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Uğurcan Evci

uevci@uci.edu

Hillsborough Community College

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Uğurcan Evci

Evci, corresponding author: ORCID: 0000-0001-6096-6593

AFFILIATION: Department of Political Science, University of California, Irvine.

Note: The author is currently affiliated with the Hillsborough College

ADDRESS: 4001 W Tampa Bay Blvd, Tampa, FL 33614

uevci@hccfl.edu

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Abstract

In this article, I analyze electoral engineering cases in Turkey between 1980 and 2018, showing that Turkish political parties and policymakers often failed to identify an optimal strategy regarding electoral reform in this period. The purpose of my study is to gather more data to improve understanding drivers of successful electoral policymaking. I first analyze all electoral engineering attempts after civil elections were restored in Turkey, starting with the country's 1991 elections. I show that the political parties failed to identify an optimal electoral reform strategy roughly 54% of the time overall, while the failure rate was even higher, at 62.5%, among the parties that designed the reforms since 1991. I find that political parties have not been better off after careful deliberate decision making compared to simply tossing a coin. I compare reasons for such electoral engineering failures in Turkey—which include the volatility of votes under high electoral thresholds, the overestimation of electoral support, a lack of technical knowledge, the weak institutionalization of political parties, and a lack of reliable polls—with other cases in the literature to pave the way for future research. This article also can be interpreted as a replication of earlier research investigating electoral engineering in emerging democracies by applying a similar methodology on a longer time frame in an established democracy.

INTRODUCTION

This article examines two specific phenomena of electoral engineering: the unintended consequences of electoral engineering and missed opportunities to benefit from particular electoral reforms. When discussing such missed opportunities, I am referring to instances when political party leaders have had ample opportunities to engage in electoral engineering to improve the likelihood of their success but failed to initiate appropriate reforms to strengthen their representation via an increased number of seats in the national parliament. By assessing the outcomes of electoral policymaking and political parties' decisions, I analyze if political parties were successful or not in identifying effective strategies regarding electoral reforms. Rather than functioning as a predictable tool for political gain, proportional representation in this context generated systemic vulnerabilities that ultimately undermined the reform designers themselves. These Turkish cases illustrate how the mechanical complexities of PR often produce unexpected paradoxes and spoiler effects that disrupt strategic political behavior, aligning with broader findings in the public choice literature (Flis & Kaminski, 2025; Kaminski, 2018; McCune & Wilson, 2023).

This article is organized as follows. First, I summarize my methodology for each section of the paper. In order to simulate such scenarios reliably, I devised a method to simulate elections under the Jefferson-D'Hondt method with uneven voter distributions across different districts, developed and validated in Evci (2020). Rather than reproducing district-level vote reallocations, this simulation approach captures the mechanical transformation of votes into seats under counterfactual electoral arrangements while

preserving the core properties of the electoral system. After briefly summarizing the simulation method, I present my methodology for measuring the success of an electoral reform. Second, in two different sections, I assess political parties' success or failure following electoral policymaking in Turkey: the 1995 electoral reform proposal; "missed opportunities" in 1995, 1999, and in 2002; as well as the 2018 electoral reform (Evci & Kaminski, 2021). As I discuss in greater detail later in this article, I define "success" here as an action that has benefited the decision-maker. Prior to the conclusion, I analyze my findings comparatively to the other cases in the literature to analyze determinants of successful or failed electoral engineering.

While electoral engineering discussion is straightforward, the discussion of "missed opportunities" may not be clear to readers. The "missed opportunities" section of this study covers the situations in Turkey during the 1995, 1999, and 2002 elections. I assert that the political parties were unsuccessful in these elections, both in terms of preparing for electoral reform and positioning themselves properly vis-à-vis the existing electoral system.[1] Ultimately, I show that the parties were not better off after their deliberative decision-making than had they simply tossed a coin. A lack of technical knowledge, clientelism and patronage, unreliable polls, voter volatility, and the weak institutionalization of the parties are some of the causes behind the electoral engineering errors made in Turkey in these elections. The data I use for this analysis comes from

[1] I assume that a political party's main objective when pursuing electoral reform is seat-maximization, although this objective could be slightly different, depending on the exact situation, such as having one political party assist a smaller political ally reach a certain threshold, etc.

official election results, parliamentary meeting proceedings, and political party campaign documents, in addition to my own simulations based on official election results.[2]

Similar work assessing the effectiveness of electoral engineering is available in the literature. One prominent example of this is Kaminski (2002). In his article, Kaminski (2002) investigates electoral engineering attempts in Poland, a transitioning democracy during the 1990s. That study evaluates whether parties were able to anticipate the mechanical consequences of electoral reforms for seat allocation. The contribution of this article is that it replicates a similar design over a longer period of time, in a political system that is not going through a transition. This replication allows one to assess whether Kaminski's results are only the consequence of the early phase of electoral transition and the parties' unfamiliarity with electoral systems.

The manuscript approaches these issues through a simulation-based methodology anchored in the public choice tradition. To isolate the mechanical effects of proportional representation from psychological voter behavior, I utilize the Flis-Słomczyński-Stolicki formula for counterfactual seat allocations alongside the Success Index to evaluate party decision-making. By systematically evaluating these cases over a prolonged timeframe in a non-transitional democracy, the study offers a rigorous empirical assessment of the inherent anomalies and implementation barriers found within proportional representation systems, particularly concerning the unequal representation resulting from systemic disproportionality (Wada & Kamahara, 2024).

[2] I use the simulation method outlined in Evci (2020), which is a modification of the method used by Flis et al. (2020).

This article examines the mechanical effects of electoral engineering and systems. The literature differentiates between psychological and mechanical effects of electoral systems. Building on Taagepera and Shugart's foundational work on electoral systems (1989), the analysis here treats mechanical effects — the direct transformation of votes into seats — as the primary driver of electoral outcomes, with psychological effects (voters' strategic responses) treated as secondary. Mechanical effects result from the direct implementation of electoral laws, while psychological effects arise from voters' expectations of these mechanical effects (Van Der Straeten et al., 2013). A quasi-experimental study in Switzerland and Japan demonstrates that even when psychological effects are anticipated to outweigh mechanical effects, the mechanical effects were more significant (Blais et al., 2011). Another study, analyzing 462 electoral districts in Finland and Portugal from 1962 to 2011, finds that psychological effects, such as strategic behaviors, are often masked by non-strategic behaviors and concludes that mechanical effects are "the most decisive link of the electoral chain" (Harfst et al., 2018, p. 90). This study assumes psychological effects to be negligible to small, based on the minor nature of the reforms from a voter's perspective, with no change in the voting method. For instance, Turkey's recent electoral reform reduced the national electoral threshold from 10% to 7% without other major changes. Such minor reforms, unlike a switch from single-member districts to proportional representation, are not expected to produce significant psychological effects.

This article proceeds as follows. The next section outlines the methodology used to simulate counterfactual electoral outcomes. This is followed by an analysis of electoral engineering cases in Turkey, which examines both proposed reforms and missed

opportunities. Readers primarily interested in the broader results may skip ahead to the "Success Over Time" section (hereafter referred to as "Results") and return to the detailed case analyses as needed. The article then discusses the implications of these findings for understanding electoral engineering failures, before concluding.

