

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN TURKEY:

FEMALE MEMBERS OF DISTRICT MUNICIPAL COUNCILS



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This research was funded by the Raoul Wallenberg Institute. The authors would like to thank all the female local politicians who participated in the study.

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Women's political participation in Turkey: Female members of district municipal councils^ψ

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^ψ This research was funded by the Raoul Wallenberg Institute. The authors would like to thank all the female local politicians who participated in the study.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AK PARTY	Justice and Development Party
BETAM	Bahcesehir University Center for Economic and Social Research
CEDAW against Women	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination
CHP	Republican People's Party
CTDC	Centre for Transnational Development and Collaboration
DTP	Democratic Society Party
GRB	Gender-Responsive Budgeting
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
IYI PARTI	Good Party
HDP	People's Democratic Party
KEDV	The Foundation for the Support of Women's Work
MHP	Nationalist Movement Party
SEC	Supreme Electoral Council
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

According to the latest Global Gender Gap Report released by the World Economic Forum, Turkey is the 130th out of 149 countries in terms of the gender gap in political representation, and ranks lowest on gender equality among the countries that are its peers in the high human development group.¹ Despite the increase in the number of women in the Parliament from 4.7 to 17.4 percent in the past decade, women’s political participation, particularly in local administrations, remains very low.² The results of the March 31st 2019 elections show that a female mayor was elected in only 4 provinces.³ Moreover, merely 29 out of 920 district major positions were fulfilled by women.

Can female politicians be effective in local politics despite the worrying representation rates? How do women in local politics contribute to policy making at the local governments? Taking into account the fact that female politicians are more interested in public services, are they more likely to support gender-sensitive policies?

This report recalculates the share of women in local district councils across Turkey using data from the Supreme Electoral Council, and focuses on municipalities in districts where women are more likely to influence policy making because they have higher shares in councils.⁴ Researchers conducted face-to-face, structured, in-depth interviews with 31 female politicians from five different parties in six different provinces. Female politicians from different political parties in Istanbul, Bursa, Diyarbakır, İzmir, Ankara and Adana, and their views on politics, on running for office, and their political views, their take on their parties’ is a reminder of how rich the local politics are and how important the far-reaching into the society gender is. The fieldwork, which was completed right before the

¹ “Global Gender Gap Report 2018”, World Economic Forum, http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2018.pdf

² For instance, according to the 2014 local election results, only 2.8 percent of mayors and 4.7 percent of provincial council members are women. This rate remains below the goal determined within Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 1995. In addition, women’s political participation in Turkey falls behind the “Gender Equality” component of Sustainable Development Goals which aims to “ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life”

³ <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/kadin/2019/04/01/81-ilde-4-kadin-aday-zafere-ulasti/>

⁴ According to Betam’s calculations, the share of women in district councils is 9.6 percent, and thus below the official share of 10.7 percent released by the Ministry of Interior. According to the data of the Supreme Electoral Council, the number of appointed and alternate members is 3657. However, in the Supreme Electoral Council data, some men have mistakenly been coded as women. When these coding errors are corrected, the number of female district council members decreases to 3515. The cleaned and corrected data set that only contains the appointed members has been used throughout the report, in calculations and in graphs. Data shows that, from 2009 to 2014, female district council members from AK Party and MHP have increased modestly. Meanwhile, the share of CHP female members has increased from 5 percent to 15.4 percent, the share of HDP female members increased to 30.5 percent.

elections on March 31st, revealed how far politics in general, and local politics in particular, to gender, just by looking at the commonalities across and divergences among female local politicians from AK Party, CHP, HDP and MHP/İyi Parti.

Findings

In the research, initially women in local administrations were asked if they consider themselves to be different than their male counterparts, followed by a focus on how they explain their position and contributions in local policymaking processes. As women politicians answered the questions and unraveled their stories, they illuminate not only the practices of discrimination that arise because of the nature of the society and politics, within party politics and their private lives, but also how they legitimize discrimination themselves. Furthermore, this report asked the women if they were able to collaborate amongst themselves within the party and across different parties, as well as about the practices and, if necessary, trainings that they demand to produce more efficient policies.

Female Politicians, Male Politicians

All of the elected women, from all political parties, share the view that men and women approach politics differently, and they enter politics with diverging motivations. Female politicians think that men enter politics with personal objectives such as acquiring power, money and status, whereas women enter politics to serve the people and to contribute to the society.

Majority of the interviewees stated that women were more hardworking and, partially as a result of stereotypes towards women, better equipped compared to men.

Female Politicians' Contribution to Politics

The way female politicians perceive their own contributions to politics vary with respect to their party affiliations. While women from CHP argue that their political power is limited, and they need to be more influential, AKP women think that their contribution to politics is significant but choose to explain this over women's alternative perspectives compared to men's, giving examples such as only women can think about details like placing flowers next to a public bench. Women from HDP underline that their priority is to pull women out to the public sphere, and they bring forth gender-sensitive politics. Women from MHP/İYİ Party also complain that their numbers are small, and they stress that women change the whole political climate.

Women from all political parties share the view that the existence of women in local politics is an encouragement for all women. Regardless of what they can achieve, be it working on park sanitation, to open up access to occupational training or helping victims

of domestic violence, all participants underline the significance of showing other women that it is possible for women to exist in politics.

All female council members emphasize that serving female voters is their priority. To that end, they intensify their efforts on increasing women's use of public space and to render these spaces safe for them.

In depth interviews reveal that there are distinctly diverging views among women from political parties' over their perceptions of what constitutes a gender-sensitive policy. While some participants think that gender sensitive policies are policies that exclusively aim women voters, others define them as policies developed with the objective of preventing gender discrimination. Without doubt, there are differing point of views not only between political parties, but also between women with differing levels of gender awareness. Women from CHP and HDP both positioned on the left side of the political scale, are more likely to have a perspective of gender-equality. Women from these two parties often talk about forming a gender-sensitive budget that is more reflective towards the needs of women, one that allows presenting more comprehensive services for them. Themes like the fight against domestic violence, efforts to increase women's presence in the public sphere are highlighted in these talks. While all council members call attention to the care-providing responsibilities of women, members from CHP and HDP argue that the perception that these responsibilities belong exclusively to women should also be fought. Even though women from AK party do not question that these are women's responsibilities, they say that it is thanks to their husbands and other family members that they can be in politics. Women from AK party perceive 'gender-sensitive policies' as policies that accept and often reproduce society's existing gender roles. On the other hand, they develop projects to ease the burden that come with these roles. Views of female council members from MHP on gender sensitive policies are varied.

Gender Roles and Discrimination

Many female politicians state that they experience discrimination as a result of their responsibilities to provide care for children, families and the elderly, and as a result of the dominant social conviction that politics is not for women. Interviews also include statements that point to a harsher dimension of discrimination, one that even can be defined as violence. Participants state that male politicians even show the courage of blaming women for being "dishonorable".

In line with societal roles assigned to them, female politicians are directed to commissions that reflect their responsibilities as caregivers, e.g. commissions on areas such as family, women, equality, social and cultural fields. Women experience difficulties in participating in more technical commissions such as zoning, law and infrastructure. While for men, access to commission membership require no special conditions or occupational experience on the given field, women are required to prove their credentials for the position they are nominated.

The overwhelming majority of the female politicians state that, in the nomination process, they were listed in rows that made it almost impossible for them to get elected. The candidates that were able to get elected, or were nominated from a better ranking, mentioned the men in the party that made it possible.

Another topic on which female politicians differ across party affiliations is how they perceive to become a super-woman. Participants from AKP usually praise themselves as being more hardworking than their male counterparts, while HDP and CHP members emphasized the underlying inequality. On the issue of merit, participants from AKP mentioned that in some areas they can be inadequate and talked about how it comfortable it is that they do not have deal with “money”.

Co-working and Solidarity

In order to understand the degree to which it is possible to achieve solidarity among women in the party and across parties, the participants were asked questions about cooperation among women. Female politicians approached solidarity with women from other parties cautiously, and were responding optimistically about women solidarity within the party, except for MHP. The fact that female members of AK Party and CHP show reluctance to cooperating, reflect the polarized nature of Turkish politics. On the other hand, some examples that were put forward by the participants illustrate that finding a common ground to operate on may be more feasible in local administrations.

Suggestions:

All women who were interviewed share the view that certain specific precautions (quota, free registration) are needed to increase women’s participation in politics. CHP, HDP and MHP members explicitly stand for gender quotas and the zipper system. AK Party members argue for strategies to attract women to politics at the entry level.

On the other hand, while political parties have their own schools and academies, the participants state that they would benefit from attending training programs. Inspired by the ideas put forward by the participants, these programs can be about developing skills to solve conflicting communications and trainings in technical matters (such as from gender-sensitive budgeting to body language and diction). These training programs may be party-specific and/or may aim to bring together women from different political parties.

Next step in this kind of training programs could be devising trainings to equip men with a gender-equality perspective and to develop the skills they need to work together with their female counterparts.

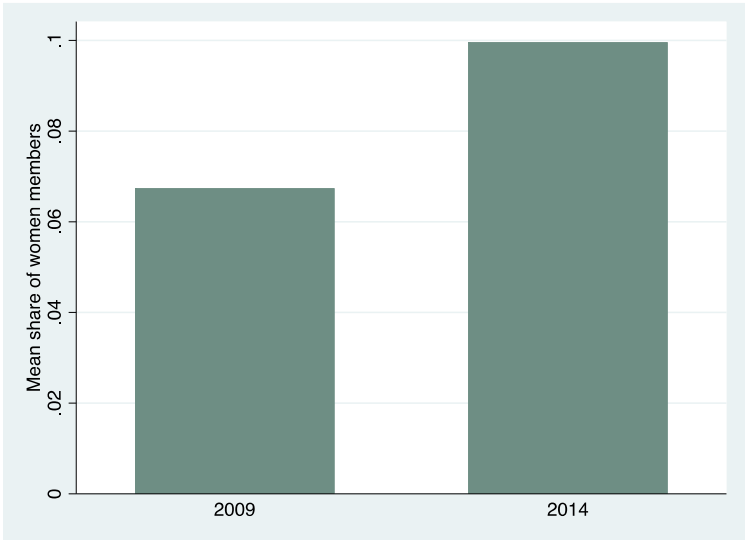
The research team has observed the unique evaluations of each participant and each experience, reflecting the richness of in-depth qualitative analyses. The issues on which party leaders have a strict opinion or intra-party discipline prevails, some degree of convergence of opinions has been observed, as has been on the quota issue within AK Party, however, participants also shared their own personal views outspokenly.

INTRODUCTION

According to the latest Global Gender Gap Report⁵, the widest gender disparity remains in political empowerment. In fact, the gender gap in political representation is reported to be 77.1 percent, on average around the globe. Political representation is not only a crucial aspect of empowerment, but also a human right⁶.

Turkey is the 130th out of 149 countries in terms of the gender gap in political representation, and ranks lowest on gender equality among the countries that are its peers in the high human development group.⁷ Despite the increase in the number of women in the Parliament from 4.7 to 17.4 percent in the past decade, women’s political participation, particularly in local administrations, remains very low.⁸ According to the Figure 1, the share of female politicians in district municipal councils is 9.6 percent as of 2014 local elections. This rate is far from ensuring equal opportunities in political representation, albeit a significant increase compared 2009 local elections (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Average share of women in district municipal councils by election year



⁵ “Global Gender Gap Report 2018”, World Economic Forum, http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2018.pdf

⁶ Main human rights conventions and other legal instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), all include principles of non-discrimination and equal political rights, underlining the rights of women to take part at all levels of decision making in their countries without discrimination, and the States’ obligation to ensure this, is the international norm.

⁷ <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-gender-gap-report-2018>

⁸ For instance, according to the 2014 local election results, only 2.8 percent of mayors and 4.7 percent of provincial council members are women. This rate remains below the goal determined within Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 1995. In addition, women’s political participation in Turkey falls behind the “Gender Equality” component of Sustainable Development Goals which aims to “ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life”

Source: Betam calculations based on Supreme Electoral Council (SEC) data

According to March 2019 municipal election results, women candidates were elected as mayor only in 4 provinces out of 81⁹. Moreover, regarding district mayors, female politicians are elected for 29 positions out of 920¹⁰. In other words, only 3.15 percent of district mayors are female. We note that these results were retrieved from newspaper reports since the Supreme Electoral Council has not released yet the official election results.

