

AN ACTOR-BASED APPROACH TO PRE-ELECTORAL  
COALITION MAKING

by  
AHMED OĐUZALP ŐAMLI

Submitted to the Graduate School of Social Sciences  
in partial fulfilment of  
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Sabancı University  
July 2024

**AN ACTOR-BASED APPROACH TO PRE-ELECTORAL  
COALITION MAKING**

Approved by:

Asst. Prof. Oya Yeğen .....  
(Thesis Supervisor)

Prof. Özge Kemahlıoğlu .....

Asst. Prof. Alper Yağcı .....

Date of Approval: July 22, 2024

AHMED OĞUZALP ŞAMLI 2024 ©

All Rights Reserved

## ABSTRACT

### AN ACTOR-BASED APPROACH TO PRE-ELECTORAL COALITION MAKING

AHMED OĞUZALP ŞAMLI

POLITICAL SCIENCE M.A. THESIS, JULY 2024

Thesis Supervisor: Asst. Prof. Oya Yeğen

Keywords: pre-electoral coalitions, prospect theory, domain of losses, risk-taking

This thesis examines the determinants of pre-electoral coalitions (PECs) and analyzes in which circumstances actors choose to form pre-electoral coalitions. Adopting prospect theory from behavioral economics, it explains the PEC formation with a focus on risk-taking, risk-aversion, and the domain of losses and gains. The first chapter employs a cross-national dataset that includes four different datasets to test the effect of the domain of losses on the PEC formation, which is a risk-taking behavior. Furthermore, this study operationalizes the ideological distance between political parties as the dependent variable. The empirical findings demonstrate that some of the proxies of the domain of losses have the expected impact on risk-taking behavior. The partial support in this chapter is accompanied by the qualitative analysis of the Turkish elections in 2018 and 2023. In these elections, both the incumbent and the opposition increased risk-taking behavior as a result of the placement of their reference point in the domain of losses. A paired comparison of these elections allows us to keep the effect of the institutions constant and to focus on the actors' reactions to conjunctural factors.

## ÖZET

SEÇİM ÖNCESİ KOALİSYON YAPIMINA AKTÖR TEMELLİ BİR YAKLAŞIM

AHMED OĞUZALP ŞAMLI

SİYASET BİLİMİ YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ, TEMMUZ 2024

Tez Danışmanı: Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Oya Yeğen

Anahtar Kelimeler: seçim öncesi koalisyonlar, beklenti teorisi, kayıplar alanı, risk alma

Bu tez, seçim öncesi koalisyonların (SÖK) belirleyicilerini incelemekte ve aktörlerin hangi durumlarda seçim öncesi koalisyon kurmayı tercih ettiklerini analiz etmektedir. Davranışsal iktisat alanındaki beklenti teorisini benimseyen tez, SÖK oluşumunu risk alma, riskten kaçınma ve kayıplar ile kazançlar alanına odaklanarak açıklamaktadır. İlk bölümde kayıplar alanının, bir risk alma davranışı olan SÖK oluşumu üzerindeki etkisini test etmek için dört farklı veri setini içeren ülkeler arası bir veri seti kullanılmaktadır. Ayrıca, bu çalışma siyasi partiler arasındaki ideolojik mesafeyi bağımlı değişken olarak operasyonel hale getirmektedir. Ampirik bulgular, kayıplar alanının bazı göstergelerinin risk alma davranışı üzerinde beklenen etkiye sahip olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu bölümdeki kısmi desteğe, 2018 ve 2023 Türkiye seçimlerinin niteliksel analizi eşlik etmektedir. Bu seçimlerde hem iktidar hem de muhalefet, referans noktalarını kayıplar alanına yerleştirmelerinin bir sonucu olarak risk alma davranışını artırmıştır. Bu seçimlerin ikili olarak karşılaştırılması, kurumların etkisini sabit tutmamıza ve aktörlerin konjonktürel faktörlere verdikleri tepkilere odaklanmamıza olanak tanımaktadır.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The last two years of my life passed in the blink of an eye. Sabancı University not only transformed my understanding and capabilities of political science and social sciences in general, but it also gave me lifelong friends and dear professors whom I admire and respect deeply.

I want to thank all my cohorts for their help, especially during the long nights of the POLS529 and POLS530 courses.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to my advisor, Professor Oya Yeğen, who has been incredibly supportive, thoughtful, and helpful even when I was too lazy to do anything. I want to thank Professor Mert Moral, who constantly enlightened me even during our coffee-breaks and taught me I need to dedicate time and labor to have something valuable. I want to thank Professor Berk Esen, who commented on my work for months and enabled me to question even things that I thought were facts. I want to thank Professor Özge Kemahlioğlu, who has been a fantastic professor and jury member; even her presence made me proud. Lastly, I especially thank Professor Alper Yağcı, whom I met when I was a high school student. Since then, I have admired him, and he has become a role model for me. Thankfully, he honored me by accepting to be on my jury.

I want to thank Professor Sona Golder and Professor Matt Golder, who kindly listened to my ideas and arguments about this study. Professor Sona Golder is mentioned for many times in this thesis, which is hardly sufficient to show her unmatched contribution to the pre-electoral coalition literature. It was an incredible experience listening to them comment on my work. I also want to thank Professor Jennifer Gandhi and Professor Ora John Reuter, who shared their dataset with me and allowed this study to be made.

I am grateful to my students, who taught me more than I taught them.

I want to thank my friends, who helped me get back on my feet when I was not in the mood and supported me during this long and challenging period. The best conversations are the hardest to have.

I want to thank my family members who supported me no matter what, especially my grandparents, İmren and Cemil, who are there whenever I need them.

Finally, knowing that no thank you is and will never be sufficient, I would like to thank my dear wife, Ashi. She is an incredible friend, storyteller, emotional support, debater, and source of happiness. I am so lucky to have a person in my life with whom I can only communicate with my eyes because the eyes never lie. Without her, not a single sentence in this thesis would be possible, at least this easily. Thank you for making life beautiful and the earth breathable.

*To my lifelong companion,  
Ash*



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>OZET</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b> .....	<b>xi</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b> .....	<b>xii</b>
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b> .....	<b>xiii</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>2. WHAT ARE THE DETERMINANTS OF PECS?</b> .....	<b>8</b>
2.1. Introduction .....	8
2.2. Literature Review.....	9
2.2.1. The Determinants of PECs in Democratic Regimes .....	9
2.2.1.1. Institutional and structural factors.....	9
2.2.2. The Determinants of PECs in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes .....	12
2.2.2.1. Institutional and structural factors.....	13
2.2.2.2. Survival and strategy.....	13
2.3. Theoretical Framework .....	15
2.4. Research Design .....	21
2.4.1. Dependent Variables .....	21
2.4.2. Independent Variables.....	22
2.4.3. Model .....	23
2.5. Empirical Findings.....	25
2.6. Conclusion .....	28
<b>3. RISING STAKES, DOMAIN OF LOSSES, AND THE CASE OF TURKEY</b> .....	<b>31</b>

3.1. Introduction .....	31
3.1.1. Government and Party Systems in Turkey .....	33
3.1.2. Cleavages in Turkish Politics, AKP, and Rising Competitive Authoritarianism in Turkey .....	34
3.2. Methodology and Case Selection .....	36
3.3. Theory and Hypotheses .....	40
3.4. Discussion.....	43
3.4.1. Background on Opposition Coordination .....	43
3.4.2. The Case of the 2018 Elections .....	45
3.4.2.1. Opposition pre-electoral coalition behavior in 2018 ..	47
3.4.2.2. Incumbent pre-electoral coalition behavior in 2018...	49
3.4.3. The Case of the 2023 Elections .....	50
3.4.3.1. Opposition pre-electoral coalition behavior in 2023 ..	52
3.4.3.2. Incumbent pre-electoral coalition behavior in 2023...	54
3.5. Comparison .....	57
<b>4. CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>APPENDIX A.....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>APPENDIX B.....</b>	<b>81</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1. Logistic Regression on PEC Formation .....	26
Table 3.1. Turkish General Election Results: 2018 vs. 2023 .....	56
Table 3.2. Turkish Presidential Election Results: 2018.....	56
Table 3.3. Turkish Presidential Election Results: 2023 (Both Rounds) ....	56
Table A.1. Summary Statistics for 3-year Change Models .....	71
Table A.2. Sample for the PEC Formation Hypothesis - Part 1 .....	73
Table A.3. Sample for the PEC Formation Hypothesis - Part 2 .....	74
Table A.4. Sample for the Ideological Distance Hypothesis.....	75
Table A.5. Logistic Regression on Incumbent PEC Formation with Alternative Period Change .....	76
Table A.6. Logistic Regression on Opposition PEC Formation with Alternative Period Change .....	77
Table A.7. Logistic Regression on PEC Formation with Alternative Period Change.....	78
Table A.8. Heckman Selection Model on Ideological Distance between PEC Partners.....	79
Table B.1. Coordination Strategies Across Elections (2014-2015) .....	81
Table B.2. Coordination Strategies Across Elections (2018-2023) .....	81
Table B.3. Democratic Performance Measures (V-Dem).....	81
Table B.4. Other Political Measures .....	82
Table B.5. Economic Performance Measures.....	82

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1. Incumbent and Opposition Utility Functions .....	20
Figure 3.1. Ballot Papers for the Legislative and Presidential Elections in 2018.....	47
Figure 3.2. Ballot Paper for the Legislative Election in 2023 .....	52
Figure A.1. Opponent PECs Marginal Effects .....	72
Figure A.2. Dominant Party Age Marginal Effects .....	80

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AKP: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party) .....	6
BBP: Büyük Birlik Partisi (Great Unity Party) .....	32
CA: Competitive Authoritarian(ism) .....	3
CHP: Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party) .....	6
DEVA: Demokrasi ve Atılım Partisi (Democracy and Progress Party) .....	52
DSP: Demokratik Sol Parti (Democratic Left Party) .....	32
ECHR: European Court of Human Rights .....	51
GP: Gelecek Partisi (Future Party) .....	52
HDP: Halkların Demokratik Partisi (Peoples' Democratic Party) .....	33
HÜDA PAR: Hür Dava Partisi (Free Cause Party) .....	32
İYİP / İYİ Party: İyi Parti (Good Party) .....	36
KHK: Kanun Hükmünde Kararname (Decree Law) .....	46
MHP: Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Action Party) .....	32
PEC: Pre-electoral Coalition .....	2
SP / SAADET: Saadet Partisi (Felicity Party) .....	48
TBMM: Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi (Grand National Assembly of Turkey) ..	44
TİP: Türkiye İşçi Partisi (Workers' Party of Turkey ) .....	54
YRP: Yeniden Refah Partisi (New Welfare Party) .....	32
YSP: Yeşil Sol Parti (Green Left Party) .....	54

ZP: Zafer Partisi (Victory Party) .....56

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*“It is, after all, the politicians who decide how many parties or candidates the voters get to choose from.”*  
– Blais and Indridason (2007, 204)

Political parties are everywhere, from the most democratic system to the most authoritarian one. Whether it is a multiparty democracy or single-party totalitarianism, parties serve various functions. Although these functions change and parties are predominantly affected by the institutional, structural, and sociological context in which they operate, their presence is universal.

There is a whole corpus about what a political party is, what its function is, and how it behaves. The literature on party politics also has various branches, examining how parties behave and the complex relationship that exists between parties and voters in advanced and new democracies as well as in non-democracies. Whether we are studying parties with different sizes, parties with varying levels of democratic performances, parties in various governmental positions, parties from different ideologies, or parties with different benefits and priorities, our aim as students of party politics is to understand and establish causal links between the actions of these complex organizations and their causes.

Even though it is widely accepted since Maurice Duverger that (mainly electoral) institutions determine party behavior, similar parties can act differently in similar institutional settings. The way a party behaves in a plurality electoral system is expected to be different than a proportional one. A party in a deeply polarized society with multiple social and political cleavages could have very different strategies than a party in a more stable society. Alternative to the institutional and cleavage-based explanations, spatial explanations focus on the ideological locations of parties and voters, respective to their ideological positions. According to the latest, political parties are dynamic and active: even though the exogenous factors affect their optimal strategies, parties adapt themselves to their surroundings (Lupu 2015).

The changing political landscape of the world has pushed many scholars to study political parties in non-democratic (or hybrid) systems as well. Unlike before, democratic countries are not seen as the only living places of political parties. Instead, political parties in non-democratic systems have essential functions as well, especially considering that electoral autocracies have been the most common form of contemporary authoritarian regimes. Hence, studies on political parties in non-democratic systems include opposition parties (Helms 2023, 392).

In the same vein, coalition studies have started to shift focus from democratic regimes to non-democratic ones. Scholars are interested not only in the post-electoral coalition bargaining process in multiparty democracies but also in the opposition strategies, such as forming pre-electoral coalitions in electoral authoritarian regimes. The growing literature on the pre-electoral coalitions (PECs) was first studied in the context of democracies: presidential regimes in Latin America (Albala and Couto 2023; Borges, Turgeon, and Albala 2021; Bunker 2019; Kellam 2017) and parliamentary systems in Europe (Golder 2005, 2006*a*). Furthermore, there are newer studies focusing on Central Asian and African countries that are presidential (Gandhi and Ong 2019; Ong 2022). In democratic systems, institutional and structural factors are mainly used to explain the determinants of the PECs. Some of the explanatory variables that are institutional in the literature are disproportional and majoritarian electoral rules and presidential powers. In contrast, the structural explanatory factors are the political party system, ideological proximity between political parties, the similarity of the size of these parties, and previous experience with pre or post-electoral coalition formation (Hortala-Vallve, Meriläinen, and Tukiainen 2024; Kellam 2017). As stated above, the scholarly interest in PECs has increased since PECs are important not only as an electoral strategy but also for portfolio allocation in cabinet formation (Albala, Borges, and Couto 2023).

Studying PECs is important, especially because of their real-life impact, both in winning and governing. Scholars who study the electoral impact of PECs find that these coalitions can prevent legislative absolute majorities, lead to more dispersed seat allocations, and enable smaller parties to become more visible and even gain important office positions (Hortala-Vallve, Meriläinen, and Tukiainen 2024).

We observe PEC formation in various systems of government as well as regime types: presidential, semi-presidential, parliamentary, democratic, and non-democratic. It may be argued that PECs are not possible only in the perfect two-party systems like the US. Operating under the first-past-the-post rule, there may even be a possibility of a PEC in the UK's two-and-a-half-party system (Guardian 2020). Even though



PECs are nearly universal<sup>1</sup>, one crucial point to emphasize is that the dynamics in democracies and non-democracies are quite different, which also shape the different incentives of political parties in these systems (Gandhi and Ong 2019; Gandhi and Reuter 2013).

The growing literature on competitive authoritarianism (CA) includes the PECs in these systems as a part of the opposition strategy to challenge the regime, organize protests, and possibly achieve democratization by election (Armstrong, Reuter, and Robertson 2020; Wahman 2011). Scholars have stated that these systems have different characteristics than democratic regimes and that the effect of institutional factors is weaker in this context (Gandhi and Reuter 2013). Political parties, and especially the opposition, are in survival mode as the social groups that they represent also try to sustain their lives under an antagonistic authoritarian regime. This incentivizes parties to coalesce and form PECs to increase their chances against the incumbent. Although they are not in the scope of this study, scholars have also studied the effects of such pre-electoral coordination on defeating the authoritarian incumbent (Bunce and Wolchik 2011; Ong 2022) and democratization (Wahman 2011) and analyzed factors that persuade voters to vote strategically (Cox 1997) and studied the role of joint election campaigns (Ong 2022).

Scholars have been interested in the strategic entry problem of opposition parties in CA regimes, with the aim of overthrowing an authoritarian regime. In democratic elections, the loser does not face an existential threat. However, elections in competitive authoritarian regimes are crucial for parties in the sense that the loser faces more severe consequences and the winner enjoys more unrestricted political power. In such elections, opposition parties form PECs to pool resources, share responsibilities, and show solidarity. For this, they need partners with such strategic resources. However, the question of why parties opt for strategically useless and ideologically distant partners remains. All in all, every PEC decision is a risky choice because it has several shortcomings as well. Most importantly, parties may risk alienating their voters if they demand that they vote for another party's candidate. Secondly, they may need to forgo parliamentary seats in the legislative elections in favor of their PEC partners in addition to forgoing the biggest prize, the presidential office in the presidential system. Thirdly, they face potential compromises from ideological and policy positions in case of winning (and even sometimes before the elections). Other potential risks are coordination failure, during office bargaining in the pre-electoral period, inducing uncertainty, reputation costs, and brand dilution (Jiménez 2023).

In addition to exploring the role of risk and uncertainty, party size, ideology, and

---

<sup>1</sup>It may not be possible to form pre-electoral coalitions if it is not officially allowed or if it is directly banned.

regime type are of interest. As unexplored questions and areas, the research questions in this study include “Which parties cooperate with which parties?” In the existing literature, the main explanation for this question is the ideological proximity and similarity of party size in terms of votes. I believe that this argument fails to explain the unusual choices of partnerships, especially in non-democratic elections such as the 2002 elections in Kenya, the 2018 elections in Malaysia (Ufen 2020), and the 2022 elections in Hungary, where the anti-regime cleavage may explain only some aspects. Therefore, another question that we are interested in is “How does PEC formation differ across democratic performance?” Informed by the literature about the similarities and differences between democracies and competitive authoritarian regimes, one of the main arguments is that even though the political parties compete in various degrees of democracy, the mechanisms by which they think and act are quite similar.

An under-explored part of the pre-electoral coalition formation literature in the CA regimes is the dynamics for the incumbent political parties joining in ruling alliances (Greene 2008). Even if we visit the co-optation literature, we can only find limited explanations revolving around spoils that an authoritarian incumbent offers to a limited number of elites (Svolik 2012). While the main focus is on the opposition strategies in authoritarian elections, the incumbent party can form pre-electoral coalitions if sufficient conditions are met such as the uncertainty of an electoral victory. The qualitative part of the study takes that into account.

The main aim of this study is to increase our understanding of why PECs are formed under certain institutional and structural conditions. It is often forgotten or overlooked that political parties are led by human beings who make choices from a particular set of options. This study moves beyond the institutional and strategic explanations formed around institutional factors and underlines the role of agency. It proposes that the framework of the prospect theory, which was put forward by Kahneman and Tversky (1979; 1986), offers a viable explanation. Using this framework will allow us to understand why parties form PECs and especially why they sometimes choose ideologically incompatible and strategically complicated partners to form overstretched alliances. Using the framework, this thesis provides an actor-based approach to studying PEC formation.

In the second chapter, I first introduce the framework that will inform the quantitative analysis of PEC formation in Latin American countries and qualitative study on Turkey’s PEC experience. The theoretical framework challenges a critical element in economic behavior: the expected utility theory. This is when rational actors, such as party elites and political parties as a whole, make decisions from a set of

options constrained by institutional and structural conditions, and their behavior deviates from the expectations of the expected utility theory when they face risks. Each party and party elite faces a two-stage choice: whether to form/join a PEC and then who to include in that PEC. However, the expected utility theory explains how actors should behave in a situation, not how they actually act in most cases. I believe that this distinction is overlooked in the PEC literature as well.

I argue that the individual choices of party elites are underestimated and understudied, especially when we consider that they are crucial in parties with strong discipline and parties without a programmatic policy or office-seeking parties (Strom 1990). A crucial maxim of the prospect theory, the main theoretical framework of this study, is that individuals are risk-averse in the domain of gains but risk-seeking in the domain of losses. A significant advantage of this alternative theory in behavioral economics is that it relies on experimental studies, and it has nothing to do with how individuals should behave but how they actually behave in real life. They have limited information, which leads to bounded rationality, which is partly caused by external factors and partly because of the cognitive and psychological limitations of the decision-makers (Jones 1999, 318).

Because it is difficult to make a comparison between the parliamentary and the presidential systems because of the distinct nature of these two systems (Colomer and Negretto 2005; Linz and Valenzuela 1994), this study focuses on the multiparty presidential elections in quantitative analysis in one part, while having a broader set of countries for another part of the analysis. Although there are some institutional differences between them, Latin American countries offer a good set of countries that are comparable and expose the effect of other explanatory variables such as democratic and economic performance. This analysis is done in the second chapter, where I employ a quantitative approach by benefiting from several established datasets. The impact of political and economic conditions on the pre-electoral coalition formation is estimated.

The Turkish case provides a fertile ground for observing the mechanisms that determine the party incentives to form pre-electoral coalitions in CA where the playing field is skewed in favor of the incumbent (Esen and Gumuscu 2016). Turkey held its first public vote for the presidential office in its history in 2014.<sup>2</sup> The two-round system encouraged parties to support each other and ended up with the two largest opposition parties nominating a single candidate. Turkey amended its constitution

---

<sup>2</sup>The direct election of the head of the state was first introduced in 2007; however, the first election was in 2014. It should be noted the military leader of the 1980 coup, Kenan Evren, was elected as the President of Turkey when the new constitution which proposed Evren as the president, was approved with a referendum in 1982.

to have a presidential system in 2017, and these changes became effective right after the June 2018 general and presidential elections. Following this major institutional change in 2017, the law that regulates the general elections was altered to allow formal electoral alliances. The concurrent general and presidential elections with a run-off system for the presidential election compelled the ruling AKP and the largest opposition party, CHP, to form pre-electoral alliances (Sayarı and Taşkın 2024), resulting in the establishment of two distinct PECs: *Cumhur İttifakı* (People’s Alliance), led by the incumbent president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s party AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi -Justice and Development Party) and *Millet İttifakı* (Nation Alliance), led by the main opposition party CHP (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi -Republican People’s Party). Two sets of changes to the electoral law ahead of the 2018 and 2023 elections also altered the institutional opportunity structures for political parties. First, in 2018, amendments to the electoral law allowed formal PECs to be established and mandated the 10% threshold to apply to the total vote of the political parties in alliance, which also provided that the number of people elected to the parliament in a given alliance is calculated according to the total votes of the alliance (Law no. 7102, see İğdır (2023)).

