the so-called postmodern coup of 28 February 1997, which forced the RP-led coalition government to resign, and the eventual banning of the RP by the Constitutional Court.

The 2002 parliamentary elections opened up a new page in the history of the Turkish party system. The Justice and Development Party (AKP; one of the successor parties to the RP) won an absolute majority of seats in parliament and formed a single-party government, the first since 1991. The AKP repeated this success in the 2007 and 2011 parliamentary elections, each time increasing its percentage of votes. Thus, at the moment, the AKP appears to be the predominant party, once again marking a transformation of the party system. The so-called three maladies of the Turkish party system (fragmentation, volatility, and polarization) will be analyzed in Chapter 4 as well as the recent trend toward a predominant party system.

If one reason for the changes in the party system is the increasing social and ideological diversification within Turkish society, another is a more external one; namely, the effects of military coups and the changes in the electoral system. Indeed, the military government of 1960–1961 closed down the ousted Democrat Party (DP), and the military regime of 1980–1983 banned all political parties that existed prior to the coup. Similarly, during the semimilitary regime of 1971–1973, the Islamist-leaning National Order Party (MNP) and the Marxist Turkish Labor Party (TİP) were closed down by the Constitutional Court. In the atmosphere created by the postmodern coup of 1997, the RP and its successor, the Virtue Party (FP), met the same fate.

The effects of electoral systems on party systems are well-known. Since the transition to multiparty politics, Turkey has tried a variety of electoral systems, from a simple plurality (first-past-the-post) system with party lists to many versions of proportional representation, such as the d'Hondt system (see Chapter 5)

with or without a constituency threshold, the national remainder system, and finally a d'Hondt system with a 10 percent national threshold. The size of the constituencies also changed several times from relatively small (a maximum of six deputies) to quite large (a maximum of eighteen deputies). The effects of these changes are discussed in Chapter 5.

Since electoral systems strongly influence the distribution of seats in parliament, this has always been a hotly debated issue in Turkish politics. Thus, in Chapter 6, I address the current debates on the issue of electoral reform, the views of different political parties, and the studies carried out by various nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and think tanks.

Beneath these apparently radical changes, however, the Turkish party system also displays a certain basic stability. In the sixteen truly free and competitive elections starting with that of 1950 (excluding the controversial elections of 1946), parties representing the conservative/liberal center-right tendency have always obtained a strong majority of votes under different names and under different electoral arrangements (see Chapter 3).⁴ Such stability can be attributed, above all, to the enduring effects of the basic social cleavage in Turkey, described in this book as a center-periphery cleavage. Given the strong link between the cleavage structure and the party system both in general and in the Turkish case, I conclude the present chapter with a general and comparative analysis of the impact of social cleavages, and in Chapters 2 and 3 I analyze the historical roots of that impact and its persistence in the multiparty period. Throughout the book, the emphasis is on the party system rather than on individual parties. Even though the two areas often are inseparable, it remains true that “parties and party systems offer two quite distinct foci of analysis.”⁵ In the Turkish case, the system displays much greater persistence than parties.

Social Cleavages and Party Systems

Party systems reflect, to a greater or lesser degree, the social cleavage structure of societies. Cleavage structures influence various aspects of a party system. With regard to the number of parties, a

society divided essentially by a single cleavage line is likely to give rise to a two-party system while a society with two distinct cleavage lines can be expected to produce a four-party system, and so forth.⁶ The degree of intensity of the cleavages also affects an important dimension of the party system; namely, the degree of polarization, an important variable that distinguishes moderate and polarized multiparty systems.⁷ In divided or segmented societies where cleavages follow racial, ethnic, linguistic, religious, or sectarian lines, the party system also displays characteristics quite different from those in more homogeneous societies. Clearly, the correspondence between cleavage structures and party systems is not a one-to-one relationship. Such relation may be stronger in some societies than in others.

