

Gender Asymmetry in Local Politics: Women's Representation in Local Elections in The Republic of Turkey

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Abstract

The issue of women's participation and representation in politics gains more importance in local politics due to the link between local politics and pluralist and participatory democracy. Since women are less involved in national and local political mechanisms than men, policymaking and implementation processes are determined mainly by men. Women's presence in the political sphere has not reached the desired level in worldwide. In this study, the issue of women's participation in local politics and their representation in local politics in the Republic of Turkey will be analyzed. The descriptive analysis method was used in the study. All local elections held between 1930, when women were given the right to vote and be elected, and till the last election in 2019, were included in the analysis. Data were compiled based on the online election archives of official institutions (Turkish Statistical Institute, Supreme Electoral Council), scientific studies in the field, and reports prepared by national and international organizations. It is thought that the study will contribute to all stakeholders working in this field to provide information on the extend of the problem and to develop policies and projects for solution to increase the representation of women in local politics.

Keywords: representation of women in local politics, local politics, Turkey

Yerel Siyasette Toplumsal Cinsiyet Asimetrisi: Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde Yerel Seçimlerde Kadın Temsili

Özet

Kadınların siyasete katılımı ve temsili konusu, yerel siyasetin çoğulcu ve katılımcı demokrasi ile olan bağı nedeniyle yerel siyasette daha da önem kazanmaktadır. Kadınlar, ulusal ve yerel siyaset mekanizmaları içerisinde erkeklere oranla daha az yer aldıkları için, politikaların yapımı ve uygulanması süreçleri çoğunlukla erkekler tarafından belirlenmektedir. Kadınların siyasal alandaki varlıkları, tüm dünyada istenilen seviyeye ulaşabilmiş değildir. Bu çalışmada, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde kadınların yerel siyasete katılımı ve yerel siyasette temsili konusu analiz edilecektir. Çalışmada, betimsel analiz yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Kadınlara seçme ve seçilme hakkının verildiği 1930 yılından 2019 yılındaki son seçime kadar yapılan tüm yerel seçimler analize dahil edilmiştir. Veriler, resmî kurumların (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu, Yüksek Seçim Kurulu) online seçim arşivlerinden, alanda yapılan bilimsel çalışmalardan, ulusal ve uluslararası kuruluşlar tarafından hazırlanan raporlardan yararlanılarak derlenmiştir. Çalışmanın, yerel siyasette kadın temsiline artırılması için siyasetçilere, sivil toplum kuruluşlarına ve bu alanda çalışan akademisyenlere sorunun boyutu hakkında detaylı bilgi sunması ve çözüme yönelik politika ve projeler geliştirme konusunda katkı sağlayacağı düşünülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: yerel siyasette kadın temsili, yerel siyaset, Türkiye

Araştırma ve Yayın Etigi Beyanı

Etik kurul kararı gerektirmemektedir.

Yazarların Makaleye Olan Katkıları

Ö. İ.K.'nin makaleye katkısı %100'dür.

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1. Introduction

Women's participation and representation in politics gain much more importance, especially at the local level, which is one of the most important application areas of participatory and pluralist democracy. Local politics is a concept that encompasses all formations, such as local governments, city councils, women's branches, civil society organizations, civil initiatives and social movements. Regarding women's participation and representation in local politics, the forms of politics in all these areas gain importance. The mutually reinforcing relationship between the local and democracy requires mechanisms that are more easily accessible for all segments of society that are subjected to discrimination to communicate and make their demands heard. In this context, the fact that local policymakers have a better chance of establishing closer and more one-to-one relations with the public should also facilitate the inclusion of women and all other underrepresented groups in local politics. This study will focus on local governments, one of the most important areas of local politics.

Political life in Turkey is generally analyzed within the framework of the Ottoman Empire period and the Republican period of Turkey. The issue of women's political participation and representation is generally researched in accordance with this classification. This study focuses on all local elections held in the Republic of Turkey. In this study, all local elections held from 1930, when women were granted the right to vote and be elected, to 2019, the date of the last local election, will be analyzed based on women's representation. Information and data obtained from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), The Supreme Board of Elections (YSK), projects and reports prepared by national and international organizations, and scientific studies in the field will be analyzed using a descriptive method. The limitations of the study are that the results of the local elections before 1999 cannot be tabulated in detail since the gender-based statistical information of the official data up to the date of the 1999 Local Elections is not available in the online archives of the relevant official institutions (TÜİK, YSK). In this study, since the detailed data of only the local elections between 1999-2019 were obtained, the gender distribution of election results for all local government units for the local elections of 1999-2004-2009-2014 and 2019 are shown in the tables. Other documents and scientific studies were utilized to analyze the results of local elections held between 1930-1999 in the context of gender asymmetry.

In the first section, women's political participation and representation will be discussed in the context of local politics. In this section, the concepts of political participation and political representation will be explained and the underrepresentation of women in local politics, which is the most important instrument of democracy, will be questioned. In the second part, the lower level of women's representation in the political sphere compared to men in the period from the first granting of the right to elect and be elected to women in the Republic of Turkey to the present day will be discussed. In addition, in this section, local politics in Turkey and the status of women's participation and representation in local governments, one of the most important areas of local politics, will be questioned with the help of data from international and national studies. In the third section, all local elections held in the 100-year history of the Republic of Turkey will be analyzed according to the data of official institutions, the gender asymmetry given according to the election results will be revealed, and the reasons for women's underrepresentation will be discussed in the process. The conclusion chapter summarizes and provides policy recommendations.

This study is expected to provide local policy makers, civil society organizations, civil initiatives, the media, scientists working in the relevant field and all women with the opportunity to evaluate the gender asymmetry in the political sphere in Turkey through local elections while developing solutions on how to increase women's political participation and representation. It is thought that a hundred-year breakdown of the gender asymmetry in local politics will provide insights for the development of more egalitarian and gender-sensitive policies and practices in social and political life in the future.

2. Women Representation and Participation in Local Politics

Local politics encompasses policies that regulate the daily lives of the people and address their needs and requirements. Local governments, which are the center of local politics, are institutions where close

relations with the local population can be established and democratic participation can be realized more easily. All different segments of society having a voice in local governance will facilitate their equal access to local services. Local governments where the needs of women, people with disabilities, people with different ethnic and religious identities, and all discriminated identities met to facilitate their daily life practices. In addition, formations such as city councils, women's branches, civil society organizations, civil initiatives, social movements, and local media, which are part of local politics, are also effective mechanisms for participating in the policy-making process and shaping the policies of local governments. The participation and representation of all local segments in local politics become a major concern. In this section, the concepts of local politics, political participation and representation will be analyzed in the context of women's representation in local governments.

