SOME FINDINGS ON THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF GENERATION Z YOUTH IN TÜRKİYE

Ender Akyol
Inonu University Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Malatya, Türkiye
ender.akyol@inonu.edu.tr

Fatih Erarslan
Inonu University, Graduate School of Social Sciences, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Malatya, Türkiye
fatih.erarslan@gop.edu.tr

Abstract

In recent years, there has been significant interest in generational studies across various disciplines of social sciences. Particularly, the political participation behaviors and voting tendencies of individuals known as Generation Z have drawn the attention of both academicians and political decision-makers. However, in Türkiye, studies examining the relationship between generational voter tendencies and political participation preferences are limited and are generally conducted on a regional or educational basis, focusing on specific provinces, regions, or schools.

Based on the assumption that a descriptive and explanatory study on the general political participation tendencies of Generation Z in Türkiye is needed, this research was designed. The study considered citizens living in Türkiye as the population, and a representative sample was determined. Since the variable in question would be measured at the societal level, the sample was distributed at the NUTS II level. To achieve a representative sample, a minimum size of 417 was calculated with a ±3% margin of error at a 95% confidence level. Accounting for potential missing data, the sample size was increased to 500. The sample included 26 provinces and 31 districts from Level 2 of Türkiye's Statistical Regional Units Classification. The data obtained were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences), focusing on the general voter tendencies of Generation Z. The analyses included reliability analysis, frequency analysis, chi-square tests, and difference tests. The findings revealed that 85.8% of participants were not members of any political party, and 67.4% did not believe in solving problems through politics. Furthermore, 41.6% identified themselves as sympathetic voters, while 34.2% considered party leadership important in voting decisions. Additionally, 66.2% of respondents stated that Türkiye needs a new political party, and 60.6% expressed support for a return to the parliamentary system.

Keywords

1. Introduction

In general, in social sciences, groups of people with certain characteristics formed by the events and experiences that have been experienced individually in a certain common time period and within the society are defined as 'generations' (Alwin & McCommon, 2007: 221). According to generational theories, some attitudes of individuals are formed in the early ages of life and remain relatively unchanged over time (Whittier 1997). In this context, political socialisation processes of individuals are determinant on their political tendencies and behaviours. These general tendencies, which are thought to develop at a relatively early age, shape the views that citizens form towards the political issues and problems they encounter later on, their attitudes towards political parties, leaders and candidates, their attitudes towards political parties and their views on the political system in general (Sears & Levy 2003).

Sears (1990) found that there are four different perspectives in the political socialisation literature: The first is the 'persistence perspective' (Easton & Dennis, 1969), which emphasises

the immutability and maintenance of political attitudes acquired in the family from childhood onwards, and the 'lifetime openness perspective' (Jennings & Niemi 1974), which emphasises the changeability of political attitudes at any age. On the other hand, regarding the sometimes increasing or decreasing role of different agents in the political socialisation process, the 'life cycle perspective' (Stoker & Jennings, 1995) argues that people are predisposed to adopt certain tendencies at certain life stages, such as radicalism in youth and conservatism in later life. Finally, the 'impressionable years perspective' (Wasburn & Covert 2017) argues that political beliefs and attitudes are unusually fragile/vulnerable in late adolescence and early adulthood.

In the 1960s and 1970s, dramatic political, social and economic events such as wars, economic crises, crises of legitimacy of governments and similar dramatic political, social and economic events initiated analyses of generational politics. In this context, the 'impressionable years perspective' analysed the effects of political and social events on a particular generation in a historically and periodically similar period. Underlying much of the research is the assumption that late adolescence and early adulthood is a particularly critical period in the life cycle for developing enduring political orientations, and that enduring period effects tend to be particularly pronounced for members of this age group. Alwin and Krosnick (1991) showed that cohorts who gain political consciousness during the rise of a political party stabilise certain political orientations, such as party identification, while Russell et. al (1992) showed that socialisation during M. Thatcher's time in power in the UK resulted in first-time voters in 1979 and 1987 being more conservative than other cohorts in their youth.

