

# Is a Two-Party System Possible in Turkey?: Two-Party System vs. Two-Political Alliance System

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## Introduction

Why and how do two-party systems emerge? Why do some countries prefer to implement two-party systems? The answers to these questions come from the political history of the countries; politics build legal rules just as the latter build the former. This study examines the emergence of two-party systems in Turkey through this lens.

Political systems can be broadly classified as one-party systems, two-party systems, and multi-party systems. Even though the number of parties in the two-party system can exceed two, two major parties dominate the political landscape.<sup>1</sup> The United States of America, the United Kingdom, and Canada are the prominent countries to have implemented the two-party system. Turkey, on the other hand, started as a multi-party parliamentary system with two-party dominance by the early 1970s, but then moved to highly fragmented system. Military interventions in Turkey - coup d'états in 1960, 1971, and 1980 - paved the way for fragmentation with multi-parties in political life.

In Turkey, the political system was amended with the constitutional amendment of 2017. With this amendment, the current Turkish political system abandoned its parliamentary system which had been in effect since many years. The transition to the presidential system has required the

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1. ERGUN ÖZBUDUN, SİYASAL PARTİLER 128 (Sevinç Matbaası 1977).

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amendment of some rules in the *Law on the Elections of Deputies*. This amendment in the *Law on the Elections of Deputies* has facilitated and legally guaranteed that electoral alliances can be made between political parties. In the election of 2018, there was no longer a de facto problem in terms of electoral alliances about the national electoral threshold of 10%. Also, an absolute majority of those who voted in the presidential election is now needed to elect the President. Therefore, electoral alliances between political parties have become the center of the Turkish political system. This situation led to the establishment of two main electoral alliances. These two electoral alliances haven't been limited to the only parliamentary election and presidential election, they also occurred in the local elections of 2019. Although proportional representation was implemented as an electoral system in Turkey, it should be discussed whether a two-party system will now be realized in Turkey due to the change in the governmental system. This Article, first, discusses nature of a two-party system and which countries are implementing the two-party system. Then it will be explained why Turkey amended its constitution in 2017 and how these amendments paved the way for electoral alliances in Turkey. The Article analyzes whether the constitutional amendment and the electoral alliances in Turkey will result in a two-party system in the political system of Turkey. I also discuss how the amendment in the Law on the Elections of Deputies about lowering the threshold to 7% and proposals about the alliances may affect the political system of Turkey.

This Article, first, discusses the nature of a two-party system and which countries are implementing two-party systems. Then, it will explain why Turkey amended its constitution in 2017, and how these amendments paved the way for electoral alliances in Turkey. The Article analyzes whether the constitutional amendment and the electoral alliances in Turkey will result in the establishment of a two-party system in the political system of Turkey. The Article will also discuss how the amendment to the *Law on the Elections of Deputies* went about lowering the electoral threshold to 7%, and how proposals about the alliances may affect the political system of Turkey.

### **Two-Party System**

Political parties are categorized in various ways. While political parties are classified either as a cadre party, mass party, or mixed party according to their structure, they can be further classified as a disciplined party or an undisciplined party. There are also additional classifications of political parties. Maurice Duverger categorized political systems as one-party, two-

party, and, multi-party systems based on the number of political parties.<sup>2</sup> Some authors challenge this classification and argue that classifying by the number of parties is insufficient.<sup>3</sup> For example, Giovanni Sartori has addressed the common opinion that this categorization is insufficient by expressing that party systems have been classified as one-party, two-party, and multi-party for a long time.<sup>4</sup> Sartori based this conclusion on Duverger's classification of political parties under seven titles, and this categorization including the two-party system.<sup>5</sup>

The two-party system is the most well-known system because it is relatively simple, and many prominent states representing paradigmatic samples have implemented this system.<sup>6</sup> The basic feature of the two-party system is the dominance of two major parties in the political system. Even though there may be more than two parties in the party systems, two major parties must dominate the governments. There are other parties in the power race in this system. As a result, there are more than two parties in parliament.<sup>7</sup> So, the most important thing for this system is not number of parties or how many parties run in elections; If two major parties dominate governments and parliaments in a country, this political system is called a two-party system.