Ahead of the 2023 elections, another electoral law change (Law no. 7393) decreased the unusually high electoral threshold of 10% to 7% (Official Gazette, 06.04.22) and changed the seat allocation method by ending the two-stage allocation and, hence, ending the distribution of the surplus votes for the parties within an alliance (Sayarı and Taşkın 2024). The Venice Commission noted that the modification to “the use of a single-stage allocation, when combined with the high electoral threshold, risks operating in clear disfavor of smaller parties belonging to an electoral alliance, thus limiting the impact of the creation of this alliance.” (*Opinion No. 1084 / 2022* 24.05.22) However, the change seems to have prompted the parties to run with joint lists, not disbanding their PECs, thanks to the established pre-electoral coalitions and increasingly polarized political and social environment (Taşkın and Çakın 2022).

Hence, these PECs continued to exist in the 2023 general elections as well, with the addition of official and unofficial partners to both camps and the establishment of several other smaller PECs. In these elections, both the opposition side and the incumbent party formed PECs. However, the depth and extent of these PECs changed dramatically. In this vein, this study is interested not only in the formation of a PEC as the dependent variable but also in the extent of the PEC. Studying two comparable cases within the same national unit allows us to ensure that a paired comparison is logical and feasible. Analyzing Turkey’s 2018 and 2023 elections as a paired comparison can help us to understand how changing dynamics under the same macro institutions can change the decisions of the political parties and their

acceptance of risk. Motivated by these insights, in the third chapter, I employ a paired comparison approach and study two elections in Turkey as a within-case study.

The thesis proceeds as follows: In the next chapter, I explain the literature on PEC formation, both in democratic and non-democratic elections. Then, I provide my theoretical framework, expectations, and research design. This is followed by the cross-sectional quantitative analysis where I investigate how the domain of losses affects the likelihood of making risky decisions in terms of PEC formation. Findings mainly show that some of the proxies of the domain of losses predict PEC formation, some in the opposite direction of hypotheses. Important variables include dominant party age, opponent PEC formation, and inflation.

In order to further explore the influence of conjunctural factors on PEC formation and the choice of political parties included in the PEC, in the third chapter, I examine Turkey's two presidential election periods, 2018 and 2023, as a paired comparison design and provide a mechanism within my theoretical framework. This approach allows us to overcome the issues caused by data availability and coding of the variables in the quantitative analysis. Lastly, I explore the potential shortcomings of this study and areas of future research.

## 2. WHAT ARE THE DETERMINANTS OF PECS?

### 2.1 Introduction

One of the main criticisms made by the early scholars of PEC literature is that the coalition literature heavily focuses on the post-electoral bargaining process, namely portfolio allocation, and cabinet formation (Borges, Turgeon, and Albala 2021). Fortunately, there has been an increasingly growing interest in PECs from various perspectives, both in terms of the conditions that lead to PEC formation and the importance of PECs in the post-electoral period.

PECs can be particularly beneficial for the smaller parties so much so that they can be “hostage-takers” in minimal winning coalitions, exercising a disproportionate power (Raile, Pereira, and Power 2011, 324). PECs strongly impact the survival of the cabinets, and this affects the timing of PEC formation as well. In multiparty presidential systems, PECs tend to form early, as portfolio allocation is highly dependent on existing partnerships (Albala and Couto 2023; Borges, Turgeon, and Albala 2021; Chiru 2015). Furthermore, legislative majority PEC cabinets last longer than majority cabinets that are not a result of a PEC, whereas they tend to survive shorter if they are in the minority, compared to post-electoral coalition minority cabinets (Albala, Borges, and Couto 2023). In presidential elections, presidents have a coat-tail effect on their parties and partners (Borges and Turgeon 2019). Debus (2009) finds that the policy positions of both approved and rejected coalition partners are important. All these findings show that studying PECs is important, since they play an elemental role in the electoral and post-electoral periods.

PECs can have different aims and effects in non-democracies. Scholars are aware of this distinction as current opposition literature is more focused on competitive authoritarian regimes than democratic regimes (Helms 2023). An important distinction is that coordination can be the single option for electoral success in competitive authoritarian regimes (Wahman 2011). Even ideologically distinct opposition par-

ties may be forced to coordinate in such systems (Jiménez 2023; Ong 2022). Therefore, we may argue that incentives for PECs in competitive authoritarian regimes are different from democratic ones, as they are mostly strategically made and have different aims such as regime change.

In such competitive yet authoritarian elections, there is even an uncertainty of power transition if the incumbent loses the elections. In contrast, ‘ex-ante uncertainty and ex-post irreversibility’ are the key components of democratic elections (Przeworski 1991). Even before the election day, the autocrats start to manipulate the elections by transforming the opposition into rivals and hindering a coordinated opposition (Lust-Okar 2005).

## **2.2 Literature Review**

### **2.2.1 The Determinants of PECs in Democratic Regimes**

#### **2.2.1.1 Institutional and structural factors**

A key question in this literature is what incentivizes PEC formation. Disproportional electoral institutions are one of the key drivers of PECs (Strom, Budge, and Laver 1994). In his theoretical model, Shin (2019) finds that PECs are more likely to be made in plurality elections than two-round ones and when the threshold for victory in the first round is lower in two-round elections. Similarly, Golder (2005) states that PECs are formed in disproportional systems if there is a sufficiently large number of parties. Golder’s finding is particularly important; otherwise, we would not be able to explain the lack of PECs in two-party systems (like the US).

The interaction between the legislative and the presidential elections is also studied. For example, Hicken and Stoll (2011) claim that in concurrent parliamentary and presidential elections, the president’s party is expected to go hand in hand with the president since it would be less likely to vote for a presidential candidate but for a different party at the same time. Even so, this “party-punisher” vote is very likely to go to the PEC partners of the president. Presidential candidates do not only contribute to the coattail effect for their parties but also the PEC members, what we call “diffused coattails” (Borges and Turgeon 2019). This is not only relevant for countries with ideologically close and congruent PECs like Chile but also ideologically dispersed and not-so-congruent PECs like Brazil. This is a crucial feature of presidential systems since parliamentary control is important for the legislative man-

date, and minority presidents whose parties fail to hold the median position in the assembly become like “lame ducks” (Borges, Turgeon, and Albala 2021). Presidents encourage PEC partnership for this by using five different tools: agenda power, budgetary authority, cabinet management, partisan powers, and informal institutions (Chaisty, Cheeseman, and Power 2014).

In presidential elections, there are some additional institutional factors in play, such as *de jure* and *de facto* powers of the president. For example, Alemán and Tsebelis (2011) argue that powerful presidents are not so enthusiastic about finding partners. Spoon and West (2015) claim that a powerful presidential office may decrease the chances of PEC formation as parties prefer to exit the race altogether instead of trying to share the benefits of the presidential office in case they win.

Apart from the institutional factors, some structural factors condition the PEC formation. As stated above, Golder (2005) underlines the importance of party system size. According to a further study by the same author, a polarized and fragmented party system and an expected large (but not overstretched) coalition size make PECs likelier (Golder 2006*b*).

We should always keep in mind that forming or joining a PEC is a two-stage process: first, parties decide whether they are going to be a part of a PEC, then they choose partners from a set of options. In this sense, we expect ideological closeness to be an important determinant of PEC formation. In fact, scholars find that it is easier for ideologically close parties to form PECs (Golder 2006*a*; Kellam 2017). One of the main mechanisms of this is forming a PEC with close allies, which decreases the cost of benefit sharing, as Bandyopadhyay, Chatterjee, and Sjoström (2011) show in their formal model.

However, there are some reservations about this claim. First and foremost, measuring ideological closeness is not an easy task as defining ideology is not straightforward itself. These quantitative studies usually treat the ideological spectrum as a simple left and right ideological cleavage, even though in reality, the political arena is far more complex. As Lipset and Rokkan (1967) famously described, political parties are politicized forms of social and cultural cleavages that were frozen back in time. Even this minimalist view can be used to refute the argument above, since the complex nature of contemporary political issues and the positions of political parties make the left and right spectrum inadequate to capture the multidimensional aspects of party competition (Albright 2010). Even in this fundamental study, there are four different cleavages stated that include different party families operating on them. Secondly, PECs are made for winning elections, and parties should evaluate their prospects while choosing partners. Parties choose ideologically closer partners



in a PEC, only if the winning prospects are high (Magyar 2022). Also, parties may need to have similar stances on the same issue dimensions, considering the multidimensional nature of contemporary politics (Rovny 2012). According to one of the most fundamental maxims in coalitional studies, Gamson’s Law, parties in a coalition should get and do get seats proportional to their contribution to the coalition (Gamson 1961). Carroll and Cox (2007, 310) find that in parliamentary democracies PECs make portfolio allocation more in proportion to their seat contributions. However, as Golder (2006*a*, 310) emphasizes, the factors that are important in government formation and alliance formation are different. Ideological compatibility matters in alliance formation because it will impact how voters perceive the PEC and find that pre-electoral coalitions are more likely to form between ideologically compatible parties.

Some parties are not completely ideologically oriented. As Kellam (2017) underlines, presidential PECs often include non-programmatic office-oriented political parties whose ideological stances are not that strong. Furthermore, particular parties might be obligated to forgo their positions even if their ideological bases are solid and important to them, or even adopt ambiguity as a strategy (Bräuninger and Giger 2018).

Naturally, the behaviors of the political parties are affected by various factors. For example, party discipline and intra-party democracy can be good predictors of external cooperation. Alvarez and Sinclair (2012) find that legislators that are coming from open primaries are more likely to cooperate with other party legislators than those who come from closed primaries. In his extensive piece that analyzes party behavior, Strom (1990) claims that there are many parties with different orientations, namely office-oriented, policy-oriented, and vote-oriented. This classification is helpful to understand the PEC behavior of a party but these are ideal types that do not necessarily exist in the real world. For instance, the past experiences of successful or failed cooperation as well as expectations of future benefits are determinants of future behavior since political parties are “neither amnesiac nor myopic” (Strom 1990, 569). Moreover, in the empirical world, there may be trade-offs between these objectives. These orientations may result from institutional and structural factors such as electoral rules, the number of parties, parties’ organizational constraints and office benefits.

Although most of these institutional and structural factors are relevant (or more influential) in democratic regimes, some of them are also valid in non-democracies.

### 2.2.2 The Determinants of PECs in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes

Political scientist Gerardo Munck (2024) recently expressed criticism towards the V-Dem (Varieties of Democracy) index, especially because it places all regimes in a continuum regarding their democratic performances, saying that, in reality, we should first distinguish between democracies and non-democracies, then measure democracies continuously. There were some counter-criticisms, claiming that many non-democracies feature institutions and structures that are found in democracies; however, their powers and extent of *de facto* authority differ. Although the measurement of this distinction can be debatable, there is scholarly consensus that there is a distinction between democracies and non-democracies in terms of the constraints in which political parties compete. In the context of this study, competitive authoritarian regimes are relevant because they allow for meaningful elections, where there is a genuine possibility of power alteration, hence meaningful incentives for PEC formation. The authors that have coined the term competitive authoritarianism, Levitsky and Way (2002) state that:

“In competitive authoritarian regimes, formal democratic institutions are widely viewed as the principal means of obtaining and exercising political authority. Incumbents violate those rules so often and to such an extent, however, that the regime fails to meet conventional minimum standards for democracy ” (Levitsky and Way 2002, 52).

In this sense, these regimes lack fundamental characteristics of liberal democracy and even electoral democracy in the Schumpeterian minimalist sense. There is a chance that the incumbent will not cede power since it may lead to regime change (Gandhi and Reuter 2013). However, the elections are still an option, the best one, for political parties to obtain power even with the playing field tilted against the opposition parties. Often, elections are neither completely free nor fair. It is not free in the sense that there can be systematic fraud and intimidation of voters, not fair in the sense that the opposition parties are financially, physically, socially, and sometimes even geographically restricted while the incumbent enjoys major advantages (Levitsky and Way 2010, 7-8).

### **2.2.2.1 Institutional and structural factors**

The distinction between democracies and competitive authoritarian regimes is for understanding the PEC behavior in the latter. As stated above, institutional factors are the driving force behind PEC formation in democracies. Nevertheless, as Gandhi and Reuter (2013) find, these have only partial effects in authoritarian elections. Wahman (2011) also stresses that institutional factors have weaker effects in authoritarian regimes and PECs are more likely when there is a clear policy divide from the incumbent and electoral prospects are positive. In a case study on the failure of the opposition parties to form a pre-electoral coalition in the 2018 Zimbabwe elections, Mwonzora (2022) argues that the electoral system, the first-past-the-post system has generated a zero-sum-game attitude towards the election but it does not comprehensively explain the failure. Accordingly, the problems such as lust for power, lack of trust, disagreements over seat distribution, intra-party competition as well as what is at stake in the particular election help explain why it is difficult for the opposition to coalesce and support each other (Mwonzora 2022).

In non-democratic regimes, parties are not generally well-organized ideologically oriented actors that aim to win elections; instead groupings of political and economic notables who strive to gain personalistic benefits (Gandhi and Reuter 2013, 142). Coordination between opposition political parties may be difficult because there is the chance that one of them may be coopted, which makes trusting the other potential coalition partners difficult. The expectation that a regime transition may be on the horizon may influence the calculation of political parties. For the opposition parties, it may make them more concerned about whether they can trust their fellow parties in the PEC that they will honor their commitments. Although this theoretical claim is not supported by Gandhi and Reuter (2013) analysis which examines the likelihood of regime change by economic performance, the study on the 2018 Zimbabwe elections shows that transitional elections, i.e., the first election after the end of an authoritarian period have raised the stakes for opposition parties and made compromise difficult (Mwonzora 2022).

### **2.2.2.2 Survival and strategy**

As the opposition coordination literature shows us, in non-democratic countries, PEC formation is a fundamental strategy for opposition parties. Such PECs may also be enhanced in terms of coordination by running under a common alliance logo, slogan, motto, program, and joint candidates (Ong 2022, 3). In such regimes,

opposition parties face different and harder challenges than their counterparts in democratic countries since in the former, the struggle is about authoritarian regime change and not for mere electoral victory. In such regimes, not only is the playing field before the elections tilted towards the incumbent, but the space for the opposition parties and voters also continuously shrinks. The constant and selective repression influences pre-electoral coordination. Venezuela’s opposition’s experience with coordination shows that opposition coordination is most likely when the repression is intermediate. In the lower end, it is not necessary for survival to cooperate, and if the repression is too high, there is no point in cooperating since it is no longer a competitive regime (Jiménez 2023). Similarly, Gandhi and Reuter (2013) find that there is a relationship between harassment of the opposition and PEC formation, but it is not possible to gauge the direction of causality because the authoritarian incumbent may use repression to deter PEC or in response to PEC.

In addition, Gandhi and Ong (2019) find in their quasi-experimental study that a key factor of the success of the Malaysian opposition was reducing uncertainty about the post-electoral period by announcing cabinet formation, significantly reducing the deferrals from their ideologically diverse coalition. However, this does not mean that establishing opposition PECs in competitive authoritarian regimes is a straightforward task. First and foremost, the effort of coalescing before the elections requires a vulnerable autocrat who genuinely faces the possibility of losing (Ong 2022, 25). Only then opposition parties may be willing to take the costly bargain that a PEC requires. But other factors such as the stability of a major opposition party are important factors for PEC formation because a “large opposition party with a stable history of competition indicates that there is at least one significant party that has had the opportunity to build a reputation for cooperative behavior, and hence a coalition is more likely” (Gandhi and Reuter 2013, 148).

As in democratic elections, pre-electoral coordination has possible negative side effects such as “brand dilution or voter dissatisfaction” (Jiménez 2023, 61). However, parties representing distinct, and even distant, ideologies may have to work together. As Ong (2022) puts forward, there are multiple challenges to opposition coordination in competitive authoritarian regimes. The ideological compromise is the first issue. Usually, incumbents occupy the median voter’s position in the ideological spectrum, crowding opposition parties out. This may require ideologically diverse parties to partner. The second problem arises from the electoral systems, embodied in the form of the strategic entry problem. This is especially the case in the presidential elections where the pre-electoral coalition is forced to find an acceptable candidate. Otherwise, the anti-regime vote will be split. In other types of autocratic elections, such as legislative and local elections, the bargaining process gains importance as the

partners have to decide which party's candidate to nominate from each district. In these elections, the allocation of seats between the PEC partners is possible unlike the presidential elections. If there is a single opposition candidate in a district, opposition voters can easily identify and consolidate their votes for that candidate. Similarly, in proportional representation with a closed-list, inter-party bargaining occurs in which party's candidates are ranked higher or lower on the fused list, which is a key element in pooling all anti-regime votes. The third issue is credible commitment. The weaker allies especially need to trust the coalition *formateur's* promises to deliver pork and office benefits in the post-electoral period, and they also need to signal that they can work together in the future (Christiansen, Nielsen, and Pedersen 2014). The last problem as underlined above is autocratic interference. Autocrats often modify the electoral rules so that the opposition does not fully decide on what is the best way to strategically coalesce (Lust-Okar and Jamal 2002). They can also target the prominent members of the opposition with arrest and prosecution.

Consequently, the institutional factors that determine the formation of pre-electoral coalitions are less influential incentives in competitive authoritarian regimes, where strategizing to dethrone the autocrat is the key motivation of opposition coordination. The literature on PEC formation is also interested in understanding structural factors such as the electoral compatibility of PECs in terms of their ideology and the size of partner parties. These considerations may also change depending on whether the parties operate in advanced or new democracies or non-democracies. Whatever motivation political parties may have, the decision to form a PEC (or to stretch it) is given by parties, which requires agency. These decisions may not be completely logical at all times, especially when we introduce the element of risk.

### **2.3 Theoretical Framework**

The basic premise of pre-electoral alliance formation is that alliances provide electoral benefits -making it more likely to get elected than running individually. Even if there is no electoral motivation, forming an alliance can provide office benefits. Even though in presidential systems, there is no way to hold presidents accountable to their pre-election agreements, Kellam (2017) argues that PECs are more likely in presidential systems. The ideological distance between parties is low because there is always the possibility that the president does not honor the promises made during the campaign. Therefore, parties that do not wish to violate their policy position may withdraw from the coalition. However, for the parties operating

in non-democratic regimes, being part of a transitional government is invaluable; therefore, cooperation is likely. The possibility of conflict among the members of the PEC in the post-election period makes ideological compatibility important. However, the risk factor (i.e., harsher political, social, and economic conditions combined with the chance of electoral victory as a pre-electoral coalition as the necessary condition, in other words, the uncertainty of incumbent victory) may force opposition parties to be more concerned about electoral benefits than office or policy benefits.

A key feature of this study is the rejection of decision-making based on the expected utility, which is often implicitly the main theoretical framework in coalition literature. Largely, the aforementioned determinants of PECs assume that actors, i.e., political parties, calculate the costs and benefits of joining a PEC and choose the option that maximizes their electoral benefit. The PEC literature on democratic elections mostly focuses on institutional factors, which leave no room for an actor-based diversion from the equilibrium that these factors impose. However, shrinking space for the opposition and their strategic need to build an opposition alliance, as explained above, may change calculations. Gandhi and Reuter (2013, 145) do underline that a possible victory for the opposition that will generate a regime transition indicates that “the stakes of the election are high not only for the incumbent but also for opposition parties.” Naturally, such considerations affect party behavior as the parties do not operate in a vacuum. However, with increasing stakes in the case of losing, the risk-acceptance will be visible, and this deviates from the institutionalist approach.

Prospect theory offers a theory of decision-making under risk as Kahneman and Tversky (1979) start from the observation that people make decisions based on whether it is a loss or gain according to their reference point. They demonstrate in their experimental study that people often defy the assumptions of the expected utility theory when under risk. A key finding of their study is the reflection effect: “risk aversion over high probability gains and low probability losses, and risk-seeking over low probability gains and high probability losses” (Oliver 2024, 174). Accordingly people tend to overvalue the losses and undervalue the gains, meaning that the same amount of loss would have a bigger negative impact compared to the positive impact of the same amount of gains. In the experiments, they work with small amounts of money; however, the potential of implementing the prospect theory into explaining the political decision-making process is also persuasive. First, the participants face a choice between a guaranteed gain and an even higher expected gain with risk. Unlike the expected utility theory foresees, most of the participants prefer a certain gain, acting risk-averse in the “domain of gains.” Nevertheless, when they face a guaranteed loss, they embrace the risk and choose the other option with lower

expected utility. In other words, people are risk-seeking in the “domain of losses” (Oliver 2024, 168).

Next, we see a comparison between the group without any money and the people with some money when the experiment starts. The people with initial money tend to choose option A, the sure gain whereas the moneyless ones choose option B, the gamble. This is because the former is focused on not losing money they have, however the latter group wants to take risks for a higher potential gain.

According to prospect theory, people make decisions under risk and uncertainty based on a reference point. One of the possible issues for political scientists might be that “it is a reference-dependent theory without a theory of the reference point” (Levy 1997; Mercer 2005). How the reference point is framed matters. Some scholars even experimentally tested the prospect theory on political elites to show that framing is also important for politicians (Walgrave et al. 2018). Surely, this line of thinking can be adapted to political decision-making, especially to understand the strategic choices that go into the formation of the PECs. We can compare parties in the domain of gains and the domain of losses, whether they are small or large, and the opposition or the incumbent. The theoretical framework of this study is the implementation of the prospect theory into the comparative politics sub-field with a focus on pre-electoral coalition formation.<sup>3</sup>

Accordingly, a key component of the PEC formation is the element of risk and the reference points of the political parties. In every election, there are winners and losers. What the losers lose in non-democracies tends to be greater than the losers in democratic regimes. This may include personal threats, imprisonment, affective (negative) polarization, and even party closure. For this reason, parties can maximize their risks (i.e., by making a pre-electoral coalition, especially with ideologically distinct partners) to eliminate their certain losses. However, forming a PEC is a risky decision itself since it may lead to brand dilution, voter dissatisfaction and estrangement, low turnout, and concessions from policy, ideology, and office benefits, even if the PEC in question wins. In any PEC, there are compromises; however, the cost of the compromise may change depending on the risk involved.

