



Dr. Türkmen Göksel
Ankara University, Faculty of Political Sciences
Dr. Yetkin Çınar
Ankara University, Faculty of Political Sciences

THE IMPACT OF THE ELECTION THRESHOLD ON THE PARLIAMENTARY STRUCTURE IN JUNE 12, 2011 ELECTIONS

The general elections held on June 12 identified the 24th parliament. The election, results of which were influenced by many factors, enabled the Justice and Development Party (AKP) maintained the power for the third consecutive period, a first in the Turkish political history, and also managed to increase its votes. The opposition parties Republican People's Party (CHP) and Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and the independent candidates supported by the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) got into the parliament. Other parties that competed in the elections could not be represented all but one getting less than 1% of the votes. Evidently, the results of this interesting election were also influenced by certain characteristics of the current election system. This note draws attention to some issues about the impact of the election system on the results of the recent election, in the light of the research conducted so far.

One interesting outcome of the election was that while the AKP improved its votes by 3.3% compared to the 2007 elections (46.6% to 49.9%) it lost 15 seats at the parliament (341 to 326). There are three underlying factors for this outcome: first, the gap between the first party (the AKP) and the second party (the CHP) narrowed since the latter enjoyed a larger improvement in votes. Because of the distribution method, this narrowing has a negative effect on the number of seats held by the leader party. The second factor is that the AKP was (almost) the only rival in regions where the BDP got high shares from votes and that the BDP increased its share in votes compared to the 2007 elections. For instance, the AKP which had 2 members of parliament (MP) in Hakkari in 2007 elections had none in 2011 elections. The third factor is the regulation introduced by the Higher Election Board (YSK) on the regional distribution of MPs. This note analyzes the extent to which this regulation affected the election results. The note concludes that if this regulation had not been introduced, the AKP would have had 5 more MPs.

Before analyzing the impact of the election system on the parliamentary structure in detail, the note will take a brief look at the election results and examine the outlook on the basis of disproportionality index, one indicator of “fair representation”

Table 1. 2011 Elections¹

	Vote rate %	Share of Seats %	Seats – Vote Rate
AKP	49,9	59,3	9,4
CHP	25,9	24,5	1,4
MHP	12,9	9,6	3,3
INDEP./BDP	6,6	6,5	0,1

The disproportionality index can be defined as highest value of the absolute difference between the share of seats and share of votes held by parties. Therefore, the disproportionality index for the 2011 elections is 9.4. The comparison of the index with the index values in the last four general elections is seen below.

Table 2. Disproportionality Indices in the Last Five General Elections

	1995	1999	2002	2007	2011
Disproportionality Index	0,08	0,06	0,32	0,15	0,09

Although 2011 election is the fairest in terms of representation among the elections participated by the AKP (2002, 2007 and 2011 elections), it is less fair than the 1995 and 1999 elections. *The point to note here is that the index is based solely on the difference between the number of the seats held and the rate of the votes held and gives no information about whether the voters voted for their primary choice or secondary choice.* It is evident that voters' voting for parties other than that of their primary choice affects the fairness of representation adversely. This issue is scrutinized in the below section that examines the long term (cumulative) effects of the election threshold.

Now, let us analyze the impact of some key characteristics of the election system on the structure of the parliament. The characteristics addressed in this context are:

1. *The short term (static) and the long term (cumulative) impacts of the 105 election threshold*
2. *The impact of the number of MPs allocated for each election zone*

¹ This study was conducted on June 13, 2011 on the basis of early election results.

1. The short term (static) and the long term (cumulative) impacts of the 10% election threshold

Long term impacts

10% election threshold pushed small parties below the threshold gradually turning them into “signboard” parties². Because of the 10% threshold, a substantial proportion of voters tended to vote for the parties of their second or third choice with the belief that the party of their primary choice cannot get into the parliament; and this in turn brings an inexplicit representative unfairness. One indicator of this is that in 2011 elections all parties that were left out of the parliament (except the Felicity Party – or the SP – which won 1.24% of the votes) had votes below 1%. The fact that the many of the supporters of the parties that are out of the parliament how including the SP, Democratic Leftist Party, Voice of the People's Party and the Democrat Party chose to vote for the AKP, the CHP and the MHP with belief that the parties of their choice cannot exceed the election threshold.

In conclusion, voters' tendency not to vote for the parties of their primary choice influenced by the implementation of the 10% threshold for a long time affects the fairness of representation negatively in “qualitative terms” if not in “quantitative terms”. This issue is of key importance concerning the quality of democracy.