Despite this overwhelming under-representation, are there any changes that women members of district municipalities bring about? Given that women politicians are more interested in public services, are more likely to support gender-responsive policies? Can we detect these in the Turkish context? And if so, how do local women politicians contribute to politics in Turkey?

Focusing on district municipal council's women politicians, this research asks these questions to thirty-one women from four different political parties in six different cities in structured focused interviews. Furthermore, during the selection of the sample, the researchers cleaned out the inaccurate observations of the data set on which all research on this topic is based. The Higher Council of Elections data includes the alternate members as well as the permanent ones, summing the numbers up to 3657 and women members' number to 10,7 percent.¹¹ Yet there is no way of confirming whether the alternate members are included. Moreover, a closer look at the data shows that HCE miscoded the gender of some of the council members. Therefore, data has been recoded as precisely as possibly as much as the names reflect the gender of member. Total number of women members decreases to 3515, and the share is 9.6 percent.

The in-depth interviews with women councilors from AK Parti, CHP, HDP ve MHP/İYİ Parti in İstanbul, Bursa, Diyarbakır, İzmir, Ankara ve Adana gave the opportunity to investigate women's experiences in the municipalities and set forth what women thought of their own contributions, if they think they have any. Moreover, this study puts forward the convergence and divergence points in policy making and investigates the circumstances under which women with different party affiliations can demonstrate solidarity.

Women's views and opinions on politics, their own candidacy and political life, and their political parties remind once more the richness of local politics and the overarching effects of gender. The research, completed right before the 31 March local elections, also reveals the commonalities and distinctions of women politicians from different political parties, underlining the absence of a gender understanding not only in local but also in overall political life in Turkey.

⁹ <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/kadin/2019/04/01/81-ilde-4-kadin-aday-zafere-ulasti/>

¹⁰ <http://www.diken.com.tr/baskanlar-degisir-kadinlarin-siyasetteki-yeri-degismez-1389-baskanin-sadece-37si-kadin/>

¹¹ (http://www.migm.gov.tr/kurumlar/migm.gov.tr/BELLED%C4%B0YELER/2014_yili_mahalli_idarelerin_cinsiyet_da_gilimi.pdf).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA

To shed light on the research questions and on the fieldwork, first we investigate the gender distribution of local politicians in Turkey. Note that the statistics presented in Figure 2 are calculated using only appointed members of local councils and point to a share of 9.6 percent. However, the local administration data provided by Ministry of Interior reports the same share as 10.7 percent¹². Despite using the same data source (Supreme Electoral Council (SEC), there has been a slight discrepancy between our calculations and the records of Ministry of Interior. This difference is potentially due to two reasons. First of all, data provided by Ministry of Interior consider the alternate members of district municipal councils whereas our calculations consider solely appointed members, since we cannot validate whether the alternate members are currently on duty or not. Secondly, upon closer scrutiny, we realized the SEC had made a mistake in coding the gender of some of the local politicians. The data was recoded to correct for obvious errors as much as names allow the identification of the gender. To be precise, the number of women members in district municipal councils, both the appointed and the alternate, are reported as 3657 by SEC. After having cleaned the miscoded observations, the number of women members in district municipal councils declined to 3515. Throughout this report, our calculations and figures are based on the corrected data and they represent solely appointed female members.

Figure 2 presents the share of appointed women members in district municipal councils according to their party affiliation and year of election. From 2009 to 2014 the share of women members affiliated with Justice and Development Party (AK Party) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) showed a very limited increase. Accordingly, the share of women in AK Party grew from 9.9 percent to 11.1 percent while the share women in MHP increased from 4.1 percent to 5.7 percent.

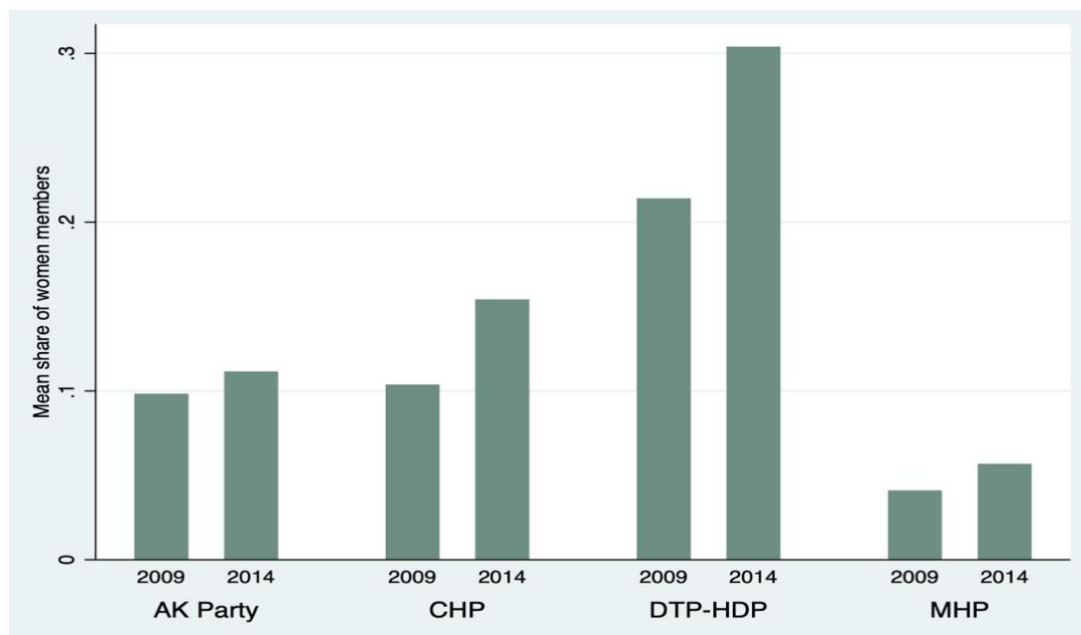
On the other hand, Republican People's Party (CHP) and People's Democratic Party (HDP) improved the share of appointed women members substantially. The share of appointed women members with CHP affiliation increased by 5 percentage points and was recorded as 15.4 percent as of 2014. The share of appointed women members with Democratic Society Party (DTP) affiliation was the highest among all political parties at 21.4 percent in 2009. However, in December 2009, Turkey's Constitutional Court voted to close¹³ down DTP which then lead to the foundation of HDP, a pro-minority left-wing party¹⁴ that carries the legacy of DTP and Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) (Tekdemir, 2016). Hence, we consider DTP being the predecessor of HDP and compare the share of women members as if these two parties were the same across the two election rounds. Accordingly, the share of women members affiliated with HDP demonstrated a significant increase to reach 30.5 percent as of 2014.

¹²(http://www.migm.gov.tr/kurumlar/migm.gov.tr/BELED%C4%B0YELER/2014_yili_mahalli_idarelerin_cinsiyet_dagilimi.pdf).

¹³ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8408903.stm>

¹⁴ <https://www.hdp.org.tr/tr/parti/parti-tuzugu/10>

Figure 2 Average share of women in district municipal councils by party affiliation and election year



Source: Betam calculations based on Supreme Electoral Council (SEC) data

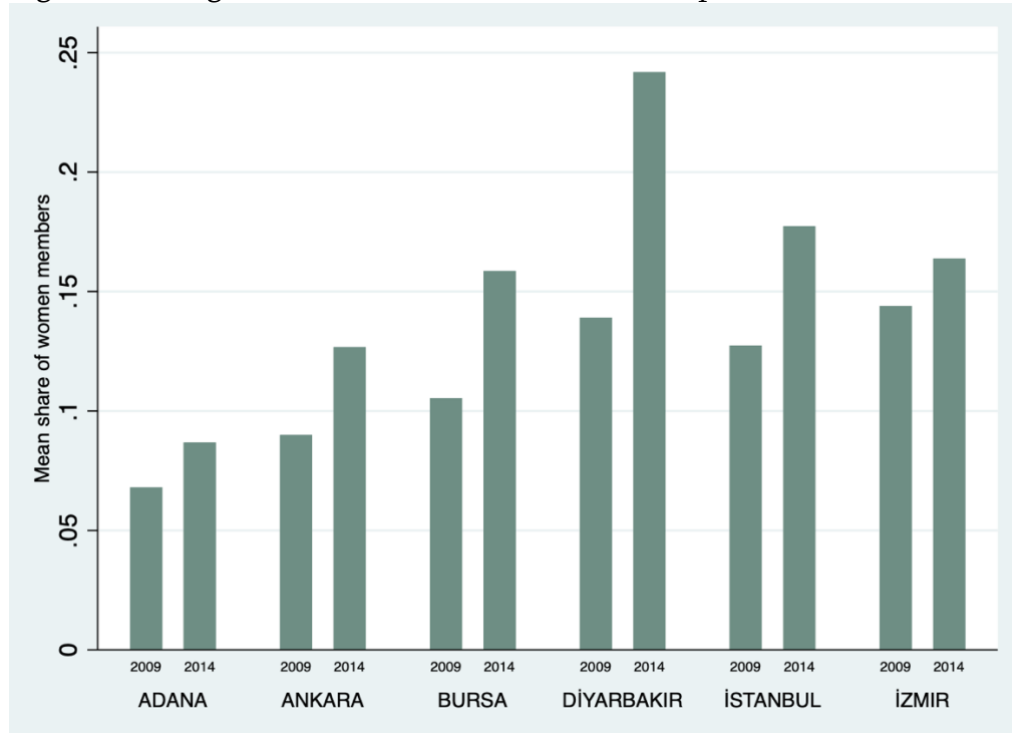
The significant improvement in women's local political participation within CHP and HDP can be explained by the introduction of gender quotas. DTP introduced the co-chair / co-mayor system and 40 percent gender quota for the first time in Turkish political history¹⁵ in 2007 (Gül and Altındal, 2015). Later on, this quota was adopted by HDP during the 2014 local elections and then it has been raised to 50 percent with the conception of equal representation, before the general elections took place in 2015.¹⁶ Similarly, CHP increased its existing gender quota from 25 percent to 33 percent in 2012 (Gül and Altındal, 2015). However, due to the absence of zipper system, the share of women members in district municipal councils remains relatively low since the male decision-makers in political parties tend to fill these quotas by placing women in the bottom of the lists, in places where they cannot be elected according to the electoral laws in Turkey. Lastly, to our best knowledge, AK Party and MHP have not introduced any gender quotas, while the Good Party (İyi Parti) has 25 percent gender-quota but did not participate in the 2014 local elections since it was established in 2017.

Figure 3 presents the share of appointed women members in district municipal councils by province and election year. These provinces are selected for in-depth interviews due to the relatively high shares of women within district municipal councils. Among the provinces chosen for this study, Diyarbakır has the largest share of local female politicians by 24.2 percent as of 2014. On the other hand, Adana has the lowest share of women members in district municipal councils by 6.8 percent in 2009 and 8.7 percent in 2014. However, Adana is among the selected provinces as it hosts diverse political parties within its municipal district councils.

¹⁵ <https://bianet.org/biamag/siyaset/118826-dtp-nin-kisa-tarihi>

¹⁶ <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/110963/hdpnin-kadin-secim-beyannamesi-aciklandi>

Figure 3 Average share of women in district municipal council



Source: Betam calculations based on Supreme Electoral Council (SEC) data

Regardless of measure and cities, all shares are well below the 33 percent threshold that is widely accepted as meaningful participation. Therefore, for the purposes of this research, we have detected 6 cities, Adana, Ankara, Bursa, Diyarbakır, İstanbul, İzmir, where women's share is greater than 20 percent in district municipal councils. We stratify the selection of female politicians and districts by population (aiming for relatively more populous cities) and by party affiliation (AK Party, CHP, HDP, MHP and/or İyi Parti). The field study was initiated with the goal of implementing 8 in-depth interviews with female local politicians (members of district municipal councils, deputy majors, and/or majors) from each of the four largest parties, AK Party, CHP, HDP/BDP, MHP/İyi Parti. Participants were selected through a snowball sampling procedure. The field work, as summarized in Table 1, progressed smoothly for three parties, namely AK Party, CHP, HDP/BDP. Almost all interviews with aforementioned three parties have been completed in Istanbul, Adana, Diyarbakır, Ankara and İzmir. However, the team had a difficult time interviewing MHP/İyi Parti female local politicians. The team identified two bottlenecks: (1) MHP has very few seats and very few female politicians. (2) The upcoming local election is the first that İyi Parti will participate in. Therefore, women who served in district councils as representatives of MHP and who have since switched to İyi Parti stated that they prefer being active on the field before the local elections. As a result, the project team interviewed with 9 local female politicians from CHP, 11 from AK Party, 8 from HDP and only 3 from MHP.

