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COALITION GOVERNMENTS AND THEIR STRUCTURES IN TURKEY

Abstract:

A coalition refers to an alliance of two or more political parties to form a government and to perceive common interests for a continuance of a parliamentary term. In general, if no political party achieved an absolute majority of mandates in general elections, a coalition government will be formed. In West European parliamentary systems, coalitions are unavoidable. With a view to political systems in Europe, coalition cabinets are common, such as in Germany, Italy, Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands. Since its foundation in 1923, Turkey is also characterized by coalition governments which were unstable and negative assessed by the media and public at large. In particular, at times of political unrest and economic crises including the military coup in 1960, 1970 and 1980, fifteen coalition governments in the Turkish parliamentary system have been formed. Against this background, the main focus of the paper will be on the lifespan and stability of coalition governments in Turkey. The paper then investigates the main reasons for the resolution of coalition governments and their impacts on political culture in Turkey.

Keywords:

Turkey, coalition governments, polititcal culture

1 Introduction

The concept of coalition is used differently in the social sciences, but in political science, the notion of coalition is used to define cooperative forms of interaction for representing or asserting specific interests. Commonly understood as a social phenomenon, many American sociologists tried to operationalize this concept in the 1960s and 1970s (Jun, 1994, p. 19). For Kelley (1969) cited by Jun (1994), the notion of coalition as a general social phenomenon 'is a combination with actors pursuing a common goal' (*Ibid*, p. 19). Despite criticism on coalition formation and its failure, many political scientists and coalition theorists have tried to explain the success of government coalitions in parliamentary democracies with traditional theories of government formation (Budge & Herman, 1978, p. 459). According to Laver and Schofield (1990), coalition governments bargaining in parliamentary democracies are typical of Western Europe after the end of World War II with the exception of Britain and Spain which have no tradition of coalition cabinet (Laver & Schofield, 1990, p. 1; Müller, Bergman & Strøm, 2008, p. 7).

Since its foundation in 1923, Turkey has experienced different forms of government which have strongly influenced the functioning of the governmental system and generated uncertainty and problems in politics. Although in a multi-party system coalition governments are usual, in the long-term, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) has held the majority of seats in parliament as a single-party and has implemented its program since 2002. In June 2015, new parliamentary elections were held in Turkey, where the ruling AKP won 40.87% of the votes and firmly secured its seats in parliament. Compared with the last general election in 2011, the recent parliamentary election resulted in favor of the AKP. Despite concerns, the contesting parties such as the Republican People's Party (CHP) won 24.95%, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) received 16.29%, and the People's Democratic Party (HDP) obtained 13.12% of the votes and by surpassing the 10% hurdle, they had the opportunity to secure their seats in parliament. According to the High Council of Election (YSK), the AKP took 258 seats, the CHP won 132 seats, and both the MHP and the HDP earned 80 seats in the parliament.¹

From the point of view of many political scientists and law professors, the potential for a single-party government was hopeless. To form a government alone, the winning AKP party needed 276 seats for a majority. In this case, the AKP was forced to be involved in a coalition with the other three parties. Recent polls and intellectuals favored a coalition between the AKP and the CHP, but the opposing CHP and HDP parties were unwilling to be coalition partners with the AKP. In the meantime, all the focus was directed towards the MHP seeing as a potential partner was needed to accelerate the coalition forming as soon as possible² (Gieler & Henrich, 2015, p. 21). Due to the tense relationship with the AKP, the MHP refused its support after long and failing coalition negotiations and this already complex situation led to a new call for parliamentary elections on November 1, 2015. Finally, after the parliamentary elections in November 2015, the AKP regained its lost votes and guaranteed its

absolute majority in parliament.³ However, political scientists as well as the political environment offered various scenarios, concerns and questions as to whether Turkey would re-experience a pending unstable coalition government in the 21st century as in the 1990s (see Turan, 1997, p. 299; Yoldaş, 2000, p. 202).