When the general tendency in the literature on the scope of Generation Z members, which is the subject of this study, is considered, it is seen that they are those born in 2000 and after (Willams, 2010: 12). Generation Z individuals experienced negative events such as global crises, environmental problems and terrorist incidents during their childhood and early youth and were directly or indirectly affected by these events. On the other hand, Generation Z individuals were born into a period in which technological developments such as the internet developed very rapidly. Accessing and interacting with information through technology is extremely important for this generation (Lainer, 2017: 289). Generation Z, which lives a life intertwined with digital technologies, is also called 'Generation I', 'Internet Generation', 'Next Generation' and 'iGen'. It is also called the 'Instant Online' generation (Levicate, 2010: 173). Prensky (2001: 1-6) has named this generation as 'Digital Natives' in the most understandable terms since Generation Z is the

generation that has come to a digital world. From the perspective of political socialisation, the views of Generation Z youth, who are socialised under different conditions than previous generations in terms of technological innovations, active use of the internet and social media, reveal interesting results in terms of traditional political institutions such as politicians and political parties.

It is seen that Generation Z individuals in Turkey have similar characteristics with other Generation Z individuals anywhere in the world with the effect of globalisation. On a global scale, neoliberal policies have continued, economic crises have been experienced, unemployment has increased, technological developments have accelerated, the internet has become widespread, and global occupations and protests have increased. In addition, developments specific to Turkey have also shaped Generation Z individuals 'from the perspective of impressionable years'. In the post-2000 period, there is a generation in Turkey that grew up under the rule of the Justice and Development Party from the ages of 11-12 until their late twenties (Kalaycıoğlu, 2022). The 2013 Gezi Park Protests, the 15 July 2016 FETO coup attempt, the transformation of the parliamentary system into a presidential system, the system of alliances, constitutional referendums, the Syrian civil war and the massive wave of migration to Turkey were all experienced by Generation Z individuals.

It has been discussed and attracted attention for a long time that Generation Z has an apolitical attitude worldwide and that young people are generally disinterested in politics (political apathy) and their political participation is decreasing (Putnam, 2007; Hart & Henn, 2017). In studies, it is stated that the political participation of Generation Z, the young individuals of the 2000s, is limited and that they are more unfamiliar with the political activities carried out by the previous generations. As research on youth participation in conventional politics in liberal democracies shows, participation in conventional politics among young people tends to decline (Wattenberg, 2012). As is well known, the most commonly used distinction between forms of political participation is between conventional and unconventional political participation. Conventional political participation includes activities such as voting, participating in political campaigns and becoming a member of political parties. Unconventional political participation, on the other hand, includes activities such as signing petitions, boycotting, going on strike, participating in political demonstrations, etc., which generally express citizens' discontent with political decisions (Russell, 2016). It is also understood that in many liberal democracies, young

people do not find traditional political institutions such as political parties, elections and politicians acceptable and do not trust them (Henn & Oldfield, 2016). Since young generations perceive conventional political institutions as 'dirty' and 'corrupt' in the context of the crisis of representative liberal democracy, this leads them to lose interest in conventional forms of political participation (Bee, 2021). Therefore, it is understood that young people do not take part in the critical points of the political system and parties and find it meaningless to be present at these points (Bendicto, 2008: 81). However, with the help of technology, new forms of political participation have started to emerge, and it is claimed that young people today participate in politics more and in a different way because they have different qualities and abilities than their parents' generations (Kitanova, 2020: 821).

With a population of over 80 million, more than one million young people become voters for the first time every year in Turkey, and half of the population consists of young people under the age of 30 (British Council, 2018). Given Turkey's young population, it is important to understand Generation Z's political participation preferences. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to explain the political participation levels and political behaviours of individuals belonging to Generation Z, who have the right to vote and be elected in Turkey without legal restrictions, and to seek answers to the political behaviours of Generation Z, which is perceived as apolitical in the light of the findings of the study.

2. Material and Method

Through the quantitative questionnaire form created in the research, the participants' expectations from politics and politicians were made sense of, and their similarities and qualities were tried to be tested within the framework of political participation levels.

