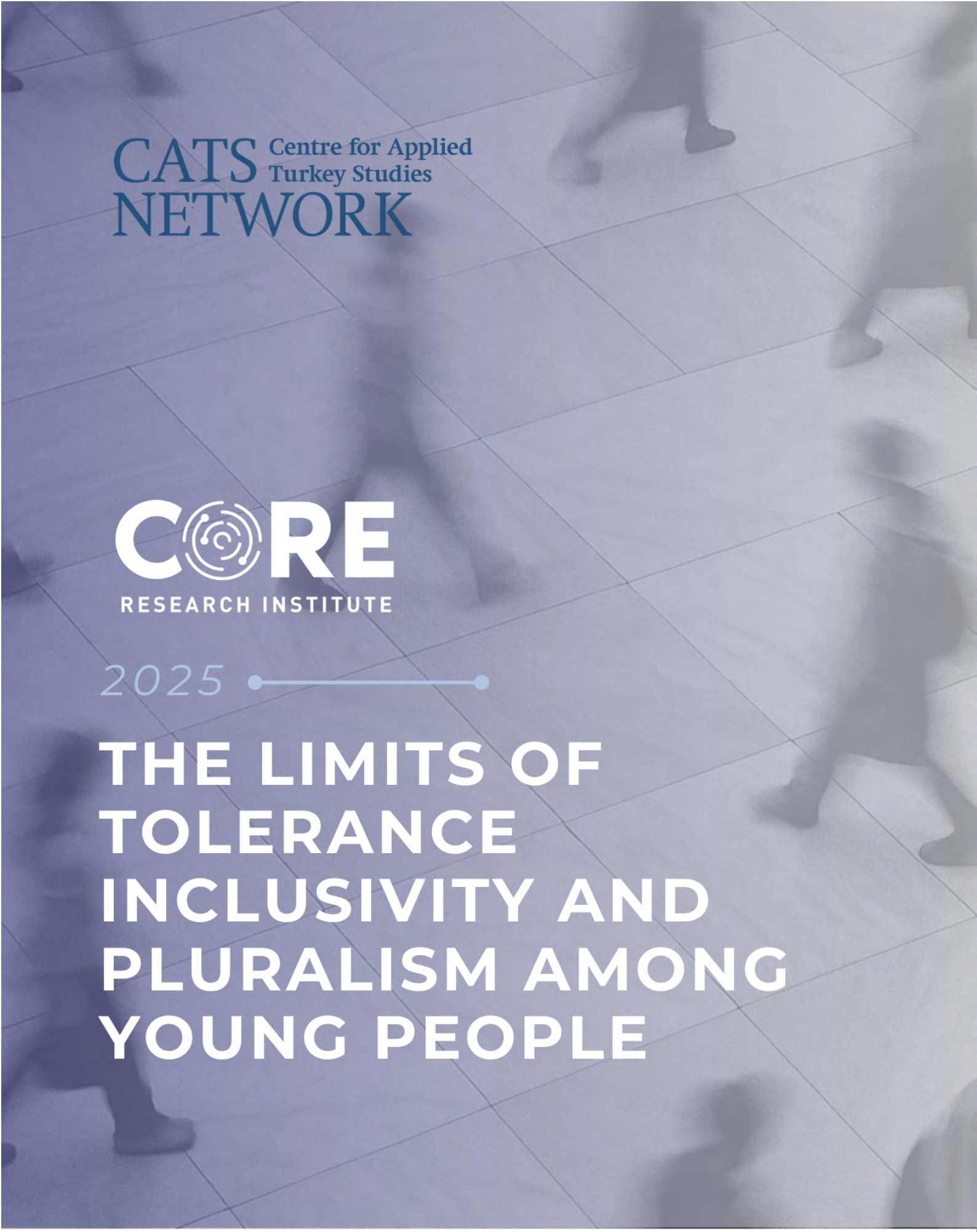

CATS NETWORK Centre for Applied Turkey Studies

CORE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

2025

THE LIMITS OF TOLERANCE INCLUSIVITY AND PLURALISM AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

STIFTUNG MERCATOR

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Research Team

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01 INTRODUCTION

1. INTRODUCTION

During a period marked by simultaneous political and economic crises in Turkey, it is important to understand the younger generation's perspective on the political system, democracy, the state, and fundamental values, both in terms of youth policies and the country's future.

This comprehensive research report, titled **Understanding Youth in Turkey: Democracy and Political Values,** is based on fieldwork findings from young people aged 18-30. The report addresses topics such as young people's relationship with politics, their approach to democracy, their perception of the European Union and the West, and their attitude toward pluralism.

The study is based on the observation that, over the past decade, developments such as the rise of nationalism and isolationism, increased opposition to immigration, and the spread of security-oriented discourse have transformed the younger generation's perception of democracy and their relationship with pluralism. In this context, the study examines Turkey's position within an objective framework in terms of its domestic politics and relations with the West/EU. It takes into account trends such as young people's disengagement from politics and rising feelings of insecurity and powerlessness.

The main research question was: **What are the values and attitudes of young people in Turkey regarding social issues, and how do these attitudes differ according to political, ideological, socio-economic, and cultural variables?** Within this framework, the following sub-questions were addressed: (i) Young people's awareness of and attitudes toward pluralistic democracy and democratic values, (ii) their views on human rights, respect for diversity, the environment, gender, combating hate speech, migrants, and the sources of these views, (iii) the influence of nationalist, conservative, and authoritarian narratives, and (iv) the role of the West and the European Union in shaping young people's values.

When evaluating this report and similar texts, it is important to remember that the youth as a category is not homogeneous and is large in population. First, students, workers, and NEET (not in education, employment, or training) youth fall outside the fundamental areas of education and working life and constitute separate segments with different needs and problem areas. When adding ethnic, religious, and worldview-related identity differences to this, it becomes difficult to speak of a single youth category. Therefore, generalizing analyses of young people, which are repeated in this report, are never valid for all young people. It is necessary to interpret the data considering that general observations reflect prevailing trends and must be evaluated alongside specific breakdowns.

Before examining the research results, it is helpful to review the macro data on young people. First, regarding the population, it can be said that Turkey has now entered the phase of completing its demographic transformation. Contrary to calls for three children, the average fertility rate has fallen below 1.5. In parallel, the proportion of elderly people is also rising. In fact, Turkey now fits the definition of an aging country. Despite this, Turkey still has a large young population. The age range considered young can vary. TÜİK statistics use the 15-24 age range as a basis. Some international authorities also use a similar age range. Conversely, there is a tendency to extend the age limit for youth to 30 (or even 35 from a sociological perspective). Additionally, the 15-18 age group is often considered children. Therefore, ambiguity exists about who is considered young. Moreover, age has sociological implications. For instance, many political leaders highlighted as young are over 50. In many sports, people over 30 are considered old.

According to official definitions, Turkey's youth population ratio (ages 15–24) is 14.9% (12.8 million), which is significantly higher than the EU-27 average of 10.7%. Using different criteria, **the number of young people in Turkey is 15.427 million for the 18–29 age group and 19.318 million for the 15–29 age group.**

Turkey's youth unemployment rate (15–24) was 16.3% in 2024. In 2024, the youth unemployment rate in the EU was 14.9%. The NEET indicator reveals a structural weakness in Turkey. In 2024, the NEET rate for individuals aged 15–29 was 25.9%, which is more than double the EU-27 average of 11.1%. Furthermore, the situation is even more striking among women, at 30.1%. In a global context, the ILO reports that the NEET rate for the 15–24 age group was 20.4% in 2023.

In Turkey, the rate of those without at least a high school diploma in the 25–34 age group was 30% in 2023, while the OECD average was 13% in 2024. New OECD publications show that Turkey reduced this rate from 41% to around 28% between 2019 and 2024.

In the EU, the average age at which young people leave their parents' home is 26.2. Housing costs and prolonged transition periods delay young people's independence. In Turkey, young people often continue living with their families even after starting work unless they get married. Only starting work in another city or being a student allows for independent living.

These structural barriers negatively affect young people's life satisfaction in many areas, from access to resources to interactions within their social circles, and make it easier to shift the burden to other segments of society.

Summary Indicators

Indicator	Turkey	EU/OECD
Youth Population Share (15–24, 2024)	**%14.9**	**%10.7**
NEET (15–29, 2024) [*]	**%25.9**	**%11.1**
NEET (15–24, 2024, by gender) [**]	Erkek **%16.2** Kadın **%30.1**	Women **%12.1** Men **%10.0** (EU-27)
Youth Unemployment (15–24, 2024)	**%16.3**	**%14.9**
Age of Leaving Parental Home (2024)	—	**26.2**
25–34 Lower Secondary School Enrollment Rate [***]	**%30** (2023) **~%28** (2024 trend)	OECD average **%13** (2024)

[*] NEET age groups may vary by country and institution. The Turkey-EU comparison is based on ages 15–29. [**] The Turkey gender breakdown is for ages 15–24, and the EU-27 gender breakdown is for ages 15–29. [***] Turkey's 2023 value comes from the OECD's 'Education at a Glance 2024' country notes. The OECD's new notes show a downward trend to ~28% for 2024.[1]

Beyond the macro data, it's important to note that the debate on democracy and pluralism isn't limited to Turkey. Western countries have also been grappling with the challenges facing democracy and pluralism for a long time. The promise of pluralistic democracy was peaceful coexistence with differences. However, experience has shown that this is not so easy.

In response to democracy's tendency to become the rule of the majority, pluralistic democratic approaches promised that all different groups in society could live together with equal rights. For this promise to be realized in daily life rather than remain on paper, though, many complex conditions must be met. Whether differences can coexist depends on how strongly fundamental principles such as rights and equality are defended, whether contact between different groups occurs on an equal footing, and how belonging is shaped (e.g., whether citizenship is based on exclusionary exaltation or a secure community bond).

Today, the promise of pluralistic democracy is under pressure from two powerful currents: **political populism and identity-based polarization.** These forces destabilize young people's inclusive attitudes toward differences. Identity politics, accelerated by social media, disinformation, and a widespread sense of injustice, are lowering the tolerance threshold of young people. Tolerance, acceptance, recognition, and management can become confused.

[1] TÜİK – Youth Statistics, 2024 (Bulletin No: 54077)
- TÜİK – Labor Force Statistics, 2024 (Annual)
- Eurostat – Statistics on young people neither in employment nor in education or training (NEET)
- Eurostat – Population by age group (15–24), 2024
- Eurostat – Unemployment statistics (youth 15–24), 2024
- Eurostat – Young people – Housing Conditions / Age of leaving the parental home, 2024
- OECD – Education at a Glance 2024/2025, Country Notes: Turkiye
- ILO – Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024 (NEET rate)

Yet inclusiveness is critical to social peace. When education and public policies simultaneously target equality, cultural pluralism, and safe public spaces for all, the goal should be more than merely "tolerating" or "managing" differences.

According to important figures in the field, such as *Mouffe* and *Dahl*, pluralistic democracies have two fundamental pillars: **legitimate opposition and contestation, as well as participation and inclusiveness.** In other words, democracy must allow different voices to compete freely and encourage participation in this competition from the broader society.

This implies more than the mere "presence" of different groups. For inclusive attitudes to become permanent, legitimate opposition is necessary, individuals must be able to comfortably carry multiple identities, and rights-based thinking must become widespread. This raises a new question: **What do we mean by tolerance: "putting up with" or "respecting"?**

According to Gasser, pluralism alone is not enough. It is tolerance that sustains pluralism. There is a fundamental difference between "tolerating" and "accepting." When young people belonging to minority groups feel that their existence is limited by a "conditional" and "superior" attitude — that they are merely tolerated — their self-esteem and sense of belonging are threatened. This weakens their psychological well-being (Cvetkovska et al.). Research shows that acceptance has the most positive effect, discrimination has the most negative effect, and tolerance based on putting up with or coping falls between these two, leaning closer to negative outcomes in the long term. The findings of this study also point to the weakness of young people's pluralism credentials. Exclusionary attitudes suggest that young people's tolerance is limited to an attitude of superiority that undermines the self-esteem and sense of belonging of minority groups. This attitude is merely a form of "endurance-based" tolerance.

The fundamental dynamics that weaken young people's inclusive attitudes and trigger exclusion are generally associated with three layers:

1. **Political discourse and populism:** Populism can be defined as either a narrow ideology that divides society into two homogeneous groups, the "morally pure people" and the "corrupt elites" (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser), or a discourse that constructs the political arena through opposition between "us" (the people) and "them" (the elites/establishment) (Laclau). Today's hegemonic populist discourses view social pluralism as a "deviation" and question the legitimacy of those who are different from them (the opposition). Shifting inevitably towards an anti-pluralist stance, this discourse sharpens the "us and them" distinction in young people's minds by grounding it in morality.
2. **Identity threat and polarization:** Young people experience an "identity threat" when they feel excluded or encounter anxieties. One of their natural responses is to develop a reactive identity or negative identification. In other words, when faced with anxieties related to exclusion or existential threats, they cling more tightly to their ethnic or religious identities. They also become more inward-looking and construct an identity based on opposition. This increases the distance between them and other groups and weakens inclusiveness.
3. **Structural processes:** Social exclusion does not stem solely from individual prejudices. Structural processes, such as general structural and economic problems and weak social support mechanisms, also fuel exclusion (Redmond et al.). These structural barriers negatively affect young people's life satisfaction in many areas,

from access to resources to interactions within their class. They also make it easier to shift the burden onto other segments of society.

In articles published between 2016 and 2017 (and subsequently updated), *Roberto Stefan Foa* and *Yascha Mounk* revealed striking findings using long-term data sets, such as the World Values Survey.

1. **The importance placed on democracy is declining:** Younger generations (Millennials and Generation Z) are significantly less likely than previous generations (Generation X and the Baby Boomers) to say that "living in a democratic country" is essential.
2. **Openness to authoritarian alternatives is increasing:** Young people are more likely than their parents and older generations to view authoritarian alternatives, such as "a strong leader who doesn't have to deal with elections or parliament" or "military rule," as good or fairly good forms of government.
3. **Collapse of Trust in Political Institutions:** Young people's trust in parliaments, political parties, and the fairness of elections is at historically low levels.

According to *Foa* and *Mounk*, this situation is not merely "youth criticism," but rather a sign of "democratic deconsolidation": the erosion of the fundamental norms that ensure the stability of democracies.

Other political scientists who disagree with this thesis, such as *Pippa Norris*, argue that *Foa* and *Mounk* misinterpreted the data. According to them:

1. **The problem lies in the "practice" of democracy, not the "ideal":** Young people do not view democratic principles, such as freedom of speech, equality, and rights, as weak. Instead, they find the performance of existing democracies to be weak, citing their inability to solve pressing issues such as growing economic inequality, political corruption, and the climate crisis.
2. **It is not "disaffection" with democracy, but rather, "dissatisfaction":** In other words, young people are not saying "democracy is bad"; they are saying "our democracy is not working well."
3. **"Critical citizens":** Rather than withdrawing from politics, young people are engaging through non-traditional, more pluralistic means, such as street protests (e.g., Fridays for Future, Black Lives Matter), social media activism, and petition campaigns. This can be seen as the transformation, not the death, of democracy.

There are empirical data and evidence that support these discussions.

- **Deep dissatisfaction is confirmed:** Almost every study, including the latest 2024 reports from the Cambridge University Bennett Institute, of which Foa is a member, confirms that young people in Western democracies are **historically the most dissatisfied** group with the functioning of democracy (especially in the US, UK, France, and Germany).
- **Defenders of pluralism are losing ground (shift to the far right):** This dissatisfaction with democracy is **leading** some young people to **anti-pluralist, populist, far-right** parties.
    - In recent elections in Europe (the Netherlands, France, Germany, Italy), there has been a noticeable increase in support for far-right parties among young people (especially young men).
    - These parties use rhetoric that presents pluralism as a threat.

In short, young people's faith in existing democratic models in the West has been shaken. Some young people advocate for more activism and "direct" democracy, viewing this as optimistic. However, a significant portion of young people are at risk of turning to populist and authoritarian solutions that reject pluralism, combined with economic concerns and perceptions of identity threats. These research findings are consistent with this summary snapshot of the West and are explanatory in nature. The trends observed in Turkey address the same problem areas (distrust and populism) as the democratic dissatisfaction experienced by younger generations in the West. However, due to economic fragility and institutional erosion, the loss of trust is more intense. Openness to authoritarian alternatives is increasing.

In order to facilitate the perusal of the report, we would like to share some key findings distilled from the research results at the outset. Our findings reveal a fragile trend of pluralism, highlighting the duality between young people's principled endorsement of pluralism and their restrictive attitudes in practice.

01

"Opportunity squeeze."

Young people feel that "doors are closing" on their future due to long educational processes, low incomes, high housing costs, delayed transitions to adulthood, political polarization, and economic fragility. They experience an "opportunity squeeze" in a social context where the return on education and work is declining and opportunities are narrowing.

02

Leaving the family home reduces prejudices.

The majority of young people live with their families. This delays their experience of independent living, limits their pursuit of individual freedom, and increases their dependence on their families. Young people who live away from their families (alone, with friends, or in dormitories) are significantly more open to marriage and cohabitation with people of different identities than those who live with their families.

03

The core of their value system is situational pragmatism, not rigid principles.

Young people's value system is based on pragmatism grounded in circumstances and concrete cost-benefit analyses rather than on immutable, rigid ideological principles. This manifests as an approach that can be summarized as "in principle, yes, but in practice..."

04

Political fatigue and psychological escape: not apoliticism, but distrust.

Young people's distance from politics stems not from indifference, but from a deep distrust and fatigue toward current forms of politics and a widespread belief that individual effort will not yield results. This leads to a "psychological escape," or the conscious decision not to follow the agenda, rather than active participation. We can say that people did not start to not trust politics suddenly. It happened little by little over many years. Young people have experienced a "collapse of trust" in political institutions.

05

Political identity is shifting.

Young people are moving away from traditional left-right divisions. The left-right divide is confined to supporting the ruling party or the opposition. Additionally, 31% of people do not define themselves along this axis. Political positions are now determined more by lifestyle and universal values such as justice, merit, and freedom than by rigid ideologies.

06

Secularizing religiosity: faith is personal, politics is distant.

The rate of belief in God among young people is quite high at 81.5%. However, this does not translate to support for the politicization of religion. Most young people oppose using faith as a political tool and are developing a more personal, "secular" form of religiosity.

07

Nationalism is fluid and graded; belonging is common, while racism is uncommon.

The findings show that nationalism does not form a homogeneous bloc. Nationalism is prevalent and influenced by populist rhetoric that sometimes borders on discrimination. However, its patterns and boundaries are not clear-cut. The prevailing attitude is, "I am a nationalist, but never a racist."

09

The search for a leader and insecurity: "Who will save me?"

Young people do not fully trust any of the current political leaders. No leader scores above a 5 out of 10. This crisis of representation may cause young people to look to figures outside of politics whom they perceive as "competent" and "honest." Their search for leadership is shaped more by the question, "Are they honest and competent?" than by party identity.

11

High anxiety, low participation: the opposition's mobilization paradox.

Young people, who are the most anxious about their future and livelihoods, are also the group that most supports the opposition. However, they also had the highest rates of not voting and casting protest votes in the 2023 elections. This "mobilization paradox" demonstrates how high anxiety can erode faith in the system and eliminate the motivation to vote. Conversely, a similar situation occurred with young people close to the ruling party in the 2024 local elections. Some pro-government youth concerned about the situation reacted by not voting rather than changing their voting preferences.

08

The vision of a strong state.

Young people expect a strong, protective state that intervenes in problems and crimes. At the same time, they seek a balance that will limit excessive power.

10

Support for the opposition is higher among young people.

Unlike the general population, young people predominantly support the opposition. Forty-seven percent support the opposition, while 36% support the ruling party. Cross-tabulations related to voting behavior describe a three-dimensional map:
(i) As cultural preservation sensitivity (national–religious orientation) increases, so does support for the ruling party.
(ii) As the emphasis on "universal values" increases, so does the shift toward the opposition.
(iii) Hesitations in the protest pool are based on performance and trust.
Within this framework, the sphere of influence on young voters can be described by the following formula: rule-based governance + economic opportunity + cultural belonging.

12

A dual view of the EU: "A world of opportunities" and "a cultural threat."

Young people's support for EU membership is high (56.6%). On the one hand, the EU is seen as a system that offers travel freedom, prosperity, and rules that will "put the country in order." On the other hand, the EU is perceived as a threat due to reasons such as discrimination and concerns about sovereignty.

13

The perception of the West acts as a "mirror," serving as a means to criticize and idealize one's own country.

For young people, the West (especially Europe) is not only a place they want to visit, but also a "mirror" that they use to measure and criticize Turkey's current situation. The lack of concepts such as justice, meritocracy, and institutionalism—which young people complain about most in domestic politics—becomes apparent when the West is idealized in these areas. Therefore, a positive view of the EU or the West is fueled not only by an interest in the opportunities there but also by a desire for Turkey to achieve "good governance" standards.

14

Young people have two "Wests" in their minds: the EU as an opportunity and the US as a threat.

Their perception of the West is not monolithic; they distinguish clearly between the European Union and the United States. They see the EU as a rule-based, institutional, pragmatic "area of opportunity" and a "model" that could solve Turkey's problems. In contrast, they perceive the US as an imperialist, self-serving, and unreliable actor. Particularly due to its stance on the Palestinian issue, they see the US as morally hypocritical. This distinction shows that young people's criticism and distrust of the West is largely focused on U.S. foreign policy, while Europe is largely exempt from this criticism.

15

The environment is a common ground that transcends differences.

While young people are divided on the most polarizing political issues, they show almost complete agreement on environmental issues. The environment is also the issue on which they most agree within their own age groups. They are clearly opposed to sacrificing nature for economic development. The environment has become a unifying "generational value" that transcends identity politics.

16

The limit on LGBT+ rights: "Tolerance in the private sphere; restriction in the public sphere."

While most young people do not consider the existence of LGBT+ individuals to be problematic in the private sphere, they view the visibility of this existence in the public sphere (e.g., marches and flags) as "propaganda" or a "disruption of social order" and want it restricted. This shows that the issue is framed more as a matter of "moral order" than a rights violation.

17

Foreign policy is now a domestic political issue: anti-immigrant sentiment is a critique of governance.

For young people, foreign policy, particularly regarding Syrian refugees, has become a domestic political issue that directly affects their economic future and security. Anti-immigrant sentiment is not just a cultural reaction but also a criticism of a "governance crisis" based on the perception that borders are uncontrollable and unmanageable.

19

The fact that Kurds are seen as "native and national" does not prevent their othering.

Kurds are seen as the children of this land. However, most Turkish youth are reluctant to embrace basic aspects of their identity, such as their mother tongue, and those are expected to assimilate.

21

"Yes, but...": the divergence between principled agreement and implementation.

Young people take a principled liberal and pluralistic stance on many sensitive issues (education in one's mother tongue, gender equality, the resolution process). However, when it comes to implementation, red lines such as "national security," "social order," or "traditional roles" come into play, weakening this principled stance.

18

Social distance hierarchy: "native" Kurds and "foreign" Syrians.

There is a clear social distance hierarchy in the minds of young people. When prejudices against identities are examined, Afghans and Syrians are in the outer circle, while Kurds are in the inner circle. This shows that Kurds are perceived as an "internal/local" identity, not "foreigners."

20

The core of the demand for democracy is justice and meritocracy.

For young people, these two values are the most fundamental and indispensable elements of democracy. The absence of these two values erodes the state's legitimacy. In the absence of these values, the existence of elections remains the only gateway to legitimacy for the system.

22

The pluralism report card is weak: more than half of young people show exclusionary tendencies.

According to the Pluralism Index, only 17% of young people have a fully inclusive attitude. A majority of 52% show exclusionary and authoritarian tendencies. A further 32% fall somewhere between these two extremes. This indicates that young people's propensity for pluralistic democracy is limited. The duality between young people's principled approval of pluralism and their restrictive attitudes in practice can be described as "fragile pluralism."

02
METHOD

2. METHOD

The study used an explanatory, sequential, mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative components, to analyze the value systems of young people in a multidimensional way.

- **Quantitative Research:** A large-scale face-to-face survey was conducted with a representative sample of 2,401 people from across Turkey. This produced statistical generalizations about young people's political values and tendencies.
- **Qualitative Research (In-Depth Interviews):** Focus group meetings were conducted with nine groups, three times each, for a total of 65 participants. In-depth interviews were conducted with 30 individuals, taking into account different socio-economic and ideological diversity. These methods were used to understand how young people justified these values, their personal experiences, and their emotional burdens.

This report aims to reveal the stance of Turkish youth in the face of current political and social dilemmas. To achieve this goal, the report analyzes the aforementioned quantitative and qualitative findings.

The quantitative section includes a face-to-face survey of a highly representative sample of 2,401 individuals aged 18–29 in 12 provinces, selected according to the Turkish Statistical Institute's regional classification, with a 95% confidence level and a ±2% margin of error. The qualitative section included 30 in-depth interviews to cover different profiles, as well as three **Participatory Action Research (PAR)** sessions with nine different youth groups, each with six to eight participants. During the PAR sessions, discussions were held on topics such as pluralistic democracy. These discussions were accompanied by short advocacy narratives and expert facilitator guidance. Attitude changes were monitored by administering the same scales to participants at the beginning and end of the sessions.