Local politics is a concept that includes all political activities related to the administration of municipalities in cities and urban administrative units (Kurtoğlu, 2004, p. 20) and all other civil organizations and formations that produce policies on issues concerning cities and people living in cities. All activities that will increase the welfare of people in cities and urban areas and distribute resources fall within the scope of local politics. In general, local politics, which covers the city and its administration, encompasses all administrative units in the city. In addition, organizations such as non-governmental organizations, foundations, initiatives, private organizations, local media, etc. operating in cities are also among the important participants in the determination of policies that include the solution of problems related to the city and the problems and demands of the people living in the city (Akdoğan, 2008, pp. 9-10). The most basic administrative units in cities are municipalities and cities are governed by mayors elected for five-year terms. Municipal council members elected in local elections also serve in municipal assemblies (Kurtoğlu, p. 20). In order to solve local problems, effective participation of both local governments and local people and all stakeholders in governance is required.

The content of local politics consists of the daily lives of people living locally and problems related to cities. Local governments try to solve these problems through the policies they implement. The participation of local residents in local policymaking is one of the most important features of democratic systems. Although democracy in its purest definition means the rule of the people, the content of democracy has changed today. In representative democracies, democracy includes the right of citizens to elect their representatives as well as the right of the people to participate in governance. This requires a participatory, inclusive, pluralistic, and dialogic democracy. Especially in local governments, it is one of the *sines qua non* requirements of democracy that local politicians and representatives elected by the people, who are the stakeholders of the governments, represent all different identities and social classes and take care of their needs (Çelik and Uluç, 2009, p. 216).

The relationship between democracy and local governments dates back to the Ancient Greek and Roman civilizations. Democracy is a concept associated with city states in the sense of the right to self-government until the 19th century (Yıldırım, 1990, p. 9). Since the first emergence of democracy, democracy has realized itself on urban spaces and with the people living in the city. In order to ensure the effective implementation of democracy in local governments, the people living in the city should be included in the policy-making process. Local people can actively participate in local politics by taking part in local non-governmental organizations, city councils and initiatives, as well as by being elected in the local government mechanism (Aksu and Taştekin, 2020, p. 191). In addition to municipalities and municipal councils, democratic political participation and representation tools should be open to the public in special provincial administrations, village administrations and neighborhood administrations (Şehitoğlu and Çarkçı, 2022, p. 248).

When it comes to urban spaces, it becomes a necessity for women, who are the direct recipients of local services, to take an active part in local politics due to the fact the needs and problems of men and women differ in terms of their use of urban spaces areas. As Alkan (2004, p. 72) points out, this is precisely where the problem of representation in local governments should focus on. Because representation in local politics means that the inhabitants of the city delegate their authority in decisions concerning the town. When

authority is transferred from one sex to another, it leads to blindness to the needs and expectations of half of the city's population from the very beginning. One of the reasons for this is that the difference in lives and expectations is reflected in the difference in the knowledge and experience carried to the mechanisms of representation. In this context, the concepts of political participation and political representation and their relationship with local politics gain importance.

Women's struggle to exist in the political sphere is one of the most researched and questioned issues by scholars (Sancar, 2008; Alkan, 2004; Paxton, et al., 2007; Al-Ali, 2012; Çakır, 2013; Broockman, 2014; Krook and Sanin, 2019; Yadav, 2023). Academic studies in the field generally focus on women's participation and representation in national politics. However, considering that democratic participation starts at the local level, the problem of women's representation and participation in local politics becomes even more important. Projects and scientific studies that will enrich women's participation and representation, struggle practices in all areas of masculine politics provide important gains towards women's equal representation with men in politics.

The definition of political participation is one of the concepts on which there is no consensus among political scientists. In general terms, political participation is explained as the governed segment's obtaining a say as a partner in governance. Reducing political participation only to voting behavior eviscerates the concept. Political participation is a broad concept that includes voting and all kinds of behaviors and efforts to influence political decisions (Büyüksunoğlu, 2013 pp. 20-21). Huntington and Nelson (1976, p. 4) define the concept of political participation as all activities designed by citizens to influence government decisions. Weiner (1971, p. 164) defines political participation as organized or unorganized, permanent, or temporary actions that aim to influence the policies of actors in the government, including local, national, legal, or illegal methods. Dahl (1976, pp. 56-57), while defining political participation in terms of action, also states that interest, caring, and knowledge are important elements of political participation. According to Özbudun (1975, p. 4), political participation, like Weiner's definition, is the activity of citizens to take legal or illegal, successful, or unsuccessful actions determined by themselves or by others in order to influence the policies of the government. Kalaycıoğlu (1983, p. 10) also emphasizes the action aspect in his definition of political participation and explains it as citizens acting of their own volition to influence the decisions of governments.

The concept of political participation covers a wide range of activities. Limiting political participation to voting carries the risk of causing citizens to move away from politics and governance after a while (Eriş and Akıncı, 2019, p. 44). In addition to voting, political participation includes different activities such as participating in non-governmental organizations, participating in various civil initiatives, becoming a member of political parties, participating in protests, writing articles in newspapers, magazines, and blogs. As individuals move away from the political institution where decisions concerning their lives are taken, the tools of democracy will become ineffective. The depoliticization of citizens over time will also pose dangers for democracy. A high rate of political participation is directly proportional to the strength of participatory democracy.

There are various psychological and socio-economic factors affecting political participation. While psychological factors include factors such as sense of efficacy, level of interest and sense of responsibility, socio-economic factors include factors such as education, income, occupation, gender, age, and urbanization. Dahl (1976) classifies the dimensions of political participation as interest, caring, knowledge and action. While determining the dimensions of political participation, the psychological and socio-economic conditions of individuals who participate in politics or not, and how this affect and shape the dimensions of participation are essential. The degree to which the dimensions of political participation increase political participation also varies. For example, a person may only be interested in a political event and try to get more information about it. Another person may act by deciding to put the information he/she

has acquired into action. In this case, the levels of political participation of these people will be different (Eser and Sarışahin, 2016, p. 40).

In this context, each of these psychological and socio-economic factors, as well as dimensions such as interest, knowledge and action, are important in explaining why women's levels of political participation are lower than men's. In addition, entrenched beliefs based on gender, other intersecting identities and the laws of the countries continue to feed the given discrimination. Women have been prevented from participating in politics, one of the most important public spheres, for various reasons within patriarchal systems (Gökçimen, 2008, p. 7). Thus, women's level of political participation has remained low and their political representation rates have also remained low. Especially when we look at the proportion of women in parliaments and local politics, it is seen that women are underrepresented compared to men almost all over the world.

The concept of political representation, like the concept of political participation, is a concept on which no consensus has been reached by political scientists in terms of its definition. As cited by Örs (2006, p. 7), one of the answers given by political scientists and writers to the question of what representation is that representation can only exist if the people represented believe in it. The question of what creates the feeling and belief of representation in people finds its counterpart in the embodied representation indicators that include elements such as the parliament building, municipal and public buildings, the national flag, the national anthem, and voting. Therefore, it becomes difficult to talk about a single definition of representation. In essence, the concept of representation has changed with different socio-economic and political developments since the Middle Ages and by the 16th century, it was defined in terms of aristocracy and monarchies (Çelik and Uluç, p. 218). Many thinkers: J. Bodin, J. Locke, E. Burke, T. Hobbes, J. S. Mill, J. J. Rousseau, E. J. Sieyes, etc. - have contributed to the development of the concept by putting forward different ideas on the concept of representation. What these ideas have in common is that a small section of the public makes decisions on behalf of the public and implements them. In this context, representation means the delegation of one's powers to others (Bulut and Taniyıcı, 2008, p. 172). When the concept of representation is examined historically, we come across parliaments as the institution that embodies the concept. In this context, due to the difficulty of implementing direct democracy, representative democracies, in which representation is based on elections and in which the people elect people to represent them, have become widespread. In this context, parliaments in national politics and municipalities in local politics are among the most important institutions of representative democracies (Örs, p. 6-7).