Methodology:

Simulations:

Evaluating the impacts of electoral reform policymaking on each political party necessitates running simulations under hypothetical scenarios. However, such simulations pose a significant challenge. Turkey employs the Jefferson-D'Hondt electoral method, widely acknowledged in academic literature for causing seat magnification and seat distribution is often not perfectly proportional to vote distribution. Seat magnification effect often leads to larger parties being overrepresented as demonstrated in Taagepera and Laakso (1980); Lijphart (1990); Benoit (2000); Balinski and Young (2001). Hence, a reliable simulation method requires the use of counterfactual voter distributions.

To ensure the reliability of simulating elections under the Jefferson-D'Hondt method, I developed a method in Evci (2020), which provides a regional correction to the formula by Flis et al. (2020), henceforth referred to as FSS. In their paper, Flis et al. propose

a formula for simulating elections under the Jefferson-D'Hondt method in countries with similar voter distributions across districts. Their formula initially allocates seats according to each party's vote share, then applies a corrective adjustment to account for the seat magnification effect of the Jefferson-D'Hondt method. However, their method lacks precision in countries exhibiting imbalances in voter distributions across districts.

A possible alternative to the approach adopted here would be to conduct counterfactual simulations at the district level. However, given the structure of my simulations, such district level counterfactuals are not feasible in this study. More importantly, as Kaminski (2001) shows, district level counterfactual simulations generate unexpected methodological problems that undermine their reliability. In contrast, the FSS approach developed by Flis et al. (2020) is specifically designed to address these issues while capturing the seat magnification properties of the Jefferson–D'Hondt method. For these reasons, the use of the FSS framework, and its adaptation in this study, is the most appropriate and internally consistent choice for the simulations conducted here.

Conceptually, the FSS approach estimates the expected seat allocation by combining each party's normalized vote share with institutional features of the electoral system, such as the total number of districts and the effective number of relevant parties. Rather than reproducing district-level vote counts, the formula approximates how the Jefferson-D'Hondt divisor system systematically transforms votes into seats at the national level. This allows for counterfactual comparisons across alternative electoral arrangements while preserving the mechanical properties of the electoral system. The regional correction introduced here relaxes the assumption of uniform voter distribution by applying the

formula separately to clusters of districts with similar electoral characteristics, thereby improving accuracy in cases with substantial district-level heterogeneity.

The formula is as follows:

$$s_i = p_i \cdot s + \frac{1}{2} c\,(p_i \cdot n - 1),$$

s_i is the total number of seats of party i in the parliament

p_i is the vote share of party i among the relevant parties (called the normalized vote share)

c is the total number of electoral districts

s is the total number of seats in parliament

n is the number of relevant parties[3]

In Evci (2020), I first classified electoral districts into three internally homogeneous subsets based on shared structural and electoral characteristics, such as district magnitude and vote distribution patterns. These subsets were designed to capture systematic differences across districts while preserving within-group similarity in seat–vote translation. I then applied the Flis–Słomczyński–Stolicki (FSS) correction formula separately within each of these three district clusters.

[3] *Relevant parties* refers to parties that surpass the legally defined electoral threshold and therefore enter the seat allocation process; parties that fail to meet the threshold are excluded because they do not participate in the distribution of parliamentary seats under the Jefferson–D'Hondt method.

This clustering strategy allows the simulations to account for meaningful regional and structural variation in electoral outcomes without requiring district-level counterfactual simulations, which are infeasible given data limitations and known methodological problems. While increasing the number of clusters would, in principle, improve precision, doing so would also introduce additional complexity and instability without proportionate analytical gains. Using three clusters represents a deliberate trade-off between precision and transparency: it substantially improves simulation accuracy relative to a single national application of the formula, while keeping the procedure tractable and replicable. The results demonstrate that this approach meaningfully reduces estimation error compared to uncorrected methods, supporting the use of the FSS framework in this context.

To gauge the precision of my formula, I compared actual election outcomes with the simulation results generated using my method and real-world election data. I calculated the total error in percentage terms by comparing the outcomes of actual elections with my simulation results (using the Loosemore-Hanby Goodness of Fit metric). Consequently, lower error levels equate to more accurate simulations. Figure 1 showcases a comparison between the original and the modified FSS formula. It's evident that the FSS formula with my modification reduces the error by more than half in terms of LH% in all tested cases. Particularly in cases from Turkey, the error is among the lowest compared to all other cases analyzed in the original paper by FSS (2020) and, on average, the remaining error is slightly over 1%, which corresponds to roughly 0.3 of the error obtained without the regional correction. Furthermore, in Evci (2020), I also show that the modified formula works in other countries such as Spain, as error improves from 8% using the original

formula to 3.68% using the modified formula. Therefore, I assert that the method I devised for running simulations in countries with voter imbalances under the Jefferson-D'Hondt method is well-suited for the objectives of my study.

Measuring the Success of an Electoral Reform:

The Success Index introduced by Kaminski (2002), an article that I am replicating in this study, provides us with a tool for estimating the rate of success in an electoral engineering attempt. Kaminski's SUCCESS Index formula is provided below in Equation (1):

$$S = \frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{n} s_i, \quad (1)$$

where *n* is the total number of parliamentary parties involved in an electoral reform process. For $i = 1, \ldots, n$, s_i ... is 1 if a party supported the electoral reform and gained ex post advantages, or, alternatively, if a party opposed the electoral reform and they lost seats ex post. Conversely, *s* equals 0 if a party supported the reform but lost seats ex post or if a party opposed the reform and gained seats ex post. In other words, a 1 denotes a success, while a 0 denotes an electoral engineering error. Therefore, either a success or an error can be achieved in two different ways. Therefore, the index can be seen as the proportion of successes by seat-maximizing parties in identifying more beneficial options.

Significance

In the present study, my primary focus is on Turkey, thus making this work primarily a single-country study. Nevertheless, Turkey presents us with valuable information that can be used in other contexts. Firstly, Turkish politics yields a great deal of variation in terms of

political structures. The existence of regional political parties, political coalitions, and multiple attempts at electoral engineering, as well as changing political party structures viewed historically, provide useful insights regarding electoral engineering in general. Secondly, Turkey's history with authoritarian, competitive authoritarian, and democratic regimes allows us to understand electoral politics at various points along the democratic spectrum. Although there are concerns regarding Turkey's drift to competitive authoritarianism (Esen & Gümüşçü, 2016), there is no evidence of widespread electoral fraud in recent Turkish elections. This is an important assumption for the present analysis, as the Success Index evaluates parties' strategic anticipation under stable mechanical electoral rules rather than manipulation of electoral outcomes through fraud. While outright fraud may be absent, proportional and mixed systems remain highly vulnerable to strategic 'hacking' where incumbents alter mechanical thresholds or alliance rules to secure disproportionate advantages legally (e.g. Tanács-Mandák & Horváth, 2025). Although the elections have not been completely fair due to the historical restrictions on Kurdish representation as well the actions of the incumbent political party and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan heavily appropriating state resources for partisan distribution, there is nothing preventing the opposition from gaining seats or positions once they surpass the required number of votes. One good example of this situation was the local elections in 2019: the AKP majority government used all the tools at its disposal but still lost the mayorships in five out of six of Turkey's largest cities, including the three most populous ones: Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir. In the most recent parliamentary and presidential elections in May 2023, Erdogan's AKP received its lowest share of all votes since its foundation, and it has to rely on its multiple alliance partners in order to push

legislation in the parliament. In March 2024, Erdogan's AKP failed to be the leading national party in the polls for the first time in local elections. While the main opposition party, CHP, was able to win municipalities that correspond to the 60% of Turkey's GDP, the AKP currently controls municipalities that correspond to only 22.1% of the country's GDP (Doğruluk Payı, 2024).