The quantitative fieldwork was conducted during the first half of March 2025. Qualitative fieldwork was suspended due to developments in March that increased political tension. Qualitative applications were completed between June and August.

2.1. Sample structure

Figure 1. Gender

The study aimed to achieve equal representation of women and men, which was largely accomplished.

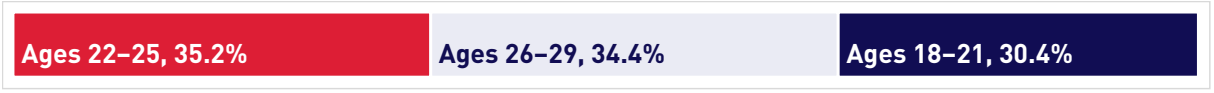


Figure 2. Age Group

Along with the target group made up of young people, the variety of age groups within the youth population was also considered. The age distribution relates to the different life stages experienced by young people. Education is the main focus for those aged 18–21, while the transition to the workforce and plans for marriage or starting a family become more prominent after age 25. This diversity indicates the need to analyze youth not as a single entity, but rather as a heterogeneous group with different experiences.

Figure 3. Marital Status

Only 17% of young people are married; most are single. This is consistent with the rising age at which people get married. For example, according to TÜİK data, the average age at first marriage was 28.3 for men and 25.8 for women in 2024. Longer education periods, economic problems, housing difficulties, and limited opportunities for independent living are causing people to postpone marriage.

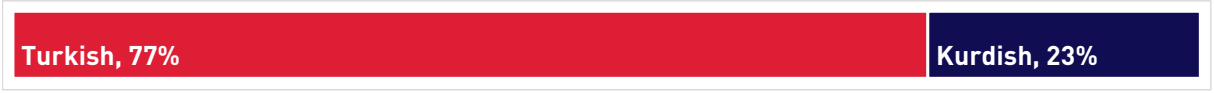


Figure 4. Native Language

The percentage of young people whose native language is Kurdish is 23%. In studies representing Turkey as a whole, the Kurdish percentage is around 18–19%, but it appears to be higher among young people. This difference is the result of demographic change. In fact, fertility rates among the Kurdish population are declining, as they are among the Turkish population. However, in the past, the difference in the two populations' fertility rates has resulted in the proportion of Kurdish youth in the general youth population being higher than the proportion of Kurds in society as a whole. For this reason, the "identity dimension" cannot be ignored in our youth studies.

03

DAILY LIFE

3. DAILY LIFE

In this study, we examined young people's attitudes toward politics and values, as well as certain behaviors and emotional states related to their daily lives. Our goal was to gather data on their sociocultural characteristics. We examined variables such as alcohol and cigarette consumption, living arrangements, English proficiency, desire to live abroad, travel experience, and various emotions. Our goal was to identify both their internal differences and their similarities and differences with other age groups. Our analysis of independent daily life data shows that economic contraction is the primary determinant of young people's social, cultural, and economic experiences. This contraction increases the cost of socializing and delays independent living.

Figure 5. Alcohol Use

Alcohol consumption among young people does not differ significantly from that of other age groups. Fifty-four percent of young people do not drink alcohol at all, and according to interviews, per capita consumption levels are not high. Compared to other European countries, these rates indicate that alcohol consumption among young people is low. This suggests that family influence and religious and cultural norms still play a strong role among young people. From in-depth interviews, we can observe that the decline in alcohol consumption outside the home may be related to the rising cost of socializing in recent years. Open spaces and less expensive cafés are becoming the preferred choice instead.

Figure 6. Smoking

It can be said that the smoking rate among young people is below the societal average. The prevailing discourse on the health effects of smoking and the policies implemented in recent years may be more effective among younger generations. However, it is worth noting that young people do not differ significantly from other age groups in certain habits.

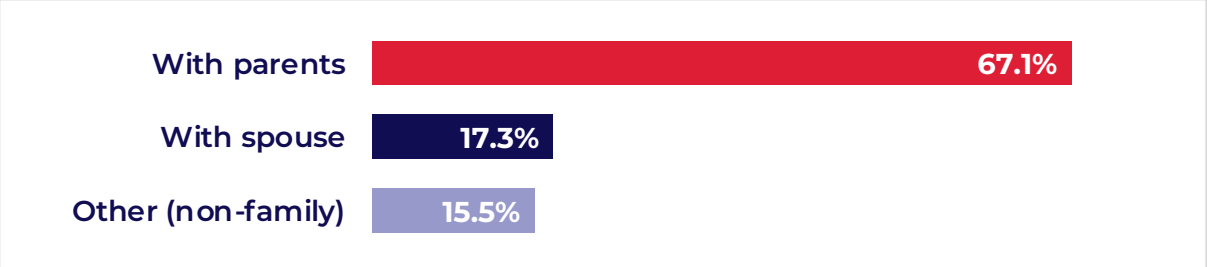


Figure 7. Living Arrangements

The vast majority of young people live with their families. The proportion of those who live alone or with people outside their families is quite low. This situation stems from traditional norms as well as structural factors, such as the economic crisis, high rents, and unemployment. It delays their experience of independent living, limits their search for individual freedom, and increases their dependence on their families. As will be seen in the following sections, this lifestyle can influence young people's judgments. Living with family limits contact with different identity groups and indirectly affects perception of social distance.

The fact that most young people live with their families is related to traditional norms and economic conditions. Even after starting work, many young people continue to live with their families unless they get married.

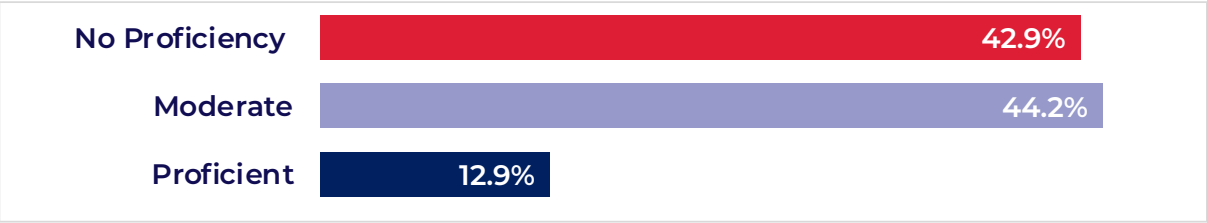


Figure 8. English Proficiency

Although English is considered an essential skill for young people, proficiency rates are quite low. Only 13% consider themselves proficient, while 43% are unable to speak the language. This reflects not only the inadequacy of education in schools, but also the inequality of opportunity. Those who are proficient in English are mostly those who have attended private schools, taken courses, or had experience abroad. Therefore, English has also become a "language of inequality" among young people.

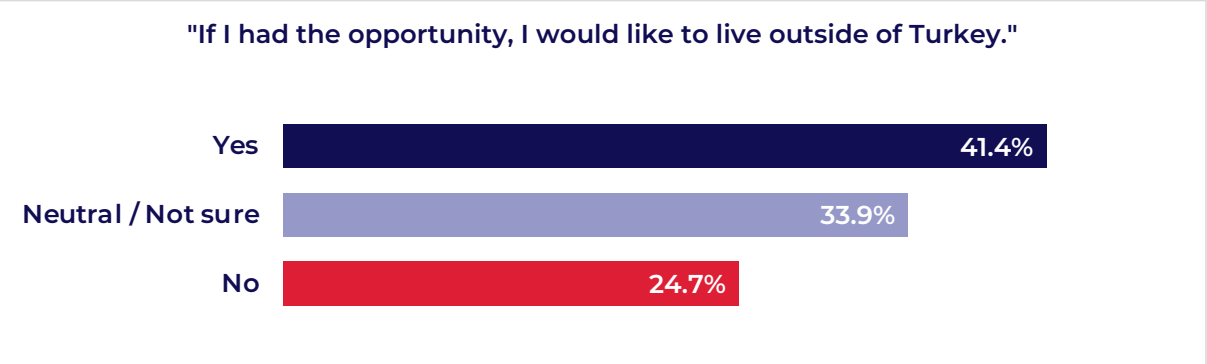


Figure 9. *"If I had the opportunity, I would like to live outside of Turkey."*

The desire to live abroad has always been prevalent among young people, and it remains so today. This desire is motivated not only by the wish to escape Turkey, but also by the desire to see other places, develop oneself, and gain socio-economic status.

However, according to the research team's previous studies, there has been a slight decrease in the desire to live abroad. In-depth interviews revealed that even individuals who expressed a desire to live abroad mentioned their reservations and hesitations. The perception that discrimination is increasing in the West has dampened the intensity of the desire to live abroad. Although the intention is high, limited opportunities increase the risk of disappointment among young people.

As we will see in the following sections, young people have high expectations for opportunities in the EU/West. However, perceptions of discrimination against immigrants and concerns about "not belonging" create a disconnect between intention and action. Intentions remain high, but reservations are increasing. Some young people express the sentiment, "Even if I go, I won't be able to stay." This emotional duality transforms moving abroad from a "career strategy" into an "identity reckoning."

Figure 10. *Moving Abroad*

Only 13.3% of young people have gone abroad, which can be seen as a clear indicator of opportunity inequality. Visa restrictions, economic barriers, and passport costs limit their mobility.

Overseas experience should be considered a social right and freedom, as well as a means of personal development. However, while a select few young people can take advantage of this opportunity and enjoy the benefits of having "seen the world," many others are deprived of this experience. This situation exacerbates social inequalities. Language proficiency, passports, and visa access create a new "mobility capital" inequality among young people.

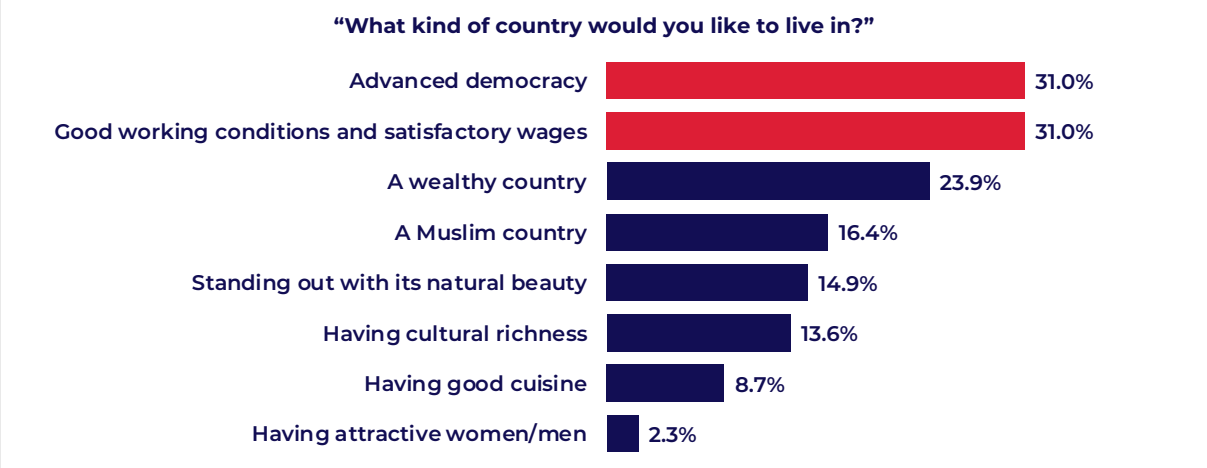


Figure 11. "What kind of country would you like to live in?"

When describing the ideal country, young people emphasize values such as freedom, justice, equality, and prosperity. This indicates that they seek stability and development in the political climate and economic level of the country they dream of for the future. The desire for a democratic country with a strong economy goes hand in hand. For them, the ideal country guarantees individual freedoms, provides equal opportunities, and offers a secure life.

Despite their young age, young people emphasize their experience of weary living in focus groups and one-on-one interviews. They express their need for rest and renewal. One way to achieve this is to live in another country.

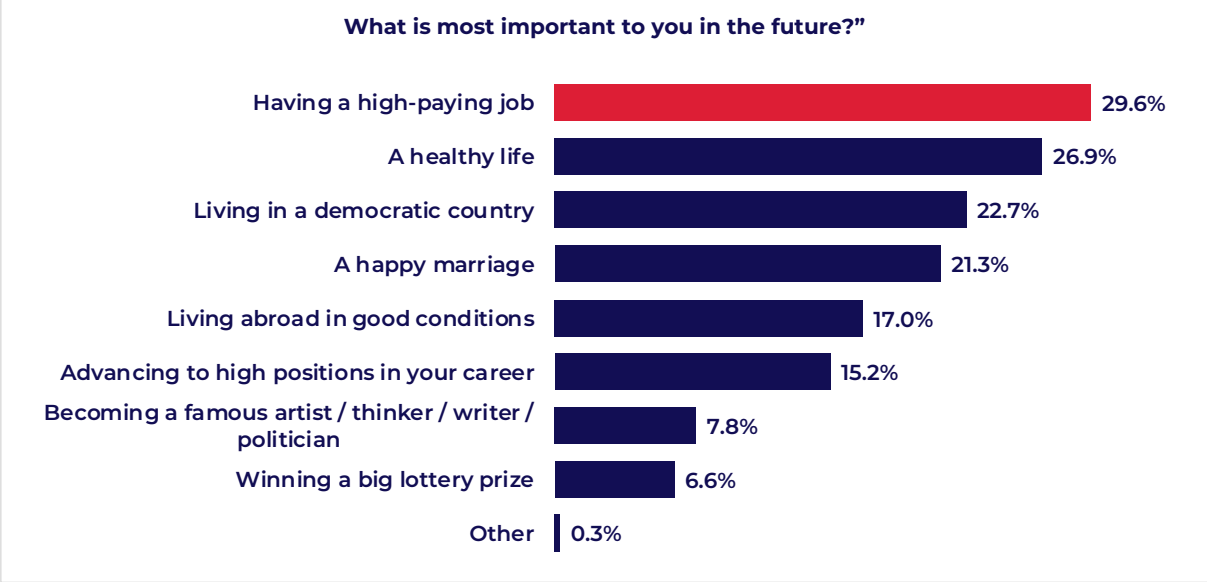


Figure 12. "What is most important to you in the future?"

For young people, freedom and economic security are the most important values for the future. While finding a job and ensuring livelihood security and living standards are important, demands for individual freedom and equality are also strong. This picture shows that young people have concrete living conditions and value-based expectations. The basic demands are democracy, prosperity, and individual health and happiness.

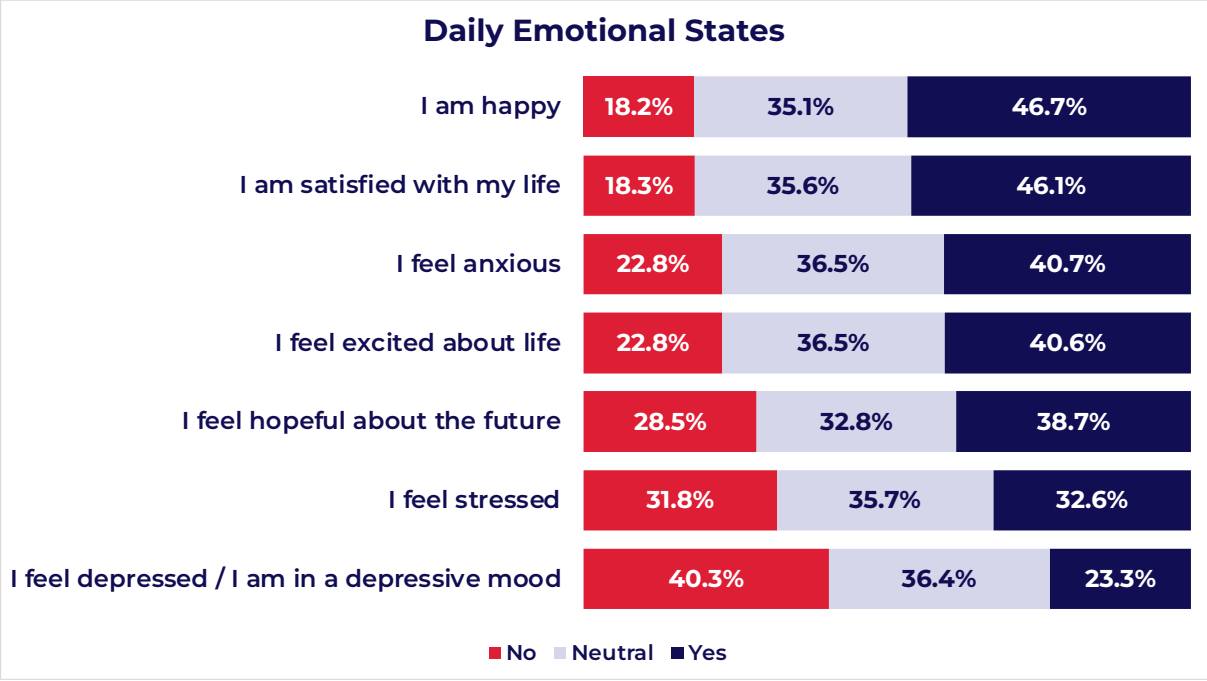


Figure 13. Daily Emotional States

Negative feelings are prevalent among young people. They are anxious and not hopeful about the future. Although their life satisfaction is low, their happiness levels have not fallen as much. However, 20–30% of young people struggle to hold on to life. This group is at risk of sliding toward either authoritarian populism or apathy. Nevertheless, anxiety can also be a sign of awareness and contains political energy that, if properly directed, can transform into participation.

The emotional state of young people reflects the current economic and political environment. Their low life satisfaction is closely related to anxiety about the future, political fatigue, and social isolation, topics that will be discussed in later sections.

Supported by findings from the qualitative phase, the anxiety and low hope experienced by young people in their daily lives stem from the tangible impact of the merit crisis on their personal futures.

The belief that education is a fruitless investment is becoming widespread among young people. A young woman working in a hospital expresses this sentiment harshly: "They study and study; they blind themselves. They ruin themselves. They go to work, but the money they earn is not a fair reward for their labor. I wish I could give them what they deserve."

The recent claim that young people are picky about jobs, which has sparked debate, may actually have some truth to it. However, this phenomenon can also be described as an educational mismatch, meaning they are forced to take jobs that are below their level of education or unrelated to their field of study. A young woman with a degree in social services explains, "Honestly, I can't find many jobs in my field. So, unfortunately, I'm also looking outside my field. But I can't find anything outside my field either. In general, I can't find any job at all," revealing that education alone is not enough to find employment and explaining the basis for her anxiety about the future.

Three patterns emerge in discussions about the challenges of transitioning into the workforce:

- **Uncertainty in the period after education** (e.g., waiting in the KPSS/preparation cycle: "I'm studying for the KPSS because I can't find a job."
- **Part-time and temporary jobs** (e.g., bookstore clerk, waiter, delivery driver).
- **Searching for side income** (e-commerce, etc.).

These three factors create a feeling of **"being stuck"** that prolongs young people's career transitions. Limited mobility, evidenced by low English proficiency and unequal access to international experience (only 13% speak English, and only 13.3% have traveled abroad), perpetuates this limbo. Language and mobility opportunities are confined to a few privileged channels.

Another reason for negative emotional states is political fatigue. When a young female lawyer gives up on politics or when another young person dismisses politics as "too much for me" it shows that emotional burnout has become part of young people's daily mood, and that indifference is a conscious defense mechanism.

Political and humanitarian crises trigger young people to distance themselves from not only politics, but also news in general, as a form of psychological protection. One participant explained their decision to stop following the news after the earthquake and Gaza agenda, saying, "I quit politics because it affected my psychology too much." They check in again when "something really big happens," but otherwise stay away. This completes the picture of "high anxiety, low satisfaction; happiness is somewhat resilient." The data reveals a narrative in

which the emotional burden of the 20-30% of the population who are "struggling to cope" carries over into daily practices, such as news consumption and withdrawal from social media. Therefore, young people have turned limited news consumption into a selective exposure strategy to manage political anxiety.

One conservative participant stated that their psychological resilience was intact but listed "future anxiety and financial circumstances" as their main concerns. Another participant described how emotional burdens combined with political insecurities, saying, "I'm not happy. Politics makes me feel powerless." These two extremes coexist within the same age group—narratives of individual resilience alongside the fragility produced by economic and political uncertainty.

In-depth interviews also reveal that high social costs and relationship difficulties underlie young people's low life satisfaction.

Socializing has become alarmingly costly for young people. Their preference for less expensive cafés or open spaces and avoidance of consumption outside shows that high socialization costs constrain daily life. There is a widespread demand among young people for accessible culture.

Socialization costs are now the decisive factor shaping young people's daily lives. Everyday leisure spaces are shrinking due to the rising cost of living. Participants often mention the financial barrier to attending cultural events. One interview emphasizes the importance of making festivals, concerts, and other events free for young people. This points to the re-publicization of socializing and the legitimacy of "cheap entertainment" as a youth demand.

Social isolation and loneliness are additional factors affecting young people's emotional well-being. A student who dropped out of school describes an "incredible sense of isolation" among themselves and other young people who have withdrawn into their shells. They suggest accessible psychological support and socialization programs as solutions. However, this loneliness is not individual; it is a collective feeling of exhaustion spread across the generation.

In summary, young people's anxious emotional state appears to be a rational response to the current political climate and the failure of economic conditions and merit-based mechanisms to improve. The constraints experienced in daily life create structural pressures that weaken young people's desire to participate in politics.

Data on daily life shows that young people are trying to exist in a shrinking space. They are constrained not only by economic hardship, but also by political insecurity, social isolation, and limited mobility. These issues form the basis for the crisis of representation, anxiety, and demands for democracy discussed in later sections of the report.

04

POLITICS AND IDENTITY

4. POLITICS AND IDENTITY

This section examines the complex, multifaceted relationship between Turkish youth and politics. Using quantitative data, it explores what traditional ideological divisions mean for young people and the impact of fundamental affiliations, such as faith and identity, on political preferences and voting behavior in the 2023 presidential elections. Using qualitative data, we analyze young people's trust in political leaders, how their anxiety levels are reflected at the ballot box, and how their social media usage habits influence voter behavior. This section reveals that youth are not a monolithic group but rather participate in the political arena with diverse identities, expectations, and experiences.

Turkish youth interpret politics through the prisms of identity, values, and experience. While classic ideological positions serve as "reference points," they take on new meanings.

4.1. Ideology, Identity, and Belief

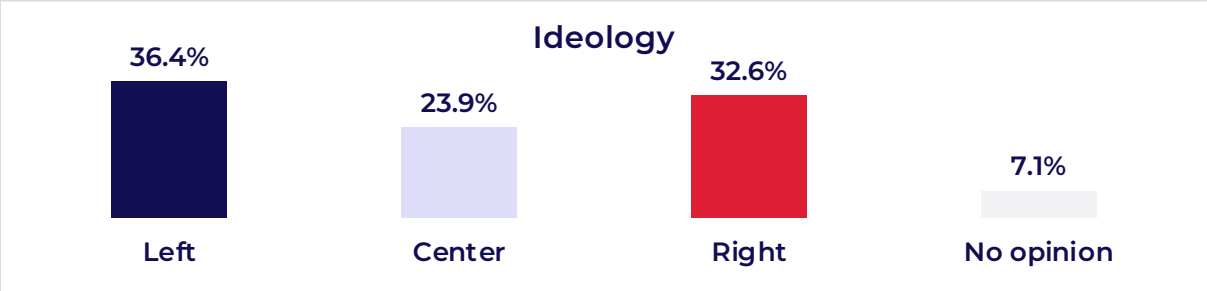


Figure 14. Ideology

Young people's approach to politics signals a departure from traditional left-right ideological allegiances. This shift is due to the fact that young people now evaluate politics through concrete norms such as justice, merit, freedom, and economic security rather than through abstract ideological packages.

In terms of ideology, they are slightly closer to the left than society as a whole, but not by much. While 36% identify as left-wing and 33% as right-wing, 31% do not identify with either side. Thirty-six percent and 33 percent are high percentages.

However, the fact that 31% remain outside this polarization axis indicates that the classic right-left divide does not define politics for young people and that identities and everyday issues are becoming more important.

Furthermore, many participants equate the left-right distinction with supporting the ruling party or the opposition rather than specific ideological values. This situation could be interpreted as an "ideological dissolution" that directs young people to make political choices based on values, lifestyle, identity, and concrete issues.

One could even interpret this as a potential "**search for synthesis**." Even if they have not abandoned concepts, this group may reject rigid, traditional patterns of the right and left. They are forming a new political center that embraces certain values from both sides (e.g., spirituality and cultural security from the right and freedom and justice from the left). This fragmented yet value-unifying hybrid structure shows that political actors should use a hybrid political language that unites the values of young people rather than rigid ideological discourse to reach this group.