Political representation emerges in democratic systems when the people, with their free will and for a certain period, elect people to represent them. Thus, as representatives of the people those elected become responsible for defending the interests of the people they represent in parliament and municipalities. As Çitçi (1996, p. 6) points out, the principle of political representation is thus based on the ideal of an informed electorate that will choose among representative candidates who will advocate for basic policies within the framework of their interests and demands, and a representative who will advocate for general interests. In this context, policies that are sensitive to the needs of different segments and equal representation of the segments affected by local politics and local policies gain importance. Alkan (2005) suggests two considerations for the development of a local service approach that is sensitive to women's needs. The first is the provision of services and arrangements that meet the needs of women and fall within the scope of social welfare practices and public support policies. The second is to consider the fact that women may also be affected by the provision of services that do not prioritize women, or the provision of these services inadequately (Alkan, 2005, p. 64). For this very reason, the representation of women in national and local politics needs to increase to prevent policies and practices from being based on gender asymmetry.

In democratic systems, political representation, especially the representation of all different groups, is one of the most important requirements of democracy. The participation or representation of groups that are subjected to various discrimination practices due to their identities, beliefs, gender, and social position in the political representation mechanism is a situation that strengthens democracy. In this sense, the high rate

of women's political representation is also associated with democracy. Since the ancient Greek democracy, the level of women's representation in politics has been one of the most studied issues. According to Sancar (2008, p. 219), one of the most important obstacles to progress in terms of democracy and women is the failure to understand the link between women's rights, women's equality, and women's representation on the road to democratization. The more women's participation and representation in parliament and local political mechanisms, the stronger the democracy and the faster the socio-economic development of countries (Kentworthy and Malami, 1999, p. 239).

In Turkey, as in the world, the problem of women's participation and representation in local politics and local governments is based on the male-dominated structure and gender patterns. Women have always carried a symbolic meaning in national and local politics and this understanding continues. Women who are nominated as candidates are used to affirm the image of political parties or to benefit from victim psychology. Moreover, since women's presence in the public sphere is problematic, their presence in both national and local politics remains limited. Since women's primary sphere of duty is considered to be the "home", the perception that women in politics will disrupt these duties and neglect the household is valid. In fact, it is often women as well as men who direct and carry this perception. Another reason for the lack of women's participation and representation in local politics and local governments in Turkey is that non-governmental organizations and women, who are the carriers of women's struggle, have not included local politics and representation in local politics within their interest and efforts (Alkan, 2004, p. 75). In this context, looking at the representation of women in local politics and local governments in Turkey within the historical process will provide important outputs for policy makers, civil society organizations and researchers working on the relevant subject in terms of finding solutions to increase the level of women's political participation and representation.

3. Women in Local Politics in Turkey

In this section, the question of local politics and women's participation and representation in local politics will be discussed in the context of Turkey. In Turkey, women gained most of their civil and political rights only after the establishment of the republic, such as improving the social position of women and granting women the right to vote and be elected. Turkey is among the countries that granted women the right to vote and be elected relatively early. However, one hundred years later, women are still underrepresented in national and local politics.

Among the reasons for women's exclusion from the public sphere and thus from politics is the belief that women are inherently incomplete and inadequate beings. Because of these characteristics, women were not even recognized as citizens for a long time. Thus, men were absolutized as the only legitimate representative and women were confined to private spheres. The 17th and 18th centuries in America and Europe were the periods when women began to demand their rights and to make these demands loudly heard (Sumbas, 2015, pp. 105-108). Olympe de Gouges, who criticized the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* adopted in France in 1791, saying that it did not include women, published the *Declaration of the Rights of Women and Citizens*. Gouges was guillotined by the *Revolutionary Court* in 1793 for entering the field of politics, a field unbecoming for women. In 1792, M. Wollstonecraft wrote the book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* and defended the equality of the sexes and women's rights. In 1848, when only men were granted the right to vote as a result of the *Chartist Movement* in England, women in England started to struggle for their political rights. It was only in 1918 that women in England gained the right to vote (Çakır, 2013, pp. 14-19). In the Republic of Turkey, women were granted political rights very soon after the new state was established.

The first political rights granted to women in the Republic of Turkey were recognized in local politics. Accordingly, women were granted the right to vote in local elections for the first time with the *Municipality Law* enacted in 1930. In the 1930 local elections, Nezihe Muhittin from the Beyazıt district of Istanbul and Suat Derviş from the Beyoğlu district of Istanbul were nominated as candidates of the Free Republican People's Party. Since the *Free Republic Party* was dissolved in 1930, only three months after its

establishment, the results of the elections were not obtained. Women gained the right to elect and be elected as mukhtars and to elect and participate in village committees through an amendment to the *Village Law* in 1934. Women were given the right to vote and be elected in parliamentary elections in 1934. The right to vote and be elected for men was granted in 1923, the year the republic was first established. The first election in which women were elected as members of parliament and entered the parliament was the general election held on February 8, 1935. Accordingly, 17 women were elected as member of parliament in the parliamentary elections held on this date. In the March 1, 1936, by-election, Hatice Özgenel, a retired teacher, was elected as Çankırı MP. Thus, one more woman was elected as a member of parliament in the by-election and entered the parliament (Çakır, 2013, pp. 97-104) and the rate of women MP in the parliament became 4.6% in 1936 (Gökçimen, p. 21). In 1950, the year of the transition to multiparty life, the rate of women MP in the parliament remained at 0.62%. This rate was 14.4% in 2007 and 17.1% in 2018 general elections (Sancar, 2018, p. 13).

Turkey is among the countries with the lowest representation of women in local political institutions. According to the report of TUSIAD named *Gender Inequality in Turkey: The March Towards Equality between Women and Men: Education, Working Life and Politics* (2008, p. 235), women's representation in politics in Turkey shows a reverse trend when compared to countries around the world. Accordingly, although women's representation in national politics is low in many countries, women's political representation in local political institutions, where they can take part in policymaking, is higher in these countries. In Turkey, as in national politics, local political decision-making bodies are also dominated by men. The reasons for the male dominance at the local level are the greater accessibility of rant and the traditional patriarchal patterns prevailing in local centers. There is a need for more women's participation and representation in local policies that regulate women's daily life practices. Women's participation in decisions is important in meeting many basic needs such as ensuring security on the streets after dark, opening daycare centers for children, increasing playgrounds, organizing streets and avenues, transportation, cleaning, and food.

