

## IMPACT OF NATIONWIDE ELECTORAL THRESHOLDS ON PARTY SYSTEM FRAGMENTATION AND DISPROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION IN GREECE AND TURKEY

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### ABSTRACT

Nationwide electoral thresholds (NETs) are known to secure a parliamentary majority for the largest party, reduce party system fragmentation, and prevent extreme, minor, or non-core group parties from entering parliament. By comparing Greece and Turkey, which have applied NETs since 1993 and 1983 respectively, this article investigates why some of these aims have not been achieved. Using time-series data since 1950, we show that neither country needed to introduce NETs to establish single-party governments. Rather, they were implemented primarily to prevent non-core groups from entering parliament as a party. This caused disproportional legislative representation, especially in Turkey. Although Turkey's NET initially reduced the raw number of parties contesting elections, this effect weakened in the long run and, in contrast to the literature, increased party system fragmentation. Finally, extreme parties have benefitted from Greece's fragmented party system since 2012 whereas electoral engineering in Turkey has failed to prevent non-core groups from passing the electoral threshold.

**Keywords:** Party System, Nationwide Electoral Thresholds, Greek Politics, Turkish Politics, Disproportional Representation.

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## YUNANİSTAN VE TÜRKİYE'DEKİ SEÇİM BARAJLARININ PARTİ SİSTEMİ PARÇALANMASI VE ORANTISIZ TEMSİLİYETE ETKİSİ

### ÖZ

Seçimlerde galip gelen parti için parlamento çoğunluğunu sağladığı bilinen genel seçim barajları (GSB); parti sistemi parçalanmasını azaltmak; aşırı, küçük veya çoğunluk/çekirdekte olmayan grupların partilerinin parlamentoya girmesini önlemek amacıyla uygulanır. Bu makale, sırasıyla 1993 ve 1983'ten beri GSB uygulayan Yunanistan ve Türkiye'nin karşılaştırmalı bir incelemesini vererek, bu amaçlardan bazılarının neden başarılı bir şekilde gerçekleştirilemediğini açıklama amacındadır. 1950'den bu yana iki ülkedeki seçimleri kapsayan zaman serisi data-setimiz, her iki ülke için de GSB'lerin uygulanmasının tek parti hükümetleri kurmak için bir gereklilik olmadığını, ancak esas olarak bazı grupların parlamentoya parti olarak girmesini önlemek için uygulandığını ve özellikle orantısız temsile neden olduğunu ampirik olarak sunmaktadır. Türkiye'de GSB uygulaması seçimlere katılan partilerin sayısını azalmıştır; ancak bu etki uzun vadede ortadan kalkma eğilimindedir ve literatürün tersine parti sistemlerini istikrara kavuşturmamıştır. Son olarak, Yunanistan'da 2012'den beri aşırı partiler, parçalı parti sisteminden yararlanırken, Türkiye'de seçim mühendisliği çekirdek olmayan grupların seçim barajını aşmasını engellemektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Parti Sistemi, Genel Seçim Barajı, Yunanistan Siyaseti, Türkiye Siyaseti, Orantısız Temsilîyet.

### Introduction

Electoral reforms are believed to have strong effects on party system fragmentation and consequently on political stability. In his study of the significance of political parties for political systems, Peter Mair suggests, "To trace the source of problems of the legitimacy and stability of democratic regimes [one may look] back to the character of their party systems".<sup>1</sup> He concludes that the open structures of proportional representation (PR) electoral systems and fragmented party systems threaten democracies by making politics unpredictable. Since their transitions to multi-party democracy in the 19th century and 1950 respectively, Greece and Turkey, two

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Mair, "Comparing Party Systems", *Comparing Democracies 2: New Challenges in the Study of Elections and Voting*, (eds.) Lawrence LeDuc, Richard G. Niemi and Pippa Norris, Sage Publication, London 2002, p. 88.

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Southeast European countries, have mostly held regular democratic elections. However, both experienced political crises like military coups and social upheavals while economic crises undermined their political stability.<sup>2</sup> During the 1950s, both countries had pluralist electoral systems that, contrary to Mair's predictions, allowed unjust electoral disproportionality. This encouraged semi-democracies (or even authoritarian policies) while provoking significant political unrest. For example, the dominant parties won 80% of the parliamentary seats in Greece's 1952 election and between 1950 and 1957 in Turkey. To discourage authoritarianism, make representation fairer, and stabilize democratic political rule and the party system, both countries then adopted PR.<sup>3</sup> Except for some periods detailed below, however, PR made it difficult for any party to gain a parliamentary majority in either country as it caused party system fragmentation and allowed extremist parties to enter parliament.

Because PR tends to produce small parliamentary majorities, countries using such electoral systems usually implement nationwide or regional electoral thresholds to encourage stronger governments by discouraging party fragmentation. Many Western democracies that apply PR or mixed systems use electoral thresholds with various levels, including Germany, Croatia, and the Czech Republic (5%), Bulgaria, Slovenia, and Norway (4%), and Ukraine and Spain (3%).<sup>4</sup> NETs are not used in Luxembourg, Portugal, Iceland, Ireland, and Finland. Turkey has the highest NET at 10%, which was introduced in 1983 following the 1980 military

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece*, Fourth Edition, Cambridge University Press, New York 2021; Yaprak Gürsoy, *Between Military Rule and Democracy: Regime Consolidation in Greece, Turkey, and Beyond*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor MI, 2017; (eds.) Florian Bieber and Dario Brentin, *Social Movements in the Balkans: Rebellion and Protest From Maribor to Taksim*, Routledge, New York 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Clogg, *op.cit.*; Panayote Elias Dimitras, "Electoral Systems in Greece", *Eastern European Development and Public Policy*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1994, p. 143-175, Ali Çarkoğlu, "Voting Behaviour", (eds.) Metin Heper and Sabri Sayarı, *The Routledge Handbook of Modern Turkey*, Routledge, London and New York 2012, p. 160-170.

<sup>4</sup> Electoral thresholds differ based on the country. For example, a legal threshold is imposed to avoid fragmentation at the regional or district level while there is no national threshold in Spain. See Ignacio. L., Penas, "Cleavages and Thresholds: the Political Consequences of Electoral Laws in The Spanish Autonomous Communities, 1980-2000", *Electoral Studies*, Volume 23, Number 1, 2004, p. 23-43. In Croatia, a 5% threshold at the constituency-level is implemented and Kasapovic discusses that it prevented atomized pluralism as well as party fragmentation. See Mirjana, Kasapovic, "Coalition Governments in Croatia: First Experience 2000-2003", *Politička Misao*, Volume 40, Number 5, 2003, p. 52-67.

coup.<sup>5</sup> Greece has had a NET since 1993 whereby parties and individuals (i.e., independent candidates) must exceed 3% of the vote nationally to gain any seats.<sup>6</sup> In both countries, NET also aims to prevent non-core ethnic and religious minorities-Kurds (approximately 6-8% of Turkey's population in the 1970s) and Muslims (around 1% of Greece's population)-from entering parliament with their own parties as this is considered a threat to national security.<sup>7</sup>

Political stability has been associated in both countries with the formation of single-party governments (systems where one party wins an absolute majority of parliamentary seats) whereas multiparty coalition governments are blamed for causing political and economic crises. However, our merged data for Greek and Turkish parliamentary elections since 1950 (26 elections in Greece and 19 elections in Turkey) indicate that, following the adoption of NETs, the share of single-party government rule fell to 63% from 73% in Greece and 75% in Turkey (Table 1).

Furthermore, although the number of parties seeking election after the electoral reforms fell by 30% in Greece (from 41% to 19%) and over 50% in Turkey (from 8% to 3%), it rose again, especially in the 2010s, to 20-30 parties in Greece and 15-20 parties in Turkey. Moreover, rather than stabilizing, the effective number of parties (ENP) unexpectedly increased in both countries during the 1990s and 2000s. To achieve a 'generated majority'<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> With the new election law approved on 31 March 2022, the threshold is reduced to 7%, which will be used starting from the 2023 national elections.