On a separate note, this paper also serves as a replication of Kaminski's (2002) analysis on Poland. By applying Kaminski's design to a longer period on an established political system, we can gather more data to assess whether Kaminski's results were due to the unique circumstances in Poland, or whether similar results hold true in different contexts. In this sense, Turkey functions as a harder test of parties' ability to anticipate the mechanical consequences of electoral reforms under prolonged institutional complexity and uncertainty.

Cases of Electoral Engineering in Turkey

The Evolution of Basic Features of the Electoral System

The 1980 coup established an electoral system in Turkey aimed at reducing the number of effective political parties. They introduced a two-tiered threshold: a 10% national benchmark and district-level thresholds based on the ratio of total votes to seats within a district. Originally, the parliament consisted of 450 deputies. In 1995, following a reform proposal detailed in this article, Turkey's Constitutional Court eliminated the district-level thresholds. Existing scholarship finds no evidence of systematic political party interference in the Turkish Constitutional Court's annulment decisions during the period under study. Instead, judicial behavior appears to be shaped primarily by judges' ideological preferences

and the broader structure of political competition rather than direct partisan pressure (Belge, 2006; Aydin-Cakir, 2018). This suggests that the Court's invalidation of electoral reforms in the 1990s cannot be attributed to party-driven manipulation, even though later institutional changes increased executive influence over judicial appointments.

This created an electoral system with a 10% national threshold and increased the number of deputies to 550. In 2018, a new provision was introduced that allowed political parties to form alliances for vote tallying. This meant that a party in an alliance that cleared the 10% national threshold was also considered to have cleared it, regardless of its individual vote share. The number of deputies in the parliament has been increased to 600. Throughout this period, the Jefferson-D'Hondt method was used for all Turkish elections. This institutional continuity allows for direct comparison of the mechanical effects of different reform proposals across time.

The districts correspond to the cities of Turkey, and district sizes range from 1 to 18 deputies, except for Istanbul. If a city's population requires more than 18 deputies, those cities are divided into two or three districts. The only exception to the 18-deputy maximum is Istanbul, where the three districts are represented by 35, 27, and 36 deputies, respectively. The reason for larger Istanbul districts is that the election law permits cities to be divided into a maximum of three districts. Due to Istanbul's exceptionally high population compared to other Turkish cities, it is represented by more than 18 deputies across multiple districts. The second largest city, Ankara, is represented by two districts, each with 18 deputies. This variation in district magnitude is a key source of seat-vote

disproportionality under the Jefferson–D'Hondt method and motivates the use of simulations that account for district-level heterogeneity.

1995 Electoral Reform Proposal

In this section, I analyze the Turkish political parties' decision-making regarding the 1995 electoral reform and understand their successes and failures. Even if the 1995 electoral reform was never implemented due to a Constitutional Court decision, it remained the law of the land until two weeks before the elections. Therefore, all political parties built their strategies as if the elections were to be held under the electoral law implemented by the electoral reform in 1995, making this episode particularly well-suited for counterfactual analysis of parties' expectations and strategic positioning. I compare what would have happened if the reform was not struck down by the Constitutional Court, and what happened in the 1995 elections to assess political parties' success or failure regarding their support or opposition for the 1995 electoral reform.

This reform was initiated by the CHP and the DYP coalition government. The data I use to examine the situation comes from Parliamentary Commission proceedings, political party election manifestos, and parliamentary meeting proceedings (e.g., Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 1995; Demokratik Sol Parti, 1995; Refah Partisi, 1995; Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi, 1995). However, there is no available parliamentary voting data to analyze since votes are often not counted when a clear visible majority has voted either yes or no in the parliament. Accordingly, parties' positions are inferred from official statements and parliamentary records rather than roll-call votes.

A constitutional amendment prior to the 1995 elections included fair representation and governmental stability clauses (Yüzbaşıoğlu, 1996). As discussed earlier, government stability was already a major component of the electoral design following the 1980 coup. Still, an electoral design with double thresholds came at the expense of representativeness, as the country's smaller parties often remained underrepresented—even in cases when they could have cleared the 10% national threshold—due to district thresholds, which were sometimes as high as 50%. For instance, the DSP won only 1.56% of all parliamentary seats in 1991, even though they received 10.74% of the national vote. **This discrepancy illustrates the magnitude of the mechanical effects generated by the electoral system.**

The electoral engineers used the constitutional requirement of fair representation and governmental stability as a justification for the 1995 reform. In general, political parties often argue that they seek to design a better and fairer electoral system when they engage in electoral engineering, and the 1995 Turkish reform attempt was not an exception. However, reviewing the parliamentary meeting proceedings clearly conveys that all opposition parties believed that the proposed reform was designed to advance the interests of the ruling coalition of the DYP and CHP.[4]

Following the 1995 elections, a coalition government formed by the DYP and CHP proposed an electoral reform introducing a double threshold system and an additional national district with 100 seats. The double threshold required parties to pass a 10%

[4] Prior to February 1995, the center-left was represented by the Social Democratic Populist Party (SHP) in the parliament. The SHP was part of the ruling coalition at the time the 1995 reform was initially proposed.

national vote threshold and achieve a minimum number of votes in a district to gain representation. The additional 100 seats were distributed based on national vote percentages for parties that surpassed the 10% threshold, without district thresholds applying. The DYP-CHP coalition argued that this system would enhance stability and fair representation, though the opposition was skeptical.

Political parties' support or opposition is available in Table 1. DSP's opposition for both provisions of the reform is not surprising as the thresholds had led to a significantly lower number of seats for the DSP in the 1991 elections. Instead, the DSP proposed a 5% national threshold without any district thresholds. Meanwhile, the RP supported even higher district thresholds—without specifying a number—likely because they knew that they were in a strong position for the elections (Türkiye Buyuk Millet Meclisi, 1995).

All opposition parties opposed the national district with 100 national deputies, arguing that it was engineered only to benefit the CHP and, further, that it would strengthen political party leaders' domination over their parties (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi, 1995).

Table 1. *Political Parties' Positions on District Thresholds and the National District*

Political party name	Opinion on district thresholds	Opinion on the national district
RP	Support	Oppose

ANAP	Oppose	Oppose
DYP	Support	Support
DSP	Oppose	Oppose
CHP	Support	Support

The proposed electoral reform was challenged in court and struck down by the Constitutional Court following the DSP's appeal on November 18, 1995. Five days later, the DYP–CHP coalition introduced a revised proposal that retained the 10% national threshold and added a uniform 10% district threshold nationwide, which the Court also annulled on December 1, 1995 (Ormanoğlu, 2020). Party positions regarding district thresholds remained unchanged across both proposals, and as a result, neither the district thresholds nor the provision for 100 national deputies was implemented. The number of parliamentary seats nevertheless increased from 450 to 550, with all deputies elected under the same system. The elections held on December 24, 1995, thus took place with a 10% national threshold but without district thresholds, across 83 districts, including five newly created small districts. Although the reform was not implemented, the Court's decisions occurred less than a month before the elections, making it reasonable to assume that parties had already formed their strategies under the expectation that the reform would take effect. This provides a basis for evaluating parties' hypothetical gains and losses through counterfactual analysis.

1995 Electoral Reform Simulations

Reviewing both the parliamentary meeting proceedings and the commission meeting reports allows me to create three counterfactual simulations so that I can understand each party's position vis-á-vis each electoral component separately. In these documents, party members clearly outline their positions regarding the proposed electoral design, often with separate comments on the district thresholds, as well as the 100 national deputies. This separation makes it possible to evaluate each component independently while holding other institutional features constant.