Since 2005, *United Nations Women (UN Women)* and the *Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)* have been preparing *Women in Politics* maps to determine the position of women in politics in states around the world. According to UN-IPU's most recent *2023 Women in Politics Map*, women are far from equality in political participation. This map shows that Turkey ranks 173rd among 190 countries in terms of women's participation in politics with a rate of 5.9%. Out of 190 countries, only 31 countries have women as heads of state or government and 22.8% have women as ministers. Albania (66.7%), Finland (64.3%), Spain (63.6%), Nicaragua (62.5%) and Liechtenstein (60%) are the top five countries with the highest number of women ministers (UN Women-IPU, "Women in Politics, 2023 Map", 2023).

Another important document in terms of revealing gender inequality is the *Global Gender Gap Report* published by the *World Economic Forum (WEF)* since 2006. The report is based on the following criteria: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. *The 17th Global Gender Inequality Index Report*, published in 2023, evaluated 146 countries and compared relevant data across countries. In this report, Turkey ranks 129th out of 146 countries with a score of 0.638. Considering the analysis of the report in the political field, it is seen that inequality between genders continues in political leadership. According to the report, while the rate of women in parliament was 18.7% among 76 countries in 2013, this rate increased to 22.9% in 2022. In local politics, women's representation is above 40% in 18 countries out of 117 countries, including Bolivia with 50.4%, India with 44.4% and France with 42.3%. The report underlines that research shows that the presence of women in local decision-making positions plays a very effective role in redefining local priorities. The report also states that women in leadership positions in local politics bring a rich perspective to governance and inclusively prioritize family-friendly policies and policies that promote gender equality, such as income, employment, and parental leave. It is also noted that women's prioritization of these issues has contributed to more equitable and responsive local communities. However, according to the report, 24 countries, mostly in the Middle East, North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa, including Saudi Arabia (1.2%), Ghana (3.8%), Turkey (10.1%) and Japan (14.31%), have less than 15% representation of women leaders

in local politics. In 135 of the countries included in the report, nearly 3 million women have been elected to decision-making bodies in local politics. In addition, 85 countries have implemented legal gender quotas in local elections, 66 countries have enacted candidate quotas, and 19 countries have reserved seats for women. Despite all these positive developments, as of 2020, out of the 6.02 million elected members of local governments worldwide, only 2.18 million, or 36%, are women. Although women are represented in local politics at a higher rate than women in national parliaments (25%), the report draws attention to the fact that gender equality in local governments is still not achieved (Global Gender Gap Report, 2023, pp. 53-55).

Women's political participation and representation levels are as low in local political institutions as they are in parliament. International conventions and documents aimed at increasing women's participation and representation in local politics include policies and practices to increase women's participation and representation in this field. Examples of international conventions regulating the representation and participation of women in local politics include the European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), *European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life* dated 2006; the *European Urban Charter* and the *European Declaration on the Rights of Citizens* dated in 2008. As example for international documents are the International Union of Local Authorities (IULA) Declaration on *Women and Local Government* dated in 1998; the Council of Europe Charter of *Local Self-Government* dated in 1985 and the Paris Global Agenda for *Equality between Women and Men in Local Life* dated in 2015 (Sancar, pp. 16-17).

The European Charter for Women and Men in Local Life and *Local Agenda 21 (YG-21)* are documents that are frequently referred to in Turkey in terms of women's participation and representation in local politics. Turkey initiated *Local Agenda 21 (YG-21)* practices in 1997 with the support of the *United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)* under a project coordinated by the United Cities and Local Governments, Middle East, and West Asia Regional Organization (UCLG-MEWA). In the course of time, these activities were transformed into Turkey's *Local Agenda 21 (YG-21)* Program. Under this program, the establishment of *City Councils* in provinces and municipalities was encouraged and supported. It was also made possible for local governments to establish *Women's Assemblies*. For this purpose, a *City Council Regulation* was prepared within the framework of the *Municipality Law No. 5393* (Sancar, pp. 20-21).

In general, women's participation and representation in both national and local politics in Turkey has always been inadequate. Due to the natural relationship between politics and power, these fields are dominated by the masculine. In order to take part in the political sphere, women either have to masculinize and exist there or, on the contrary, as carriers of patriarchal discourses, they emphasize the traditional roles and responsibilities that are seen as specific to women. One of the examples of this is Latife Bekir, who was elected as a member of the Istanbul City Council in the 1930 municipal elections: "Municipalism means, first and foremost, an enlarged household administration". With this discourse, Ms. Latife emphasized the similarity between housework and local services, which were seen as women's duty and responsibility, and thus legitimized traditional gender codes and discourses (Yaraman, 1999, p. 44).

4. Reading Local Elections Since the Founding of the Republic of Turkey in the Context of Gender Asymmetry

Although women were granted the right to vote and be elected at an early period in the Republic of Turkey, women's representation in parliament, ministries, and other local political institutions such as municipalities, provincial and sub-provinces counsels and mukhtarships has not reached an adequate level in the historical process. Since 1930, women have gained the right to vote and be elected in local elections and since 1934 in national elections. Throughout the 100-year history of the Republic of Turkey, the level of women's representation in local politics has remained very low compared to men. Among all mayors

elected during this period, 31 thousand men and 119 women were elected as mayors (KADER, 2021, p. 33).

If the participation and representation of women in local elections held between 1923 and 1946, the single party period of the Republic of Turkey, is analyzed, it will be seen that women's participation and representation rates in local politics were low in these years. Nevertheless, women struggled to exist in the male-dominated political sphere and were elected to municipal councils in some provinces. In this section, due to the difficulty of accessing data on all local elections held throughout the history of the republic, data on local elections until the 1999 local elections are compiled from the projects and reports of organizations working in the field and scientific studies in the field. Data on local elections between 1999-2019 are compiled from the data of TÜİK and YSK.

On April 3, 1930, with the amendment made to the Municipality Law, Latife Bekir, Rana Sani Yaver, Refika Hulusi Behçet and Safiye Hanım, who ran for the municipal elections from the Republican People's Party (CHP), were elected to the Istanbul Municipal Council, and Nakiye Hanım was elected to the Permanent Council. Women's right to elect and be elected to the village headmen and the board of elders in villages became possible in 1934 with an amendment to the *Village Law* (Çakır, p. 125). The first female Sub-District Mayor in the Republic of Turkey was Mrs. Sadiye, who was elected in 1930 from Kılıçkaya town in Yusufeli district of Artvin province. The first woman mayor was elected for the first time in the local elections held in 1950. In these elections, Müfide İlhan, as the candidate of the Democratic Party (DP), became the first woman mayor of Mersin and Turkey (Bozkurt and Bozkurt, 2014, p. 53).