An important contribution of this study is distinguishing between incumbent and

---

<sup>3</sup>It is safe to say that the prospect theory has not attracted much interest in the field of political science, international relations scholars being an exception. Mercer (2005) provides us with one of the most thorough reviews of the use of prospect theory in political science. Firstly, only 5 percent of citations of Kahneman and Tversky’s original article is from political science, which is way less than other fields of social sciences such as economics, psychology, management, sociology. Secondly, and more interestingly, this limited interest comes from the scholars who study international security, not from political economists (McDermott 2004). Some notable comparativist examples are Fanis (2004) who analyzed the behavior of various economic groups against the Pinochet regime; Somer-Topcu (2009) who examined the policy shift of political parties upon electoral loss; Vis (2011) and Linde and Vis (2017) who experimented on political decision-making and prospect theory.

opposition behavior in terms of pre-electoral coalition formation. I argue that the incumbent and opposition would have similar incentives in different degrees. Both sides would conform with the expectations of the prospect theory, risk-taking in the domain of losses and risk-averse in the domain of gains. However, as Levitsky and Way (2002, 59) put forward, the incumbents in competitive authoritarian regimes have the power to manipulate the elections by using harassment, bribery, cooptation, and targeted prosecution. Furthermore, incumbents in CA regimes often enlarge their sphere of influence, not only in the political domain, by controlling state institutions but also in the economic realm. As happened in Russia, Turkey, Venezuela, and Nicaragua, the political elites often side with business conglomerates and coopt them to increase their grip on power (Pleines 2019, 322). Therefore, a losing incumbent would be in a more favorable position than a losing opposition in a competitive authoritarian regime because the former can sustain its influence in the political and economic realms thanks to established links and cadres even if it loses the elections. The elections can even offer a “peaceful exit” for the autocrats. For the opposition, on the other hand, a new electoral loss would mean more severe consequences as the incumbent can continue to make life harder for the opposition. For this reason, the incumbent’s time in office is an important determinant of risk-seeking behavior. At the same time, in an uncertain election, the incumbent cannot confidently see itself in the domain of gains even if he consolidated political and economic power during his tenure. As a result, he would fail to place himself in the domain of gains. Figure 2.1 illustrates similar but different utility functions for the opposition and the incumbent.

Since Kahneman and Tversky made their experiences in a lab setting with only individuals, it is very hard to reflect it to political decision-making in real life. In real life and political behavior, it is harder to decide if an actor is in the domain of gains or the domain of losses. One proposal in the literature is the status quo: if an actor is satisfied with the status quo, the perceived domain is the gains; if not, it is the domain of losses. However, this approach could not explain the behavior of an incumbent who is about to lose an election and willing to take risks. An actor who is supposedly in the domain of gains, say an incumbent who is in power, may see himself in the domain of losses if there is a realistic chance of electoral defeat.

Primary argument is that whenever they are in the domain of losses, parties will diverge from the classical expectations that the expected utility models offer. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze political environments with diverse risk levels as well as the political parties facing different levels of risk within those environments. From this understanding the hypotheses are drawn:



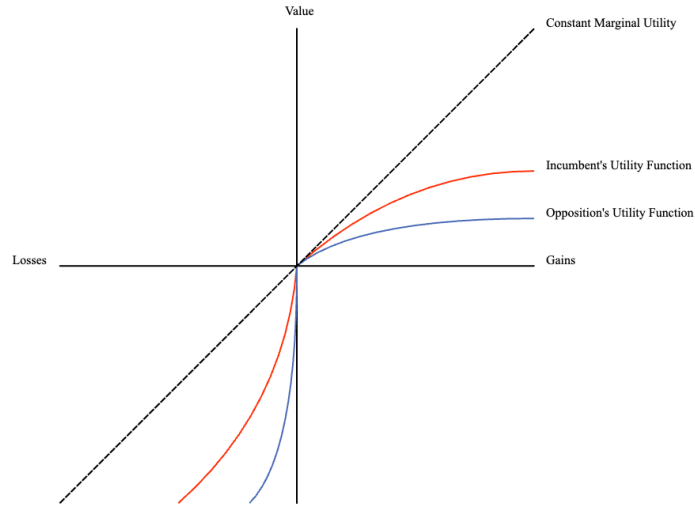
- H1 Political parties are more likely to take risks by making pre-electoral coalitions when they are in the domain of losses.
  - H1.1 Political parties are more likely to make pre-electoral coalitions when the autocratic regime is more institutionalized and the democracy level is deteriorating.
  - H1.2 Political parties are more likely to make pre-electoral coalitions when the opposition supports democratic ideals.
  - H1.3 Political parties are more likely to make pre-electoral coalitions when their opponents form pre-electoral coalitions.
  - H1.4 Political parties are more likely to make pre-electoral coalitions when there is an economic crisis and electoral uncertainty.
- H2 The distance between the political parties that form pre-electoral coalitions tends to increase when they are in the domain of losses.
  - H2.1 The distance between the political parties that form pre-electoral coalitions tends to increase when the autocratic regime is more institutionalized, and the democracy level is deteriorating.
  - H2.2 The distance between the political parties that form pre-electoral coalitions tends to increase when the opposition supports democratic ideals.

It is not easy to establish that a political party positions itself in the domain of losses. However, there are good indicators such as deteriorating democratic performance and troubling economic conditions. Calculating a single risk factor for a complex political system is nearly impossible. Nevertheless, these indicators can draw a framework to start with.

Since we are dealing with non-democratic elections, an opposition that embraces democratic norms and ideals would create the so-called democracy versus authoritarian cleavage, which would eventually push actors into the domain of losses. In addition to these systemic factors, parties would take risks when there is a more coordinated opponent, whether it is the incumbent or the opposition. Additionally, contextual factors that push actors to place themselves in the domain of losses such as an economic crisis (or its perception) or electoral uncertainty may lead them to accept risks and form pre-electoral coalitions.

Forming a pre-electoral coalition with an ideologically distant partner is riskier than forming one with an ideologically close partner since there are increased risks, such as brand dilution and compromises from the vote, policy, office, and pork. Additionally,

Figure 2.1 Incumbent and Opposition Utility Functions



in a presidential system, the president-elect has no obligation to honor the pre-electoral arrangements.

From this perspective, existing alternative explanations about all institutional and structural factors are related to the risk factor. What do majoritarian and disproportional electoral rules do? They increase the risk of not getting elected for all parties, especially for the smaller and weaker ones, thus imposing a domain of losses on these actors. What does the higher ideological discrepancy between possible partners do in a PEC? It increases the risks in terms of reliability, sharing of benefits, and ideological compromises in case of an electoral victory and during the electoral campaign. Therefore, the alternative explanation, that is, parties tend to form PECs with ideologically closer parties, is more plausible in general. What does poor democratic and economic performance do? They increase the extent of damages for any losing party, increasing the risk factor. Overall, why do opposition parties try to coalesce in competitive authoritarian regimes? It is because it is very likely that they will lose if they compete individually, and there is a better chance that they win if they cooperate and pool their resources, thus decreasing risk. This is more obvious for the opposition parties, even though the incentives for the incumbent may also be present since they can also possibly experience electoral defeat, which will be a clear loss from their reference point.

As the prospect theory dictates, the evaluation of risk depends on where an actor

stands. If they stand in the domain of gains, they do not need to risk the guaranteed gain even if the expected utility is lower. Conversely, they would embrace the risk if they are already losing, even if the expected loss is higher.

As stated above, quantifying the risk or domain of losses is difficult. In order to facilitate the analysis, I determine several variables that are the proxies of risk. The next section outlines the research design.

## 2.4 Research Design

Four established datasets were employed for this study. The first is the 14th version of the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset that was published in March 2024 (Michael Coppedge et al. 2024). Variables regarding democratic and economic performance are mostly taken from this dataset. Secondly, Gandhi and Reuter (2013)'s dataset about pre-electoral coalition formation in non-democratic elections between 1946 and 2006 is employed as the main dataset.<sup>4</sup> Both parliamentary and non-parliamentary countries are included; however, they are controlled in the estimations by a presidential election dummy. Thirdly, Kellam (2017)'s dataset about pre-electoral coalition formation in Latin American presidential elections between 1953 and 2009 is employed to estimate the impact of risk on the ideological compatibility between PEC partners as it includes data on political party pairs in respective country-election year dyads. Only presidential regimes are included in the analysis, although there are both presidential and legislative elections in the dataset for the PEC formation hypothesis. Lastly, version 6 of the National Elections Across Democracy and Autocracy (NELDA) dataset is utilized to employ the variables of electoral uncertainty and economic crisis during elections (Hyde and Marinov 2013).

### 2.4.1 Dependent Variables

There are two dependent variables in this study: the successful formation of a PEC and the ideological distance between the PEC partners.

The first dependent variable is widely utilized in the literature to establish a framework for PEC formation. It is coded as a binary variable to distinguish between the

---

<sup>4</sup>I am deeply grateful to Professor Jennifer Gandhi and Professor Ora John Reuter for sharing their dataset with me.

existence of a PEC between two parties or its lack thereof.<sup>5</sup> Gandhi and Reuter's dataset differentiates between incumbent and opposition coalitions, which provides an important opportunity to treat them as separate dependent variables. A joint PEC variable is coded by this author if there is any kind of pre-electoral coalition in a given election.

The second dependent variable is the ideological distance between the PEC partners. The ideology of political parties is discrete: left, center-left, center, center-right, and right. Although alternative continuous coding of ideology is available, I do not include it because of the large number of missing observations. The distance is squared to have a non-directional interpretation.

### 2.4.2 Independent Variables

Defining risk is difficult for a political system, and measuring it is way more challenging. It may be impossible to calculate a single risk score for every polity and political party, respectively. This might qualitatively be done for a limited number of in-depth cases. However, some indicators can be employed as proxies for the risk factor. V-Dem's Liberal Democracy Index is used as one of the independent variables. Since the analysis is about deteriorating conditions, three-year change prior to the election year is calculated for every country-election year. Similarly, a three-year change of institutionalized autocracy variable is calculated and employed, which is included in the V-Dem dataset, which borrows it from the Polity IV study. The age of the dominant party is also employed to test the level of institutionalization of the incumbent party. A binary-lagged opposition coalition variable is included to see if prior experience has an effect on the formation of an incumbent or opposition coalition. Since we are dealing with non-democratic elections, which are skewed in favor of the incumbent, the opposition coalition democracy index, which measures the commitment to democratic ideals, is included to see the effect of the so-called democracy-authoritarian cleavage. Inflation for economic performance is added as a control variable. Since the dataset used to test the second hypothesis only includes Latin American presidential elections, a presidential election dummy, and a Latin America dummy are included to see if these elections are more prone to pre-electoral coalition formation.

The appendix includes estimation models with five—and seven-year changes of the liberal democracy index and institutionalized autocracy. However, it should be

---

<sup>5</sup>See Gandhi and Reuter (2013) and Kellam (2017) for the coding of this variable.

noted that the three-year selection is not arbitrary and aims to capture the acute change in the political regime.

Because of the unavailability of data, I can only test the effect of changes in the liberal democracy index and the institutionalized autocracy on the ideological distance between pre-electoral coalition partners.

### 2.4.3 Model

For the PEC formation hypothesis, a logistic regression model with robust standard errors is estimated, given the binary nature of the dependent variable. The model equations are below:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{logit}(\text{Incumbent PEC}) = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \Delta 3\text{-Year Liberal Democracy} \\ & + \beta_2 \Delta 3\text{-Year Institutionalized Autocracy} \\ & + \beta_3 \text{Electoral Uncertainty} \\ & + \beta_4 \text{Opposition PEC} \\ & + \beta_5 \text{Dominant Party Age} \\ & + \beta_6 \text{Previous Opposition PEC} \\ & + \beta_7 \text{Democratic Opposition} \\ & + \beta_8 \text{Economic Crisis} \\ & + \beta_9 \text{Inflation } t_{t-1} \\ & + \beta_{10} \text{Presidential Election Dummy} \\ & + \beta_{11} \text{Latin America Dummy} + \epsilon \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
\text{logit}(\text{Opposition PEC}) = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \Delta 3\text{-Year Liberal Democracy} \\
& + \beta_2 \Delta 3\text{-Year Institutionalized Autocracy} \\
& + \beta_3 \text{Electoral Uncertainty} \\
& + \beta_4 \text{Incumbent PEC} \\
& + \beta_5 \text{Dominant Party Age} \\
& + \beta_6 \text{Previous Opposition PEC} \\
& + \beta_7 \text{Democratic Opposition} \\
& + \beta_8 \text{Economic Crisis} \\
& + \beta_9 \text{Inflation } t_{t-1} \\
& + \beta_{10} \text{Presidential Election Dummy} \\
& + \beta_{11} \text{Latin America Dummy} + \epsilon
\end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
\text{logit}(\text{PEC}) = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \Delta 3\text{-Year Liberal Democracy} \\
& + \beta_2 \Delta 3\text{-Year Institutionalized Autocracy} \\
& + \beta_3 \text{Electoral Uncertainty} \\
& + \beta_4 \text{Dominant Party Age} \\
& + \beta_5 \text{Previous Opposition PEC} \\
& + \beta_6 \text{Economic Crisis} \\
& + \beta_7 \text{Democratic Opposition} \\
& + \beta_8 \text{Inflation } t_{t-1} \\
& + \beta_9 \text{Presidential Election Dummy} \\
& + \beta_{10} \text{Latin America Dummy} + \epsilon
\end{aligned}$$

Due to missing data, some observations are omitted in the model estimations, which can lead to imprecise results. Therefore, I am not able to work with the full dataset.

For the ideological distance hypothesis, I use Kellam's (2017) dataset which only includes Latin American countries. It includes data that broadly corresponds to the subsample of the previous dataset used. Since we are only dealing with the ideological distance of political parties that formed a pre-electoral coalition, there is the potential threat of selection bias. To overcome this issue, I am estimating a Heckman selection model with robust standard errors, which estimates the selection probability first and then proceeds to the estimating ideological distance model. As per the Heckman selection model, there are two equations: the selection equation (probit model) and the outcome equation (Heckman model).

$$\begin{aligned}
\text{Selection Equation: } \text{PEC} &= \beta_0 + \beta_1 \Delta 3\text{-Year Liberal Democracy} \\
&+ \beta_2 \Delta 3\text{-Year Institutionalized Autocracy} \\
&+ \beta_3 \text{Democratic Opposition} \\
&+ \beta_4 \text{Inflation } t_{t-1} + \epsilon
\end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
\text{Outcome Equation: } \text{Ideological Distance} &= \gamma_0 + \gamma_1 \Delta 3\text{-Year Liberal Democracy} \\
&+ \gamma_2 \Delta 3\text{-Year Institutionalized Autocracy} \\
&+ \gamma_3 \text{Democratic Opposition} \\
&+ \gamma_4 \text{Inflation } t_{t-1} + \nu
\end{aligned}$$

## 2.5 Empirical Findings

For the regime coalition model with three-year changes, low log pseudolikelihood and p-value indicate a good model fit. Furthermore, there are three statistically significant variables. Firstly, higher inflation levels are associated with a decreased probability of incumbent coalition formation, contrary to the first hypothesis- but the effect is not substantively significant. However, one unit increase in the opposition coalition variable is associated with an approximately 2.5 times increase in the probability of incumbent PEC formation, which is a substantive effect. Lastly, a year increase in the age of the dominant party decreases its likelihood of making a pre-electoral coalition by approximately 7%, which means that as the incumbent stays in office longer and its rule gets more institutionalized, its likelihood of PEC formation decreases, which is in line with the first hypothesis.

Interestingly, in the 5-year change models, we see the statistically significant effects of both the liberal democracy index and the institutionalized autocracy, which paradoxically increase the likelihood of incumbent PEC formation. Substantively, the effect of the improved democracy score is higher, in contrast to the first hypothesis. Nonetheless, the substantive effect of the institutionalized autocracy, which increases the risk factor, is in line with the hypothesis.

One of the interesting findings in the 7-year change model has a negative substantive effect of electoral uncertainty on the incumbent PEC formation. Intuitively, I expected that higher uncertainty would lead incumbents to seek PEC formation; however, an alternative explanation could be that in a political environment where

Table 2.1 Logistic Regression on PEC Formation

	(1) Incumbent PEC	(2) Opposition PEC	(3) PEC
$\Delta$ 3-Year Liberal Democracy	3.093 (3.687)	-10.53* (5.667)	-1.788 (2.967)
$\Delta$ 3-Year Institutionalized Autocracy	0.260 (0.179)	0.00912 (0.149)	-0.00366 (0.128)
Electoral Uncertainty	-1.440* (0.752)	0.878* (0.527)	-0.0530 (0.464)
Opposition PEC	1.227** (0.610)		
Dominant Party Age	-0.0746*** (0.0208)	0.0300* (0.0175)	-0.0128 (0.0121)
Previous Opposition PEC	0.254 (0.685)	1.300** (0.526)	1.970*** (0.509)
Democratic Opposition	-0.848 (0.928)	-1.166 (0.948)	-1.081* (0.627)
Economic Crisis	-0.378 (0.713)	-0.296 (0.503)	0.0376 (0.462)
Inflation t-1	-0.00212** (0.000881)	-0.0390 (0.0307)	-0.00445 (0.00387)
Presidential Election Dummy	-0.198 (0.572)	0.139 (0.401)	0.0517 (0.347)
Latin America Dummy	-0.216 (0.851)	0.628 (0.601)	0.720 (0.453)
Incumbent PEC		1.537** (0.631)	
Constant	-0.665 (0.622)	-1.961*** (0.588)	-0.669 (0.478)
Log Likelihood	-65.361	-83.333	-123.096
N	270	270	270

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$



the electoral success of the incumbent is not certain, the incumbent may fail to find committed partners even though they try to find some. This interesting effect could be studied further.

A crucial predictor of the opposition coalition is prior experience of PEC formation. It increases the likelihood of opposition PEC formation by more than two times. In the same vein, formation of the incumbent coalition is positively associated with the opposition PEC formation, which increases the likelihood by nearly four times. Lastly, opposition parties' democracy index has a positive effect on coalition formation, although the government coalition democracy index does not have a significant effect. Even though they are significant at the 90% confidence level, three variables offer invaluable insights. Firstly, the age of the dominant party has a positive effect on the opposition PEC formation, which is the opposite of the effect on the incumbent PEC formation. Secondly, electoral uncertainty has a positive impact on the opposition PEC formation. Lastly, improvements in democracy decrease the chance of opposition to form PEC, which is in line with hypothesis 1.1. The results are similar in other models, especially in the 5-year change model.

The only significant variable is previous opposition PEC for the general PEC formation model which is the same for 3-year, 5-year, and 7-year change models. This finding shows that the incumbent and opposition pre-electoral coalition formation as separate dependent variables is crucial for more accurate findings since we fail to distinguish the effects in the general PEC models. As a result, the sub-hypotheses H1.1 and H1.3 find partial support for the opposition coalitions. On the other hand, the sub-hypothesis H1.2 finds strong support both for the opposition and incumbent coalitions.

As stated above, the Heckman selection model is estimated to overcome the problem of selection bias. Even though this model developed by Heckman (1974) allows us to account for selection bias, it is highly sensitive to collinearity between the outcome variable and selection equation (Marchenko and Genton 2012, 304). Therefore, I carefully selected variables of interest to avoid practical difficulties.

In estimating the ideological distance, only several Latin American countries are included. Because of the dyadic nature of the dataset, it includes all possible party pairs for every country-election year. Therefore, the number of observations is close to seven thousand. However, successful PEC formation exists in only 2.3% of them. This makes Heckman selection model work as intended more difficult, especially in case of adding numerous predictors.

Therefore, the model is kept limited on purpose to achieve successful convergence.

One important predictor of PEC formation in the selection model is the 3-year change in liberal democracy level, which has a negative effect, meaning that increasing democracy score is associated with decreasing chance of PEC occurrence. This result also supports the first hypothesis. Even though the institutionalized autocracy score has a negative effect, the effect of the liberal democracy change is much more substantive, comparing approximately 35% and 4% of the change in the likelihood of PEC formation. Even though the effect of inflation is statistically significant and positive, the real impact is not substantial. Another important determinant of PEC formation in the selection equation of the Heckman model is the opposition democracy index, which suggests that a democratic opposition increases the likelihood of PEC formation by more than 41%. It should be noted that the Wald Chi-square test shows that the selection model is not significant overall, which means that we need more variables to explain PEC formation, which I did in the previous analysis. It is also important that rho and lambda suggest that there is no significant selection bias in the model.

The most important finding of the outcome equation is that the one-unit increase in the change of democracy performance results in a 112% increase in the ideological distance between PEC partners. This finding is contrary to hypothesis 1.1 proposed. I expected to find that a more democratic environment would mean less risk and, therefore, closer partner selection. However, we see an opposite effect. It might be that a more democratic environment results in more open-minded political parties about partner selection. A crucial outcome of this analysis is that we need a deeper understanding of the second hypothesis, and a more complete dataset is key for achieving this.

## 2.6 Conclusion

Both of the hypotheses proposed that in addition to the institutional factors, the actors' line of thinking is important in pre-electoral coalition formation. In an observational study, we can only find proxies that put the reference points of the political parties in the domain of losses. As the prospect theory dictates, an actor is more prone to take risks if they are in the domain of losses. Domain of losses is defined as the deteriorating democratic and economic performance for the political parties, which constitute the independent and control variables. Both dependent variables, PEC formation and ideological distance between partners, are described as risky decisions since forming a pre-electoral coalition may have important side

effects as well, especially when they are made with an ideologically distant political party. In this analysis, I have investigated whether shifts to the domain of losses affect the likelihood of making risky decisions.