<sup>6</sup> European Commission for Democracy through Law Report, Comparative Report on Thresholds and Other Features of Electoral Systems which Bar Parties from Access to Parliament, December 2008.

<sup>7</sup> The current size of Turkey's Kurdish population is unknown because no official census has been conducted since 1965. According to the population censuses of 1960 and 1965, 6.66% and 7.55% of the population, respectively, spoke Kurdish as their mother tongue, Fuat Dündar, *Türkiye Nüfus Sayımlarında Azınlıklar*, Çiviyazıları, İstanbul 2000, p. 157, 207. Similarly, the current size of Greece's Muslim population is unknown due to large migrations and no official census since the 1950s. It is estimated at 90,000-135,000, which is equivalent to 1-1.5% of the total population. See Vermund Aarbakke, "Concept of Reciprocity and Its Significance for the Political Organization of the Muslim Minority in Greece", *Reciprocity: Greek and Turkish Minorities Law, Religion and Politics*, (ed.) Samim Akgönül, İstanbul Bilgi University Press, İstanbul 2008, p. 443- 460.

<sup>8</sup> It is the condition leading party in order to produce an effective working parliamentary majority thanks to the electoral system, although it got less than the majority of the votes in the general election. See Douglas W. Rae, *The Political Consequences of Electoral Laws*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1967, p. 173.

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Greece also introduced an electoral law giving extra seats to the largest party (40 seats in 2007 and 50 in 2012). However, rapid fragmentation and polarization have continued, with six early parliamentary elections since 2009, eight prime ministers, and four coalition governments. Finally, in both countries, while centre parties have failed to mobilize their voters, non-core groups and extremist parties have increased their seats in both parliamentary and local elections. In short, they have overcome the electoral thresholds.<sup>9</sup>

Our paper does not investigate whether political stability is synonymous with parliamentary majorities.<sup>10</sup> Instead, because both countries designed their electoral systems to avoid coalition governments, this paper primarily asks why NETs have failed to guarantee parliamentary majorities for the largest parties and provide political stabilization in either country. Does electoral engineering, such as increasing NETs to control the political participation of minorities or non-core groups always work? There is a clear consensus that institutional and socio-economic factors affect party systems and their fragmentation. Research has focused on various factors that affect party systems: the link between party system fragmentation and political stabilization;<sup>11</sup> the impact of institutional determinants, such as electoral systems and voter turnout;<sup>12</sup> and socio-economic variables, such as social cleavages and economic crises.<sup>13</sup> However, these studies generally ignore the

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<sup>9</sup> “Non-core” groups are any aggregation of individuals that a state’s ruling elite perceives as an unassimilated ethnic or religious group. This paper focuses on Kurds in Turkey and Greece’s Muslim minority. An extremist or anti-system party opposes liberal democracy and the constitutional order while a minor one accepts free elections and the parliament as legitimate structures while mobilizing small Numbers of voters.

<sup>10</sup> Some studies even suggest a reverse causality. Daniel Diermier and Antonio Merlo found that between 1945 and 1997 in 11 Western democracies only 20 single-party governments were formed with over 50% of the parliamentary seats out of 313 elections. See “An Empirical Investigation of Coalitional Bargaining Procedures”, *Journal of Public Economics*, 2004, Volume 88, Number 3-4, p. 783.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Coleman, “Dynamics in the fragmentation of political party systems”, p. 141; Bingham G. Powell. *Contemporary Democracies: Participation, Stability and Violence*, Harvard University Press, 1982; Scott Mainwaring and Timothy Scully, *Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems In Latin America*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1995.

<sup>12</sup> Octavio Amorim Neto and Gary W. Cox, “Electoral Institutions, Cleavage Structures, and the Number of Parties”, *American Journal of Political Science*, Volume 41, Number 1, January 1997, p. 149-174; Arendt Lijphart, “The Political Consequences of Electoral Laws, 1945-85”, *The American Political Science Review*, Volume 84, Number 2, 1990, p. 481-495.

<sup>13</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, *Cleavage Structures, Party Systems and Voter Alignments: An Introduction*, Free Press, New York 1967; Jae-On Kim and Mahn-Geum Ohn, “A Theory of Minor-party Persistence: Election Rules, Social Cleavage, and the Number of Political Parties”, *Social Forces*, Volume 70, Number 3, 1992, p. 575-599; Ali Çarkoğlu, “The

effects of NETs on party fragmentation and the performance of the political system.

By merging data for Greek and Turkish parliamentary elections since 1950,<sup>14</sup> the present study aims to fill this gap by testing the influence of electoral thresholds on party system fragmentation in two very similar cases, where the outcomes exhibit both similarities and differences. This paper first briefly reviews the literature on the relationship between party systems, electoral systems, socio-economic determinants, and electoral thresholds. It then discusses political stability in Greece and Turkey in relation to NETs. The third part presents the hypotheses to be empirically tested with a combined dataset for Greek and Turkish parliamentary elections. The paper concludes by considering party system fragmentation in Turkey and Greece, particularly Turkey's shift from parliamentary rule to presidentialism in 2018 and the new bill on reducing the NET to 7%, and Greece's proposed shift from reinforced to simple PR.

### 1. Party System Fragmentation and Electoral Thresholds

Previous cross-national studies suggest that electoral reforms can increase the number of parties. This fragmentation of the party systems, defined as the degree to which votes are scattered across minor parties, has several causes, including the voting system, social and economic cleavages, and democratization. The main concern regarding fragmentation is that it can make governments unstable<sup>15</sup> while a multitude of parties can significantly impair the political system's performance.<sup>16</sup> Some researchers have argued that government stability and the democratic government fall as the number

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Turkish Party System in Transition: Party Performance and Agenda Change", *Political Studies*, Volume 46, Number 3, 1998, p. 544-571; Anna Bosco and Susannah Verney, "From Electoral Epidemic to Government Epidemic: The Next Level of the Crisis in Southern Europe", *South European Society and Politics*, Volume 21, Number 4, 2016, p. 383-406.

<sup>14</sup> In Greek political science, scholars usually include the post-authoritarian period, referring to the transition to democracy in 1974, known as the *Metapolitefsi* (Μεταπολίτευση). To measure the impact of electoral law changes and maximize the Number of cases for both countries, this study includes all elections since 1950.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen Coleman, "Dynamics in the fragmentation of political party systems", *Quality and Quantity*, Volume 29, Number 2, 1995, p. 141-155.

<sup>16</sup> Arendt Lijphart, "*Electoral Systems and Party Systems: A Study of Twenty-Seven Democracies, 1945-1990*", Oxford University Press, New York 1994; Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1976.

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of parties in parliament and ideological polarization between them rises. Conversely, four-party system factors shape political (in)stability: fragmentation in/multiparty system; strong party ties to social groups; strong support for radical parties; and voter volatility.<sup>17</sup> Regarding Western democracies, however, neither an increase in the effective number of parties nor the formation of coalition governments cause government instability and democratic backsliding.<sup>18</sup>

Political science research has produced a clear consensus that both socio-economic and institutional factors influence party systems and fragmentation,<sup>19</sup> although researchers claim that fragmentation may also be due to social cleavages. As Lipset and Rokkan put it, “the party system of the 1960s reflects-with few but significant exceptions-the cleavage structures of the 1920s”.<sup>20</sup> Other studies show that regionalization of social cleavages creates a conversion bias against minor parties that affects voters’ attitudes towards them. This in turn changes the impact of electoral rules.<sup>21</sup> That is, the number of parties depends on the interaction between social heterogeneity and electoral permissiveness. Critically, because the cleavage structure affects both the electoral system adopted and the number of parties within it, electoral rules may decisively determine fragmentation.