Compared with European parliamentary systems in Germany, Italy, Austria, Denmark or Belgium where coalitions are quite common, Turkey has begun to undergo a new phase in which the configuration of a coalition government was implemented for the first time in 1961. Up until 2002, 58 governments had been formed including 15 coalition governments in legislatures that had short lifespans triggered by economic crises. The main focus of the paper will be on the lifespan and durability of parliamentary coalitions in Turkey from 1961 to 2002. Which parties formed the government and under what terms the parties competed for cabinet formation are issues which will also be addressed. Finally, the paper highlights the main reasons for the resolution of coalition governments and their impacts on political culture in Turkey.

2 Coalition governments in Turkey

The main focus in coalition studies is on the empirical analysis of the life cycle and politics of coalition cabinets. Coalition is an interesting political process that has fascinated many political scientists and theorists.

The coalition formation process has indeed received much attention from political scientists. As Müller (2009) stated, in democracies, governments are the central actors in political systems, whereby political parties are keen on competing for government participation. Before a coalition cabinet is formed, the prospective coalition partners expect to take office to implement their policy programs. As already mentioned above, there were 15 coalition governments in Turkey. Table 1 provides an overview of the cabinets between 1961 and 2002.

Table 1: Coalition governments in Turkey, 1961–2002

Prime Minister	Government parties	Term of Office Start End	Form of Government
Ismet Paşa (Inönü)	CHP, AP	20.11.1961–25.06.1962	Coalition government
Ismet Paşa (Inönü)	CHP, YTP, CKMP, independents.	25.06.1962–25.12.1963	Coalition government
Ismet Paşa (Inönü)	CHP, independents.	25.12.1963–20.02.1965	Coalition government
Suat Hayri Ürgüplü	AP, YTP, CKMP, independents	20.02.1965–27.10.1965	Coalition government
Mustafa Bülent Ecevit	CHP, MSP	26.01.1974–17.11.1974	Coalition government
Süleyman Demirel	AP, MSP, CGP, MHP	31.03.1975–21.06.1977	1st Nationalist Front
Süleyman Demirel	AP, MSP, MHP	21.07.1977–05.01.1978	2nd Nationalist Front
Mustafa Bülent Ecevit	CHP, CGP, independents	05.01.1978–12.11.1979	Coalition government
Süleyman Demirel	DYP, SHP	20.11.1991–25.06.1993	Coalition government
Tansu Çiller	DYP, SHP	25.06.1993–05.10.1995	Coalition government

Tansu Çiller	DYP, CHP	30.10.1995–06.03.1996	Coalition government
Ahmet Mesut Yılmaz	ANAP, DYP	06.03.1996–28.06.1996	Coalition government
Necmettin Erbakan	REFAHP, DYP	28.06.1996–30.06.1997	Coalition government
Ahmet Mesut Yılmaz	ANAP, DSP, MHP	30.06.1997–11.01.1999	Coalition government
Mustafa Bülent Ecevit	ANAP, DSP, MHP	28.05.1999–18.11.2002	Coalition government

Source: http://www.basbakanlik.gov.tr/Forms/_Global/_Government/pg_CabinetHistory.aspx,

retrieved from January, 26, 2016; Yunus Yoldaş: *Das politische System der Türkei*. Frankfurt am Main, u. a., 2008, pp. 53–55; with own supplements.

One year after the coup d'état on May 27, 1960, the first in the history of Turkish politics, general elections were held on October 15, 1961. This marked the end of the military rule of the National Unity Committee with the approval of the new constitution and thus, the government was transferred to civilians again. Meanwhile, some officers of the Turkish armed forces continued their activities, but the period of dominant military politics ended in short order when the authoritarian group was eliminated from the government (Özdemir, 2008, p. 243; Kahraman, 2008, p. 213). In 1961, besides the closed Democratic Party (DP), which could not take part in the legislative elections, new political parties were formed and competed on the political stage. On 15 October 1961, the Republican People's Party (CHP), the Justice Party (AP), the Republican Peasants' Nationalist Party (CKMP) and the New Turkey Party (YTP) stood for election. Despite the victory of the CHP, no parliamentary majority was reached to form a government. Thus, the election results indicated coalition negotiations with party leaders (Kara, 2004, pp. 47–48).