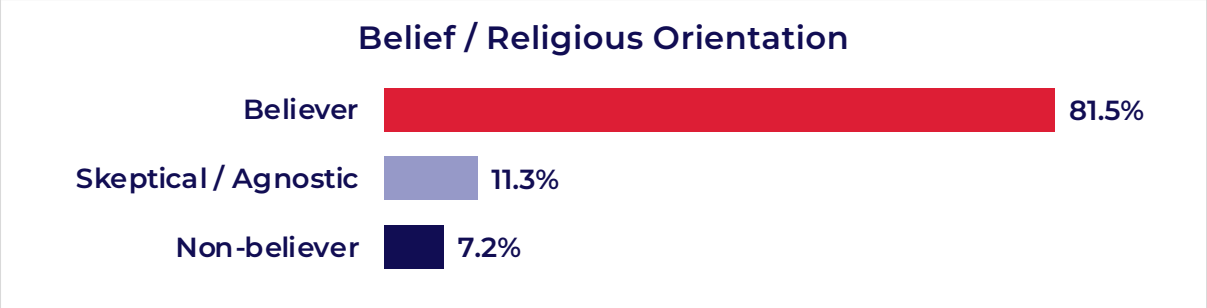


Figure 15. Belief / Religious Orientation

The trend of young people moving away from religion is not as prevalent as is sometimes suggested in public discourse. According to the results obtained from the question about belief in God and doubting the oneness of God, 81.5% say they believe in God without doubt, indicating a strong foundation of faith among young people. However, this belief varies in its practices and interpretations. Young people are moving toward a more individualized and flexible understanding of religion: a form of belief independent of traditional patterns and blended with personal choice and freedom. Though it may seem problematic at first, a category of secular religiosity is emerging. In other words, religious belief is not declining; rather, the practice of religion and living according to religious obligations is decreasing. This can be interpreted as the individualization of religion rather than irreligion. This trend requires both conservative and secular groups to reconsider their concerns and expectations.

Although many young people believe in God, criticism of how this belief is represented in politics is widespread. For instance, a young person explained their preference for Ümit Özdağ, saying he is a figure who "embrace[s] spirituality" but does not "market religion." Young people's distrust of traditional conservative politics' sincerity discourse on piety may reduce the tendency to embrace piety as an identity.

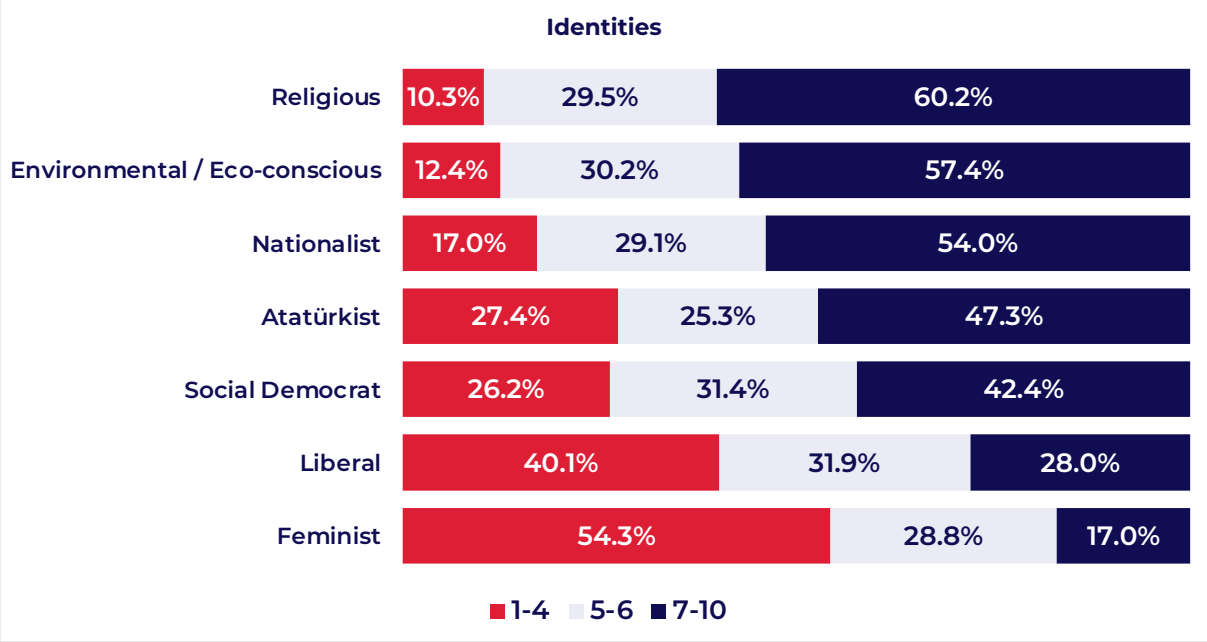


Figure 16. Identities

Young people's sense of identity is multi-layered. Although traditional affiliations (religious, nationalist, and Kemalist) remain strong, universal identities such as "human," "individual," and "global citizen" emerge when asked about in qualitative interviews. This demonstrates that, in the age of globalization and communication, young people are developing more cosmopolitan identities. At the same time, regional, class, and cultural differences play a significant role in shaping identity preferences. Ethnic identity is more central for Kurdish youth, while individual and universal identities stand out among young people in big cities. Overall, it can be said that Turkish youth have a fragmented yet pluralistic identity structure.

4.2. Political Trust, and Participation

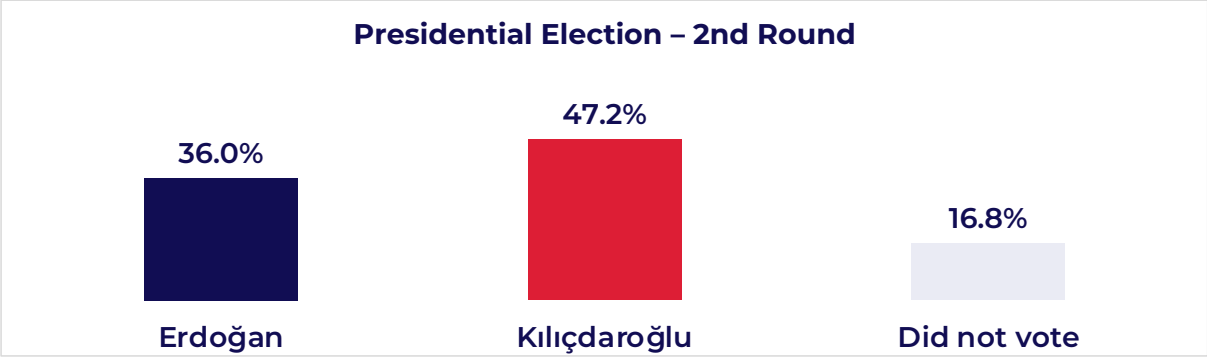


Figure 17. Second Round Votes for the 2023 Presidential Elections

In the 2023 election, Erdoğan garnered 52.2% of the vote, while Kılıçdaroğlu secured 47.8%, among the general public. However, when it comes to young people, the tides turn decisively in favor of the latter. Kılıçdaroğlu received 47.2%, while Erdoğan received 36%. The fact that Kılıçdaroğlu received more votes than Erdoğan among young people indicates that this generation's political leanings are more aligned with the opposition. However, there are two points to note. First, a higher tendency to support the opposition does not mean that all young people support the opposition. A significant proportion of young people (36%) support Erdoğan. Second, a significant proportion (16.8%) did not vote for either candidate. In other words, a significant portion of young people prefer to remain outside the current polarization: they reject the current government but are not convinced by the opposition. Therefore, assuming that young people are "completely opposition" based on the fact that most are opposition overlooks political diversity.

Cross-tabulations describe a three-axis map:

(i) As sensitivity to cultural preservation (religiousness–nationalism) increases, so does support for the ruling party.
(ii) As emphasis on universal values/merit increases, support for the opposition increases.
(iii) There is hesitation in the protest pool, and it is based on performance and trust.

Within this framework, the sphere of influence on young voters could be described by the following formula: **rule-based governance + economic opportunity + cultural belonging.**

		All voters			Valid votes	
		Erdoğan	Kılıçdaroğlu	Protest vote	Erdoğan	Kılıçdaroğlu
	Total	**36.0%**	**47.2%**	**16.8%**	**43.3%**	**56.7%**
Age Groups	18-21	33.6%	46.7%	19.7%	41.8%	58.2%
	22-25	34.2%	46.8%	19.1%	42.2%	57.8%
	26-29	39.5%	48.0%	12.5%	45.1%	54.9%
Household income	Low	37.8%	38.3%	23.9%	49.7%	50.3%
	Lower-middle	41.6%	41.8%	16.6%	49.9%	50.1%
	Middle	36.3%	51.6%	12.1%	41.3%	58.7%
	Upper-middle	25.4%	60.9%	13.7%	29.5%	70.5%
English proficiency	Doesn't know	40.3%	43.6%	16.1%	48.1%	51.9%
	Intermediate / Gets by	35.1%	46.9%	18.0%	42.8%	57.2%
	Good	24.5%	60.6%	14.9%	28.8%	71.3%
Living arrangement	With parents	36.4%	45.7%	17.8%	44.4%	55.6%
	With spouse	42.9%	45.0%	12.1%	48.8%	51.2%
	Non-family / Other	26.4%	55.6%	17.9%	32.2%	67.8%

Younger voters tend to be more open to the opposition. Notably, the tendency to protest declines among the over-25 age group, which is predominantly made up of new entrants to the workforce. This group may be more concerned about the immediate impact of election results on their future. This demonstrates that youth are not a fixed bloc throughout their stages; generational differences exist within it.

Period-specific pressures, such as the transition from education to work, housing, and concerns about the future, can influence preferences.

Another notable finding is that opposition support exceeds 60% (70% when distributed) among young people from high-income families. Conversely, support for Erdoğan is concentrated among young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

		All voters			Valid votes	
		Erdoğan	Kılıçdaroğlu	Protest vote	Erdoğan	Kılıçdaroğlu
Ideology	Left	2.9%	87.3%	9.9%	3.2%	96.8%
	Center	27.5%	44.0%	28.5%	38.5%	61.5%
	Right	80.4%	12.7%	6.9%	86.4%	13.6%
Belief / Religious orientation	Non-believer	30.1%	53.6%	16.3%	36.0%	64.0%
	Skeptical / Agnostic	30.2%	54.1%	15.7%	35.8%	64.2%
	Believer	37.4%	45.7%	17.0%	45.0%	55.0%
Religiosity	Low	10.5%	65.8%	23.7%	13.8%	86.2%
	Medium	25.3%	52.7%	21.9%	32.5%	67.5%
	High	45.3%	41.6%	13.2%	52.2%	47.8%
Nationalism	Low	22.6%	58.4%	19.0%	27.9%	72.1%
	Medium	28.9%	48.6%	22.5%	37.3%	62.7%
	High	44.0%	43.0%	12.9%	50.6%	49.4%
Mother tongue	Turkish	38.6%	46.4%	14.9%	45.4%	54.6%
	Kurdish	26.6%	50.3%	23.1%	34.6%	65.4%
Headscarf (wearing)	Yes	51.9%	32.7%	15.3%	61.3%	38.7%
	No	26.0%	56.8%	17.2%	31.4%	68.6%

The voting preferences of young people are not limited to a single bloc. They differ according to ideology, belief, and identity. As expected, support for the opposition rises among the secular left, while support for the ruling party strengthens among the religious and nationalist right. The existence of a non-voting/protesting segment, and the concentration of this group within certain demographics, shows that young voters cannot be classified as either pro-government or opposition. This group is distanced from the political system due to issues of trust and representation.

Despite debates suggesting that the concepts of left and right have lost their explanatory power and are used less frequently, young people actively use these two concepts to describe their political positioning. Cross-tabulations show that opposition is clearly positioned on the left, while support for the ruling party is positioned on the right. The center is fragmented. This pattern points to two things: First, young people use ideology as a reference point that guides their political choices, not merely as a label. Second, among young people in the center, the "value-performance" contradiction is pronounced: ideals such as freedom and justice coexist with skepticism about the performance of candidates and coalitions. The center is therefore a flexible yet fragile pool and the main target of persuasion politics.

As levels of religiosity rise, there is a link between support for the ruling party and a lack of religiosity. This demonstrates that the link between religion and politics persists among young people in Turkey, but its form has changed. It is no longer ritual attachment that is decisive, but rather a sense of cultural security. The increase in opposition preference among the secular population indicates a shift towards a framework where freedom and meritocracy are valued.

Support for the ruling party is also increasing among those with a nationalist identity. Among those with a Kurdish identity, however, the influence of the opposition and the DEM line is evident. Overall, identity security and a sense of representation appear to be more influential than political programs in shaping political orientation. The shift toward the opposition among those with universal/individualistic identities is consistent with the expectation of a rule-based regime and equal opportunities.

Erdoğan also trails among Turkish youth (46% to 39%), but the margin is narrow. Among Kurdish youth, however, the opposition's lead is more substantial (50% to 27%). This indicates how strongly expectations of representation and justice influence political preferences. Conversely, the protest rate is higher among Kurdish youth. The picture is clear: high opposition support and low participation coexist. For the opposition, this is a latent growth reserve, while for the ruling party, it is a structural disadvantage. Therefore, the ethnic divide answers not only the question of "Who is being voted for?" but also "How will the result change if more people come to the polls?"

Although veiled women have joined the opposition in increasing numbers in recent years, veiled women are the category with the highest support for Erdoğan. Erdoğan receives 52% support from veiled young women, compared to 26% from non-veiled women. Notably, the motivation for participation is similar in both groups. In other words, the gap is not widened by a mobilization divide, but by identity alignment.

		All voters			Valid votes	
		Erdoğan	Kılıçdaroğlu	Protest vote	Erdoğan	Kılıçdaroğlu
Interest in politics	Not interested	32.9%	41.6%	25.5%	44.1%	55.9%
	Moderate interest	35.4%	49.0%	15.6%	41.9%	58.1%
	Interested	40.6%	49.3%	10.1%	45.1%	54.9%
Anxiety level	Low	49.3%	37.5%	13.2%	56.8%	43.2%
	Medium	37.6%	45.1%	17.3%	45.4%	54.6%
	High	26.8%	54.9%	18.4%	32.8%	67.2%
Social Media	Facebook	37.5%	48.5%	13.9%	43.6%	56.4%
	Twitter	31.7%	51.4%	16.9%	38.2%	61.8%
	Instagram	35.8%	47.6%	16.6%	42.9%	57.1%
	Tiktok	36.8%	46.8%	16.3%	44.0%	56.0%
	Tinder	32.0%	49.1%	18.9%	39.4%	60.6%
	LinkedIn	31.4%	51.4%	17.1%	37.9%	62.1%

Public opinion may be prejudiced in favor of the idea that young people who are distant from politics are less opposed, while those who actively follow politics are more opposed. However, the data does not support this idea. Erdoğan receives the most votes from young people interested in politics. Essentially, their level of interest in politics does not significantly affect

the distribution of votes. The clearest result on this issue is that interest in politics correlates strongly with election participation. Participation reaches 90% among the interested, while remaining at 74.5% among the uninterested. Proportionally, the gap between the ruling party and the opposition does not change among interested and uninterested young people. Only those with a moderate level of interest are more clearly in favor of the opposition.

Contrary to popular belief, interest in politics does not determine young voters' preferences from start to finish. As the table shows, the opposition's rhetoric is more persuasive among young people who "follow closely but are not fanatical." However, as interest increases, the magnitude of the difference changes more than the direction. The real difference is reflected in participation. In other words, interest determines the frequency with which people go to the polls rather than which side they vote for. Therefore, interest changes the breadth and number of effective votes, not the direction of political competition.

Concern clearly divides the voting map of young voters into two. Erdoğan is clearly ahead in the low concern band, while Kılıçdaroğlu is very strong in the high concern band (the gap widens dramatically). Although the opposition has the upper hand in the moderate anxiety band, the difference is more limited. In short, as "future and livelihood" anxiety rises, the demand for a change in power increases. When anxiety is low, the preference for stability prevails. This may be an expected result. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that those with low anxiety levels have a higher election turnout. Despite the highly politicized climate, the 2023 elections did not sufficiently attract young opposition voters.

Therefore, participation is also critical here. The protest/non-participation rate is higher in the high anxiety cluster than in other groups. This suggests the existence of a subgroup that "wants change but is postponing voting." As mobilization in this group increases, the current opposition advantage grows. In summary, the anxiety axis is one of the few factors that determines both direction and magnitude.

Young people are the most concerned about the future and their livelihoods. Therefore, they are expected to demand the most change. However, they also have the highest rates of abstention and protest voting. We can describe this as a "mobilization paradox." While high anxiety pushes young people toward the opposition, it has also eroded their faith in the system and political figures, eliminating their motivation to vote. This situation reveals a critical weakness: the opposition has failed to attract this group.

Social Media Breakdowns: The platform map of young voter behavior

It is worth remembering that, while the opposition holds a majority among young people, Erdoğan's support remains at 36% among all young people and 43% among valid young votes, according to all cross-tabulation analyses. Therefore, when examining the situation among users on different social media platforms, the platforms showing a wider gap can be evaluated. First, on LinkedIn and Twitter, the gap exceeds 20 points, making it possible to conclude that opposition votes are more consolidated among users of these platforms. On TikTok and Facebook, the gap narrows to 12–13 points. These are the platforms where competition is most evident. Instagram occupies the middle ground, with a moderate difference. Instagram points to a broader middle ground where both opposition and ruling party rhetoric can reach young people simultaneously. It is a platform where concrete and visual narratives can be effective in avoiding excessive polarization. However, the risk here is that "silent movements: small waves" can spread without being visible.

Tinder users produce an interesting dual signal, however. Kılıçdaroğlu is in the lead again, but the protest/non-participation rate is the highest. Facebook has the highest participation rate and the lowest protest rate.

The data shows that the political preferences of young people cannot be explained by a single platform. The same political orientations appear with varying intensity on different platforms.

The distribution of votes across social media platforms indicates that these platforms do not generate political preferences independently, but rather, they are spaces where existing trends solidify and intensify. Twitter and LinkedIn may be areas of consolidation for the opposition because these platforms are more political and argument-based. Conversely, the openness of TikTok and Facebook to competition implies that political discourse on these platforms is more indirect, visual, and lifestyle-focused.

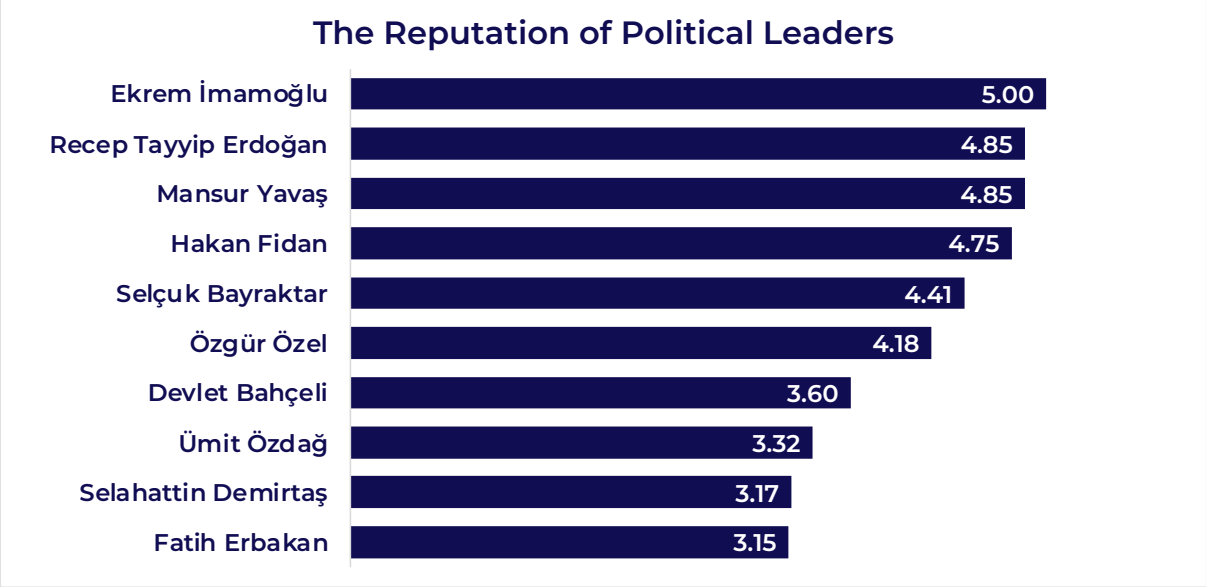


Figure 18. The Reputation of Political Leaders

Young people have generally lost trust in politicians. No political leader scores higher than a 5 out of 10. People only respect leaders in their own neighborhoods. In-depth interviews also revealed that young people struggle to find a political figure who represents them fully.

The frequency with which respondents answered "no one," "none," or "none of them quite fit the bill" to our direct questions about presidential candidates shows that the current political spectrum fails to offer the leadership profile idealized by young people. Young people are interested in politics for pragmatic reasons, and their low trust in politicians is reshaping the search for leadership based on technocratic competence and ethical governance. Notably, young people are turning to figures outside of politics, mentioning experts, opinion leaders, and research writers/journalists.

The fact that a 19-year-old with left-wing views placed Erdoğan in second place, citing "there is no other good name" as the reason, if İmamoğlu were not his first choice, points to the opposition's leadership crisis and demonstrates the importance of leadership. Political identity is built more on the question, "Who will save me, and how honest and competent is this person?" than on "To which party do I belong?" The emphasis on "honesty" and "spirituality" in leadership confirms that young people view politics as both an economic and a moral issue.

		Income Group				Presidential Election – 2nd			Mother tongue	
	Total	Low	Lower-Middle	Middle	Upper-Middle	Erdoğan	Kılıçdaroğlu	Protest vote	Turkish	Kurdish
Ekrem İmamoğlu	5.0	4.1	4.7	5.5	6.2	2.7	7.1	3.9	5.3	3.9
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	4.8	4.4	4.9	5.1	5.0	8.4	2.8	3.6	5.2	3.6
Mansur Yavaş	4.8	3.7	4.5	5.4	6.1	3.2	6.3	4.1	5.4	2.8
Hakan Fidan	4.8	4.5	4.9	5.0	4.5	6.8	3.5	4.0	5.1	3.7
Selçuk Bayraktar	4.4	4.1	4.6	4.6	4.2	6.2	3.3	3.9	4.7	3.3
Özgür Özel	4.2	3.3	3.7	4.6	5.6	2.3	5.9	3.3	4.4	3.4
Devlet Bahçeli	3.6	3.2	3.5	3.8	3.9	5.5	2.5	2.8	4.0	2.1
Ümit Özdağ	3.3	2.4	3.1	3.7	4.6	2.6	3.8	3.3	3.7	1.9
Selahattin Demirtaş	3.2	3.3	2.7	3.1	3.9	1.7	4.4	3.2	2.5	5.7
Fatih Erbakan	3.2	2.9	3.2	3.1	3.5	4.1	2.7	2.9	3.3	2.7

Examining the income group breakdown reveals that, as income levels decrease, the majority of leaders receive lower ratings. However, the gap is even wider for some leaders.

Among ruling-party leaders, Erdoğan (4.4–5.1), Fidan (4.5–5.0), and Bayraktar (4.1–4.6) maintain consistent ratings throughout the income spectrum. In contrast, opposition leaders have a sharp curve of approval that increases as income rises. For example, Imamoğlu scores 4.1 among low-income groups and 6.2 among middle- and upper-income groups, while Yavaş scores 3.7 and 6.1, and Özel scores 3.3 and 5.6. These results confirm the importance of class and income divisions in young people's political preferences. While ruling figures enjoy more balanced acceptance across all socio-economic levels, support for opposition leaders is more consolidated among middle- and upper-income groups.

Notably, Ümit Özdağ's approval rating increases from 2.4 to 4.6 with rising income, suggesting that his harsh rhetoric on migration is more popular among metropolitan and middle-upper class segments.

The **2023 second-round** voter groups align with expectations.

- Erdoğan scored highest among his voters (8.4), followed by Fidan (6.8) and Bayraktar (6.2). This duo most closely resembles the profile of a natural heir for the "continuity/technocratic right." Imamoğlu scores 2.7, and Yavaş scores low at 3.2.
- Among Kılıçdaroğlu voters, İmamoğlu (7.1) and Yavaş (6.3) are the clear leaders, followed by Özel with 5.9. Power figures score low in this group. Hakan Fidan is the most accepted figure (Fidan: 3.5; Bayraktar: 3.3; Erdoğan: 2.8).
- The "low politics/capacity" signal is repeated in protest votes: Yavaş scores 4.1, Fidan scores 4.0, and Bayraktar and İmamoğlu stand out with 3.9.

The native language breakdown shows that ethnic-political identity clearly influences perception. Among Kurdish youth, Demirtaş is in first place with a score of 5.7. Among Turkish youth, many leaders cluster around a score of 5 out of 10, while Demirtaş drops to a score of 2.5. Yavaş's rise to first place is also noteworthy. The municipal opposition tone finds some resonance among Kurdish youth. While İmamoğlu receives a score of 3.9, Yavaş remains at 2.8. Ruling and right-wing figures receive low scores in this group: Erdoğan receives a score of 3.6, Fidan receives a score of 3.3, and Bayraktar receives a score of 3.4. Overall, this picture confirms that it is difficult to raise approval ratings without overcoming the identity barrier.