The youngest participant is at the age of 33 and the oldest is 65. The average age of the participants is 47. Interviews were generally held in the municipalities, party buildings, party election offices and offices of the participants. Except one participant, all the interviewees were comfortable with voice recording. All the participants were eager to

talk. Some of the participants even stated that the use of their actual names does not constitute a problem. In order to preserve the confidentiality of the participants, a handle was assigned to each interviewer, containing a number and information of their party (e.g. 1, CHP).

Field team also interviewed two former municipal employees who were executive officers. These two interviewees were selected due to their extensive experiences in local administrations which make a significant contribution to the research outcomes. Despite not being party members, they were well aware of the intra-party dynamics and they comprehensively evaluated the party activities took place at the municipality.

Table 1 List of interviewees

Interview nb	Date	Party	Province	Deputy Mayor	Member of the District Council	Nb of years active in politics
1	10.12.2018	CHP	İstanbul		X	5
2	04.01.2019	CHP	İstanbul	X		5
3	16.01.2019	CHP	İstanbul		X	5
4	23.01.2019	CHP	İstanbul		X	10
5	25.01.2019	AK Party	İstanbul		X	10
6	31.01.2019	AK Party	İstanbul	X		9
7	06.02.2019	AK Party	İstanbul	X		10
8	04.02.2019	MHP	Adana		X	10
9	04.02.2019	AK Party	Adana		X	12
10	04.02.2019	CHP	Adana		X	23
11	05.02.2019	CHP	Adana		X	16
12	05.02.2019	HDP	Adana		X	39
13	05.02.2019	CHP	Adana		X	5
14	05.02.2019	MHP	Adana		X	10
15	21.02.2019	HDP	Diyarbakır		X	5
16	21.02.2019	HDP	Diyarbakır		X	13
17	22.02.2019	HDP	Diyarbakır			16
18	22.02.2019	HDP	Diyarbakır			25
19	22.02.2019	HDP	Diyarbakır		X	5
20	22.02.2019	HDP	Diyarbakır		X	10

21	23.02.2019	HDP	Diyarbakır			13
22	07.03.2019	AK Party	Ankara		X	15
23	07.03.2019	AK Party	Ankara		X	16
24	08.03.2019	AK Party	Ankara	X		16
25	08.03.2019	AK Party	Ankara		X	17
26	22.03.2019	CHP	İzmir		X	10
27	23.03.2019	MHP	İzmir		X	5
28	24.03.2019	AK Party	İzmir		X	16
29	25.03.2019	AK Party	İzmir		X	28
30	19.04.2019	CHP	Bursa	X		15
31	19.04.2019	AK Party	Bursa		X	6

Data shows that female politicians have been in politics for 13 years on average. Still, there are differences across political parties. Women from HDP have been in politics for 16 years on average, women from AK Party, 14 years on average. On the other hand, women from CHP have an average of 10 years in politics. In light of this data, one could conclude that women from CHP are younger. The average age ranges from 46 to 50. Yet, women from CHP and HDP have the same average age. In this regard, it can be concluded that women in HDP have entered politics at a younger age. Majority of women in politics are married. The average number of children is 1.3 among women from CHP and 1.9 among women from AK Party. The educational distribution shows that majority of female district council members are college graduates, and a non-trivial number of them have graduate degrees. Note that this data is not representative of the entire group of female district council members.

Party	Average age	Marital status	Nb of children	Education				
				Less than HS	HS	College	Master's	PhD
AKP	48	0,8	1,9	1	2	5	2	
CHP	46	0,9	1,3			6	2	2
MHP	50	0,7	1,7	1		1	1	
HDP	46	0,5	1,5	1	1	5	1	

MAIN FINDINGS

We compare and contrast each party's replies under the four research questions as presented in the introduction:

1. How do women from different political parties, different ideologies, identities see themselves in politics? Do they see themselves different from male politicians? If they do, along which dimensions do they think they differ?
2. How do women explain their place in local policy-making? Do they think that they can contribute? And if so, how do they explain their contribution to local politics?
3. Do female politicians face discrimination in local politics? What types of discrimination do they face?
4. Can women in local district councils work together across parties or over parties? What are the issues and the ways in which they can work together?

Surveying women's self-evaluation of their political participation is a difficult task for a variety of reasons. First, each woman is different and their explanation as to why they went into politics, how they perform politics, and their perception of whether their representation and policies matter vary. Therefore, based on in-depth interviews, we can only draw similarities and divergences. We chose to focus these similarities and divergences across the party lines, yet interviews revealed that there are also regional differences, such as the existence of gender understanding in Adana.

Second, when we asked about experiences of female politicians, attempting to understand how they explain their place in politics, we were confronted with various types of discrimination stories. From their entrance to politics to their senior years, women accounted many stories of how they were left aside, excluded or even insulted because of their gender. While it was not the aim of the project to particularly focus on this issue, replies to the questions also revealed that women's own perception of discrimination also matters. Although recounting the same stories, while the respondents from AK Party and MHP did not name what they were confronted with as discrimination, CHP and HDP respondents did.

The same difficulty presented itself when analyzing gender-responsive policies given that women's perceptions of what constitutes gender-responsive policies may not always serve the purpose of achieving gender equality. For example, when sending out baby packages to their constituents, the female politicians aim to serve the women. Yet pink packages for girls and blue packages for boys serve to reproduce the traditional gender stereotypes rather than aiming for gender equality, which is a primary aim of gender-responsive policies.¹⁷ Nevertheless, we still grouped this type of an action as a gender responsive policy since the female politician's primary goal was to serve female constituents.

¹⁷ According to the definition provided by the European Institute for Gender Equality, gender sensitive policies are "policies and programs that take into account the particularities pertaining to the lives of both women and men, while aiming to eliminate inequalities and promote gender equality, including an equal distribution of resources, therefore addressing and taking into account the gender dimension".

We should also note that since there are different perspectives on women's empowerment, replies of the respondents to the first three headings sometimes got convoluted and we grouped the replies looking at the entirety of the interview.

How do women from different political parties, different ideologies, identities see themselves in politics?

The project team inquired how politically active women see themselves in politics compared to their male counterparts and focused on understanding the areas in which they see themselves as different. How women characterize what they do differently in politics, how they describe men's political behavior and whether these characterizations change according to political parties is an important question for two reasons. First, similarities and discrepancies in women's description of their place in politics provide the researchers with the ability to better understand the nature of politics and political parties. Second, the replies provide hints on possible cooperation areas. The interviewer(s) asked whether women think that male politicians' priorities were different or not, whether having women in local politics makes a difference, and the policy areas in which women cannot be present. In order to cross-check and better understand what local female politicians understood from politics and gender, questions on female constituents were also asked, e.g. whether they vote for female politicians, whether they have different demands than male constituents, and whether the politicians cared specifically about their female constituents.

Overall, as explained in detail below, women across different political parties acknowledge women's different eye for politics, and especially local politics, underlining the importance of female politicians in reaching female constituents, and questioning men's motivation to enter politics.

Republican People's Party (CHP)

Female council members of the CHP believe that women and men approach politics differently, and that therefore, female and male politicians differ. Many members say that female politicians care more about the society, and usually join politics because they are concerned about the society they live in and the children (2. CHP; 10. CHP; 11. CHP; 13. CHP), whereas male politicians care more about power (11. CHP), and money-related issues (2. CHP; 10. CHP; 26. CHP). Furthermore, they believe that if they can empower women, they can change mothers, and future generations, and thus create social change (4. CHP).

Another divergence between male and female politicians is defined via the way they enter politics. Female council members from CHP contemplate that men enter and progress in politics via memberships in informal groups (2. CHP; 10. CHP). Women believe that men are there because they are somebody's relative or they are from the same town (3. CHP). One member says that loyalty is more important than merit (30. CHP). Therefore, in their view, such liaisons constrain men's political stance, which is shaped by the stance of the group that they belong to and is thus unquestionable. Council members think that women, on the other hand, go through their own struggle to get to where they are.

Therefore, they believe that women in politics exist as individuals, are more open to discussion, to communication, to persuasion, to cooperation (2. CHP).

The belief that female politicians are more open may be one of the reasons why council members of CHP believe that female politicians find it easier to work with other female politicians. They think it is easier to communicate if the counterparty is also a woman, even if she is from a different party. (1. CHP). The deputy mayors imply that it may be easier to work with executive units when their managers are also women (2. CHP). Female politicians say that they can communicate with women in their districts more easily, they can enter their homes (3. CHP; 11. CHP; 26. CHP).

One council member discusses that these differences may stem from the way men and women are brought up and may hurt women's positions in the political sphere.

"But men can babble, talk nonsense, but talk. Women are more nervous. They are under pressure, they feel more (uncomfortable) when they say something wrong. Men know how to yell, to argue. We don't. (...) We are not brought up that way, at the end of the day. (...) Women feel more nervous when they take the stage (1. CHP).

Justice and Development Party (AK Party)

Female council members of the AK Party share similar views with their CHP colleagues about how female politicians are different from male politicians. They also think that women and men approach politics differently, women caring more about the society, and the family and the children (24. AK Party), and they enter politics to serve, whereas men care about their own well-being, economic gains (9. AK Party) and the "seat" (24. AK Party, 5. AK Party) "Women are not selfish" says another member (25. AK Party). Yet the difference that they underline most is how women are more hardworking, and service-oriented.

One respondent clarifies the reasons why she is in politics: "I think women should be in politics. (...) I am forward-looking/thinking. To provide a better future for the kids. To create an environment where women can do (politics). To foster that self-confidence, that is my goal" (28. AK Party, Izmir). Other respondents argue that "almost all women would focus more on how to best do whatever they are assigned to that day, on how to achieve the given work in the most correct, successful and fast way. They (women) are very hardworking" (5. AK Party; 9. AK Party; 24. AK Party).

Respondents praise female politicians' ability to merge the family life with the public life as well, "Women have more responsibilities in life. They have family life, they have children. (6. AK Party; 9. AK Party; 22. AK Party). "Thanks to motherhood and female point of view, women approach things in a more comprehensive way," says another respondent (31. AK Party). One AK Party politician underlines that men also face difficult circumstances but, "not as much as women." (6. AK Party).

The respondents are also aware of the diversity of women and reflect this in their replies. "Women would also like to reach their target seats," says one respondent, "I do. But my priority is to do right whatever I am doing now." (5. AK Party). One respondent says, "There are also women who are rentiers, when you are in politics, they come to you with different demands and proposals" (9. AK Party).

Female politicians from AK Party, similar to their colleagues in the CHP, see themselves as better communicators than men. “Women are more genuine, cordial and trustworthy. Whenever we knock on a door, we talk to them, where they are from, we ask about their problems we do not only talk about ourselves,” argues one respondent (22. AK Party). Women also agree that since they talk the same language with women, therefore they can have better relations with the constituents (24. AK Party). Like their counterparts from CHP, women from AK Party state that it is easier for female politicians to enter homes (5. AK Party; 7. AK Party; 9. AK Party). They also acknowledge that this works to the party’s advantage as well, since “reaching a woman means reaching 10 women” (22. AK Party) as “women talk to other women, their husbands” (25. AK Party).

People’s Democratic Party (HDP)

Women from HDP were keen on addressing the gender-sensitive policies they supported and, in some cases, implemented as detailed in the sections below, and how they prioritized women’s solidarity (16. HDP, 17.HDP), more so than pointing out the differences between themselves and men. They explain how, before municipal council gatherings, they gather as women from the party, and how women’s demands are discussed and women’s needs are prioritized, how their male colleagues are even criticized by them if they do not behave in an equalitarian manner (16. HDP).

Women from HDP, as their colleagues in CHP and AK Party, state that female politicians can enter homes more easily, therefore, women are included in all local visits (16. HDP). They believe that female politicians are perceived to be more trustworthy, and less corrupt (15. HDP). One candidate argues that women have the transformation power in the society as they are the mothers who raise future generations (18. HDP).

Nationalist Action Party (MHP) and The Good Party (İYİ Party)

Three respondents from the MHP all state that female politicians are in politics to serve the community whereas two of them point out that male politicians are in it for power and money (8. MHP; 27 MHP). One member argues that the motive may depend on the type of person, there may be women who are “after the seat” and there may be who are more oriented to serve (8. MHP). Yet they underline that women are strong and brave, and if women are in politics, they need to be (8.MHP; 27. MHP).