The most known examples of two-party systems are the UK, the U.S., New Zealand, Australia, and Canada.<sup>8</sup> However, the party systems in the UK, Australia, and Canada are described as two-and-a-half party systems<sup>9</sup>

The two-party system has been dominant in the UK for the last 300 years.<sup>10</sup> Duverger asserts that there was a consistent two-party system in the UK until it was disrupted by the strength and effectiveness of the labor movement in 1906. After the *Liberal Party* lost power in 1924, a new two-party system started to take form in the UK.<sup>10</sup> Since that time, The *Labor Party* has been the main political opposition against the *Conservative Party*, instead of the

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2. MAURICE DUVERGER, SİYASİ PARTİLER 276-364 (Bilgi Yayınevi 1974).

3. ÖZBUDUN, *supra* note 1, at 111.

4. GIOVANNI SARTORI, PARTIES AND PARTY SYSTEMS 105 (ECPR Press 2005).

5. *Id.* at 110.

6. *Id.* at 164.

7. ÖZBUDUN, *supra* note 1, at 128.

8. SARTORI, *supra* note 4, at 164.

9. Alan Siaroff, *Two-and-a-Half-Party Systems and the Comparative Role of the 'Half'*, 9 PARTY POLITICS 267, 267 (2003)..

10 STEPHEN INGLE, THE BRITISH PARTY SYSTEM 18 (Routledge Press 4th ed. 2008).

10. DUVERGER, *supra* note 2, at 279.

*Liberal Party*. This shift in the political landscape occurred very quickly in the mid-1920s. Although the Liberal Party gained an insignificant amount of votes, it failed to prevent the establishment of the government by the *Conservative Party* or the *Labor Party* for a long time because of the majority system.<sup>11</sup>

According to Duverger, “The simple-majority single-ballot system favors the two-party system”. This approach corresponds to a situation close to a sociological law.<sup>12</sup> This approach to the two-party system, in which the simple majority depends on the one-vote system, is known as the “Duverger’s Law”. Also, there is a tendency toward a multi-party system in the proportional representation system.<sup>13</sup> The driving force behind the “simple one-round majority system encourage[ing] a two-party system” approach put forward by Duverger is the “concept of polarization” that he uses in his work. One of the key aspects of polarization characterized by Duverger is its working together of two forces, described as the “mechanical factor” and the “psychological factor”. The mechanical effect of electoral systems is about how electoral rules restrict the way votes are converted into seats in parliament. As for the psychological factor, it is formed from the reaction of voters and parties that guess mechanical limits. The clear division of the polarization process into these two effects is Duverger’s most important theoretical contribution to the study of the political consequences of electoral laws. Contemporary studies of mechanical influence generally see the influence of electoral rules on the parties that win the seats as the main explanatory variable—generally represented by district sizes. Studies of psychological impact, on the other hand, focus on the role of electoral rules in shaping the number of parties vying for seats, as well as the way voters vote for these parties, often controlling factors such as social divides, problem sizes, and the character and timing of the presidential election. In the examples of the U.S., the UK, and Canada, which will be examined below, the single-name simple majority system is applied. For this reason, the emergence of the party system as a two-party system in the U.S., the UK, and

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11. ÖZBUDUN, *supra* note 1, at 129.

12. DUVERGER, *supra* note 2, at 217

13. Also, Benoit mentioned the expression of V. O. Key states: “in a single-member district only two parties can contend for electoral victory with any hope of success; a third party is doomed to perpetual defeat. . . That prospect tends to drive their members to one or other of the two parties. The single-member district thus molds parties into the bipartisan pattern.” Kenneth Benoit, *Duverger’s Law and the Study of Electoral System*, 4 FRENCH POLITICS 69, 71 (2006).

Canada supports the proposition put forward by Duverger, as two major parties dominate in these countries.