Lipset and Rokkan's Model on Cleavage Structures and Party Systems

Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan's seminal study on cleavage structures, party systems, and voter alignments⁸ is probably the most influential and most often quoted work on the topic. Peter Mair rightly points out that their argument put forward "almost thirty years ago . . . even now continues to be one of the most familiar and most frequently cited theses within the field of comparative party studies."⁹ The fundamental thesis of their work can be summarized in the following sentence: "The party systems of the 1960s reflect, with few but significant exceptions, the cleavage structure of the 1920s. . . . The party alternatives, and in remarkably many cases the party organizations, are older than the majorities of the national electorates."¹⁰

Lipset and Rokkan analyze the cleavage structures in Western democracies along two axes, territorial and functional. At one end of the territorial axis are "strictly local oppositions to encroachments of the aspiring or the dominant national elites and their bureaucracies: the typical reactions of peripheral regions, linguistic minorities, and culturally threatened populations to the pressures of the centralizing, standardizing, and 'rationalizing' machinery of the nation-state"; in other words, a center-periphery cleavage. Con-

flicts along the functional axis, on the other hand, “*cut across* the territorial units of the nation.” They may be interest-specific oppositions and therefore amenable to rational bargaining, or ideological or “‘friend-foe’ oppositions of tight-knit religious or ideological movements . . . over conceptions of moral right and over the interpretations of history and human destiny.”¹¹

Applied to European party systems, these two axes have produced four dimensions of opposition in Western politics. Two of them were products of the national revolution and two of the Industrial Revolution. “In their basic characteristics of the party systems that emerged in the Western European politics during the early phase of competition and mobilization can be interpreted as products of *sequential interactions between these two fundamental processes of change*.”¹² The products of the national revolutions were those of center-periphery and church versus state. The first represented the opposition between the central, often bureaucratic, nation builders and the peripheral subject cultures. The second pitted the secular nation builders against the defenders of the corporate privileges of the Catholic Church. As Lipset and Rokkan argue, many “countries of Western Europe were all split to the core in the wake of the secularizing French Revolution and without exception developed strong parties for the defense of the Church, either explicitly as in Germany, the Low countries, Switzerland, Austria, Italy, and Spain or implicitly as in the case of the Right in France.”¹³

The two other cleavages were the products of the Industrial Revolution. One was between rural and urban interests.

The conflict between landed and urban interests was centered in the *commodity* market. The peasants wanted to sell their wares at the best possible prices and to buy what they needed from the industrial and urban producers at low cost. Such conflicts did not invariably prove party-forming. . . . Distinctly agrarian parties have only emerged where strong cultural oppositions have deepened and embittered the strictly economic conflicts.

The second also derived from the Industrial Revolution; the cleavage between the owners of capital and the working class, however,

was much more pervasive. “Conflicts in the *labor* market proved much more uniformly divisive. Working-class parties emerged in every country of Europe in the wake of the early waves of industrialization.”¹⁴

Lipset and Rokkan also argue that “sequential interactions between these two fundamental processes of change” constitute an important variable explaining the differences among Western European party systems, and that the differences are due to the

first three of the four cleavage lines. . . . The “center-periphery,” the church-state, and the land-industry cleavages generated national developments in *divergent* directions, while the owner-worker cleavage tended to bring the party systems *closer to each other* in their basic structure. The crucial differences among the party systems emerged in the early phases of competitive politics, before the final phase of mass mobilization. They reflected basic contrasts in the conditions and sequences of nation-building and in the structure of the economy at the point of take-off toward sustained growth.¹⁵

The Lipset and Rokkan model convincingly explains the formation of the Western European party systems and the differences among them due to the different sequential interactions in their early phases of competitive politics. This model also fits the Turkish case, as I analyze in detail in the chapters that follow, even though Turkey is not among the countries studied by Lipset and Rokkan. Indeed, in Turkey, too, the currently dominant cleavages (center-periphery and church-state) are the products of the national (nation building) revolution, and these two cleavages have often overlapped. The basic difference from Western European politics is that in Turkey, as in other Muslim-majority countries, there is no equivalent of the Catholic Church, with its autonomous structure and corporate privileges. However, a functionally similar cleavage developed between the ardent secularizers and the devout Muslims, combined with the center-periphery cleavage. On the other hand, as a late industrializing country, Turkey did not face the two cleavages that were the products of the Industrial Revolution. A distinctly agrarian party never

appeared on the scene, and the capital owners–working class cleavage has remained of clearly secondary importance to the present day.