Despite the data limitations, because PEC occurrence is a rare event, the models fit well with the data at hand. Not all the variables show statistical and substantive significance; however, some of them provide invaluable insights. Because of the data unavailability, I was not able to test a third dependent variable, which is the level of coordination and commitment of the pre-electoral coalition. A new coding with extensive research is needed in this area. Furthermore, a quantitative analysis is insufficient to understand the dynamics of decision-making in a particular election. Although we now have a general pattern of under which conditions parties form a PEC, we have yet to explore the dynamics behind them.

The difficulty of standardization and data unavailability limit the generalizability of the findings of a quantitative analysis, like in this chapter. Furthermore, it also fails to capture the mechanisms of actors' choices in a pre-electoral period in terms of pre-electoral coalition formation. Even though I show the circumstances that favor the pre-electoral coalition and draw its theoretical framework, a qualitative, in-depth analysis would allow us to delve into the mechanisms and processes better. For this reason, in the next chapter, I qualitatively analyze the Turkish case with a paired comparison of the 2018 and 2023 elections. It will also be possible to assess the extent of the commitment of the pre-electoral coalitions with changing political and economic circumstances.

Studying the Turkish case is particularly suitable since it offers a great deal of variation between its elections in 2018 and 2023. We would be able to mostly keep the effect of the macro institutions constant while accounting for the increasing stakes and high uncertainty with its multiplicative effect. Even though there were key institutional changes that altered actors' incentive structures, both elections were concurrent legislative and presidential elections where pre-electoral coalitions were formally allowed. However, different levels of risk, especially related to democratic and economic performance, may have influenced the different choices of pre-electoral coalitions.

A cursory look at the democracy scores employed in the quantitative chapter for the Turkish case shows that we do not observe an important difference between the two elections. However, an in-depth analysis would show us that both elections actually differed considerably, not only because of the pre-electoral period but also because of the post-electoral prospects. In this vein, prospect theory can explain the behavior of political actors under risk in the Turkish example. Accordingly, a qualitative

study allows us to investigate reference points of incumbent and opposition parties. After closely examining the preceding conditions and dynamics, these two elections can offer us an enhanced understanding that quantitative analysis fails to provide.

### 3. RISING STAKES, DOMAIN OF LOSSES, AND THE CASE OF TURKEY

*“Every election in this country is a new War of Independence”*  
– Recep Tayyip Erdoğan<sup>6</sup>

#### 3.1 Introduction

For 84 years, between 1923 and 2007, the Turkish head of state was elected via a parliamentary vote except for times of military coups in 1960 and 1980 and when the 1982 constitutional referendum also ratified the presidency of the coup leader. The president was constitutionally independent, acting as a guardian of the regime and an arbitrator between political parties. In 2007, with a constitutional amendment through a referendum, the popular election for the top office was introduced.<sup>7</sup> Turkey’s governmental system already deviated from the ideal type of parliamentary system as the head of the state already enjoyed vast appointment powers, and this change to direct election pushed it to a semi-presidential one (Özbudun 2012). However, on paper, presidential powers and their relations with other branches of government remained the same. The new election system for the presidency was put into effect with the 2014 presidential elections on August 10, when then-prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan won the majority without needing a runoff. Four years later, in 2018, the electoral law was amended to formalize the formation of pre-electoral coalitions, which institutionalized the early attempts at electoral coordination. Other indicators of Turkey’s democratic and economic performance started to deteriorate, especially after the failed coup d’état in 2016 and during the 18-month-long state of emergency. This resulted in a shrinking playing field, espe-

---

<sup>6</sup>Speech at a rally in June 2015

<sup>7</sup>The term limit was increased to two from one, but the duration of a term was reduced to five from seven.

cially for the opposition parties whose MPs and even former presidential candidates were jailed.

The changing institutional, structural, and conjunctural factors render Turkey an interesting case for studying the causes of PEC formation. As discussed in the previous chapter, the main independent variable, which is the risk factor, can be analyzed by employing proxies. Here, using a qualitative approach, I will investigate pre-electoral coalition formation under different risk conditions.

It is often overlooked in the literature, but we should also analyze the incumbent's behavior, namely Erdoğan and its ruling party AKP's increasing efforts to include partners in their respective PECs. Focusing on the AKP's cooptation of and coordination with other parties can provide crucial insights since their PEC selection changed dramatically over the years and elections. In 2014, they did not form a PEC at all, while the opposition ran with a joint candidate. In 2018, they formed People's Alliance (Cumhur İttifakı) with MHP (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi -Nationalist Action Party) and BBP (Büyük Birlik Partisi -Great Unity Party). Lastly, in 2023, they formally included the newly established YRP (Yeniden Refah Partisi -New Welfare Party) and informally DSP (Demokratik Sol Parti -Democratic Left Party) and HÜDA PAR (Hür Dava Partisi -Free Cause Party).

Furthermore, the second dependent variable discussed in the previous chapter, the extent and depth of the PEC, has limitations for a quantitative study, but a qualitative, comparative study would allow us to capture the different incentives in terms of coordination strategies. Lastly, and most importantly, employing an in-depth examination of a single case with within-case variation will enable us to detect the dynamics that lead actors to make decisions about joining PECs, whether it conforms with the expected utility or not. By delving into a single case and making a paired comparison, I will be able to see the process of PEC formation under different risk conditions and analyze whether it fits the prospect theory and findings in the previous chapter. This is a crucial addition to the existing literature as it not only deals with the conditions that lead to PEC formation among certain actors but also argues that there is a decision mechanism by employing an actor-based approach.

In sum, a thorough analysis of PEC formation in Turkey provides us the opportunity to investigate the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, i.e., how institutional, structural, and contextual factors incentivize the formation of PECs. In doing so, the investigation can reveal how the political parties act in response to changing risks, both in terms of PEC formation and partner selection.

In the following sections, I will first provide background on Turkey, including its gov-

ernment and party system and societal cleavages. Next, I will explain the methodology - a qualitative comparative approach through a within-finding case study of the 2018 and 2023 presidential elections and the theoretical framework that has also informed the previous chapter. Then, I will proceed with a detailed analysis of pre-electoral coalition formations in 2018 and 2023. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the insights gained from the paired comparison.

### **3.1.1 Government and Party Systems in Turkey**

Since its transition to a multiparty system in 1946, Turkey always had opposition parties. Several parties were forced to dissolve, and others shut down. All parties experienced a total ban after the *coup d'état* in 1980, and over the years, several others were banned by the Constitutional Court. However, other than these interventions, Turkey's multiparty system persisted. Since the introduction of the 1961 Constitution, proportional representation (PR) with the d'Hondt method has become a norm in Turkish politics. Interventions altered the full PR system, especially the introduction of a uniquely high electoral threshold of 10% after the 1982 Constitution. Although Turkey's electorate has always been a volatile one, the 2002 general elections were exceptional: half of the voters shifted their votes from 1999 to 2002 (Çarkoğlu 2022). Only two parties, the AKP and the CHP, managed to pass the 10% threshold, which meant that no other party was able to have representation in the parliament. The previous prime minister's party, DSP (Demokratik Sol Parti -Democratic Left Party), which got 22.19% in 1999, simply vanished with 1.22% (Çarkoğlu 2022). After more than a decade of coalitional politics, Turkey had a majority government with the election of AKP, which received 34.28% of the popular vote (Cagaptay 2002).

This situation changed in the 2007 elections as nationalist MHP, the second-place member of the coalition between 1999 and 2002, managed to surpass the electoral threshold. Although AKP increased its vote share, its number of seats declined. The AKP achieved a landslide victory in the 2011 parliamentary elections as well. However, in June 2015, pro-Kurdish HDP (Halkların Demokratik Partisi, Peoples' Democratic Party), running as a political party rather than as independents, succeeded in surpassing the threshold and denying AKP an absolute majority. Following five months of a hung parliament, the AKP achieved a majority in November snap elections. This setback for the AKP happened after Turkey, for the first time, elected its president by popular vote in 2014, and Erdoğan was not the leader of his party for the first time since 2001 because the constitution then prohibited a

partisan head of state.

### **3.1.2 Cleavages in Turkish Politics, AKP, and Rising Competitive Authoritarianism in Turkey**

Scholars of Turkish politics have argued that the party system in Turkey has been a direct consequence of politicized social cleavages (Mardin 1973). Even though Lipset and Rokkan (1967)'s seminal work on frozen cleavages in Europe cannot be directly adapted to the Turkish context, Mardin borrows the center-periphery cleavage to explain the dynamics of Turkish politics (see also Levin (2023)). The author claims that ever since the Ottoman era, up until the Democrat Party and CHP rivalry, we can explain the struggles in Turkish politics between the ones in the center and the ones in the periphery. A similar conceptualization is the *Kulturkampf* argument, which states that Turkish society is divided into two sides: the secular and socially liberal coastline and the nationalist-conservative hinterland (Kalaycıoğlu 2012). The author also states that a second cleavage is in play, Turkish and Kurdish ethnic nationalism (Kalaycıoğlu 2012, 17).

Apart from these existing social cleavages, there has been a debate about the emergence of a new political cleavage: democracy versus authoritarianism (Selçuk and Hekimci 2020). Accordingly, Erdoğan's rule created this new cleavage (or the latent cleavage became visible), which trumps all the other social cleavages at play. This growing cleavage was quite visible in the 2017 referendum campaign where the opposition argued switch to presidentialism was going to exacerbate the personalization of Erdoğan's rule. Accordingly, the democracy-authoritarian cleavage is so central that ideologically distant opposition parties are forced to cooperate against Erdoğan and his alliance if they wish to reverse the democratic decline. Additionally, the presidential system has altered the power distribution between the executive and legislative, weakening the parliament. This may have incentivized smaller parties (and splinter parties) that do not necessarily have the prospect of winning parliamentary seats to be formed. Instead, they may opt to influence policy preferences by taking sides in the presidential elections, which is more straightforward.

Arguably, authoritarianism in Turkey trickles down and affects all aspects of life (Borsuk and Levin 2021). It is imperative to examine the competitive authoritarian features of the current regime to understand the risk factor and its impact on political party behavior, both for the parties and citizens. Esen and Gumuscu (2023, 23) describe Erdoğan as "a populist autocrat who wields strong control over political and judicial institutions and dominates the media against his opponents." This defi-



nition is aligned with the definition of competitive authoritarianism by Levitsky and Way (2002). Esen and Gumuscu (2016, 4-5) claim that Turkey transitioned into a competitive authoritarian regime from an unconsolidated, tutelary democracy. Erdoğan managed to complete this transition by controlling the media, gaining control of material resources and sharing spoils, politicizing and utilizing state institutions, and repressing opposition actors and, hence, violating civil liberties. These are accompanied by an authoritarian neoliberal economic practice that favors a particular economic group but leaves others out (Altınörs and Akçay 2022). Even though (competitive) authoritarianism was not novel for Turkey, as low intraparty competition showed its effects on interparty competition, it was Erdoğan and the AKP who strengthened the authoritarian grip (Bakiner 2023, 868).

Erdoğan's road to power began with a surprise victory to become the mayor of Istanbul in 1994. He later established the AKP with several colleagues to form an alternative to Islamist parties. AKP came to power following a deep regime and economic crisis at the beginning of the 2000s. Although the AKP started as a conservative democratic party with liberal overtones, as a result of intraparty dynamics, the liberal individuals in the party lost out to those that coalesced Erdoğan's ability to win elections and espoused a majoritarian understanding of democracy (Esen and Gumuscu 2023, 82-84). After serving as the prime minister for 12 years, increasing the party's popular vote in each election, Erdoğan became the first president of the country that was elected by a popular vote, thanks to "his socio-economic background with all its cultural implications, the economic policies promoting crony capitalism, patronage, and the urban rent and infrastructural investments" (Kalaycıoğlu 2015, 171). From this point onwards, making pre-electoral coalitions started to become the norm in Turkey. Even though the literature would benefit from more work on the incumbent party's coalition, the opposition strategies are well-examined (Aras and Helms 2021; Korkmaz 2024; Musil 2024; Somer and Tekinirk 2024; Yabancı 2024). First of all, the regime change towards presidentialism created a powerful president and undermined the tutelary roles of the military and the judiciary as the guardians of the *ancien régime* (Aras and Helms 2021, 596). The authors also underline the disproportional features of the system, such as the majoritarian election of the president, 10% threshold, and a weakened legislative body, as the important factors pushing the opposition to develop new strategies of coordination. Before the introduction of this new regime, the opposition designated a common candidate in the 2014 presidential elections, trying to find common ground between the social democratic CHP and the Turkish nationalist MHP (Kalaycıoğlu 2015). Clearly, institutional engineering affected the party system in Turkey (Sarı and Taşkın 2024). However, the accompanying emergence of a new cleavage

(democracy-authoritarianism) may have pushed the parties to coordinate with parties from a broader ideological spectrum (Selçuk and Hekimci 2020). The repeated opposition coordination failed to generate incumbent turnover but did result in opposition victory in the 2019 and 2024 local elections. Since the June 2015 parliamentary elections, when the AKP for the first time lost its parliamentary election, the electoral mobilization and the political polarization in the country have continuously raised the stakes both for the opposition and the AKP (Esen and Gumuscu 2018). The fragmented and ideologically dispersed opposition's successful coalition initiatives were realized arguably due to the fact that CHP played an intermediary role between the Turkish nationalist, MHP-splinter İYİ Party, and the pro-Kurdish, left-wing HDP (Musil 2024).

### 3.2 Methodology and Case Selection

This study aims to explore the causal mechanisms between the conditions of an election and the formation of pre-electoral coalitions. In the previous chapter, I found that a growing domain of losses pushes political parties to form pre-electoral coalitions. Nevertheless, it may not be possible to accurately identify the ideological positions of political parties across different contexts and quantify the political parties' motivations for PEC formation and their decision mechanism with regard to coalition partner selection. More importantly, as Gandhi and Reuter (2013) stress, regime change may affect the behavior of opposition parties in non-democratic behaviors, but because of endogeneity, it is difficult to say how with a quantitative study. For this reason, the quantitative chapter of this thesis offers only some preliminary findings about the circumstances that make the PEC formation more likely and partner selection more diverse. In order to understand the processes and mechanisms in PEC formation, I rely on qualitative methods that will enable me to observe the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variables. For this purpose, I am employing qualitative techniques: within-case study and dual process tracing (Beach 2016; Bennett and Checkel 2014).

This chapter applies the framework of prospect theory in pre-electoral coalition formation, and introduces the element of risk and the concept of the domain of losses to the 2018 and 2023 Turkish presidential elections. A key argument is that the risk for political actors varies across democracies and non-democracies. To reiterate, on the democratic side of the literature, we see some common explanations for PEC formation and partner selection. These are mainly ideological proximity (Bandy-

opadhyay, Chatterjee, and Sjoström 2011; Golder 2006*b*; Hortala-Vallve, Meriläinen, and Tukiainen 2024; Kellam 2017; Magyar 2022), disproportional institutions (Golder 2005; Hortala-Vallve, Meriläinen, and Tukiainen 2024), weaker executive powers (Spoon and West 2015), and size similarity (Griebeler and Resende 2021; Ibenskas and Bolleyer 2018). On the other hand, scholars who study PEC formation in non-democracies tend to focus on the opposition alliances (Gandhi and Ong 2019; Gandhi and Reuter 2013; Helms 2023; Jiménez 2023). There are some limitations arising from this perspective.

Firstly, looking at the variation between democratic and non-democratic countries does not allow us to see the effect of democratic performance and autocratic institutionalization on the PEC formation. An over-time study can help explore the effect of democratic performance and autocratic institutionalization on the variation in the pre-electoral coalition formation.

Secondly, the non-democracy literature is too focused on opposition strategies, and the works on the incumbent cooperation are nearly non-existent. In this chapter, I am equally interested in analyzing the motivations of the opposition and the incumbent.

Lastly, the formation of PEC is well-examined as a binary dependent variable, but there are limitations to studies on the extent of PECs, which analyze them in terms of the party size (Ibenskas and Bolleyer 2018) and ideological compatibility (Golder 2006*a*; Kellam 2017). The extent of a pre-electoral coalition is a key factor in its success. Even though there are attempts to classify alliance strategies (Ibenskas and Bolleyer 2018; Ong 2022), a quantitative analysis is hard to manage as Golder (2006*b*, 200) states that it is not easy to study pre-electoral coalitions since they are often omitted in ballots or not visible in election results. This pushes the researcher to delve into the case studies (if they exist) to start coding. Consequently, standardizing and coding the extent of a pre-electoral coalition is an even harder task. Therefore, comparative research through a within-case study can help identify the causal mechanisms at play.

Studying a single country may have shortcomings, such as limited external validity and generalizability. Even though it is possible to see patterns with statistical analysis, every case has its own dynamics. These idiosyncratic features may act as confounding variables as well. Another possible limitation is the selection bias. As Collier and Mahoney (1996) state, only studying cases where our outcome of interest occurred or where the key factors are the same would lead to biased results. Therefore, in an ideal design, dependent variables should vary, independent variables should vary and they should covary.

To overcome these issues, I adopt a qualitative comparative approach through a within-finding case study and trace the process in the 2018 and 2023 presidential elections. Using Turkey as the case study can offer essential insights into the PEC formation and its extent since it is a relatively new phenomenon in Turkish politics. It also provides me with the tools to apply crucial concepts in the prospect theory qualitatively, such as risk and uncertainty, the domain of losses and gains, and explore reference points for incumbent political parties and those in opposition. Opposition coordination since 2014 differed both in terms of outcome as well as possible explanatory factors. Consequently, the PEC formation variation we observe is substantial. Between 2014 and 2018, the major changes were switching to the presidential system with weak checks and balances under conditions of a state of emergency, the introduction of concurrent presidential and legislative elections, deteriorating democratic performance, and the introduction of the institution of the pre-electoral coalition as a formal possibility. Even though there was informal coordination between opposition parties in the 2014 presidential elections because this was before the switch to the presidential system and did not take place concurrently with legislative elections, I limit my analysis in this election as a precursor to formal ones made by the opposition and incumbent in the 2018 and 2023 presidential and general elections.

Additionally, I do not focus on the opposition coordination that took place in the 2019 local elections, where some opposition parties agreed upon a joint candidate and chose not to field candidates in certain districts. This part of the study will be both illustrative and explorative. I will adopt a paired comparison strategy and engage in causal process tracing by relating variables to one another over time, a strategy that Tarrow (2010) calls “duel-process tracing.” However, the advantage of studying a single country with a paired comparison approach is that the internal validity is extremely high because we are dealing with the same culture, population, and similar macro institutions and the causal process analysis allows me to relate variables to one another over time. Both dependent variables, PEC formation and partner selection, vary over these years. In 2018 and 2023, the democracy indicators were about the same in the V-Dem and Freedom House indices but Turkey’s economic performance had deteriorated. The *de jure* presidential powers did not change. An electoral law amendment in 2022 Law No. 7393 decreased the 10% electoral threshold to 7%, but also the distribution of surplus votes within the alliance, which was introduced with the 2018 electoral law, was eliminated. While the reduction of the threshold may have weakened the attractiveness of alliances for small parties, the practice of counting the total votes of the alliance for seat allocation may have made the attractiveness of the type of PEC previously formed in 2018. Both the incumbent

AKP and the opposition had prior experience in PEC formation. Yet new political parties were formed, two of them being splinters from AKP. Between the 2018 and 2023 elections, the number of political parties which were eligible to compete in parliamentary elections had increased.<sup>8</sup>

While, certainly, the switch to the presidential system and the accompanying electoral law changed the institutional structure and incentivized pre-electoral coalition formation, we must also note that even in the absence of a permissive rule that allows for formal PEC, in the 2019 local elections, an informal electoral alliance resulted in opposition victory. Surely, the local election dynamics are different and only a plurality of the votes are needed (as opposed to the majority); it is a winner-take-all type of election where opposition parties successfully coordinate by nominating joint candidates. Therefore, we should take into account non-institutional factors as well, specifically considering how decision-making under risk- democratic and economic performance- may have affected pre-electoral coalition making since PECs in 2018 and 2023 were formed in different electoral rules. Another factor in risk calculation that I employ for the qualitative analysis is how much time is left in the incumbent's tenure, which is relative to the existing time of rule. This comparison allows me to capture the linkages between different independent variables of interest, including the different components of the risk factor and the dependent variable.

The framework of the prospect theory is useful in explaining the actor's decisions with respect to these changing circumstances while laying out possible mechanisms and processes. It allows me to account for decision-making under risk and uncertainty. Fundamentally, I argue that the stakes of the elections (i.e., their criticalness) and the level of uncertainty regarding election outcomes shape political parties' decision-making. This is relevant not only for the opposition but also for the incumbent, who has a chance of losing the elections.

As explained in Chapter 2, if an actor is satisfied with the status quo, the context in which they make decisions is in the domain of gains; if not satisfied, it is in the domain of losses. This incentivizes all actors to be risk-taking rather than risk-averse as they enter the domain of losses. That is why incumbent parties may also consider themselves as if they are in the domain of losses. I argue that the risk-taking behavior is curvilinear and not linear. Even if the actors are situated in the domain of losses or calculate that they may move to that domain, if their perceived probability of winning the election is low, they will not take risks. For example, if it were certain that the incumbent would win the elections, neither the opposition nor the incumbent would be risk-taking by forming a PEC. As argued

---

<sup>8</sup>The number of eligible political parties in 2015 parliamentary elections was 31, 10 in 2018, and 36 in 2023.

in Chapter 2, by agreeing to be a part of the pre-electoral coalition, they take advantage of office benefits, but in case of both a win or loss, a party risks brand dilution, voter dissatisfaction and estrangement, low turnout, and concessions from policy, ideology in case of an electoral win. Similarly, if it were certain that one of the opposition parties would win the elections by itself, that party would not take the unnecessary risk of joining with others. In contrast, the other opposition parties may be incentivized to be part of a winning PEC. Therefore, risk-taking increases with high uncertainty. Risk-taking, in the scope of this thesis, means making PEC or accepting stretched coalitions with ideologically distant partners. I may need to clarify this point: making a PEC is always the riskier option. For a political party, competing alone is the easiest, most straightforward, and risk-averse option. However, this may not always be the ideal decision. In some instances, forming a PEC and even forming a PEC with distant parties might be more logical or fruitful. Nevertheless, this is still a risky option; it is another question of whether the risk that political parties take pays off.