In the 1938 local elections, four women were elected from the CHP to the Municipal Council in Ankara: Makbule Naci Eldeniz, Hürriyet Sırmaçık, Zehra Boyov and Süreyya Ülgün. Four women were also elected to the Istanbul Municipal Council, while no female candidate was elected from Izmir. The women elected to the Istanbul Municipal Council are Mediha Orhon, Ayşe Yeğen, Nebahat Sunar and Nahide Sipahi. Some other women who were elected to the municipal councils outside Istanbul and Ankara are Münevver Asal, who was elected as a member of the Izmit Municipal Council, Emine Ahsen Şengül, who was elected as a member of the Bursa Municipal Council, and Fatma Yüce, who was elected as a member of the Edirne Municipal Council. In the 1942 local elections, five women were elected to the Ankara Municipal Council; Advıye Ferik, Makbule Naci Eldeniz, Hürriyet Sırmaçık, Meliha Evcen and Ubeyde Elli. Hürriyet Sırmaçık was elected in the previous elections in 1938 and 1942 and continued to serve in her second term. After failing to elect a female municipal councilor in 1938, Izmir elected 3 female councilors in the 1942 elections. These were Cevriye Uyum, Belkıs Bilman and Tayyibe Onaran. In Istanbul, where a total of 4 women were elected as municipal councilors in 1938, the number of women elected in the 1942 elections increased to 9; Nebahat Erker, Semiramis Tezel, Faide Esendal, Celile Fikret Onural, Fatma Akyol, Safiye Erol, Lahika Manyas, Bican Bağcıoğlu and Nimet Günaydın (Üste, 2017, pp. 108-109).

In the local elections held in 1934, 1938 and 1942, women were nominated as candidates from almost all provinces. In the 1946 local elections, the number of women elected decreased compared to the 1942 elections. Since pre-1999 detailed statistical data on the results of local elections are not available in the online archives of official institutions, Table 1 only shows the number of women mayors elected by the parties participating in the local elections until 1994.

Table 1 lists the local elections held in Turkey between 1930 and 1994 according to the number of women mayors elected by the parties participating in the elections. Accordingly, in 1930, during the one-party rule, the CHP elected only 1 woman mayor out of a total of 502 mayors. Data for 1946 is not shown as it was not available. In 1950, in the first local elections of multi-party rule, only DP elected 1 woman mayor out of a total of 600 mayors. In this period, no woman was elected from CHP. 1955 and 1963 elections are not shown in the table due to lack of data. In the 1968 local elections, out of a total of 1243 mayors, CHP's and Justice Party's (AP) 1 woman candidate was elected as mayor. In the 1973 local elections, a total of 1620 mayors were elected. Only 5 of these mayors were women; 1 was elected from CHP, 1 from AP and 3 independently. In the 1977 local elections, as in 1973, only 5 women mayors were elected out of a total of

1710 mayors. One woman was elected as mayor from CHP, three from AP and one independent woman. In the 1984 elections, the first local elections held after the 1980 military coup, no woman mayor was elected among a total of 1692 mayors. In the 1989 elections, only 2 women mayors were elected from the Social Democrat Populist Party (SHP). The total number of mayors elected this year was 1976. In the 1994 local elections, the increase in the number of municipalities was not reflected in the number of elected women mayors. Accordingly, the number of women mayors elected among a total of 2695 mayors was only 9. Of the women mayors, 2 were elected from the Independent, 2 from the SHP, 3 from the True Path Party (DYP) and 2 from the Motherland Party (ANAP) lists.

Table 1. List of All Local Elections Held in The Republic of Turkey Until 1999 According to Women Mayors

Local Election Year	Total Number of Mayors	Total Number of Women Mayors	CHP	AP	Independent Candidate	SHP	DYP	ANAP	DP
1930	502	1	1						
1946	NA	NA							
1950	600	1							1
1955	NA	NA							
1963	1045	NA							
1968	1243	4	3	1					
1973	1620	5	1	1	3				
1977	1710	5	1	3	1				
1984	1692	-							
1989	1976	2				2			
1994	2695	9			2	2	3	2	

Source: Compiled by the author from KADER, Why Women Have No Name in Local Politics (2021, p. 25).

Local governments are administrative units where it is easier for the public to participate directly in governance, and local government bodies facilitate this democratic participation. Municipal councils stand out as the decision-making bodies of local governments. The municipal council is the most important organ through which local participation and representation mechanisms function; the demands and problems of the people are brought to the agenda of the municipal council through the council members. In this context, the higher the proportion of women in the municipal council, the more women's demands and problems will be discussed on the agenda of the council, the decision-making body of the municipality. Other administrative units of local governments are the provincial general council, village and neighborhood mukhtars and village and neighborhood councils of elders. Local elections are held every five years in Turkey. Representatives to serve in local government units are elected by citizens residing within the borders of the relevant settlement (Official Gazette, 2005).

When it comes to women's representation in local governments, the representation rates of women in the office of mayor mostly come to mind. This study aims to determine the rate of female representation in all organs of local government. Thus, the level of democratic participation in all relevant units of local politics and the gender asymmetry in these units will be questioned.

Table 2. Distribution of Mayors who won the 1999 Local Elections by Gender and Political Parties

Political Parties	Women	Total Number of Mayors
CHP	3	
ANAP	5	
HADEP	3	
DSP	2	3200
MHP	1	
TOTAL	14	

Source: Compiled by the author from KADER, Why Women Have No Name in Local Politics (2021, p. 25).

Table 2 shows the distribution of women elected as mayors according to political parties according to the results of the April 18, 1999, Local Elections. Accordingly, out of the 22 political parties that participated

in the elections, only 5 of them elected women mayors. The total number of women mayors is 14 (YSK, 1999 Local Administrations Elections). Three women from CHP, five from ANAP, three from People's Democratic Party (HADEP), two from Democratic Left Party (DSP) and one from the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) were elected as mayors. The total number of mayors was 3200 in 1999.

Table 3. Number and Ratios of Women and Men Elected to Local Governments in Turkey According to the Results of 1999 Local Elections

	Number of Men	Proportion of Men (%)	Number of Women	Proportion of Women (%)	TOTAL
Mayor	3,197	99.4	18	0.6	3,215
Municipality Councilor	33,543	98.4	541	1.6	34,084
Provincial General Council Member	3,078	98.6	44	1.4	3,122

Source: TÜİK, Gender Statistics 2021, p. 135.

Table 3 shows the numbers and ratios of male and female representatives elected to local government positions across Turkey according to the results of the April 18, 1999, Local Elections. Accordingly, there are 3,197 male and 18 female mayors out of a total of 3,215 mayors. According to the 1999 local election results, 98.6% of the mayors elected were men and 1.4% were women. It is seen that women are represented at a very low rate in the representation mechanism of local politics. Out of a total of 34,084 Municipality Council Members, 33,543 were men and 541 were women. Again, with a rate of 1.4%, women are far below the 98.6% of elected men. Among the Provincial General Council Members, women were again underrepresented compared to men. Accordingly, out of a total of 3,122 provincial general council members, 3,078 are men and 44 are women. While the representation rate of women remained at 1.4%, men were represented in the provincial general council with a rate of 98.6%.