Other studies on fragmentation draw on Duverger’s law,<sup>22</sup> which claims that PR systems encourage party proliferation and government instability. According to Duverger, two factors shape electoral rules: mechanical (institutional) and psychological. The institutional approach

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<sup>17</sup> Michael Taylor and Valentine M. Herman, “Party Systems and Government Stability”, *The American Political Science Review*, Volume 65, Number 1, 1971, p. 28-37; Mainwaring and Scully, *op.cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Laver and Norman Schofield, *Multiparty Government: The Politics of Coalition in Europe*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 1998; Daniel Diermier and Antonio Merlo, “An Empirical Investigation of Coalitional Bargaining Procedures”, *Journal of Public Economics*, Volume 88, Number 3-4, 2004, p. 783-797.

<sup>19</sup> Amorim-Neto and Cox, *op.cit.*, p. 149.

<sup>20</sup> Lipset and Rokkan, *op.cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>21</sup> Kim and Ohn, *op.cit.*, p. 582; Flick Martina Witzig and Adrian Vatter, “Electoral Institutions, Social Diversity and Fragmentation of Party Systems: A Reassessment”, *Swiss Political Science Review*, Volume 24, Number 1, 2018, p. 1-15; Amorim-Neto and Cox, *op.cit.*, p. 165. Peter Ordeshook and Olga V. Shvetsova, “Ethnic Heterogeneity, District Magnitude and The Number of Parties”, *American Journal of Political Science*, Volume 38, Number 1, February 1994, p. 100-123.

<sup>22</sup> Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties*, Methuen, New York 1954.

considers how electoral rules shape voter choice whereas the psychological approach considers how voter expectations and their electoral experiences respond to changes in electoral rule<sup>23</sup> That is, the former concerns vote-seat relationships whereas the latter concerns vote distribution.<sup>24</sup> For Sartori, party systems involve inter-party competitions, determined by the relationships and reactions between parties.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, inter-party competitiveness and electoral unpredictability help new parties enter parliament whereas the opposite discourages excessive changes.<sup>26</sup>

The prominent studies reviewed so far have tended to consider NETs as a psychological rather than mechanical determinant of voter strategies and government stability. Institutionally, Taagepera and Shugart suggest that ensuring fairer electoral representation through the choice of constituency size helps convert the actions of political parties and voters into political results.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, when a constituency is contested by many parties, it is unreasonable to use a threshold to eliminate them because it increases disproportionality. In short, while all electoral mechanisms are disproportional to some extent, small constituencies or high electoral thresholds help the larger parties or coalitions gain seats disproportionately. Psychologically, strategic voting and coalition formation may interact with electoral mechanisms to affect fragmentation. Duverger's law predicts that strategic voting for pre-electoral coalitions, which is itself shaped by the electoral thresholds, strongly affects voter psychology. Given that coalition government is more likely under PR, voters may strategically prefer potential coalition partners that might not otherwise pass the threshold.<sup>28</sup> Under PR, strategic voting is considered unnecessary since voters are represented in proportion to their votes. Nevertheless, Golder argues that high thresholds encourage disproportionality by making coalition governments more likely,

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<sup>23</sup> Lipset and Rokkan, *op.cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>24</sup> Andre Blais and R.Kenneth Carty, "Does Proportional Representation Foster Voter Turnout?", *European Journal of Political Research*, Volume 18, Number 2, 1990, p. 92; Witzig and Vatter, *op.cit.*, p. 1-15.

<sup>25</sup> Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework For Analysis*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1976, p. 169.

<sup>26</sup> Mair, *op.cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>27</sup> Rein Taagepera and Matthew Soberg Shugart, "Predicting The Number of Parties: A Quantitative Model of Duverge's Mechanical Effect", *The American Political Science Review*, Volume 87, Number 2, June 1993, p. 462.

<sup>28</sup> Amorim-Neto and Cox, *op.cit.*, p. 168.



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with pre-electoral coalitions resulting from bargaining between parties seeking parliamentary seats.<sup>29</sup>

As this literature review has noted, these studies disagree in explaining how NETs have failed to create political stability and prevent extreme parties from entering parliament in countries with similar institutional features and PR systems. While these cross-national studies can show that electoral reform changes the number of parties, they are limited in analyzing the reasons why these countries adopt NETs and why electoral engineering does not work. Accordingly, this study presents a pure time-series analysis of the institutional change and the evolution of the Turkish and Greek party systems with a hermeneutic quantitative analysis. The two countries are chosen as the most similar examples of PR electoral systems adopting NETs.

## **2. Party System Fragmentation in Turkey and Greece: Electoral Laws, Disproportionate Representation, and Government Stability**

Neither Greece nor Turkey has prevented party system fragmentation despite efforts to ensure a ‘generated majority’ to encourage political stability and discourage extreme parties through electoral engineering (e.g., NET and extra seats for the largest party). Both countries implemented NETs for two main reasons: first, to eliminate the need for coalition governments, which were blamed for causing political instability. This was reasonable, given the military interventions after political parties failed to form governments or made coalitions with anti-system parties supporting political violence. The second reason was to exclude or limit the parliamentary participation of non-core religious or ethnic groups.<sup>30</sup> Table 1 summarizes government types in Turkey and Greece since 1950. Following elections without NETs (8 in Turkey and 15 in Greece), more than 70% of governments were formed by one party, which is quite high compared to Western European democracies at around 50%.<sup>31</sup> While these statistics do not prove that NETs reduced the

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<sup>29</sup> Sona Nadenichek Golder, “Pre-electoral Coalition Formation in Parliamentary Democracies”, *British Journal of Political Science*, Volume 36, Number 2, 2006, p. 193-212.

<sup>30</sup> Burcu Taşkın, “SYRIZA’s Electoral Victory in Greek Thrace: Impact of Muslim Minority Vote in the Changing Political System”, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Volume 23, Number 2, 2017, p. 157; Ali Hüseyinoğlu, “Balkanlarda Azınlıklar ve Siyasal Katılım Hakkı: Batı Trakya (Yunanistan) Örneği”, *Yeni Türkiye*, Volume 21, Number 69, 2015, p. 4777-4786.

<sup>31</sup> Wolfgang C. Müller and Kaare Strøm, “Coalition Governance in Western Europe: An Introduction”, *Coalition Governance in Western Europe*, (eds.) Wolfgang Müller and Kaare Strøm, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2000, p. 2.

number of single-party governments, they show that, in contrast to consolidated Western countries, no single party has survived through all elections in either country.<sup>32</sup>

**Table 1. Government types in Turkey and Greece before and after introducing a NET**

	Single-Party Governments		Coalition Governments or No Government Formed		Parliamentary Elections since 1950	
	Before NET	After NET	Before NET	After NET		
<b>Turkey</b>	5 (75%)	7 (63%)	3		4	19
<b>Greece</b>	10 (73%)	7 (63%)	5		4	26

### 2.1. Turkey

Following the shift to PR, non-core groups in both countries have gained parliamentary representation. In Turkey, the Kurdish movement first overcame the electoral threshold through joint lists, then independent candidate blocs, and finally as a party in the 2015 and 2018 parliamentary elections. To get around the threshold, members of small parties commonly compete as candidates of larger parties before returning to their original parties. Anti-system pro-Islamist parties increased their vote shares after the 1990s and came to power in 2002 with the economically neo-liberalist and ideologically conservative Justice and Development Party [Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (JDP)]. Today, Islamist parties (JDP and Felicity Party / SP) and the Kurdish People's Democratic Party [Halkların Demokratik Partisi (HDP)] represent over 55% of the vote. In Greece, despite the 3% electoral threshold for independent candidates, Muslim candidates have gained many votes in Western Thrace since the 1990s to win seats on national party tickets.

