
July 2021

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Recommended Citation

Abdulai, Abdul -Malik; Ceter, Ayten; and Nyadera, Israel Nyaburi (2021). Women and Local Government Elections in Turkey: Analysis of Supply and Demand-Side Framework. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 22(7), 93-106.

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Women and Local Government Elections in Turkey: Analysis of Supply and Demand-Side Framework

By Abdul -Malik Abdulai¹, Ayten Ceter², and Israel Nyaburi Nyadera^{3*}

Abstract

How do women perform in Turkish local government elections? Existing studies have delved on the subject of participation and representation of women in political activities and the main concern has been to assess the factors responsible for the underrepresentation of women in politics. However, previous studies have largely focused on the representation of women in national legislative assemblies seemingly to assert that political representation of women is confined to national politics and their representation in local governments is largely overlooked. This paper seeks to fill the lacuna in the literature by focusing on participation and representation of women in local government in Turkey. By using the supply and demand-side framework, we seek to understand factors that have contributed to the low representation of women in local governments in Turkey.

Key Words: Representation of women, local governments, politics, Turkey, participation of women

Introduction

The extensive literature on gender and politics has in the recent past focused on the subject of political representation and participation of women with an initial concern of bridging underrepresentation of women in politics, especially in legislative assemblies, to the forefront following the realization that underrepresentation of women poses a huge legitimacy challenge to the existing democratic progress of nation-states (Childs & Lovenduski, 2013; Kenworthy & Malami, 1999; Sapiro, 1981). In consonance with this concern is Philips' theory of politics of representation which posits that interests of women should essentially be represented by women, and that equality in political representation is a major requirement for a functioning democracy. The main premise of Philips concern is that men and women have different interests and an increase in the number of women in politics would mean a better representation of the interest of

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women. Despite this assertion, women have continually been at the periphery of the political sphere (Caiazza, 2004; Leyenaar, 2004).

Accordingly, the reasons for the low representation of women are comparable irrespective of the level of development and modernization of countries. Low income among women, who occupy the lowest positions in the division of labour despite the burgeoning population, is one critical factor that has hindered women to pursue politics (Alkan, 2009; Erickson, 1997). Education, culture, as well as the murky political terrains that characterise the main political environment in many countries also play part in hindering women from political contests especially at the local level (Ertürk, 2006). Aside from the reasons for the under-representation of women, scholarly debates have tried to comprehend the concepts of political participation and representation of women in political decision-making positions (Jayal, 2005; Öztürk, 2012). The representation of women is often construed as the number of women occupying key decision-making positions in a given political system while participation focuses on the activities designed to influence decision-making processes, of which some of these activities could take a violent turn (Huntington & Nelson, 1976). Görün (2006), posits that political participation is manifest in activities such as voting in elections, taking roles in the administrative office, participating in decision-making process or taking other responsibilities in the governance structures (Görün, 2006). Kurebewa (2014) conceptualizes the participation of women in a political process based on the nature of work women engage in when they are at the decision-making positions (Kurebewa, 2014).

Going by the important roles' women play in the political arena, countries have endeavoured to incorporate more women in various positions within government and political structures. In Rwanda and Sweden, there is incredible advancement with regards to women's participation and representation (IPU, 2013). This tremendous advancement can be attributed to two reasons. The first is the realization that women play important roles in policy formulation and implementation, especially on gender issues and the second is that equal representation of both women and men in local administration is used to assess the level of countries' democratic development and therefore countries strive to achieve gender parity (Jayal, 2005).

Local governments are very crucial administrative units that provide essential services due to their proximity to local people and their awareness of local challenges (Kurebewa, 2014). In spite of the increasing importance of local governments, representation and participation of women is notably low. When we take a look at the participation and representation of women in Turkey's local politics, women have continued to register low numbers for over 80 years since they were granted the right to vote and to participate in political processes (Alkan, 2009; Gökçimen, 2008; Negiz and Üçer, 2012; Anbarlı Bozatay and Kutlu, 2014). So why has the country continued to have low representation and participation of women in local governments? What factors are at play in women's representation and participation in Turkey's local governments? Using the supply and demand-side framework, this paper seeks to explore the issue of underrepresentation of women in Turkey's local governments.