Table 4. Distribution of Mayors by Gender and Political Parties in the 2004 Local Elections

Political Parties	Women	Total Number of Mayors
CHP	4	3,225
SHP	1	
DYP	1	
DP	2	
AKP	9	
TOPLAM	17	

Source: Compiled by the author from KADER, Why Women Have No Name in Local Politics (2021, p. 25).

Table 4 shows the distribution of women elected as mayors according to political parties according to the results of the March 28, 2004, Local Elections. Accordingly, out of the 21 political parties that participated in the elections, only 5 of them elected women mayors. The total number of women mayors is 17 (YSK, 2004 Local Administrations Elections). Four women from CHP, one from SHP, one from DYP, two from DP and nine from Justice and Development Party (AKP) were elected and served as mayors. The total number of mayors was 3,225 in 2004.

Table 5. Number and Ratios of Women and Men Elected to Local Governments in Turkey According to the Results of 2004 Local Elections

	Number of Men	Proportion of Men (%)	Number of Women	Proportion of Women (%)	TOTAL
Mayor	3,207	99.4	18	0.6	3,225
Municipality Councilor	33,660	97.6	817	2.4	34,477
Provincial General Council Member	3,151	98.2	57	1.8	3,208

Source: TÜİK, Gender Statistics 2021, p. 135.

Table 5 shows the numbers and ratios of male and female representatives elected to local government positions across Turkey according to the results of the March 28, 2004, Local Elections. There are 3,207 male and 18 female mayors out of a total of 3,225 mayors. According to the 2004 local election results, 99.4% of the elected mayors were men and 0.6% were women. Compared to the 1999 elections, the number

of elected women mayors was 18 in 2004 as well. Since there was an increase in the number of municipalities in 2004 compared to 1999, the proportion of women mayors elected in 2004 remained lower. Of the total 34,084 Municipal Council Members, 34,477 are men and 817 are women. With a rate of 2.4%, women were far below the 97.6% of men elected. Compared to the 1999 election results, the number of women elected as municipal council members increased in 2004 due to the increase in the number of municipalities. Among the Provincial General Council Members, women were again underrepresented compared to men. Accordingly, out of a total of 3,208 provincial general council members, 3,151 are men and 57 are women. While the representation rate of women remained at 1.8%, men were represented in the provincial general council with a rate of 98.2%. Compared to the 1999 elections, the proportion of women in the provincial general council increased slightly in the 2004 elections, from 1.4 to 1.8.

Table 6. Gender Distribution of Voters in 2009 Local Elections

	Number of Female Voters	Number of Male Voters	Total Number of Voters
2009 Elections	24,353,222	23,653,428	48,006,650

Source: Obtained from the 2009 Local Administration Election Results of the YSK.

Table 6 shows the gender distribution of registered voters in the March 29, 2009, Local Elections. Accordingly, out of a total of 48,006,650 registered voters, 23,653,428 were male voters and 24,353,222 were female voters. As these data show, although women make up half of the total number of voters, the gender distribution of elected candidates shows that the representation of women in politics is not at the same level.

Table 7. Distribution of Mayors by Gender and Political Parties in 2009 Local Elections

Political Parties	Women	Total Number of Mayors
CHP	6	2,903
DTP	15	
AKP	3	
DP	2	
TOTAL	26	

Source: Compiled by the author from KADER, Why Women Have No Name in Local Politics (2021, p. 25).

Table 7 shows the distribution of women elected as mayors according to political parties according to the results of the March 29, 2009, Local Elections. Accordingly, out of the 21 political parties that participated in the elections, only 4 of them elected women mayors. The total number of women mayors is 26 (YSK, 2009 Local Administrations Elections). 6 women from CHP, 15 from Democratic Society Party (DTP), 3 from AKP and 2 from DP were elected as mayors. The total number of mayors was 2903 in 2009.

Table 8. Number and Ratios of Women and Men Elected to Local Governments in Turkey According to the Results of 2009 Local Elections

	Number of Men	Proportion of Men (%)	Number of Women	Proportion of Women (%)	TOTAL
Mayor	2,922	99.1	26	0.9	2,948
Municipality Councilor	30,450	95.8	1,340	4.2	31,790
Provincial General Council Member	3,269	96.7	110	3.3	3,379
Village Headmen	34,210	99.8	65	0.2	34,275
Village Council of Elders	137,848	99.8	329	0.2	138,177
Neighborhood Headmen	18,178	97.7	429	2.3	18,607
Neighborhood Council of Elders	71,174	98.1	1,409	1.9	72,583

Source: TÜİK, Gender Statistics 2021, p. 135.

Table 8 shows the numbers and ratios of male and female representatives elected to local government positions across Turkey according to the results of the March 29, 2009, Local Elections. There are 2,922 male and 26 female mayors out of a total of 2,948 mayors. According to the 2009 local election results, 99.1% of the elected mayors were male and 0.9% were female. Compared to the 2004 local elections, the number of municipalities decreased in the 2009 elections. Nevertheless, the proportion of women mayors increased slightly compared to 2004. Out of a total of 31,790 Municipal Council Members, 30,450 are men and 1340 are women. Women represented 4.2% and men 95.8% of the municipal councils. Out of a total

of 3,379 provincial general council members, 3,269 were men and 110 were women. While the representation rate of women remained at 3.3%, men were represented in the provincial general council with a rate of 96.7%.

Unlike the 1999 and 2004 local election results, this table also shows the number and ratio of elected male and female representatives at the village and neighborhood level. According to this table, out of a total of 34,275 village mukhtars, 34,210 are male and 65 are female. The ratio of female village mukhtars is 0.2%, while the ratio of male village mukhtars is 99.8%. The total number of people elected to the Village Council of Elders is 138,177. Of these, 137,848 are men and 329 are women. While the representation rate of women remained at 0.2%, men were represented with a high rate of 99.8%. In terms of neighborhood mukhtars, 18,178 male and 429 female mukhtars were elected from a total of 18,607 mukhtars. Accordingly, the rate of female mukhtars is 2.3% and the rate of male mukhtars is 97.9%. Finally, 71,174 men and 1409 women were elected among the total 72,583 Neighborhood Council of Elders. Men constituted 98.1% and women 1.9% of the neighborhood elders' committees.

Table 9. 2014 Local Elections Gender Distribution of Voters

	Number of Female Voters	Number of Male Voters	Total Number of Voters
2014 Elections	26,704,757	25,991,075	52,695,832

Source: Obtained from the 2014 Local Administration Election Results of the YSK

Table 9 shows the gender distribution of registered voters in the March 30, 2014, Local Elections. Accordingly, out of a total of 52,695,832 registered voters, 26,704,757 are male voters and 25,991,075 are female voters. As this data shows, half of the total voters are women. However, when the gender distribution of elected candidates is analyzed, the representation of women in politics is not equal.

Table 10. Distribution of Metropolitan Municipality Mayors by Gender and Political Parties in 2014 Local Elections

	Men	Women	Total
AKP	17	1	18
BDP	1	1	2
CHP	5	1	6
MHP	3	-	3
Independent Candidate	1	-	1
TOTAL	27	3	30

Source: Obtained from data in TÜİK Data Portal.