Turkey's electoral system laws, which were mostly introduced after the military interventions in 1960 and 1980, have kept party system fragmentation artificially low.<sup>33</sup> Election Law (26.04.1961/no.298), passed following the 1960 military intervention, replaced Turkey's plurality electoral

<sup>32</sup> Çarkoğlu, *op.cit.*, p. 551; Gürsoy, *op.cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Çarkoğlu, *op.cit.*, p. 551.

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system with PR (D'Hondt). The 10% threshold, regulated by Law No. 2839, Section 33 in June 1983, determines the members of the Turkish Grand National Assembly. The threshold was set to ensure that those with similar political views would necessarily gather within one party.

The law also defines a 'constituency electoral threshold' in line with the overall aim of preventing minor parties that support ethnic or religious interests from entering parliament while promoting majority governments.<sup>34</sup> Three general elections were made according to this 'double threshold' system. The goal of implementing this high threshold was largely realized at the beginning. Legal thresholds initially favoured the newly established parties such as ANAP with gaining the majority of votes, as they were intended. Relatively quickly thereafter, especially with the abolishment of the ban on the existing politicians and party names, NETs facilitated the return of the post-coup parties (or their successors) to power. In the 1990s, NETs failed to achieve what it was intended: it was not difficult for new parties to emerge by gaining electoral support, and it did not reduce volatility in Turkish elections. Since 1983, the NET has always been on every political party's agenda. There were recent discussions on lowering Turkey's threshold to 7% and on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March, 2022 the new election law has been approved by the parliament.<sup>35</sup>

Turkey's threshold is the highest in Europe, where the average (excluding Turkey) is 4.6%. Only five countries have NETs above 5%: Turkey (10%), Liechtenstein (8%), the Russian Federation and Georgia (7%), and Moldova (6%). Yet, the effect of the electoral threshold in Turkish elections has been limited to satisfy expectations. While it initially prevented minor parties from entering parliament, non-core ethnic Kurdish and anti-system pro-Islamist parties successfully mobilized their voters to win many seats after the 1980 military coup. During the 1990s, party system fragmentation increased while a majority government was only achieved in the 2002 elections by wasting 45% of the votes. This in turn, in parallel with Duverger's theory on the psychological impact of institutions, shaped voting

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<sup>34</sup> Sabri Sayari, "Back to a Predominant Party System: the November 2015 Snap Election in Turkey", *South European Society and Politics*, Volume 21, Number 2, 2016, p. 187.

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/elections/turkeys-new-election-law-likely-to-lower-threshold-to-7>, (12.5.2021); <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/elections/turkey-lowers-national-threshold-to-7-with-new-election-law>, "Turkey's new election law likely to lower threshold to 7%", Turkey lowers the national threshold to 7% with the new election law, (1.4.2022).

behaviour in the 2007 elections as voters abandoned minor parties in favour of strategic voting. Meanwhile, Turkey's NET has also encouraged minor and ethnic parties to run independent candidates via joint lists with the major parties.

Therefore, the Turkish party system, which has been characterized by high volatility and fragmentation, seems to decrease not with the implementation of 10% NET in 1983, but with the coming to power of JDP in 2002 when the party gained more than 50% of the seats in the parliament in the last four elections. The average district magnitude in Turkey was 6.25 (before the June 2018 legislative elections, in which the number of seats in the parliament increased from 550 to 600), which is lower than the median among countries with PR rules (7.925) in Bormann and Golder's dataset.<sup>36</sup> As argued in the recent studies, in addition to the electoral formula and the threshold, the district magnitude also empowered the JDP.<sup>37</sup> The fact that in predominant party systems- as Turkey has since 2002-, the fragmentation of political opposition and the ideological distance between the opposition parties can be another important reason for the failure of the opposition to replace the dominant party in power.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, naturally, the fear of a wasted vote due to the high threshold prompts voters to support their second-best option, which concentrates the votes among large parties. This situation has changed when the transition to the presidential system Turkey consolidated a two-bloc system consisting of a JDP-led People's Alliance in favour of a presidential system and Nation Alliance by the ideologically distanced opposition parties headed by the CHP.<sup>39</sup> The fact that the parties in the pre-electoral alliances are exempt from individual thresholds decreased this fear of wasted vote for the Turkish voters.

Turkey and Greece have differed regarding disproportionality (the percentage of votes wasted because they do not result in parliamentary representation). In Turkey's 1983 elections, just after NET was implemented,

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<sup>36</sup> Christian N. Bormann and Matt Golder, "Democratic Electoral Systems around the World, 1946-2011", *Electoral Studies*, Volume 32, Number 2, p. 360-369.

<sup>37</sup> Düzgün Arslantaş, et al., "Does the Electoral System Foster a Predominant Party System? Evidence from Turkey", *Swiss Political Science Review*, Volume 26, Number 1, 2020, p. 125-143.

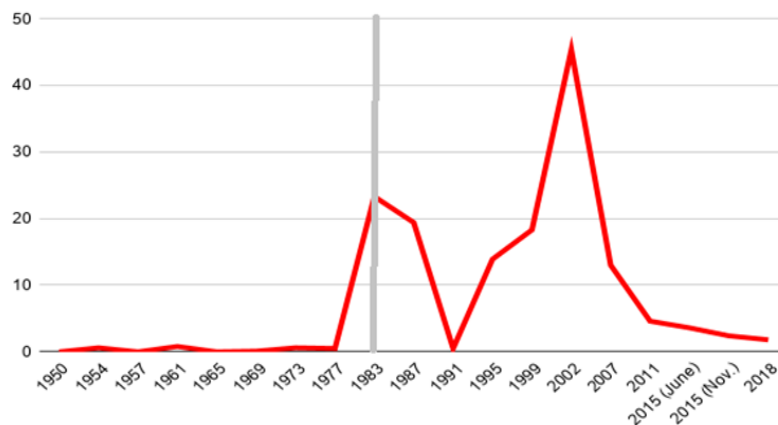
<sup>38</sup> Sayarı, *op.cit.*, p. 188.

<sup>39</sup> Burcu Taşkın, "The 2019 Provincial Elections in Turkey: AKP's Struggle to Retain Power Vis-a-Vis a Revitalized CHP", *Regional and Federal Studies*, 2021, Volume 31, Number 3, p. 462.

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disproportionality increased from 0.5 to 23.30%. Similarly, in the 1987 elections, the Motherland Party (ANAP) gained 292 seats (64.80%) from only 36.31% of the vote whereas the Social Democratic People's Party gained only 99 seats from 24.74% of the vote, while 22.30% of the total vote remained unrepresented in parliament. In the 1991 parliamentary elections, disproportionality dropped back to 0.5% because the Kurdish movement party HADEP ran under the Social Democratic People's Party's (SHP) joint list (Figure 1). In the 1995 and 1999 elections, however, it rose more than 10% after Kurdish movement leaders were arrested and HADEP was banned. Overall, including in 1991, Turkey's electoral system has only rewarded the party with the largest vote share rather than all parties exceeding the threshold. However, once the additional constituency or regional threshold was abolished in 1995, all parties exceeding the thresholds benefitted from disproportionality.<sup>40</sup>

**Figure 1: Disproportionality rates in Turkey (before and after NET)**



ENP in Turkey was highest during the 1990s, characterized by frequent coalition governments. In the 1999 elections, centre-left and centre-right parties together won 57.6% of the votes. Since 2000, however, party system fragmentation has decreased with a more stable party system under JDP's single-party government rule. Nevertheless, radical right and left

<sup>40</sup> Yavuz Sabuncu, "Seçim Barajları ve Siyasal Sonuçları", *Anayasa Yargısı*, Volume 22, Number 1, 2006, p. 195.

parties still claim around 67% of votes.<sup>41</sup> During the 1970s, despite relatively high ENP and coalition governments, Turkey had a two-party system contested by PRP and the Justice Party.<sup>42</sup> After the presidential system was adopted in 2018, disproportionality fell to just 1.80% due to the pre-electoral alliance law of March 13, 2018. Because NET was now based on each alliance's total vote share rather than its individual parties' shares, the joint list formula and pre-electoral alliances resulted in 9 parties being represented in parliament. It also increased party system fragmentation even though there were only 5 elected parties. That is, despite NET, both minor and extreme parties passed the thresholds.