The heated academic debate on the Lipset-Rokkan thesis centers mostly on their “freezing hypothesis.” Writing in the 1960s, they argued that the cleavage structures in the 1920s, more precisely at the time of the introduction of universal manhood suffrage, were essentially “frozen” since then. Thus, they claimed, “the parties which were able to establish mass organizations and entrench themselves in the local government structures before the final drive toward maximal mobilization have proved the most viable. The narrowing of the ‘support market’ brought about through the growth of mass parties during this final thrust toward full-suffrage democracy clearly left very few openings for new movements.”¹⁶

The freezing hypothesis, however, has been challenged on several grounds. One point of view is that Lipset and Rokkan’s observations were valid for the 1960s, but that they no longer are. Thus, Ivor Crewe argues that, since the 1940s, unprecedented levels of economic growth and welfare, “sustained peace on the European Continent, a vast expansion of higher education and increased travel and communication between countries combined to inculcate a new set of ‘post-materialist’ values in the younger generation—especially its better and more prosperous members.”¹⁷ Indeed, since Ronald Inglehart’s influential book, students of electoral behavior have paid increasing attention to the rise of “postmaterialist” values and the emergence of new cleavages that cannot be properly explained under the fourfold typology of Lipset and Rokkan.

Among such postmaterialist concerns, one might cite environmentalism, quality of life, gender equality, identity issues, multiculturalism, participatory democracy, workplace democracy, and sexual freedom.¹⁸ Thus, Inglehart, like many other scholars, concludes that

to a considerable degree, Lipset and Rokkan were correct in speaking of a “freezing of party alignments” dating back to an era when modern, mass-party systems were established. Although

deep-rooted political party alignments continue to shape voting behavior in many countries, they no longer reflect the forces most likely to mobilize people to become politically active. Today the new axis of conflict is more apt to stimulate active protest and support for change than is the class-based axis that became institutionalized decades ago.¹⁹

A second group of scholars, using longer-term data from the 1920s and even going back to the nineteenth century, argue that the freeze hypothesis did not reflect realities even for the period before the 1970s. Such studies indicate that “not only does the recent volatility of the 1970s challenge the continued validity of the Lipset-Rokkan hypothesis, but the long-term analysis also suggests that the hypothesis never really carried much validity in the first place. Party systems have never been particularly stable, and hence the freeze has been exaggerated.”²⁰

Despite the accumulated results of these studies, however, Mair thinks that the critics of the Lipset-Rokkan thesis confuse the change in the aggregate support for individual parties with the persistence or change in the lines of cleavages. Thus, he argues that “there is no simple one-to-one correspondence between an individual party organization and the presence of a cleavage. . . . Thus while individual parties may rise and fall, the major ‘alternatives’ may therefore persist. . . . For while the various indices of aggregate electoral change may tell us a great deal about electoral stability/instability in general, they appear to tell us little about the persistence/decay of cleavages.”²¹

While reaching a firm conclusion about this interesting debate is beyond the scope of the present study, it appears that what we now face is not only a change in the electoral fortunes of individual parties, but also changes in the cleavage structures. Certain conflicts that gave rise to older cleavages, such as those between the center and periphery and the church and state, were more or less solved as a result of modernization and democratization. The cleavage between urban and agrarian interests has never been of particular salience except in a limited number of countries. And the most pervasive of the four cleavages—namely, the one between the bourgeoisie and the working class—while still persistent

in a majority of countries, has certainly lost much of its earlier intensity. Finally, new postmaterialist cleavages have emerged that cannot be subsumed under the four cleavages analyzed by Lipset and Rokkan.

Arend Lijphart identifies seven cleavage lines or “issue dimensions” in the twenty-one contemporary democracies that he studied. These are socioeconomic, religious, cultural-ethnic, urban-rural, regime support, foreign policy, and postmaterialism.²² The first four correspond to Lipset and Rokkan’s four cleavages. Thus, the socioeconomic dimension reflects the cleavage between the middle-class and working-class parties. Parties differ along this line with regard to their positions on four issues: “(1) government vs. private ownership of the means of production; (2) a strong vs. a weak governmental role in economic planning; (3) support of vs. opposition to the redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor; and (4) the expansion of vs. resistance to governmental social welfare programs.”²³ Lijphart argues that this dimension was of high salience in nineteen of the twenty-two democracies (the Fourth and the Fifth French Republic are listed separately), and of medium salience in only three of them (the United States, Canada, and Ireland). He concludes that, in none of these party systems, “the socioeconomic issue dimension is absent or of negligible importance.”²⁴

The religious dimension or the church-state cleavage is “the second most important dimension,” and salient in half of the twenty-two democracies. Even though both religious and anti-clerical parties “have moderated their claims and counter claims to a large extent . . . the religious and secular parties are still divided on a range of moral issues, such as questions of marriage and divorce, birth control, abortion, sex education, pornography, and so on.”²⁵

With regard to the cultural-ethnic dimension, or the center-periphery cleavage in Lipset and Rokkan’s terminology, Lijphart observes that it “appears much less frequently in the twenty-two party systems than the religious dimension, mainly because only four of our countries are ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous: Belgium, Canada, Switzerland and Finland.”²⁶ However, this dimension is quite salient in a number of the newer, “third

wave” democracies not included in his list of twenty-two democracies, such as Spain, Bulgaria, Romania, Latvia, Ukraine, Moldova, Macedonia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Ethnic conflicts even resulted in the fragmentation of the former Yugoslavia and the split of Czechoslovakia.