Although it is not included in the Constitution or any law in the U.S., there is a two-party system in the U.S.<sup>14</sup> The two-party system in the U.S. is the oldest and the most permanent among the countries where the two-party system is implemented.<sup>15</sup> Because the American voters have regional, class, pluralist, and individualist behavioral patterns, it is expected that there will be a party system in American politics, each of which expresses their interests in a significant segment of the political plane at first sight. This plurality could be considered to express a multi-party system. Yet, in the U.S., the *Republican Party* and the *Democratic Party* are the dominant political parties in the political system.<sup>16</sup> Although there have been third-party movements in the U.S., these trials have failed. For instance, Robert M. La Follette who was the candidate of the *Progressive Party* got one-sixth of votes, which was 16.6% of all voters, in the presidential election of 1924. George Wallace, who was the candidate of the *American Independent Party*, was supported by 13.5% of voters in the presidential election of 1968. There was a similar situation in the presidential election of 1948. In this election, Henry Wallace who was the candidate of the *Progressive Party* had been supported by 2.37% of voters. The basic reason for third-party movements in the U.S. is the quality of a temporary protest movement. Different interests can exist together in the same party because the American parties have an undisciplined structure and quality of decentralization. While disciplined parties expect their members to abide by party decisions, members of undisciplined parties don't have to comply with the party decisions because the undisciplined parties don't punish their members. These features are important in terms of ensuring the continuity of the two-party system.<sup>17</sup> The *Tea Party* movement draws attention among third-party movements in the U.S. The *Tea Party*, which had the opportunity to be represented by achieving partial success in the House of Representatives and the Senate, takes its name from the Boston Tea Party, which was a very important event in terms of American Independence. The "Tea Act" had been imposed on American colonies by the British Empire, imposing heavy taxes on the colonies. So, members of the colonies spilled 342 chests of tea in ships belonging to the British into the sea. After this event,

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14. JOHN F. BIBBY & L. SANDY MAISEL, *Two PARTIES - OR MORE? THE AMERICAN PARTY SYSTEM* 24 (Westview Press 2nd ed. 2003).

15. SARTORI, *supra* note 4, at 166.

16. *See also, Id.* at 23.

17. ÖZBUDUN, *supra* note 1, at 129.

the American Revolutionary War was started by American colonies against the British Empire. The modern *Tea Party* has incurred concerns about the state that converted unrecognizably to a foreign asset in 2009. These concerns were about the size and intervention of the federal government. Although it can be expressed that these concerns existed before Barack Obama was elected as President in 2008, this election caused fears related to an ongoing fundamental change to heighten. The *Tea Party* movement promised to advocate for and reintegrate the ultimate principles of the basics of American national identity. In the midterm elections of 2010, the *Tea Party* movement was supported by 18% of voters. The support was very important for the *Tea Party*. Although this was a significant success for the *Tea Party*, this has not led to any alteration of the two-party system in the U.S. The *Tea Party* movement did not gain such a high level of support from voters in the elections following the election of 2010. Therefore, the rise of the movement, as stated above, was a protest. In terms of the struggle for power between the *Republican Party* and the *Democratic Party*, these two major parties have not come into question, and there has not been any change. Accordingly, the *Tea Party* movement failed in American political life, like the *American Independent Party* and the *Progressive Party*, as a third-party movement. American voters prefer one of the two major parties even when they are presented with alternatives.<sup>18</sup> This situation prevents the transfer from a two-party system to a multi-party system since American voters engage in tactical voting. The American two-party system is appropriate to the structure of society, culture, and the structure of the government of the U.S. and there aren't any tendencies toward the alteration of the two-party system.<sup>19</sup>

Frank Hawkins Underhill stated that the Western World has not agreed on a preference for a two-party system or multi-party system in Canada, in his book titled "Canadian Political Parties" (the fifth edition of which was published in 1974). According to Underhill, there is a tendency towards the two-party system in all English-speaking countries. Underhill stated that the British party system is part of the legacy of colonies with British law and the parliamentary institutions. According to Duverger, the *Liberal Party of Canada* and the *Conservative Party of Canada* are the national parties in Canada. The *Labor Party* and the *Social Credit Party*, among others, were local Canadian parties in the 1970s which were strong in some states of Canada.<sup>20</sup> The foundation of the *Liberal Party* and the *Conservative Party*,

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18. BIBBY & MAISEL, *supra* note 15, at 43.

19. *Id.* at 196.

20. DUVERGER, *supra* note 2, at 296.

the two oldest parties in Canada, goes back to the days of the Confederation.<sup>21</sup> There are a lot of parties in Canada but the power of these other parties is sufficient to attain power. Despite Underhill's assertion above that there is a two-party system in all English-speaking countries, the electoral system in South Africa is a proportional representation system. Even though South Africa was a British colony, the party system is a multi-party system according to Chapter 1, Article 1 of the Constitution of South Africa of 1996. So, the preference for the electoral system doesn't directly depend on speaking English or being a British colony, it depends on the structure of society.