## 2.2. Greece

Since 1974, Greece has used open-list PR with some unique features.<sup>43</sup> All parliamentary elections after 1974 used the so-called 'ameliorated' or 'reinforced' proportional system,<sup>44</sup> which gives the winning parties (which were centre-right New Democracy and centre-left PASOK until 2012) a considerably higher share of parliamentary seats than its share of votes is, at the expense of smaller parties (again mainly the leftist parties until 2012). The sole exception was the proportional system used in three consecutive elections between 1989 and 1990, which significantly reduced the first party premium, causing governmental instability for several months. A nationwide electoral threshold of 3% was added to the electoral law in 1993. Unlike in other European countries, this applied both to national parties and independent candidates to prevent extreme parties and Muslim politicians

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<sup>41</sup> According to the 2018 Parliamentary election results: far-right parties JDP 42,56%; MHP 11,1%; Felicity Party gained 1,34% and far-left party HDP got 11.7% of the votes.

<sup>42</sup> Ergün Özbudun, "Seçim Sistemleri ve Türkiye", *Ankara Üniversitesi Hukuk Fakültesi Dergisi*, Volume 44, Number 1, 1995, p. 529.

<sup>43</sup> Electors cast a 'preferential vote' for one to five candidates on a constituency list, depending on the Number of seats. Parliament has 300 seats of which 238 are allocated to the 56 districts where candidates campaign in hopes of winning enough votes to secure one of these seats. Political parties, party coalitions, and independents may present lists of candidates. Twelve of the remaining seats are national seats awarded to parties based on their national vote share. To determine how many district seats a party will receive, Greece uses the Largest Remainder System, which allocates seats to each party in two steps. First, a vote quota is determined by the size of the district using the Droop quota formula ( $\text{total valid poll/seats} + 1$ ). Second, once the quota is decided for a district, each party meeting this vote quota is awarded seats. Their votes are then subtracted from the party total.

<sup>44</sup> GRFREECE, *Greece Electoral, Political Parties Laws and Regulations Handbook: Strategic Information, Regulations, Procedures* (World Business and Investment Library), Intl. Business Pub., USA 2015.

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from entering parliament as independents.<sup>45</sup> for the threshold also applied to European elections. Since Western Thrace joined Greece in 1920, its Muslim minority has been represented in all elections except 1993, when Muslim parliamentary candidates ran as independents despite the impossibility of electing an independent MP due to the threshold.<sup>46</sup>

The threshold introduced in 1993 ended the minority's struggle to participate outside Greece's main parties. In the four general elections between 1993 and 2004, multi-member constituency seats were initially allocated to each constituency under a quota system using the Hagenbach-Bischoff method. The 2007 and 2009 general elections were held under the new electoral law of 2004, which automatically grants the winning party a majority premium of 40 seats while the remaining 260 seats are distributed by proportional representation. An amendment in 2012 increased this majority premium, also known as bonus-adjusted proportional representation, to 50 seats, leaving 250 seats to be allocated by PR. This rule enabled the country to use an open list system in standard elections, which should result in a proportional system based on the high district magnitude. Nevertheless, Greek elections have historically resulted in a two-party system with the two strongest parties alternating in winning a parliamentary majority.<sup>47</sup> Another reason why the legal threshold of 3% in Greece has a little effect is the natural threshold (the percentage of votes needed to get one seat at a district level), and is mainly dependent on the mean district magnitude (the average number of legislators returned per districts) use of fifty-six districts for party lists.<sup>48</sup>

Hence, Greece implemented NET, its party system after 1981 changed from polarized pluralism to a two-party system whereby the socialist

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<sup>45</sup> Elias Nikolakopoulos, "The Electoral Influence of Political Parties", in *Elections and Political Parties in the 1980s: Evolution and Prospects of the Political System*, (eds.) Christos Lyrintzis and Elias Nikolakopoulos, Themelio, Athens 1990, p. 203-247.

<sup>46</sup> Similarly, the Muslim minority voted for their own party DEP in the 2014 and 2019 elections for the European Parliament (EP), and despite the fact that the party gained the majority of votes in the Ksanthi and Rhodopi districts due to 3% threshold failed to send representatives to the EP. For detailed information about the Muslim-Turkish MPs served in the Greek Parliament see Özer Hatip, *Yunan Parlamentosu'nda Görev Yapmış Batı Trakya Türk Milletvekilleri*, Bakeş Yayınları 33, 2015.

<sup>47</sup> The open list system means that each party produces a list of eligible candidates for each district. Voters then select the candidate they want to represent them from a list of candidates.

<sup>48</sup> Pippa Norris, *Radical Right: Voters and Parties in the Electoral Market*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006, p. 107.

PASOK and conservative New Democracy alternated in government,<sup>49</sup> with smaller parties playing only marginal roles in governmental politics. Greece thus contradicts Duverger's Law since its reinforced PR has consistently produced a two-party system that barely requires compromise or coalition politics.<sup>50</sup> Recently, however, its party system (like others in Europe) has undergone rapid fragmentation and polarization.

In political science, party system fragmentation is usually measured by the effective number of parties in terms of the allocation of parliamentary seats and various power indices of each party's importance in forming majority coalitions. According to the inverse sum of the squared seat shares index, Greece had a solid two-and-a-half party system throughout the 1990s and 2,000s (like the UK). After the May 2012 elections, however, the effective number of parliamentary parties jumped to 4.83, before stabilizing at 3.76 because of the elections' particular strategic and highly politicized character, when Greece's Eurozone membership was under threat and the EU was exerting enormous pressure. Since 2009, Greece has held six parliamentary elections, all called early, and its first referendum since 1974 while having eight prime ministers and four coalition governments. Given this high volatility, Greece currently lacks an established party system; if anything, it resembles the turbulent transitional period typically seen in new democracies until their party systems settle down.

Since 1993, minor and minority parties have criticized NET for being anti-democratic.<sup>51</sup> In 2017, for example, the leader of the Union of Centrists party, Leventis, stated, "if the Muslim party had a 5 percent vote, we would have made the threshold 5 percent." That is, NET in Greece was introduced to control the political representation of Muslims.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Takis S. Pappas, "The Transformation of the Greek party system since 1951", *West European Politics*, Volume 26, Number 2, 2003, p. 90-114.

<sup>50</sup> Dimitras, *op.cit.*, p. 143.

<sup>51</sup> "Yunanistan'daki azınlık sorunları Atina'da ele alındı", *Gündem Gazetesi*, <https://gundemgazetesi.com/news/detayh.php?id=2402>, (15 December, 2016).

<sup>52</sup> "Vasilis Levendis'ten Batı Trakya Türklerini ulusal tehdit olarak gören açıklama", *ABTTF*, <https://www.abtff.org/html/index.php?link=detay&id=5667&grup=4&arsiv=hfceyxob>, (12 September, 2017). Also See Hüseyinoğlu and Sakellariou, "Islamophobia in Greece", *European Islamophobia Report 2017*, SETA Publications, Istanbul 2018. They highlight that with his statement Leventis suggests "any possible entrance of an Islamic political party into the Greek Parliament would also work for the national interest of the neighbouring country, namely Turkey", p. 291.