Women Political Leadership, why it Matters.

Political leaders undoubtedly play a crucial role in any society. With the increasing challenges and complexities faced in service delivery, there are calls for more insightful leaders at both the national and local levels (Onder & Brower, 2013). This quality of leadership is believed to be necessary for the prosperity and survival of humanity amid new challenges such as the

COVID -19 pandemic. There is also convergence in the idea that current and future leader have to transcend the limited often parochial leadership approaches of the past. This means the inclusion of both women, youths, and other traditionally marginalized groups into the leadership structure (Nyadera & Kisaka, 2019). But despite growing calls for these reforms, existing literature tends to focus more on the success of men leaders while searching for patterns of good leadership models while contributions by women along similar lines have remained elusive.

There have been several deliberate efforts aimed at promoting women's representation in politics and while some success has been achieved so far, women political representation across the world remains at an average of 14%. To explain this low number of women in the political arena, Randal (1987) and Norris (1997) adopted the theory of 'demand and supply'. According to these scholars, structural factors affected the supply side arguing that politicians often emerge disproportionately from groups of highly educated individuals and particular disciplines such as Law. This means that for women who either lack access to higher education or miss out of certain courses, rising to become politicians become very difficult (Kisaka & Nyadera, 2019). The demand side is affected by among other factors culture and tradition which in many societies tend to demean women leadership. However, does it mean women are less competent are unable to lead their nations? This article believes that women have the competence and capacity to offer progressive leadership and transform not only countries but the world. Our assumption is based on evidence of performance by women leaders across the world.

1. Women tend to work through collaboration: one feature of male-dominated political systems is the high level of division among ideologically competing groups. This sometimes derails crucial elements of national unity due to lack of compromise and accommodating different opinions. Women on the other hand are found to be willing to adopt a bi-partisan position on crucial matters.
2. Less corrupt. A study by Swamy et al (2001) revealed that women in political positions tend to be less corrupt than their male counterparts. Given the devastating impact, corruption has on different societies, it is worth giving more women leadership roles if that will help reduce the loss of public funds.
3. Women are concerned about other issues that tend to get less attention. Women are not only marginalised in positions of leadership but also are disadvantaged when issues such as gender violence, reproductive rights, children welfare, equal pay for work done are not taken seriously. Women in leadership will give these issues the attention they deserve given their experience on challenges related to the above issues.
4. Another benefit of embracing more women into political leadership has to do with the demographics of most societies today where the ratio of men to women is almost equal. This means when women are marginalised from leadership, it means half of the population and their interest do not get the needed attention.

This paper will examine the trend of women's representation in Turkey's local government over the years by looking at their performance during local government elections.