Even though the paired comparison approach means that the 2018 and 2023 elections are the main focus of this chapter, employing process tracing design offers additional benefits. The study will gain dynamism since I will not only compare the conditions of the pre-electoral coalition making in the two election years, but also take it as a timeline. This will allow me to take into consideration prior experience with coordination when decision-making took place under different perceptions of risk. In this vein, such detailed analysis will help me assess whether insights from the prospect theory framework are useful to understand PECs in competitive authoritarian regimes. For a systematic paired comparison of PEC formation in Turkey's two election years (2018 and 2023), I give the context prior to the election, followed by a detailed analysis of the actors' behavior. Since this study adopts an actor-based approach, it aims to explain party behavior under conditions of risk and uncertainty based on their reference points. Interviews were held with a former-General Secretary of CHP and a former deputy chair of YRP to gain more insights about what political parties faced internally prior to the elections.

### **3.3 Theory and Hypotheses**

As argued in the previous chapter, in addition to the institutional and structural factors stated in the literature, the element of risk and whether the actor situates itself in the domain of losses are important determinants of the pre-electoral coalition

making and partner selection.

I argue that agency matters since political parties consist of individuals who evaluate the costs and benefits of their collective decisions but often make seemingly unexpected decisions. Thus, assuming that they simply maximize utility when they make decisions under uncertainty, without considering how they respond to a risky choice leading to gain or loss, may not capture how actors make decisions in real life. An important aspect of this study is to explore the decision-making of an authoritarian incumbent to stretch his pre-electoral coalition. It might be that this behavior is standard for an incumbent in a competitive authoritarian regime. These autocrats tend to give pork and office benefits to their partners to increase their chances of winning. However, forgoing a minimal winning coalition should be equally undesirable. Furthermore, it can be argued that the autocrats have myriad ways to tilt the playing field at the expense of the opposition, in addition to the incumbent advantage. In the framework of the prospect theory, the actors make their decisions based on a reference point. This reference point does not have to be in the present:

“The reference point usually corresponds to the current asset position, in which case gains and losses coincide with the actual amounts that are received or paid. However, the location of the reference point, and the consequent coding of outcomes as gains or losses, can be affected by the formulation of the offered prospects, and by the expectations of the decision maker” (Kahneman and Tversky 1979, 274).

In an election, offered prospects are two-fold, and they are tied to the expectations of the decision-maker. If the political actor expects to win, he is in the domain of gains, and he may act risk-averse. In such a case, a smaller-than-expected gain can hurt the decision maker instead of its opposite. Similarly, if the actor expects to be losing, he is in the domain of losses and willing to take risks. High uncertainty imposes a risk-taking behavior on the incumbent as well; since they cannot see themselves in the domain of gains, a possible electoral loss could mean the loss of benefits that the authoritarian regime provides.

The hypotheses that are explored within the scope of PEC formation in the Turkish case are as follows.

H1 Political parties in Turkey took more risks by making pre-electoral coalitions when they were in the domain of losses.

H1.1 The democratic backsliding and deteriorating economic conditions in

Turkey pushed parties to take risks by making ideologically incompatible pre-electoral coalitions.

H1.2 The democratic backsliding and deteriorating economic conditions in Turkey pushed parties to take risks by making extended pre-electoral commitments.

H2 Even though the incumbent did not take more risks than the opposition, it took more risks as the stakes increased.

In the same direction with the hypotheses in the previous chapter, I mainly focus on the declining democracy level and economic performance between the 2018 and the 2023 elections. These developments are evaluated for their impact on electoral uncertainty. In competitive authoritarian regimes, the elections offer some level of meaningful uncertainty in the sense that the opposition is not completely hopeless about the outcome. When the likelihood of opposition victory is close to zero, there would be no incentive for PEC formation. Similarly, if one political party calculates that electoral victory is close to be certain, we would also not expect it to form PEC. Thus, a certain level of uncertainty would increase the likelihood of risk-taking and PEC formation. In the Turkish case, I expect to find that deteriorating economic and democratic conditions provided a suitable environment for risk-taking, thus pre-electoral coalition formation.

As shown in the previous chapter, political parties tend to form pre-electoral coalitions when their rivals also form such alliances. Stakes became higher for the incumbent as its rule became more institutionalized and more intertwined with the economic elites; hence, there was more to sacrifice in case of an electoral defeat. In such a system, an electoral loss would not be as detrimental for the incumbent as the opposition since it already controls many state apparatuses and media. In many instances, elections can even serve as a means of peaceful exit for the incumbent. For all these reasons, the incumbent would not be willing to take as much risk as the opposition takes; however, it takes more risks compared to itself in the previous elections.



## 3.4 Discussion

### 3.4.1 Background on Opposition Coordination

Between 1950 and 2018, 20 election alliances were formed, the majority of them took place after 1991 (Demirkol and Çoban Balci 2021). In fact, between 1957 and 2018 joint candidate lists were legally prohibited but political parties coordinated by either nominating small parties' candidates from another party's list or by entering into informal nomination agreements (See also İğdır 2023). The 2014 presidential elections were pivotal for Turkish politics as it was the first election when the president got elected directly by popular vote. This was due to a constitutional amendment implemented in 2007, which became effective after the previous president Abdullah Gül's 7-year term ended. With this change, the term limit of a president was extended to two, and the term duration was reduced to five from seven. Even though the responsibilities and duties of the president remained the same after the 2007 amendments, the popular election meant that *de facto* the government system had transformed to semi-presidentialism (Kalaycıoğlu 2015, 158). Majority runoff (two-round system) meant that to get elected, the candidate had to secure 50%+1 votes. Between the first and second rounds, there are two weeks. In the 2014 presidential elections, there were no concurrent legislative elections and no formal permissive rule for pre-electoral coalition formation. However, parties were free to endorse common candidates.

The political landscape was shaped by three preceding events: the Gezi Park protests in May-June 2013, the December 17-25 corruption scandal, and the March 2014 local elections. Gezi Park protests were a traumatic event for Erdoğan and the AKP. During the protests, he was openly threatening the protesters by arguing that “there is a web of treason behind these protests.”<sup>9</sup> The December 17-25 corruption scandal was defined as an “attempt of judicial *coup d'état*.”<sup>10</sup> It was the first explicit division between the Gulenists, who later attempted a military *coup d'état* in 2016, and the ruling AKP. These two events can be seen as the first “cracks” in Erdoğan's rule; however, the material support of some influential NGOs and companies who were close to AKP remained strong (Esen and Gumuscu 2016, 1589-90). Between these events and the 2014 local elections, Twitter and YouTube were banned, a

---

<sup>9</sup> Erdoğan'dan Gezi Parkı eylemcilerine ültimatı (2013). These protests were so impactful for Erdoğan so that even after years, he continued to attack the protesters. Also see <https://medyascope.tv/2022/06/01/Erdoğan-gezi-eylemcilerini-hedef-aldi-bunlar-surtuk-bunlar-curuk/>

<sup>10</sup> Gezi ve 17 Aralık Olayları Karşısında Dik Durmasaydık, Bugün Çok Farklı Bir Türkiye'de Yaşıyor Olurduk (2014). Speech at a meeting with business circles in September 2014

sign of Erdoğan's increasingly authoritarian rule (Esen and Gumuscu 2016, 1592). The results of the 2014 local elections were a clear victory for Erdoğan: his party won 43.4% of the votes, 18 of 30 metropolitan municipalities, and 800 of 1351 municipalities.

The economic conditions were favorable for the incumbent. The monthly inflation was 0.45% and the annual inflation was 9.32%, which is quite desirable considering Turkish economic history. The consumer confidence index was 73.9 out of 200, which was non-confident but stable. The percentage of the population who suffered from serious financial hardship had dropped from 43.8% to 29.4% from 2013 to 2014. GDP per capita was \$12,578.2 in 2013, the highest in history, and \$12,165.2 in 2014, the second highest.

Prior to the elections, three opposition parties had their respective parliamentary groups in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (GNAT, TBMM in Turkish). The two biggest opposition parties, the main opposition CHP and Turkish nationalist MHP decided to join forces and endorse a common candidate. Upon the recommendation of MHP<sup>11</sup>, Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, a conservative career academic, was declared as the joint nominee. This cooperation was the first of its kind for the direct election of the president. Even though there were a few cooperation experiences in the past, the ban on the joint parliamentary lists directly blocked the formal pre-electoral coalitions. Given the fact that there were no concurrent legislative elections in 2014, the extent of the PEC was quite limited, so much so that the parties did not even make a rally together. Even though the president was not the head of government and was not supposed to be partisan, Erdoğan, during his campaign, declared that he was going to be partisan.<sup>12</sup> However, for the opposition parties, the *de jure* position of the presidency may have lowered the stakes.

All in all, the opposition agreed on a common candidate 55 days before the first round, on June 16, 2014. The nomination process was extremely opaque since only two party leaders decided whom to nominate. This came 15 days before the announcement of then-prime minister Erdoğan's candidacy. For the opposition, the primary aim was to curb Erdoğan's increasingly popular and authoritarian rule. Cooperation between a center-left main opposition party and a right-wing nationalist opposition party showed that parties were not reluctant to set aside their ideological differences for electoral benefits. As Selçuk and Hekimci (2020) argue, the 2014 election was an important precedent for future opposition coordination.

---

<sup>11</sup> Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu 10 yıl sonra ilk kez açıkladı: Çatı aday fikri kimindi? (2024)

<sup>12</sup> Erdoğan: Sakıyız Seçmiyoruz, Tarafsız Olmayacağız... (2014)

The pro-Kurdish HDP nominated their co-leader Selahattin Demirtaş as the presidential candidate and did not endorse İhsanoğlu for the race. The pro-Kurdish parties were yet to pass the electoral threshold; by then, they had competed as independent candidates from their respective electoral districts (mainly in the Eastern and Southeastern regions of Turkey). Therefore, the 2014 presidential elections were a good opportunity for the Kurdish movement to become more visible in Turkey’s political arena.

Several factors led to limited coordination. Firstly, institutional factors prevented parties from coordinating in the elections, let alone parties from opposing political camps. The constitutional powers of the presidential office were limited. The local elections in March 2014 were a failure for the opposition, incurring a direct loss. All these factors meant lower stakes (thus a less likely reference point positioning into the domain of losses), lower uncertainty, and better circumstances for an Erdoğan victory.

However, there were many factors that imposed a domain of gains for the incumbent, which resulted in risk-averse behavior. Firstly, the recent victory in the local elections served as a litmus test. Secondly, the macroeconomic performance was the best for many metrics, such as GDP per capita, in the country’s history. Thirdly, the opposition failed to pitch a popular candidate who could carry the elections, especially against PM Erdoğan. We can speculate that the incumbent did not feel the need to take risks by forming an informal PEC and giving compromises since it was clear that Erdoğan was highly likely to win the elections singlehandedly and influence the policy-making after the elections.

### **3.4.2 The Case of the 2018 Elections**

The 2018 was a pivotal year in Turkish political history. The concurrent legislative and presidential elections were the first under the new presidential system. The elections took place earlier than scheduled. Following a call by MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli, Erdoğan announced upcoming snap elections by arguing that Turkey needed to “overcome uncertainties”. Additionally, it was the first time since 1957 that pre-electoral coalitions (or electoral alliances, seçim ittifakları, in the Turkish political parlance) were formally allowed by law.

Despite its success in the 2014 local elections, in the June 2015 general elections, AKP was not able to secure an outright majority in the parliament for the first time due to pro-Kurdish HDP’s electoral success as they passed the 10% electoral thresh-

old for the first time in their history. Even though a coalition government could not be formed outside of AKP, Erdoğan did not give the authority to form government to the second party, CHP, and the elections were renewed on November 1, 2015—with a series of deadly terrorist attacks in between the elections Şahin (2021). The June 2015 election was the first sign for both the opposition and incumbent AKP that the AKP rule could be replaced by an election.

The failed attempt of *coup d'état* on July 15, 2016, against Erdoğan led to an 18-month-long state of emergency, increasing emphasis on national security, and a series of public sector dismissals by executive decrees (Kanun Hükmünde Kararname, KHK in Turkish), marginalization of the opposition, and polarization of the society and the political arena. There followed a rapid attempt to change the constitution in order to establish a hyper-presidential regime. The changes were approved in the parliament in January 2017 and adopted by a slim margin of votes via a referendum on April 16.

Some key changes in the 2017 amendments included establishing the president as the head of government and abolishing the post of prime minister, allowing the president to be a member of a political party, increasing the number of MPs in the GNAT from 550 to 600, increasing parliamentary term from four years to five to ensure concurrent elections, empowering both the president and the parliament (at least 3/5 of total MPs) to renew the elections and abolish both branches, increasing the power of the president by giving the authority to issue presidential decrees and appointing the cabinet, appointing the top public officers, proposing state of emergency, and introducing the office of vice president without a specified number of VPs.

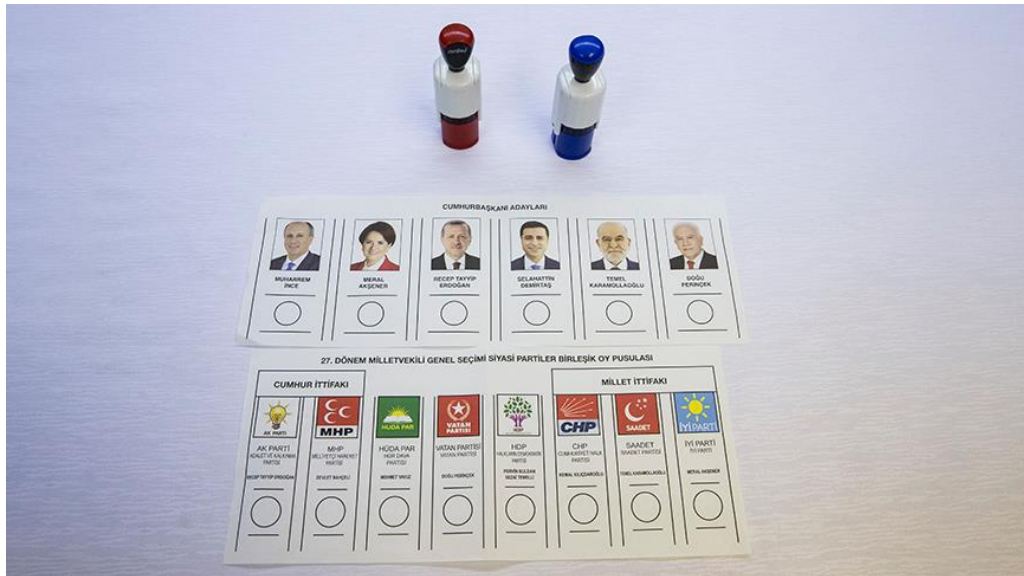
On May 2, 2017, Erdoğan became a member of the AKP once again, just 16 days after the constitutional referendum on April 16, 2017. On May 21, 2017, he became the leader of his party after a three-year hiatus, which was the first in Turkish history. These changes meant it was about to get harder for the opposition parties, as they started to face a very powerful president who could make policy, appoint the top public officials, and directly influence the parliament as the leader of the biggest party by seat share. On March 16, 2018, a new legislation that passed the parliament was published in the Official Gazette, which formally allowed pre-electoral coalitions. According to the new rule, political parties could announce official PECs, and the vote count and seat distribution would be based on the portions of the vote that each party received. Passing the unusually high 10% threshold became easier as well; if an alliance were to get 10% combined, all members of the alliance would pass the threshold, and seats were to be allocated according to their respective vote

shares.

On April 18, 2018, Erdoğan announced holding early concurrent elections to ensure a swift transition to the presidential system. This was later called by snap elections (in a negative sense) by opposition leader Akşener, whose İYİ Party was recently established and would not be eligible to compete in the elections if CHP did not transfer some of their MPs to İYİ Party for them to establish a parliamentary group and become eligible to be on the ballot.

The economic outlook has gotten worse since the 2014 elections. The USD/TRY rate was 4.7, compared to 2.16 in 2014 presidential elections. The monthly inflation was 2.61%, and the annual inflation rate was 15.39%, a considerable increase from the last presidential elections. The consumer confidence index dropped to 70.3, showing a steady decrease. GDP per capita became \$9,568.8, falling even below the 2010 level. The percentage of people who suffered from serious financial hardship was 26.5%, merely a small decrease since 2014.

Figure 3.1 Ballot Papers for the Legislative and Presidential Elections in 2018



### 3.4.2.1 Opposition pre-electoral coalition behavior in 2018

As stated above, the first strategy employed by the main opposition CHP was to transfer 15 MPs to the recently established İYİ Party in order to enable them to be on the ballot. This transfer took place just four days after Erdoğan decides to hold early elections. It was the first explicit cooperation action between the political groups who campaigned for the “No” vote in 2017, which was around the partisan lines and can be seen as a plebiscite for Erdoğan’s rule (Bilgin and Erdoğan 2018).

Two weeks after the transfer, four opposition parties, two of which were electorally viable, formed the Nation Alliance (Millet İttifakı in Turkish) on May 5, 2018. It was decided that, on the ballot, there would be three parties under the umbrella of this PEC: CHP, İYİ Party (which included candidates from the Democrat Party, DP), and the Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi). Traditionally, CHP represented a secular social democratic position on the center-left. İYİ Party is the splinter of hardliner Turkish nationalist MHP, which endorsed “Yes” in the 2017 referendum. DP claims to be the party that naturally succeeded the DP in the 1950s, which ended CHP’s 27-year one-party regime in 1950 and established a right-wing conservative tradition, and Saadet is the successor of the shut-down Virtue Party and Welfare Party of Erbakan who established the political Islamist “National Vision” (Milli Görüş) ideology, which was split between the AKP and Saadet. As seen, the median and average position within the pre-electoral coalition were right-wing, even though the coalition *formateur*, CHP, was traditionally center-left and secular.

In the 2018 elections, the opposition PEC was more ideologically diverse than the incumbent’s People’s Alliance. Considering that in 2014, AKP did not have any informal partners, but in 2018, they formed a formal PEC with MHP and BBP; we can say that for the electoral benefit, it was willing to take some risk by forming a PEC, albeit with ideologically close partners. Even though the parties agreed to compete in the legislative elections under the same coalition, they could not manage to find a single candidate for the presidential elections. As a result, there were three presidential candidates from the alliance: İnce from CHP, Akşener from İYİ Party, and Karamollağlı from Saadet. Another major opposition force, HDP, nominated Demirtaş as their candidate, a long-term socialist, and Eurasianist Doğu Perinçek made it to the ballot, and lastly, President Erdoğan was the single candidate of the AKP and MHP’s PEC.

A plausible claim would be that the opposition PEC nominated more than one candidate not as a strategy to maximize the turnout but because it was too premature to agree on a common candidate. This can be seen from the post-election failure of the PEC and public statements of party leaders, who claimed that the National Alliance was simply “an electoral coordination, not a coalition.”<sup>13</sup>

The change in electoral institutions was a necessary condition to form official PECs; however, the opposition was already inclined to cooperate in the elections as seen in the 2014 presidential race. *Formateur* CHP’s partner selection was stretched, including three right-wing parties in the alliance, two of which did not promise much in terms of logistical and organizational support. Compared to the 2014

---

<sup>13</sup> *Seçim için kurulan Millet İttifakı dağıldı* (2018)

elections, the stakes were higher: the economic performance was deteriorating, the authoritarian practices were more prevalent, and the 2017 referendum equipped the president with enormous proactive powers. With Erdoğan back as the official leader of the AKP, there was a strong chance of presidential coattail in the legislative elections. Furthermore, the chances of opposition victory were not negligible. In this high uncertainty and imposed domain of losses, parties, especially the bigger ones, accepted to take risks by forming a PEC with ideologically distant partners, seemingly agreeing to end the 16-year Erdoğan rule.

Being part of a PEC has benefited all partners in the opposition's coalition in the 2018 elections. Saadet, receiving less than 2%, could not get a deputy from its own list, but three SP members who were nominated from the CHP lists entered the parliament. CHP also received electoral benefits. In a number of cities where it has not been able to elect a deputy for a significant time, it won arguably because of the alliance with Saadet and İYİ Party (Cebeci 2018).

### 3.4.2.2 Incumbent pre-electoral coalition behavior in 2018

The 2018 elections were peculiarly interesting since, for the first time in Turkish political history, an incumbent party formed a pre-electoral coalition. After the announcement of early elections, the People's Alliance (Cumhur İttifakı in Turkish)<sup>14</sup> was formed on May 4 by the ruling AKP, far-right Turkish nationalist MHP, which had landed support to Erdoğan after the attempted coup in 2016, and the far-right Sunni Islamist Great Unity Party (BBP in Turkish), which did not have much electoral promise except for a few Islamists conservative cities and districts.

The incumbent's pre-electoral coalition had different dynamics than the opposition alliance. First and foremost, it was more ideologically congruent. AKP as the *formateur* can be counted as the most moderate party among these three parties. Secondly, the role of the MHP and BBP in cabinet formation and policy-making in the post-election period was unclear; however, they did not receive any explicit office benefits. It was speculated that MHP wanted to fill key bureaucratic posts instead. After the rapprochement with the AKP, MHP "ceased to operate as a political party and turned into a bureaucratic machine" (Gürpınar 2023, 107). The cost of forming a pre-electoral coalition can be falsely seen as zero for the AKP as they would have dictatorial powers within the coalition in the Gamsonian sense. However, the cost of forming a PEC is not zero for the AKP because the party's

---

<sup>14</sup>Even though the English name of the alliance may sound like left-wing because of "People," it is an uncommon Arabic-originated word in Turkish and have a conservative tone.

cadres had to compromise from the key bureaucratic posts, in addition to possible brand dilution. Even though AKP and MHP do not have very distinct voter bases, AKP had to revise its rhetoric to be more security-oriented and nationalistic.