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After the May 2012 elections, the first held after implementing the first two EU bailout programs, the number of parliamentary parties jumped to eight, including radical left and right parties. This extreme fragmentation was unprecedented in Greek politics. PASOK and ND's support fell to a historic low, together with losing over 45% of their votes, while SYRIZA suddenly became a main political player by almost quadrupling its vote share. Because the 2012 May/June parliamentary elections shook up the traditional party system and radically transformed voters' electoral behaviour, many Greek scholars describe them as the 'double-earthquake elections'.<sup>53</sup> Voter turnout fell (around 56% in recent elections) while electoral volatility increased along with the effective number of parties.<sup>54</sup> This period of political turmoil and de-institutionalisation caused a de-alignment of the voters. By 2012, some established political parties disappeared<sup>55</sup> and the single-party government ended. The party system also switched from two-partyism involving ND and PASOK to polarized pluralism.<sup>56</sup> However, the 2019 parliamentary elections signalled a return to normal two-partyism between ND and SYRIZA.<sup>57</sup>

### 2.3. Disproportional Representation and Party System Fragmentation in Comparison

Disproportionality in Greece has remained lower than in Turkey, with the highest levels in the 1952 (13%) and 1981 (16%) elections before NET was introduced in 1993 and in the May 2005 elections (19%) after it (Figure 2). Various constitutional factors can explain this difference. Whereas pre-

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<sup>53</sup> Yannis Voulgaris and Ilias Nikolakopoulos, "Introduction", *Ο Διπλός Εκλογικός Σεισμός [2012 The Double Earthquake Elections]*, Themelio, Athens 2014; Eftichia Teperoglou and Emmanouil Tsatsanis, "Dealignment, De-Legitimation and the Implosion of the Two-Party System in Greece: The Earthquake Election of 6 May 2012", *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion & Parties*, Volume 24, Number 2, 2014, p. 222-242.

<sup>54</sup> Roula Nezi, "Economic Voting Under the Economic Crisis: Evidence From Greece", *Electoral Studies*, Volume 31, Number 3, 2012, p. 503; Bosco and Verney, *op.cit.*, p. 383.

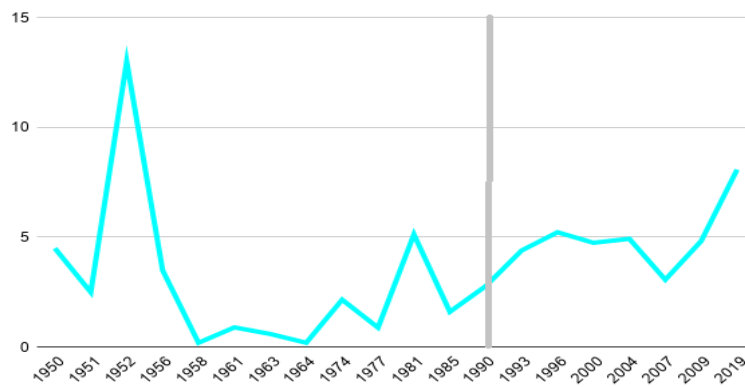
<sup>55</sup> Vasiliki Georgiadou and Jenny Mavropoulou, "Anti-Establishment Parties in Government: Syriza-Anel Policy-Making Match between the Radical Left and the Radical Right", *Southeastern Europe*, Volume 45, Number 1, 2021, p. 19-47.

<sup>56</sup> Emmanouil Tsatsanis, "The Swift Unravelling: Party System Change and De-institutionalization in Greece During the Crisis", (ed.) *Marco Lisi, Party Systems and Democracy in Europe: Continuity, Renewal or Change?*, Routledge, London 2018, p. 115-136.

<sup>57</sup> Emmanouil Tsatsanis, et al., "Two-Partyism Reloaded: Polarisation, Negative Partisanship, and the Return of the Left-right Divide in the Greek Elections of 2019", *South European Society and Politics*, Volume 25, Number 3-4, 2020, p. 1-30; Rori Lamprini, "The 2019 Greek Parliamentary Election: Retour à la Normale", *West European Politics*, Volume 43, Number 4, 2020, p. 1023-1037.

electoral alliances are prohibited in Turkey, parties form pre-electoral blocs in Greece, especially between ideologically similar parties, which enable minor parties to mobilize their voters despite the electoral threshold. Consequently, whereas post-electoral coalitions are seen in Turkey, pre-election alliances are common in Greek politics. In Greece, the similarity in trends with the number of parties is striking. Before Greece's economic crisis, wasted votes remained below 5% (Figure 2). In the first post-bailout elections of 2012, however, wasted votes climbed sharply to 19%, representing more votes than the winning party won. In the three elections, wasted votes have been significantly higher than before 2009, as have the number of parties. This shows that both institutional factors and socio-economic factors determine party system fragmentation and disproportionality.

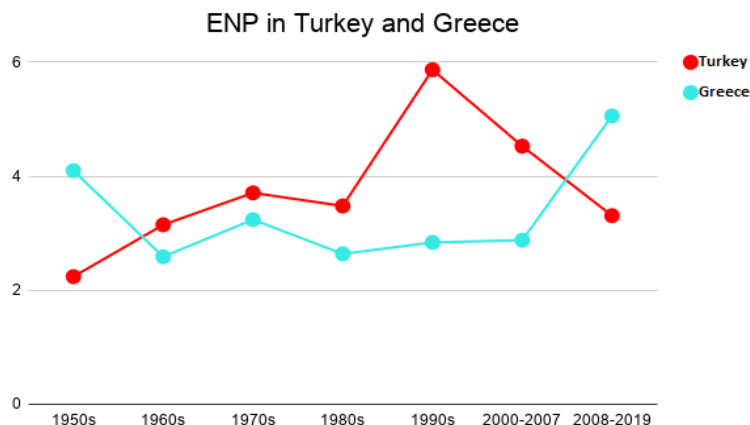
**Figure 2. Disproportionality rates in Greece (before and after NET)**



The information provided in Figure 3 (average ENP per decade) shows different patterns of party system stabilization although the two countries adopted similar electoral systems and NET implementation. Until 2009, party system fragmentation-as measured by ENP-was lower in Greece than in Turkey, except in the 1950s, remaining very stable at around 2.5, which reflects a two-party system. This suggests that Duverger's law on mechanical factors does not always apply when a detailed historical institutionalism approach is used for the low number of cases.

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**Figure 3. Effective number of parties in Turkey and Greece (1950s-2010s)**



Fragmentation in Greece rose steadily by 183% between 2009 and May 2012. In the repeated 2015 parliamentary elections, eight parties passed the threshold. Alongside high ENP rates, Greece has seen increasing disproportionality and falling voter turnout. This suggests that voters have responded differently to Greece's political instability and economic crisis: while supporters of centralist parties have expressed their discontent by not voting or voting negatively, extreme parties have successfully mobilized their supporters to vote.

Given the political instability in both countries, inter-election periods are also important for analysing party system fragmentation. Turkey has had fewer snap elections than Greece, which had only four periods without snap elections (1981-1985, 1985-1989, 1996-2000, and 2000-2004). This is despite Turkey's problematic democratic history, including military interventions almost every decade, coalition governments, economic crises, and regime changes. Greece has held 26 elections since 1950 compared to 19 for Turkey while the average period between elections is 1,295 days in Turkey and 922 in Greece (Table 2). This difference may be due to cultural factors rather than institutional determinants. In Turkey, the party oligarchy is strong enough for the party leader, who is very important for Turkish politicians, to

retain power.<sup>58</sup> Hence, they are less likely to resign in the face of political or economic crises. In Greece, to protect democracy, centralist parties have preferred to call elections rather than form coalitions with anti-system parties to retain power.