		Vote Preference						Ideology		
	Total	AK Party	CHP	Dem Party	MHP	Protest vote	Undecided	Left	Center	Right
Ekrem İmamoğlu	5.0	2.5	7.8	4.5	2.9	3.3	4.4	6.9	5.3	3.0
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	4.8	8.7	2.9	1.9	7.7	3.2	4.4	2.7	4.6	7.6
Mansur Yavaş	4.8	3.0	7.2	2.8	3.8	3.5	5.1	6.3	5.0	3.4
Hakan Fidan	4.8	6.8	3.9	2.4	6.8	3.6	4.7	3.3	4.7	6.5
Selçuk Bayraktar	4.4	6.2	3.6	2.4	5.7	3.5	4.7	3.0	4.6	5.9
Özgür Özel	4.2	2.2	6.5	3.8	2.5	2.9	3.5	5.8	4.2	2.5
Devlet Bahçeli	3.6	5.4	2.6	1.8	8.3	2.6	2.9	2.3	3.5	5.3
Ümit Özdağ	3.3	2.4	4.0	2.1	3.3	2.9	3.4	3.7	3.9	2.5
Selahattin Demirtaş	3.2	1.6	3.4	7.9	2.2	2.9	2.3	4.6	3.3	1.8
Fatih Erbakan	3.2	4.0	2.7	2.0	3.7	2.6	3.0	2.3	3.7	3.8

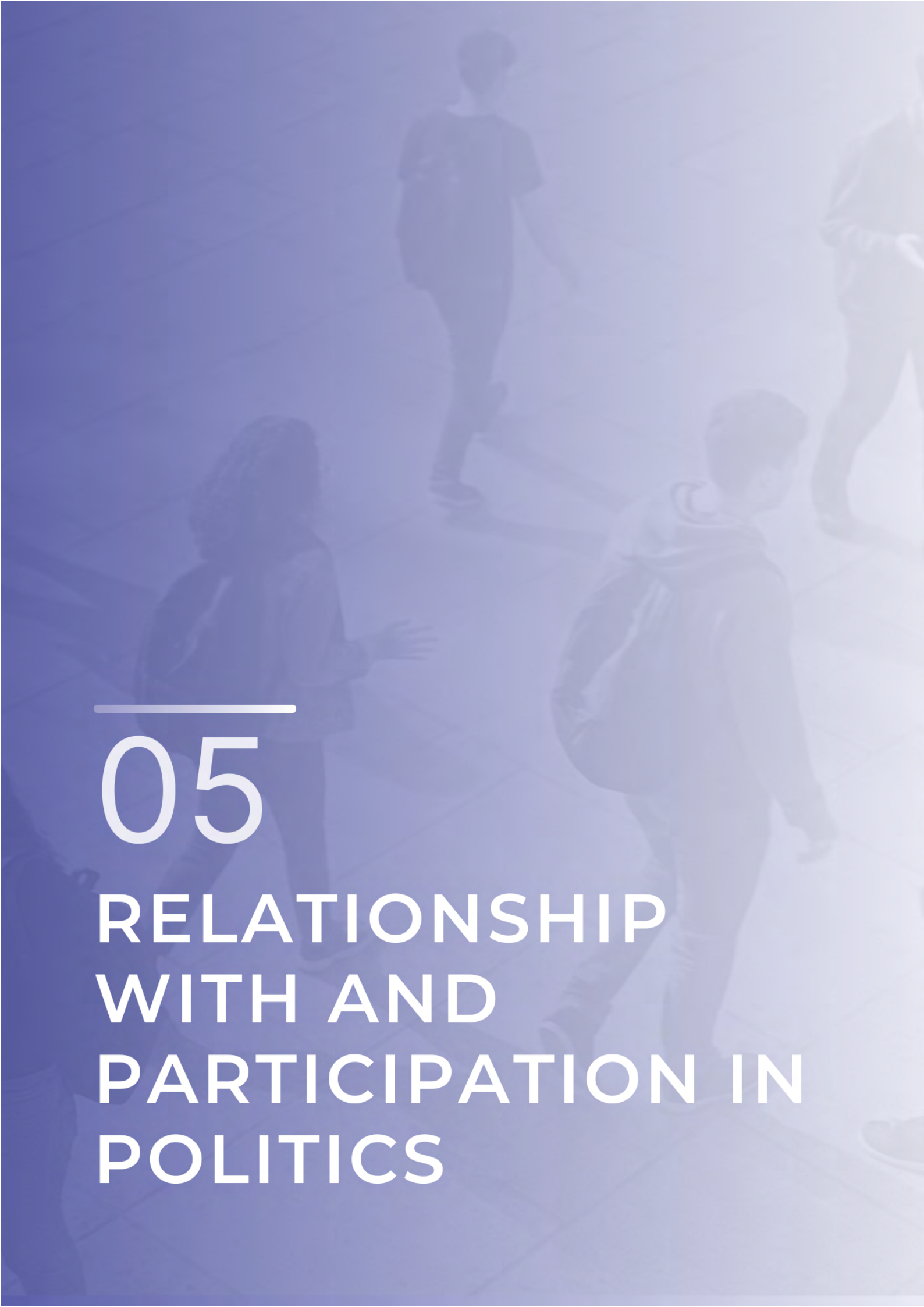
The ideology axis is another area where preferences are clearly divided. On the left, the highest scores are for Ekrem İmamoğlu (6.9) and Mansur Yavaş (6.3). In the center, this duo remains in the lead with scores of 5.3 and 5.0, respectively. However, Fidan (4.7) and Bayraktar (4.6) emerge as viable secondary choices. Erdoğan (7.6) is the clear leader on the right, followed by Fidan (6.5) and Bayraktar (5.9). This trio represents a common "state-security-technology" repertoire among right-wing voters.

The profile of the undecided voter indicates a "weak party identity–strong capacity search": Yavaş is in first place with a score of 5.1, followed closely by Fidan and Bayraktar with scores of 4.7. Among protest voters, all names are squeezed into the 2.6–3.6 range, indicating a general distrust of political figures.

Two details stand out in terms of reaching beyond the party base. Hakan Fidan and Selçuk Bayraktar remain popular among AK Party (6.8–6.2) and MHP (6.8–5.7) supporters, forming a second ring that extends to 3.9–3.6 among CHP voters.

Özgür Özel represents opposition consolidation, averaging 4.2 overall: 6.5 among CHP voters and 3.8 among DEM voters. However, he does not expand as much as the mayors do among center voters (4.2) and right-wing voters (2.5).

The figures for locked identities also paint a clearer picture. Selahattin Demirtaş is very high among DEM voters at 7.9, but low among other bases: CHP (3.4), AK Party (1.6), and Right (1.8). Devlet Bahçeli is at the top among MHP voters with a score of 8.3. He remains at a low-to-medium level among other groups. His scores are generally low (total 3.3). Notably, he scores 4.0 among CHP voters and 3.7 among left voters. This suggests recognition and acceptance among part of the center-left opposition rather than his own right-wing ideological base. He is weak among right voters, scoring 2.5.



05

RELATIONSHIP WITH AND PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

5. RELATIONSHIP WITH AND PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

In this section, we explore the distant and contradictory relationship that young people have with politics. Contrary to the widespread belief that young people are becoming apolitical, the data shows that they have not completely broken ties with politics; rather, they are deeply distrustful of and fatigued by the current forms of politics.

Readers will encounter concrete data on young people's lack of confidence in political issues, their reasons for remaining distant from politics except for issues affecting their daily lives, their distrust of institutions, and their reluctance to engage in traditional forms of participation, such as protesting. The main thesis of this section is that this situation is not so much a lack of interest as it is a psychological escape and "political fatigue" stemming from the widespread belief that individual effort will not yield results. However, the data does not depict young people as completely disconnected from politics. Rather, **it reveals people who are "sensitive to injustice but do not believe they can achieve results." Interest fluctuates and depends on context; engagement is superficial and fragmented.** The psychological cost of the agenda plays as much of a role in low participation as the fear of punishment and feelings of ineffectiveness. Consequently, political behavior is shifting from street rallies to lower-risk channels, such as digital campaigns, boycotts, and volunteering.

5.1. Interest in Politics

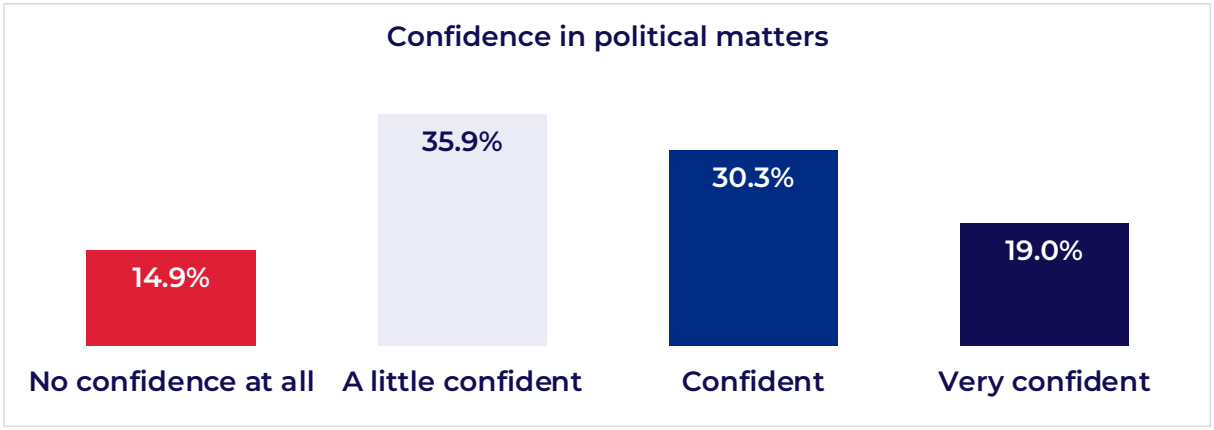


Figure 19. Confidence in political matters

Young people lack self-confidence in politics. Many are reluctant to express their ideas and are unsure whether they have the correct information. They clearly feel anxious about "getting the wrong information" or "being misunderstood" when sharing their opinions. This points to a lack of political socialization and mechanisms that encourage critical thinking. Nevertheless, it is the confident young people who drive discussion in peer groups. What makes this group stand out is not so much their level of knowledge, but rather their confidence in debate.

The loss of self-confidence stems from risk calculation rather than indifference. This trend can be linked to the "spiral of silence" theory. Young people consider the social cost (ostracism, stigmatization) and legal risks of debate, which increases the threshold for expression. As this threshold rises, public voices turn to safer channels, such as close circles of friends or anonymous accounts. This situation silences public debate, allowing only the most courageous or extreme voices to be heard while rendering the preferences, hesitations, and concerns of the majority invisible.

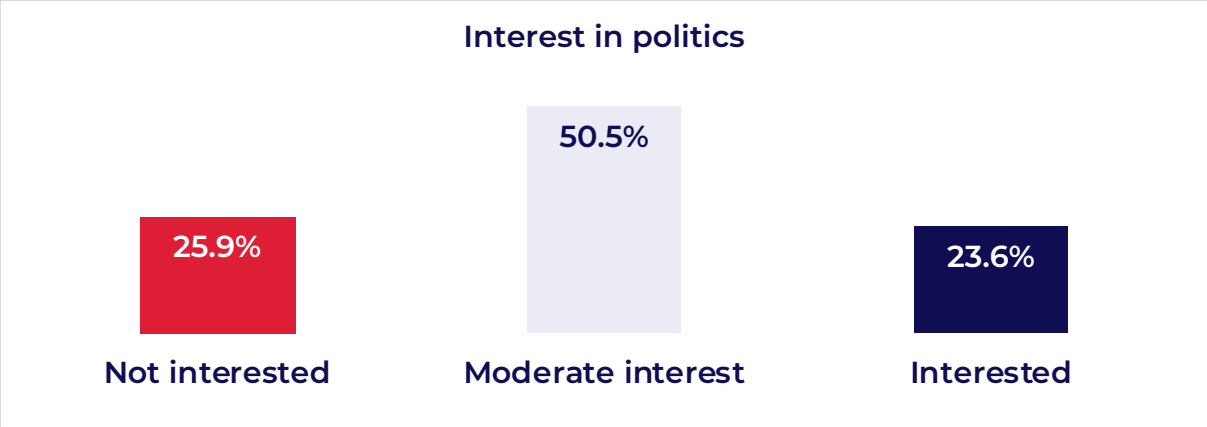


Figure 20. Interest in Politics

The interest of young people in politics fluctuates. Most follow politics from a distance, becoming more interested when issues directly affecting their daily lives, such as the economy, unemployment, and education, come to the forefront. As this picture shows, young people are not uninterested in politics, but rather, they are distant from institutional politics. This fragmented interest stems from the failure of current political figures to develop inclusive language for young people and the unsatisfactory nature of their politics.

5.2. Political Engagement and Trust in Institutions

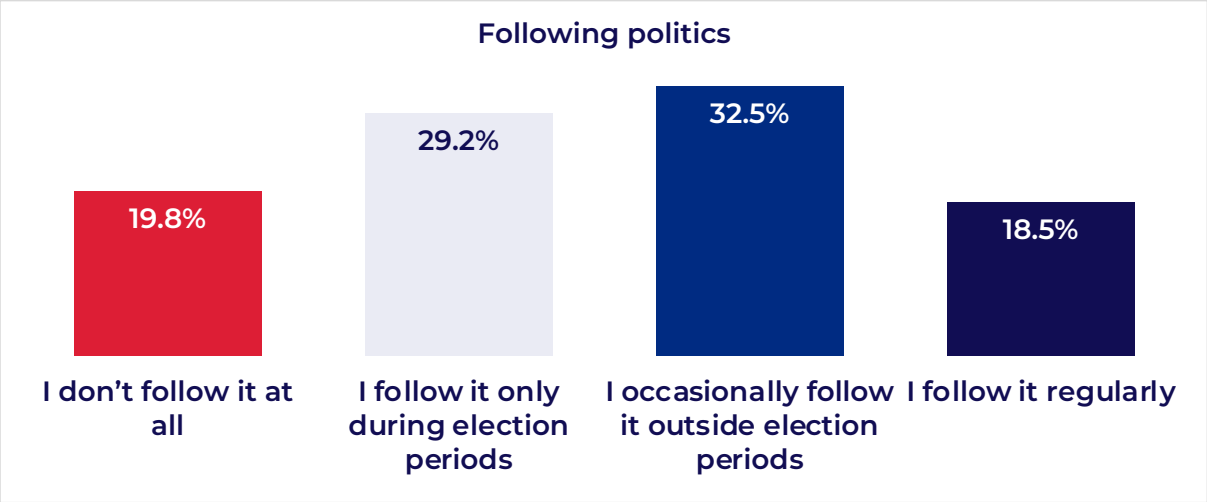


Figure 21. Following Politics

Young people do not regularly or deeply follow politics. They mostly learn about current events in a fragmented and superficial way through their social media feeds. Traditional media outlets have low viewing rates. This results in high exposure to political information of low quality. Thus, young people are aware of current events, yet their political behavior is disconnected from the details.

Considering interest in politics and the variables of political engagement together, a regime emerges where interest fluctuates and engagement is fragmented and superficial. Young people closely follow politics on issues that directly affect their daily lives, such as the economy, work, and education. However, they mostly entrust the flow of news to the speed of social media. This creates the "high exposure–shallow inference–shallow engagement" paradox: the agenda is known, but the details are not. Naturally, this also feeds the feeling of ineffectiveness.

The natural consequence of the "high exposure–shallow inference–shallow engagement" paradox is that young people develop an emotionally reactive relationship with politics. Without detailed information and strategic analysis, they respond immediately and emotionally to news or images they encounter on social media. These responses are often short-lived. As a result, political participation becomes unstable, rising with an event and fading quickly. When political information is surrendered to the speed of social media, the ability to make strategic decisions weakens, and the mobilization of young people becomes difficult and fragile. Consequently, a model based on emotion rather than information dominates the political behavior of young people, manifesting as reactive surges, rapid declines, and short-lived mobilization.

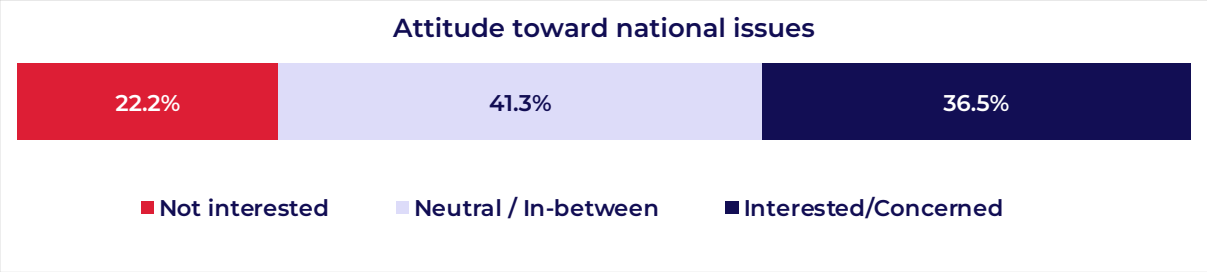


Figure 22. General Attitude Toward National Issues

Young people are aware of the country's problems, but they feel hopeless about finding solutions. The belief that "there is nothing I can do" is one of the most significant barriers to political participation. This passive attitude demonstrates that, while young people are politically conscious, they are reluctant to take action. This illustrates how unrepresented feelings create a political vacuum. The core feelings here are hopelessness and powerlessness. Young people accurately identify the problems, but they lack confidence in their ability to produce solutions through their own actions. This feeling is the biggest psychological barrier to participation.

Powerlessness is not limited to apoliticism; it can also be framed as a "psychological disconnect/escape." Young people may be pushing themselves away from the news flow due to finding the agenda "exhausting/frustrating" and the burden of traumatic years (earthquakes, economic crises, recent political developments, arrests). Consequently, young people recognize the problem yet refrain from taking action because they perceive themselves as incapable of generating solutions. This phenomenon can also be attributed to the political representation mechanism's exclusion of young individuals.

Figure 23. Protest Participation

Although the percentage of young people who participated in the protests was low, their tendency to react to injustices they encountered on social media was significant. It is likely that the rate of participation in demonstrations increased after the events of March 19. On the other hand, our qualitative studies revealed that even among those who are oppositional and inclined to react, there are factors that negatively affect participation in demonstrations. Undoubtedly, the primary factor limiting participation is the fear of punishment. Other factors that reduce participation include the low probability of achieving results through demonstrations and the behavior of certain participants that deviates from the purpose of the demonstration. Nevertheless, the low protest rate does not mean that young people are completely passive. Lower-risk forms of participation, such as social media campaigns, boycotts, and volunteer activities, appear to be more common among them than participation

in physical demonstrations. This shows that the form of political participation is changing. Furthermore, young people who consider the risks and costs conclude that street protests involve "high costs and uncertain benefits." For them, micro-participation channels embedded in digital and everyday consumption choices seem more rational. This shift can be defined as "**risk optimization**" or "**rational passivity**" rather than mere passivity. It is a conscious choice made under current conditions rather than a sign of indifference or cowardice. This choice directs them toward micro-participation channels and micro-politics, which they find more rational. Young people engage in "politics without politics" through channels such as digital activism, boycotts, and volunteering. In other words, they exhibit **micro-political** attitudes through their values and consumption choices. This can be seen as the emergence of a new political arena that replaces the classic representation mechanism. It functions as a layer that complements the street rather than replacing it.

Figure 24. Trust in Institutions

Trust in institutions is low. Young people trust the media and public institutions the least. The military is the only institution that inspires trust and exceeds a certain threshold. The media and public institutions are at the bottom of the trust scale. Notably, trust in the EU exceeds trust in public institutions. The trust in institutions map shows that young people view the state through the lens of security and science, while considering politics a lower priority due to a lack of trust and merit. Conversely, the list of institutions that young people trust more can be seen as expressing their desire for institutions based on rules and merit, where ideological friction is low.

		Income Group				Presidential Election – 2nd			Mother	
	Toplam	Low	Lower-Middle	Middle	Upper-Middle	Erdoğan	Kılıçdaroğlu	Protest vote	Turkish	Kurdish
Military	**6.55**	5.92	6.56	7.03	6.73	7.52	6.04	5.95	7.11	4.67
TÜBİTAK	**5.71**	5.40	5.72	5.95	5.85	6.75	5.14	5.33	6.06	4.53
United Nations	**5.49**	5.19	5.41	5.56	5.91	5.73	5.60	4.97	5.64	5.00
Constitutional Court	**5.48**	5.16	5.51	5.74	5.50	6.81	4.81	4.86	5.86	4.19
European Union	**5.47**	5.17	5.44	5.54	5.85	5.35	5.76	5.04	5.56	5.17
Grand National Assembly of Türkiye	**5.45**	5.11	5.44	5.66	5.66	6.88	4.71	4.78	5.83	4.18
Central Bank of the Republic of Türkiye	**5.41**	5.01	5.31	5.77	5.61	6.96	4.54	4.93	5.82	4.06
Presidency Directorate of Communications	**5.37**	4.99	5.28	5.70	5.55	7.07	4.47	4.70	5.75	4.09
Presidency of Türkiye	**5.37**	4.94	5.30	5.69	5.59	7.28	4.34	4.63	5.74	4.12
Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK)	**5.36**	5.14	5.27	5.46	5.63	6.20	4.89	5.11	5.68	4.27
Ministry of Justice	**5.28**	4.95	5.22	5.58	5.37	6.95	4.41	4.50	5.67	3.97
Current Government	**5.16**	4.87	5.16	5.36	5.26	6.97	4.18	4.45	5.52	3.95
Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK)	**5.15**	4.96	5.17	5.20	5.29	6.45	4.47	4.73	5.47	4.10
Turkish Football Federation	**5.00**	4.63	5.03	5.03	5.51	5.85	4.67	4.49	5.29	4.01
Media	**4.77**	4.40	4.76	4.97	5.08	5.78	4.24	4.51	5.06	3.77

Looking at the cross-tables, it is clear that almost all groups have lost trust in institutions, and this is true for different income groups. Trust in institutions is positively correlated with socioeconomic status, and it is particularly prevalent among middle and upper-income groups within the economy-judiciary-technocracy sector (Central Bank, Turkish Statistical Institute, Constitutional Court, and Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey). Kurdish youth have lower levels of trust in institutions. The European Union is the only institution that Kurdish youth trust, with a score above 5.

TÜBİTAK (5.71), the UN (5.49), and the EU (5.47) are all above the medium-high threshold for overall trust. Trust in TÜBİTAK is very high among ruling party voters (6.75) and moderate among opposition voters (5.14). The difference is more limited for the EU (5.35 vs. 5.76). These results suggest that science and technocracy, as well as international institutions, have less ideological friction than domestic politics.

As income decreases, the state's protective role becomes more important. As income increases, demands for institutionalism and meritocracy grow stronger. Therefore, trust in and approval of leaders diverge systematically according to income group.

In conclusion, we can say that young people view the corporate world through a hierarchy that prioritizes security and science, while placing media at the bottom. Meanwhile, political preferences and identities sharply reshape the distribution of trust. Young people's distance from politics should not be interpreted as indifference, but rather as protective behavior fueled by distrust, emotional exhaustion, and a sense of low efficacy. This distance is not a disengagement from politics but rather a shift toward new forms of politics.

06

PERCEPTIONS OF THE EU

6. PERCEPTIONS OF THE EU

This section examines the diverse perspectives of Turkish youth toward the European Union. Although there is significant support for Turkey's EU membership, young people view the EU as having a dual image: desirable values and opportunities, such as freedom of travel, prosperity, meritocracy, democracy, and human rights, on the one hand, and concerns about discrimination, double standards, dependency, and sovereignty, on the other hand. Survey data, interviews, and focus group findings reveal that young people's perception of the EU is shaped by a pragmatic cost-benefit analysis rather than ideological patterns. In summary, this section explores how the EU can exist as both a regulated world of opportunity that young people affirm and a cultural and political threat, how this dual perception varies according to demographic and identity divisions, and why the EU and the US occupy separate places within Western perception.

6.1. General Attitudes Toward the European Union

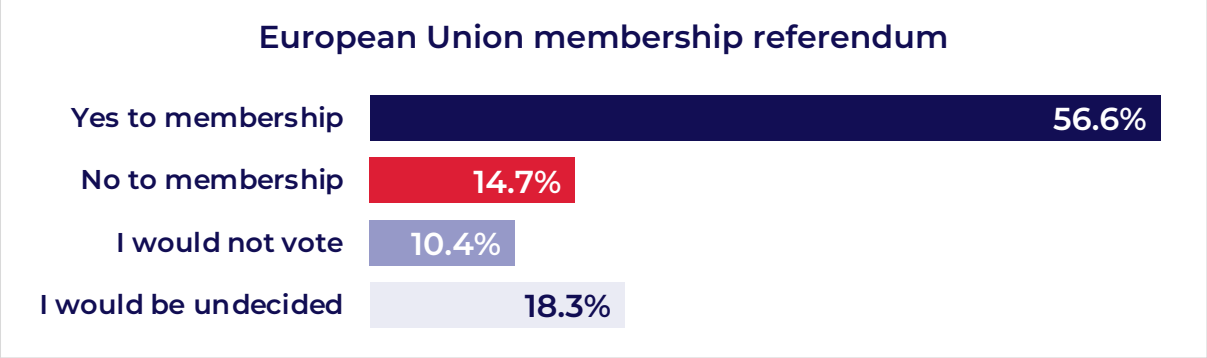


Figure 25. European Union Referendum

According to Eurobarometer's 2025 data, 32% of the public views the country's EU membership positively, 17% negatively, and 51% neither positively nor negatively. This study's results reveal that young people's approach is much more positive than society's overall. Support for EU membership is quite high among young people (56.6%). Opposition to membership is low at 15%. A significant number of people are undecided or say they will not vote (28.7%). Conversely, the findings of the qualitative phase, which will be detailed below, show that young people have a dual perception of the EU, recognizing its benefits while also having reservations, but with a predominantly positive attitude rather than a one-dimensional "yes or no" preference.