Short term impacts

Under the current circumstances where the votes of relatively small parties decreased significantly due to the long term impact of the election threshold, the short term impacts of the election threshold was examined by posing the question “what if there was no election threshold?” A survey conducted by the A&G Research Company asked the respondents “which party would you vote for if there was no election threshold, that is, in the case that they do not have concerns about whether or not the party they support can exceed the threshold”. It was assumed that the answer to this question reflects the primary choice of voters independent of the behavioral effect of the election threshold. The following method was used to identify the behavioral effect of the election threshold on the basis of the observations in this context:³

10% of the total votes of the three parties in the parliament (the AKP, the CHP and the MHP) were deduced and the resultant total was distributed among the parties that could not get in the parliament in proportion to their sizes. The distribution of the seats was recalculated on the basis of this arrangement.⁴ Below, the distribution derived with this method and the results of the 2011 election are compared.

² This issue was addressed in a TEPAV policy note titled “The Static and Dynamic Impacts of the 10% Election Threshold on Voter Behavior” published in March 2011.

³ For details, please see Göksel and Çınar (2011).

⁴ No modification was made for the votes to independent candidates.

Table 3. Comparison of the Current Distribution and the Case with 0% Election Threshold

	Current Distribution of Votes	10% Threshold	Distribution of Votes under Behavioral Effect	0% Threshold*
AKP	49,9	326	44,9	321
CHP	25,9	135	23,2	134
MHP	12,9	53	11,7	53
INDEP./BDP	6,6	36	6,6	36
SP	1,2	-	3,6	6

* Same results were obtained under election threshold at 0%, 1%, 2% and 3%.

The distribution derived on the basis of the behaviorality assumption revealed that if the election threshold was abandoned or reduced to 1%, 2% or 3%, one more party (the SP) could get into the parliament and thus the fairness of representation would be improved as the rate of unrepresented votes decreased. *Although it appears as if the lowering of the election threshold would have had a small impact on the results of the 2011 election, it should be noted that a significantly high threshold at 10% have had a long term cumulative impact.*

2. Number of MPs Distributed Among Election Zones:

This section first assesses the impact of the amendments introduced by YSK between 2007 elections and 2011 elections with the aim to improve the fairness on the basis of the population per a MP⁵. Table 4 shows the distribution of the seats in the current situation in comparison with the distribution in the case if the YSK have not introduced the mentioned amendments before the 2011 elections.

Table 4. Distribution of Seats in the Current Situation and in the Case without the YSK Amendment

	Current Situation	Without the YSK Amendment
AKP	326	331
CHP	135	130
MHP	53	56
INDEP./BDP	36	33

If the YSK had not introduced the amendment devoted to ensure a fairer distribution of MPs, the AKP would have had 331 seats in the parliament. *This example reveals that even small amendments tailored to improve the fairness of the election system can derive significant outcomes.*

⁵ This issue was stressed in the TEPAV policy note titled "The Impacts of the "YSK" Regulations on "Fairness" and "Composition of the Parliament" published in April 2011.

Furthermore, table 5 presents the results of the analysis based on the method proposed on the distribution of MPs which is believed to enable a higher convergence between election zones with respect to the size of population per an MP.⁶

Table 5. Composition of the Seats in the Current Situation and under the Proposed Situation

	Current Situation	Proposed Situation
AKP	326	326
CHP	135	138
MHP	53	56
INDEP./BDP	36	30

The proposed regulation does not bring a large difference in the composition of the parliament in comparison with the current situation whereas it ensures a fairer outlook with respect to the distribution of MPs among election zones on the basis of population.

In short, even though the 2011 election appears to be fairer on the basis of the disproportionality index compared to the 2002 and 2007 elections, the cumulative impact of the election threshold as high as 10% turned small parties into signboard parties forcing voters to shift away from the parties of their primary choice. In this context, fairness in representation is damaged. Under these circumstances, it can be concluded that the arrangements in the opposite direction (reducing or abolishing the election threshold) will improve the fairness of representation while having no significant impact on the power of the winning party.

On the other hand, the results revealed that the allocation of MPs among regions was critically important. Although the YSK regulation caused the AKP lose only 5 seats in the parliament, this difference proves significant as it deprived the AKP of the 3/5 majority necessary to craft the constitutional amendments to referendum.

Bibliography:

Göksel, T. & Çınar, Y. (forthcoming, 2011). *Türkiye’de Seçim Barajına ve Seçim Sistemi Değişikliklerine Yönelik Analizler ve Politika Önerileri*, TEPAV.

⁶ In the proposed method, the “regional weight” was calculated by dividing the population of a particular election zone to the total population; the weights calculated for each region were multiplied by 550 MPs and the results were rounded up to roughly calculate the number of MPs per election zone. For the details of this analysis, objective criteria and the details of the proposed regulation, please see Göksel and Çınar (2011).