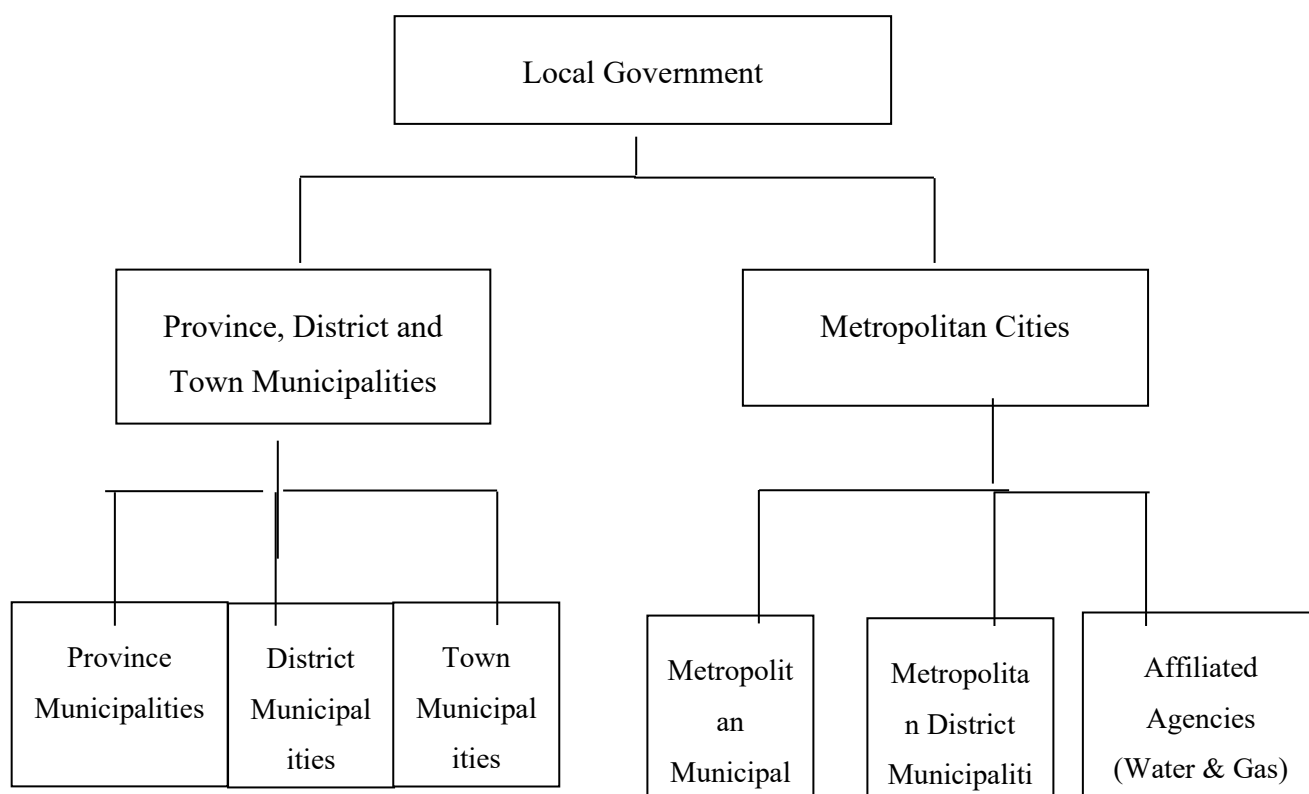
Local Government System in Turkey

Turkey has both central and local governance structures. The local governments were created as a result of structural reforms in public administration in the early 2000s. Significant changes were introduced in the legal framework of the local governments to outline the duties and responsibilities of local units (Altowaitee *et al.*, 2019). Essentially, local governments in Turkey

include local government associations, special provincial administrations, municipalities, municipal affiliated agencies, and development agencies.

These local administration units can be categorised in two to include: Municipalities and special provincial administrations. Special provincial administrations are headed by the governor of the central government who undertakes both central government and local administration duties (Nyadera & Islam, 2020). These special provincial administrations operate within the boundaries of a district. On the other hand, municipalities are administrative units headed by the Mayor. The mayor is separately elected by the voters within the location. Municipalities are further divided into province municipalities, metropolitan municipalities, and district municipalities. In metropolitan municipalities, services like transport, sewerage maintenance, natural gas and drinking water are performed by affiliated agencies which are separate administration units.

Figure 1: Structure of Municipalities in Turkey



Source: Güzel, A. & H. H. Yılmaz (2018).

Conceptualizing Women's Representation and Participation

Scholarly debates have tried to comprehend the concepts of political participation and representation of women in politics to mark out the impact of women existence in politics (Jayal, 2005; Öztürk, 2012). A huge body of literature is anchored on Hanna Pitkin's conceptualization of participation and representation in which four categories of representation are outlined: symbolic, substantive, descriptive and formalistic (Pitkin, 1967: 209). However, many studies have extensively ventured to distinguish between substantive or 'acting for the interest of represented' and descriptive representation. In general terms, substantive representation is given prominence over descriptive representation which is construed as representing a group based

shared characteristics such as gender, race or ethnicity but not acting for the group (Alkan, 2005; Cindođlu, 2011; Negiz & Üçer, 2012).