Despite their reservations about the EU, young people largely support Turkey's membership. Their support is closely linked to the freedoms, rights of movement, and economic opportunities offered by the EU. Opponents highlight the EU's exclusionary attitude toward Turkey, its potential for discrimination, and concerns about sovereignty. The data points to a clear motif of pragmatism in young people's perception of the EU: membership means opportunity and mobility. Conversely, as we observed among young participants in our qualitative studies, even those with reservations about the EU expect that membership will

"put Turkey in order." This increases their approval of EU membership. They believe it will make the country more rule-based, ensuring that the rules are enforceable and the system is reliable. Therefore, the traditional perception of the West and the EU—that is, "let's take their technology but never their values"—is shifting towards a more positive view of the West due to factors such as the rule of law, the supremacy of rules, an increased value placed on nature and humanity, equality before the law, and a reduction in crimes such as favoritism, corruption, and irregularities. However, cultural concerns about life in European countries remain strong. Among these concerns, the erosion of social and/or communitarian values by individualism and moral degeneration stand out. However, these concerns pose less of a problem today than in the past because the Turkish population has acquaintances who have experienced the West firsthand, and they believe they can protect themselves from cultural deformation and assimilation better than previous generations did.

Ultimately, young people's support for the EU is more closely linked to their view of EU membership as an external anchor that will solve Turkey's current problems stemming from meritocracy and systemic crises than to an ideological stance. This demonstrates that trust in the EU is based on the expectation of a rule-based regime, the rule of law, and concrete opportunities.

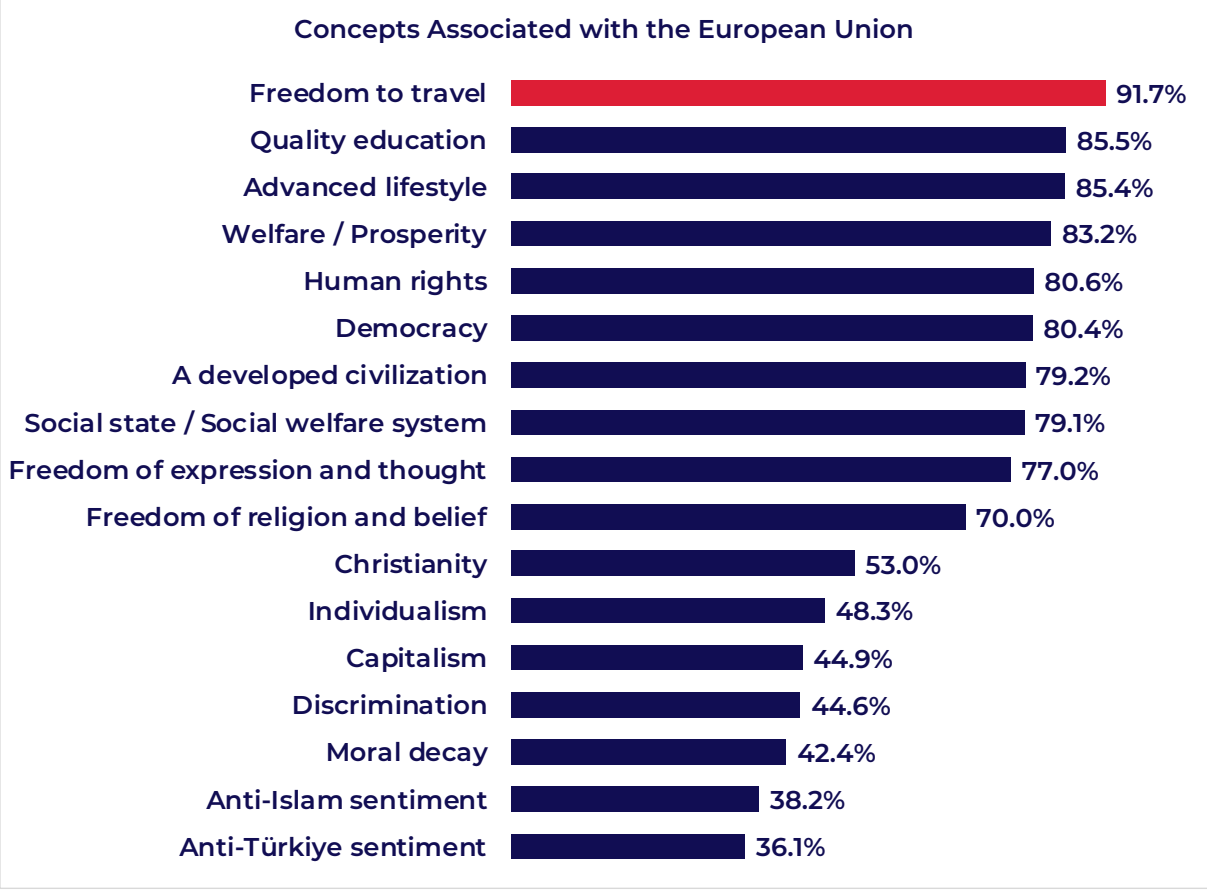


Figure 26. Concepts Associated with the European Union

Young people mostly associate the EU with positive issues that will improve their quality of life, such as increased freedom and democracy. The rate at which they associate the EU with negative aspects, such as hostility toward Turks or Islam, is quite low. When young people hear "EU," the first things that come to mind are freedom of travel, education, democracy, prosperity, and human rights. However, discrimination, double standards, and exclusionary attitudes towards Turkey also evoke associations at rates ranging from 36% to 45%.

Approval of EU Membership According to Socio-demographic Variables

		Yes	No	Undecided
	Overall	**56.6%**	**14.7%**	**28.7%**
Gender	Women	53.2%	15.8%	30.9%
	Men	60.1%	13.6%	26.3%
Age Group	18-21	55.2%	14.0%	30.7%
	22-25	55.4%	15.7%	28.9%
	26-29	59.1%	14.3%	26.6%
Living Arrangement	Living with parents	57.2%	14.8%	28.0%
	Living with spouse	50.7%	17.6%	31.6%
	Living independently	60.9%	11.1%	28.0%
Income Group	Lower	56.3%	11.8%	31.9%
	Lower–middle	52.7%	17.7%	29.5%
	Middle	55.8%	17.7%	26.5%
	Upper–middle	62.3%	11.5%	26.2%

Support for the EU is linked to direct access to opportunities and, indirectly, to expectations of a rule-based regime and equality. Income, education, and lifestyle divisions reinforce this relationship.

Two simultaneous patterns emerge along the **gender and age** axes. Support is higher among men (60.1% "Yes"), while indecision is increasing among women (30.9% "Don't know"). Although women have the potential to embrace the narrative of opportunity, reservations prevail. The magnitude of indecision indicates the distance between "intellectual support" and "emotional/security-based skepticism." The high level of uncertainty among women may be related to cultural security concerns and sensitivity to discrimination. The high level of support among men, on the other hand, aligns with a stronger desire for mobility.

As age increases, the "yes" rate rises (from 59.1% among 26–29-year-olds to 62.3% among 30–34-year-olds), while indecision decreases (from 30.7% to 26.6%). As people grow older and gain more experience, the concrete benefits of the EU become more apparent, while the "wait-and-see" attitude weakens. Thus, the pragmatic nature of youth strengthens with age.

A breakdown of **life situations** (living with parents, spouse, or outside the family) offers a more indirect window into attitudes toward the EU. Those living outside the family are significantly more likely to say yes, while those living with their spouse (i.e., those who are married) are relatively more likely to say no. This result is related to the fact that early marriage is associated with a certain cultural identity.

Support is distributed unevenly along the **income** line. "Yes" is chosen by 56.3% of low-income groups and 62.3% of high-income groups. In contrast, "No" is most prevalent among middle-income groups (17.7%). These results suggest that those who view the EU as an opportunity for institutionalization tend to be in groups with higher access to resources. In contrast, the economically sensitive middle classes tend to be dominated by hesitations concerning sovereignty and competition. The decrease in indecision among high-income groups (26.2%) indicates that uncertainty about the EU decreases with increased access to information and clarity about future plans.

Approval of EU membership by Identity Variables

		Yes	No	Undecided
	Overall	**56.6%**	**14.7%**	**28.7%**
Religiosity	Low	65.9%	6.9%	27.2%
	Medium	57.0%	13.9%	29.1%
	High	54.9%	16.4%	28.7%
Nationalism	Low	63.5%	11.4%	25.2%
	Medium	53.6%	12.1%	34.3%
	High	56.1%	17.2%	26.7%
Mother Tongue	Turkish	53.7%	16.5%	29.8%
	Kurdish	67.5%	8.1%	24.4%
Ideology	Left	71.2%	8.8%	20.0%
	Center	58.0%	13.3%	28.7%
	Right	42.1%	23.2%	34.7%

As religiosity and nationalism increase, the EU is viewed as a test of sovereignty. Among those with low religiosity and left-wing identities, however, the EU is seen as a package of rights and opportunities.

Religiosity and nationalism are the two cultural variables that most influence attitudes toward the EU. As religiosity increases, the "yes" response decreases (65.9% among the less religious and 54.9% among the more religious). As nationalism rises, the "no" and "undecided" rates increase (34.3% undecided, the highest rate among the moderately nationalistic). These differences reflect the interpretive gap between those who view the EU as a set of values, evaluating it based on justice and opportunity, and those who see the EU as a test of identity and sovereignty. In other words, the EU evokes different associations: rules and freedom for one group and concerns about cultural intervention and border relaxation for another.

The divide between **native languages** solidifies this cultural axis. Support is significantly higher among Kurdish youth (67.5% Yes, 8.1% No, and 24.4% Undecided), while among Turkish youth, "Yes" remains at 53.7%. This difference shows that the EU generates normative hope more easily in contexts where it is perceived as a guarantor of rights and justice. For Kurdish youth, the EU is seen as an advocate for rights and security. Therefore, their hope for the EU is combined with expectations of representation and equal treatment.

The picture becomes clearer when viewed along **ideological** lines. On the left, "Yes" dominates with 71.2% of the vote. On the right, however, "Yes" drops to 42.1%, while "No" rises to 23.2% and "Undecided" rises to 34.7%. On the left, the EU is interpreted as a set of values consistent with the rule of law, freedom, and prosperity. On the right, the EU is viewed as a questionable area within the framework of sovereignty, cultural integrity, and economic independence. In the center, "Yes" is strong at 58%. This position is linked to pragmatic calculations, primarily economic opportunities, independent of identity.

The profile of the "undecided pool" becomes clearer when these divisions come together: indecision is relatively higher among women, younger age groups, middle-income earners, moderately nationalistic individuals, and those on the right of the ideological spectrum. This group is caught between the values/opportunities narrative offered by the EU and concerns about identity and sovereignty. For these young people, the issue is not whether the EU is an "abstract ideal" but whether security, equal treatment, and concrete benefits can be guaranteed together. Therefore, indecision involves uncertainty that must be resolved on two axes: the informational axis (institutions, functioning, and post-membership order) and the emotional axis (honor, sovereignty, and cultural preservation).

Cross-tabulations demonstrate how this dual perception is distributed across demographic and cultural dimensions. The emphasis on opportunity and law generates support among those on the left, the less religious, and Kurdish youth. In contrast, the emphasis on sovereignty and identity generates skepticism and indecision among those on the right, the highly religious, and those with medium-to-high levels of nationalism. Therefore, the youth's attitude toward the EU is too complex to be captured by a single slogan. Within the same data set, a desire for access to universal standards coexists with a need for cultural and national security. Young people's view of the EU oscillates between pragmatism and identity. Support strengthens as experience and knowledge increase. However, indecision intensifies in areas of emotional security and institutional uncertainty.

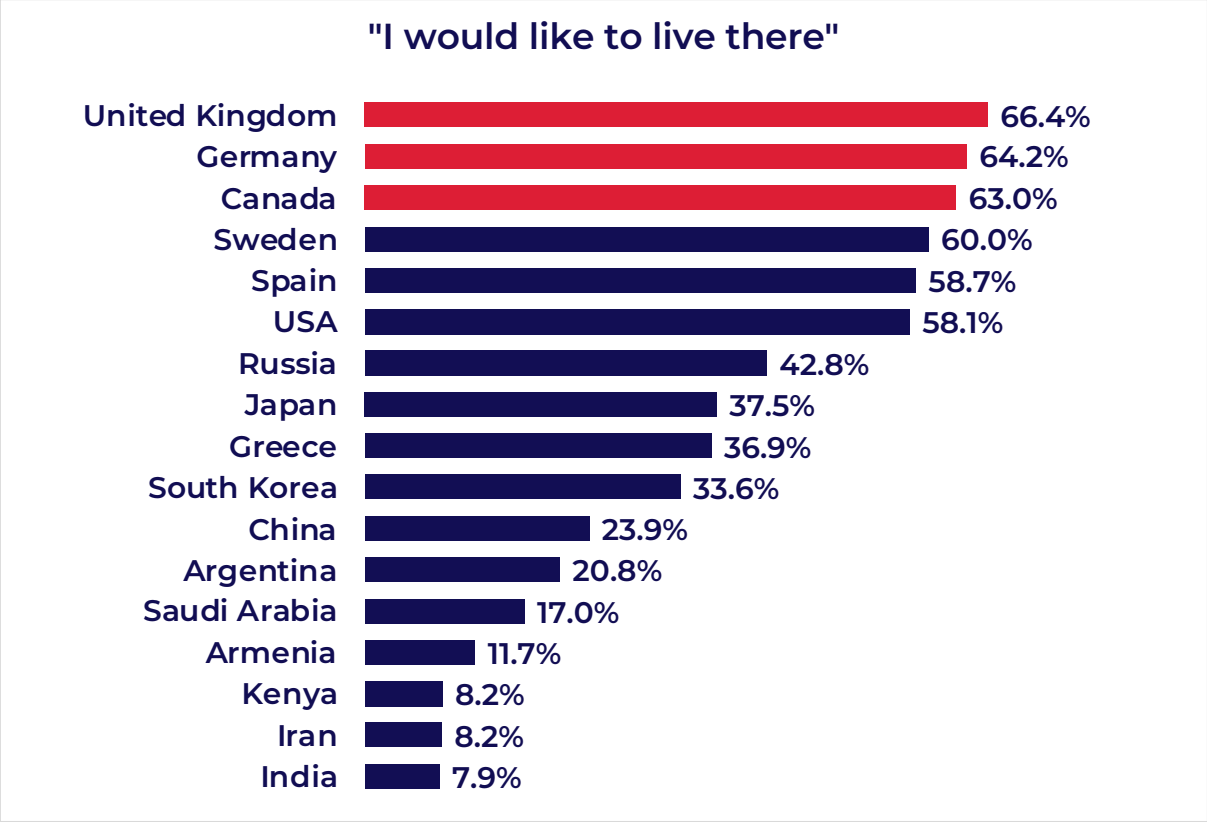


Figure 27. Would You Like to Live in Any of These Countries?

To understand young people's preferences, we listed different countries and asked if they would like to live in them. The UK stands out among the countries not only for its conditions, but also for its appeal as a place to learn a language. Germany is always at the forefront due to its development and large Turkish immigrant population. Qualitative findings support the observation that, apart from the UK and Germany, the most preferred countries to live in are the Scandinavian countries, Canada, and Switzerland, due to their prosperity, freedoms, and sensitivity to discrimination.

A significant proportion of young people say they want to live in EU countries. The main reasons are economic prosperity and opportunities. Attractive aspects include education, employment, quality of life, and freedoms. However, concerns about discrimination and xenophobia limit the intensity of this desire. Overall, this suggests that young people still view the West as an appealing, albeit imperfect, place to live.

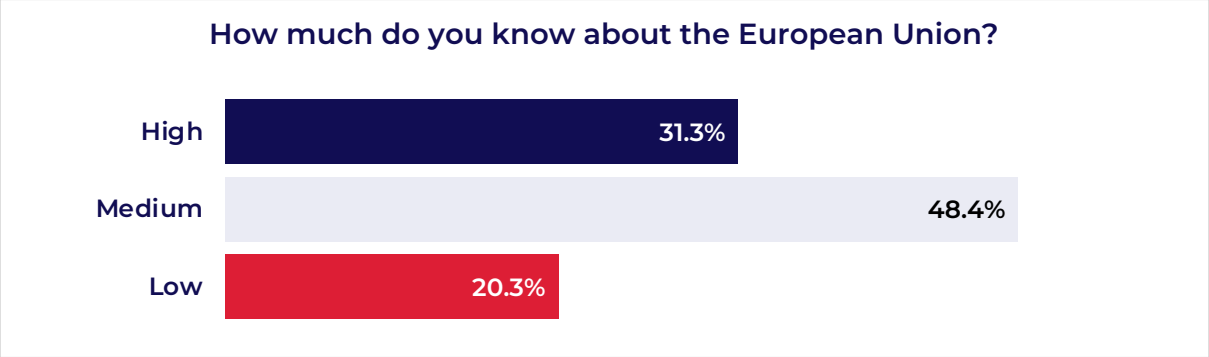


Figure 28. How Much Do You Know about the European Union?

The level of knowledge about the EU is generally moderate. As we observed in the qualitative stages, mastery of institutional details is limited. However, concrete benefits related to daily life, such as visas, travel, education, and work, are clearly emphasized.

"I would say EU literacy is moderate." A center-left participant's framework of the European Union as "a union established by countries for trade and comfortable travel" illustrates this combination of practical benefits and general values.

While most young people have a general understanding of the EU, they lack detailed knowledge of its institutions, how they function, and its policies. This lack of knowledge leads to superficial discussions about the EU. For young people, the EU is more closely associated with opportunities, symbolic values, and lifestyle than with its institutional structure. One reason for this perception is the strong belief that the EU is essentially a capitalist economic organization. This perception gives rise to concerns that Turkey's EU membership could increase dependency and work against Turkey's interests. The fact that this concern does not affect the desire for membership exemplifies the contradictory and inconsistent nature of strong pragmatism among young people.

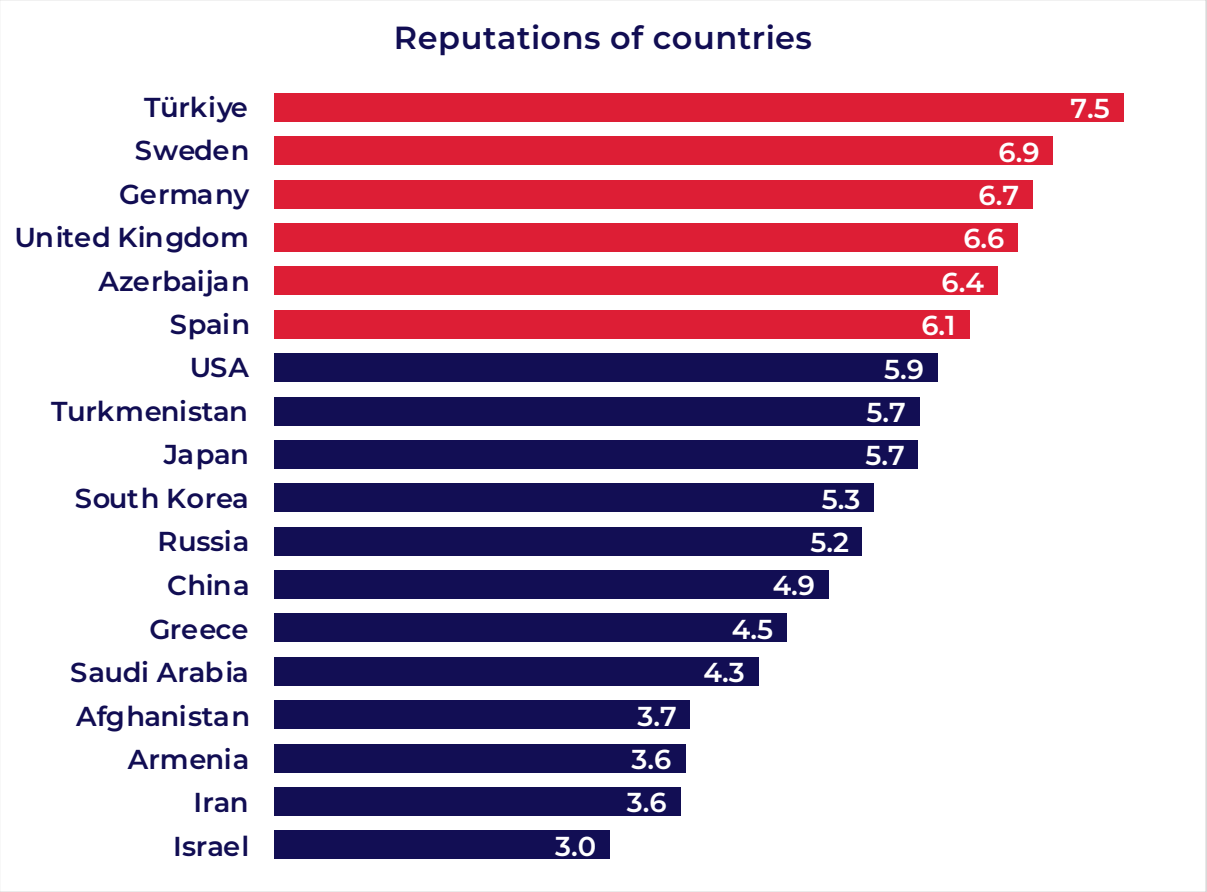


Figure 29. On a Scale of 1 to 10, How Would You Rate Its Reputation?

EU countries are viewed as having different levels of prestige by young people. Germany and the UK stand out due to their strong economies and educational opportunities, while other countries are viewed more neutrally or negatively. These perceptions show that young people do not view the EU as a uniform bloc but rather evaluate it based on the differences between countries. At the same time, it is clear that migration policies and attitudes toward Turkey also influence young people's perceptions. Another notable point is that the US has begun to lose prestige among young people. Existing prejudices and negative feelings about the West are beginning to weigh more heavily on the US. While EU countries (and Canada) embody the more favorable aspects of the West, such as liberalism and humanity, the US is associated with discriminatory, capitalist, and corrupt characteristics. We will elaborate on this topic in more detail below.

Countries perceived as distant from Turkey in terms of lifestyle and cultural characteristics, such as Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and Iran, have very low reputation scores.

6.2. Perceptions of the West and the EU

Cultural-Political Threat Oscillation and the Search for Opportunity and Models

Despite the high proportion of positive views on EU membership and low opposition to it, young people's perception of the West/EU has positive aspects but also reservations and negative elements.

This perception diverges along two main axes: one for Turkey's future, and the other for assessments of life in Western countries:

- A **positive view** from **the perspective of welfare and rights** (democracy, the social state, education, freedom of expression, and the environment), and a favorable view of EU membership.
- **From the perspective of identity and sovereignty**, there is **a distant or negative stance** (imperialism, cultural and religious incompatibility, and self-interest), and a cold, neutral, or hesitant view of membership.

A language of low knowledge and interest is also evident, with phrases like "I don't know."

A fluid spectrum exists between these two powerful poles in young people's view of the West/EU. On one end, the West is seen as a place of "merit, law, institutionalism, and opportunity." On the other end, the West is seen as a "hypocritical and threatening cultural-political bloc." In between these two extremes, there is a group with limited knowledge but a strong image of the West, as well as a nuanced sense of belonging and identity expressed as, "I want to go, but I can't stay."

The EU and the West as a "Model" and Escape Route: Merit, Rights, the Rule of Law, and Opportunities

The definition of a "rights-first state" among young people (merit, justice, and freedom of expression) is linked to the democratic-welfare model attributed to the EU. Young people who consider merit, freedom of expression, and justice to be the backbone of democracy are describing not only the EU, but also the moral framework of the system they demand. This concept is reflected in narratives that portray the EU as a reliable entity that "operates based on principles." "First, it establishes certain values under its umbrella... I find it more reliable because it is an institution that acts based on values."

Another participant said, "If I were in charge, I would create programs to send young people abroad," which illustrates the desire for EU education and mobility opportunities. The same practical utilitarianism is linked to daily life. Another participant said, "When you say EU... EU harmonization process... EU values come to mind," and a young person who said, "Throw yourself into a European country, then travel all over Europe," established the EU as a map of accessible opportunities.

The correlation between welfare and rights has produced partial approval of the EU among some young people with conservative-nationalist leanings. "Their democracies work better than ours, social welfare support is better, and there is more freedom of expression and thought." Alongside these positive perceptions, however, there are also critical notes, such as "hypocrisy on environmental issues" and "discrimination against immigrants and Black people."