As of the end of 2023, the total population of Turkey is approximately 85 million. The young population in the 15-24 age group is approximately 13 million. The young population corresponds to 15.1 per cent of the total population. 51.3 per cent of the young population is male and 48.7 per cent is female. Within this young population, the group between the ages of 18 and 23, which can be defined as Generation Z, is approximately 8 million people (TÜİK, Youth in Statistics, 2023).

2.1. Participants

The data of the research were collected in January-April 2024. Considering the citizens living in Turkey as the population, the sample to represent the population was determined. For a representative sample, considering the voter turnout rates, the minimum sample number was calculated as 417 with a sensitivity of +/- 3 at 95% confidence interval. Taking into account possible missing observations, a total of 500 people were interviewed face-to-face at their addresses. The survey was conducted in seven geographical regions of Turkey. 26 provinces in NUTS 2 (Level 2) in the 'Classification of Statistical Territorial Units of Turkey' were determined as the sample. In the study, it was tried to determine the descriptive characteristics of the general voter tendencies of the participants with the scale formed within the framework of the research. Information on the demographic information of the participants is explained in Table.1.

Table.1: *Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Characteristics.*

Variable	n	%
Gender		
Female	250	50
Male	250	50
Marital Status		
Married	69	13,8
Not Married	431	86,2
Continuing Education Level		
I completed my education.	268	53,6
Associate degree	68	13,6
Undergraduate	161	32,2
Postgraduate	3	0,6
Graduate Education Level		
High school	389	77,8
Associate degree	76	15,2
Undergraduate	35	7
Father's Education Status		
Illiterate	4	0,8
Literate	6	1,2
Primary school	172	34,4
Secondary school	144	28,8
High school	152	30,4
Associate degree	10	2
Undergraduate	12	2,4
Mother's Education Status		
Illiterate	16	3,2
Literate	9	1,8

Primary school	207	41,4
Secondary school	124	24,8
High school	126	25,2
Associate degree	10	2
Undergraduate	8	1,6
Family Residence		
Town	3	0,6
District	125	25
Province	267	53,4
Metropolitan	105	21
Person you live with		
With my family	476	95,2
With friends	6	1.2
Alone	17	3.4
Other	1	0.2
Average Monthly Income Level		
Below the Poverty Line	396	79,2
Above the Poverty Line	104	20,8

(Source: Authors' Own Illustration).

2.2. Data Collection Tools

Personal Information Form. This form included information such as gender, age, marital status, education level, parental education level, place of residence and income level of the participants.

General Voter Tendencies Form. In this form, 22 questions were asked to the participants.

Factors Affecting Political Participation Levels Form. In this form, a statement consisting of 17 items was asked to the participants.

3. Findings

Table.2: *Descriptive Statistics for General Voter Tendencies Questions.*

Variable	n	%
Did you vote in the last general election?		
Yes	427	85,4
No	73	14,6
Do you plan to vote in the upcoming elections?		
Yes	493	98,6

Undecided	7	1,4

If yes, have you decided on the political party to vote for?

Yes	444	88,8
No	56	11,2

Are you a member of any political party?

Yes	71	14,2
No	429	85,8

Have you taken an active role in the election campaign of any candidate or political party?

Yes	62	12,4
No	438	87,6

Do you think you should take an active role in political activities?

Yes	68	13,6
No	421	84,2
No idea	11	2,2

Do you believe that problems can be solved through politics?

Yes	156	31,2
No	337	67,4
No idea	7	1,4

Have you participated in a petition organised for the demands of a group representing you or for protest purposes?

Yes	73	14,6
No	427	85,4

Have you read the programme of the political party you prefer/sympathise with?

Yes	107	21,4
No	393	78,6

Which of the following political identities best describes you?