Table 2 shows simulation estimates of counterfactual scenarios, as well as the actual election results. I discuss three counterfactual simulations, as outlined below. I test the impact of each component of the electoral reform both separately and then I assess their impacts together. The components are (a) the district thresholds and (b) the 100 deputies from a single national district. By specifically testing the impact of each component of the electoral reform, I look to flesh out the level of success of the decision-making regarding each aspect of the electoral reform. This design allows for isolating the mechanical effects of each reform element on seat allocation.

I did not use parliamentary "yes" and "no" votes for the electoral reform because some parties such as ANAP were heavily critical of the reform, but they still voted yes because the reform also meant that the elections would be held earlier than the planned date in October 1996. [5] They considered an earlier election as an opportunity to boost their

[5] This is because the electoral reform also meant that the elections would have been held earlier than the planned election date in October 1996. While the electoral law stipulated that elections would have been held every five years, the parliament had the authority to set early elections.

number of seats. Therefore, their "yes" vote in the parliament does not indicate support for the principles of the reform.

Below are the three counterfactual simulations, their comparisons, and explanations of what information do each counterfactual simulation yield, all of which are summarized in Table 2.

I) Election simulations with only district thresholds, compared to the actual election results. This simulation exercise helps us to understand the impact of district thresholds. Here, all other institutional parameters are held constant.

II) Election simulations with only district thresholds, compared to election simulations with district thresholds and a single national district of 100 deputies. This simulation exercise helps us to understand the impact of a single national district in the presence of district thresholds. The comparison isolates the marginal effect of introducing a national district.

III) Election simulations with a national district of 100 deputies, compared to actual election results. This simulation exercise helps us to understand the impact of a single national district without the presence of district thresholds. This scenario approximates the most proportional configuration among the three cases.

I)

The district thresholds would have helped the larger parties and harmed the smaller parties. The parties that designed the reform, the DYP and the CHP, would have had better

outcomes without the district thresholds. The strongest party, the RP, would have won an extra 2.9% of all seats. This result indicates that district thresholds amplified seat magnification effects in favor of the largest party.

II)

The second set of simulations shows that the addition of a national district with 100 deputies would have benefited the smaller parties compared to the larger ones. Elections with a national district would have led to a 1.27% decline of all seats for the RP. Smaller parties would have won approximately an extra 0.72% of all seats. This reflects a partial correction of disproportionality introduced by the district thresholds.

III)

Lastly, the third set of simulations compares elections with a single national district of 100 deputies but without district thresholds to the actual election results. Under this counterfactual scenario, we see the most proportional representation in parliament, albeit it is far from perfect. The main mechanism here is that the seat magnification impact of the Jefferson-D'Hondt method becomes smaller when 2/11 of all parliament deputies are elected from a single district. The seat representation for the smaller parties increases by 1.04 percentage points for the CHP and increases by 0.57 percentage points for DSP; this means that the two smallest parties in parliament would have won approximately nine more seats under scenario three compared to the actual election results, thus improving representational fairness. Nevertheless, even this configuration does not eliminate disproportionality entirely.

In conclusion, it is impossible to argue a large scale successful decision-making for political parties with regards to the 1995 electoral reform. Ultimately, the success index for each component of the reform ranged between 0.5 and 0.6, while the success rate was 0.17 for parties which designed the reforms. The sizes of the impacts appear to be larger for the largest political party—the RP—and the smaller parties—the CHP and DSP. These results illustrate the difficulty parties face in correctly anticipating the mechanical consequences of electoral reforms, even when effects are sizeable. I discuss the successes and failures of the political parties in the following sections of this article

Table 2. *1995 Elections – Calculations and Simulations*

	Percentage of votes received in 1995 elections (percentage of seats received)	Seats won in the 1995 elections	District thresholds only (*Success*)	100 deputies only (*Success*)	District thresholds and 100 deputies	Percentage of seats – only district thresholds	Percentage of seats – only 100 deputies	Percentage of seats – district thresholds and 100 deputies
RP	21.38 (28.72)	158	174 (1)	154.26 (1)	167.36 (N/A)	31.64	28.05	30.43
ANAP	19.65 (24)	132	132 (1)	130.99 (1)	131 (1)	24	23.82	23.82
DYP*	19.18 (24.55)	135	132 (0)	133.44 (0)	13 (0)	24	24.26	23.82
DSP	14.64 (13.82)	76	67 (1)	79.18 (0)	71.82 (1)	12.19	14.39	13.06
CHP*	10.71 (8.91)	49	45 (0)	52.09 (1)	48.82 (0)	8.19	9.95	8.88
SUCCESS			0.6	0.6	0.5			

Note. Descriptions of values in parentheses specified in each column in parentheses. "Success" signifies the success of a political party in positioning itself in terms of the reform. 1 denotes successful positioning; 0 denotes failure. The methodology behind the overall Success index calculations is outlined in this article; the calculation method is based on a paper by Kaminski (2002). Asterisks denote reform reform designing political parties.

Missed Opportunities: Coalitions in the 1990s

The political science literature on electoral engineering typically focuses on reforms that policymakers have proposed or enacted. However, political parties may also commit electoral engineering errors by missing feasible opportunities to improve their positions, either through institutional reform or by adjusting their strategies within existing electoral rules. Such missed opportunities are analytically observable when institutional constraints and feasible alternatives can be identified ex ante. The Turkish elections between 1991 and 2002 provide clear examples of these cases.

During this period, Turkey's center-left and center-right ideological blocs could have improved their seat shares by adopting apparentement rules similar to those introduced in 2018. This analysis treats apparentement as a feasible counterfactual institutional arrangement rather than an ex post behavioral assumption. Under the 2018 rules, seats are first allocated to alliances as a whole, even though votes are cast for individual parties, and then distributed among alliance members proportionally to their vote shares. Parties within an alliance may thus bypass the 10% national threshold if the alliance clears it.

Apparentement allows party leaders to retain organizational autonomy and control over candidate nominations while participating in alliances. In contrast, electoral mergers risk diluting leaders' authority by centralizing candidate selection across parties. In the Turkish context of the 1990s, where electoral politics revolved heavily around party leaders, there were few incentives to decentralize candidate selection or nominate popular candidates, as observed in some European cases (Flis & Wojtasik, 2014). From the perspective of party leaders, apparentement therefore dominated mergers by preserving

leadership control while reducing vote splitting. This conflict between maximizing overall seat allocation and preserving party leadership control mirrors the broader challenges of balancing narrow political interests within complex proportional frameworks (Flis, Kaminski & Salamon, 2025). Throughout the 1990s, the center-left and center-right together held sufficient parliamentary majorities to advance such a reform, yet ideologically similar parties continued to compete separately, thereby diminishing their collective seat shares. The case studies examined here focus on the elections of 1995, 1999, and 2002. After 2002, center-right parties largely disappeared from Turkish politics, and the center-left consolidated under the CHP, limiting the institutional feasibility of apparentement thereafter.

Mergers were widely viewed as risky in the 1990s, particularly following the return of legacy political leaders from the 1970s, which produced parallel leadership structures within both ideological blocs. Apparentement, by contrast, would have allowed parties to remain distinct while mechanically pooling electoral support at the seat-allocation stage, an assumption tested through sensitivity analysis in Appendix A. Accordingly, this section focuses on apparentement, a rule adopted in Turkey's 2018 electoral reform and analyzed in Evci and Kaminski (2021), to evaluate whether failing to implement such arrangements constituted an electoral engineering error under the Success Index framework.