Therefore, the EU and Europe are considered to be "ahead of Turkey" in terms of institutional principles, the welfare state, freedom of expression, and education. EU membership is also justified in terms of "quality of life" and "freedoms." The positive aspects are as follows:

- **Emphasis on EU principles and institutionalism:**

One participant defines the EU as an organization that "acts on principles" and justifies itself by committing to them. Therefore, they find the EU "safe" and would like Turkey to join.

Another participant says, "I like Western democracy. We should follow their example," and explains their admiration by linking it to specific institutions. In this vein, democracy, the quality of education, and the image of a "functioning state" are mentioned together.

- **Concrete list of benefits:**

Another participant views EU countries as "better than Turkey" in terms of democracy, the welfare state, education, rights and freedoms, and the environment. The statement "If there were a referendum on the EU, I would vote yes" sums up this perception.

The crisis of meritocracy in Turkey has created a deadlock, framing the West as a "forced exit." A 19-year-old participant describes it as less of a choice and more of a systemic necessity, saying: "I studied at university for a year... I feel compelled to flee to America."

- **Cultural affinity and harmony:**

Although there are certain cultural reservations on specific axes, some cultural elements positively impact perception, especially compared to the Middle East. For instance, a center-left participant emphasizes that "Western values align with my own" and that "if I overcome the language barrier, I will adapt easily." Young people experience an "adaptation-belonging pendulum" regarding the EU: they feel culturally close to it, yet they also see the risk of discrimination as a real barrier.

- **The language of "countries to emulate":**

The benchmark of contemporary civilizations still points towards the West and is valid and influential. For example, a young, apolitical/centrist person positions Western countries as a reference group that they "like and should emulate"; they clearly state that they want democracy in their own country.

A participant with conservative leanings and a realpolitik mindset may affirm membership within a utilitarian framework, stating that, if there were a referendum tomorrow, they would vote "yes" to damage Turkey's image.

The "Identity-Sovereignty" Lens: Distant Stances Toward the West/EU

Despite their warm attitude toward the EU, young people have reservations. Those who are particularly skeptical or cold towards EU membership view the West as a mercenary/imperialist bloc. Concerns about cultural and religious incompatibility, as well as moral concerns, come to the fore.

This sentiment is evident not only among young people, who tend to be more distant from the EU, but also among those who are not directly opposed to it, yet still have reservations.

Those who are more opposed also use anti-imperialist language. One young person describes the West as exploitative, divisive, and waging war while "selling garbage under the name of green transformation," saying, "Our enemies are... I hate the EU." The idea that "the West is trying to divide Turkey" is central to this narrative.

Religious/cultural incompatibility is frequently emphasized. A conservative participant who opposes EU membership argues that freedom of religion and belief is problematic in practice. He states, "As a Muslim, you will encounter bigotry there," and emphasizes the clash of values, concluding that "prosperity is high, but it does not directly bring civilization."

The narrative of "they envy us" remains relevant. Young conservatives elevate Turkey's prestige and status, positioning the West as "looking at us, envying us." This defensive, proud tone creates an expectation of autonomy rather than membership. Membership is considered risky because it could lead to dependency.

Conversely, while there is no direct opposition, distance and indifference stand out among young people with reservations. Those who say, "I can't adapt to the West, and I'm not curious about it" demonstrate low interest and cultural distance. The conceptual confusion of a participant who responds "Trump" when asked about the EU is a typical sign of this indifference.

Most young people who view the EU and the West as opportunities are also influenced by cultural defense and anti-hegemonic discourse that portrays the West as "hypocritical and threatening."

6.3. The Europe/US Divide

In the minds of young people, Europe is associated with opportunity and stability, while the U.S. is associated with speed and aggression.

A key finding of the research is that young people mentally categorize Europe (particularly EU countries) and the US as distinct entities. Feelings toward the EU stem from lukewarm or moderate utilitarianism (prosperity, free movement, and education), while the US occupies a more distant place primarily through the lens of extreme capitalism, imperialism, and injustice.

The US is portrayed more critically in terms of partisanship, justice, health security, and discrimination, while Europe is portrayed more critically in terms of its welfare state and institutions.

The three topics most frequently mentioned in the criticism of the US are partisan politics, extreme capitalism, and individualism.

A center-left participant said, "I don't like America. It's not justly governed, and it's very partisan, clearly distinguishing the US from Europe. This same participant criticized US capitalism through the lens of a "culture of spending" and found Europe to be more balanced. Another participant argued that social justice has not developed in the US, citing the inability to tax large corporations and the debt cycle created by gaps in health insurance. They see Germany and the Netherlands as better at establishing balance. The observation that "individualism is much greater in America" further highlights the cultural differences.

The theme of U.S./Western imperialism is also prevalent in left-critical circles. The discourse of "NATO interests and imperialism" in the context of Syria and the Middle East transforms the negative perception of the U.S. into an ideological argument.

Young people see Europe as a more likely destination for the merit, justice, and freedom they seek. However, this lukewarm sympathy for Europe can quickly change when tested by moral issues such as Gaza, migration, and Islamophobia. The degree of approval or distance shifts according to political and cultural tensions on the ground.

Some conservative participants questioned the EU's moral legitimacy, stating that Western countries and Israel draw strength from the EU and committing massacres at the level of genocide. They said they would vote "no" in a referendum. In another discussion along similar lines, the EU receives positive feedback, except regarding freedom of religion and belief. However, attitudes toward Islamophobia and Gaza undermine the claim of "civil/principled integrity." On the other hand, a more technical criticism divides the EU into two parts: "Cumbersome, but Schengen is useful." While the EU's power to impose sanctions and its political speed are questioned, free movement is considered valuable.

EU	A "generally better" assumption comes to the fore when benefits affecting daily life (travel, education, work) and the expectation of rights/merit are considered. Objections mostly arise from moral and political fractures, such as those concerning Gaza, migration, and Islamophobia. Criticism of institutional sluggishness and "hypocrisy" also accompanies this.
USA	Through the lens of extreme capitalism and individualism, partisan politics is criticized. Shortcomings in social justice and public security create a noticeable coldness, especially among center-left and left-leaning young people.

In summary, young people associate the US with aggressive power politics and the EU with a rule-based order and social welfare mechanisms. Therefore, most anti-Western sentiment is directed at the US.

Skeptical-oppositional view of the EU

Some dissident young people label the EU as an "instrument of German hegemony" and a "club that prioritizes its own interests." They use sharp narratives, such as "if they are going to take Turkey, they will take it by force."

In conservative nationalist circles, Selçuk Bayraktar is regarded as a figure representing "domestic capacity that reduces dependence on the West." One participant cited these figures as "individuals who have contributed positively to the nation," designating them as exemplary leaders. This sentiment underscores the perception of a distinct identity, distinguished from both the EU and the US, not on ideological grounds, but rather on the basis of technological capabilities and security concerns. A techno-nationalism that emphasizes defense industry-focused technology is associated with political criticism of the EU.

While criticizing the West's historical colonialism, another participant acknowledges that political institutions in Europe are more competent. In other words, moral criticism and institutional appreciation are expressed in the same sentence.

Concerns about Islamophobia are also prevalent. Stories about people considering settling in Europe but worrying, "I'm dark-skinned. Will I be treated as a second-class citizen?" reveal an identity barrier that discourages migration to the West.

Critics of the West perpetuate the narratives of colonialism and hypocrisy; many say, "The West is exploitative." Nevertheless, the practical acceptance that "the system works" has become the norm. The idea that "European institutions are more competent and powerful" is repeated across different political veins. Thus, despite emotional and cultural reservations, adapting to life in Europe (especially for education and work) becomes a highly attractive option.

In summary, the cultural map of young people is based on a balance of geographical references involving dual proximity and dual distance.

1. **Institutional/lifestyle proximity to Europe:** Predictable procedures, freedom of expression, and expectations of meritocracy shift perceptions in Europe's favor. The Mediterranean region stands out with its cultural warmth.
2. **Proximity to the Middle East in terms of social fabric:** A sense of kinship exists through family, religiosity, daily contact, and codes of privacy. However, when it comes to legal regimes, freedom of expression, and institutional quality, Europe is the point of reference.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of young people find the EU to be culturally closer to them than other regions. It is worth taking a closer look at this cultural duality.

The metropolis-periphery divide: "Istanbul/Marmara/Aegean resembles the West, the rest of the country resembles the East"

A frequently repeated internal map reading in the field also divides cultural orientation geographically: "A significant part of the country resembles the 'East' culturally, but people in the metropolis (Istanbul, Marmara, and Aegean regions) resemble the West more," says a center-left participant. This shows that young people have a dual aesthetic and behavioral code of Turkey in their minds. This indicates that the sense of closeness to Europe is particularly strong among urban/mobile youth. Therefore, young people believe that Turkey has a geographically divided cultural identity.

Middle Eastern Similarities: Family, Daily Habits, and Religiosity

The vast majority of young people identify as both Western and Middle Eastern. While they acknowledge the similarities with the Middle East, they tend to see themselves as more Western.

Most interviewees identify culturally closer to Europe, especially the Mediterranean region, than to the Middle East. There are two reasons for this. The first is a Western affinity based on "the rhythm of daily life and the functioning of institutions."

A secular-centrist participant explained, "I think Turkey is a Western country. I would adapt more easily to Europe (Spain or Sweden) than to Iraq or Syria," explained this preference, citing the predictability of procedures and consistency of public institutions. This difference is summed up well by the statement, "When you are told to do this or that, you know it will work; in the Middle East, the feeling that 'even if I do it, it may not work' prevails."

On the other hand, the social similarities with the Middle East, such as family devotion, forms of friendship, and daily warm contact, are also frequently mentioned. "The lifestyle and family-friendship relationships are closer to us," says one participant, describing this feeling of closeness as simply cultural proximity. Another participant with conservative views speaks from an ambivalent position: "We have cultural ties with the Middle East, but I don't see similarities with its people," adding that joining the EU could carry the risk of assimilation. This statement captures the tension between cultural closeness and identity preservation well. A young conservative woman establishes a more systematic balance between similarity and difference: "We are separate from Iran and Syria because of the difference in republics. Some open up; some close down. But the reactions in eastern Turkey resemble those in the Middle East," offering a dual perspective through both the legal regime and social practices.

Therefore, despite traces of Middle Easternness in terms of cultural proximity, the needle points toward the West. Young people see the West (the European Union) as a cultural space that belongs to them. They idealize the West in terms of education, technology, individual freedoms, and social norms.

In the interviews, young people's affirmation of similarities with the Middle East shows that they do not completely reject their origins. However, these similarities are overshadowed by their tendency to identify with the West. While the Middle East is accepted as part of their identity, it is not preferred as a cultural path forward. The greater tendency to identify with the West reveals that desired identity prevails over inherited identity.

The fact that the vast majority of young people find the EU to be culturally closer than other regions is also a strong indicator of Turkey's cultural aspirations in the traditional East-West dilemma. This preference is not just political or economic, but rather the result of a search for a particular lifestyle and values associated with modernity.

Cultural Affinity: Proximity to the Mediterranean, the "Cold" North, and Inland Geography Divide

Young people also distinguish between the north and the Mediterranean in terms of their sense of cultural closeness to the West. The Mediterranean region is valued for its climate, gastronomy, and social characteristics. Spain, Italy, France, and Greece are considered closer and easier to adapt to. In contrast, examples from Central and Northern Europe, such as Germany and the Netherlands, stand out with their distant and cold cultural image. One participant says, "Greece, Turkey, and Tunisia are so inseparable. I could adapt to France, but I might struggle in Germany because people are colder." Similarly, a participant with nationalist leanings acknowledges the cultural distance while also conceding institutional superiority: "Germany is cold, but its education, democracy, and welfare state are stronger than ours."

A young lawyer's narrative, "I could adapt to Italy because I have an emotional connection to it," shows that a sense of proximity to the Mediterranean is established not only through cultural codes, but also through an aesthetic and emotional connection.

Young people's sense of closeness to the Mediterranean stems from cultural rhythms, social warmth, and everyday life practices, while their sense of distance from Northern Europe stems from individualism and cold communication codes. The pattern of "proximity to the Mediterranean basin–distance from Northern Europe" is widespread under the heading of cultural harmony. For example, a nationalist student says, "Germany is cold, but they are ahead of us in democracy and the welfare state," establishing a duality of admiration and distance within a single paragraph. Similarly, another participant expresses the prejudice that "Westerners are cold." In some interviews, the cultural map is projected within the country. For example, one participant says, "Draw a line beyond Sivas, dividing it into west and east," while another comments, "Istanbul, Marmara, and the Aegean regions are similar to the west, while the rest of the country is more 'eastern.'" These comments confirm the same mental map from two different voices.

The statement "The Mediterranean basin is easier" (e.g., France) suggests that warmth and sociability are important criteria for cultural compatibility. They believe Mediterranean cultures, such as those in Spain, Italy, Greece, and southern France, are closer to Turkey's

social and communicative norms. A more flexible social structure and an outward-looking communication style support this perception of easy adaptation.

The Northern European Challenge (Germany): The statement "I would struggle in Germany; people are colder" reflects the clash between the perceived individualism, formality, and distant social relationships of Northern European cultures (Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom) and Turkey's communal and emotional norms. This critical nuance shows that, even when choosing the West, young people do not want to compromise their emotional and social needs.

Another young person oriented toward the West emphasizes that Turkey is becoming "Middle Eastern," even though the two regions are not inherently similar. This points to a position where emotional closeness to the West coexists with opposition to the Middle East. On the other end of the spectrum, a participant with little interest in politics bases the possibility of adapting to Europe on the idea of "freedom and security," saying, "Germany could be... there is freedom of thought and a comfortable life."

Thus, Germany is a two-layered figure in the minds of the participants: "Cold but strong institutions." While nationalist-leaning young people find Germany distant, they also emphasize its institutional quality, education system, and welfare state. This micro-map shows that cultural divisions within Europe—the Mediterranean is close and Central/Northern Europe is distant—shape young people's perceptions of integration. This distinction reinforces secular-centrist youth's tendency to be "immediately drawn to the Mediterranean and cautiously toward Germany," while conservative-nationalist youth lean toward "cultural distance from Germany but institutional admiration."

In summary, young people's perception of the EU is balanced by two pillars:

1) The freedom–merit pillar (pragmatic attraction): This is an image of the West where merit matters, visas are easily obtained, and education is of high quality. This raises the perception that it is "worth going." Pragmatic responses to EU membership, such as "Yes, tomorrow," are the political projection of this pillar.

2) The security–identity pillar (cultural brake): Islamophobia, "second-class" anxiety, moral outrage over the West's hypocrisy and Palestine policy, and indifference or lack of knowledge about the EU feed this pillar. The result is a feeling of "I can't stay, even if I go."

Four distinct types emerge from the intersection of these two columns:

1. **Opportunistic-pragmatic yes-sayers** (merit, institutions, travel)
2. **Ambivalent middle-of-the-roaders** (limited knowledge, strong image)
3. **Cultural skeptics** (high concerns about belonging and identity)
4. **Anti-hegemonic opponents** (those who view the EU as a "club of interests")

These four groups demonstrate that views on the EU are distributed across experiential, cultural, and security-based layers rather than ideological ones.

The findings demonstrate that the cultural orientation of Turkish youth is fundamentally Western-centric and aspirational. However, this orientation fluctuates based on emotional and social integration within Europe. Most importantly, this cultural divergence is creating a clear East-West divide within the country, separating metropolitan areas from the countryside. Young people do not weigh membership ideologically, but rather based on opportunities. The expectation that EU membership will "put Turkey in order" increases support.

For many, the West is a necessary model that provides what Turkey cannot. At the same time, however, there is a cultural and political distance. These two orientations can coexist within the same person, such as institutional appreciation alongside cultural hesitation. Data shows that a pragmatic "yes" and a moral/identity-focused "distance" coexist. EU literacy is limited, yet the image of the West remains strong.

Cultural orientation is Western-centric, but emotional affinity lies in the Mediterranean. Liberalism is found in Scandinavian countries, Switzerland, and Canada. Linguistic orientation is toward England, and institutional admiration is concentrated in Germany. This demonstrates that the need for "warmth-seeking sociality" and "predictable institutions" coexist.

The burden of recent judgments of "discrimination, imperialism, and excessive capitalism" in the image of the US is becoming more pronounced, and the US is bearing the brunt of negative feelings about the West.

Consequently, young people's perception of the EU is based on a balance of cultural affinity with the West and concerns about identity and sovereignty. For them, the EU is both an opportunity and a cultural test. Support is fueled by pragmatism, while skepticism is fueled by security and identity concerns.

07

PERCEPTION OF DEMOCRACY

7. PERCEPTION OF DEMOCRACY

This section focuses on how young people perceive democracy. For them, it represents an ideal based on values such as freedom of expression, justice, and meritocracy. However, its current implementation in Turkey has caused it to diverge from this ideal. Young people do not perceive democracy as an abstract regime, but rather as a system of rights, justice, and meritocracy that shapes their living conditions.

With concrete data and qualitative findings, this section reveals how young people define democracy, why they center their definition on "hope for change through elections," and how the absence of justice and meritocracy erodes their trust in the system. It also addresses the dual expectations young people have of the state, namely that it provides social security while also being able to restrict freedoms, and how they combine abstract democratic rights with concrete demands for economic justice.

7.1. Approaches to Democracy

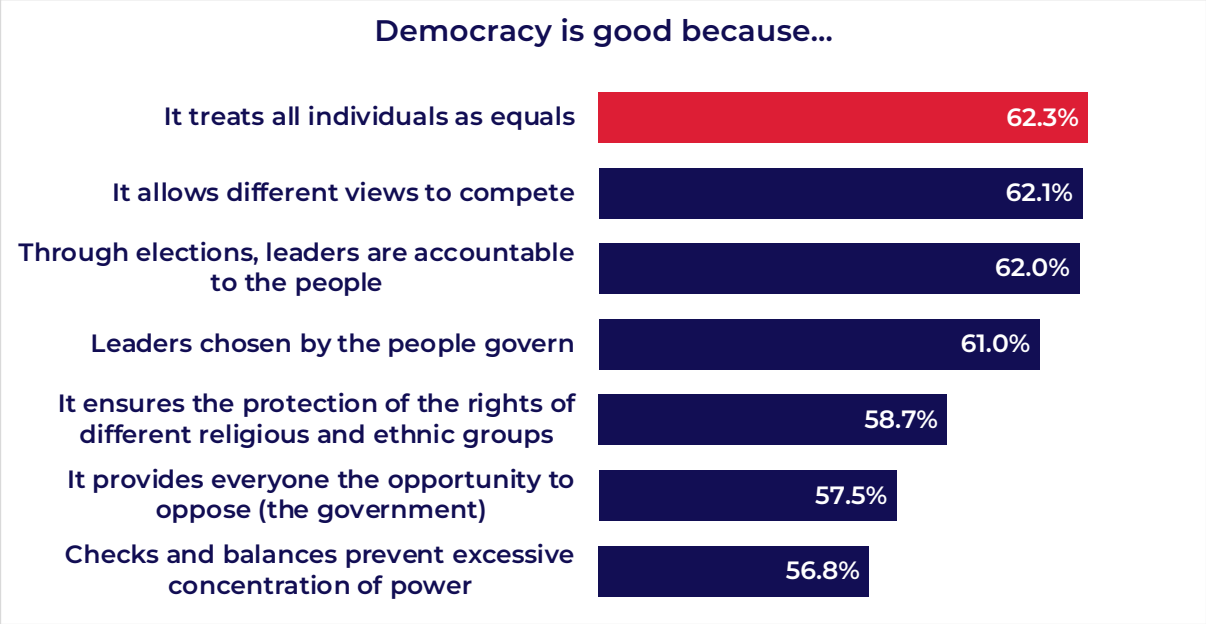


Figure 30. "Democracy is good because..."

Democracy is a valuable concept for young people. However, they also have many reservations about it. For instance, they do not consider it to be an effective form of government. Sometimes, they value statism, and at other times, they criticize areas where the state has become authoritarian. However, they do not engage in deep discussions about democracy or adopt democratic approaches. Democracy is an insufficient system for the vast majority, yet it must be preserved because it allows governance to be determined through elections. Erosion of democratic institutions, media polarization, and a low sense of representation limit young people's normative knowledge of democracy. Consequently, democracy is reduced to elections and justice.

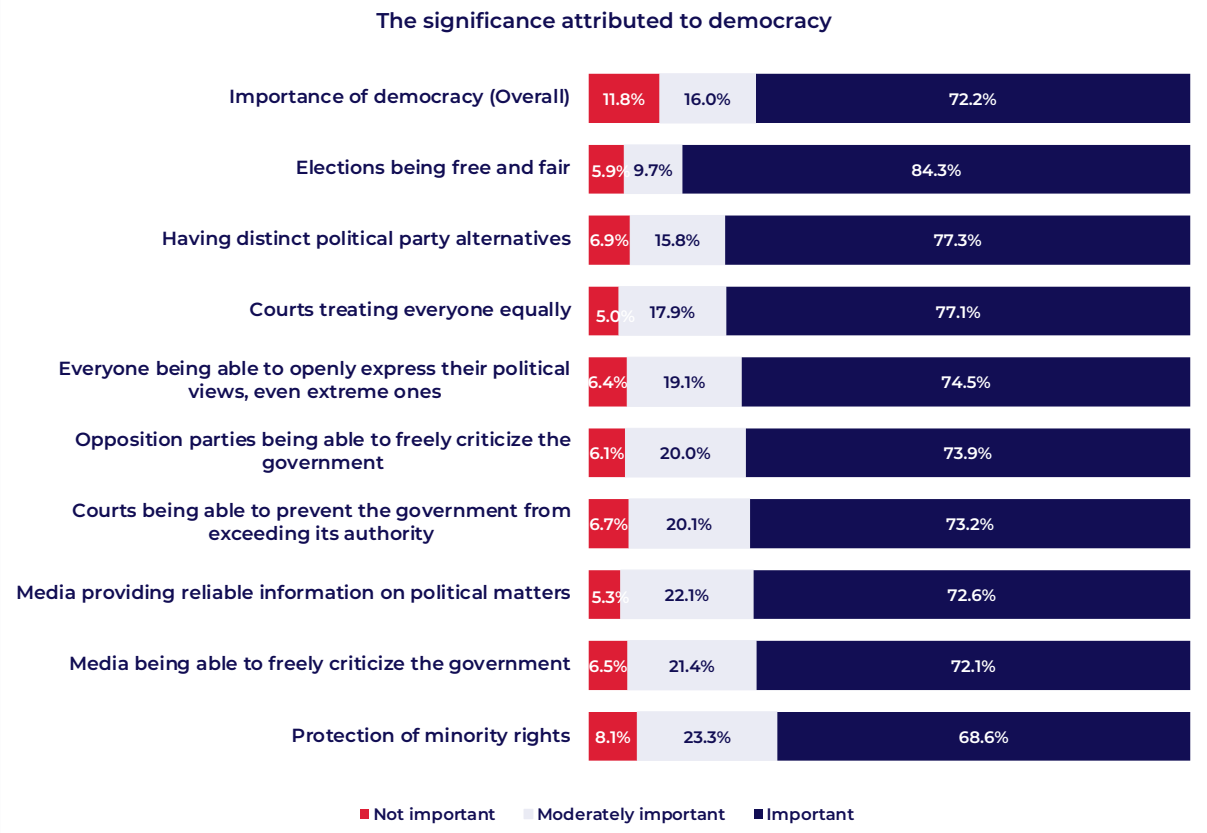


Figure 31. The significance attributed to democracy

Young people usually place a high value on democracy. However, they have different definitions of democracy. Some define it as equal representation and freedom, while others define it as majority rule. These different perceptions demonstrate that young people do not share a common understanding of democracy, but rather have different conceptions of it.