Conservative	64	12,8
Nationalist	43	8,6
Nationalist-conservative	68	13,6
Democrat	15	3
Social democrat	60	12
Liberal democrat	11	2,2
Liberal	41	8,2
Kemalist (Atatürkçü)	162	32,4
Islamist	2	0,4
Nationalist (Ulusalcı-Secular nationalist)	23	4,6
Socialist	8	1,6
Ethnic nationalist	3	0,6

Which of the following types of voters do you identify yourself as?

Partisan voter (loyal to the party)	90	18
Sympathising voter (sympathising with the party)	208	41,6
Undecided voters (voters who cannot make a decision until the election)	28	5,6
Floating voters (voters who are not loyal to any party and vote for different parties).	43	8,6
Tactical voters (voters who can vote for a party they do not approve of in order to prevent a party from coming to power)	3	0,6
The voter who votes for the leader.	128	25,6

Which factor is most important for you in your decision to vote for a political party?

The leader of the party	171	34,2
Candidates	25	5
Party ideology	134	26,8
Party statute	25	5
Past actions of the party	66	13,2
The party's projects	79	15,8

Top three most influential factors for voting*

Commitment	253	16,9
Citizenship	438	29,2
Cultural belonging	104	6,9
Social responsibility	297	19,8
Future anxiety	295	19,7
Necessity	13	0,9
Religious values	68	4,5
Feelings of love, respect, hatred, hatred, hatred depending on the historical process	32	2,1

How/where do you usually follow the current political process in Turkey?

I do not follow	82	16,4
Visual media	157	31,4
Printed media	11	2,2
Internet news	114	22,8
Social media	134	26,8
Near neighbourhood	2	0,4

Is there a need for a new political party in Turkey?

Yes	152	30,4
No	331	66,2
No opinion	17	3,4

Rate your assessment of the existence of democracy in Turkey on a scale of 1-10

1-There is no democracy in the country	33	6,6
2	43	8,6
3	102	20,4
4	78	15,6
5	41	8,2

6	44	8,8
7	82	16,4
8	66	13,2
9	6	1,2
10-The country is completely democratic.	5	1
Do you think we should return to the parliamentary system?		
Yes	303	60,6
No	175	35
No Opinion	22	4,4
How do you see Türkiye in the future?		
It will be a rising power	92	18,4
There will be no change	279	55,8
It's going to get worse	121	24,2
No opinion	8	1,6
What do you think about your future?		
I am very hopeful	20	4
Hopeful	249	49,8
Pessimistic	191	38,2
I am very pessimistic	39	7,8
No opinion	1	0,2

*Multiple response

(Source: Authors' Own Illustration).

Table 3: *Arithmetic Means of the Statements Related to the Questions on the Factors Affecting the Levels of Political Participation.*

Statements	Arithmetic Mean	Rank
1. The candidate himself	4,38	2
2. Ideology of the candidate	4,42	1
3. Party promises	4,17	4
4. Past actions of the party	4,16	5
5. Party ideology	4,35	3
6. My family and close circle	3,22	9
7. Public opinion survey results	2,87	13
8. The probability of the candidate winning the election	3,73	6
9. Effectiveness of the political campaign	3,34	8
10. Face-to-face interviews with voters	3,63	7
11. Television broadcasts	2,85	14
12. Newspaper and magazine publications	2,48	16
13. Radio broadcasts	2,30	17
14. Internet	2,96	11
15. Social media	2,97	10
16. Brochures, posters, announcements, photographs, films, etc.	2,53	15
17. Rallies and demonstrations	2,95	12

(Source: Authors' Own Illustration).

4. Conclusion and Discussion

Although Generation Z youth are publicly characterised as apolitical, it is seen that they do not stay away from voting, which is the most basic level of political participation. In terms of voting as the easiest type of political participation, the rate of participation in elections in Turkey is also high in previous generations. It can be said that there is a continuity in electoral participation. The main motivation for voting is the duty of citizenship. In addition, it is seen that

political party preferences, i.e. party identity, are pre-determined before the voting process. However, Generation Z youth avoid membership of a political party and do not prefer to participate in election campaigns of political parties. Therefore, Generation Z youth do not prefer to take an active role in political activities. In support of our findings, according to KONDA research, four out of every five young people in Turkey are not members of any political party (KONDA, 2022). In liberal democracies, the ratio of party membership to the electorate declined between the 1980s and the late 1990s (Mair 2000; Mair & Van Biezen 2001).