### 3. Hypothesis and Data Analysis

As explained above, NETs are used to decrease the number of parties contesting elections and eliminate political instability stemming from dynamic and static effects of policies by stopping minor parties from entering parliament. Depending on the threshold level, this can cause low parliamentary representation (high disproportionality). In Greece's elections between 2015 and 2019, representation rates decreased from 93.7% to 91.92% whereas they increased from 87.48% to 99.31% in Turkey.<sup>59</sup>

Previous research has considered party system fragmentation in terms of the institutional factors suggested by Duverger. In the present study, the relationship between NET and party system fragmentation will be measured both by the number of parties running in the elections and the number of parties represented in parliament. On the other hand, because our attention is on the legal thresholds (defined by electoral law) rather than the natural threshold based on district size, the research design does not compare district magnitude measurements for the two countries. Based on Duverger's law and other theories of party systems, we will test our research question as to why NETs have not had the desired effects in Greece and Turkey. To do this we test a multiple linear regression (MLR) model for three main factors: the influence of NET, institutional arrangements, and economic changes. Table 2 reports descriptive statistics for all variables.

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<sup>58</sup> İlder Turan, "Türk Siyasi Partilerinde Lider Oligarşisi: Evrimi, Kurumsallaşması ve Sonuçları", *İstanbul Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi*, Volume 45, 2011, p. 1.

<sup>59</sup> Turkish Statistical Institute, Turkish Election Results 2019, [https://tuikweb.tuik.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt\\_id=1061](https://tuikweb.tuik.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt_id=1061), (26.5.2022)

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**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics**

	Greece		Turkey	
	Minimum	Maximum	Minimum	Maximum
N: number of parliamentary elections	26		19	
Electoral threshold	0	1	0	1
Number of parties competed in the elections	4	41	3	20
Number of parties in the parliament	3	10	2	8
Effective number of parties	2.19	8.95	2.14	5.79
First party's seat Percentage	24.80	82.33	24.70	94
Vote gap between the first two parties	0.80	33.95	1.73	25.70
Voter Turnout	57.91	86.57	64.30	93.30
Economic growth	-5.71	11	-3.38	11.10
Average number of days between elections	42	1,476	147	1,722

**Source:** Table compiled by the authors.

**H1:** *Implementing a NET reduces party system fragmentation.*

The second hypothesis concerns the role of party systems in party system fragmentation. Previous research indicates that party systems are influenced by several electoral system variables, including the electoral system and competitiveness. Studies conclude that PR encourages more parties and greater government instability. Countries with PR therefore usually implement NETs to encourage strong governments by reducing party system fragmentation whereas countries with plural or majoritarian electoral systems do not need extra-institutional mechanisms to support the largest party and ensure governmental stability. Greece's introduction of reinforced PR in 1974 created a stable political system with strong single-party governments whereas Turkey's introduction of PR with D'Hondt in 1961 failed to bring political stability. Both countries had fewer parties before PR,

except for Greece in 1950. During the 1950s, both Greece and Turkey suffered high disproportionality and authoritarian policies under pluralist electoral systems whereas PR encouraged high competitiveness. Our second hypothesis, therefore, addresses party system fragmentation in relation to the electoral system, competitiveness, voter turnout, and the largest party's seat percentage,<sup>60</sup> as follows:

**H2.a:** *PR in Greece and Turkey increases party system fragmentation by increasing competition and reducing the largest party's vote share.*

**H2.b:** *PR increases party system fragmentation by increasing voter turnout.*

Several studies have investigated the effect of socioeconomic determinants on party system fragmentation. Accordingly, the third hypothesis addresses the relationship between the party system and the government's economic performance. In particular, economic growth during the election year can influence the country's political trajectory. In Turkey, the number of parties contesting elections was lowest in 1950 and 1983 with three parties, when economic growth was 9.40% and 4.97% respectively. In Greece, there were only four parties in 1961 with 11% economic growth.<sup>61</sup> Hence, a negative relationship is expected between the number of parties running for elections and economic growth during an election year on the basis that voters punish centralist parties for economic turmoil. This leads to the third hypothesis:

**H3:** *Economic growth in an election year reduces party system fragmentation*

Based on these hypotheses, this study tests how the following types of variables affect party system fragmentation (number of parties in parliament and ENP) in Greece and Turkey: institutional (electoral threshold); party system (number of contesting parties, party competition, voter turnout, largest party's vote share); and socioeconomic (economic growth). It uses electoral data for 45 parliamentary elections between 1950 and 2019 (26 in Greece; 19 in Turkey) to test an MLR model for each dependent variable.

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<sup>60</sup> The electoral system is coded as a binary variable: PR: 1; Plurality: 0; competitiveness is measured as the percentage vote gap between the first two parties.

<sup>61</sup> World Bank, 2019,

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=GR>, (26.5.2022).

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**Table 3: Regression equation with NET, party system, and socioeconomic variables**

	Dependent variable: number of parties in the parliament		Dependent variable: effective number of parties	
	B	t	B	t
<b>(Constant)</b>	16,859	6,384	11,041 (2,458)	4,491
<b>Electoral threshold</b>	* <b>-.765</b> (.386)	* <b>-1,981</b>	.679 (.360)	1,888
<b>Number of parties contesting election</b>	* <b>.046</b> (.022)	* <b>2,124</b>	.002 (.020)	.093
<b>Competitiveness</b>	* <b>.069</b> (.030)	* <b>2,263</b>	.022 (.028)	.765
<b>First party's seat percentage</b>	** <b>-.092</b> (.022)	** <b>-4,260</b>	<b>-.087</b> (.020)	** <b>-4,294</b>
<b>PR or Plurality</b>	-1.206 (.692)	-1,743	<b>-1.306</b> (.644)	* <b>-2,028</b>
<b>Percentage voter turnout</b>	** <b>-.090</b> (.027)	** <b>-3,339</b>	-0.029 (.025)	-1,173
<b>Economic growth during election Time</b>	-.031 (.050)	-.620	-.018 (.046)	-.387

The MLR model (Table 3) presents our core results. Except for the electoral system and voter turnout, they confirm previous studies of party system fragmentation. Contrary to expectations, the number of parties

represented in parliament decreased after Greece and Turkey adopted PR (39 of 45 elections). While this result confirms Lijphart's argument<sup>62</sup> that the electoral system is not a very strong electoral engineering instrument for shaping the party system because the decrease (*H2.a*) is not statistically significant. Considering that Greece's party system remained very stable until 2008, this result makes sense, although it contradicts Duverger's theory.

We measured the effect of NETs on party system fragmentation (*H1*) by the number of parties elected to parliament, which decreases with NETs. Indeed, NETs in Greece and Turkey successfully countered the tendency of PR to encourage more parties to contest elections than in plurality elections. As mentioned earlier, once NETs were implemented in Greece and Turkey, the number of parties contesting the elections dropped immediately before rising later. That is, as the number of parties contesting elections increases, so does the number of parties with the potential to win parliamentary seats.

In Turkey, there is a negative correlation between competitiveness (measured as the vote gap between the two largest parties) and the number of parties elected, especially since the 2002 parliamentary elections. When competition decreases, the number of parties successfully running for political power increases. That is, a decline in party competition between the two largest parties (i.e., the existence of a dominant party) benefits extreme parties if they can mobilize their supporters to vote. Inter-party competition is more intense in Greek than in Turkish politics as the vote gap exceeds 10% in only a minority of Greek elections (38.46% of elections) whereas it exceeds 10% in a majority of Turkish elections (63.16%) (Table 2). Our model also demonstrates a similar relationship between the largest party's seat percentage and voter turnout on party system fragmentation. Under a dominant party system or two-party system, mostly seen in Greek elections, party system fragmentation drops significantly.

Previous studies indicate that parties have more chances to win parliamentary seats under PR due to higher voter turnout (*H2.b*). However, our study suggests the opposite, especially for voter turnout. Although, as discussed above, NET causes disproportionality, this does not necessarily prevent party splits. As the system fails to respond to the electorate's needs and expectations, untested parties, leaders operating through non-democratic internal party machines, and new parties with ethnic appeal attract and

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<sup>62</sup> Lijphart, *op.cit.*, p. 481.