In Canada, the Liberal Party was the winning party in the election of 2000 and gained the support of 40.8% of voters and 172 seats in parliament. In the election of 2004, the Liberal Party was the first party again. After this election, the Conservative Party won the elections of 2006 and 2008. In the 2011 federal elections, the Conservative Party placed first, while the Liberal Party placed third. The New Democratic Party won second place with 30.6% support and gained 103 seats in the parliament. This table in the federal election of 2011 requires an examination of whether the party system in Canada will move away from being a two-party system and become a multi-party system. I respond negatively to this question because of the results of the 2015 election. The Liberal Party and the Conservative Party, the oldest parties in Canada, took the first two places in this election. The New Democratic Party lost over 10% support of voAlso, the result of the 2015 election showed that the power can change between two majority parties. Thus, the Canadian party system hasn't converted to a multi-party system. The table that emerged in the federal election of 2019 supports this idea.

It is very difficult to rise to power with only one party in Canada. Because of this, parties that do not come to power alone establish a minority government instead of a coalition.<sup>22</sup> Hence, any political party that has not had enough seats could come to power through only one party. In the election of October 21, 2019, in Canada, the Liberal Party was the first party and obtained the support of 33% of voters and 157 seats in the parliament. The Conservative Party attained 34% of the voters and received 121 seats in the parliament. While Bloc Québécois was supported by 8% of the voters and received 32 seats in the parliament, the voting rate of the New Democratic Party was 16%

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21. FATİH ÖZTURK, ABD VE KANADA FEDERALİZMİ 144 (Filiz Kitabevi 2021).

22. ÖZBUDUN, *supra* note 1, at 130.

and it received 24 seats in the parliament. After the federal election of 2019, the minority government was formed by Justin Trudeau, the leader of the Liberal Party. In the federal general election of 2021, the Liberal Party was supported by approximately 32.6% of the voters and had 159 seats in the parliament. The Conservative Party received 33.7% votes and attained 119 seats in the parliament in the same election. While the Bloc Québécois gained 32 seats, the New Democratic Party was in the parliament.<sup>23</sup> In the federal election, no party reached the 170 seats required to come to power by only one party in the parliament. So, Trudeau established a minority government as the prime minister again.

In Turkey, after the one-party rule that lasted 22 years (1923-1945), multi-party-political life started. There was a two-party system from 1946 to 1960. The Republican's People Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP) and the Democrat Party were dominant in Turkish political life during this period. Although more than two parties participated in the 1946 general elections, the election was held under the control of the CHP. The general elections of 1950, 1954, and 1957 witnessed the struggle between the Democrat Party and CHP. In the 1950 general election, the Democrat Party received 55% support and the CHP was supported by approximately 40% of the voters. In the general election of 1954, the Democrat Party's vote rate was 58%, while the CHP's vote rate was 35%. The same situation emerged in the general election of 1957. In this election, the Democrat Party received 48% and the CHP attained 41%. As can be seen from this example, Turkey is not alien to the two-party system.

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23. Even though it is given the different proportion for the results of the election, it is referred to the official website of the House of Commons for the composition of the House of Commons. For the composition of the House of Commons *see Party Standings in the House of Commons*, HOUSE OF COMMONS (last visited Dec. 5, 2021), <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Members/en/party-standings>.<sup>24</sup> In some countries, the threshold is different for allying parties and non-allying parties. For instance, even though the threshold is 5% for non-allying parties, it is different for allying parties in Slovakia. If an electoral alliance includes two or three parties, the threshold is 7% for these parties. If four or more parties participate in an electoral alliance, it is 10% for these parties. *On Elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic of 2004*, art. 42, [http://aceproject.org/ero-en/regions/europe/SK/Election\\_Law\\_slovakia.pdf](http://aceproject.org/ero-en/regions/europe/SK/Election_Law_slovakia.pdf). There is a similar regulation in Moldova. While the electoral threshold was 6% for non-allying parties in the general elections of 2001 and 2005, it was an increased higher proportion for electoral alliances in the election of 2005. According to this amendment, if an electoral alliance includes just two parties, the threshold is 9%. For electoral alliances that include more than two parties, it is determined 12%. Also the law on political parties advantage to national wide parties. OLEH PROTSYK & ION OSOIAN, *ETHNIC OR MULTI-ETHNIC PARTIES? PARTY COMPETITION AND LEGISLATIVE RECRUITMENT IN MOLDOVA* 6-7 (European Center For Minority Issues 2010). In Turkey, there isn't such a regulation that is similar to Slovakia and Moldova.