According to our research findings, Generation Z youth 'do not believe that problems can be solved through politics. The fact that they do not prefer to read the programmes of the political parties they prefer or support supports this point. As our research findings show, according to Generation Z youth, there is no need for the establishment of a new political party in Turkey. This finding can be explained by the findings that they do not believe that problems can be solved through politics and that they do not trust politics. On the other hand, the decline in party membership and the lack of interest in traditional politics indicate that citizens are becoming disenchanted with politics in liberal democracies (Dalton & Wattenberg 2000). According to our research findings, the majority of the respondents identify themselves with Kemalist (Atatürkçü) and Nationalist-Conservative, Conservative and Nationalist political identities. According to Konda research, 28% of young people define their lifestyle as traditional-conservative, while 11% define themselves as religious-conservative (KONDA, 2022). The rising trends such as nationalism, xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiments in the world may have an impact on the young people in Turkey in defining their political identities. However, there is a need for further research on this issue.

The participants of our research expressed themselves as sympathising voters. As the findings show, the identity of the political leader is an important factor in identifying themselves as voters. According to this finding, the participants identify with the political leader more than the political party identity. As a matter of fact, the fact that the leader of the political party is seen as the most important factor in voting supports this finding.

As the findings of the survey show, Generation Z youth, who do not believe in the existence of democracy in Turkey, stated that the current government system should be abandoned and the parliamentary system should be returned to. According to the Konda survey, 90 per cent

of young people in Turkey rate the functioning of democracy with a score of 5 or lower on a scale of 1-10 (KONDA, 2022).

The current political and social climate in Turkey does not allow young people to develop an active, participatory political identity. This situation not only causes young people to remain indifferent to politics but also alienates them from politics. At the legal-institutional level, especially by making arrangements regarding political parties and electoral systems, young people can be actively orientated towards the political sphere.

In addition, the attitudes and stances of young people towards political life can only be enriched by giving young people the opportunity to express themselves in daily life. In order to realise this enrichment, young people should be made a subject in the society and they should be given the opportunity to have a say in their own future. Especially when young people have the opportunity to make decisions as active citizens in determining and shaping their own lives, they will be more involved in politics. This situation can add a new perspective and dynamism to politics. In order to develop new political processes in which young people are active, there is a need for a political ground that is dominated by democracy and is free from hierarchy with a more libertarian identity.

THANK YOU

REFERENCES

Alwin, D. F., & Krosnick, J. (1991). Aging, cohorts and the stability of socio-political orientations over the life span. *American Journal of Sociology, 97*, 169–195. https://doi.org/10.1086/229744

Alwin, D. F., & McCammon, R. J. (2007). Rethinking generations. *Research in Human Development, 4*(3-4), 219–237. https://doi.org/10.1080/15427600701663072

Bee, C. (2021). The civic and political participation of young people in a context of heightened authoritarianism: The case of Turkey. *Journal of Youth Studies, 24*(1), 40–61. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2019.1683523

Benedicto, J. (2008). Young people and politics: Disconnected, sceptical, an alternative, or all of it at the same time? *Young People and Political Participation: European Research Young People's Studies Magazine, 8*(81), 13–31.

Dalton, R., & Wattenberg, M. (2000). *Parties without partisans: Political change in advanced industrial democracies.* Oxford University Press.

Easton, D., & Dennis, J. (1969). *Children in the political system: Origins of political legitimacy.* McGraw-Hill Book Company.