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mobilize electoral support. This further encourages fragmentation. In short, extreme and new parties with strong ideologies are more likely to mobilize their voters than centralist party leaders.

Our results indicate that the number of parties elected increases as economic growth decreases, meaning those moderate parties' votes are shared between minor parties. Greece has suffered more severe economic recessions than Turkey. The worst three coincided with 1974, 2009, and 2012 elections, when economic growth was -5.71%, -3.56%, and -4.08%, respectively (Table 2). Economic growth was highest during the 2011 Turkish elections (11.13%), followed by Greece's 1961 and 1963 elections at 11% and 10%, respectively, while ENP in Greece varied between 2.5 and 3.0. Party system fragmentation increased in Greece in the 2009 and 2012 elections, held during recessions. Similarly, ENP accelerated to 6.79 in Turkey's 1999 parliamentary elections, when economic growth was -3.38%. Thus, this analysis suggests that mechanical factors better explain party system fragmentation and political stability than socio-economic factors.

The second column in the regression model (Table 3) tested the influence of NET, other institutional factors, and socio-economic variables on party system fragmentation, measured here by ENP. Contrary to expectations, the model suggests that NET increases party system fragmentation, although this is not statistically significant. This confirms our assumptions about Greece and Turkey. That is, NETs have not provided political stability or a stable party system because minor and extreme parties have overcome electoral thresholds in Turkey during the 1990s and in Greece during the 2000s. This is mainly because there were already stable party systems before NETs were implemented. In both countries, NETs have increased disproportionality and reduced the number of parties able to win parliamentary seats by contesting elections. However, this does not guarantee stabilization of the party system (i.e., a low effective number of parties). On the contrary, as Table 4 shows, when the direct impact of NETs on ENPs is measured with a t-test, its impact in both Turkey and Greece is opposite to that desired: NETs have not reduced party system fragmentation.

**Table 4. Regression equation between NETs and effective number of parties.**

	B	t
(Constant)	3.112	10.704 (.291)
Electoral threshold	1.063	<b>2.557</b> (.416)

The two statistically significant predictors of ENP are electoral systems and the largest party's parliamentary seat percentage (Tables 2 and 3, respectively). As noted earlier, the effect of PR contradicted our expectations as it is more likely to increase ENP. The largest party's seat percentage is the most significant determiner of ENP. Dominant-party rule with an absolute parliamentary majority reduces ENP.

### Discussion and Conclusions

Countries with PR use electoral thresholds to balance governmental stability against fair representation. There is extensive literature on party system fragmentation and its relationship with electoral systems and socio-economic elements. In contrast, research is lacking on the effects of NETs. This study thus represents a new step in a larger research agenda connecting the impact of NETs with party system fragmentation, disproportional representation, and government formation. Our results indicate that electoral reforms in Greece and Turkey produced the expected effects on party system size, but that these effects tended to disappear in the long run. Thus, our findings can inspire new comparative electoral studies with small numbers of cases.

For years, Greece and Turkey have promoted single-party governments to provide political stability. Both countries implemented election thresholds to prevent non-core groups from entering parliament, whether as a party or through an independent list, although there was no major necessity and no political behaviour based on minority awareness. However, there is a significant difference in the strategies of their minority parties. Since the 1996 elections, Greece's Muslim minority has supported candidates on national party tickets because the 3% threshold prevents the election of independent candidates. In Turkey, on the other hand, the pro-Kurdish HDP has overcome the 10% NET since 2015 by attracting both a majority of Kurdish voters and

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also the secular, left-wing Turkish voters, who mainly perceive HDP as an agent to reduce the JDP's percentage of parliamentary seats.<sup>63</sup> We should also add that the percentage of ethnic Kurds in Turkey has increased since the adoption of NET in 1983 (to approximately 12-16%).<sup>64</sup> In contrast, Greece's Muslim minority party, DEB, does not have this mobilizing capacity, given that the group's population remained constant within years.

Our results indicate that, in both countries, NETs have increased disproportionality and reduced the number of parties contesting elections and entering parliament. However, they have not guaranteed stabilization of the party systems (low effective number of parties). Instead, minor and extreme parties found new strategies to overcome electoral thresholds in Turkey during the 1990s and in Greece during the 2000s. These include post-electoral coalitions in Turkey (and pre-election coalitions were legalized in 2018 under the new presidential system) and pre-election alliances in Greek politics. Thus, NETs were not entirely successful in politically deterring non-core groups in either country. Rather, our comparison of ENP in Greece and Turkey shows that the party system was more stable before NETs were implemented.

In both countries, especially in Turkey because of the extremely high 10% threshold, opposition and minor parties have criticized NET while incumbent and the largest parties, who benefit from it, have promoted political stability over disproportionality. Turkey's new presidential system was supposed to promote economic development and political stability. Instead, while uniting opposition parties in pre-electoral alliances, it increased party system fragmentation and was accompanied by an economic recession. Moreover, recent elections with pre-electoral alliances have consolidated a bipolar party system in Turkey. The ruling JDP and its ally, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), have agreed to lower the election threshold from 10% to 7% (the bill is submitted to the parliament on 14 March, 2022 and approved on 31 March 2022). While this legal change was welcomed for

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<sup>63</sup> "Kürtlerin yüzde 62'si HDP'ye", *Hürriyet*, 9 June 2015, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/kurtlerin-yuzde-62-si-hdp-ye-29234843>, (25.05.2022).

<sup>64</sup> KONDA 2019 Report on 'Gender in Turkey: Life Styles Research 2018', [https://konda.com.tr/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/KONDA\\_ToplumsalCinsiyetRaporu.pdf](https://konda.com.tr/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/KONDA_ToplumsalCinsiyetRaporu.pdf), (27.7.2021).

reducing vote waste and improving democratic representation,<sup>65</sup> it is also likely to alter the formation of the electoral alliances and party fragmentation for subsequent elections. It is also possible to reduce the secular votes for the pro-Kurdish party.

Since the 1980s and 1990s, respectively, Turkey and Greece have had more extreme or anti-system parties in parliament while centralist parties have lost votes. This indicates that, as Taylor and Herman note, party characteristics and ideological distance in parliament and government are more crucial determinants of political stability than the total number of parties or ENP.<sup>66</sup>

In general, the largest party's seat percentage is crucial in determining both ENP and the number of parties represented in parliament. Interestingly, we also found a negative relationship between competitiveness and the number of parties, implying that lower party competition benefits extreme parties because they can better mobilize their supporters to vote than centralist parties. This is especially true regarding Greek parties because competition is more intense than in Turkish politics. Greece will implement a simple PR system for the next general election, expected to be in 2023, which will eliminate the extra 50 bonus seats and require parties to get more than 47% of the vote (against around 39% in the current reinforced PR system) to win a parliamentary majority.<sup>67</sup> Considering low voter turnout in Greece, this new electoral system is expected to favour small parties and increase party system fragmentation, thereby encouraging the formation of coalition governments. While left-wing parties support coalition governments to increase political monitoring on corruption, the ruling ND party claims that Greece will recover from its major economic crisis more effectively under governments free of coalition commitments.

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<sup>65</sup> "Turkey to reduce election threshold from 10 to 7 percent", *Bianet*, 1 September 2021, Bianet <https://bianet.org/english/politics/249626-turkey-to-reduce-election-threshold-from-10-to-7-percent>, (14.05.2021).

<sup>66</sup> Michael Taylor and V. M. Herman, *Party Systems and Government Stability*, Cambridge University Press, Volume 65, Number 1, 1971, p. 28.

<sup>67</sup> "Greece to change election law, abandon proportional system", *ABC News*, 20 January 2020, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/greece-change-election-law-abandon-proportional-system-68501871>, (05.06.2021).

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