### **The Electoral Alliances in Turkey**

#### **A. The Short History of the Electoral Alliances in Turkey**

There were a lot of electoral alliances in the elections before 2018 in Turkey. In the general election of 1991, an alliance included the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi), the Nationalist Task Party (Milliyetçi Çalışma Partisi, MÇP), and the Reformist Democracy Party (Islahatçı Demokrasi Partisi, IDP). The members of the MÇP and the IDP became candidates and were elected from the Welfare Party's list. In the same general election, the Social Democratic Populist Party (Sosyal Demokrat Halkçı Parti, SHP) and the People's Democracy Party (Halkın Demokrasi Partisi, HADEP) formed a different electoral alliance in the same way. In this alliance, the members of HADEP were elected from SHP's list as members of the parliament. The members of the Great Unity Party (Büyük Birlik Partisi, BBP) were elected from the Motherland Party (Anavatan Partisi, ANAP) in the general election of 1995. A similar situation arose between CHP and the Democratic Left Party (Demokratik Sol Parti, DSP) in the general election of 2007. There were many other examples of alliances in Turkish political life. The common feature of these alliances is to run the members of one or more of the parties that formed the electoral alliance from one party's list. They do it in this way because there were no legal arrangements related to electoral alliances before 2018 in Turkey. This is because the ruling parties did not want the low-voting parties to be represented in parliament. Otherwise, it would be difficult to establish a government, because the government had to have the confidence of the parliament in the parliamentary system before the amendments of the Constitution in 2017. If the parliament had amended the Law in the Election of Deputies in this direction and allowed electoral alliances to be legally established, there would have been much greater and more serious governmental crises in Turkish politics.

#### **Electoral Alliances in Turkey After 2018**

The Turkish Constitution of 1982 was inextricably amended by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey in 2017. The Presidential system was implemented instead of the parliamentary system that had long been the governmental system of Turkey. The preference of this governmental system is a political choice as well as the amendment of the governmental system has caused important changes in the constitutional law and election law. One of the most notable of these changes is the legally arrangement-related electoral alliances. Before the amendments, electoral alliances were carried out in a way that was not included in the election legislation, by nominating the

candidates of one party from the list of another party. A party that nominated its candidates from the list of the party with which it was allied did not participate in the election. Candidates of this party elected as deputies participated in their own party by resigning from another party after the election.

Electoral alliances are made easy among political parties after the 2018 amendments in the Law on the Election of Deputies. According to these amendments, two or more parties can nominate their members from the list of the other party in the alliance, or all parties in the alliance can participate in an election with only one list. If parties in the alliances participate with different lists, the logos of these parties are placed side by side in the same rectangle on the ballot, so voters can vote for any party in the electoral alliance. Also, the political parties establishing an alliance can choose a title for the alliance. Thanks to this regulation, the political parties in the electoral would not have to pass the electoral threshold of 10% separately to be able to get its members into parliament. It is enough to pass the electoral threshold of 10% by the electoral alliance.<sup>24</sup> So, in terms of all parties in all electoral alliances, the threshold was de facto 0% in the general election of July 24, 2018.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Last Amendments in the Law on the Election of Deputies Before the Election of 2023**

TBMM accepted to amend some rules in the Law on the Election of Deputies in 2022. With these amendments, TBMM has determined the threshold at 7%. This is very important for Turkish democracy and politics because Turkey

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25. Batuhan Ustabulut, *Temsilde Adalet ve Yönetimde İstikrar İlkeleri Çerçevesinde Türkiye'de Ülke Seçim Barajı Uygulanması [Electoral Threshold Implementation in Turkey within the Framework of Two Principles: Justice in Representation and Stability in Governing]*, 5 İNSAN VE İNSAN 341, 354-355 (2018).