A possible counterargument might be that the incumbent did not take risks as much as the opposition did; however, the only relevant comparison is the 2014 and 2018 behavior of the incumbent itself. A simulation based on previous election outcomes shows that AKP and MHP encountered “unintended consequences” because of the institutional changes that allowed for PEC formation. Had this institutional change not been enacted, İYİ Party may not have gotten elected into parliament, and there would not be a fifth legislative party in the parliament, strengthening the opposition bloc (Moral 2021). The smallest party in the incumbent PEC, the BBP, did not receive many electoral benefits; only its leader entered into parliament, and that was because he ran from AKP lists. While the MHP did not receive any outright office benefits in the form of cabinet positions, its ideological position has influenced the AKP, and the party cadres have reportedly filled key bureaucratic positions. In the concluding remarks of this chapter, the perceived domain of losses, the actual domain of losses, and the extent of actors’ willingness to take risks are more thoroughly evaluated.

### **3.4.3 The Case of the 2023 Elections**

Even though Erdoğan received a first-round victory in 2018, the AKP could not win the majority of the seats for the second time in their history after the June 2015 elections, staying just six seats shy of the majority. However, this was not relevant for forming the cabinet because of the novel presidential system. Yet, legislatively, the People’s Alliance had a majority. The implications are two-fold: AKP does not need to achieve a parliamentary majority to form the cabinet, but it is now dependent on the MHP’s support to win presidential elections and achieve a majority in the parliament. In this way, AKP facilitated their way to stay in full power only by giving bureaucratic posts to coalition partners. With this strategy, they also manage to pretend that this is not a government coalition but merely an electoral alliance.

The 2023 elections were more competitive and uncertain than the previous ones because of several factors. Firstly, the opposition’s success in the 2019 local elections was impactful. Opposition flipped key metropolitan municipalities, including the capital Ankara, Adana, Antalya, Mersin, and Hatay. Among all, the biggest city, Istanbul, was the focal point because of the nullification of the slim CHP victory in



March 2019. After a tiresome battle, CHP candidate İmamoğlu managed to attract more support and win more than 54% of the votes (the turnout rate was 84.51%) in a city where there are more than 10.5 million registered voters. This was a severe blow to Erdoğan's image of invincibility, as he personally worked for the AKP's candidate, former prime minister Binali Yıldırım's campaign. We have witnessed informal electoral alliances in the 2019 local elections even though there is no way to make a pre-electoral coalition formally in local elections. Therefore, there should be additional factors to the institutional arrangement that contribute to the PEC formation.

Prior to elections, Turkey experienced a massive natural disaster on February 6, 2023. Two earthquakes with magnitudes of 7.8 and 7.5 shook country's Southeastern cities, causing death of 53,537<sup>15</sup> people according to contested official numbers.<sup>16</sup>

The macro institutional features were identical to the 2018 elections. The constitutional role of the president, concurrent elections, and the two-ballot majority run-off system for presidential elections remained the same. A key institutional change in the electoral law in 2022 was the national electoral threshold, which came down from 10% to 7%. However, the other changes limited the impact of smaller parties in the pre-electoral coalitions. Firstly, having a parliamentary group was not sufficient to become eligible to run in elections, the political party needed to establish their organizational structure in at least 41 cities out of 81. Secondly, the apportionment of seats was not by the total vote of the alliance itself but by the individual party's vote share. This meant that smaller parties had to perform better in order to win their own seats. Thirdly, the president was legally permitted to campaign using state resources.<sup>17</sup>

Two crucial factors that may have impacted risk perception of political parties were democratic and economic performance after the 2018 elections. The erosion in the democratic institutions continued as the playing field remained tilted in favor of the incumbent. The private and public media outlets were completely biased, prominent opposition figures were in jail despite the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), and the popular Istanbul mayor was threatened with a political ban for allegedly insulting a public officer. A sizable number of Kurdish municipalities were governed under appointed "trustees". Furthermore, Erdoğan had been in office for 20.5 years by the time of the 2023 elections and another electoral loss for the

---

<sup>15</sup>(*Bakan Yerlikaya: Depremlerde 53 Bin 537 Canımızı Kaybettik* 02.02.24)

<sup>16</sup>(*Karataş* 22.03.23)

<sup>17</sup>*MİLLETVEKİLİ SEÇİMİ KANUNU İLE BAZI KANUNLARDA DEĞİŞİKLİK YAPILMASINA DAİR KANUN* (06.04.22)

opposition would mean facing more than 25 years of Erdoğan rule.

The economic performance was very poor: The USD/TRY rate was 19.6, compared to 4.7 in 2018. The inflation rate was 39.59 percent, coming down from levels of 80%, 91.1 consumer confidence index, which was higher than other elections but still signaled a non-confidence in the economic outlook, unequal distribution of an increased GDP per capita as GINI rose to 0.433.

All these factors meant higher uncertainty in elections and appeared as the opposition's best chance to beat Erdoğan. In many opinion polls, Kılıçdaroğlu was leading the race, even winning in the first round according to some surveys.

Figure 3.2 Ballot Paper for the Legislative Election in 2023



### 3.4.3.1 Opposition pre-electoral coalition behavior in 2023

Following the first-round loss in 2018, the Nation Alliance was disbanded. This was a sign of it being merely an electoral cooperation. However, in 2022, the opposition showed that forming alliances is not a choice against a competitive authoritarian regime, it is a must because they could be easily outplayed without a strategic partnership. On February 12, 2022, the leaders of six opposition parties sat at a round table and discussed the possible scenarios for a post-Erdoğan Turkey. Four of these parties were members of the Nation Alliance back in 2018. Two new members were conservative GP (Gelecek Partisi- Future Party), and conservative-liberal DEVA<sup>18</sup> (Demokrasi ve Atılım Partisi -Democracy and Progress Party), which both splintered from the ruling AKP. The leader of the former, Ahmet Davutoğlu, was the prime minister (2014-2016) and the chair of the AKP (2014-2016) after Erdoğan was elected as the president, and the leader of the latter was a deputy PM (2009-2015) under both Davutoğlu and Erdoğan, have served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs (2007-2009) and the State Minister in charge of Economy (2002-2007). He was also the Chief Negotiator in Turkey's accession negotiations to the EU (2005 and 2009).

<sup>18</sup>It is an acronym that also means "Solution" in a relatively older Turkish with Arabic origin.

In a nutshell, both leaders were former top AKP elites who ruled alongside Erdoğan for many years. Davutoğlu had not split from the AKP amicably, as Erdoğan had forced him to step down from prime ministry and he was replaced by a loyalist, Binali Yıldırım.

This opposition coordination was at first known as the “Table of Six”. The initial meeting took place as a preliminary meeting, where the leaders discussed general matters. The focal points were democratic norms and institutions, returning to the (strengthened) parliamentary system, depolarization, and economic and social problems. On February 28, 2022, 16 days after the meeting, the Table published an announcement that included the basic principles of the new strengthened parliamentary system. The announcement was not made in a party building but in a hotel. The Table gathered often to discuss political matters. In the remaining time of 2022, they met in June (and published a document about election security) and September and gathered twice in November. Within 12 months, they held 12 meetings and published five documents/reports about Turkey’s issues and post-Erdoğan transition, including three meetings in 2023 (one was after earthquakes in February). Only in their eleventh meeting in late January did they announce that they would switch to the name of the Nation Alliance and compete in the elections under this banner. At that time, the strategy for the presidential elections was still unclear, and the candidate was not chosen.

On March 3, a major setback for the coalition occurred as the İYİ Party leader Meral Akşener decided to leave the Table and criticized other political parties for supporting CHP leader Kılıçdaroğlu’s candidacy for their own sakes (Balta and Demiralp 2023). She claimed that the İYİ Party proposed Ekrem İmamoğlu or Mansur Yavaş, CHP mayors of Istanbul and Ankara, who were more popular according to their surveys, as the opposition’s presidential candidate. However, other five party leaders proposed, and dictated according to Akşener, the candidacy of the CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu. On March 4, the “Table of Five” gathered without Akşener for the first and only time and announced that they would announce their presidential candidate on March 6. On said date, Akşener returned to the table, accepting Kılıçdaroğlu’s candidacy with an additional demand: İmamoğlu and Yavaş were going to be “executive” vice presidents, in addition to all Table of Six party leaders becoming vice presidents. On March 6, Kılıçdaroğlu’s candidacy was announced at the Saadet headquarters. Later on, the Labor and Freedom Alliance consisted of YSP (HDP had a party closure case in process) and TİP decided to endorse Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and not to nominate their own candidate. According to an informal interview conducted with Mehmet Akif Hamzaçebi, former Secretary General of CHP, the Table of Six had turned into a structure to validate the candidacy of Kılıçdaroğlu.

Due to the changes in the electoral law, the smaller parties in an electoral alliance could not afford to compete separately. Yet rather than making PEC less attractive for small parties, this rule change incentivized joint lists (Sayarı and Taşkın 2024). CHP took the biggest risk, including 76 names from other parties within their lists. Even five İYİ Party candidates were nominated from CHP lists. CHP, a center-left social democratic party, spared tens of MP candidates to center-right to right-wing parties. As Balta and Demiralp (2024) claim, the ideological dispersion of partners in this pre-electoral coalition hindered efforts to rally around a single manifesto firmly.

Furthermore, the formation of Nation Alliance and its failure to support a strong candidate increased the level of uncertainty in the elections, which became costly as the opposition thought itself to be in the winning position right before the elections and did not want to take further risks (Balta and Demiralp 2024, 16). When they thought they were winning, they positioned themselves in the domain of gains and avoided taking risks by endorsing a candidate who could pose problems in terms of power-sharing in the post-electoral period in case of a victory. This paradox led to more uncertainty, which voters do not like, especially those who would be expected to switch their vote to the opposition.

### **3.4.3.2 Incumbent pre-electoral coalition behavior in 2023**

Early in the election period, the AKP's People's Alliance core members from the 2018 elections remained the same. However, a decisive factor for this PEC's electoral performance was the emergence of a new Islamist party, the New Welfare Party (YRP in Turkish). The party was established in November 2018 and appealed to the Islamist conservative base of the AKP, who predominantly voted for the original Welfare Party of previous PM Necmettin Erbakan in the 1990s. Fatih Erbakan, the son of Necmettin Erbakan, founded the party, claiming to be the true successor of the ideology of National Vision. On March 20, 2023, Erbakan announced that he would seek candidacy and his party would compete in the parliamentary elections without being a part of the People's Alliance. After nearly getting seventy thousand signatures for candidacy (one hundred thousand needed), AKP quickly approached and convinced YRP to become a part of their pre-electoral coalition. YRP claimed that they were aligned on the core issues; the Nation Alliance could not be beneficial for the country and announced that Erbakan was withdrawing from presidential candidacy, endorsing Erdoğan. AKP had to convince them to guarantee the YRP's votes and organizational support. All in all, YRP is much more hardliner than AKP

and, to an extent, dictated their ideological lines to the latter.

Apart from the YRP's inclusion to the incumbent PEC, the external endorsement of two incredibly distant political parties was noteworthy: the center-left Democratic Left Party (DSP, which was established by the revered former CHP leader Bülent Ecevit) who were given three MP candidacies from the AKP list, and Kurdish Sunni Islamist Free Cause Party (HÜDA PAR in Turkish) who were given four MP candidacies from the AKP list, which was unofficially associated with Islamist terrorist organization Kurdish Hezbollah. Even though many other parties endorsed Erdoğan unilaterally, these parties were included in the AKP lists in the parliamentary elections. Therefore, these developments can be counted as part of the expansion of the incumbent's pre-electoral coalition. The People's Alliance's sole presidential candidate was Erdoğan once again.

In conclusion, AKP stretched its PEC so much so that it included a center-left party (DSP), a far-right Turkish nationalist party (MHP), a far-right Kurdish Islamist party (HÜDA PAR), a far-right Islamist conservative party (BBP), and another far-right Islamist party (YRP). As a right-wing conservative coalition *formateur*, AKP was to the left compared to the median position of its coalition.

While an expansive evaluation of the benefits received from PEC formation in the 2023 general and presidential elections is beyond the scope of this thesis, we can underline a few points. With pro-Kurdish HDP not nominating a presidential candidate, the presidential elections, especially in the second round, took place between two major parties' candidates; CHP candidate Kılıçdaroğlu receiving 48% support was not interpreted by him as a "major loss." In total, 35 candidates from small parties running on CHP lists entered into parliament, and MPs from Gelecek and Saadet united under a parliamentary group, increasing their representation advantages. CHP's seats declined compared to the 2018 general elections. From the incumbent bloc, YRP, a new party running for the first time, chose to run under its own name and list and was able to get five seats in parliament. Had the YRP run without being a part of a PEC, it would not have passed the 7% threshold. Although AKP's vote share decreased compared to 2018, its alliance still maintained a parliamentary majority.

Table 3.1 Turkish General Election Results: 2018 vs. 2023

Party	2018 Votes	2018 %	2023 Votes	2023 %
AKP	21,338,693	42.56%	18,586,137	35.32%
MHP	5,565,331	11.10%	5,283,345	10.04%
YRP	–	–	1,505,736	2.86%
HDP (YSP)	5,867,302	11.70%	4,624,094	8.79%
TİP	–	–	903,742	1.72%
CHP	11,354,190	22.65%	13,374,463	25.41%
İYİP	4,993,479	9.96%	5,211,632	9.90%
SP	672,139	1.34%	–	–
ZP	–	–	1,198,647	2.28%
Others	346,041	0.69%	1,938,386	3.68%
<b>Toplam</b>	<b>50,137,175</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>52,628,182</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 3.2 Turkish Presidential Election Results: 2018

Candidate	Votes	%
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	26,330,823	52.59%
Muharrem İnce	15,340,321	30.64%
Meral Akşener	3,649,030	7.29%
Selahattin Demirtaş	4,205,794	8.40%
Temel Karamollaoğlu	443,704	0.89%
Doğu Perinçek	98,955	0.20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50,068,627</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 3.3 Turkish Presidential Election Results: 2023 (Both Rounds)

Candidate	R1 Votes	R1 %	R2 Votes	R2 %
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	26,086,102	49.24%	26,690,529	51.91%
Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu	23,873,749	45.07%	24,728,027	48.09%
Sinan Oğan	2,796,613	5.28%	–	–
Muharrem İnce	216,470	0.41%	–	–
<b>Total</b>	<b>52,972,934</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>51,418,556</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 3.5 Comparison

In this chapter, I have thoroughly examined the underlying conditions and behavior of the main opposition and incumbent parties. Comparing the 2018 and 2023 elections in Turkey provides a fruitful ground to analyze the political party's decision-making under different levels of risk and uncertainty. Between the two cases, nearly all structural and institutional factors remained the same, whereas the conjunctural systemic factors such as economic performance, democracy level, incumbent's tenure, and degree of uncertainty for all parties changed drastically.

The economic downfall was three-fold: firstly, key macroeconomic factors showed weak performances, such as inflation, unemployment, and the USD/TRY rate (which is crucial because of Turkey's dependency on imported raw materials). Secondly, many economic policies and decisions disproportionately hit educated middle-class urban voters who predominantly voted for the opposition, especially for the CHP. Thirdly, an increasingly neo-patrimonial economic model favored a few business conglomerates and eliminated the rest, preventing state economic opportunities from being fairly distributed.<sup>19</sup>

Turkey's democratic processes were marred by executive aggrandizement, primarily by executive decrees that undermined the parliamentary will (Özcan and Kimya 2023). Turkish Constitutional Court and the European Court of Human Rights decisions were systematically ignored and the judicial institutions were verbally attacked by President Erdoğan and his ministers. Erdoğan simply used all his constitutional powers and beyond. His control over the ruling AKP as its leader and close economic and political relations with close business circles who also controlled much of the media amplified the incumbent advantage. Between 2018 and 2023, the 2019 Istanbul mayorship elections were annulled and repeated, and those Eastern provinces that were won by the pro-Kurdish HDP in the local elections were governed by appointed trustees (kayyum). These developments also paved the way to a decreasing popularity for Erdoğan. Even though mostly opposition parties and their voters, most of the society was affected by poor economic performance and real-life problems such as the housing crisis. The party system was affected by these cracks as the number of splinter parties from the AKP increased. The projected support for these parties varied over time in the opinion polls.

Given the fact that the institutional factors were nearly identical between the two elections, we can keep the effect of institutions constant. Even though there were

---

<sup>19</sup> Kılıçdaroğlu İlk Kez Açıkladı: "Beşli Çeteye" Kaç Milyar Dolarlık İhale Verildi? (2022)

some changes in the electoral law, such as decreasing electoral threshold and within-PEC seat allocation rules, *de jure* responsibilities of the president were the same, as well as his election rule. Furthermore, both elections were concurrent with legislative elections, which incentivized parties to form PECs since parties create national strategies in concurrent elections, which also affect their behavior in the presidential elections. In this sense, it is not surprising to observe electoral alliances as the new normal in Turkish politics.

However, forming or joining a PEC is never a risk-free behavior. It has multiple risks, most notably compromises from ideology, seat, office benefits, voter turnout, and brand identity. This is a relevant risk even if PEC partners are ideologically closer. As this discrepancy between the parties grows, so do the risks because of ideological incompatibility. Furthermore, increasing the number of members in the pre-electoral coalition creates the risk of moving further away from the minimum winning coalition, resulting in suboptimal allocation of office and cabinet seats in the post-election period. Therefore, it can be argued that, forming pre-electoral coalitions is a better strategy than competing alone, however, it is always riskier and this risk increases as the PEC becomes more ideologically diverse and stretched in terms of numbers. Conditions that lead to stretched and diverse coalitions are explained under the prospect theory in this study.

In the Turkish context, the actor's PEC behaviors between 2018 and 2023 changed dramatically, not only the number of parties but also the ideological discrepancy, commitment, and coordination levels. In 2023, both CHP and AKP enlarged the size of their PECs with additional members. Furthermore, the opposition parties organized multiple meetings, announced a common program, and even declared that they would govern the country together, unlike the less loose electoral alliance in 2018. The inclusion of two splinter parties from the AKP shifted the median ideological position of the PEC to the right, while CHP and its leader, Kılıçdaroğlu, maintained their former role. Similarly, the incumbent AKP preserved its PEC in between the elections. Furthermore, they formally included one new political party and informally cooperated with two distant political parties. The inclusion of these two informal allies, center-left DSP and far-right HÜDA PAR, seems paradoxical: it might be argued that these parties did not have much bargaining power, so their impact within the PEC was limited. If so, why did AKP care about including them in their party lists? If it was to signal that they are inclusionary, why did they feel the need to signal this trait? In my opinion, the prospect theory explains this behavior accurately when political and economic conditions are considered.

One of the fundamental contributions of the prospect theory is including reference



points in the analysis of economic decision-making. Another important aspect is that reference points are relative, meaning that they do not have to be in the present, but actors can perceive their reference point in the future as well as the present. This is a good explanation of why an authoritarian incumbent who can control media, co-opt opposition parties, jail political rivals, and even annul some elections might see himself in the domain of losses. If the uncertainty increased against the incumbent victory and the chances favored the opposition, the incumbent would place its reference point in the future and deem himself in the domain of losses. Therefore, as a coalition *formateur*, the incumbent seeks risk to avoid a potential loss. The same logic applies to the opposition. No matter how much the opposition is favored to win the elections or if there is uncertainty about the potential winner, a competitive authoritarian incumbent can revert this with the menu of manipulation at hand. In addition to this unfavorable condition, the opposition parties and supporters already face difficulties in political, social, and economic life outside of the electoral process. As a consequence, the opposition would also embrace the risks. The perception of gains and losses can push actors to make choices that are against their expected utilities. The key argument is that both the incumbent and the opposition enlarged their respective coalitions, with unlikely partners with no material or vote prospects. This means accepting more risks without the promise of returns of equal size. This is perfectly in line with the logic of the domain of losses or not being in the domain of gains. High stakes with high uncertainty to lose them force actors to place themselves in the domain of losses, therefore take risks.

The major institutional change that affected PEC formation was the change in the electoral law that permitted electoral alliances officially in the parliamentary elections which was a necessary condition to form formal PECs, though not a sufficient condition. Furthermore, there was no prior experience of PEC formation in the 2014 presidential elections, which took place under a parliamentary system with no concurrent elections, whereas this was present for the opposition parties in 2018. The incentive to cooperate for the legislative election also affected the coordination (or the lack of it) in the presidential election. As Başkan and her colleagues show, the ideological coherence of the Nation Alliance was lower than that of the People's Alliance in the 2018 elections, mainly because the former was more desperate to win the elections to stop an authoritarian regime from continuing its existence (Başkan, Gümrükçü, and Canyaş 2022). The incumbent was able to curb their risk relatively more since their utility function is closer to the expected utility than the opposition, as shown in the previous chapter.