Erdoğan, E. (1999). Türk gençliği ve siyasal katılım boyutları: Bir katılım endeksi çalışması. *İstanbul Strateji/Mori.*

Grasso, M. T. (2014). Age-period-cohort analysis in a comparative context: Political generations and political participation repertoires. *Electoral Studies, 33*, 63–76. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2014.02.006

Hart, J., & Henn, M. (2017). Neoliberalism and the unfolding patterns of young people's political engagement and political participation in contemporary Britain. *Societies, 7*(4), 33. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc7040033

Henn, M., & Oldfield, B. (2016). Cajoling or coercing: Would electoral engineering resolve the young citizen–state disconnect? *Journal of Youth Studies, 19*(9), 1259–1280. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2016.1154935

Jennings, M. K., & Niemi, R. G. (1974). *Political character in adolescence.* Princeton University Press.

Kalaycıoğlu, E. (2022). Party identification and vote choice in Turkey. In A. Çarkoğlu & E. Kalaycıoğlu (Eds.), *Elections and public opinion in Turkey* (pp. 169–192). Routledge.

Kitanova, M. (2020). Youth political participation in the EU: Evidence from a cross-national analysis. *Journal of Youth Studies, 23*(7), 819–836. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2019.1636951

KONDA. (2022). Gençlerin insan hakları algısı: Kamuoyu araştırması, Ekim '22. https://konda.com.tr/rapor/174/genclerin-insan-haklari-algisi-arastirmasi

Levickaitė, R. (2010). Generations X Y Z: How social networks form the concept of the world without borders – The case of Lithuania. *Limes, 3*(2), 170–183. https://doi.org/10.3846/limes.2010.17

Mair, P. (2000). Partyless democracy: Solving the paradox of New Labour? *New Left Review, 2*, 21–35.

Mair, P., & Van Biezen, I. (2001). Party membership in twenty European democracies, 1980–2000. *Party Politics, 7*(1), 5–21. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068801007001001

Prensky, M. (2011). Digital natives, digital immigrants. *NCB University Press, 9*(5), 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1108/10748120110424816

Putnam, R. D. (2007). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community.* Simon & Schuster.

Russell, A. T., Johnston, R. J., & Pattie, C. J. (1992). Thatcher's children: Exploring the links between age and political attitudes. *Political Studies, 40*(4), 742–756. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.1992.tb01792.x

Russell, Ö. Ç. (2016). Türkiye'de seçime ve geleneksel olmayan siyasal faaliyetlere katılımı etkileyen bireysel seviye faktörler. *AÜSBF Dergisi, 71*(2), 437–463. https://doi.org/10.1501/SBFder_0000002399

Sears, D. O. (1990). Whither political socialization research? The question of persistence. In O. Ichilov (Ed.), *Political socialization, citizenship education and democracy* (pp. 60–109). Teachers College Press.

Sears, D. O., & Levy, S. (2003). Childhood and adult political development. In D. O. Sears et al. (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of political psychology* (pp. 60–109). Oxford University Press.

Sloam, J. (2016). Diversity and voice: The political participation of young people in the European Union. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations, 18*(3), 521–537. https://doi.org/10.1177/1369148115620975

Stoker, L., & Jennings, M. K. (1995). Life-cycle transitions and political participation: The case of marriage. *American Political Science Review, 89*(2), 421–433. https://doi.org/10.2307/2082435

Tezcan, M. (2000). Sosyo-kültürel değişim sürecinde Türkiye'deki gençlik. In *Türkiye ve Avrupa'da Gençlik* (pp. 94–103). Konrad Adenauer Vakfı ve Türk Demokrasi Vakfı.

Tuna, Y. B. (2013). İnternet kuşağı ve siyasi aktivizm: Genç siviller "yaş"lanıyor. In *Gençlik halleri: 2000'li yıllar Türkiye'sinde genç olmak* (pp. 270–291). Efil Yayınevi.

Wasburn, P. C., & Covert, T. J. (2017). *Making citizens: Political socialization research and beyond.* Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-50243-4

Wattenberg, M. (2012). *Where have all the voters gone?* Harvard University Press.

Williams, K. C., & Page, R. A. (2011). Marketing to the generations. *Journal of Behavioral Studies in Business, 3*(1), 37–53.

Whittier, N. (1997). Political generations, micro-cohorts, and the transformation of social movements. *American Sociological Review, 62*(5), 760–778. https://doi.org/10.2307/2657359