had the highest threshold in the world before the amendments. These amendments include some regulations about alliances as well. Accordingly, the method of determining the number of deputies was changed by TBMM. If two or more parties establish an alliance amongst themselves and are supported by at least 7% of voters, the calculation and distribution of deputies in the electoral districts will be made by taking into account the number of votes received by each party within the alliance in that electoral district. These amendments aim to diminish the role of the low-voting parties in alliances because some low-voting parties can establish new alliances very easily after these amendments. Even though it seems possible to establish new alliances among the low-voting parties, six opposition parties including CHP and the İyi Parti (Good Party) which are components of the Nation Alliance have gathered around the same table and have decided that the Presidential candidate would be determined by these six parties. So, although it is legally possible to establish new alliances in Turkish politics after these amendments, I expect the existing two alliances which are the People's Alliance and the Nation Alliance to run in the next presidential and parliamentary elections of 2023. If new alliances establish, except these two alliances in Turkish politics, the People's and Nation Alliances will be dominant in the upcoming election. Also, the last debates show that it seems possible for a different block which occurred by the Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi), the Future Party (Gelecek Partisi), and the Democracy and Progress Party (Demokrasi ve Atılım Partisi - DEVA) in the Nation Alliance. If it occurs, I expect that the candidates of the Future Party and the DEVA will be on the list of the Felicity Party. Because the Felicity Party is a successor party of the Welfare Party which was the first party in the 1995 parliamentary election and represents Islamic political tradition which is called the Milli Gorus (Islamic View) Movement in Turkish politics. The AK Party is also a split party from the Milli Gorus Movement. But the DEVA has announced that it will run the upcoming election under its name and logo. Also, the DEVA has declared that it will continue to contribute to the table of six that includes the CHP, the İyi Parti, the Felicity Party, the Democrat Party, the DEVA, and the Future Party. A similar statement has been made before by the Future Party. These announcements may be considered strategic moves.

### **Can Electoral Alliances Lead to a Two-Party System in Turkey?**

In the general election of 2002, voters predominantly voted for two parties: the *Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AK Party)* and CHP because of political and economic problems in 1990s Turkey. A lot of parties could not have won any seats in parliament because the votes of

these parties were less than the electoral threshold of 10% in the 2002 election. For instance, even though the *True Path Party (Doğru Yol Partisi, DYP)* was supported by 9.5% of voters, the party could not have any members in parliament. According to the 2002 general election's results, 45% of voters could not be represented in parliament because of the 10% electoral threshold. This situation encouraged tactical voting in elections later than the 2002 parliamentary election.<sup>26</sup> Voters voted for second or third preference parties for years because they knew the odds of their first choice surpassing the 10% threshold was next to impossible. Indeed, such a threshold is the globe's highest. The tactical voting led to the system that predominantly represented two parties (AK Party and CHP) in, *TBM*) since the election of 2002. Although four parties passed the electoral threshold and presented in TBMM, the same two parties were dominant in the Turkish Assembly. In terms of the parliamentary election of 2007 too, two major parties have been dominant in parliament.

The first parliamentary election after the 2017 referendum that accepted the presidential system was the 2018 election. One of the legal reasons for electoral alliances is the amendment of the governmental system in Turkey. According to the Turkish presidential system, if one of the presidential candidates has the support of the absolute majority (50%+1 vote) of the voters, this presidential candidate will be elected president. But if one of the presidential candidates does not achieve an absolute majority, they will have to run on a second ballot. The two candidates with the most votes will run in the second ballot. Because it requires one of the candidates to win an absolute majority, the electoral alliances are the center of Turkish political life. In Turkey, it is difficult to attain the absolute majority since Turkey has a polarized political structure.

The AK Party is a dominant party because it has won all elections since 2002.<sup>27</sup> Also, polarization has increased in every election term after 2002.<sup>28</sup> The electoral alliances have become a necessity because it is so difficult to have the absolute majority due to polarization since the 2018 election. Also, the presidential and parliamentary elections are on the same day and in the

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26. For detailed information about tactical voting see Stephen D. Fisher, Definition and Measurement of Tactical Voting: The Role of Rational Choice, 34 *British Journal of Political Science*, 152-166 (2004).

27. E. Fuat Keyman, *The AK Party: Dominant Party, New Turkey and Polarization*, 16 *INSIGHT TURKEY* 19, 24 (2014).

28. *Id.* at 29.

new Turkish governmental system. This situation encourages alliances to be made both in the Presidential and parliamentary elections.

The ruling AK Party has allied with the *Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP)* which was one of the opposition parties in the 2018 presidential election. This electoral alliance has been named the *People's Alliance (Cumhur İttifakı)*. *BBP* supported this alliance and had a seat from the AK Party's candidate list in the parliament according to the election's results. Over 52% of voters supported Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, whom they elected President of Turkey. The People's Alliance had taken over 53% of the parliamentary election that occurred concurrently with the presidential election. The second alliance was the *Nation Alliance (Millet İttifakı)* that included *CHP*, the *Iyi Party*, the *Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi)*, and the *Democrat Party*. The parties of the Nation Alliance participated with three different candidates for the 2018 presidential election but failed in the election. Approximately 34% of voters supported The Nation Alliance in the parliamentary election.