Asked whether women are different from men, one respondent argues that women are braver (8. MHP). She recalls an event when there was a motion to go to Kerkük to see how the aid from Turkey is used in the camps. She tells, “Two of my council member friends from CHP raised their hands, saying they want to go (...) Then I said ‘Let’s go’. (...) Men did not come, some were afraid” (8. MHP).

Women also admit that they owe everything to their own efforts, being resilient and following up (8. MHP; 27. MHP). Another member admits, “as a politician, I am successful because I spend more time in politics than men do” (14. MHP).

MHP women have conflicting views on whether female electorate supports women candidates or not. One respondent says they do (27. MHP), one says they do not (14. MHP), and the last one argues that women do not vote with a lot of information, they

either vote for someone they like or for some candidate whom her husband supports (8. MHP).

Different approach to politics

Local female politicians' views on whether they are different from male politicians converge on two main issues. First one relates to women's inclination to think more about children, family and the society. Female politicians argue that women have different aims than men entering politics, women are more concerned about the society and therefore women think less in terms of what types of benefits they will gain personally from politics. Whereas men are more likely to think about money, the political seat, and more generally power. Yet while CHP and AK Party women were more comfortable in terms of answering these questions, we did not receive the same clear-cut answers neither from HDP nor from MHP.

Women from all political parties agree on female politicians' ability to enter into the houses of the constituents and communicate better with women electorate over their male colleagues. Talking about differences between male and female politicians, women also underline the importance of resilience, and how women have to be very strong while in politics.

How do women explain their own contribution?

The interviewer(s) asked whether female politicians think that they made a change in politics and were asked to describe their concrete contributions in detail. As expected, there were replies relating to both politics and policies, and women from all political parties recognized the difference they brought to the scene of politics, how their existence within the municipal councils changed the male atmosphere of the council and the commissions. Yet, stories of discrimination abound, and those testimonies are listed under the third research question regarding discrimination.

Interviews also revealed that there are particular differences in what women from different political parties consider to be gender-responsive policy. Some think of it as services geared towards female constituents only, while others think of it as improving policy through a gender-inclusive lens. In terms of gender-responsive policies and whether female politicians could make changes in policy to better serve their gender, replies were more concrete for some political parties, as detailed below.

Republican People's Party (CHP)

Female council members of CHP explain their contributions as infinitesimal, as incremental (1. CHP; 13. CHP). Some members even say that female politicians have no power, but that they only fulfill a position to be showcased to prove that there are women in the party (3. CHP; 13. CHP). Nevertheless, when asked to elaborate further, it becomes clear that they do not think they can change policy, but that they think women in local politics can still play a role.

Many female council members from CHP believe that they can change the way women are perceived by both men and women. One member explains that she has worked hard to paint a picture of women as "people", not "flowers", or not as "poor, wretched beings",

but as people who may be needing help for various reasons (13. CHP). Another member points out that on one hand she is “playing rough” to break the fragile image of women, but on the other hand, she is putting on fishnet stockings to prove that she is a woman even though she plays rough (3. CHP).

Council members also believe that they can play important roles in lifting up other women, in motivating other women to run for office (2. CHP; 3. CHP; 11. CHP; 30. CHP). One female deputy major says that she opens up ways for council members, who could otherwise be completely left out of the executive part of local politics (2. CHP). They also see themselves as role models, demonstrating that women can and should be active in politics. In the words of one member, after she decided to run for office, “young female candidates followed in other districts” (11. CHP).

When talking about women’s contributions to local politics, council members from CHP underline that if and when women are constrained to “women’s branches”, the policy is compartmentalized: policies and women’s policies, whereby the latter is predominantly shaped by traditional gender roles (2. CHP; 10. CHP; 30. CHP). One example that was provided was the “Woman and Family Commission” of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. Council members from CHP state that women get sidetracked into this commission. That is why one district municipality sent men to this particular commission: to free female members for other commissions and to remind people that it is not only women who should fight for equality (3. CHP). In this respect, they argue that gender should be a cross-cutting theme, shaping all policies. Furthermore, it should not be limited to women, but should also include men (2. CHP). One member states this in her own words: “I am furious about women’s branches. What are women’s branches? What are they branches of? Are women doing something different than you?” (30. CHP).

Gender Responsive Policies

Female politicians in the CHP underline that they represent women, that they care about policies regarding women and other disadvantaged groups (1. CHP; 4. CHP; 10. CHP). Furthermore, they believe that female voters care more about the use of public spaces that they are more likely to use, e.g. parks and marketplaces, about public transportation (1. CHP; 3. CHP; 13. CHP). Two axes of policy emerge from prioritizing women’s needs (1) To allocate space and funds to public use (2) To facilitate access to and to ensure safety of public spaces.

CHP women in councils aim to prioritize and to increase the budgets allocated to gender-responsive policies. Female council members underline that care responsibilities fall disproportionately on women and that they fight to allocate space and funds to public use through parks, nursing rooms, child care centers, rehabilitation centers, etc (4. CHP; 11. CHP). This fight may entail opening up new public spaces or protecting the ones that already exist. Female council members say that they opened up nursing rooms in places such as community centers (4. CHP), shopping malls and parks (4. CHP); childcare centers for disadvantaged working women (4. CHP; 11. CHP); rehabilitation centers for the disabled children (4. CHP) Clearly, these types of public spaces serve a dual purpose of acknowledging and alleviating the care responsibilities of women (2. CHP), and also

allocating public spaces to women. In this respect, they believe they are prioritizing the use of public spaces for the public good (13. CHP).

Ensuring that public spaces are also reserved for women's use does not always imply that these spaces are safe or accessible for women. Here lies the second important axis of gender-responsive policies in CHP district councils. Female members state that the safety of the public parks is a concern among the women in their districts. To ensure that women feel safe, they had security cameras and proper lighting installed in parks (4. CHP; 11. CHP). In this vein, one female council member mentions that it was the female members who opposed and stopped the building of a parking garage under a school's building due its potential adverse effects on safety and health of children who attend that school (1. CHP). Another member gives the example of a women's toilet in a park, that was locked, not that of men. The reason cited was that the drug addicts were using it. The council member had to visit the mayor to get it unlocked (10. CHP).

The aforementioned types of policies are targeted directly at women's needs in districts. Albeit not as directly, female council members of CHP talk frequently about another gender-sensitive policy: that aimed at raising awareness of gender equality. Underlining the strength of traditional gender roles that emerge in the political sphere as well, they state that raising awareness is an essential part of their policy, not only within their own party, CHP, but also within the municipality's executive units, as well as in other parties (4. CHP). They emphasize that the traditional approach to women exists throughout the municipalities as well. According to them, local politics focus on more traditional roles, such as handicraft programs, etc. However, they also acknowledge that their primary goal is not only lightening the load of traditional gender roles, e.g. by providing care, but also getting people to question why these roles fall upon women" (1. CHP).

One of the most debated policies in raising awareness is the establishment of "gender-equality commissions". Female council members from CHP push for gender-equality commissions whereas members of other parties may push for "women - men", in an effort to leave LGBTT community out of the equation. "We changed the name of the 'Women-Men Equality Commission' to 'Gender Equality Commission'. The AK Party members objected by saying that there is no such thing as gender, but only *sex¹⁸*" (2. CHP). Members who managed to have these commissions established emphasize the importance of pushing for "gender equality" (4. CHP). One member actually pushed to establish a gender-equality unit within the municipality, hoping to change the executive structure within the municipality as well (2. CHP). On the other hand, the council members are also aware that these efforts take time and may not be effective. They state that the change that women bring about is incremental, and it is slow (1. CHP; 10. CHP).

Gender-responsive policies sometimes boil down to social support (2. CHP). In a similar vein, the gender equality commissions are usually placed under the social support units (4. CHP). Women are still considered to be beings in need of help (3. CHP). Female politicians try to change this context to include gender from a broader perspective. For

¹⁸ This part of the discussion is not easily translated into English. The word for gender equality in Turkish is "toplumsal cinsiyet", and its direct translation is "social gender". The AK Party members object by saying that there is only men and women, and social gender does not exist.

example, they believe that gender-sensitive budgeting going to reach farther into the system, potentially to executive units within the municipality (2. CHP). Nevertheless, they also state that gender inequality is deeply engraved in the system. According to one council member, even the concept of “gender-sensitive budgeting can be repellent to the executive units of the municipality” (4. CHP).

One council member points out that gender does not only refer to men and women, but also to LGBTT community members, indicating that their goal is not to empower women only but women and also the LGBTT community (2. CHP). Yet, they also underline that the mayor’s support is crucial in this struggle. When municipalities support LGBTT events, they state that they may even have to cancel if the major is not supportive (2. CHP).

Female politicians talk about policies aimed at fostering cooperation and support among women. POTLAÇ, a women’s cooperative is an example within Kadıköy Municipality. They are also trying to form a care cooperative with the assistance of KEDV (2. CHP). Another municipality implemented projects whereby women sold the goods they produced in small fairs. Over time, women who participated started to get organized and form associations (dernekler), which fostered solidarity. One member recounts that a woman from these associations decided to run for mukhtar, emphasizing the power of solidarity (30. CHP)

Justice and Development Party (AK Party)

Asked about whether they contribute differently to policy making, AK Party members confidently respond that they do. They underline how women are different from men, more detail-oriented, and paying attention to things that go unnoticed by men, and argue that women contribute differently.

“Whenever we sit in in a technical meeting, we bring a new point of view. Men look at the roads and they see the stones in the pavement, the highway or the apartment building,” says a Council member, “Whereas when a woman looks at the road, she looks at the “soft details” such as a park ground for children, a park bench, a flower,” (5. AK Party) Another one explains, “Women pay attention even the color of the flower,” (28. AK Party). Women’s attention to detail is highlighted by many respondents (7, AK Party; 22. AK Party; 24. AK Party; 25. AK Party; 31. AK Party).

AK Party members also highlight women’s interests in public spaces, such as how women are more demanding for parks and green spaces for their kids and families, (9. AK Party; 22 AK Party). Another respondent draws attention to how women are more attentive to public safety, citing an example of how she worked on the prohibition of inflammable torches and firecrackers within indoor areas due to their detrimental effects on public health (31. AK Party).

In terms of whether female politicians change perceptions of women’s participation in politics, AK Party women concur that taking part in politics changes perceptions, yet respondents are also aware of the diversity of female politicians. “By being there we become role models for other women. We do not let people say that women would not serve to anything in politics” (22. AK Party). Another district council member from AK Party confirms spillover effects, saying that female politicians act as role models for future

generations giving the example on higher share of women candidate for 2019 elections (31. AK Party). Yet, some argue that there can be bad role models, therefore it is better not to have role models at all (24. AK Party).

Another contribution that is commonly stated by the female district members from AK Party concerns the male-dominant environment in politics. They state argue that “women change the setting when they enter a meeting. Men behave differently when there are women around. They talk nicer, sit tighter,” (5. AK Party; 7. AK Party; 9. AK Party; 22. AK Party; 23 AK Party).

Gender Responsive Policies

Female politicians of the AK Party draw attention to women’s care work and how, as women members of city councils, they can be more attentive to the needs of women in their neighborhoods. They do know the burden on women in terms of taking care of the children and the family, the fact that women’s economic empowerment is also hindered by this type of work. Their solutions focus on social aid and providing childcare facilities. In terms of creating public spaces for women, such as making the parks better and safe spaces, for instance, are not as prioritized as much as the CHP women.

When asked about gender-responsive policy, one respondent replies, ““When I was at the Directorate of Culture, we started the first “Welcome Baby” package. We visit the newborns. We started this in the Culture Directorate then transferred it to the Social Aid. If the newborn is a boy, the package is blue, for example. It has everything that a mother may need. (...) Now, we have a new project, patient care package. (...) We have a service called ‘health service at home’, whoever benefits from it also receives this package.” (6. AK Party).

As a gender-responsive policy, one respondent gives the example of a child-care facility they opened in Ankara, so that women from the neighborhood could participate in the crafting courses they started within the municipality. She says, “Women could not come to (the crafting courses) since they had children. So, we talked to the mayor about this. They opened up another space for children. One on top of the other. When they were attending the courses, they left their children there with 2 teachers. They picked (the children) up when they left. We also said that it would be beneficial to sell the handicrafts- and now they are being sold” (22. AK Party).

Gender- equality commissions were mentioned by AK Party women as well, yet they did not seem to be interested or somewhat disappointed with them. One of the respondents worked in the gender equality commission at the District Municipality, recalled that they asked to the Human Resources of the Metropolitan Municipality to give an account of the women who worked there, yet she neither remembers the answer nor can properly reply what exactly was done at the Commission. (25. AK Party). Another woman explains how it was thanks to the mayor, that the Women and Family Commission was founded right away at the Municipality, praising him for his efforts (7. AK Party).