Comparing the 2018 and 2023 elections, the outcomes were different in terms of PEC formation and the extent of PEC. We should first note that the incumbent party

(AKP) did not make a PEC at all in 2014. In response to changing institutional dynamics, they teamed up with two other right-wing parties to form the People's Alliance (Cumhur İttifakı) in 2018. Secondly, the opposition formed a 4-party PEC with the name of Nation Alliance (Millet İttifakı), which was organizationally more coherent and determined than the informal CHP-MHP cooperation in 2014, which featured a single candidate in the presidential elections. Since there were no concurrent parliamentary elections hence no cooperation in terms of MP seats, we cannot confidently speculate whether the extent of cooperation would have been higher if there were concurrent elections. However, in the local elections that were held less than 5 months earlier in the same year, there was no cooperation between parties. On the other hand, we witnessed a great deal of cooperation in the 2019 local election. Arguably past experience of cooperation has informed the opposition political parties' willingness to form PECs. In the 2023 elections, the opposition parties have revived but also enlarged the PEC in terms of number of partners. The major parties from both sides, AKP and CHP increased their risk-acceptance between the 2018 and 2023 elections in Turkey. We can argue that as the power of the presidential office increased dramatically in this period, the presidential elections have become the main driver of the pre-electoral coalition-making process. With YRP joining Cumhur İttifakı, its party leader chose not to run as a presidential candidate. In the opposition camp, agreeing on a single candidate turned out to be difficult and costly as the İYİ Party leader left Millet İttifakı and only agreed to rejoin after CHP agreed that its two popular mayors would be presented as VPs. Possibly fearing brand dilution that may result from the more dense coordination with CHP and reluctantly supporting its leader as the presidential candidate, İYİ chose to run independently in the 2024 local elections and lost sizable support.

## 4. CONCLUSION

This study aims to explore the dynamics of pre-electoral coalition making. In addition to the institutional factors which dominate the literature, an actor-based approach is embraced. The main theoretical framework for explaining the PEC formation is the prospect theory from behavioral economics, which was first introduced by Kahneman and Tversky (1979). According to the prospect theory, the reference point that actors position themselves is a crucial aspect of the decision-making process. If the actors are in the domain of losses, they tend to take risks, which are sometimes contrary to the expectations of the expected utility theory. If the actors are in the domain of gains, they tend to avoid risks, which can be unnecessary as well.

Competing as a pre-electoral coalition involves tradeoffs since it may have side effects like brand dilution, voter base dissatisfaction, and compromises from office, pork, ideology, and policy. In this sense, it involves risk in both the electoral performance and post-electoral process in case of victory. In fact, the most costly scenario is where a party takes all these risks and fails anyway. Furthermore, these risks increase if the pre-electoral coalition partners are ideologically distant. This is because accepting an ideologically distant party as a partner and compromising on policy, ideology, and office benefits would mean increased voter dissatisfaction. In presidential regimes, where there is no guarantee that the president will honor the agreements, in case of an electoral victory may also not result in office and policy benefits.

In an observational study, it is not possible to determine how politicians position their reference points before an election; this could have been done in an experimental setting or through structured interviews. However, proxies of the domain of losses, such as declining democratic performance, increasingly institutionalized autocracy, inflation, and other factors, are employed as the proxies of risk, which is forming a pre-electoral coalition and accepting ideologically distant parties as partners in this context. This is a new approach to understanding PEC formation, and what constitutes the domain of losses or which circumstances play a role in an actor's

self-placement in the domain of losses could be further evaluated and improved.

The results of the quantitative chapter provide mixed findings. Important measures of the domain of losses, such as an opponent pre-electoral coalition, institutionalization of the dominant party, and a facilitating factor, previous opposition pre-electoral coalition, are important predictors of PEC formation. Interesting findings, such as the age of the dominant party having a significant impact in the opposite direction for the incumbent and opposition PEC formation, show that there is a need to shift the focus of the literature, such as studying incumbent coordination in non-democratic elections. On the other hand, the variables that I expected to be the most prominent effect, such as institutionalized autocracy and change in democratic performance, did not produce the effect I foresaw. In my opinion, this is not a shortcoming of the framework of the prospect theory; instead, it is a sign that a formal model or a quantitative model with more complete data is needed to achieve more credible results.

In the qualitative chapter, the Turkish case is examined as a single-case study with a paired comparison of the 2018 and 2023 elections. Studying a single case offers a high level of internal validity. Since we do not need to control for the unobserved factors such as cultural, social, and historical aspects, we can simply focus on the changes in the observed factors, especially those that create a domain of losses and the risks taken by both the opposition and the incumbent. The analysis concludes that all parties started to see themselves as in the domain of losses because of deteriorating democratic and economic conditions, as well as the increasingly uncertain electoral environment. Since there is a growing literature on opposition strategies and cooperation in competitive authoritarian elections, the risk-taking behavior of the opposition in such an election might have been easily predicted. However, the divergence of a competitive authoritarian incumbent from cooptation tactics to form pre-electoral coalitions would not have been easily predicted. This also supports the claim that more studies that focus on the dynamics of PEC formation for incumbent parties are needed.

Further studies might focus on the probability of success of different types of pre-electoral coalitions in terms of extent, partner selection, and timing. The electoral outcomes of the pre-electoral coalitions can be a good area to study in detail. Furthermore, in-depth elite interviews can help us decode the mysteries behind the shut doors and what motivates political parties to propose or join PECs. Further studies can also focus on the specific electoral, policy, and office benefits that PECs generate to evaluate how these considerations impact different ways and levels of coordination when parties join forces to form pre-electoral coalitions.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Albala, Adrián, and Lucas Couto. 2023. "Question of Timing: Pre-Electoral Coalitions in Multiparty Presidential Regimes." *Brazilian Political Science Review* 17(1): e0001.
- Albala, Adrián, André Borges, and Lucas Couto. 2023. "Pre-Electoral Coalitions and Cabinet Stability in Presidential Systems." *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 25(February): 64–82.
- Albright, Jeremy J. 2010. "The Multidimensional Nature of Party Competition." *Party Politics* 16(November): 699–719.
- Alemán, Eduardo, and George Tsebelis. 2011. "Political Parties and Government Coalitions in the Americas." *Journal of Politics in Latin America* 3(April): 3–28.
- Altınörs, Görkem, and Ümit Akçay. 2022. "Authoritarian Neoliberalism, Crisis, and Consolidation: The Political Economy of Regime Change in Turkey." *Globalizations* 19(October): 1029–1053.
- Alvarez, R. Michael, and Betsy Sinclair. 2012. "Electoral Institutions and Legislative Behavior: The Effects of Primary Processes." *Political Research Quarterly* 65(September): 544–557.
- Aras, Bülent, and Ludger Helms. 2021. "The Limits of Institutionalizing Predominance: Understanding the Emergence of Turkey's New Opposition." *European Political Science* 20(December): 592–602.
- Armstrong, David, Ora John Reuter, and Graeme B. Robertson. 2020. "Getting the Opposition Together: Protest Coordination in Authoritarian Regimes." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 36(January): 1–19.
- Bakan Yerlikaya: Depremlerde 53 Bin 537 Canımızı Kaybettik. 02.02.24. <https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/bakan-yerlikaya-depremlerde-53-bin-537-canimizi-kaybettik,g4ChtXUUwkeWoxJm7M2p3g>.
- Bakiner, Onur. 2023. "Only Game in Town? The Persistence of Competitive Authoritarian Regimes in Modern Turkey." *Turkish Studies* 24(October): 853–881.
- Balta, Evren, and Seda Demiralp. 2024. "Paradox of Optimism: Opposition Coordination against Autocratic Incumbents in Turkey's 2019 and 2023 Elections." *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* (April): 1–21.
- Bandyopadhyay, Siddhartha, Kalyan Chatterjee, and Tomas Sjoström. 2011. "Pre-Electoral Coalitions and Post-election Bargaining." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 6(August): 1–53.
- Başkan, Filiz, Selin Bengi Gümrükçü, and F. Orkunt Canyaş. 2022. "Forming Pre-Electoral Coalitions in Competitive Authoritarian Contexts: The Case of the 2018 Parliamentary Elections in Turkey." *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 24(March): 323–343.

- Beach, Derek. 2016. "It's All About Mechanisms – What Process-Tracing Case Studies Should Be Tracing." *New Political Economy* 21(September): 463–472.
- Bennett, Andrew, and Jeffrey T. Checkel, eds. 2014. *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool*. 1 ed. Cambridge University Press.
- Bilgin, Hasret Dikici, and Emre Erdoğan. 2018. "Obscurities of a Referendum Foretold: The 2017 Constitutional Amendments in Turkey." *Review of Middle East Studies* 52(April): 29–42.
- Blais, André, and Indridi H. Indridason. 2007. "Making Candidates Count: The Logic of Electoral Alliances in Two-Round Legislative Elections." *The Journal of Politics* 69(February): 193–205.
- Borges, André, and Mathieu Turgeon. 2019. "Presidential Coattails in Coalitional Presidentialism." *Party Politics* 25(March): 192–202.
- Borges, André, Mathieu Turgeon, and Adrián Albala. 2021. "Electoral Incentives to Coalition Formation in Multiparty Presidential Systems." *Party Politics* 27(November): 1279–1289.
- Borsuk, Imren, and Paul T. Levin. 2021. "Social Coexistence and Violence During Turkey's Authoritarian Transition." *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 21(April): 175–187.
- Bräuninger, Thomas, and Nathalie Giger. 2018. "Strategic Ambiguity of Party Positions in Multi-Party Competition." *Political Science Research and Methods* 6(July): 527–548.
- Bunce, Valerie J., and Sharon L. Wolchik. 2011. *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries*. 1 ed. Cambridge University Press.
- Bunker, Kenneth. 2019. "Why Do Parties Cooperate in Presidentialism? Electoral and Government Coalition Formation in Latin America." *Revista de Estudios Políticos* (December): 171–199.
- Cagaptay, Soner. 2002. "The November 2002 Elections and Turkey's New Political Era." *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 6(December): 42–48.
- Çarkoğlu, Ali. 2022. "Turkey's November 2002 Elections: A New Beginning?" *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 6(December): 30–41.
- Carroll, Royce, and Gary W. Cox. 2007. "The Logic of Gamson's Law: Pre-election Coalitions and Portfolio Allocations." *American Journal of Political Science* 51(2): 300–313.
- Cebeci, Büşra. 2018. "Saadet Partisi'nin 24 Haziran hüsrani." <https://medyascope.tv/2018/06/25/saadet-partisinin-24-haziran-husrani/>.
- Chaisty, Paul, Nic Cheeseman, and Timothy Power. 2014. "Rethinking the 'Presidentialism Debate': Conceptualizing Coalitional Politics in Cross-Regional Perspective." *Democratization* 21(January): 72–94.

- Chiru, Mihail. 2015. "Early Marriages Last Longer: Pre-electoral Coalitions and Government Survival in Europe." *Government and Opposition* 50(April): 165–188.
- Christiansen, Flemming J., Rasmus L. Nielsen, and Rasmus B. Pedersen. 2014. "Friendship, Courting, and Engagement: Pre-electoral Coalition Dynamics in Action." *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 20(October): 413–429.
- Collier, David, and James Mahoney. 1996. "Insights and Pitfalls: Selection Bias in Qualitative Research." *World Politics* 49(October).
- Colomer, Josep M., and Gabriel L. Negretto. 2005. "Can Presidentialism Work Like Parliamentarism?" *Government and Opposition* 40(1): 60–89.
- Cox, Gary W. 1997. *Making Votes Count: Strategic Coordination in the World's Electoral Systems*. 1 ed. Cambridge University Press.
- Debus, Marc. 2009. "Pre-Electoral Commitments and Government Formation." *Public Choice* 138(January): 45–64.
- Demirkol, Özhan, and Aslıhan Çoban Balci. 2021. "Türkiye'de Seçim İttifakları: 1950-2018." *Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Dergisi* 22(November): 350–377.
- Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu 10 yıl sonra ilk kez açıkladı: Çatı aday fikri kimindi?* 2024. <https://anlatilaninotesi.com.tr/20240513/ekmeleddin-ihsanoglu-10-yil-sonra-ilk-kez-acikladi-cati-aday-fikri-kimindi-1083741265.html>.
- Erdoğan'dan Gezi Parkı eylemcilerine ültimatı.* 2013. [https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2013/06/130615\\_erdogan\\_miting](https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2013/06/130615_erdogan_miting).
- Erdoğan: Saksı Seçmiyoruz, Tarafsız Olmayacağım...* 2014. <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/87867/erdogan-saksi-secmiyoruz-tarafsiz-olmayacagim>.
- Esen, Berk, and Sebnem Gumuscu. 2016. "Rising Competitive Authoritarianism in Turkey." *Third World Quarterly* 37(September): 1581–1606.
- Esen, Berk, and Sebnem Gumuscu. 2018. "The Perils of "Turkish Presidentialism"" *Review of Middle East Studies* 52(April): 43–53.
- Esen, Berk, and Sebnem Gumuscu. 2023. "How Erdoğan's Populism Won Again." *Journal of Democracy* 34(July): 21–32.
- Fanis, Maria. 2004. "Collective Action Meets Prospect Theory: An Application to Coalition Building in Chile, 1973-75." *Political Psychology* 25(3): 363–388.
- Gamson, William A. 1961. "A Theory of Coalition Formation." *American Sociological Review* 26(June): 373.
- Gandhi, Jennifer, and Elvin Ong. 2019. "Committed or Conditional Democrats? Opposition Dynamics in Electoral Autocracies." *American Journal of Political Science* 63(October): 948–963.

- Gandhi, Jennifer, and Ora John Reuter. 2013. “The Incentives for Pre-electoral Coalitions in Non-Democratic Elections.” *Democratization* 20(January): 137–159.
- Gezi ve 17 Aralık Olayları Karşısında Dik Durmasaydık, Bugün Çok Farklı Bir Türkiye’de Yaşıyor Olurduk.* 2014. <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/1358/gezi-ve-17-aralik-olaylari-karsisinda-dik-durmasaydik-bugun-cok-farkli-bir-turkiyede-yasiyor-olurduk>.
- Golder, Sona Nadenichek. 2005. “Pre-Electoral Coalitions in Comparative Perspective: A Test of Existing Hypotheses.” *Electoral Studies* 24(December): 643–663.
- Golder, Sona Nadenichek. 2006a. *The Logic of Pre-electoral Coalition Formation. Parliaments and Legislatures* Columbus: Ohio State University Press.
- Golder, Sona Nadenichek. 2006b. “Pre-Electoral Coalition Formation in Parliamentary Democracies.” *British Journal of Political Science* 36(April): 193–212.
- Greene, Kenneth F. 2008. “Dominant Party Strategy and Democratization.” *American Journal of Political Science* 52(January): 16–31.
- Griebeler, Marcelo De C, and Roberta Carnelos Resende. 2021. “A Model of Electoral Alliances in Highly Fragmented Party Systems.” *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 33(January): 3–24.
- Gürpınar, Doğan. 2023. *Apparatchiks and Ideologues in Islamist Turkey: The Intellectual Order of Islamism and Populism*. Palgrave Pivot Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Heckman, James. 1974. “Shadow Prices, Market Wages, and Labor Supply.” *Econometrica* 42(July): 679.
- Helms, Ludger. 2023. “Political Oppositions in Democratic and Authoritarian Regimes: A State-of-the-Field(s) Review.” *Government and Opposition* 58(April): 391–414.
- Hicken, Allen, and Heather Stoll. 2011. “Presidents and Parties: How Presidential Elections Shape Coordination in Legislative Elections.” *Comparative Political Studies* 44(July): 854–883.
- Hortala-Vallve, Rafael, Jaakko Meriläinen, and Janne Tukiainen. 2024. “Pre-Electoral Coalitions and the Distribution of Political Power.” *Public Choice* 198(January): 47–67.
- Hyde, Susan, and Nikolay Marinov. 2013. “National Elections Across Democracy and Autocracy.”
- Ibenskas, Raimondas, and Nicole Bolleyer. 2018. “Forms of Inter-party Cooperation: Electoral Coalitions and Party Mergers.” *East European Politics and Societies: and Cultures* 32(August): 451–472.
- İğdir, Zeynep Özge. 2023. Institutional Regulation Of Interparty Pre-Electoral Coordination In Europe: 1945-2018 PhD thesis Sabancı University Istanbul: .



- Jiménez, Maryhen. 2023. “Contesting Autocracy: Repression and Opposition Coordination in Venezuela.” *Political Studies* 71(February): 47–68.
- Jones, Bryan D. 1999. “Bounded Rationality.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 2(June): 297–321.
- Kahneman, Daniel, and Amos Tversky. 1979. “Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision under Risk.” *Econometrica* 47(2): 263–291.
- Kalaycıoğlu, Ersin. 2012. “*Kulturkampf* in Turkey: The Constitutional Referendum of 12 September 2010.” *South European Society and Politics* 17(March): 1–22.
- Kalaycıoğlu, Ersin. 2015. “Turkish Popular Presidential Elections: Deepening Legitimacy Issues and Looming Regime Change.” *South European Society and Politics* 20(April): 157–179.
- Karataş, İrem. 22.03.23. “İYİ Partili Usta, Depremde Yaşanan Can Kaybı Verilerine İlişkin Cumhuriyet’e Konuştu: Afetin Ardından Kullanım Dışı Kalan Kredi Kartı Sayısı...” <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/turkiye/iyi-partili-usta-depremdede-yasanan-can-kaybi-verilerine-iliskin-cumhuriyete-konustu-afetin-ardindan-kullanim-disi-2063810>.
- Kellam, Marisa. 2017. “Why Pre-Electoral Coalitions in Presidential Systems?” *British Journal of Political Science* 47(April): 391–411.
- Kılıçdaroğlu İlk Kez Açıkladı: “Beşli Çeteye” Kaç Milyar Dolarlık İhale Verildi? 2022. <https://medyascope.tv/2022/08/17/kilicdaroglu-ilk-kez-acikladi-besli-ceteye-kac-milyar-dolarlik-ihale-verildi>.
- Korkmaz, Seren Selvin. 2024. “The Role of the Opposition in Autocratisation: The Case of Turkey.” *Third World Quarterly* (May): 1–18.
- Levin, Paul T. 2023. “Reflections on Şerif Mardin’s Center-Periphery Thesis.” *Turkish Studies* 24(August): 617–639.
- Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan A. Way. 2002. “Elections Without Democracy: The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism.” *Journal of Democracy* 13(April): 51–65.
- Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan A. Way. 2010. *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*. Illustrated edition ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Levy, Jack S. 1997. “Prospect Theory, Rational Choice, and International Relations.” *International Studies Quarterly* 41(March): 87–112.
- Linde, Jona, and Barbara Vis. 2017. “Do Politicians Take Risks Like the Rest of Us? An Experimental Test of Prospect Theory Under MPs.” *Political Psychology* 38(1): 101–117.
- Linz, Juan J., and Arturo Valenzuela. 1994. *The Failure of Presidential Democracy*. JHU Press.

- Lipset, Seymour Martin, and Stein Rokkan. 1967. *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives. : [Contributors: Robert R. Alford and Others]*. International Yearbook of Political Behavior Research ; Free Press.
- Lupu, Noam. 2015. "Party Polarization and Mass Partisanship: A Comparative Perspective." *Political Behavior* 37: 331–356.
- Lust-Okar, Ellen. 2005. *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World: Incumbents, Opponents, and Institutions*. 1 ed. Cambridge University Press.
- Lust-Okar, Ellen, and Amaney Ahmad Jamal. 2002. "Rulers and Rules: Reassessing the Influence of Regime Type on Electoral Law Formation." *Comparative Political Studies* 35(April): 337–366.
- Magyar, Zsuzsanna. 2022. "Marriage of Love or Marriage of Convenience? The Determinants of Pre-Electoral Coalition Formation During the French Fifth Republic 1962–2012." *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 32(January): 88–106.
- Marchenko, Yulia V., and Marc G. Genton. 2012. "A Heckman Selection-  $t$  Model." *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 107(March): 304–317.
- Mardin, Şerif. 1973. "Center-Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics?" *Daedalus* 102(1): 169–190.
- McDermott, Rose. 2004. "Prospect Theory in Political Science: Gains and Losses From the First Decade." *Political Psychology* 25(April): 289–312.
- Mercer, Jonathan. 2005. "Prospect Theory and Political Science." *Annual Review of Political Science* 8(June): 1–21.
- Michael Coppedge et al. 2024. "V-Dem Dataset V14."
- MİLLETVEKİLİ SEÇİMİ KANUNU İLE BAZI KANUNLARDA DEĞİŞİKLİK YAPILMASINA DAİR KANUN*. 06.04.22.
- Moral, Mert. 2021. "The Story of Electoral Alliances." In *Elections and Public Opinion in Turkey*. 1 ed. Routledge.
- Munck, Gerardo L. 2024. "How not to think about democracy. I Am Writing Something on Democracy, That Considers Conceptual Issues. And I Read a Paper by Coppedge, One of the Founders of V-Dem."
- Musil, Pelin Ayan. 2024. "How Opposition Parties Unite in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes: The Role of an Intermediary Party." *Democratization* 31(January): 210–232.
- Mwonzora, Gift. 2022. "Opposition Failures in Forming Pre-electoral Coalitions in Zimbabwe." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 40(October): 544–560.
- Oliver, Adam. 2024. "Reflecting on Reflection: Prospect Theory, Our Behaviors, and Our Environment." *Behavioural Public Policy* 8(January): 173–183.