The *Iyi Party* has been supported by 9.96% of voters in the 2018 parliamentary election. If the *Iyi Party* were not included in the Nation Alliance, it would not have any parliament seats because of the 10% election threshold. The threshold did not pose a problem thanks to participating in the alliance. So, the *Iyi Party* has parliament members and has been an opposition center.

In the 2019 local election, these alliances continued in the electoral districts. The Nation Alliance won the Istanbul and Ankara Municipality Mayorships which included just *CHP* and the *Iyi Party*, but the *Peoples' Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi, HDP)* has not nominated candidates nor supported Nation Alliance candidates. Normally, the next parliamentary and presidential elections would be held in 2023. It seems that both the People's Alliance and the Nation Alliance will continue to run in the next elections. Other parties, even small ones, can participate in any of the Alliances because even a small party whose votes do not reach 1 percent can play a role in who wins the presidential election in "*the system of alliances*". So, the political parties with low electoral support have a very important role in terms of the system of alliances. This role can be pictured as the key that sometimes unlocks or locks. Because it is necessary to have the absolute vote (50%+1) to win the presidential election. There are a lot of new parties that left other Turkish parties because new parties' roles are very important for alliances. Sure, it is stated that there are political and ideological reasons for

founding new parties and alliances. Also, the Nation Alliance promises to accept the “strengthened parliamentary system” instead of the Turkish presidential system. For this reason, it is not enough to win the Presidential election for the Nation Alliance. Because the Nation Alliance enjoys a majority which can amend the Constitution in the parliament, participation or support of the new parties to the Nation Alliance are vital for this alliance. Hence the existence of the Future Party (Gelecek Partisi) and the Democracy and Progress Party (Demokrasi ve Atılım Partisi - DEVA) is so important for the Nation Alliance since these parties were split parties from the AK Party, founded by former the AK Party elites, a former prime minister and foreign minister, respectively.

In Turkey, regulating electoral alliance created a two-political alliance system rather than a two-party system. Even though forming a third alliance has been a challenge because of the electoral system and the last amendments in the Law on the Elections of Deputies, the HDP and some leftist parties established a new alliance which is called the *Labor and Freedom Alliance (Emek ve Özgürlük İttifakı)* before the election of 2023. Although, other parties except HDP in this alliance have very little public support and don't have the opportunity to play important role in affecting the election results. A similar situation is also valid for the *Ancestral Alliance (Ata İttifakı)* which has been established under the leadership of the *Victory Party (Zafer Partisi)*. According to polls, all parties including the Victory Party in the alliance do not have big public support. For this reason, it is not literally possible to describe the Labor and Freedom Alliance and the Ancestral Alliance as the third alliance. Even though the third alliance has been widely discussed in public because of the last amendments on the law, new and other small parties may prefer to participate in the existing alliances because the threshold that is 7% is still a high rate. For instance, the *New Welfare Party (Yeniden Refah Partisi)* which was established in 2018 has preferred to participate to the People's Alliance. Also, it is possible to establish a different block among conservative parties such as the Felicity Party, the Future Party, and the DEVA inside the Nation Alliance. If this block establishes itself, it would not constitute a third alliance because this alliance is not separate from the Nation Alliance. This means that forming the block is one of the options and the parties that form the block will act with other National Alliance members. The aim of establishing this block is to consolidate the conservative voters that oppose the People's Alliance. As a matter of fact, the Future Party and the DEVA are split parties from the AK Party. So, the block can have conservatives' votes. Also, this block could potentially counter some

criticism because allying with CHP, an alternative, often angers conservative voters.

The type of d'Hondt method the Turkish electoral system adopts plays an important role in the formation of electoral alliances. . The Ancestral Alliance from new alliances may cause the People's Alliance to win more seats in the parliament. Although new alliances have been formed, I expect that the power struggle will be between the People's Alliance and the Nation Alliance. So, the voters will most probably act rationally and go towards tactical voting again. The psychological factor that characterizes polarization causes voters to vote tactically. Because the presidential and parliamentary elections are concurrent, it can cause an approach to be accepted toward existing forced cohabitation relationships and could allow the voters to move in the same direction for these elections. The presidential election's character and schedule causes voters to concentrate on two alliances. Even though the TBMM determined a 7% threshold with the last amendments in the Law on the Elections of Deputies of 2022, the d'Hondt system was amended, which affects the distribution of the seats across the Alliances. Before the amendments, the number of party deputies in the alliance was calculated by dividing the votes of the alliance by the total votes obtained by the political party. With the last amendments in the Law on the Elections of Deputies, the number of deputies to be elected by each of the political parties forming the alliance will be determined based on the number of votes obtained in each constituency within the alliance. So, this amendment will make forming new alliances difficult the next time. For this reason, many scholars predict that the existing alliances will expand. As a matter of fact, gathering the Future Party and the DEVA with four components of the Nation Alliance around the same table and signing the document of strengthened parliamentary system refers to the expansion of the alliance.