People’s Democratic Party (HDP)

As detailed above, one of the primary goals of the council members was to create opportunities to pull women into the public sphere, and they believe that they achieved that goal. One member says that when a female co-mayor takes office, other women come

pouring out of their homes into the municipality (15. HDP). Other members also mention the ease at which women visit the female co-mayors (20. HDP). In other words, they think that they have contributed substantially when women can come out into the public sphere and voice their demands. And women from HDP agree that women felt safe in the public space during their time in office.

Furthermore, women from HDP think that they are forming powerful role models who transform women's perceptions as to what they are capable of and what they can achieve (16. HDP). One council member from Adana summarizes her main contribution as enhancing women's visibility, in "being able to speak up as a woman" (12. HDP). She explains that female politicians raise awareness in the society, constituting role models for women who struggle under society's pressure, and urging men "to take a step back", and to share the power (12. HDP). One member from HDP explains that the equal representation imposed by the party has empowered the female politicians who now feel more comfortable questioning the male dominance in the society as a whole. "A woman from the district organization of the party can tell a male member 'Bring your wife to the party first, let your daughter get out of the house first, don't marry two women simultaneously (polygamy) first, don't do this first, then come to the party'" (17. HDP).

One of the recurring concepts women from HDP use to explain their own contributions to local politics is solidarity. All respondents agree that their contributions are made possible by the female solidarity that exists within the party organization.

Gender Responsive Policies

The main goal of the gender-responsive policies of HDP is two-fold (1) to improve the living conditions of women in their private spheres, in front of their homes, in their neighborhoods (19. HDP), and (2) to pull women out of the private sphere into the public sphere (15. HDP; 20. HDP). One member explains this in her own words (20. HDP) "When women come to any institution run by HDP, they know that they will have a female counterpart. Even when the counterpart is not there, that she will not have to deal with a man, that a man will not force her, that he will bring a woman (that she can talk to). This creates an incredible trust, and women know this". These words highlight the importance of reaching women to pull them into the public sphere, and they try to achieve it by have more women in the municipality.

As women of HDP put it, the "feudal" structure of the society stands as an insurmountable barrier to access to the public sphere (16. HDP). One way to overcome this barrier is to create female-dominated public spaces such as women's bathrooms, women's libraries, women's cultural centers as well as nursing rooms. Women from HDP commonly state that the municipality would like to serve the women, who represent half of the population (15. HDP; 20. HDP). Even though women from HDP do not mention it, it is clear such gendered spaces would make it easier for men to grant women permission to visit these places as well.

The fight against domestic violence constitutes an important gender-sensitive policy for HDP (21. HDP). Women's shelters are an essential part of this policy. Women from HDP would like to differentiate between shelters that serve women who were subject to domestic abuse and other types of shelters that may serve other women in need, e.g.

homeless, addicts, etc. The main reason is that the locations of the shelters serving the victims of domestic violence should not be disclosed for security reasons as there is an imminent threat to their wellbeing by husbands and other family members (19. HDP; 12. HDP; 16.HDP). A woman from HDP was disturbed by the fact their counterparts in AK Party are not sensitive enough to the confidentiality policies that protect the women in shelters (19. HDP). HDP also introduced a clause against domestic violence, saying that if and when an employer of the municipality is physically abusive towards his wife, he only receives half of his wage (21. HDP).

Women from HDP underline the importance of having economic freedom in gaining access to the public sphere, and thus the prominence of having gainful employment. They explain in detail how the municipality and its executive units were used to create employment opportunities for women through positive discrimination (15. HDP; 16. HDP; 21. HDP). Council members say that when they took office, only one executive position was held by women. They created a new executive unit, “Department of Women’s Policies”, under which they formed three other units, on employment, domestic violence and education, all of which were run by women and employed women (15. HDP; 21. HDP). The metropolitan municipalities of Van and Mardin were also trying to implement similar units (21. HDP).

In the workings of the municipality, women from HDP explain a two-stage process for the women who attend the council meetings, particularly in the metropolitan municipality. In the first stage, women get together to decide on issues related to women. In the second stage, they attend the general council meetings. Women underline that all members respect party discipline, yet gender-sensitive policies have priority, and that when women decide, men have to accept without questioning (15. HDP; 16. HDP; 18. HDP; 19. HDP). Once again, women’s issues are defined to be women’s domain, which is separated from men’s domain, preventing any intervention.

The remaining gender-sensitive of policies implemented or supported by the female council members of the HDP can be summarized in the following list.

- The education unit was delivering training sessions on the human rights of women, organizing workshops and meetings (21. HDP).
- The employment unit prioritized women’s employment from a gender-equality perspective. In an effort to challenge the traditional gender roles, women from HDP recount that they motivated women to become drivers, environmental cleaners, market salespeople (16. HDP; 21. HDP).
- The domestic violence unit implemented policies to reach women who may be subject to domestic violence. A phone line was established (Alo Şiddet) for women to report domestic violence 24/7. They formed a mobile team that conducted field visits, particularly in villages where they delivered training programs that explain gender equality, domestic violence and what women can do if they are victims of domestic violence (21. HDP).
- They opened up two daycare centers in Kurdish (15. HDP; 16. HDP).
- In the farmer’s market, they allocated stalls for women sellers (21. HPD).
- They allocated one side of the Dicle river to women for cultivation (21. HDP).
- They tried to implement a purple-flag policy whereby the municipality would give a purple flag to provide an incentive for women’s employment (21. HDP).
- All events of the municipality had to reach a gender-balanced audience (17. HDP).

- In Adana, women with children who are unemployed receive social transfers through a card called “Halk Kart” (11. HDP).
- Like their counterparts from other parties in other provinces, they worked towards ensuring the safety and the adequate lighting of the parks and the roads, addressing the needs of women with children, e.g. nursing rooms and public bathrooms (21. HDP).
- Women from HDP train candidates on local politics that they deliver in different provinces. They aim to raise awareness on women’s issues, women’s role in local politics, to share experiences of women in local politics, etc. (21. HDP).
- Gender-sensitive budgeting is on the agenda. Some council members state that they were trying to introduce gender-sensitive budgeting (15. HDP). Other say that they were already practicing gender-sensitive budgeting (16. HDP).

Nationalist Action Party (MHP) and The Good Party (İYİ Party)

MHP respondents underline the difference that having women in the Council makes, changing the atmosphere of the meetings and criticize the lack of women in politics. (8. MHP, 27 MHP; 14 MHP).

Gender Responsive Policies

MHP Council members’ perception of gender responsive policy varies. One respondent believes it is creating jobs for women (8. MHP), while another knows about *gender responsive budgeting* and argues that each municipality should implement it (14. MHP). One MHP council member talks about the Women’s Life Center the Municipality opened, where there is a pool, sauna, and fitness for women (27. MHP). Another member argues that “If the Mayor does not want it there is no way of doing anything. I cannot ask for a women-friendly policy that will cost a lot of money to the Municipality” (8. MHP).

MHP members concur with the AK Party and CHP members that women voters’ demands are safe public spaces such as parks with security cameras, but they also posit that women demand as clean parks as “their tidy houses” (8. MHP).

Women make a difference

Female politicians are open about the extent to which they can be effective in local politics given their low numbers in municipal councils, yet they are also proud of their personal achievements in terms of gender responsive policies. They all underline the importance of being in politics so as to show other women that it is possible, whether it be cleaning up a park or granting access to a professional training or helping domestic violence survivors. They emphasize that they serve the female constituents in a different way than their male colleagues.

Surely, there are differences across political parties, and differences amongst individual women who have more gender awareness and who do not. Women from CHP and HDP, political parties to the left of the spectrum, have a more egalitarian gender perspective and what they understand from gender responsive policy is not only to serve women but also to have a more gender inclusive policy, as evidenced in CHP member’s point on LGBTI and HDP’s efforts to get women into the public sphere. Politicians from these political parties mention gender-responsive budgeting (GRB), which is the useful policy tool to better respond to women’s needs and to create an inclusive service provision. One MHP respondent also mentions GRB as well, but one suspects that it is rather an individual idea since the respondent is from Adana and has been to GRB trainings. Female politicians

from AK Party tend to continue talking about the differences between men and women when asked about their contributions to policy and praise women's natural ability to see the details and be more family-friendly. Asked about the specific contributions they also list social support they provide for female constituents, similar to CHP and HDP.

Discrimination

Female politicians face different types of discrimination, from being pushed to certain types of policy areas such as care work, to being subjected to maltreatment and exclusion, even being insulted. Interviewer(s) asked a range of questions related to different types of discrimination, from whether women think that their ideas are being reflected in the decision making processes within the party to whether women and men treated equally within the party, to the hardships they encountered at the entry level and how they financed their campaigns. Yet female politicians' accounts of discriminations were beyond these concerns. They were subjected to questions about their "honor," their credentials and ability to make decisions were questioned. Only one respondent out of 31 argued that there was no discrimination against women in her party and that women and men were treated equally (6. AK Party).

It is also necessary to note that when the project team was looking for answers to the question of whether women's participation to local politics matter or not, the data, not only the replies to the questions detailed below, but also the general understanding during the interviews drove the team to include discrimination as a separate and specific focus in the research.

Republican People's Party (CHP)

The traditional gender roles that shape the society affect local politics as well. Female council members discuss that the traditional gender roles create a barrier to entry. Council members say that these roles may be imposed upon them by her family, by male council members, or by the society in general. In other words, sometimes it is the family that objects, sometimes the council members underline these roles, thereby discouraging women, and sometimes it is the society that council members live in that impose these roles on women.

First of all, traditional gender roles imply that women are primarily responsible for care within the household. Female members state that family support is crucial in women's participation in politics, both practically and financially (26. CHP; 30. CHP). Council members pay for their own finances, and hence need to be allocated from the household budget. Furthermore, care responsibilities are also an issue as either they need to be reallocated between husband and wife (13. CHP) or they fall entirely on the woman, doubling her shift (11. CHP). Yet, they say that the families are not always supportive, that parents and spouses object to women running for office. One council member mentions that her husband actually does have the time to provide childcare when she needs to work after the school is out, yet, he never proposes (11. CHP). Another council member explains it in the following quote.

“Nobody asked my father (also in politics) ‘Who takes care of the children when you are doing politics?’ But they ask me ‘Where are you? (To her husband) ‘Haven’t you divorced her already?’ Who’s taking care of the children?’. Merely the moral pressure is enough for a female politician, you know.” (13. CHP).

The traditional division of labor at home implies that the husband is the breadwinner, and the wife is the homemaker. In such a household, women have a hard time entering politics since candidates need to pay a fee, and they need to finance politics. Since many women do not work, they do not have access to money to fund their political careers (1. CHP; 3. CHP; 4. CHP; 11. CHP).

The council members point out that their party, CHP, is not immune to the gender inequality that prevails. One member states that women are also more likely to prefer male politicians, thus men are more likely to be nominated:

“He said ‘no women’. My blood stopped running. Why not? ‘You don’t know this society’ he said, ‘they won’t elect women’” (30. CHP).

“If there are 5 candidates, people think one would be a woman, and it doesn’t go much further. (...) People look (at the lists), and they say ‘OK, there is one woman here’” (11. CHP).

This social pressure of being female manifests itself in the least likely forms as well. One council member remembers being warned about the pictures that are taken during field visits.

“They say ‘Please refrain from having your picture taken with a cigarette or in a place where they serve alcohol. You are a district council member. You are a female district council member’” (26. CHP).

Female members complain that their fate in politics lie in the hands of male counterparts in CHP. They believe that if there are more female members, other women will have more support and a more solid ground (13. CHP).

“A high-level party member asked me ‘What does your husband think of you being active in politics?’ I replied, ‘if you are here under the same title, my husband supports me the same way your wife does’.” (13. CHP).

Another layer of discrimination prevails when women do enter politics. Many female council members of CHP stated that women, when run for office, need to provide evidence that they are qualified, and that men never do (1. CHP; 2. CHP; 3. CHP; 4. CHP; 10. CHP). Female politicians need to answer questions regarding their education levels, their occupations, etc.

This line of reasoning also transfuses into the inter-gender relations as well. One female member pointed out that even when they have lower levels of education, experience, skills in general, male politicians are condescending to female politicians, (3. CHP).

“I asked one too many questions, (a male commission member) could not hold himself anymore. He asked me ‘You, are you an architect or an engineer?’” (10. CHP).