Other studies have gone beyond the distinction between substantive and descriptive representation by questioning the degree to which women act for women (Mackay, 2008; Weldon, 2002). In her study, Mackay (2008) develops a holistic approach that broadens the concept of substantive representation to include interactions, norms, actors and institutions in which the process of representation takes place. Indeed, the ability for women's representation, as well as their ability to participate in politics, is often constrained by the institutional and social factors as well as political parties' policies which fragments women identity on party lines. But still, is our belief that an increased number of women in politics is essential based on the account that numbers have a symbolic value.

The participation of women focuses on the activities designed to influence decision-making processes, of which some of these activities have the propensity of turning a violent (Huntington & Nelson, 1976). According to Görün (2006), political participation is manifest in activities such as voting in elections, taking roles in the administrative office, participating in decision-making process or taking other responsibilities in the governance structures (Görün,2006). Kurebewa (2014) conceptualizes the participation of women in the political process based on the nature of work women engage in when they are at the decision-making positions (Kurebewa, 2014).

Women's Representation and Participation in Local and National Governments: General Perspective

The position of women in the political arena has been part of a fierce debate that has crisscrossed several disciplines of social science. The debate traces its origin to 1848 when women activists in the United States convened the 1st Women Convention in New York (Ballington et al., 2012). From that time, political participation, and representation of women in governance and political system have continued to ignite scholarly exchange with an underlying consensus among scholars that participation and representation of women in politics vary across countries around the world (Robinson, 1995; Reynolds, 1999; Öztürk, 2012) and their contribution to governance, politics and democracy is still a fundamental part of the contemporary literature on governance and development. Conversely, despite the clamour by renown international organizations for an increased women empowerment in the political sphere, scholarly research has consistently indicated that women continue to linger on the periphery of the political sphere and their participation and representation in governance structures and democratization process is still low (Vissandjee et al, 2006; Açık,2014).

However, in recent years, there have been significant steps with regards to participation and representation of women in political sphere going by the global efforts aimed at increasing the importance of gender mainstreaming in political institutions (Waylen, 2012). Nevertheless, the quality and nature of work women do in these political institutions as well as their number is still low (Mackay, 2008). This is on the backdrop of recognition that participation and representation of women in local governments is a significant driver for women empowerment since local governments serve as avenues for recruitment of members and identification of national candidates (Panday, 2008).

The importance of participation and representation of women has been stressed in a number of scholarly works and the main emphasis is that women have the potential to serve their interests (Irwin, 2009; UCLG, 2004; Opera, 2005). When women as a group or through their representatives

participate in decisions affecting their day-to-day lives, they become more empowered to not only formulate ideas but also develop tools and techniques for redesigning their future. Jayal (2005) posits that much of the issues that affect women such as water scarcity, poor health care and poor waste disposal are at the heart of local governments' functions and as such participation and representation of women are essential in addressing these issues (Jayal, 2005). But still, women are disadvantaged when it comes to representation and participation in local and national politics.

The disadvantaged position of women in political representation and participation is an old phenomenon that is prevalent in both developed and developing countries. In the early 1950s, before the advent of feminism, a vast majority of legislatures and political activists were male and family laws in many countries favoured men with regards to sexual rights as well as property rights. Thus, very few women participated in political and decision-making processes (Htun & Weldon, 2011). Their position is compounded by low levels of education and literacy, low income and gendered workforce. For example, Women were markedly absent from the conventional politics of Britain due to the privileged position of men in British society (Waylen, 1999). After the 1997 election in which the Labour Government was overwhelmingly elected the number of newly elected women increased and their participation in political and decision-making processes was overwhelming (Nash, 1999). The rise of Thatcher and Teresa May as the Prime Ministers was very important for women who had been in peripheral positions for several years, but the recent resignation of May is also a testament of the niceties in national and local politics.

Other countries have made great strides with regards to the participation and representation of women in local and national governments by opening political spaces that favoured the rise of women. In Spain, Zapatero's socialist government made headlines in 2004 when it appointed an equal number of men and women to the cabinet. It further went ahead to appoint a pregnant woman as a defence minister. In 2011, half of the legislatures in Andorra and Rwanda were women. But still, the global participation of women in local and national politics is low, standing at about 22% according to the World Bank (World Bank, 2016).