Table 10 shows the gender distribution of candidates elected as metropolitan mayors in the March 30, 2014, Local Elections according to political parties. A total of 26 political parties participated in the elections (YSK, 2014 Local Administrations Elections). In the 2014 local elections, women metropolitan municipality candidates were elected for the first time in the history of the Republic of Turkey. Accordingly, 17 male and 1 female metropolitan municipality mayors were elected from the AK Party. The elected female candidate from the AK Party was Fatma Şahin, Mayor of Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality. The Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) elected 1 male and 1 female mayor; CHP elected 5 male and 1 female mayor. The female metropolitan municipality mayor elected from the BDP was Gülten Kışanak from Diyarbakır and the female metropolitan municipality elected from the CHP was Özlem Çerçioğlu from Aydın. Out of a total of 30 metropolitan municipality mayors, 27 are men and only 3 are women. Despite the low proportion of women, it is a great achievement that women have been elected as metropolitan municipality for the first time in the history of the republic.

Table 11 shows the number and proportion of male and female representatives elected to local government positions across Turkey according to the results of the March 30, 2014, Local Elections. In 2014, with the Law No. 6360, 30 provinces with a population exceeding 750 thousand became metropolitan cities (Union

of Municipalities of Turkey, 2014, p. 4). With this change, the comparison of 2009 and 2014 local elections is no longer valid.

Table 11. Number and Ratios of Women and Men Elected to Local Governments in Turkey According to the Results of 2014 Local Elections

	Number of Men	Proportion of Men (%)	Number of Women	Proportion of Women (%)	TOTAL
Mayor	1,356	97.1	40	2.9	1,396
Municipality Councilor	18,300	89.3	2,198	10.7	20,498
Provincial General Council Member	1,191	95.2	60	4.8	1,251
Village Headmen	18,085	99.7	58	0.3	18,143
Village Council of Elders	79,689	98.8	1,007	1.2	80,696
Neighborhood Headmen	31,013	98.0	622	2.0	31,635
Neighborhood Council of Elders	134,362	97.5	3,419	2.5	137,781

Source: TÜİK, Gender Statistics 2021, p. 135.

There are 1,356 male and 40 female mayors out of a total of 1,396 mayors. 2.9% of women and 97.1% of men were elected as mayors. Out of a total of 20,498 Municipal Council Members, 18,300 are men and 2,198 are women. Women were represented in the municipal council with a rate of 10.7% and men with a rate of 89.3%. Out of a total of 1,251 provincial general council members, 1,191 were male and 60 were female. While the representation rate of women remained at 4.8%, men were represented in the provincial general council with a rate of 5.2%.

Out of a total of 18,143 village mukhtars, 18,085 are male and 58 are female. The ratio of female village mukhtars is 0.3%, while the ratio of male village mukhtars is 99.7%. The total number of people elected to the Village Council of Elders is 80,696. Of these, 79,689 are men and 1,007 are women. While the representation rate of women remained at 1.2%, men were represented with a high rate of 98.8%. In terms of neighborhood mukhtars, 31,013 male and 622 female mukhtars were elected from a total of 31,635 mukhtars. Accordingly, the rate of female mukhtars is 2.0% and the rate of male mukhtars is 98.0%. Finally, 134,362 men and 3,419 women were elected among a total of 137,781 Neighborhood Council of Elders. Men constituted 97.5% and women 2.5% of the neighborhood elders' committees.

Table 12. 2019 Local Elections Gender Distribution of Voters

	Number of Female Voters	Number of Male Voters	Total Number of Voters
2019 Elections	28,929,732	28,128,904	57,058,636

Source: Obtained from YSK 2019 Local Administration Election Results data

Table 12 shows the gender distribution of registered voters in the March 31, 2019, Local Elections. Accordingly, 28,128,904 of the total 57,058,636 registered voters are male voters and 28,929,732 are female voters. As this data shows, more than half of the total voters are women. However, when the gender distribution of elected candidates is analyzed, it is seen that the representation rate of women in politics is very low compared to men.

Table 13. Distribution of Metropolitan Municipality Mayors by Gender and Political Parties in 2019 Local Elections

Political Parties	Men	Women	Total
AKP	14	1	15
CHP	10	1	11
MHP	1	-	1
HDP	2	1	3
TOTAL	27	3	30

Source: Obtained from data in TÜİK Data Portal.

Table 13 shows the gender distribution of candidates elected as metropolitan municipality mayors in the March 31, 2019, local elections by political parties. A total of 13 political parties participated in the 2019

local elections. Comparing the 2014 local elections with the 2019 local elections, it is seen that only 3 women were elected as metropolitan municipality mayors in both elections. Accordingly, AK Party elected 14 male and 1 female metropolitan municipality mayor. Fatma Şahin, who was elected from the AK Party in 2014, was elected as the mayor of Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality in 2019. From CHP, 10 male and 1 female candidate were elected as metropolitan municipality mayors. Özlem Çerççi, who was elected as Aydın Metropolitan Municipality Mayor from CHP in 2014 local elections, retained her position in 2019. One woman candidate from Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) was elected as metropolitan municipality mayors. The elected woman candidate is Bedia Özgökçe from Van. Another female HDP candidate, Berivan Helen from Siirt, was denied a mayor's license by the Supreme Board of Elections (YSK) on the grounds that she was not qualified to be elected, citing a previous dismissal decision under the state of emergency decree. Bedia Özgökçe, who was elected as the mayor of Van Metropolitan Municipality, was dismissed from her position on August 19, 2019, three months after taking office, and a trustee was appointed in her place. According to the 2019 local election results, 27 of the 30 metropolitan mayors are men and only 3 are women. This number decreased to 2 with the dismissal of women mayors after the elections.

In the 31 March 2019 local elections, the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality mayoral election was annulled after the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and the Justice and Development Party (AKP) appealed to the Supreme Electoral Council alleging irregularities in the Istanbul elections. On June 23, 2023, only the elections for the Mayor of Istanbul were repeated.

Table 14. Number and Proportion of Women and Men Elected to Local Governments in Turkey According to 2019 Local Elections Results

	Number of Men	Proportion of Men (%)	Number of Women	Proportion of Women (%)	TOTAL
Mayor	1,348	97.0	41	3.0	1,389
Provincial Mayor	50	98.0	1	2.0	51
Metropolitan District Mayor	494	95	25	4.8	519
Sub-District-City Mayor	777	98.5	12	1.5	789
Municipality Councilor	18,461	89.0	2,284	11.0	20,745
Provincial General Council Member	1,223	96.2	48	3.8	1,271
Village Headmen	18,081	99.4	115	0.6	18,196
Village Council of Elders	79,689	98.8	1,007	1.2	80,696
Neighborhood Headmen	31,049	97.0	970	3.0	32,019
Neighborhood Council of Elders	134,362	97.5	3,418	2.5	137,780

Source: TÜİK, Gender Statistics 2021, p. 135.