Female council members complain that the general perception of a woman as a weak individual who cannot argue, who cannot answer for herself, who cannot bargain is reflected in the way they get treated by male colleagues (1. CHP). They point out that men believe that they do not speak the same language (30. CHP). Standing up to these perceptions, some women say that they feel the need to revert to more masculine ways (1.

CHP; 3. CHP; 30. CHP). One member thinks she could contribute to local politics because her male colleagues ceased to see her as a woman (3. CHP). She shares her memory of the first times she saw fellow female politicians. “When I was elected for office, I asked the other women ‘Why are you all dressed up in jackets, like men?’. Then she goes on to say that the male members have gotten used to her as a woman, and now she feels she can flash her fishnet stockings (3. CHP).

Discrimination also happens in subtler dimensions. Council members of CHP underscore that politics “is like a men’s club, and socializing is more difficult if you are a woman” (2. CHP). Council members say that politics is also done after work hours, and thus excludes women, particularly women with care responsibilities (1. CHP; 3. CHP; 11. CHP; 26. CHP). They indicate that the same concern is raised by male members as well (1. CHP).

One female member complains that she needs to be extra careful in the way she collaborates with male counterparts as well, with the worry that she may be misunderstood. The worry that people will gossip comes up in various discussions (11. CHP; 30. CHP).

“When I talk to, have meetings with a male council member three days in a row, they misunderstand. Immediately, there is talk, gossip. When a male council member has three meetings, people say ‘He is definitely closing a deal’.” (11. CHP).

More generally, many members complain about the image of women as a “flower” (13. CHP). One member states that this image as something delicate, that needs to be protected, only comes about when men observe a conflict of interest. She recounts a memory where a group of council members and MOPs arrived in their hometown in the middle of the night where all male members disappeared without asking whether anybody needed a ride, and women got stuck at the airport waiting for cabs.

“(At midnight) nobody thinks of women’s identity as a ‘flower’. Somehow, when titles are being assigned, women (turn into) flowers and bugs” (13. CHP).

Council members in CHP emphasize that discrimination in the political sphere manifests itself in commission assignments as well. One council member provides a striking example of how commission assignments reflect the deeply engraved gender inequality in local politics in the following words.

“Everybody was trying to get into important commissions. When a lot of people asked, the district head said, ‘Try to solve it amongst yourselves, if you cannot, I’ll assign Ms. (...)’. I was used as a threat” (10. CHP).

Women say that male members can access the commissions that are perceived to be more important, such as the law commission or the zoning commission, relatively more easily. They think that female members, on the other hand, have to prove that they have the necessary qualifications, e.g. women have to be lawyers to join the legal commission, or they have to be architects or engineers to join the zoning commission. They underline that in local politics, men usually do not have to justify the reason why they are in a certain committee, but women do (1. CHP).

CHP council members state that the general perception is that women should be in women’s commissions, in family commissions, or in other commissions that are “of secondary importance” (3. CHP). Therefore, female council members who do not have an

occupation, are cornered in positions such as attending the social aid commission, distributing help, etc. (1. CHP).

“Women are asked to fill boxes to be distributed, to label them. Sell cakes, etc. Women do these things only. It’s like this everywhere. Why are *we* doing this? You sit down and do it. I will work in the field” (30. CHP).

One member discussed the lengths she needed to go to make herself heard. She states that her colleagues sometimes text her during meetings, asking her not to say anything. She explains that it does not stop her from voicing her concerns. She also recounts having asked male colleagues to voice her suggestions as she thought her idea was less likely to be accepted coming from her (30. CHP).

Justice and Development Party (AK Party)

Asked about whether they ever felt excluded from a position because of their gender, whether they encountered any difficulties because of their gender, AK Party politicians, like their CHP colleagues, underline the existence of barriers imposed upon them by traditional gender attributes and roles. One member says that “if you’ve entered political life as a woman, then you’ve taken all these risks” (6. AK Party). “Women are considered to be weak, insufficient,” says one respondent (5. AK Party). Female council members from AK Party say that in politics, one needs money and time, further explaining that women have neither. Women are responsible for providing care at home, and hence have no time, including for market work, implying that they do not have the financial means either (9. AK Party; 23. AK Party).

They also point out the high expectations from female politicians, yet three respondents argue that women need to be technically sufficient to enter or to be vocal in certain commissions (5. AK Party, Istanbul; 6. AK Party, Istanbul; 9. AK Party) while one of them criticizes this over-expectation and argues that women are discriminated against at the entry stage to politics since the requirements from women are high (31. AK Party).

Motherhood, family responsibilities, what the neighbors or the larger family would say against their efforts as well as the economic burden of being in politics are all concerns for female politicians (5. AK Party; 6. AK Party; 9. AK Party). Many of them recognize their own efforts as extraordinary and push themselves to be even stronger. “If she has a husband, does the husband allow it? If she is single, pressure from the society at large. If you can be in politics regardless of all of these, this should be appreciated, applauded. Women are doing extraordinary work when they enter politics in Turkey” (9. AK Party).

Women from AK Party also confirm that political sphere is a male-dominated environment, from the simple fact that male politicians can go out at night (5. AK Party; 9. AK Party; 23. AK Party) to how men have to be polite around female politicians (5. AK Party, Istanbul). This environment is not conducive to women’s participation to politics, and men get tense when women enter, and they change the male-dominant environment in which male politicians are used to operating (5. AK Party, Istanbul). Women from AK Party underline that this is one of the reasons women are not welcome in politics. They state that their existence in political environments cause male politicians to pull themselves together (5. AK Party, Istanbul; 7. AK Party; 9. AK Party; 23. AK Party).

On the other hand, they believe they have to push harder. “Women cannot quit, we should work. We will take our place in politics if we are strong.” (6. AK Party; 29. AK Party) “Women force themselves into politics. We say ‘we are here’ and push the doors” (9. AK Party). This need to be super-women and work extremely hard is condoned as being strong, thereby putting an extra-burden on women. Amongst the AK Party respondents, this was acknowledged by only one respondent, from Adana, which is a city with a history of women’s movement.

Asked about whether they had any difficulty entering politics, AK Party respondents, except for one, comfortably respond that they did not have any difficulties at all. Their stories, entering into politics thanks to suggestions from other party members, without any experience or knowledge of politics before (5. AK Party, 6. AK Party, 31 AK Party), and climbing the ladders within the party thanks to their own detail-oriented, compassionate hard work are very similar. Asked about whether she had any difficulty in entering politics, one respondent admits, “I did not really understand what I was getting into when I entered politics. I was not very experienced. I learned later on” (24. AK Party). Another one argues that she did not have any difficulties in entering politics, explaining: “I did not. Why? My husband is also retired. I went everywhere with him. Maybe if I went alone, I would have had difficulties. Since my husband was with me and supported me, I did not.” (22. AK Party) Another Council Member says that it was her husband who wanted her to be in politics and pushed her (28. AK Party). Yet, some others complain that there is fierce competition to “be on the list”, i.e. to be nominated, implying that the quota makes this competition worse as the number of positions are limited (9 AK Party; 23. AK Party).

Politics has also become a space for self-realization for the AK Party women. Asked about whether her ideas/ projects were taken into consideration in decision making, she carefully responds: “If we wanted to do a project, we would come together as women and talk. We thought about what could be done, whether or not it would have been accepted or not. We talked. There were no limits to that. Our ideas were respected.” (22. AK Party)

Yet, years of experience in politics also make women realize the discrimination they face, and how especially in places like Zoning Commissions, where business is lucrative, women do not have any place.

“They did not want us in the Zoning Commission. I do not know why. (...) Maybe it is because (they think) we would not understand. It is a tough area.” (22. AK Party)

“I worked as the head of the zoning commission. Of course, it was at the very beginning of my career, I was very inexperienced, I was not really involved. I followed the Mayor’s orders. (...) Women are not taken into consideration in zoning particularly or any other major Commissions, maybe our lawyer colleagues or friends with technical knowledge can talk more.” (9. AK Party).

There are also women who admit that they prefer to work in Commissions that are not linked to business interests.

“Not having to worry about worry, not having to deal with auctions is good. As you know, these are issues that cause headaches, require a lot of thinking, cause people to talk a lot. I

am content with the fact that (in what I do), the budget is small, but we do important things” (24. AK Party).

Another respondent argues that the women who are at the higher positions within the Party are being pushed aside. Therefore, it is better to be in the Women’s Branch (22. AK Party).

One female council member from AK Party firmly argues that she would have preferred to work on “politics in general” rather than on projects that aim women only (5. AK Party, Istanbul).

Women also recount more direct acts of discrimination. One respondent tells how much she suffered from how men tried to cut off her efforts for women when her name was mentioned within the party “too much” (28. AK Party). Another posits, “Men know when we will quit, they know how to hit and hurt us in politics. This is very clear” (24. AK Party). Another Council Member in Ankara recites a recent event when she went to an opening and the security guards did not believe she was a politician, and asked for her ID at the entrance (24. AK Party). “If I had been a man in a tie coming out of that car, that door would have been opened”, she says (24. AK Party).

AK Party’s female politicians underline their gratitude for their leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, to have opened the doors for them to become politicians and place them on lists. They insist that it is Erdoğan’s orders that made their male colleagues appoint women in positions (6. AK Party; 23. AK Party; 24. AK Party; 25. AK Party; 31. AK Party). One respondent adds, “Our male colleagues look at the commissions and say ‘since the President said so, we have to put some women here’” (9. AK Party).

People’s Democratic Party (HDP)

According to women from HDP, traditional gender roles obstruct women’s way into politics through two different channels (1) Women from HDP confirm that the general perception of a woman entails provision of care, for the children, for her husband, for her family, for other male members of the extended family. The responsibility of care implies that women cannot leave their homes, cannot enter the public space, and this constitutes an insurmountable barrier to entry to politics (17. HDP; 18. HDP) A council member from HDP points out that women have been pushed out of all areas in life, and barriers are built by families, spouses, in-laws, and the like, therefore need to be supported if and when a woman surmounts these barriers and enters politics (11. HDP). (2) Politics is considered to be the men’s domain. Women from HDP underline that the male-dominance in the political sphere deters women from participating in politics (16. HDP). Furthermore, families also object when women try to enter male-dominated areas. As in CHP, the HDP members talk about how families respond to women’s taking part in politics. One HDP member from Adana says that all male members had left politics over the years, but she remained. They reacted to her still being in politics. She also mentioned that her family also had to answer questions as to why she remained in politics (11. HDP). Another member says that it would not have been possible for her to enter politics had her dad been alive. She mentioned that her mother also complains from time to time (16. HDP, Diyarbakır).

In a setting they repeatedly define as “feudal”, equal representation is an important policy tool to pull women into politics. Women from HDP imply that this concept had been abruptly introduced. One woman recounts this as “Everybody was shocked, what is this co-governorship? The perception was awful (...) Even those who knew the party said ‘Where did this come from? How will a woman govern a city?’” (18. HDP). In such a setting, they underline that they had to struggle hard for a long period of time to achieve the rule of equal representation. As the women put it, they had to fight with both “the outside” and “the inside” (16. HDP; 18. HDP). Women in HDP state that men did not welcome “co-mayorship”, citing that the female co-mayor was called “Yenge Başkan”¹⁹, it was imposed upon them by the higher ranks, and they had to accept it (15. HDP). Council members underline that some women also reproduce the traditional gender roles, and the fact that the individual is a female does not necessarily imply that they will stand up against the male-dominant society (11. HDP; 16. HDP).

Women from HDP also agree that they have yet to achieve equal representation in municipal councils, and that they struggle continues (11. HDP; 15. HDP; 16. HDP). However, they immediately add that equal representation is an achievement that cannot be taken back (21. HDP). Following are examples of the struggle within the party.

A bus driver refused to wait for a woman with a stroller to board the bus. The municipal council member had visual proof of the event, and asked for the municipality to punish this behavior. She says that against all her efforts, the bus driver got a small punishment as the transportation unit protected him (21. HDP).

Women in Diyarbakır talked about previous struggles in opening a childcare center as the executive units were vehemently against it, saying that it was against the law. During the previous governance period, the male co-mayor (the more famous of the co-mayors) could not succeed in opening one, the female mayor fought harder, and had it built (17. HDP; 20. HDP).

Women from HDP say that when the allocated public space for a marketplace reserved for female sellers only, the executive units of the municipality immediately assigned a conjoint spot for men (21. HDP).

