

Chapter Two

The Kurdish Women's Political Organizing from the Feminist Neo-Institutionalist Perspective

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THE "KURDISH EXCEPTION" IN TURKISH POLITICS¹

In March 2014, Turkey's "democratizing package" allowed political parties to be chaired jointly by a man and a woman.² This legislative measure came about after being *de facto* practiced for nine years by the pro-Kurdish parties.³ Back in 2005, the introduction of co-chairing system was one of the major achievements of the Kurdish women's movement. Within the pro-Kurdish party, opponents of the project argued that the existence of the co-chairing system would serve to state prosecutors as a pretext for the closure of the party. The closure eventually happened, but the co-chairing system was applied also to the following political parties and was finally legalized in 2014. In March 2014 as well, municipal elections took place in which the pro-Kurdish parties introduced the co-chairing system to local governments. The party nominated male and female co-mayors to almost all of its 100 municipalities in the southeast region. Even though the co-mayoral system represents an extension of the newly legal co-chairing system in political parties, it has faced severe negative response from the state and has largely been dismantled in the following years with numerous co-mayors arrested.

Pro-Kurdish political parties in Turkey distinguish themselves from other political forces by significantly higher proportions of women represented on their lists as well as in the party decision-making structures. Besides the co-chairing system, there is a 40 percent gender quota, and women hold a quasi-monopoly on the selection of female candidates. In a country where the women's representation reached 17 percent in the Parliament in 2018