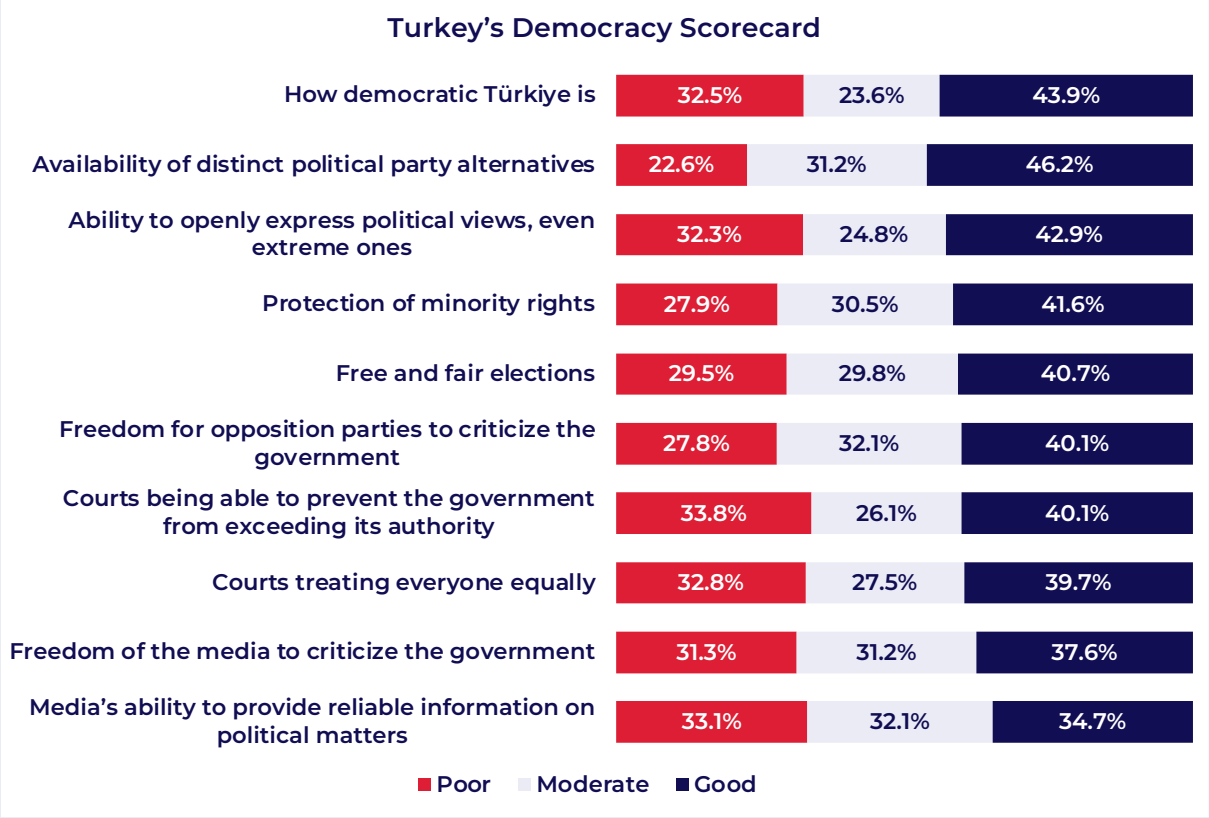


Figure 32. Turkey's Democracy Scorecard

In the eyes of young people, Turkey's democracy report card is poor. The vast majority cannot paint a positive picture of the rule of law, justice, freedoms, or representation. This assessment shows that, although young people value democracy, they believe the current system does not meet their expectations. The difference between the importance they attach to democracy and the state of the country is called the democracy gap. The democracy gap is particularly high among young people in Turkey. It is characterized by young people maintaining their commitment to democracy on a value level while distrusting the system on a practical level.

Nevertheless, Turkey's democracy score of 44% reflects the belief that the government can be changed through elections. Approximately one-third of the population believes that Turkey is not democratic in any respect.

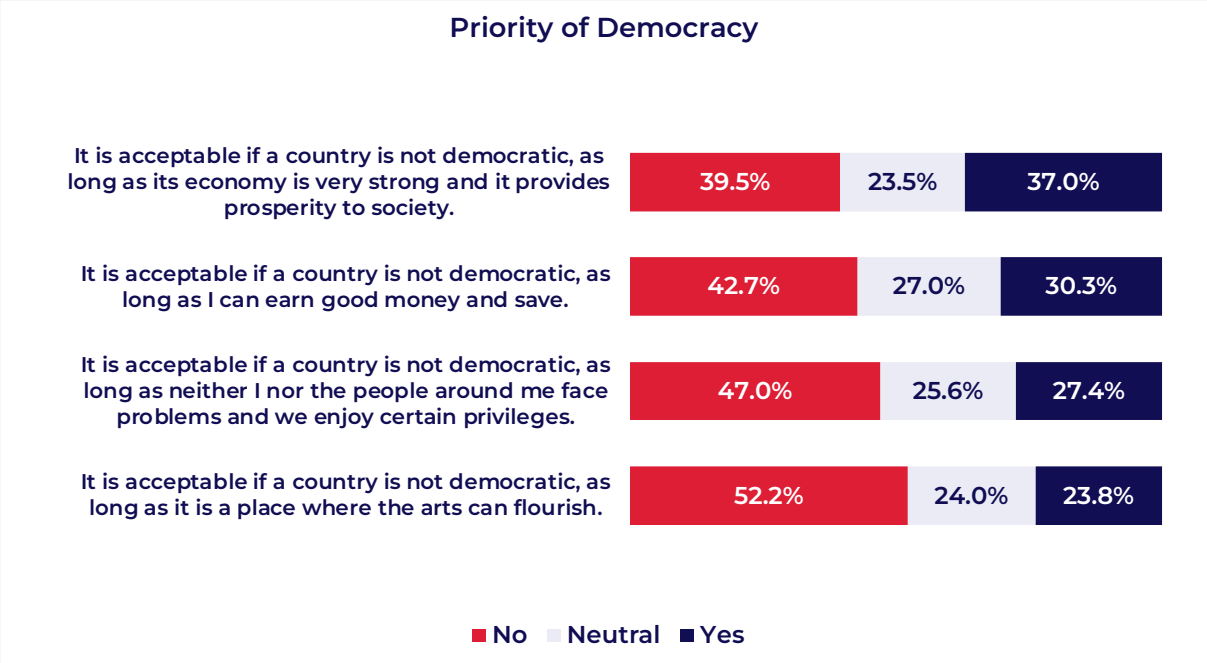


Figure 33. Priority of Democracy

Although a significant portion of young people prioritize democracy, their overall assessments reveal that many of them value security or economic well-being more than democracy. This suggests that the approach to democracy is considered alongside concrete needs rather than abstract ideals. Consequently, democracy is regarded as both a value for young people and a means by which their quality of life is determined. Young people's support for democracy is conditional: when economic crises and insecurity increase, security can take precedence over democracy.

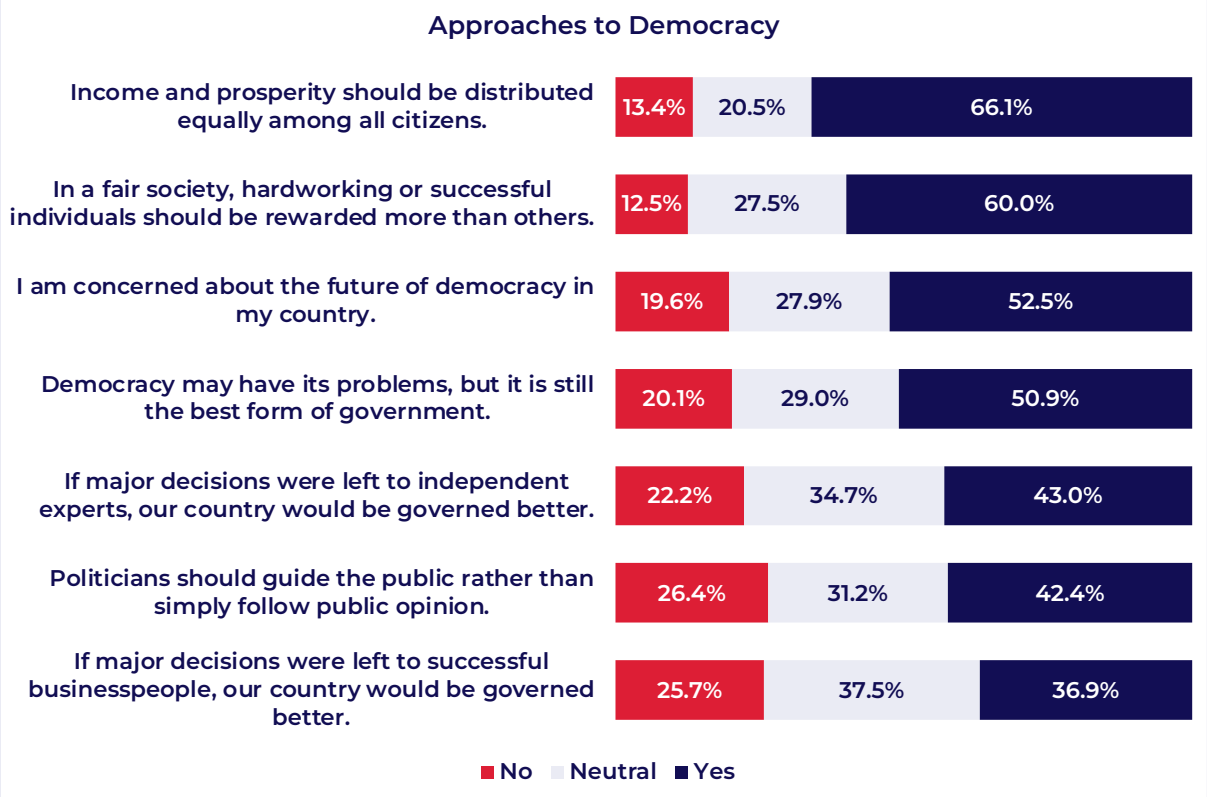


Figure 34. Approaches to Democracy

The attitudes of young people toward democracy are not homogeneous. While many consider democracy indispensable, some accept authoritarian methods as a temporary solution, especially in times of crisis. This demonstrates that democratic values are prevalent among young people but also that they are searching for alternatives. Democracy is seen more as a necessity and an alternative to authoritarianism. There is no perception of a better alternative.

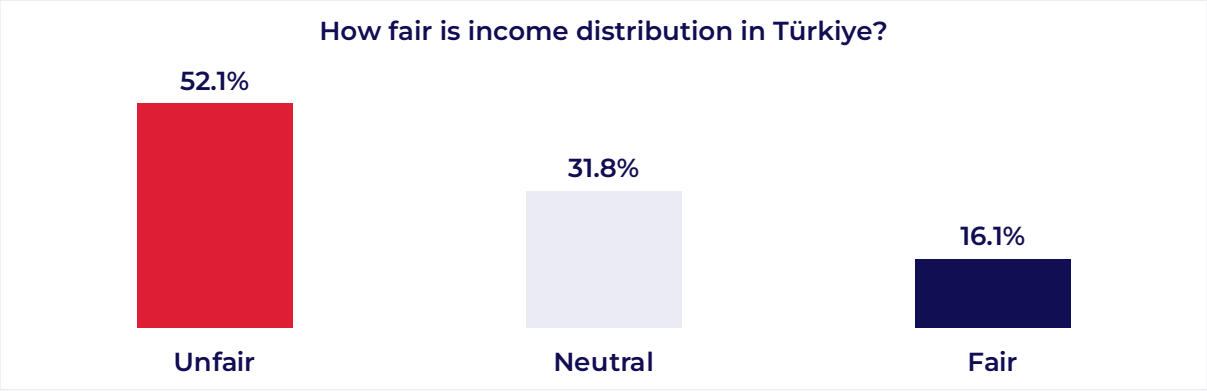


Figure 35. "How fair is the distribution of income in Turkey?"

Young people see economic inequality not only as an economic issue, but also as a test of the state's capacity for fair governance. Income inequality is at the heart of how democracy is assessed.

Most young people in Turkey find the distribution of income unfair. During an intense economic crisis, this result reveals how young people perceive the relationship between democracy and the economy. Income inequality erodes young people's trust in the system, prompting them to advocate more strongly for economic equality and democracy.

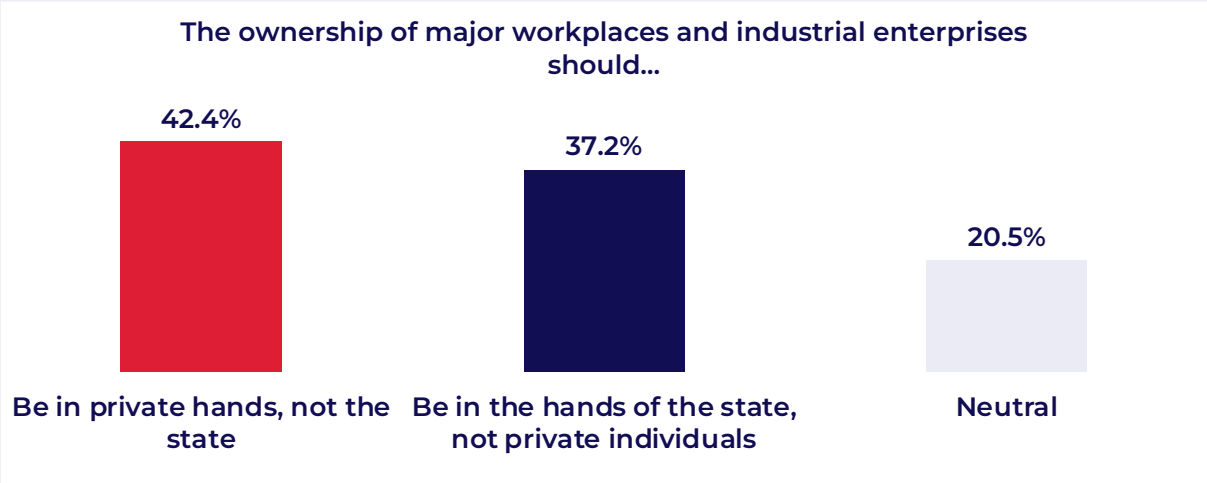


Figure 36. "The ownership of large workplaces and industrial establishments..."

Young people do not want an authoritarian state. However, they do not see a problem with the government intervening in certain areas. They are divided on the issue of ownership of large enterprises between the state and the private sector. Those who advocate for state ownership emphasize justice, equality, and the greater good. Those who prefer the private sector emphasize dynamism, efficiency, and innovation. This shows that young people base their economic preferences on both ideology and practical and experiential criteria.

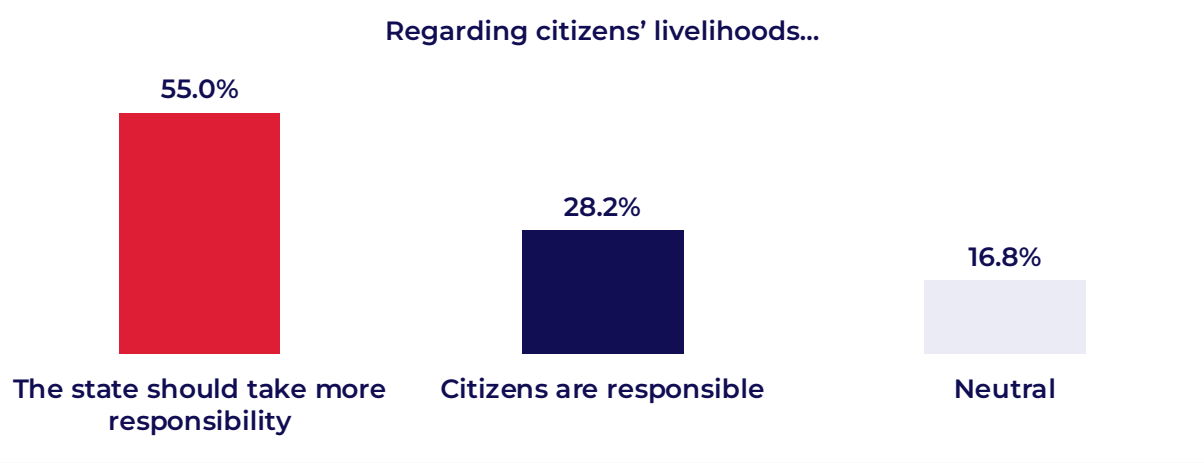


Figure 37. "Responsibility for citizens' livelihoods..."

Democracy is linked to economic conditions and political rights for young people. The security of citizens' livelihoods, the fight against unemployment, and the existence of a welfare state are seen as directly linked to the quality of democracy. This reveals that young people's perception of democracy is intertwined with not only administrative issues, but also expectations of economic justice and equal opportunities.

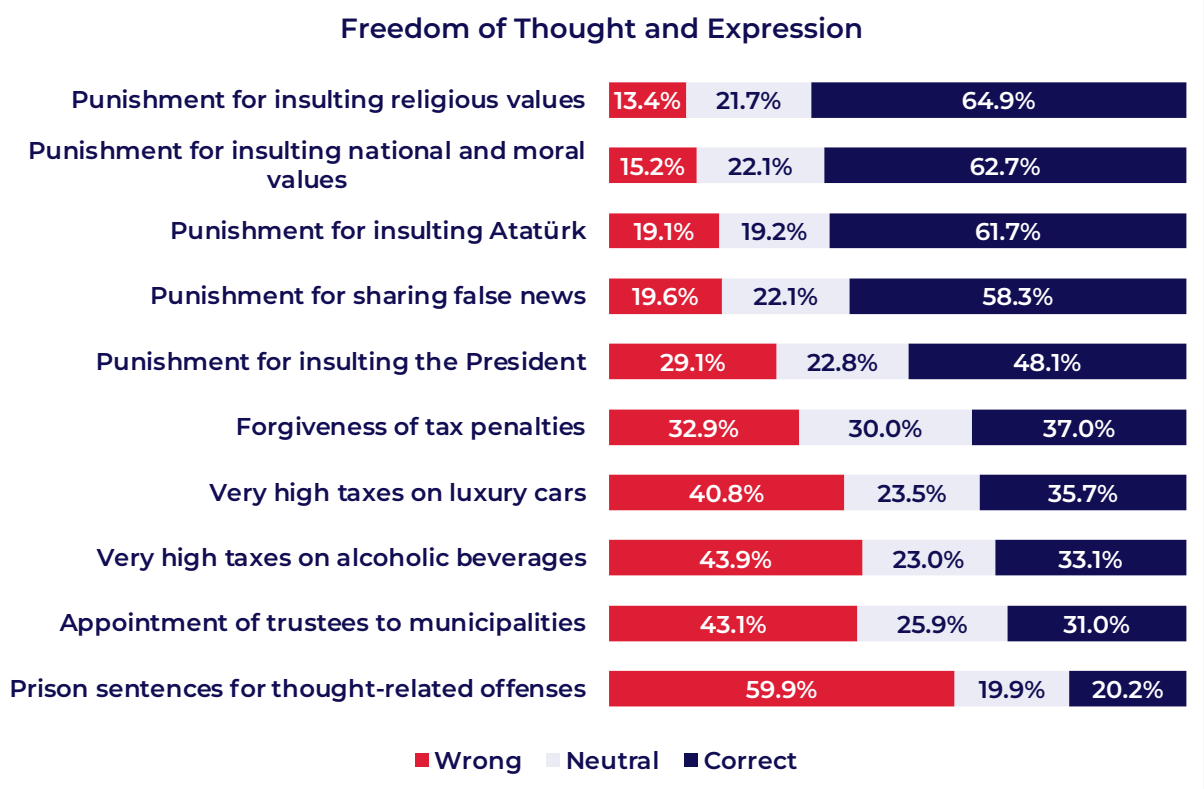


Figure 38. Freedom of Thought and Expression

Young people place a high value on freedom of thought and expression. For them, freedom is at the heart of democracy. Only 20% approve of punishing thought crimes. Sixty percent believe that punishing thought crimes is wrong.

However, this perception of freedom is conditional. 65% percent approve of punishment for insulting religious values, while 62% approve of punishment for insulting Atatürk. Despite being mostly opposition, 48% of young people believe that insulting the president should be punished, while 29% oppose this. These results reveal that young people's demand for freedom quickly recedes when elements that threaten their collective identity or moral order are at stake and that there is broad acceptance of the state's role in setting limits in this area.

Support for appointing trustees to municipalities remains high among young people at 31%, despite their generally liberal outlook. Conversely, the legitimacy of the trustee system has declined further among young people since March 19.

7.2. Definitions and Values in the Perception of Democracy

When we evaluate the above quantitative data and integrate it with qualitative data, the formula for democracy for young people is as follows:

Democracy = Freedom of Expression + Justice + Meritocracy + The Possibility of Change Through Elections.

When the first three of these four elements are absent in practice, the hope for change through elections becomes the system's only legitimate gateway.

Young people's definition of democracy closely aligns with the procedural-substantive distinction in the literature: formal democracy, based on elections, is valid; however, substantive democracy, based on material content such as justice, merit, and freedom, is lacking.

The interviews show that justice is the backbone of democracy for young people. As is often stated, democracy does not work where there is no justice, and the right to vote and be elected loses its meaning.

A participant living in Istanbul clarifies this, saying, "Without justice, the legitimacy of democracy is questioned." This same person ranks press freedom second and education third for democracy.

Justice is understood in terms of legal security (e.g., fair trials and equal treatment) and equal opportunity (e.g., access to education and employment). The emphasis on merit that emerges from the content is interpreted as the opposite of institutional decay and arbitrariness. Merit is not an abstract concept. It is the direct cause of anxiety about the future and of young people's desire for expert management. The demand for merit is also a rational risk management strategy developed in response to systemic gridlock. In such a situation, being educated and hardworking is no longer enough.

For young people, an ideal democracy is more about the moral and institutional quality of state governance than political competition.

Elements	Meaning and Narratives	Tipping Point
Justice	Justice is the foundation of the country and an indispensable condition for legitimacy. Without justice, a country becomes governed by the 'banana republic mentality.' Yusuf sums up this situation most bluntly: "Justice and merit are very important. Without merit, the 'banana republic mentality' prevails." This creates the perception that the state is moving away from the rule of law and rational governance.	Legitimacy does not come from the ballot box, but from justice.
Merit	A lack of merit is the main source of economic problems, institutional corruption, and the devaluation of personal effort. This lack of merit forms the basis of young people's search for expert management. Merit is not an abstract concept; rather, it is the direct cause of anxiety about the future. Zeynep, a social services graduate, cannot find a job, and Hüseyin is uncertain about his future appointment. These situations reinforce the belief that being educated and hardworking alone is not enough.	Management quality is at least as important as political representation.
Freedom of Expression	People expect that their freedoms will not be restricted and that they will be able to freely express their opinions within certain limits.	Democracy guarantees individual security.

The Procedural Guarantee of Democracy: The Existence of Elections

Despite the current political turmoil, young people still view elections as the most important and potentially the only vehicle for change in the system. Elections are highly valued. Even the most disengaged and politically detached individuals consider participating in elections important.

When defining democracy, Abdulkadir refers to its theoretical core: "The people electing those who govern them" and "the triad of the people, the vote, and freedom." This definition emphasizes the procedural importance of the ballot box.

The passive hope of young opponents, expressed as "Once Erdoğan is gone, things will work out," shows that they see elections as the primary vehicle for change. More than resolving problems, the hope for a change in power maintains the critical role of elections.

Concern about shifting away from the ballot box

Belief in the power of elections also sparks opposition to interference with this process.

Nursema criticizes the blocking of opposition candidates and interprets the government's move as "eliminating its rivals directly rather than competing at the ballot box." She sees this as a "violation of citizens' right to vote and choose the candidate they want."

This interpretation confirms that young people are sensitive to their right to vote and to the outcome of elections, and that they perceive the violation of this right as a direct violation of the democratic system.

Young people have an ideal definition of democracy. They describe the current system in terms of *the absence of* this definition.

Ceylan shares this radical perception by stating, "There is no democracy in Turkey," a sentiment rationalized by the collapse of the pillars of justice and merit.

Tuğçe's statement illustrates how this absence diminishes interest in politics: "The strings are not in our hands. It won't do any good for us to speak up. And it doesn't anyway." Although elections offer hope, the belief that individual efforts will be fruitless is widespread.

This feeling does not diminish young people's demand for democracy, but it does undermine their motivation to participate in the democratic process. Young people want democracy, but they do not trust the political arena.

As a result, young people's understanding of democracy boils down to three main points:

- **Normative democracy, which focuses on freedom and good governance.**
- **Procedural democracy, which is centered on the ballot box;**
- **Utilitarian democracy based on security and statism.**

7.3. Perceptions of the State

Young People's Perception of the State: Between "Shield" and "Constraint"

Young people perceive the state as having two faces: the protective state and the controlling state. Young people experience the state as both a tool that should provide goods such as welfare, justice, and merit, and a device that produces evils such as restriction, corruption, and political pressure. The state is simultaneously close and distant to young people, serving as a guarantee for their future and an authority in their present.

Overall, the interviews show that young people have two simultaneous expectations of the state: First, they demand a strong social state that provides justice, security, and welfare. Second, they are aware that the state's authority can lead to the loss of rights regarding freedom of expression, political participation, and local representation. This dual perception often causes the same participant to express both support for a strong protective/regulatory state and apprehension about a powerful state that restricts freedom.

Expectations of Social Security and Security

Young people primarily expect the state to be a modern, merit-based institution that provides social and economic security. Failure to meet their basic needs can reinforce this perception. Young people expect public administration to guarantee their future. Young people view the welfare state as both economic security and a democratic right.

Social justice is listed as a top priority in almost every profile. The security dimension of the social state concept is particularly evident among young men. A 22-year-old student emphasizes that security is part of the same equation as welfare and democratic development, listing justice, education, and human security as the trio of priorities.

The call for a social state is exemplified most clearly in times of prosperity, economic crisis, and disaster risk. A young psychology counseling student bluntly explains what is expected of the state beyond collecting donations: systematic protection and capacity. He says, "If there is no social state, the state will give out IBANs when there is an earthquake."

The sense of security is linked not only to the present, but also to the idea of intergenerational reciprocity. A 28-year-old participant from Istanbul says he feels moderately attached to his country. He explains, "I went to public schools that were paid for by the taxes of previous generations." This narrative illustrates the social state's role in rewarding labor and influencing personal life paths.

In religious-conservative discourse, the welfare state is associated with moral trust and shura, or consultation. A young teacher candidate from Diyarbakır says democratic governance is meaningful through the principles of justice, trust, and shura. He expects the state to uphold the trust entrusted to it.