Women's Representation and Participation in Turkish Local Governments

Turkey's attainment of independence in 1923 was a crucial turning point for the women with regards to social, political, and economic rights (Negiz & Üçer, 2012). In June of 1923, women had already started organizing and mobilizing themselves for political action with anticipation of occupying the political space that was largely dominated by men. They exerted their efforts with an attempt to register a political party called "Kadınlar Halk Fırkası" led by Nezihe Muhittin. However, in 1924, following the rejection of their proposal to form a political party, the organization was transformed into a women association by the name "Turkish Women's Union" that ventured on championing economic, social, and political rights of women in Turkey (Toprak, 1994; Aydin et. al. 2020). The organizations proved to be instrumental in the attainment of universal suffrage in which women of 18 years and above were allowed to vote and to contest in elections through the enactment of article 23 and 24 of the Municipal Law. In 1930 and 1934 women were granted the right to vote in local and general elections respectively. In 1933, the repeal of article 20 and 25 of the Village Law of 1924 allowed women to be eligible to vote and contest for the position of village elder as well as for the selection of the lucrative council of elders' positions (Talash, 1996).

The results of these constitutional reforms were palpable in the elections of 1935 when a total of 18 women were elected as deputies in the Turkish National Assembly. More positive

results followed in the subsequent elections and in 1950, the first woman city mayor was elected. This was followed by the appointment of the first woman minister in 1971 and in 1993 a great milestone was achieved in the history of Turkey when the first woman prime minister formed the government in Turkey (TÜSİAD-KAGİDER, 2008).

Since 1935 when women participated in their first election, there has been a slight increase in the number of women in local and national politics, especially with regards to representation in the grand parliament. The percentage increased from 4.5% in 1935 to 9% in 2007 and in 2011 the figure rose to 14% (Gençkaya, 2014). Based on the results of 2015 elections, there were 81 women deputies and 469 male deputies out of 550 deputies in the parliament translating to (14.73%) and (85.27%) respectively (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi, 2016).

Following the, two significant deductions can be made. First, even though women in Turkey attained the right to vote and to contest for political positions much earlier than a several countries in Europe, representation of women in the legislature is still dismal. The second deduction is that the representation of women has been slightly increasing since 1935 when women attained the right to vote and to contest for political positions.

At the local level, the representation of women remains much lower than at the national level. a comparison of figures between 1999 and 2018, there's a slight increase in the number of women mayors, municipal councillor and provincial council members. However, compared to the number of male representatives, it is apparent that the number of representatives that are women is very low as shown in the tables below.

Table 1: Number of women mayors

Local Elections	Women	Men	Total	Women's %
1999	18	3197	3215	0.6
2004	18	3207	3225	0.56
2009	27	2922	2949	1
2014	40	1356	1396	2.86
2019	652	7,611	8,263	7%

Source: Author compilation.

Table 1 is an indication that the number of women mayors is notably low compared to their male counterparts who are well represented in these positions. There's however a marked increase in the number of women since 1999.

Table 2: Number of women in metropolitan mayor positions

Metropolitan Mayors' Local Elections	Women	Men	Total	Women's Percentage
1999	0	15	15	0
2004	0	16	16	0
2009	0	16	16	0
2014	3	27	30	10
2019	4	77	81	3.8

Source: Author compilation.

From table 2 above, it is clear that in three subsequent elections women were not represented in the metropolitan mayors' positions and it was until 2014 that women were for the first time elected in three metropolitans. These women had already served as ministers and deputies in their political careers.

Table 3: Number women in municipal council

Municipal Council Members' Local Elections	Women	Men	Total	Women's Percentage
1999	541	33543	34084	1.6
2004	834	33643	34477	2.4
2009	1340	30450	31790	4.2
2014	2198	18300	20498	10.72

Source: Author compilation.

The figures of women representatives in the municipal council might be deceptive and could lead to the assertion that women are well represented in the municipal council. On the contrary, at a closer look, and when a comparison is done between men and women in the municipal council, the number of women is still very low. But it also points that political parties tend to choose more women candidates for municipal council positions than in mayor ship positions.