Table 3. *Chart Depicting an Assumed Ordinal Ranking of Hypothetical Counterfactual Scenarios in Cases of Party Mergers*

			Party 1		
		Merge, No Threshold	No Merge, No Threshold	Merge, Threshold	No Merge, Threshold
	Merge, No Threshold	(0, 0)	N/A	N/A	N/A
	No Merge, No Threshold	N/A	(1, 1)	N/A	(1, 3)
Party 2	Merge, Threshold	N/A	N/A	(2, 2)	N/A
	No Merge, Threshold	N/A	(3, 1)	N/A	(3, 3)

Table 3 demonstrates why merging did not make sense but *apparentement* could make more sense in the 1990s. In Table 4.3 the term "merge" refers to the merger of two hypothetical parties, and "threshold" refers to those political parties that clear the 10% national threshold in order to be represented in parliament. This chart assumes that political parties prioritizes being represented in the parliament first, and then political party leaders prioritize holding their resource allocation powers by keeping the parties

separate. This ordering reflects the minimum conditions for political survival before organizational control. Therefore, meeting the threshold is better than not meeting the threshold, and not merging is better than merging.

Here, 0 denotes a situation in which leaders lose their ability to allocate resources and their party is unable to clear the national threshold; 1 denotes when a leaders retain their position but are unable to clear the threshold; 2 denotes when a party clears the threshold but its leaders lose their sole authority due to a merger; and 3 denotes when a party clears the threshold independently and that party's leaders do not lose sole authority over resource allocation. N/A denotes unattainable scenarios. These payoff rankings are ordinal and are used only to compare relative incentives, not to quantify utility**.** Table 4.5 demonstrates that leaders had an incentive not to merge as payoffs of 1 and 3 would have been better for them compared to the payoffs of 0 and 2.

As mergers were not favored by leaders, I use *apparentement* for my simulations. Under an *apparentement* regime, political party leaders don't lose their seats while they become stronger in the parliament due to a higher share of the votes and the seats. Accordingly, apparentement represents the institutionally feasible option that aligns with both electoral incentives and leadership preservation.

Method

In order to measure success and failures for each political party, I run simulations using the methods explained above and I compare actual election results with what would have happened under counterfactual scenarios where political parties engaged in apparentement. The comparison focuses on changes in seat allocation rather than vote totals.

When establishing counterfactual simulations concerning political alliances, I first look to show that forming such alliances would not lead to fewer total for the political parties forming the alliance. Under ideal circumstances, data on voters' secondary party choices would provide definitive answers to this hypothesis. This data would presumably demonstrate that a voter would be likely to choose the ideological counterpart of their preferred party as their second choice. Such information would lead to the conclusion that if ideologically identical parties were to establish an alliance, they would not lose voters simply as a result of that alliance. However, such data is unavailable; individual-level voter data for Turkish elections in the 1990s is extremely limited, both in terms of access and scope. Rather than assuming vote additivity, the analysis explicitly tests multiple aggregation scenarios. Therefore, I use a method introduced by Kaminski (2001) where he defines the additivity, super-additivity, and sub-additivity of an alliance.[6]

I utilize these three definitions concerning coalitions in the *Sensitivity Analysis* in Appendix A to show that Turkey's center-left and center-right political parties would have fared better, even with sub-additive alliances. This result indicates that the conclusion does not rely on optimistic assumptions about voter coordination. This suggests that the benefits of forming alliances do not hinge on the additivity of votes, as political parties would have been better off, even in the case of sub-additivity. Later, I compare my simulated election results with the actual election results, showing that *apparentement*

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[6] *Sub-additive coalition*: The total votes received by a coalition are fewer than the sum of votes that the parties would have received if they had entered the election separately.

Additive coalition: The total votes received by a coalition are the same as the sum of votes that the parties would have received if they had entered the election separately.

Super-additive coalition: The total votes received by a coalition are greater than the sum of votes that the parties would have received if they had entered the election separately

would have yielded much better results for the center-left and the center-right parties. Following this section on the *apparentement* provision, I apply the above-outlined Success index (Kaminski, 2002) to each case discussed here, as well as to the 2018 electoral reform, based on a prior analysis of the 2018 elections Evci & Kaminski (2021). Ultimately, I conclude that political parties in Turkey have failed to take advantage of electoral alliances as a means of advancing their positions. Within the framework of electoral engineering, these outcomes constitute missed opportunities rather than ex post electoral shocks. The findings of this study also show that Turkey's center-left and center-right political parties could have impeded the rise of extreme-right parties if they had engaged in strategic alliances and electoral engineering.

Simulation Results

Below, I discuss the results of the 1995, 1999, and 2002 elections. In each simulation, additivity is assumed, although I demonstrate in Appendix A that even certain cases of sub-additivity would have led to similar outcomes unless there were major drops in the total support of an alliance which was unlikely. Accordingly, the results presented here should be interpreted as conservative estimates of the effects of apparentement. Election simulations are based on the Evci (2020), as explained earlier in this article under the methodology section.

In this work, I specify which coalition governments were leading the country prior to each election. However, it is important to note that an *apparentement* reform could function as a bipartisan reform since, as this section will show, such a reform would benefit

both the center-left and the center-right simultaneously. This feature distinguishes apparentement from zero-sum electoral reforms and explains why it could plausibly emerge through cross-party agreement. Together, Turkey's center-left and center-right parties had a total of 86.2%, 71.2%, and 56% of all seats prior to the, respectively, 1995, 1999, and 2002 elections.

1995 Elections.

Table 4. *1995 Election Simulations Compared with the Real Election Results*

Parties or alliances	Seats (estimated)	Seats (actual)	Percentage difference (percentage of all seats)
RP	135.44 (24.62)	158 (28.72)	-4.10
Left	141.36 (25.70)	125 (22.72)	2.97
Right	273.20 (49.67)	267 (48.55)	1.12

Note. "Seats (estimated)" denotes the simulated estimates of the number of seats with *apparentement* (with percentages of seats in parentheses). "Seats (actual)" denotes the number of seats realized in elections (with percentages of seats in parentheses).

Before the 1995 elections, the ruling government was a coalition government with the CHP and the DYP, a coalition of a center-left and a center-right party. In the 1995 elections, the formation of alliances among the center-left and the center-right would have

improved their seat share relative to the actual results. The leftist alliance's position would have improved by 2.97 percentage points of all seats, whereas the rightist alliance's position would have improved by 1.12 percentage points of all seats. These gains occur despite no changes in vote totals, underscoring the mechanical nature of the effect.

As explained earlier, the mechanism behind such gains is the seat-magnification impact of the Jefferson-D'Hondt method. To match the number of seats that the center-left won in 1995, they would have needed 21.54% of all votes rather than their actual vote share of 25.35%. The disparity is not as significant for the center-right parties because they had already gained relatively higher levels of electoral support. The DYP and ANAP received, respectively, 19.18% and 19.65% of the national vote. The alliance would have boosted their share of seats from 48.55% to 49.67%. This illustrates how apparentement mitigates seat losses arising from vote fragmentation among ideologically similar parties. Conversely, the failure to utilize such mechanisms carries a heavy representational price, a pathology frequently observed when political actors fail to grasp the structural consequences and risk diversification demands of their electoral systems (Flis, Behnke, Lorenc, & Salamon, 2025; Shikano & Herron, 2025).