According to political historian Hikmet Özdemir (2008), the formation of a coalition government between the CHP and the AP was seen as a new chance to prevent growing tensions and a political crisis that might trigger a military intervention soon (Ahmad, 1996, p. 208). General Cemal Gürsel was appointed as president and İsmet İnönü was installed as prime minister. Özdemir concludes that İnönü as an experienced political leader had the potential to run the coalition government competently (Özdemir, 2008, p. 244). Actually, the first coalition government was not formed on the basis of compromise; the coalition between the CHP and the AP was rather forced to reinstall democracy and to get rid of possible military intervention in future. The second coalition government was formed among the CHP, the YTP, the CKMP and independents, because Prime Minister İsmet İnönü refused the AP as a possible coalition partner, despite the suggestion of a national coalition government by the Turkish president Gürsel. The third coalition government took office between 1963 and 1965, formed by the CHP and independents under the leadership of İnönü. The fourth coalition was formed by the newly appointed prime minister, Suat Hayri Ürgüplü. The AP, the CKMP, the YTP and independents joined forces to form a cabinet which lasted until the parliamentary elections in 1973 (Kara, 2004, pp. 70–97). When analyzing the four coalition governments, the main reason for formation lay first in avoiding uncertainty and political unrest and, second, in preventing military intervention (Örs, 1996, p. 157). It is also important to note that besides the

emergence of governments, government terminations have also long concerned coalition theorists. As is so often the case, the first coalition government collapsed due to polarization and the difference in ideologies between the CHP and the AP. Each political party had a different concept and vision to carry out.

Another significant factor in government dissolution was the risk of party system fractionalization. These factors have also been seen in other coalition governments. The lack of compromise among coalition partners led as expected to an early termination. Nonetheless, the failure of governments depends at first glance on the reduction of social and economic welfare. Also, different arguments within political parties and different governmental goals generate the risk of dissolution. Coalition governments in the 1970s, were short-lived due to weak social, economic and political programs (Kara, 2004, p. 22).

After the parliamentary elections held on 14 October 1973, the CHP and the National Salvation Party (MSP) agreed after long cabinet negotiations to form a coalition government. The reasons for doing so included the major ideological tendencies held by both parties but also their different approaches to economic and social issues produced a coalition (*Ibid.*, pp. 109–110). However, the coalition government started to split due to fundamentally different views on political and social issues. The MSP required a ban on alcohol, the acceptance of the official holiday on Friday and new regulations for tourists entering the country assuming that they might have negative impacts on Turkish people. The CHP did not accept such requirements, a fact which brought about divisiveness within the opposition. This situation was also observed in later Nationalist Front governments during in 1975 and 1977 (Heper, 2006, p. 207).

To highlight the politics and conflicts within political parties, Metin Heper (2006) outlined the main traits observed during the period of the Nationalist Front government as follows (*Ibid.*, pp. 208–211):

- At that time, an agreement on a European Common Market between North Cyprus and Turkey was not be made.
- Coalition partners approached each other with suspicion.
- Each ministry was under the command of one political party.
- Coalition members clearly did not hesitate to criticize or sabotage the efforts of the others.
- Political parties tended towards partisan politics.
- Each one of the coalition partners tended to favoritism and protection of sympathizers.
- Coalition partners conducted themselves from time to time in an unlawful manner.

Both the CHP-MSP coalition and the Nationalist Front government were not strong enough to resolve internal matters putting them at risk of collapse due to polarization

within the party and in the social environment. Also, the rise of political violence, terrorism and the worse economic system all facilitated the 1980 military intervention (*Ibid.*, p. 211; Örs 1996, p. 166).