These tables clearly show low rates of women in three categories of local governments. This paper, therefore, utilizes the explanatory power of demand and supply-side framework to elucidate on the low representation of women in local governments.

Supply and Demand-Side Factors to Women's Representation and Participation in political positions

The framework of supply and demand has been utilized by several scholars, especially feminist to explicate patterns of women's representation and participation in politics. The framework is associated with Norris and Lovenduski (1995) who first used in their seminal work on *Recruitment: Gender, Race, and Class in the British Parliament* authored by Pippa Norris and Joni Lovenduski (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995). According to them, the supply side has two factors that influence individuals to run for office. They include resource like experience, time and money and motivational drivers like ambition, confidence and interests in political positions (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995). Aspirants who come forward to contest for political positions are influenced and motivated by the supply-side factors in their decisions. These factors, therefore, are seen to have strategic capacity to influence more women to come forward for political contests. More often, it is only those women with financial resources, political networks and political experience who present themselves for political positions. In essence, representation of women cannot increase without women empowerment and a shift in resource to enable women to compete fairly in political contests (Krook, 2010).

On the other hand, demand-side factors are attributes of the countries' institutions that draw willing contestants to political activities without much consideration of the supply-side factors. On the demand side, recruiters evaluate aspirants based on a wide range of factors including both informal and formal standards (Paxton et al., 2007). Recruiters may examine personal traits, political experience and education qualifications of the individuals. They could also examine

speaking, persuasion and campaigning abilities of aspirants and since most aspirants are not well known by the recruiters, recruiters often select candidates discriminatively and only those aspirants who are preferred by the recruiters stand a better chance even when their motivation and resources are low. In this regard women always find themselves in the periphery as a result of open bias against them (Krook, 2010).

Supply and demand-side factors function within a broader political and institutional context and the selection process often works differently in political parties that are guided by different regulations and policies. Political parties also operate in political systems in which selection of candidates is influenced by electoral system legal system and importantly, the political culture. However, irrespective of the existing contexts, women are less likely to potential aspirants compared to their male counterparts (Lawles & Fox, 2012). This is because gender has a significant role in determining political interests and ambitions since the ever-present nature of gender socialization- in which there are gender-specific roles- continues to be a hindrance to women's ability to engage in politics (Kabeer, 2001).

Essentially, gender is a product of society and culture and it influences the relationship between men and women in any given society. Societies' cultural and social norms influence the resources, decision-making ability and rights that are at the disposal of men and women. The nature of this relationship determines the roles of men and women both at home and in society at large and these could cut across other formal structures like local governments where women could be perceived as inferior (Beall, 2004).

Other studies have also found out that gender socialization influences the knowledge, ambition, and interest of women with regards to politics (Bauer & Britton, 2006). With low levels of interests, ambition and knowledge women are less likely to come forward for political contests. This situation is compounded by the demanding nature of politics that works to disadvantage women who are also expected to perform other duties at home. Therefore, cultural beliefs and traditions influence supply and demand side factors for prospective women candidates (Roza, 2010).

Supply and Demand Side Framework and Women's Representation in Turkey

In the last decades, Turkey has taken tremendous strides towards social, economic and political reforms with an aim of empowering its citizens both male and women. There have been specific campaigns that emphasised on girl child education to increase the literacy levels of women which was far much lower relative to other countries in Europe. The campaigns dubbed 'Stop Violence against women' and 'Hey girls, let's go to school' were geared towards sensitizing women and the societies on the detrimental effects of domestic violence and the need for girl child education (Tajali, 2015). Regarding elected women in the municipal councils in Turkey, there has been a significant increase from 1999 to 2018 and this can partly be attributed to the reforms and the campaigns that were organized in the last decades (Koyuncu & Sumbas, 2015).