While the center-left and the center-right could have gained more seats in terms of the absolute number of seats, there is more to the story. In the 1990s, Turkey was experiencing polarization between secularism and non-secularism rather than polarization between left- and right-wing political factions (Kalaycıoğlu, 2001). My simulations show that the fundamentalist religious party, the RP, gained a significant boost in their number of seats (i.e., 28.72% of all seats, rather than 24.62% of all seats) due to the center-left's and center-right's failure to introduce *apparentement*. In this sense, missed electoral

engineering opportunities had distributional consequences that extended beyond the immediate seat shares of centrist parties. Similar failures allowed the RP to advance in the local elections that took place in 1994. In addition, the center-left and the center-right were both split into two parties in the local 1994 elections. In Istanbul, the center-right won 37.6% of all votes, and the center-left won 32.68% of all votes. However, the RP's mayoral candidate, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, won the mayorship despite receiving only 25.19% of all votes. Considering that the local 1994 elections initiated Erdogan's ascent in Turkish politics (Heper & Toklas, 2003), the rise of the RP as the leading party, combined with the failure of the center-left and the center-right to introduce *apparentement*, had considerable long-term consequences for the political scene in Turkey. These results reinforce the argument that apparentement would have altered not only parliamentary arithmetic but also broader political trajectories.

1999 Elections.

Table 5. *1999 Elections Simulations Compared with the Actual Election Results*

Parties or alliances	Seats (estimated)	Seats (actual)	Percentage difference (percentage of all seats)
FP (formerly RP)	78.13 (14.20)	111 (20.18)	-5.98
Left	199.62 (36.29)	136 (24.72)	11.57

Right	200.79 (36.50)	171 (31.09)	5.42
MHP	71.46 (12.99)	129 (23.45)	-10.46

Note. "Seats (estimated)" denotes the simulated estimates of the number of seats with *apparentement* (with percentages of seats in parentheses). "Seats (actual)" denotes the number of seats realized in elections (with percentages of seats in parentheses).

The country's leading alliance prior to the 1999 elections was one between the ANAP, the DSP, and the DTP (the DTP was an off-shoot of the DYP), which together formed a minority government. However, after the parliament decided to hold early elections on July 30, 1998, the combined minority government of the ANAP, DSP, and DTP was dissolved on November 25, 1998. Thus, from January 11, 1999, to May 28, 1999, the 56th government was led by the DSP as a minority government. In 1999, there were significant potential gains for the left via *apparentement*, as the CHP, a leftist party, remained below the threshold, sitting at 8.71%. This provides a clear case in which apparentement would have operated primarily through threshold avoidance rather than seat magnification. While the 1995 elections show the significance of seat magnification under *apparentement*, the 1999 elections also demonstrate that *apparentement* is an effective strategy against the 10% national electoral threshold. The CHP alone squandered a total of 2,716,094 votes due to the left's failure to engage in an alliance.

Meanwhile, the right's share of seats would have increased from 31.09% to 36.50%, even if a leftist alliance would have meant that there would be an additional party in parliament; while the left would have gained another 64 seats with an additional party

entering parliament, the right would have gained another 30 seats. These results indicate that apparentement would have been positive-sum for centrist parties rather than redistributive among them. The losers of *apparentement* between the center-left parties and the center-right parties would have been the extremist parties, specifically, the FP and the MHP, which consisted of religious fundamentalists and extreme nationalists. As mentioned above, Turkey in the 1990s was polarized between secularism and non-secularism; thus, the 1999 elections demonstrate another case in which the central parties that shared identical ideologies could have prevented the rise of the extreme-right parties by introducing *apparentement* and by engaging in alliances. Once again, the mechanism operates mechanically through seat allocation rather than voter realignment

2002 Elections.

Table 6. *2002 Elections*

Parties or alliances	Seats with a rightist alliance (estimated)	Seats without a rightist alliance (estimated)	Seats (actual)	Percentage difference with the rightist alliance (percentage of all seats)	Percentage difference without the rightist alliance (percentage of all seats)
AKP	287.68 (53.17)	357.13 (66.01)	363 (67.10)	-13.69	-1.07
Left	145.65 (26.92)	183.86 (33.99)	178 (32.90)	-5.88	1.07

Right	107.68 (19.90)	N/A	0	N/A	N/A

Note. "Seats (estimated)" denotes the simulated estimates of the number of seats with *apparentement* (with percentages of seats in parentheses). "Seats (actual)" denotes the number of seats realized in elections (with percentages of seats in parentheses).

The country's leading alliance prior to the 2002 elections was between the DSP, the ANAP, and the MHP—a far-right nationalist party. The 2002 elections[7] constitute the only instance in which the left and the right would not have benefitted from forming alliances simultaneously due to the possibility of two additional right-wing parties gaining seats if the center-right had established an alliance.[8] Such complex interactions highlight how risk diversification and coordination failures can yield deeply disproportionate outcomes, similar to electoral dynamics observed in mixed and complex systems (Shikano & Herron, 2025).

This makes 2002 a boundary case for the apparentement argument rather than a contradiction of it. An election that included the AKP, a center-left alliance, and a center-right alliance would have resulted in approximately 108 seats for the center-right,

[7] Even if there were 550 total seats in the Turkish Parliament in 2002, the simulations estimate 541 seats; since the Kurdish political actors could not bypass the threshold, nine of them were elected as independents from Kurdish cities. Because it is not possible to simulate the seats won by independents, I assume the votes for independent candidates would remain equal under hypothetical scenarios given that their political movement was unlikely to cooperate with any other political actors or parties at the time.

[8] The reason for this is that only two parties won seats in the Turkish Parliament in 2002 due to the 10% threshold: the AKP and the CHP (center-left). The CHP by itself represented almost the entire center-left, won only 1.22% of the national vote. The two center-right parties, the DYP and the ANAP, won 9.54% and 5.13% of the vote, respectively. Thus, the center-right could not win any seats in the parliament. There was also an entrant right-wing populist political party, called The Young Party, which received 7.25% of the vote, which most likely resulted in the DYP remaining below the 10% threshold.

compared to the zero it gained in the actual election. On the other hand, in the event of two simultaneous center-right and center-left alliances, the center-left alliance would have lost 5.88% of all the seats they won in 2002. The AKP's losses would have been more dramatic: they would have lost 13.69% of all seats, dropping from nearly winning a three-fifth supermajority to just barely winning a majority. Even in this exceptional case, apparentement would have substantially reduced the dominance of the religious right. Once again, the implementation of *apparentement* would have impeded the rise of the religious right in Turkey.

It is important to note that the 1999 elections were held 16 years after the military's electoral law was passed and four years after the 1995 changes following the orders of the Constitutional Court. After the termination of the military tutelage of the 1980s, one could argue that the parties did not have sufficient time to adapt to the civilian nature of the elections held in 1991. It is also possible that the conditions prior to the 1995 elections were exceptionally chaotic due to the extremely short window of time following the 1995 reform proposal and the Constitutional Court's decision. However, it appears that the center-left and the center-right continued to repeat the same mistakes, even though they had extensive experience with the existing electoral system. This repetition strengthens the interpretation of these outcomes as systematic decision-making failures rather than one-off miscalculations.