- Ong, Elvin Jiayun. 2022. *Opposing Power: Building Opposition Alliances in Electoral Autocracies*. University of Michigan Press.
- Opinion No. 1084 / 2022*. 24.05.22.
- Özbudun, Ergun. 2012. “Presidentialism vs. Parliamentarism in Turkey.”
- Özcan, Abdullah Sait, and Fırat Kimya. 2023. “Executive Decrees, Omnibus Bills, and the Politics of Abusive Constitutionalism.” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* (July): 1–23.
- Pleines, Heiko. 2019. “The Political Role of Business Magnates in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes: A Comparative Analysis.” *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte / Economic History Yearbook* 60(November): 299–334.
- Przeworski, Adam. 1991. *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America*. 1 ed. Cambridge University Press.
- Raile, Eric D., Carlos Pereira, and Timothy J. Power. 2011. “The Executive Toolbox: Building Legislative Support in a Multiparty Presidential Regime.” *Political Research Quarterly* 64(June): 323–334.
- Rovny, Jan. 2012. “Who Emphasizes and Who Blurs? Party Strategies in Multidimensional Competition.” *European Union Politics* 13(June): 269–292.
- Şahin, Osman. 2021. “How Populists Securitize Elections to Win Them: The 2015 Double Elections in Turkey.” *New Perspectives on Turkey* 64(May): 7–30.
- Sayarı, Sabri, and Burcu Taşkın. 2024. “Transition from Parliamentarism to Presidentialism and the Restructuring of the Turkish Party System.” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* (March): 1–14.
- Seçim için kurulan Millet İttifakı dağıldı*. 2018. <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/gundem/secim-icin-kurulan-millet-ittifaki-dagildi-373533.html>.
- Selçuk, Orçun, and Dilara Hekimci. 2020. “The Rise of the Democracy – Authoritarianism Cleavage and Opposition Coordination in Turkey (2014–2019).” *Democratization* 27(November): 1496–1514.
- Shin, Euncheol. 2019. “A Model of Pre-electoral Coalition Formation.” *Games and Economic Behavior* 118(November): 463–485.
- Somer, Murat, and Metehan Tekinırk. 2024. “Regime Uncertainty, Democratic Erosion and Resilience, and Turkish Opposition Actors.” *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft* (March).
- Somer-Topcu, Zeynep. 2009. “Timely Decisions: The Effects of Past National Elections on Party Policy Change.” *The Journal of Politics* 71(January): 238–248.
- Spoon, Jae-Jae, and Karleen Jones West. 2015. “Alone or Together? How Institutions Affect Party Entry in Presidential Elections in Europe and South America.” *Party Politics* 21(May): 393–403.

- Strom, Kaare. 1990. "A Behavioral Theory of Competitive Political Parties." *American Journal of Political Science* 34(May): 565.
- Strom, Kaare, Ian Budge, and Michael J. Laver. 1994. "Constraints on Cabinet Formation in Parliamentary Democracies." *American Journal of Political Science* 38(May): 303.
- Svolik, Milan W. 2012. *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. 1 ed. Cambridge University Press.
- Tarrow, Sidney. 2010. "The Strategy of Paired Comparison: Toward a Theory of Practice." *Comparative Political Studies* 43(2): 230–259.
- Taşkın, Burcu, and Berfin Çakın. 2022. "Impact of Nationwide Electoral Thresholds on Party System Fragmentation and Disproportional Representation in Greece and Turkey." *Balkan Arastirma Enstitusu Dergisi* 11(1): 233–267.
- The Guardian View on a Progressive Alliance: Divided They Fall*. 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/dec/13/the-guardian-view-on-a-progressive-alliance-divided-they-fall>.
- Tversky, Amos, and Daniel Kahneman. 1986. "Rational Choice and the Framing of Decisions." *The Journal of Business* 59(4): S251–S278.
- Ufen, Andreas. 2020. "Opposition in Transition: Pre-electoral Coalitions and the 2018 Electoral Breakthrough in Malaysia." *Democratization* 27(February): 167–184.
- Vis, Barbara. 2011. "Prospect Theory and Political Decision Making." *Political Studies Review* 9(September): 334–343.
- Wahman, Michael. 2011. "Offices and Policies – Why Do Oppositional Parties Form Pre-electoral Coalitions in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes?" *Electoral Studies* 30(December): 642–657.
- Walgrave, Stefaan, Julie Sevenans, Kirsten Van Camp, and Peter Loewen. 2018. "What Draws Politicians' Attention? An Experimental Study of Issue Framing and Its Effect on Individual Political Elites." *Political Behavior* 40(3): 547–569.
- Yabancı, Bilge. 2024. "Civic Opposition and Democratic Backsliding: Mobilization Dynamics and Rapport with Political Parties." *Government and Opposition* (May): 1–25.

## APPENDIX A

Table A.1 Summary Statistics for 3-year Change Models

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
Incumbent PEC	.0888889	.2851118	0	1	270
$\Delta$ 3-Year Liberal Democracy	.0288481	.0969332	-.256	.544	270
$\Delta$ 3-Year Institutionalized Autocracy	-.9481481	2.365547	-9	7	270
Electoral Uncertainty	.2740741	.4468748	0	1	270
Opposition PEC	.1185185	.3238213	0	1	270
Dominant Party Age	15.82222	16.96459	0	72	270
Previous Opposition PEC	.1	.3005571	0	1	270
Democratic Opposition	.6558519	.2748147	.015	1	270
Economic Crisis	.2148148	.4114565	0	1	270
Inflation t-1	89.97442	545.8972	-8.525	7428.7	270
Presidential Election Dummy	.437037	.4969409	0	1	270
Latin America Dummy	.137037	.344525	0	1	270

Figure A.1 Opponent PECs Marginal Effects

### Comparison of Predicted Margins

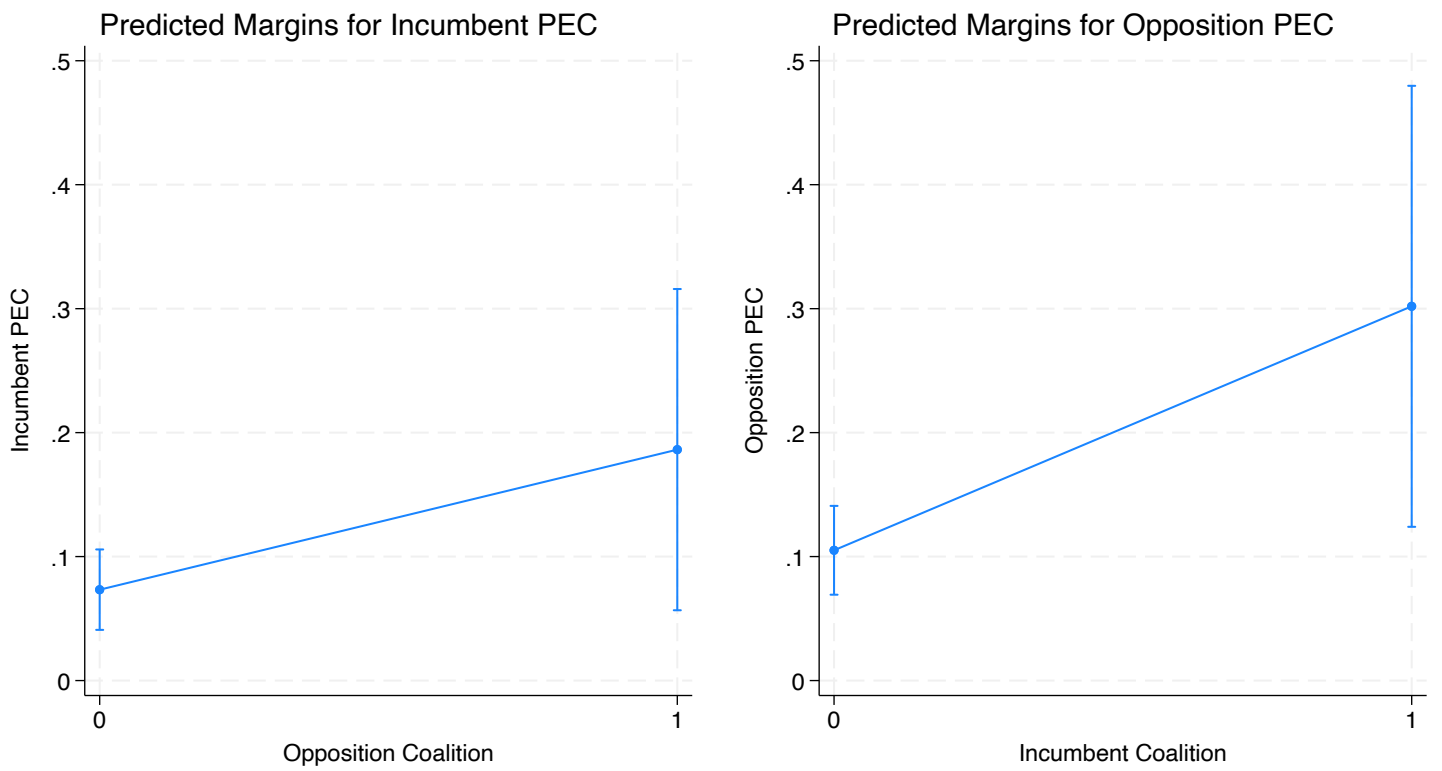


Table A.2 Sample for the PEC Formation Hypothesis - Part 1

<b>Country Name</b>	<b>Freq.</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cum.</b>
Algeria	2	0.74	0.74
Argentina	4	1.48	2.22
Armenia	3	1.11	3.33
Azerbaijan	2	0.74	4.07
Bangladesh	2	0.74	4.81
Belarus	7	2.59	7.41
Bolivia	1	0.37	7.78
Botswana	6	2.22	10.00
Brazil	1	0.37	10.37
Burkina Faso	5	1.85	12.22
Cambodia	2	0.74	12.96
Cameroon	4	1.48	14.44
Cape Verde	2	0.74	15.19
Central African Republic	2	0.74	15.93
Chad	1	0.37	16.30
Comoros	2	0.74	17.04
Cyprus	1	0.37	17.41
Djibouti	1	0.37	17.78
Ecuador	1	0.37	18.15
Egypt	18	6.67	24.81
El Salvador	5	1.85	26.67
Equatorial Guinea	3	1.11	27.78
Eswatini	1	0.37	28.15
Fiji	4	1.48	29.63
Gabon	3	1.11	30.74
Georgia	2	0.74	31.48
Ghana	5	1.85	33.33
Guinea-Bissau	3	1.11	34.44
Guyana	1	0.37	34.81
Haiti	1	0.37	35.19
Iran	8	2.96	38.15
Jordan	2	0.74	38.89
Kazakhstan	7	2.59	41.48
Kenya	3	1.11	42.59
Kyrgyzstan	1	0.37	42.96
Laos	1	0.37	43.33
Madagascar	7	2.59	45.93

Table A.3 Sample for the PEC Formation Hypothesis - Part 2

<b>Country Name</b>	<b>Freq.</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cum.</b>
Malawi	1	0.37	46.30
Malaysia	8	2.96	49.26
Mali	2	0.74	50.00
Mauritania	9	3.33	53.33
Mexico	10	3.70	57.04
Morocco	7	2.59	59.63
Mozambique	3	1.11	60.74
Namibia	1	0.37	61.11
Nepal	1	0.37	61.48
Nicaragua	2	0.74	62.22
Niger	5	1.85	64.07
Nigeria	3	1.11	65.19
Pakistan	3	1.11	66.30
Panama	2	0.74	67.04
Paraguay	8	2.96	70.00
Philippines	2	0.74	70.74
Portugal	2	0.74	71.48
Rwanda	2	0.74	72.22
Senegal	6	2.22	74.44
Sierra Leone	3	1.11	75.56
Singapore	9	3.33	78.89
South Africa	7	2.59	81.48
South Korea	10	3.70	85.19
Sri Lanka	1	0.37	85.56
Suriname	1	0.37	85.93
Syria	8	2.96	88.89
Tajikistan	2	0.74	89.63
Tanzania	5	1.85	91.48
Thailand	2	0.74	92.22
The Gambia	4	1.48	93.70
Togo	2	0.74	94.44
Tunisia	3	1.11	95.56
Uganda	1	0.37	95.93
Venezuela	1	0.37	96.30
Yemen	2	0.74	97.04
Zambia	4	1.48	98.52
Zimbabwe	4	1.48	100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>100.00</b>	–



Table A.4 Sample for the Ideological Distance Hypothesis

<b>Country Name</b>	<b>Freq.</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Argentina	757	11.05	11.05
Bolivia	1,015	14.81	25.86
Brazil	394	5.75	31.61
Chile	162	2.36	33.98
Colombia	590	8.61	42.59
Costa Rica	1,030	15.03	57.62
Ecuador	1,539	22.46	80.08
Mexico	60	0.88	80.95
Peru	458	6.68	87.64
Uruguay	100	1.46	89.10
Venezuela	747	10.90	100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,852</b>	<b>100.00</b>	—

Table A.5 Logistic Regression on Incumbent PEC Formation with Alternative Period Change

	(1) Incumbent PEC	(2) Incumbent PEC
$\Delta$ 5-Year Liberal Democracy	5.813* (2.584)	
$\Delta$ 5-Year Institutionalized Autocracy	0.298* (0.149)	
Electoral Uncertainty	-1.509 (0.812)	-1.567* (0.719)
Opposition PEC	1.787** (0.592)	1.179* (0.586)
Dominant Party Age	-0.0809*** (0.0228)	-0.0767*** (0.0220)
Previous Opposition PEC	-0.256 (0.796)	0.0949 (0.681)
Democratic Opposition	-1.195 (1.090)	-0.996 (0.937)
Economic Crisis	-0.260 (0.716)	-0.414 (0.689)
Inflation t-1	-0.000269 (0.000240)	-0.000245 (0.000292)
Presidential Election Dummy	-0.310 (0.581)	-0.440 (0.605)
Latin America Dummy	-0.211 (0.991)	-0.0880 (0.780)
$\Delta$ 7-Year Liberal Democracy		3.249 (2.826)
$\Delta$ 7-Year Institutionalized Autocracy		0.139 (0.127)
Constant	-0.470 (0.786)	-0.498 (0.653)
Log Likelihood	-60.915	-64.648
N	257	260

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Table A.6 Logistic Regression on Opposition PEC Formation with Alternative Period Change

	(1) Opposition PEC	(2) Opposition PEC
$\Delta$ 5-Year Liberal Democracy	-6.134* (2.828)	
$\Delta$ 5-Year Institutionalized Autocracy	0.00645 (0.0889)	
Electoral Uncertainty	0.903 (0.523)	0.199 (0.539)
Incumbent PEC	1.873** (0.619)	1.365* (0.582)
Dominant Party Age	0.0349* (0.0149)	0.0206 (0.0140)
Previous Opposition PEC	1.565** (0.511)	1.363** (0.513)
Democratic Opposition	-0.684 (0.865)	-0.697 (0.807)
Economic Crisis	-0.359 (0.553)	0.0243 (0.524)
Inflation t-1	-0.0420 (0.0364)	-0.0353 (0.0278)
Presidential Election Dummy	0.0140 (0.430)	0.141 (0.422)
Latin America Dummy	0.506 (0.695)	0.595 (0.636)
$\Delta$ 7-Year Liberal Democracy		2.718 (2.138)
$\Delta$ 7-Year Institutionalized Autocracy		0.172 (0.109)
Constant	-2.426*** (0.675)	-2.055*** (0.610)
Log Likelihood	-77.519	-84.526
N	257	260

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Table A.7 Logistic Regression on PEC Formation with Alternative Period Change

	(1) PEC	(2) PEC
$\Delta$ 5-Year Liberal Democracy	1.616 (1.803)	
$\Delta$ 5-Year Institutionalized Autocracy	0.0795 (0.100)	
Electoral Uncertainty	-0.0877 (0.477)	-0.249 (0.473)
Dominant Party Age	-0.0114 (0.0117)	-0.0111 (0.0122)
Previous Opposition PEC	2.102*** (0.486)	2.077*** (0.500)
Economic Crisis	-0.0493 (0.500)	0.0872 (0.456)
Democratic Opposition	-1.004 (0.648)	-1.229* (0.624)
Inflation t-1	-0.00444 (0.00461)	-0.00555 (0.00464)
Presidential Election Dummy	0.0182 (0.368)	0.000286 (0.389)
Latin America Dummy	0.679 (0.473)	0.651 (0.483)
$\Delta$ 7-Year Liberal Democracy		-0.259 (1.744)
$\Delta$ 7-Year Institutionalized Autocracy		-0.0209 (0.0939)
Constant	-0.770 (0.519)	-0.599 (0.492)
Log Likelihood	-116.574	-119.648
N	257	260

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Table A.8 Heckman Selection Model on Ideological Distance between PEC Partners

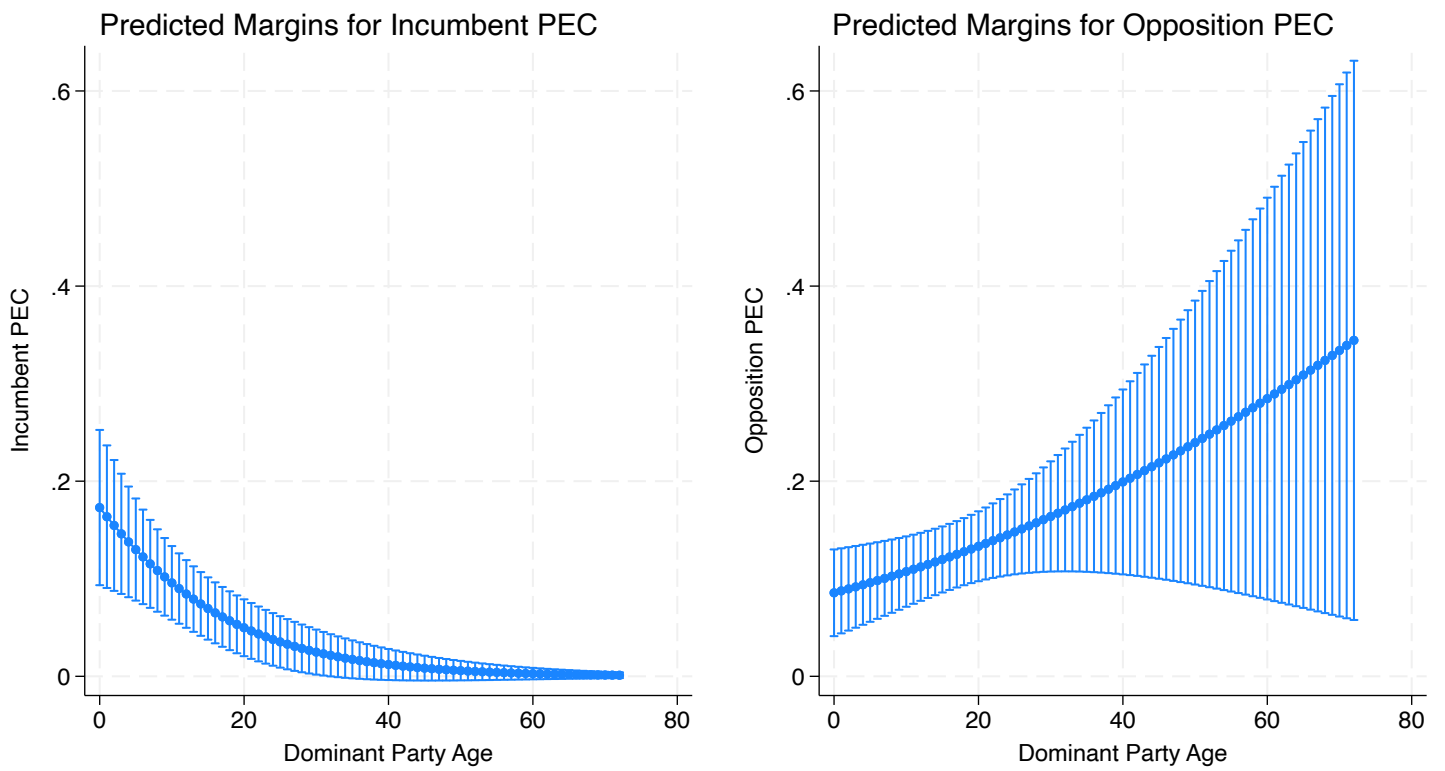
	(1) Probit Model	(2) Heckman Model
PEC		
$\Delta$ 3-Year Liberal Democracy	-0.886* (0.356)	-0.886* (0.356)
$\Delta$ 3-Year Institutionalized Autocracy	-0.0915* (0.0376)	-0.0915* (0.0376)
Democratic Opposition	1.036*** (0.173)	1.036*** (0.173)
Inflation t-1	0.000137* (0.0000635)	0.000137* (0.0000635)
Constant	-2.747*** (0.130)	-2.747*** (0.130)
Standardized ideological distance		
$\Delta$ 3-Year Liberal Democracy		0.754 (0.385)
$\Delta$ 3-Year Institutionalized Autocracy		0.0210 (0.0398)
Democratic Opposition		-0.101 (0.286)
Inflation t-1		-0.0000758 (0.0000721)
Constant		-0.298 (0.265)
/		
athrho		-0.0150 (0.0657)
lnsigma		-0.373* (0.149)
Log Likelihood	-664.121	-813.719
N	6463	6463

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Figure A.2 Dominant Party Age Marginal Effects

### Comparison of Predicted Margins



## APPENDIX B

Table B.1 Coordination Strategies Across Elections (2014-2015)

	<b>Incumbent</b>	<b>Opposition</b>
<b>2014 Local</b>	N/A	N/A
<b>2014 Presidential</b>	N/A	Joint Candidate
<b>2015 June</b>	N/A	Informal Strategic Voting
<b>2015 November</b>	N/A	N/A

Table B.2 Coordination Strategies Across Elections (2018-2023)

	<b>Incumbent</b>	<b>Opposition</b>
<b>2018 Concurrent</b>	Legislative: 3 party, formal Presidential: Joint Candidate	Legislative: 4 party, formal Presidential: Runoff support if possible
<b>2019 Local</b>	Informal coordination	Informal coordination
<b>2023 Concurrent</b>	Legislative: 4 party, formal / 6 party, informal Presidential: Joint Candidate	Legislative: 6 party, formal Presidential: Joint Candidate

Table B.3 Democratic Performance Measures (V-Dem)

<b>Year</b>	<b>Inst. Autocracy</b>	<b>Liberal Democracy</b>	<b>Egalitarian Democracy</b>
2014	0.1	0.26	0.32
2018	0.4	0.11	0.24
2023	N/A	0.11	0.20

Table B.4 Other Political Measures

<b>Year</b>	<b>Presidentialism</b>	<b>Erdoğan's Tenure</b>	<b>Electoral Threshold (%)</b>
2014	0.42	12	N/A
2018	0.82	16	10
2023	0.80	21	7

Table B.5 Economic Performance Measures

<b>Year</b>	<b>GDP/capita (\$)</b>	<b>Unemployment Rate</b>	<b>Inflation Rate</b>
2014	12165	10.90%	9.54%
2018	9568	10.90%	15.39%
2023	13110	9.40%	39.59%