According to Lawles & Fox, (2012) education has a propensity to influence the recruitment of candidates through resources and motivation. They posit that recruiters cannot be blamed for favouring those candidates with higher educational status. They go ahead to underscore the importance of education as an incentive for activism since it increases skills, interests, confidence and political knowledge (Lawles & Fox, 2012). As part of an effort to empower women in Turkey, several municipalities have established solidarity centres that offer education services, vocational

training and gender equality programs specifically for women in order to increase their knowledge levels on various issues including the workings of local governments (Koyuncu & Sumbas, 2015).

The efforts to empower women in Turkey intersect with the efforts to enhance gender equality, especially in the representation of women in local politics. This out of the recognition that gender equality is a salient driver of social-economic growth and democracy and in many cases around the world, countries that have reduced the gender gap tend to be economically prosperous (Müftüler- Baç, 2013). In the last years, Turkey has ranked poorly in the gender inequality index, being ranked between positions 120 and 129 in the last 7 years. According to Arat (2018), Turkey's position is not an indication of slow progress with regards to gender-sensitive policies; instead, it indicates that other countries are taking more serious steps in implementing gender-sensitive policies. He argues that on an overall score of 1.0 to signify total equality, Turkey has often scored between 0.5 and 0.6; an indication that progress is made (Arat, 2018).

However, considering the measurement of gender inequality of a given country, World Economic Forum assesses the equality of access to education, health, politics, and income which are used to allocate scores for every country. Dimensions like education and income are on the supply side factors that determine participation and representation of women in politics (Hausman, Tyson, Bekhouche, & Zahidi, 2013). They complement each other in many ways and achievement in one dimension would not necessarily mean an achievement in the other but in other cases, achieving one dimension means achieving another. For example, access to quality education, health and income are significant enabling women to contest for political positions. The absence of one variable, like education or income, would, in turn, jeopardize the ability of women to contest for political positions (Hausman et al., 2013).

In Turkey, despite its strong economic position in the world women are still the earners of low income with a paltry 24% of working women and of which 50% of them are not earning any income since their work is family-based. Moreover, patriarchy is still a dominant factor in women's access to employment despite the availability of article 192 that grants married women the right to seek employment outside the home. In most cases, especially in rural areas, women access to employment opportunities is under the control of their spouses (Engelstad & Teigen 2012:68-71). In spite of the tremendous progress to empower women in Turkey, the entrenched cultural and structural factors hinder the ability of women to participate in political activities by limiting their resources and motivation which in turn affect their ability to access quality education and health care.

Conclusion

This paper has employed the supply and demand-side framework to examine the continued low representation of women in Turkey's local governments. The presented literature shows a grim picture of the inequality that exists with regards to political representation in Turkey's local governments. Women are significantly underrepresented at the local government a tendency that can be construed as a hindrance to their contribution to local and national development which in turn affects Turkey's ranking in gender inequality indexing. In this regard, this paper is consistent with the literature on women's representation in local governments and it acknowledges that the negligible presence of women in politics is inconsistent with the belief that women are unable to rule and govern.

Due to the critical nature of women in governance and democracy, it is imperative for various stakeholders, especially political parties to address the challenge of women underrepresentation in local governments. Local governments are simply a microcosm of the nature of women's participation and representation at the national level. Using the supply and demand-side framework, this paper presents the stakeholders with the main factors that stand in the way of women's representation and participation in political activities at the local level. It should not be forgotten that local-level politics provide a unique avenue not only for political parties to select potential candidates but also for women to hone their political skills in preparation for the political contest at the national level.

This paper also acknowledges that women have a greater role to play with regards to increasing their numbers in the local governments' political positions. The supply-side factors can be inculcated in women by women themselves and therefore, women should strive to equip themselves with the necessary resources and skills that would make them appropriate candidates for various positions at the local level politics. However, it is imperative to underscore the fact that political parties, as well as other political infrastructure like the electoral bodies in Turkey, operate in multifaceted contexts in which cultural norms; traditions and patriarchy have a greater influence on the selection of candidates. Therefore, it is the role of Turkish society as a whole, without forgetting political leadership, to create a conducive environment that would attract more women to political contests. This could be in terms of increasing women quotas and formulating gender-sensitive policies both at the local and national level to combat the challenge of women underrepresentation.

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