After the intervention on 12 September 1980 and between the 1991 to 2002 elections, the country was administered by coalition governments. Between the general elections on 1991 and 1995, Turkey was witness to three coalition governments dominated by center-right and center-left parties (Kara, 2004, pp. 225–226). In 1991, the Right Way Party (DYP) and the Social Democratic Populist Party (SHP) formed a coalition government whose goal it was to bring democracy to the country and to stabilize the economy. Despite assumptions that the coalition would be short lived, it should be noted that after taking office the government coalition was predominantly concentrated on a democratic program that involved lifting limitations on human rights and freedoms and generating a positive economic and social environment until the next election (*Ibid.*, pp. 228–229). The tenth coalition government formed by the DYP and the SHP in 1993, under the leadership of Prime Minister Tansu Çiller was not really different from the previous coalition's principles. But it was not possible for the existing coalition to enjoy success during the parliamentary term. A budget deficit with a poor economic situation and competition within the party led to an early dissolution of the legislature (*Ibid.*, p. 246). Two years later, the DYP and the CHP was formed with no change in prime minister. All in all, the coalition was expected to help Turkey resolve the dominant political crisis, but the coalition failed miserably (*Ibid.*, p. 269).

After the parliamentary elections on 24 December 1995, a minority cabinet between the Motherland Party (ANAP) and the DYP was formed. As two center-right parties, the coalition could not serve until the end of its regular term. Disagreement and consequences of non-interaction between the parties over salient current questions of policies (*Ibid.*, p. 275) signaled the fall of the government. As a result, early elections were called in 1995. Surprisingly, the Welfare Party (RP) with its leader Necmettin Erbakan gained high popularity which came to power the following year and formed a coalition with the DYP (*Ibid.*, p. 281). According to Heper, Prime Minister Erbakan was seen as a new alternative to secular democratic order. Moreover, future prospects on the success of political Islam in the social environment or the military would intervene remained suspenseful (Heper 2011, p. 285). While holding office, the military tried to influence the policy of the coalition which led to conflicts. Under these circumstances, Erbakan had to resign and the coalition collapsed (*Ibid.*, p. 296). The fourteenth coalition government formed with the ANAP, the Democratic Left Party (DSP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) in 1997 under the leadership of Mesut Yılmaz. There was a desperate need to lower tension and to help the state find a way out of the crisis (Kara, 2004, p. 338). Thus, in this period, the coalition government put efforts into improving dialogue in foreign policies which were violated during the RP and DYP coalition. The new government also focused on Western institutions to maintain a relationship with the European Union. Beside these endeavors, economic variables such as a high inflation rate and a high unemployment rate and allegations of corruption within coalition partners had a significant impact on the duration the

government and boosted early general elections on 18 April 1999. After the elections, the three-party coalition government consisting of the DSP, the MHP and the ANAP was the fifteenth and last weak coalition government in Turkish history which lasted until 2002 (*Ibid.*, pp. 374–377; *Gümüş* 2015, p. 61). Criteria such as the political and economic crisis increased poverty and corruption all led to the demise of the government (Kara, 2004, p. 448).

3 The military impact on political life in Turkey

The political scientist Birsen Örs (1996) provided a review of the literature called ‘Military interventions in Turkey – An explanatory model’. The work provided several types of military interventions that explained how the military uses power to influence and shape Turkish politics with the focus on the concept of praetorianism. On the basis of this concept, Örs stressed the increased power of the military in the social environment and how it was likely to influence politics from time to time (Örs, 1996, p. 11). One of the main characteristics of the Praetorian army is that ‘they generally act as a pressure group behind the stage. Furthermore, they refrain from interfering in politics directly, so they are more concentrated on influencing the government at behind to meet their demands’ (*Ibid.*, p. 13). In this perspective, İlter Turan divided the political role of the army in two categories: active role and passive role. He highlights that an active role indicates the direct seizure of the government or the definition of policies which may be carried out by a civilian group. The passive role of the army means forming governments within a common political process without threaten the governmental survival (Turan, 1997, p. 299).

When looking at the history of Turkish military interventions, the military has directly intervened twice and indirectly once in Turkish politics. But on 28 February 1997 after the announcement of the National Security Committee, the military intervened again a move which in literature is described as a ‘postmodern coup’.⁴ During the presidential elections in 2007, precisely at midnight, the military posted a statement about laicism on the Internet which was defined as an e-coup by many scholars.⁵ Birsen Örs addressed the research question: ‘Why has the Turkish military often intervened in political life and what have been the factors triggering such coups?’ (Örs, 1996, p. 82) This is most relevant when environmental factors (e.g. political, social, cultural and economic) arise that have an enormous impact on the civilian-military relationship. Örs argued that difficulties such as preventing terrorism and violence, stabilizing the economy or lowering inflation called the legitimacy of the current government into question, so that the military could view itself as the guardian of democracy (*Ibid.*, pp. 79–86) and the driving force behind defending the Turkish constitution and state (Heper, 2011, p. 280).