A woman who held an administrative position in the municipality explains in detail the discrimination that abounded when the female co-mayor of Diyarbakır, decided that women would drive city busses. Upon resistance from the men who argued that women would not be able to drive and that they would get into accidents, the co-mayor had the accident reports of the male drivers pulled up to support the case (17. HDP).

The HDP introduced a clause against domestic violence, saying that if and when an employer of the municipality is physically abusive towards his wife, he only receives half of his wage. Yet, women from HDP state that there was strong resistance not to put it in practice. They think that the men are reluctant to exercise this clause, thinking that it may be binding for them in the future as well (21. HDP).

Women from HDP say that women in politics have to work harder than men (17. HDP; 19. HDP). One member says that she had to prepare harder for meetings, “in case the men

¹⁹ The wife of a male blood relative is called “yenge” in Turkish.

oppose everything [that she may say]”. Another member also mentions that men always say ‘no’ (15. HDP).

“Usually women get stuck when questions start with ‘you wouldn’t know’” (17. HDP).

One female council member recounts that when men do not approve of a policy, they undermine the issue by mocking (19. HDP). Another woman states that she refrains from voicing her opinion in a technical commission, saying that “even if you may have an idea, they may think it ridiculous” (15. HDP).

Another member recounts that they had to fight hard to have a woman employed in the new firm of the municipality, and much of the resistance came from the male co-mayor (15. HDP).

Female council members of HDP say that when the party is going on a field visit to a rural area, they get shown to a separate room by the hosts and by the male members of the party (19. HDP).

Even though women from HDP insist that the commissions adhere to the fifty-fifty rule as much as possible (15. HDP; 16. HDP; 18. HDP), it is implied that they are not as active in the more technical commissions (15. HDP). The general perception is that women are usually involved in social and cultural areas, and men in technical and scientific areas (15. HDP; 19. HDP). Many of the women from HDP state that they served in the “women men equality commissions” and in the women’s issues research commissions (19. HDP; 20. HDP; 21. HDP) even though they rotated every year. The latter commission is comprised of female members only. They also confirm that zoning commissions are usually dominated by male members (19. HDP). One council member explains this in her own words (19. HDP):

“There is a classical perception of women, things that are coded to women. We talked about the zoning commission, about science. ‘Female friends cannot do this, they cannot overcome, they cannot make themselves heard’”.

Female council members of HDP believe that when women do not have the technical knowledge, and men do, women become silent. This silence is aggravated as women are always asked about their qualifications, and the men are not (15. HDP; 16. HDP). Furthermore, women believe that even when men do not have the knowledge, they have the self-confidence that comes with male entitlement (15. HDP).

When asked about the gender discrimination in politics, regardless of party affiliation, women from HDP think that the political sphere is male dominant everywhere, and that they have managed to make a dent by the equal representation principal. They claim that most female politicians in other parties act like men (15. HDP; 16. HDP; 19. HDP; 20. HDP). Female council members from HDP believe that the women’s position has deteriorated in the society, parallel to the ruling party’s approach to gender issues (15. HDP). Women from HDP state that even within the CHP, women have accepted inferior positions, accepted that there are no female candidates for mayor (15. HDP).

Unanimously, they provide examples of the “kayyums” who were appointed by the AK Party, and more specifically, how the kayyums’ first policies in action were to reverse the gender sensitive policies of the HDP municipalities (15. HDP, 18. HDP, 19. HDP; 20. HDP). Examples of such policies are provided in the following list.

- They say that the women’s branches were closed the next day. They say that some women’s centers were left open, but the content of the training sessions were changed from gender equality to Kuran (17. HDP; 21. HDP).
- One member states that men were assigned to lead the women’s units, which were then transformed into cultural, social, family unites, e.g. the name of the “Domestic Violence Unit” was changed to “Women and Family Services” (20. HDP).
- One member of HDP explains that the new role models of the “kayyum” paints a completely different picture of women, one that is called “hanımefendi”, who talks about women’s issues from a “justice and fairness” (adalet ve hakkaniyet) perspective (21. HDP).
- “They assigned a woman from the muftiate (müftülük) to lead women’s policies.” (21. HDP).
- The childcare centers in Kurdish started offering Kuran courses for children. The teachers who were fluent in Kurdish were fired. The rest of the training programs were changed to those reproducing the traditional gender roles, e.g. cooking and sewing (17, HDP; 21. HDP).

Nationalist Action Party (MHP) and The Good Party (İYİ Party)

One of the most striking anecdotes of the interviews comes from an architect who is chosen to take place in the zoning commission with the flip of a coin. Having been in the council for six years and being assigned to commissions “that are not very active such as the equal opportunities commission”, she demanded to be in the zoning commission since she is an architect. She recounts how she asked the male member who has been in the commission before and wanted his assignment to be renewed, and when he did not accept, there needed to be decision and it was done by the flip of a coin (8. MHP, Adana). Another woman member, a civil engineer, also tells her story of not being elected to the zoning commission, arguing that “unemployed men, and those men who have only elementary school degrees were included. They did not want to include any women to the Commission” (14. MHP, Adana).

Another type of discrimination they encounter is not being included in the electoral lists or being put on ranks that are least likely to be elected. “Now we are on the electoral period. They try to put a male candidate before me to the first rank. They try to block us,” says one respondent (14. MHP). She also adds that it is not hard to find female mayoral candidates for any party. Women apply but they are not given opportunity (14. MHP).

A harsher face of discrimination, even violence, shows itself when male politicians accuse women of “not being honorable”.

“They try to oust women by defaming them over honor. Those who do it, want to gather political success over this issue. On the other hand, they (male politicians) are committing adultery all the time, they have two or three wives. Even these men oust women! They try to hobble women with this issue because the women are also in the race. They want to oppress women in this way” (14. MHP).

Discrimination Against Women in Politics

All 31 respondents but one admits that there is discrimination against women in their political parties. They explain in detail the extent of the challenge that being a woman in a male political structure presents. Women from all political parties recount how they are insulted by their male colleagues by saying that “they would not know,” they are “sensitive,” “weak” and implying that most probably they are not even a politician. Women from CHP, MHP and AK Party all recount stories of how they were not let into important and lucrative Commissions even though their credentials exceeded those of their male colleagues, or how women’s names were scratched first from party lists.

Surely, the way that women respond to discrimination varies. Some, like the HDP members have found ways to create solidarity amongst themselves, partly thanks to their internal party structure as well, some, like AK Party members, prefer to focus on care work and do not perceive discrimination as it is or refrain from labeling it as such.

Can women work together?

In order to understand whether female politicians from different political parties see cooperation amongst women intraparty and across parties possible, the interviews included questions on collaboration. Respondents replied to questions such as whether female politicians from different political parties have different priorities, whether they worked with female politicians from other political parties within the municipal council. Although they were asked about concrete examples, no satisfactory reply was recorded.

Republican People’s Party (CHP)

The CHP female provincial council members state that they can act together to change politics. In one case, they actually changed the decision of the CHP group, where they opposed the opening of a garage under a school building, and convinced the rest of the CHP group to vote against it (1. CHP). They also say that they can collaborate to push for policies to increase women’s welfare. For example, they passed a regulation that allows women to get off the city busses wherever they want after 10 pm. (1. CHP).

In a similar vein, the female council members underline that the support of higher ranked politicians matter. That is, they state that having the mayor’s support, or having a female deputy mayor is extremely helpful and sometimes crucial, particularly when the gender-responsive policies are concerned (4. CHP; 11. CHP).

That being said, women from CHP in local councils are not content with the support, or lack thereof, that they are getting from the party. CHP council members complain that there are not enough women in councils. They also state that other parties including AK Party, criticize the low representation of women in CHP as well (11. CHP). At the time the interviews were conducted, CHP was announcing the candidate lists for the local elections that will take place on March 31st. The number of female candidates was disappointingly low according to the women interviewed. Furthermore, Kılıçdaroğlu’s comments about not being able to find a sufficient number of women to nominate did not resonate well within the female council members (2. CHP; 11. CHP, 13. CHP). One member discusses that there is research that shows that some areas in her province are

more inclined to accepting female leadership. She says that the party should have taken this into account and used this opportunity to nominate female majors from these districts (13. CHP).

Even though the female council members from CHP say that they can act together to change policy, at least within the party, they still believe that they cannot achieve as much as they aspire to. A female council member underlines that expectations matter. Female politicians who join more conservative parties, do not have any expectations. Female politicians join CHP with expectations from a left-wing party, in terms of gender equality. They find it contradictory that women are sidelined, that their expectations are not fulfilled (13. CHP).

Female council members from CHP also talk about cooperating with other parties.²⁰ Women from CHP believe that provision of institutional care, ensuring quality education for children, preventing child abuse and violence against women (including early marriage) may be potential areas for collaboration across parties (2. CHP). As one member puts it: “If women in local politics can overcome escalation and focus on cooperation, they can have considerable power” (2. CHP).

Female council members from CHP point out that they may disagree with their counterparts from other parties on national issues, but their views are better aligned in local issues (11. CHP). Nevertheless, even though they say that they collaborate with women members of other parties, they also acknowledge that cooperating with women from AK Party is more difficult. They can but sometimes have difficulties in coming to an agreement with the AK Party counterparts (13. CHP). According to one council member, it is difficult for women from different parties to stand in solidarity as the AK Party is centrally governed, and thus female council members from AK Party are bound by the discourse of the central governing body. Furthermore, women in councils believe that the current polarization of politics also hinders cooperation among female council members from different parties (2. CHP). One striking example is that of a hairdresser, or lack thereof in the metropolitan municipality. The CHP female council members approached their AK Party counterparts to draft a questionnaire as to why a women’s hairdresser does not exist within the municipality whereas a men’s barbershop does. The AK Party female members said that they had to ask for permission from the head of the group, who then rejected to give permission, and the women from AK Party backed down (3. CHP).

Women from CHP find the lack of cooperation between women, across CHP and AK Party, disheartening. They believe that female council members from AK Party are indeed opposed to policies that are against gender equality, such as closing down women’s shelters, but they cannot openly oppose their fellow male councilors (1. CHP; 3. CHP; 10. CHP). They point out that the AK Party members share their reluctance in private conversations, but never openly (1. CHP). Some members suggest that cooperation may be easier within the opposition party compared to the ruling party as personal ambitions are not as pronounced (1. CHP; 3. CHP).

Female council members from CHP believe that AK Party stands on women’s shoulders, yet, some also believe that conservative politics are against women’s rights in principle

²⁰ Note that in many provinces, there are effectively two parties that are represented in the councils, namely, CHP and AK Party.

(13. CHP). They say that as AK Party becomes more gender-unequal, assigning secondary roles to women in general, women in AK Party turn silent (1. CHP). One member mentions that in her district female council members from AK Party are not members of the zoning committee even though there are architects and engineers among them, implying that gender inequality cuts deep and maybe even deeper into AK Party as well (3. CHP).

Justice and Development Party (AK Party)

Women in AK Party have divergent views on whether or not women can work together within the party, depending on their own personal experiences. Some seem to have suffered from intra-party competition, arguing that women cannot work together, they pull each other to the bottom (9. AK Party), especially when there is fierce competition due to the quota (5. AK Party). Others say that they work together with women from their own party and that they suggest other women to various positions (24. AK Party; 31. AK Party). “Even though there is competition, they did not have any difficulties since their service to the party was impeccable” (7. AK Party).

Asked about whether they work with women from different political parties, the replies vary the same way, relations, whether and how women cooperate across different party affiliations rest very much on their own individual characteristics. A council member in Beykoz says they work with the only other female member from CHP, and the way they work together is basically inviting her to “openings” and she comes (6. AK Party). Another politician recalls that they did work with women from other political parties, on issues such as narcotics and drug problems (24. AK Party) and another one on opening up a post office in the neighborhood (25. AK Party). Some respondents argue that women from different political parties have different priorities, and “AK Party’s priority is service” (6. AK Party; 22. AK Party)

Respondents also reflect some deep seated anxieties. The secular-conservative divide cuts deep in Ankara, one respondent talks about how CHP voters shut the doors to their faces since they wear headscarves (22. AK Party). Another respondent recalls an incident when she went into the municipal council and visited the room of a CHP member, and CHP members had a quarrel amongst each other as one of them did not want to welcome her and the other did (22. AK Party). In terms of difficulties encountered in cooperation, one council member highlights the traditional background of the AK Party, states that it is difficult to work with women from other parties on issues such as LGBT rights and alcohol use (5. AK Party).