Lastly, as specified earlier, the center-left and the center-right had strong majorities in parliament prior to all the elections discussed in these simulations. Furthermore, the coalition governments consisted only of center-left and center-right parties prior to the 1995 and 1999 elections. Therefore, the center-left and the center-right had ample

opportunities to pass an *apparentement* reform prior to the 1995, 1999, and 2002 elections. Thus, institutional feasibility cannot account for the absence of such reforms. The simulations discussed here show that the groups that benefited from these missed electoral engineering opportunities were invariably the fundamentalist and far-right nationalist parties, despite the fact that only the fundamentalist party, the RP, led a coalition with the DYP between June 1996 and June 1997. Furthermore, the political climate between the years 1995 and 1999 favored the center-left and the center-right parties since, even with a weaker military tutelage relative to the 1980s, the military still played an important role in politics, and it strongly supported a more prevalent center-left and center-right.

In sum, I have shown that the center-left and the center-right missed many opportunities to integrate an *apparentement* provision into Turkey's electoral law. Foregoing such opportunities cost them a significant share of parliamentary seats in almost all cases under review, and such failures facilitated the rise of non-centrist, populist, extreme-right political parties. Within the framework of electoral engineering, these outcomes constitute repeated missed opportunities rather than isolated electoral surprises.

Success over time

Thus far in this study, I have analyzed the decisions of Turkey's political parties in four separate electoral instances: the 1995 electoral reform proposal, missed opportunities in 1995, 1999, and 2002 elections. In addition, Evci & Kaminski (2021) analyze the 2018

elections. Taken together, these cases allow for an assessment of electoral engineering decisions across different institutional contexts and time periods. In the 1995 elections, the parties positioned themselves vis-á-vis the proposed electoral reform with the 10% national threshold, the district thresholds, and the creation of a national district with 100 deputies. The failure to implement *apparentement* in the elections of 1995, 1999, and 2002 can be viewed together as a single case since it is likely that this missing such an opportunity was an inherent issue with the political parties that was unlikely to change between these three elections. This grouping reflects continuity in party leadership structures and decision-making incentives rather than treating each election as an independent event. Table 7 summarizes all outcomes generated by the counterfactual simulations discussed in this article by reporting the Success Index values for each political party across the relevant electoral engineering cases. It provides a consolidated overview of parties' successes and failures over time.

Table 7. *Success over time*

Party	10% National threshold in 1995 reform proposal	District thresholds in the 1995 reform proposal	100 national deputies in 1995 reform proposal	Alliances or coalitions in the 1995, 1999, and 2002 elections	Combined – 1995 reform proposal	2018 electoral reform
DYP	1* (-9.48)	0* (-0.54)	0* (-0.19)	0* (-2.53)	0*	
CHP	1* (-7.60)	0* (-0.73)	1* (0.69)	0* (1.50)	0*	0 (13.1)
ANAP	1 (-1.16)	1 (0)	1 (-0.19)	0* (0.04)	1	
DSP	0 (-2.51)	1 (-1.64)	0 (0.88)	0* (0.58)	1	
RP	1 (-3.51)	1 (2.91)	1 (-1.21)			

AKP						0* (2.3)
MHP						0*
IYIP						0
HDP						1

Note. The asterisks for cases other than for the 1995, 1999, and 2002 alliances denote that the corresponding political party was one of the reformers. The asterisks for the 1995, 1999, and 2002 alliances denote that these political parties have been a part of a ruling government at least once prior to one of the 1995, 1999, or 2002 elections. Empty boxes mean that the party either did not exist at the time or did not have an active role in Turkish politics. The coding follows the Success Index logic outlined earlier, where 1 denotes success and 0 denotes failure.

In all, the political parties made a total of 28 decisions. Of those 28 decisions, only 13 were successful. The rate of "Success" is even lower among the parties that initiated a reform, or had the power to use electoral engineering for their benefits (i.e., three out of fourteen). This distinction highlights the difference between passive positioning and active electoral engineering. A binomial test comparing the probability of "Success" to tossing a coin reveals that there is no significant difference between the two (p = 0.8506). In other words, there is no evidence to suggest that the political parties would have been less successful if they had simply tossed a coin to decide their positions. This finding directly mirrors the benchmark established in Kaminski (2002).

Discussion

Reasons for Electoral Engineering Mistakes

Electoral engineering is difficult, and political parties make major mistakes while pursuing their electoral engineering plans. Even though policymakers often have access to data and expertise, they still frequently fail to design reforms that would maximize their benefits while minimizing the gains of opposition parties. This difficulty is compounded by the strategic interdependence of parties and the uncertainty inherent in translating votes into seats Although the Turkish case primarily provides examples of electoral engineering failures, I outline below the conditions that would increase the likelihood of success. Rather than identifying universal causes, this section situates Turkey within broader comparative patterns.

A brief literature review reveals that the following factors can lead to electoral engineering mistakes: (1) the overestimation of electoral support, particularly when participating in electoral bargaining with the opposition (Przeworski, 1997); (2) high volatility of votes and unexpected shifts in voter preferences, particularly under high electoral thresholds (Shvetsova, 2003); (3) frequent transformations of party systems and political party identities (Grofman et al., 1999); (4) a lack of technical knowledge (Kaminski, 1999); (5) weak political party institutionalization with strong leaders overshadowing political party ideologies; (6) a lack of reliable polls, and political bias in polls (Kaminski, 1999); and, lastly (7) the occurrence of transition-specific poll biases during the introduction of new electoral law and elections (Kaminski, 2002). These factors are not mutually exclusive and often reinforce one another. For Turkey, volatile voting patterns under high electoral thresholds, the overestimation of electoral support, a lack of technical knowledge, the weak institutionalization of parties, and a lack of reliable polls were the likely culprits of electoral engineering mistakes made in Turkey. Importantly,

several of these factors persist even outside periods of democratic transition. Table 8 presents compiled data on electoral engineering failures worldwide, with hypothetical reasons extracted from the literature.

Table 8. *Comparison of Identified Reasons for Electoral Engineering Failures Globally, 1989-2005*

	High volatility of votes	Transformations in party systems	Overestimating electoral support	Lack of technical expertise	Unreliable polls	Emerging democracy	Weak institutionalization of parties (including party system fragmentation and leader domination)	Public pressure causing leaders to implement reform that is not favorable to them	Compromise between parties
Poland 1989	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Poland 1993	X	X	X		X	X	X		
Poland 1997	X	X				X	X		
Poland 2001	X	X				X			
Poland 2003	X	X	X			X			
Hungary 1989	X	X	X	X	X	X			
Estonia 1992	X			X		X	X		X
New Zealand 1993								X	
Russia 1993	X	X				X			
Italy 1993							X	X	
Italy 2005	X	X							
Turkey 1991	X	X		X	X		X		
Turkey 1995 reform		X	X	X	X		X		
Turkey 1995 alliances		X	X	X	X		X		
Turkey 1999		X	X	X	X		X		
Turkey 2002	X	X	X	X	X				
Turkey 2018	X			X	X				

Note. The information compiled for this table comes from Andrews and Jackman (2005), Arslantaş et al. (2020), Aydaş (2020), Baldini (2011), Benoit and Schiemann (2001), Birch et al. (2002), Evci and Kaminski (2021), Evci & Kaminski (2025), Grofman et al. (1999), Kalaycıoğlu (1994, 1999, 2001), Kaminski (1999, 2002), Nagel (1994), Passarelli (2018), Renwick et al. (2009), and Toros (2011). The table is intended as a descriptive comparison rather than a causal test.

Discussion

As Table 8 demonstrates, identifying exact predictors of success or failure in electoral engineering is challenging. Accordingly, the claims below are exploratory and hypothesis-generating rather than confirmatory. Drawing on the Turkish case and comparative evidence from the literature, this study outlines several conditions under which electoral engineering failures are more likely to occur.