Table 14 shows the number and proportions of male and female representatives elected to local government positions across Turkey according to the results of the March 31, 2019, Local Elections. There are 1,348 male and 41 female mayors out of a total of 1,389 mayors. In this data, data on metropolitan municipality mayors are also included. In this case, 3 of the 41 female mayors are metropolitan municipality mayors. 3.0% of women and 97.0% of men were elected as mayors. Among the 51 provincial mayors, there are 50 male and 1 female candidate. While the rate of male provincial mayors is 98.0%, the rate of female provincial mayors is 2.0%. There are 494 men and 25 women among a total of 519 metropolitan district mayors. Accordingly, 95% of metropolitan district mayors are men and 4.8% are women. The total number of sub-district city mayors is 789. Of these, a total of 777 (98.5%) are male and 12 (1.5%) are female. Out of a total of 20,745 Municipal Council Members, 18,461 are male and 2,284 are female. Women were represented in the municipal council with 11.0% and men with 89.0%. Out of a total of 1271 provincial general council members, 1,223 were male and 48 were female. While the representation rate of women remained at 3.8%, men were represented in the provincial general council with a rate of 96.2%.

Out of a total of 18,196 village mukhtars, 18,081 are male and 115 are female. The ratio of female village mukhtars is 0.6%, while the ratio of male village mukhtars is 99.4%. The total number of people elected to the Village Council of Elders is 80,696. Of these, 79,689 are men and 1,007 are women. While the

representation rate of women remained at 1.2%, men were represented with a high rate of 98.8%. The 2019 local elections' distribution of the number and proportion of Village Council of Elders members by gender overlaps exactly with the 2014 local election data. In terms of neighborhood mukhtars, 31,049 male and 970 female mukhtars were elected out of a total of 32,019 mukhtars. Accordingly, the rate of female mukhtars is 3.0% and the rate of male mukhtars is 97.0%. Finally, 134,362 men and 3,418 women were elected among the total 137,780 Neighborhood Council of Elders. Men constituted 97.5% and women 2.5% of the neighborhood councils of elders. When the 2019 distribution of the number and proportion of members of the Neighborhood Council of Elders by gender is compared to the results of the 2014 local elections, the only difference is that the number of women has decreased by one. Village and Neighborhood Boards of Elders are the local administrative units with the least change in number and proportion by election year and gender.

5. Evaluation and Conclusion

Local governments are one of the most important institutions and implementation tools of democracy. The concepts of political participation and political representation are also prominent in pluralist democracies. In this context, in participatory and pluralist democracies, all differences should participate equally in politics and be represented in the political sphere. In addition, the active participation of individuals who are directly affected by local policies in these policy-making processes gains importance. Women are among the groups most affected by local policies. The field of local politics is urban spaces and urban services. It is important to determine the representation of women, who are among the most important addressees of these services, in local political institutions and to increase policies and practices that will increase the representation of women.

This study questions women's representation in the context of local politics and local elections. In this context, all local elections held in the first hundred years of the republic were analyzed with a focus on women's representation. When the local elections of 1930, 1946, 1950, 1955, 1963, 1968, 1973, 1977, 1984, 1989 and 1994 in Turkey are compared in terms of the representation of women among the elected mayors, it is seen that the local election with the highest representation of women as mayors is the 1994 local election with a total of 9 women mayors. The periods with the lowest number of women mayors were the local elections of 1930 and 1950 with 1 woman mayor. A comparison of the mayors elected in the 1999, 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019 local elections in Turkey in terms of women's representation reveals that women's representation in local governments is much lower than that of men. Among these local elections, the local election with the highest representation of women as mayors was the 2014 local elections with a total of 43 women mayors. The 2019 local elections come second with 41 women mayors. The period with the lowest number of women mayors was the 1999 local elections with 14 women mayors.

A comparison of the 1999, 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019 local elections in Turkey in terms of women's representation among elected municipal council members reveals that women's representation in these local government bodies remained at a very low level compared to men. Among these local elections, the local election with the highest representation rate of women as municipal council members was the 2019 local elections with a total rate of 11.0%. The lowest rate of women elected as municipal council members was in the 1999 local elections with 1.6%. Among these election periods, the election in which women were represented as provincial general council members was the 1999 local elections. The local election with the highest representation of women in provincial general assemblies was the 2014 elections. The low representation of women in municipal and provincial assemblies, which are the most important decision-making bodies of local politics, also prevents women from benefiting equally from local services. In the policy-making process of politicians in local governments, women should be equally represented with men.

When the representation of women in village and neighborhood mukhtarships is evaluated in the context of the 1999, 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019 local elections, the local election in which women were represented at the highest rate as village mukhtars was 2019 with 0.6%. In the 2009 local elections, women were represented at the lowest level as village mukhtars; the total share of votes received by women was 0.2%.

The highest rate of female representation in neighborhood mukhtars is observed in the 2019 local elections with 3.0%. The 2014 local elections were the lowest period in which women were represented as neighborhood mukhtars with 2.0%. Village and neighborhood mukhtars are the administrative units where the closest relations with the local community are established. Local residents can convey their demands and requests through mukhtars. However, in Turkey, the mukhtarship is not seen as one of the most important instruments of local democracy. Moreover, the fact that traditional gender codes are more visible and entrenched in local relationship networks results in women being underrepresented as mukhtars.

When the results of local elections in Turkey are evaluated, it is seen that women's representation at the local level remains very low compared to men. The lack of democratic participation and representation in local politics negatively affects the level of participation and representation in national politics and policies. Considering that local networks and relations are more informal and participation channels are more open to all segments of society in local politics than in national politics, women's lower participation in local governments compared to men is seen as an important problem. Women's reluctance to participate in politics also leads to lower levels of representation. The fact that political parties do not adopt a gender-sensitive approach when nominating candidates, the male-dominated structure of the political sphere, the masculine structure of rent centers, and the social roles imposed on women cause women to move away from politics.

Although women today have equal rights with men before the law, in terms of participation and representation in political life, in practice, women's participation and representation in politics is still lacking. Since men are in the majority in national and local political mechanisms, it is men who determine policies. The fact that laws and policies are determined by men, especially on issues of particular concern to women, further deepens the discrimination suffered by women. Changing the male-dominated structure in the political sphere and ensuring women's presence there as equal individuals is also one of the important requirements of democracy. One of the most important reasons for the low representation of women in local politics in Turkey is the dominant centralist structure. The fact that the local is weak in the face of the central structure and that the local is largely dependent on the central government in policies and practices causes both the empowerment of the local and the participation and representation of women in local politics to remain low.

Moreover, the gender-blind approach in the political sphere poses a significant challenge to the formulation of policies that include women's needs and rights and to women's equal representation with men. Increasing the number of policies, projects and studies that will ensure women's equal participation and representation in the social and political spheres will provide significant gains for women's presence in the public sphere. It is thought that this study will provide policy makers and civil society organizations with ideas on developing practices that empower women in the political sphere in order to increase women's participation and representation in the political arena.

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