The equal opportunity commissions come to the fore as spaces in which women can cooperate (9. AK Party). Moreover, projects, such as those started by the Union of Municipalities, help women work together across party lines (25. AK Party).

People’s Democratic Party (HDP)

Women from HDP think that solidarity is crucial among women to gain access to power in politics, adding that women in other parties are lacking this perspective, and the power solidarity brings. In their opinion, women from other parties are aware that solidarity is

the way to achieving power, yet, when they stand alone, personal ambitions prevent them from organizing (15. HDP; 20. HDP).

Women from HDP believe that women from different parties can collaborate, particularly on issues pertaining to women (21. HDP). Implying that women from other parties are deprived of the solidarity that they enjoy, women from HDP state that women from other parties need to bargain and negotiate with men (20. HDP).

Nationalist Action Party (MHP) and The Good Party (İYİ Party)

MHP members complain from the lack of women in the party and that cooperation within the party is hard. Although they realize that it is necessary to support each other early on and everywhere, since there are very few women within the party, there is no one to support (8. MHP). Further, intra-party discipline is important, says one respondent, “I voice my opinions carefully. If we do not, you are the one who did not submit, and you are shoved aside” (8. MHP).

As far as collaborating across political parties, one respondent says that they voted with CHP on opening up a Women’s Life Center (27. MHP). She adds, women can actually work together especially in the municipalities, to focus on their cities, districts and women’s issues (27. MHP).

Cooperation amongst women

Female politicians are careful about talking about solidarity across party lines although their replies to intra-party solidarity amongst women are more optimistic, except from the MHP members. In terms of intraparty cooperation, CHP women argue that they do work together, yet they can improve and having a woman leader, for instance a mayor or a deputy mayor would help. AK Party women, on the other hand, also argue that they support each other within the party, yet their motivation to work with other women in the party is partly due to party discipline as well. HDP members praise the importance of solidarity as evidenced in their previous replies as well, and MHP women suffer from the very low number of women, competing for very few positions, thereby not leaving enough room for cooperation.

AK Party and CHP politicians reflect the polarized nature of politics within the country. The secular versus conservative divide runs deep, and neither AK Party nor CHP members find it possible to work together. While the CHP council members find the conservative policies of the AK Party disheartening, AK Party members argue that it is not possible to concur with LGBTI friendly policies or alcohol deregulation.

The specific examples, on the other hand, demonstrate how it is possible to find some commonalities locally. For instance, there is one specific example of how women from AK Party and CHP voted against drug abuse and another when MHP and CHP voted for a women’s life center. Therefore, there exist possibilities to cooperate if trust relations are restored within the Municipal Councils.

Policy recommendations

After all the questions about their role in politics, their contributions as women to local politics and the discriminations they face, the interviewer(s) asked the respondents for policy advice as well. Questions included whether they think there are enough women in politics, what can be done to improve the situation. There were also more specific questions as to what can be done in party lists, what they thought of quotas or temporary special measures, whether they were needed, and finally whether there were specific types of training that were needed.

Republican People's Party (CHP)

All women from CHP underlined the importance of quotas in establishing women's representation in local politics. They believe that it would be more difficult for women to enter local politics in its absence (1. CHP; 2. CHP; 3. CHP). Some members say that even with the quotas, women and youth sometimes do not want to run for office, not believing that they would be nominated, that they would get elected (3. CHP; 4. CHP).

Nevertheless, they argue that quotas are necessary, yet not sufficient for equal representation, as female candidates get pushed lower in candidate lists as men may end up prioritizing their own political careers over that of women (3. CHP). Many women mention the zipper system to achieve equal representation (3. CHP; 4. CHP; 13. CHP).

Female council members from CHP emphasize the importance of equal representation as they state that it is not possible to represent a society if you cannot represent half of it well

(13. CHP). They say that the sheer number of women in councils matter as the women may have the will, but not the numbers to change policy (3. CHP; 13. CHP). They also believe that when women from different parties act together, they would be able to achieve more (3. CHP).

Women from CHP are also aware of the fact that having more women in local politics does not necessarily translate to more gender-equal policies as women, themselves, may also reproduce the traditional gender roles that constrain them (2. CHP).

Another policy recommendation by women in CHP is to waive the fee that party members need to pay to become candidates (4. CHP; 10. CHP; 13. CHP). Members state that when the CHP waived the fee for women, the number of women who applied increased dramatically (10. CHP).

Female council members believe that the headquarters should increase its support for and enact further measures for achieving gender equality. They complain that most of the gender-equality policies are constrained to counting numbers (10. CHP). They say that to raise awareness, the headquarters of the party could reward municipalities that work towards more gender-equal policies (1. CHP).

Training is mentioned as an important policy component. Council members request more training as to what their roles are, what they can do, and what the regulations are. The zoning regulations are particularly deemed important (11. CHP; 13. CHP). One member states that all party members should receive training on gender equality (11. CHP).

Women also underline the importance of role models. They state that sharing examples of how women lift each other up would breed a more women-friendly environment (1. CHP). They say that the achievements of female politician should be publicized to provide the role models women need in politics (11. CHP). Female mukhtars and female members of the parliament are named as examples of women in leadership positions (13. CHP).

Justice and Development Party (AK Party)

AK Party women did not have specific suggestions as to how to increase women's participation to politics, although they all agree that more women should be in politics. Since the Chairman of AK Party is strongly against quotas, AK Party members do not talk about quotas, or any other type of temporary special measures. Yet they all praise Erdoğan's specific policy of increasing women's representation in the party. Women agree that Erdoğan applied a verbal/implicit quota when he wanted every third member of the Municipality Council Nominee lists to be a woman, and number of women increased (22. AK Party) Another respondent, when she was also in the room when this reply was given says, "let's not call that a quota" (23. AK Party). Another respondent is also supportive of quotas, arguing that "we are living in a patriarchal society, the conditions are unjust for women, therefore there should be quotas in this period (31. AK Party). Another respondent who's been in politics since 2009 also says that Erdoğan introduced quotas, and that helped women in the party a lot, but she does not support a 50 percent quota (parity), arguing that Turkey as a country is not ready (5. AK Party).

AK Party women, when they are opposing quotas, they do bring the merit argument, criticizing that women should be in politics if they gained that position, not only because of their gender (28. AK Party, 31. AK Party).

Women also underline the resistance of their male colleagues to having more women in decision-making mechanisms, yet they do not provide any suggestions or solutions as to how this discrimination can end. They take it upon themselves to be strong and resilient (23. AK Party; 28. AK Party) instead of introducing trainings for men, for example. One respondent argues that it is discriminatory to give gender trainings since it is not "in line with our culture" (24. AK Party).

In order to ease women's nomination to municipal council membership, AK Party introduced the policy that women pay 50 percent less than male nominees. Yet, when asked about what types of precautions political parties can take to improve women's participation to politics, the respondents mentioned this policy only vaguely, if at all. Furthermore, those who did focused more on the need to be "strong", where strength also entails financial strength.

People's Democratic Party (HDP)

Highlighting the importance of solidarity in achieving gender equality in politics, one member from HDP states that women need to be organized, to act with the organization, and to use this organization as a pressure point (11. HDP; 20. HDP).

Women from HDP state that subsidizing the fee that candidates need to pay to run for office would go a long way (15. HDP; 16 HDP).

One woman from HDP emphasizes the significance of knowledge, and states that knowing the legal framework and the regulations help women in their struggle in politics (17. HDP).

HDP had quotas prior to 2008. However, the party thought that quotas were not sufficient, and that co-governors (eşbaşkan) were necessary to represent both halves of the population (11. HDP; 18. HDP; 19. HDP). In the 2019 election, they would like to implement the zipper system (11, HDP; 18. HDP; 19. HDP).

Highlighting the strength of traditional gender roles, women from HDP focus on policies that pull women into the public sphere when asked about how women's political representation can be increased. They state that access to gainful employment and thus to economic independence is key in empowerment (15. HDP; 18. HDP).

Some districts may be more likely to vote for women, either because the district is relatively more open to voting for a woman, or because a particular female politician was considered to be more successful than her male competitor. Then, her practices constitute an example for all. These areas present opportunities for women to run for office (19. HDP).

Nationalist Action Party (MHP) and The Good Party (İYİ Party)

Council members from MHP admit that there needs to be a change in the political party and special measures for women are necessary. One respondent states that zipper system is needed, since the quota system does not work to women's advantage when women candidates are put into the lists in ranks that cannot be elected (14. MHP).

They all underline that the few number of women in the party makes other women more hesitant about joining the party. "If they let women to prove themselves, then the number of women will increase in politics. Besides, there should be changes in the party constitution to alter the perspective on women" (14. MHP). One respondent argues that when the male politicians bring their wives to the functions and work with them, it helps other women to get involved (27. MHP). This proposition, however, risks to limit women in supplementary roles, as helpers to their husbands rather than being decision-makers themselves.

Policies and Trainings

All female politicians are aware of the need for some type of special measures to get more women to participate in politics, be it quota and/or waiving the fees for female candidates. CHP, HDP and MHP openly defend quotas and the more efficient zipper system. AK Party members who have been in politics longer also point out to the necessity of a mechanism at the entry level to get women in politics.

Women council members suggest specific trainings for female politicians, especially on regulations, and the local political system. Although CHP and HDP members support gender awareness trainings, some AK Party members are against them since AK Party does not consider gender as a useful classification, since it includes LGBTI as well.

In addition to these policy recommendations gleaned from the interviews, three proposals for trainings come to mind.

1. Trainings on conflict resolution and communication skills can be introduced to help women improve their ability to convince their female and male colleagues and improve intra-party relations. Also, trainings on effective use of body language and public speaking are stated by respondents.
2. Trainings on technical issues such as how local politics work, what municipal council members do, the commissions' jurisdiction, particularly that of the zoning condition as well as gender responsive budgeting, can bring together women from different political parties, and create a space for them to improve relations.
3. Since there are clear differences across party lines, trainings can be organized for each political party. Although the content would still be the same, instead of having women from different political parties together talking about women's political participation or gender issues, training sessions could be held separately. These training programs would then require meetings across political parties as a second step.

CONCLUSION

Research on women's political participation reveals that women are more motivated than men to create change in the society when entering politics, they are more concerned about public policy and have stronger preferences for social services and gender responsive policies. The findings of this report verify that women in local politics in Turkey share the same characteristics. All women across different parties agreed that their motivation for being in politics is different than men. They are more concerned about providing better services to the public and mostly, a better future for children.

The research team interviewed 31 women from 4 political parties in 6 different cities right before the 2019 local elections in Turkey.²¹ The initial question was to see whether in municipal councils where there were more women than average, local female politicians make a difference and how they explain this difference. Do they manage to implement gender-sensitive policies, do they work well with other women, are there any possibilities of cooperation across political parties? The structured focused interviews led us not only to find answers to these questions, but also revealed the vast amount of discrimination against women in local politics. While this finding was somewhat expected in a patriarchal society like Turkey, it was interesting to see how women from different political parties voiced this discrimination, what they understood from it, and how they dealt with it.

The common points for all female politicians can be summarized as follows:

1. Women from different parties stated that the motivation for being in politics is different between men and women. In their view, while men enter politics for money, rent-seeking purposes and power, women are there because they are eager to provide better services to the public, and a better future for children.
2. All women underlined that they are more competent compared to male politicians, in entering the homes of the constituents and communicating with them.

²¹ Only 2 interviews in Bursa were completed after the elections.

3. The presence of female politicians alters the patriarchal, male-dominant environment in local councils.
4. Women from different parties diverge in terms of defining gender-responsive policies. As expected, policies concerning women are shaped around the party's ideology and political agenda. However, women from different political parties all state that catering to the female electorate's preferences and needs are their certain priority.
5. Female district council members emphasize that women are the primary beneficiaries of public spaces, parks etc. Thus, these spaces should be designed considering women's needs. Majority of respondents draw attention to the security issues within the parks and how security is prioritized within their policy agenda.
6. Women underline the importance of being in politics so as to show other women that it is possible, although they do have doubts about who can be the best role model.
7. All respondents but one admits that there is discrimination against women in their political parties. Women from all political parties recount how they are sidelined, and even insulted by their male colleagues at various points in their career.
8. All respondents mention the overarching hierarchy in the party and how it is important to obey the group decisions.
9. Most women except for MHP respondents believe that if there are more women there might be ways of cooperation.

While drawing these conclusions are especially helpful in terms of designing trainings, and finding ways to reach different women from different political parties, it should also be noted that differences on individual level affects these women and their policies dramatically, especially since they are so few and alone in their political parties.

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