The remaining issue dimensions on Lijphart’s list are of clearly minor salience nowadays. The agrarian parties in the Nordic countries “have tended to become less exclusively rural and to appeal to urban electorates too, prompted by the decline of the rural population.”²⁷ The decline of the antisystem parties lessened the salience of the “regime support” dimension, just as the collapse of the Soviet Union and the European integration meant a convergence of political parties on foreign policy issues. Finally, “postmaterialism has not yet become the source of a new issue dimension in many party systems.”²⁸

While such comparative analyses provide highly valuable perspectives for the study of the party system and party system change in an individual country, they also demonstrate differences among them due to different patterns of national development, sequences, historical experiences, cultural specificities, and so on. This is also the case for Turkey. While, as pointed out above, Turkey partially fits the Lipset-Rokkan model in that the two currently prevailing cleavages (center-periphery and religion-secularism) are the products of the national revolution, many of its characteristics can be properly understood only in the light of its unique pattern of development.

Notes

1. On the waves of democratization, see Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

2. On the Turkish single-party system, see Ergun Özbudun, “Established Revolution Versus Unfinished Revolution: Contrasting Patterns of Democratization in Mexico and Turkey,” in Samuel P. Huntington and Clement H. Moore, eds., *Authoritarian Politics in Modern Society: The Dynamics of Established One-Party Systems* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), pp. 380–405; see also Ergun Özbudun, “The Nature of the Kemal-

ist Political Regime,” in Ali Kazancıgil and Ergun Özbudun, eds., *Atatürk: Founder of a Modern State*, 2nd ed. (London: Hurst, 1997), pp. 79–102.

3. Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 131–173.

4. Ergun Özbudun, “Changes and Continuities in the Turkish Party System,” *Representation* 42, no. 2 (2006): 129–137.

5. Peter Mair, *Party System Change: Approaches and Interpretations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 6.

6. Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State* (London: Methuen, 1959), pp. 231–234.

7. Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems*, pp. 135–136.

8. Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, “Cleavage Structures, Party Systems, and Voter Alignments: An Introduction,” in Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, eds., *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives* (New York: Free Press, 1967), pp. 1–64.

9. Mair, *Party System Change*, p. 3.

10. Lipset and Rokkan, “Cleavage Structures,” p. 50.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11; emphasis in original.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 34; emphasis in original.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 21; emphasis in original.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 35; emphasis in original.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 51; emphasis in original.

17. Ivor Crewe, “Introduction: Electoral Change in Western Democracies: A Framework for Analysis,” in Ivor Crewe and David Denver, eds., *Electoral Change in Western Democracies: Patterns and Sources of Electoral Volatility* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), p. 5.

18. Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles Among Western Publics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

19. Ronald Inglehart, “The Changing Structure of Political Cleavages in Western Society,” in Russell J. Dalton, Scott C. Flanagan, and Paul Allen Beck, eds., *Electoral Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies: Realignment or Dealignment?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 26; see also Scott C. Flanagan and Russell J. Dalton, “Parties Under Stress: Realignment and Dealignment in Advanced Industrial Societies,” *West European Politics* 7, no. 1 (1984): 7–23. Flanagan and Dalton contend in the same vein that “throughout the postwar years the dominant partisan cleavage in most Western democracies distinguished between the working-class and bourgeois parties. Recently,

however, there have been increasing signs that this dominant class cleavage may also be moving into eclipse” (p. 10).

20. Mair, *Party System Change*, p. 62. Mair provides an excellent analysis of the debates over the freezing hypothesis (pp. 56–66). See also Svante Ersson and Jan-Erik Lane, “Democratic Party Systems in Europe: Dimensions, Change and Stability,” *Scandinavian Political Studies* 5, no. 1 (1982): 67–96; Michal Shamir, “Are Western Party Systems Frozen?” *Comparative Political Studies* 17, no. 1 (1984): 35–79.

21. Mair, *Party System Change*, pp. 65–66.

22. Arend Lijphart, *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-one Countries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 128.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 132–135.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

28. *Ibid.*, p.140.