Three hypotheses emerge for future testing:

H1: High vote volatility increases the likelihood of electoral engineering failures.
H2: Transformations in party systems increase electoral engineering failures.
H3: Weak institutionalization of political parties increases electoral engineering failures.

Comparative evidence suggests that vote volatility is a central risk factor. Volatile voting patterns reduce parties' ability to anticipate the mechanical consequences of electoral rules, particularly under high thresholds. While such volatility is often associated with emerging democracies, the Turkish case demonstrates that it can persist well beyond formal democratic consolidation. Even in relatively stable institutional environments, uncertainty in voter behavior complicates strategic electoral design.

Party system instability further exacerbates these challenges. Frequent party entry, exit, and realignment undermine coordination among ideologically similar parties and make the effects of electoral reforms difficult to predict. Although party system transformation is often linked to democratic transitions, this study shows that instability may persist even after prolonged experience with an electoral system.

A third key factor is weak party institutionalization. In Turkey, strong leader dominance and fragmented party structures repeatedly undermined long-term strategic coordination. Party leaders retained near-total control over nominations and resources, limiting incentives to pursue reforms that required inter-party cooperation, such as apparentement. This institutional context helps explain why apparentement was politically feasible yet consistently underutilized during the 1990s.

These structural weaknesses were reinforced by highly unreliable polling. Inaccurate and volatile polling undermined parties' capacity to forecast threshold-clearing and alliance viability, increasing the likelihood of miscalculation. Evidence from both the 1990s and the 2018 elections indicates that polling errors directly contributed to electoral engineering mistakes.

Finally, while there is no clear evidence that Turkish policymakers lacked knowledge of electoral rules, limited access to technical expertise may have constrained their ability to evaluate counterfactual outcomes. Long-standing practices of patronage and clientelism, combined with elite turnover and brain drain, likely reduced the availability of specialized analytical capacity needed for effective electoral engineering.

Taken together, these findings suggest that electoral engineering failures in Turkey were structural rather than situational. Although parties gained experience with the electoral system over time, the same underlying constraints—volatility, fragmentation, weak institutionalization, and informational deficiencies—continued to shape decision-making. While Turkish parties became more willing to form alliances in the 2010s, this adaptation occurred only after repeated and costly failures.

Conclusion

Using the Success Index framework developed by Kaminski (2002), this study introduces new evidence from Turkey that complements earlier findings on electoral engineering. Across multiple electoral episodes, Turkey's political parties were no more successful in identifying advantageous electoral strategies than if they had relied on random choice. These failures occurred not only during periods of institutional flux but also after prolonged experience with a stable electoral system.

Electoral engineering remains a powerful but risky political instrument. As Sartori (1968) observed, electoral systems are among the most specific manipulative tools in politics, yet their consequences are often difficult to anticipate. Consistent with Kaminski (2002), this study demonstrates the limits of parties' ability to foresee the mechanical effects of electoral rules. By extending the analysis to a country that was not going through a democratic transition over time, it shows that electoral engineering failures are not confined to transitional contexts but may persist even under conditions of institutional maturity.

In American politics, parties and politicians are generally successful when gerrymandering district boundaries. In contrast, less established political systems with proportional representation, multiple parties, fluid voter preferences, and other unique factors present much more challenging scenarios for political manipulators. In Turkey, their electoral engineering was no more successful than simply tossing a coin.

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Appendix A

Sensitivity Analysis.

To undertake sensitivity analysis, I calculate the minimal transition rates that would give a particular coalition the majority of votes, the majority of seats, and the number of seats that the parties won separately in the 1995, 1999, and 2002 elections. Although the resultant predictions are not as strong as those that I would have been able to formulate had I access to voter preference data, they allow for reasonable assumptions due to reasons explained below.

The minimal transition rate in Table A denotes the proportion of votes that the center-left or the center-right would have had to have received to obtain the majority of national votes, the total number of national legislators gained in their respective elections, and the majority of national legislative seats. For instance, a minimal transition rate of 0.735 for the center-left in 1999 means that the center-left parties could have received only 73.5% of the votes that they actually did receive in the elections that year, and they still would have won the same number of seats in parliament.

Calculating these values allows me to show that political parties would have had to lose a significant number of votes as an alliance for an *apparentement* provision to hurt them. However, there is no indication that the parties would have lost this number of votes. In the instance used as an example in the paragraph above, there is no indication that at least 26.5% of center-left voters would have changed their voting preferences due to an electoral alliance between the center-left parties. Thus, a value of 0.735 indicates that even

under certain instances of sub-additivity, the center-left would have been better off. For instance, the center-left could have lost 20% of their votes and still won more seats in parliament.

The minimal transition rate for winning the actual number of seats is above 1 for the center-left only in the case of the 2002 elections (i.e., 1.163, meaning that the left would have had to have received 116.3% of the votes that they received in an *apparentement* election in order to receive the same number of seats). However, the reason for this is that the center-right parties were unable to clear the 10% national threshold in 2002. Given that an alliance between the center-right parties would have provided them a total of 14.67% of all the votes and 19.9% of all the seats, the left would have had to have received a higher number of votes as an alliance in order to sustain the same number of seats in parliament under an *apparentement* provision. Yet, if we calculate a counterfactual scenario in which only the left enters elections as an alliance and the right remains below the national 10% threshold, then we see, once again, that the minimal transition rate for the center-left is less than 1.

Table A. *Minimal Transition Rates*

Election year	Minimal transition rate for the majority of the votes (Left)	Minimal transition rate for the majority of the seats (Left)	Minimal transition rate for the actual number of seats (Left)	Minimal transition rate for the majority of the votes (Right)	Minimal transition rate for the majority of the seats (Right)	Minimal transition rate for the actual number of seats (Right)
1995	1.97	2.005	0.85	1.29	1.0095	0.981
1999	1.38	1.32	0.735	1.57	1.36	0.86
2002	2.07	1.68	1.163	2.91	2.06	0
2002, Without Right	2.07	1.39	0.962	N/A	N/A	N/A

The minimal transition rates provided in Table A show that in all cases, the center-left and center-right parties would have been better off with additive coalitions, as well as with some sub-additive coalitions. For example, in the 1999 elections, if they had engaged in an alliance under *apparentement*, the left could have won the same number of seats that they won in the elections by receiving only 73.5% of their total vote count, and the right could have won the same number of seats by receiving only 86% of their total vote count. The sole possible exception to these positive outcomes is that the leftist coalition might not

have benefited from an additive coalition in the 2002 elections, but this is because I include the center-right parties in my calculations, which failed to clear the threshold. When the center-right parties are removed, it is once again apparent that the center-left would have been better off under an additive alliance, even if the votes received by the second center-left party (i.e., the DSP) was minimal (1.22% of all votes). Because the transition rates show that political parties would have had to have lost significant numbers of votes under *apparentement*—an unlikely scenario—I conclude that my counterfactual scenarios under the assumption of additivity provides us with reliable estimates. The sensitivity analysis demonstrates that benefits derived from forming an alliance do not hinge on the additivity of votes, given that alliances could have provided political parties with better outcomes even under cases of sub-additivity.

Figures

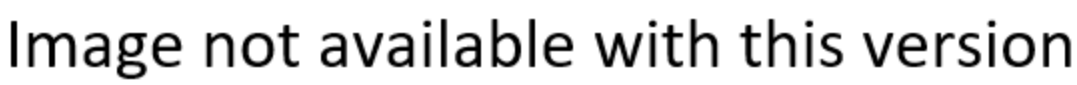


Figure 1

Legend not included with this version.