

Women 'Appear' in Turkey's Parliament

by [Soner Cagaptay \(/experts/soner-cagaptay\)](#)

Jul 17, 2011

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Soner Cagaptay \(/experts/soner-cagaptay\)](#)

Soner Cagaptay is the Beyer Family fellow and director of the Turkish Research Program at The Washington Institute.



Articles & Testimony

Turkey's political stalemate following the recent elections has overshadowed a key development: the near doubling of female deputies in parliament.

Turkey's political stalemate following the recent elections has overshadowed a key development; the near doubling of women deputies in the Ankara Parliament (Meclis): 14 percent of the Meclis members are now women.

This sudden visibility -- women's "appearance" in the Meclis -- is part of a decade-long trend. In 2002, the number of women deputies was 4.4 percent. The 2007 elections saw this figure double to 9.1 percent. Now, the 78 women in parliament make up 14 percent of the 550 deputies.

This recent trend notwithstanding, Turkey's history demonstrates the slow and circuitous nature of women's empowerment in the legislative bodies of government.

Beginning in 1935, Ataturk's reforms gave women the right to political representation in Turkey, well in advance of women in European countries such as France.

However, until Turkey became a multi-party democracy in 1946, women's presence in the Parliament was based on an unofficial quota of 4-5 percent. Deputies in this pre-democracy period were first selected by the government, and then put to a popular vote.

After politics opened up for competition in 1950, women's share in the parliament dropped to 0.61 percent. This figure remained around 1-2 percent until economic liberalization under the former Prime Minister Turgut Ozal in the 1980s. The subsequent rise of a middle-class laid the groundwork for the increase in representation of women in the 1990s.

This was a slow process, with the ratio rising from 0.88-1.34 percent in the 1980s, to 2-4 percent in the 1990s.

Since the late 1990s, however, women's demands have accelerated the rate: In each election, the ration of women legislators has nearly doubled, reaching 14 percent on June 12. If this current trend holds, at least a quarter of all deputies in the 2014-15 legislature will be women.

Among the parties, women comprise 30.5 percent of the parliamentary club of the Kurdish nationalist Peace and Democracy Party, or BDP, followed by the main opposition Republican People's Party, or CHP, ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, and opposition Nationalist Movement Party, or MHP, which have 14, 13.8, and 5.6 percent women, respectively, in their parliamentary clubs.

Although the BDP is yet to distance itself from the violence used by the Kurdistan Workers Party, the high number of women among their ranks -- coupled with the fact that one of the two party co-chairs has historically been a woman -- suggests a positive aspect of the party; namely, that they are the leading party in terms of women's representation.

On the other hand, the CHP has recently elected a woman, Bihlun Tamayligil, as the secretary general of the party under its new leader, Kemal Kilicdaroglu. This is the first time a woman has been number two in CHP, signaling that the party is indeed liberalizing, as analysts suggested it would, following Kilicdaroglu's election as its head in May 2010.

Women's rising legislative profile has also impacted the conservative MHP. Turkey's most traditionally male dominated party, the MHP now has three female deputies who make up 5.6 percent of its parliamentary club. Furthermore, for the first time, a woman, Ruhsar Demirel, has been elected to serve as one of the 16 deputy chairs to the party leader.

The AKP has also seen an increased share of women in its ranks. Up from 8.8 percent in 2007, women now comprise 13.8 percent of its parliamentary group. One of the 12 deputy chairs to the party leader is also a woman.

This is good news. Nonetheless, female representation in the executive branch of government remains an area in need of improvement.

In Turkey's parliamentary democracy, the real power lies with the cabinet. Out of the 26 positions in the new government, only one is filled by a woman, Fatma Sahin, who heads the Ministry for Women and the Family -- now symbolically renamed the Ministry of Family and Social Policies.

Translating women's heightened power in legislature into an increased share in the executive branch will be a test for Turkey in gender equality. Given the dramatic rise of women's representation in the Meclis over the past decade however, this is, perhaps, unavoidable.

Soner Cagaptay is director of the [Turkish Research Program \(/templateI02.php?SID=12&newActiveSubNav=Turkish%20Research%20Program&activeSubNavLink=templateI02.php%3FSID%3D12&newActiveNav=researchPrograms\)](#)

at The Washington Institute. ❖

Hurriyet Daily News

RECOMMENDED



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

[The Ukraine Crisis Isn't Over: Russia Has Lied About Troop Withdrawals Before](#)

Feb 16, 2022



Anna Borshchevskaya

[\(/policy-analysis/ukraine-crisis-isnt-over-russia-has-lied-about-troop-withdrawals\)](#)



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

[As China Thrives in the Post-9/11 Middle East, the US Must Counter](#)

Feb 16, 2022



Jay Solomon

[\(/policy-analysis/china-thrives-post-911-middle-east-us-must-counter\)](#)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Unpacking the UAE F-35 Negotiations](#)

Feb 15, 2022



Grant Rumley

[\(/policy-analysis/unpacking-uae-f-35-negotiations\)](#)

TOPICS

[Arab & Islamic Politics \(/policy-analysis/arab-islamic-politics\)](#)

[Democracy & Reform \(/policy-analysis/democracy-reform\)](#)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

[Turkey \(/policy-analysis/turkey\)](#)