



IdPS, Issue 6(2) 2020: 403-407

DOI: 10.1285/i20398573v6n2p403

Published: December 30, 2020

BOOK REVIEWS

Party Politics in Turkey: A Comparative Perspective, by Sabri Sayarı, Pelin Ayan Musil and Özhan Demirkol (eds.). Abingdon: Routledge, 2018, pp. 246.

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Turkish political parties present interesting cases for analysis for many reasons. Their memberships continue to expand after decades where western European parties have seen their contract dramatically, and they have a long history of dictatorial and personalistic structures. Most notably the development of the Turkish party system has been repeatedly, and (perhaps most uniquely) briefly, interrupted by military coups which have attempted to ‘re-set’ party politics at various points in the second half of the twentieth century. As Musil and Demirkol point out in the introduction, because of this Turkey’s party system doesn’t slot neatly into the models of any of the standard ‘waves’ of democracy.

For these reasons and more Turkey is an odd fit for much of the existing literature of party politics, and perhaps because of this, it has often been treated in isolation by scholars. This book offers a welcome counterweight to that trend, analysing party politics in Turkey in comparison with other European cases. The collection aptly demonstrates both the commonalities with other European democracies both old and new, as well as the Turkish system’s many unique features. And the

range of topics brought together in the volume is impressive. The book easily fulfills its goal to study “Turkish political parties from the perspective of contemporary party theories” (pg. 1) and forge a better understanding of both the theories themselves (when applied to a new context) and of Turkish party politics. And nor are the authors blind to contributions of previous scholars, and the first chapter, by Sabri Sayari, provides an exhaustive overview of the major developments in the study of party politics in Turkey.

The book is divided into three sections, the first being ‘the professionalisation of political parties,’ which essentially extends the applicability of Katz and Mair’s (1995) cartel party theory to Turkish parties. This is aptly interrogated through an analysis on party membership contributed by Tosun, Tosun, and Gökmən (chapter 2) was particularly interesting given the peculiarity of Turkish parties in this regard in the international context as their unusually high memberships. Using extensive survey data of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), Republican People’s Party (CHP), and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) the authors conclude that Turkey’s high rates of party membership can partly be explained through greater clientelism but also by the country’s deep social divisions which prompt members to join in greater numbers for ideological reasons. The theme is continued through a compressive survey of the development of campaign and media strategies by Wuthrich (chapter 3), which highlights the increasing concerns around the governing AKP dominance of a media environment which was already becoming segmented by ideology.

Following on from this, Gençkaya’s chapter four on party financing also explores the ‘cartelisation’ of political parties- who he demonstrates has become increasingly professionalised as they come to rely more and more on state funding- while also considering how the AKP has used this system to consolidate their in-

creasingly authoritarian rule. Also in this first section of the volume, Chapter five by Musil offers a direct examination of the applicability of Cartel theory to Turkey in a comparative context, using a cross-sectional analysis to assess the level of cartelisation in each party. The chapter also interestingly demonstrates the extent to which the CHP and the MHP have often co-operated with the AKP to reduce the competitiveness of the system in order to share in state benefits.

The second section of the book, entitled 'Intra-party politics and political competition,' deals with the internal structures of Turkish political parties. The section returns to a common theme of the volume - the extent of clientelism in Turkish parties. Chapter six by Özhan Demirkol provides an excellent historical analysis of factionalism and party splits in Turkey, concluding that the perception of public demand for new parties to fill certain ideological and electoral niches is the key driver in the creation of splinter parties. In addition, chapter 7 by Kemahlioğlu and Özdemir details the AKP's use of the metropolitan municipalities it runs to expand its clientelistic network and gain votes, while Gülnur Kocapinar's contribution on local party elites highlights the high degree of localism in leadership roles across both major parties, even extending to the largest cities. The third and final section, 'Inter-party relations and the party system,' also contains several significant chapters. Firstly, there is Kumbaracıbaşı's work on coalition formation (chapter 9). The chapter acknowledges that "Turkey's experience with coalition government has been marked by political instability and crisis" (pg. 157), and takes an in-depth look at the subject from a historical and comparative perspective. It aptly demonstrates how the dynamics of Turkish coalition formation - especially the attempts following the 2015 legislative election - fit into the wider theory of coalition formation, particularly in terms of the wide ideological gulf's between the opposition parties, and their misgivings about the potential costs involved with coalition governments.

Moreover, this section does good work interrogating Lipset and Rokkan's cleavage theory and its applicability in the Turkish case, something that has been long debated in the literature. The authors find that in general the secular versus Islamic cleavage and an economic left-right cleavage are highly relevant to Turkey and the parties frequently align on both these dimensions. They find little support, however, for previous studies, that have alleged the outsized importance of the center-periphery cleavage to Turkish party politics.

Bilgin's chapter ten uses an agency perspective to historically examine cleavages in the Turkish party system, concluding "Turkish parties can be aligned in terms of their differences in the relation between the state and Islam" (p. 193). Moreover, she demonstrates that this division crucially overlaps with their socioeconomic positions with "Islamic" oriented parties typically supporting more free-market policies and secular parties more interventionist solutions. This is followed by Ecevit and Celep's work (chapter 11), which uses survey data to establish the current state of the cleavages, finding a highly polarised environment both between left and right blocs and within the blocs, especially between the parties of the left (i.e. the CHP and the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP)). The section, and the book, is capped off with the chapter by Yardimci-Geyikçi, which highlights that the extreme polarisation of these cleavages makes the party system's "institutionalisation" difficult.

The functioning of party politics in Turkey has come under immense strain in recent years as the slide towards authoritarianism continues unchecked. While a first glance at the contents of the book would suggest that the volume overlooks the fact that Turkey's party system now operates under non-democratic conditions, this is in fact threaded throughout the volume. Moreover, several chapters do indeed focus on how the AKP has consolidated its power. This is evident in the

studies of clientelism - with Kemahlioğlu and Özdemir's chapter being a notable example - but also in the party's use of state funding (Gençkaya), collaboration with the other parliamentary parties to reduce competitiveness (Musil), and dominance of the media (Wuthrich). The change to a Presidential system following the 2018 elections also means an uncertain future for the party system as currently constituted. Although the volume does not take into account this aspect - and with the caveat that it was written before these changes took effect – some preliminary insights on it would have been interesting.

Ultimately, the book constitutes an excellent contribution to the field- providing a much needed comparative focus to the study of Turkish party politics. Moreover, this work addresses the under-explored study of pro-Kurdish parties in Turkey- and also the overemphasis on the CHP and AKP by examining all four major contemporary parties in great depth. While the rapidly changing nature of Turkish party politics - most notably including the switch to the presidential system and the arrival of major new parties such as the İyi Party (a centrist breakaway from the MHP)- will necessitate an update to these studies in the near future, the book remains a much needed and comprehensive examination of party politics in Turkey.

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