As stated above, electoral alliances are almost required in Turkey because the political structure, the governmental system, the political polarization, and the electoral threshold of 10% leads to the necessity of the electoral alliance. The situation will most likely be the same after the threshold becomes 7% because the weight of one vote gets heavier in this system. Also, the electoral alliances are the central agency of the political structure because it was not limited only to the parliamentary and the presidential elections, which came into question in the 2019 local election.

The Turkish political structure is a multi-party system because of the proportional representation electoral system. Although Turkey has a proportional representation system, the discussions about the majority system remain on the government's and opposition's agenda. The lengthy

discussions and speeches demand for the adoption of the majority system. If the majority system is accepted as the electoral system, a two-party system could be possibly accepted in Turkey. On the other hand, the polarization can deepen in Turkey.<sup>29</sup> If the majority system isn't accepted, even though it does not appear possible that say to establish the two-party system, it is possible that the two-political alliance system will be implemented for a long time in Turkey. As a result, the power struggle will come into question among the two alliances.

### Conclusion

After the 2017 Turkish constitutional amendments, the electoral alliance system emerged with the legislative election law amendment adopted in 2018. Electoral alliances have two main purposes. One of them is to prevent some parties from passing the electoral threshold, the second purpose is to create easy access to the absolute majority vote (50%+1 vote) in the presidential election. After accepting the electoral alliance system, the political parties with low votes have reached a key position: it is very difficult to achieve the absolute majority vote in particular for the presidential election because of high political polarization in Turkey. So, participating in any political alliances is a necessity, not a preference. Although the high political polarization causes a reconciliatory environment among parties included in the alliance, the political alliances do not prevent polarization between alliances.

Following the introduction of the presidential system, many debate whether the two-party system is possible in Turkey. The non-implementation of the majority system is the most important factor that prevents the establishment of a two-party system in Turkey. Because the political alliances are in the center of the Turkish political structure and implemented in the local elections as well, the system of alliances will seep into Turkey. The main reason for this situation is that the AK Party has been in power for a long time, although it cannot be fully qualified as the dominant party since they lost the absolute majority status in parliament in the election of June 7, 2015.. The opposition's electoral alliance's strategy succeeded in the 2019 local election.<sup>30</sup> Both the two alliances are trying to maintain and even expand their alliances. This situation is one of the indicators of maintaining the system of alliances.

After the amendments on the Law in the Elections of Deputies in 2022, even though the small parties seem to lose their effective roles in the alliances, these parties still have a very important position in the alliances because of the difficulties of having the absolute majority to be elected President and the desire to expand the alliance of the major components of the Nation Alliance.

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29. *Id.*

30. See also Senem Aysın Düzgit, [The Islamist-Secularist Divide and Turkey's Descent into Severe Polarization](#), in [DEMOCRACIES DIVIDED: THE GLOBAL CHALLENGE OF POLITICAL POLARIZATION](#) 34-35 (Thomas Carothers & Andrew O'Donohue eds., 2019).



However, the amendment on the threshold encourages the low-voting parties to establish third and perhaps fourth alliances, the two alliances will run in the upcoming presidential election. The last developments in Turkish politics support this idea.

Turkey may not have a two-party system like in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada, in particular, due to the existing proportional representation system. TBMM has not changed the electoral system in the last amendments on the Law in the Election of Deputies. Even though the last amendments encourage the establishment of new alliances in addition to the existing two alliances, six opposition parties nominated the presidential nominee together. . The representation of small parties (whose support revolves around one percent to three percent in almost all national polls so far) in the TBMM and having the absolute majority of an alliance to win the presidential election depends on alliances. Although the last amendments on the Law in the Election of Deputies increased the incentives for forming electoral alliance, it is less likely to challenge the dominance of the People's Alliance and the Nation Alliance in the Turkish party system.