Based on these factors, the intervention in civilian politics was made legitimate by the military (*Ibid.*, p. 32). Although the military’s intervention in political life has been seen as a chance to redesign politics, the direct coups led to a threat to democracy and, of course, to weakness in civil society (Heper, 2006, p. 218).

As already discussed, the military intervention in Turkey was also carried out during coalition government periods. After the 1960 coup, the polarization and increasing fragmentation of political parties prevented the formation of a stable coalition government in the 1960s, 1970s right up until 1980. As Heper formulated: 'During the coalition government period, coalition partners did not hesitate to employ nepotism and patronage that defined future policies (*Ibid.*, p. 200).' This situation was also observed after the coup of 12 September 1980. Despite the influence of military rule, the country was able to recover from its tutelage and due to constitutional changes in the following years, Turkey was able to develop its democracy gradually by excluding anti-democratic practices (Ahmad, 1995, p. 259).

4 Democratic political culture in Turkey

Turkey as the heartland of parliamentary democracy has experienced direct and indirect military dominance immediately after political and economic problems. It is obvious that after military periods, political actors supported a democratic movement to remove anti-democratic takeovers and constitute a new democratic political culture in Turkey (Turan, 1997, p. 300).

It would be unreasonable to claim that a weak level of political culture or a loss of political legitimacy would generate fears in the environment and nevertheless threats to democracy. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Turkey experienced political unrest, terrorism, violence and short-lived unsuccessful coalition governments. There was always the risk that democracy would break down during an economic and political crisis (Örs, 1996, p. 96).

Countries with a well-developed political culture, political parties, pressure and interest groups as well as established unions and associations are able to resist military coups. In these countries there is a strong civic culture, but in countries with a weak civic culture, civil society is limited (*Ibid.*, p. 45). In Turkey for example, the relationship between state and society is complex and constitutional amendments are prepared in favor of the executive (Yoldaş, 2013, p. 239).

Özbudun argued that at this stage military tutelage over politics was prominent which was seen as an obstacle for democratization. The military's political influence has been on the decline since 2007, when the Justice and Development Party (AKP) declared its authority over the Turkish military. Constitutional reforms have been made more compatible with European democratic standards. Certainly, as many scholars note, there are still problems affecting democracy such as the lack of common views and norms about relations and reactions to government opposition or the relationship between citizens and politicians which potentially affect the making of political decisions and political accountability (Heper, 2006, p. 188).

Conclusion

In modern democracies, the people are sovereign and have the power to choose political representatives from political parties through fair and free elections. Turkey as a parliamentary democracy has a long history based on forming government.

Empirical and theoretical work on government formation in Turkey is limited to help us to analyze and explain the variables in coalition governments or single-party cabinets with respect to cabinet duration and termination. When comparing Turkey with other countries in Western Europe, coalition cabinets were more unstable than in Western European parliamentary democracies. As Dodd (1967) remarked, the government formation depends on its party composition. In general, the reasons for government termination in Turkey were mainly different approaches to economic and political issues that led to a division of political parties during their term of office which accelerated military intervention in 1960, 1971 and 1980 to restore order.

From 2002 to 2015 the Justice and Development Party (AKP) maintained its parliamentary majority that was interrupted in the June 2015 general elections. This situation encouraged speculations about a possible coalition formation with other political parties that surpassed the 10% threshold to enter parliament. As coalition negotiations failed, the AKP called a pre-election on November 1, 2015 to regain its victory. After the November 2015 elections, the AKP won 49,50% of the vote with a majority of 325 seats in the 550-seat parliament to form a government on its own. Generally speaking, opinions whether a coalition government will be ever formed in the future are divided. In this context, coalition research in Turkey should be extended and improved to analyze different stages coalitions go through.

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Notes

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