



Local Power and Female Political Pathways in Turkey: Cycle of Exclusion

by Lucie G. Drechselová, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, 270 pp., £84,99 (hardback), ISBN 978-3-030-47142-2

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BOOK REVIEW

Local Power and Female Political Pathways in Turkey: Cycle of Exclusion, by Lucie G. Drechselová, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, 270 pp., £84,99 (hardback), ISBN 978-3-030-47142-2

Women's participation in politics has been one of the most controversial issues in Turkey since the establishment of Turkish Republic. While the young Republic was proud of enfranchising women even before many of its European counterparts, it stayed silent about the low level of women's representation at the local and national level. Since the 1930s, women have been able to participate in Turkish political life as voters and candidates. With the 1980s, many scholars—mainly female—have discussed how this legal framework is reflected in political institutions. Their studies are centered on a statistical fact in Turkish politics: women's underrepresentation in politics. Lucie Drechselová contributes to this discussion by deconstructing the notion of “cycles of exclusion” to understand from various perspectives the low levels of female participation/representation in local politics in Turkey. The author highlights an enigma she refers the “Turkish Paradox,” which reveals disproportionality between underrepresentation of women in national and local politics in favor of the former one. The work both engages with existing literature and presents original analysis from fieldwork in İzmir, Trabzon, and Diyarbakır.

Chapter 2 sketches the historical background of women's journey in Turkish politics while questioning women's underrepresentation or “cycle of exclusion” both in national and local elections. The book aims to scrutinize the aforementioned “Turkish Paradox,” and it assesses its historical and institutional (party-specific) aspects in this chapter. It reveals the young Republic's gender regime by emphasizing that “reform did not aim at women's individual fulfillment and emancipation” (p.43) and draws attention to the contemporary picture of the four parliamentary political parties regarding women's inclusion into politics. To give a concise overview and cover the long period from diverse aspects, it offers an intense reading for women's exclusion in politics. By doing so, it prepares the reader for the analysis of fieldwork in the following chapters.

Drechselová discusses the first step of her argument -*cycle of exclusion*- in Chapter 3 by emphasizing the importance of constituting the electoral list and its gendered mechanism in the women's inclusion or exclusion process. She addresses the interaction between local party organizations and national headquarters and questions the hierarchical party position in Turkish politics while focusing on candidate selection mechanisms. Additionally, the chapter provides a party-specific explanation by including intraparty dynamics during the inclusion or exclusion of women in the election list. Drechselová adopts a subtle approach to understand women's low level of representation in local

politics by tracing the processes of political representation. Incorporating the role of women's branches is also critical to see political maneuvers and agency of women in candidate selection.


The author builds her research step by step in Chapter 4 by highlighting women who were both on an electoral list and elected to office. Drechselová introduces us to female councilors in three cities covered in this research. While she utilizes an intersectional perspective to trace the pathways of female councilors, she includes the profile analysis to show who they are and how their multiple identities or social capital intersect. For this, the chapter draws on interviews from more than 30 female councilors from different localities and parties. It shows a striking point in terms of women's profiles who have more in common despite their party differences. Yet, Drechselová brings our attention to the pro-Kurdish party's female representatives to explain how things can be reversed. Also, she underlines that the shared profiles do not conclude with a similar political experience due to the local configuration and party politics beyond the similarities. This chapter is the longest one which provides perspectives on female elected officials by considering their family, educational and professional backgrounds, biographical features, and current family status.

Chapter 5 examines the constraints of female representation in local politics. While combining gendered upbringing, intraparty hostilities, and local configuration, she explains women's underrepresented position in politics. For this, the chapter first tackles the role-learning process of women, which is about how women internalize the conservative norms and order since their childhood and how they can adopt these roles into their political life. Then, it analyzes the exclusionary environment of political parties for women, which also prevents women from being experienced in intraparty networks. Even though the author points out the role of intraparty dynamics in the lack of female representation, she also does not underestimate the impact of local configurations where women encounter diverse opportunities or challenges. Finally, the author presents the critical part of her puzzle by making women, party, and local features interact to uncover how limits are (re)produced.

Chapter 6 introduces women's agency from a wide angle and discusses individual strategies or accommodation practices of women shaped by intraparty dynamics and party ethos. Rather than similarities, Drechselová underlines the diversities of women's strategies to sustain their role within the political parties in three ways. First, according to her cases, in conservative parties, women follow existing rules and party ideology to prove they are the examples of legitimate femininity. Then, even though women may act more subversively in the Republican People's Party, these attempts remain limited to the individual level. Despite the lack of coordination and collective action, she points out how some individual actions would create a transformation in favor of women within the party, called "butterfly politics." Finally, she analyzes the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party, where criticism towards patriarchal order has become a component of the party's ethos, and it also allows collective action among women.

The last chapter summarizes the work and discusses the results. She assesses the diverse reasons, conditions, structures, experiences, and life stories that have an impact on women's position in politics. Despite the broad range of focus, she provides quite detailed and convincing research about the women's journey in politics and pushes the limits of existing understanding regarding gender and politics.

The book's most valuable and outstanding feature is its original data collection from five long-stay and follow-up visits and 200 semi-structured in-depth interviews with local political actors. She focuses on four political parties in Turkish politics and their local dynamics in the abovementioned cities. Being in the field comes with opportunities and challenges for any researcher. To welcome the opportunities and overcome the challenges, Drechselová develops two perspectives to examine her research question: being locally specific and party sensitive. The author's position in the research experience enlightens beyond the accepted patterns and process by emphasizing female subjectivity. She also presents diverse conceptual themes, which build a multifaceted analysis of her fieldwork. These conceptual approaches are utilized to clarify each chapter of the book, which are also designed to answer the specific questions to deconstruct the "cycles of exclusion" of women in local politics. The research design and Drechselová's approach towards the field can be considered groundbreaking to understand the complexity of the Turkish context from the women's perspective. Yet, there are still missing points because the experiences of non-Muslim or non-Sunni women, who could be included to show how they face a double burden from the intersection of both their own communities and the general structure of what Drechselová shows.

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