The issue of interviews is also one of the most sensitive topics for young people regarding the state. It is one of the issues that erodes their sense of social justice the most. Young people view their inability to find employment and the challenges of transitioning to working life as a shortcoming of the state. The expectation of finding work in their field of study particularly reinforces this feeling.

Zeynep says, "I'm looking for something related to my field. I can't find much. Generally, I can't find any job." Hüseyin is waiting for an appointment. "We're waiting for an appointment. Let's see. Whatever is best."

Another related issue is university education. Young people are generally dissatisfied with education as a whole, including higher education. They claim that the current system does not prepare them for the workforce or facilitate their transition.

One young person says, "The state should restructure the education system by prioritizing vocational skills." A conservative young woman adds: "Frankly, opening too many universities... Vocational high schools would make more sense." Many people complain that there are too many universities, and that their quality is very low.

Another expectation of the state involves social and cultural opportunities. "The state should provide social events, cultural activities, and art events that are free or very affordable." Free concerts, which have recently been the subject of intense debate, as well as other free cultural and artistic events provided by municipalities, are an important need for young people. This includes suitable venues where they can socialize.

Eren: "Students should have free access to culture and art, and they should be able to visit museums free of charge."

Young people want to see the state as an entity that produces prosperity and justice. Merit, press freedom, and the functioning of parliament and institutions are prerequisites for this social state performance.

Attributing the role of protecting morality and order to the state

Consent to the state's order-creating and preserving function is particularly evident in areas such as insults and the protection of values. Most participants consider insults against religious and national-spiritual values punishable, and some say that sanctions may be necessary for insults against the president depending on their severity. A 25-year-old participant from Mersin says he "finds it justified" to punish insults against religious and national values and believes punishment is necessary for insults against the president, depending on their severity. Similarly, a married woman living in Izmir explicitly calls for punishment of insults against religious, national, and spiritual values.

This acceptance is seen not only among conservatives but also among atheists, who emphasize that "religious values should not be touched." Here, the state is seen as an institution that establishes boundaries to maintain social peace. A significant portion of young people remain on this line and open the door to severe punishments, such as the death penalty, as a deterrent. However, a minority opposes punishment for insults and thought crimes, using libertarian arguments. A young lawyer in Ankara rejects punishment for religious and thought crimes on the grounds of secularism and freedom of expression.

In summary, the state's punitive capacity is broadly accepted when it comes to protecting values and authority. However, this acceptance can turn into a more critical stance when it comes to democratic rights.

The Authority-Freedom Dilemma

Young people fear that the state apparatus, which they want to be strong and protective, will restrict their individual and political freedoms through political authority. They also fear that the state will not recognize the will of the ballot box.

The distinction is particularly clear in the realm of freedom of expression. One group argues that the arrest of journalists and restrictions on access effectively narrow multi-party politics and count as criteria for undemocratic behavior.

Young people quickly bring up the risk to democracy when the state uses its authority in elections and representation. They cite the appointment of trustees, the removal of members of parliament, political engineering through the judiciary, and restrictions on freedom of expression and the media as concrete indicators of authoritarianism. A 28-year-old participant sums up this sentiment, saying, "Trustees in municipalities, removal of members of parliament... an authoritarian system."

Justice, the press/freedom of expression, and education are often cited as the three pillars of a democratic country. While the statement "At least elections are held" is considered positive, restrictions on freedom of expression are considered authoritarian.

Thus far, we have generalized the state-democracy axis and identified three typical positions among young people (pure forms are rare; most people fall somewhere in between).

1) Shield—Authoritarian State: Those who prioritize public order and collective values, and who are more restrictive regarding freedom of expression.

2) Skeptical–Conditional State: A position that legitimizes restricting freedoms based on security and contextual justifications but is sensitive to arbitrariness. These are attitudes that say, "It depends on the situation."

3) Shield-Liberal Balance: Those who demand a strong welfare state and justice and are sensitive to freedom of expression. Additionally, according to quantitative data, a minority segment comprising 5-10% of young people is close to a rights-first state understanding. These individuals view the state's role as expanding the sphere of rights.

The Democratic Dilemma: To Rule or to Serve?

The fundamental dimension of young people's perception of the state is the dilemma of whether the state should act as a "ruling authority" or a "serving mechanism."

While young people's expectations of the state are similar, their views diverge on the "boundaries of freedom."

Common ground: The idea that the state provides security is common across different identities and ideological orientations. Young people demand an effective, fair administration based on technocratic meritocracy that combines the protection of the welfare state with the guarantee of individual freedoms.

The line of division: It appears in expression and representation. Where should the line be drawn on issues such as trusteeship, penalties for expression, centralization, and the protection of positions and values? Even the same person may demand harsh penalties for certain crimes yet reject imprisonment for thought. Most people have both a desire for a protective state and a sensitivity to the sphere of freedom.

Young people see the state as the embodiment of both "security" and "power." Security is associated with justice, merit, social protection, and institutionalism, while power is associated with trusteeship, centralization, punishment, and protecting positions and values. There is a social demand for a "tough but fair" order.

Consequently, young people view the state as having two faces: one that provides security (justice, meritocracy, and social protection) and one that controls and restricts (trusteeship, centralization, and punishment). The social demand is for a strict but fair order. This dilemma forms the basis of young people's desire to view the state as a mechanism that serves rather than rules.

08

SENSITIVE ISSUES, TOLERANCE, AND PLURALISM

8. SENSITIVE ISSUES, TOLERANCE, AND PLURALISM

This section examines the areas in which young people have the most difficulty understanding pluralism. The report highlights the contrast between the high level of consensus that young people have achieved on universal issues, such as the environment, and their deep differences of opinion on "sensitive" issues at the heart of identity politics, including the Kurdish question, gender roles, religiosity, nationalism, and LGBT+ rights. Through concrete data, this section explores young people's complex relationship with pluralism: fragmented attitudes toward resolving the Kurdish issue; the exclusionary and inclusive faces of nationalism; distance from religiosity in favor of a secular lifestyle; tension between principled acceptance of gender equality and traditional limits in practice; and a widespread approach of "tolerance in the private sphere, restriction in the public sphere" toward homosexuality.

The findings allow us to define young people's approach as conditional tolerance. Pluralism is shaped not by absolute acceptance, but by the constant tension between universal rights and red lines, such as "national security," "social order," and family and morality.

While young people theoretically defend freedom of expression, populist rhetoric can influence them to consent to restrictions on these rights, arguing that they threaten social peace, national and spiritual values, and political stability. Young people navigate the fine line between tolerance and inclusivity in their approach to pluralism. Indeed, those who are inclusive on certain issues may be exclusionary on others.

This distinction becomes more pronounced as issues become more sensitive. Inclusivity generally remains valid as long as it does not undermine national identity or the desired social order. This becomes evident in issues such as the Kurdish question, homosexuality, and immigration.

The main finding is that young people's approach to pluralism involves constant negotiation between universal rights and red lines, such as "national security," "social order," and "family/morality," rather than taking an absolute, principled stance.

8.1. Environmental Issues

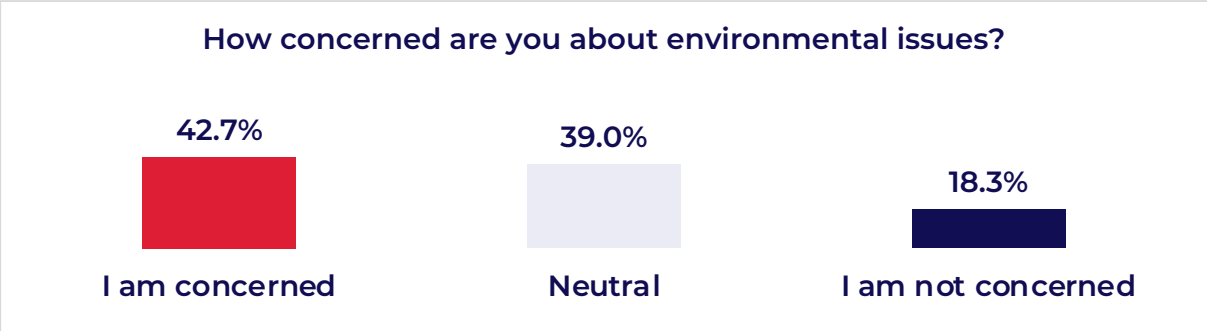


Figure 39. "How concerned are you about environmental issues?"

Young people value environmentalism and nature conservation. Concern about environmental issues is also quite prevalent. They see climate change, air pollution, and the depletion of water resources as matters that directly affect their daily lives. They also see urban sprawl, loss of green spaces, and health problems as related to climate and environmental issues. These concerns suggest that environmental issues are now considered a central political issue rather than a marginal one. For young people, the environment is closely linked to feelings of hope and confidence about the future. Their awareness of environmental issues goes beyond mere concern; they can identify specific problems one by one. They have a high level of awareness of issues such as waste management, energy, climate, and water scarcity. This reveals the need for environmental policy and the high expectations young people have in this area.

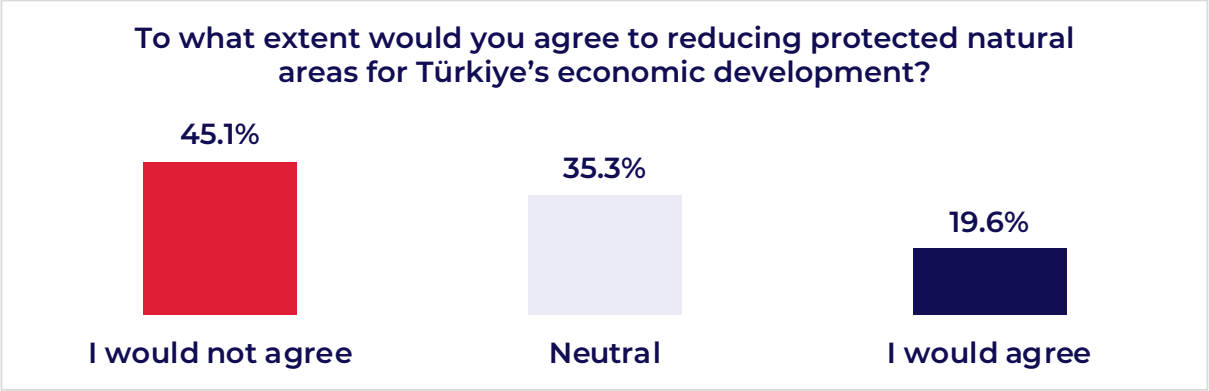


Figure 40. To what extent would you agree to reducing protected natural areas for Türkiye's economic development?

One of the most striking findings of the research is that, even at a time when economic conditions and unemployment concerns are at their peak, young people say, "We are not willing to sacrifice nature for economic growth." It is also noteworthy that they are unwilling to sacrifice the environment, even when economic conditions and their impact on daily life are intense. They establish a direct link between environmental degradation and economic

decline. Unlike the general approach to economic problems, which focuses on short-term solutions, young people think more holistically and in the long term when it comes to nature. This attitude shows that young people perceive environmental damage as not only an ecological cost but also an economic cost that threatens their future.

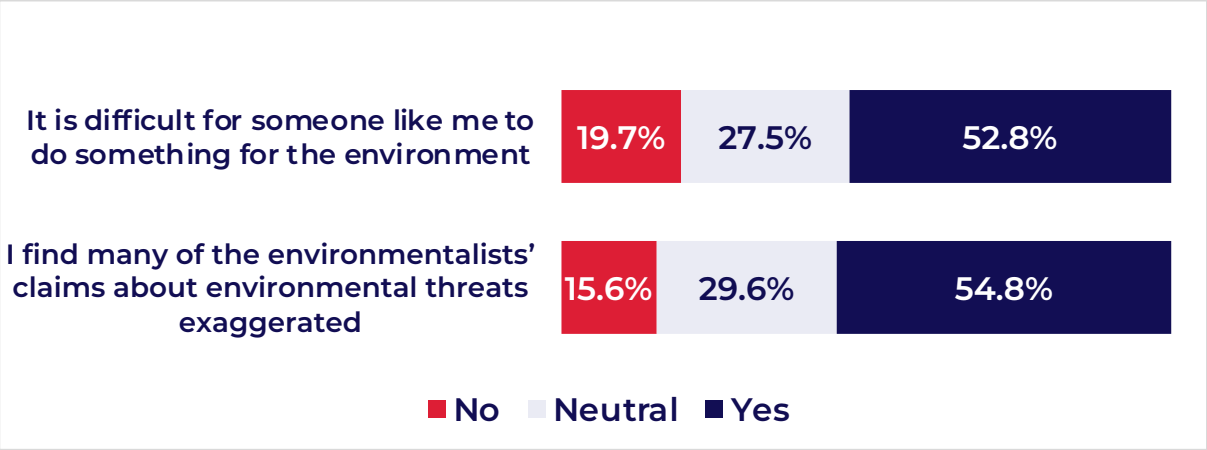


Figure 41. Assessments Regarding Environmental Issues

Young people who are usually distant from activism and tend to view it as marginal now see activists' "alarm bells" as necessary warnings about the environment rather than exaggerations. They accept environmental activism not as an ideological stance, but as a necessary and legitimate defense of their future. It is also worth noting, however, that national interests are an important source of motivation in the environmental field and that solving environmental problems is seen as relevant to the country's future.

Today's youth are not paralyzed by the once-common belief that environmental problems can only be solved on a global scale in the long term. They believe that, as individuals, they can take action today. In fact, they believe arguing otherwise could legitimize the destruction of nature by feeding into the idea that "nothing can be done." Ultimately, they advocate for action despite economic problems and the cost of solving environmental issues. Concurrently, they reject the notion that environmentalists' arguments are exaggerated.

These findings show that the environmental theme has emerged as rare common ground that partially transcends identity-based divisions. Although young people are sharply divided on issues such as identity and security, they find common ground on environmental issues and concerns about the future, despite their political and cultural differences.

8.2. Migrants and Crises

This section examines how Turkish youth perceive and expect foreign policy regarding issues such as Syria, Palestine, and the Russia-Ukraine crisis. Young people largely distrust regional actors. Notably, negative perceptions of Russia and Israel prevail, as does a negative view of the Syrian regime. The findings reveal that young people view foreign policy as both an abstract field, like a "chess game between distant states," and a concrete reality that directly affects their daily lives, security, and economic future — particularly with regard to the issue of Syrian refugees.

Young people's understanding of Syria is divided into two intertwined areas: criticism of the state's Syria policy and daily concerns about Syrian refugees. The language of sovereignty/occupation dominates the Ukraine section, while a clear moral response stands out in the Israel-Hamas section. However, when it comes to intervention and burden-sharing, tension arises between the desire to act morally and the calculation of rational interests. A "pragmatic brake" kicks in, and there is a widespread feeling that Turkey has "already paid a heavy price" and "should not reach any further." This duality shows that young people's participation in foreign policy is based on balancing moral impulses with weighing costs and risks.

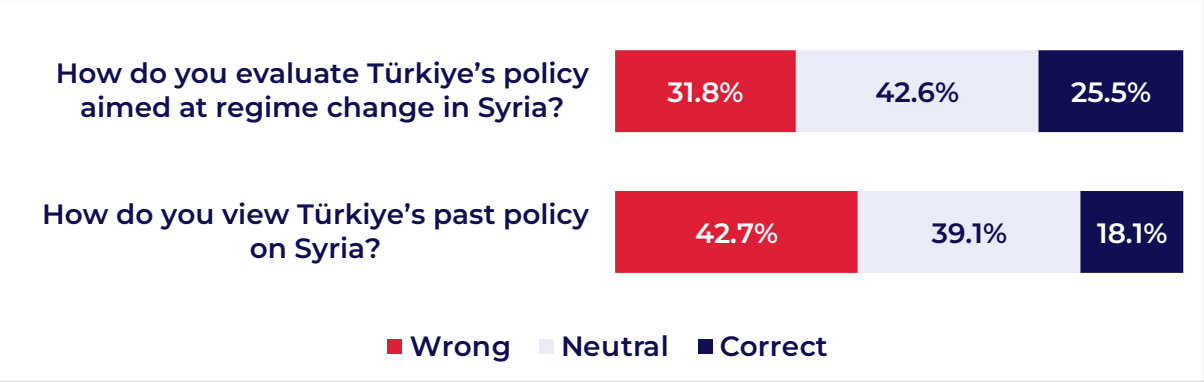


Figure 42. Syria Policy

As with society at large, young people have negative feelings about the Syrian issue. For one thing, most young people are critical of Turkey's policy toward Syria. There is a widespread perception that these policies create a domestic social burden and negatively impact Turkey's foreign policy.

In focus groups and interviews, young people view foreign policy not as an indisputable matter of state but as part of domestic politics. Some argue that the borders are deliberately not sufficiently controlled, allowing migrants to arrive in Turkey haphazardly and uncontrollably. Second, many believe that Turkey has been overly accommodating, taking on a burden that no other country, including Muslim Arab countries, has taken on to such a degree.

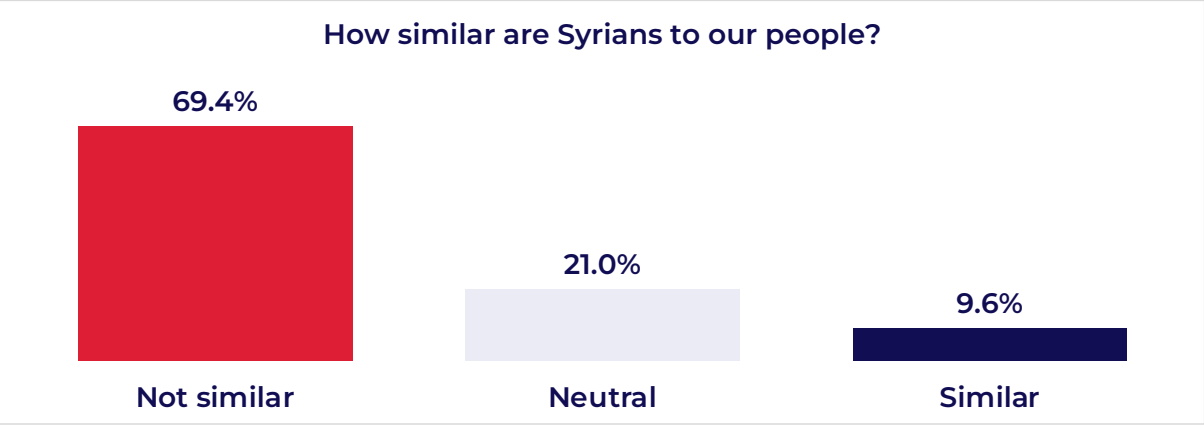


Figure 43. "How similar are Syrians to our people?"

A significant portion of young people find Syrians distant and think that "they are not like us." Conversely, as confirmed in the qualitative phase of this study and reflected in the Kurdish Studies Center's research on Turkish perceptions of Kurds, Kurds are considered "native and national" as the children of this land. However, Syrians fall into a different category. Despite cultural proximity, they are coded as "foreigners," a group excluded from the us-them distinction.

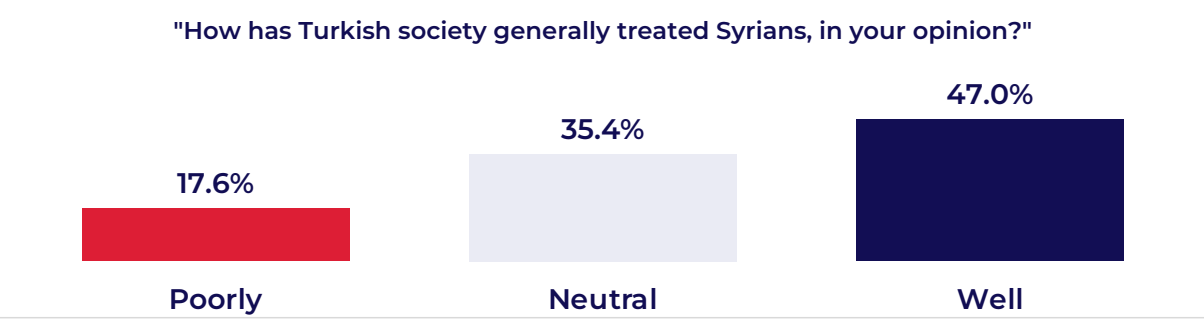


Figure 44. "How has Turkish society generally treated Syrians, in your opinion?"

Most young people believe that society has treated Syrians well. Only 18% believe that Syrians have been treated badly. Conversely, 47% say Syrians have been treated well. While this percentage is high, it's clear that feelings are mixed. Populist rhetoric has been effective but has also led to exaggerated negative attitudes toward Syrians and a moral reckoning.

The large Syrian population in Turkey is a major concern. Populist rhetoric on this issue strongly resonates with young people. Many people believe that Syrians commit a high rate of shameful crimes and violence, receive preferential treatment in services such as healthcare and education, and receive economic aid. As a result, they are said to harm society and the economy. Additionally, they are said to be culturally distant from Turks, and their lifestyle and habits are considered disturbing.

Syrian migrants are the group most easily excluded from young people's performance of pluralism. They are caught between economic security, social order, and national identity. Transitions occur between harsh opposition, conditional acceptance focused on integration, and a middle ground that can soften through contact. Pragmatic complaints, such as labor exploitation, tax evasion, and pressure to access services, are repeated, as are marginalizing discourses that emphasize borders and security.

In summary, young people's emphasis on freedom and equality collides with four perceived threats associated with migration:

1. **Economic Threat:** Narratives of "stealing jobs, wages, and social benefits" and "informality and tax evasion."
2. **Social Threat:** Cultural decay, ghettoization, and rejection of integration.
3. **Security threat:** "Border-honor" discourse and the perception of crime, harassment, and public order from an internal security perspective.
4. **Demographic/political threat:** Systematic citizenship and "Arabization" anxiety that could alter election results.

Economic Displacement: Labor Force, Wages, and the Language of Privilege

One of the most visible consequences of migration is its impact on the labor market. According to one participant, employers can exploit migrants by paying them low wages, which creates market imbalances. "Employers can exploit these people. They use them to save their businesses." This narrative is combined with complaints about unregistered work and tax evasion. There is a growing opinion that the impact is more noticeable in small places or places with more visible concentrations, such as Gaziantep. "There are a lot of problems, like not paying taxes when starting a business. It has a big impact in small places."

Economic reasons are often reinforced by a perception of privilege. A participant with nationalist leanings says that social rights provided to migrants — which he believes "even Turkish citizens don't have" — are "provocative," framing migration as a burden on the budget and welfare system. On the other end of the spectrum, a more cautious voice explains that they initially viewed the idea of migrants working positively. However, as numbers increased, they became concerned about declining education and welfare levels. Nevertheless, it is emphasized that this objection relates to irregular and unplanned intensity.

Thus, two layers are distinguished in the language of economic exclusion: The first layer is market-pragmatic (low wages, tax evasion, and a burden on services), and the second layer is moral/identity-based (discussion of privilege and entitlement). The former implies the need for integration and regulation, while the latter fuels political hardening.

Social Order and Security: "Border-honor," Crime, and Public Peace

Security discourse produces more red lines than economic grievances. Here, data, perception, and sensation are intertwined, and definitive judgments are based not on experience, but on general opinion. For example, a participant who states that "a country's border is its honor" argues that accepting people without identity checks increases the risk of terrorism and insecurity. Similarly, a narrative of disorder is established using indicators of daily life, such as "increased crime" and "overcrowded hospitals." Some statements directly contain generalizations about crime, such as "they harass women." Although these are often stated to be at the level of perception or sensation, there is no hesitation in presenting them as arguments.

Young people's belief that "borders are deliberately not being adequately controlled" can be interpreted as an extension of their criticism of incompetence and arbitrariness in domestic politics to foreign policy. To them, the migrant issue is not an isolated problem, but rather a crisis of state management and governance.

Identity and Cultural Distance: From "Similar Neighbor" to "Foreign Crowd"

Although they may seem more distant, the strongest and most difficult prejudices to overcome are in the cultural sphere. Cultural distance oscillates between closeness and distance. An educated participant from the central region, referring to commonalities stemming from being Mediterranean, says that behavioral patterns can facilitate understanding. However, he adds that the numerical increase has created a permanent variable in Turkey, which is not good. Another participant emphasizes similarities with eastern provinces while noting growing segregation in metropolitan areas. Among young people who have interacted with each other, more nuanced distinctions emerge, such as, "The culture is similar, but they are more radical in their religion."

In the hardline opposition group, differences are moralized through demographics and family patterns. Stereotypes such as "We don't have eight or nine children" and "They are filthy" solidify the cultural distance in the "us versus them" distinction.

The Axis of Politicization: Nationalist Mobilization and Resorting to Racism

The issue of migration has become a powerful dividing line in the formation of the political identities of young people. References to the Victory Party and Ümit Özdağ are frequent in the nationalist, conservative vein. One young person links their voting preference to their attitude toward migration, saying, "I've been thinking about Ümit Özdağ for a while. He's more nationalist." In contrast, another participant objects to the tone of the migration debate, which veers toward racism. They argue that this rhetoric should be restricted.

The immigration debate is one of the main triggers of security-centered, nationalist politicization among young people. However, it also generates perceptions of extremism and mobilizes reactions.

On the other hand, personal contact can soften judgments. One participant, who had a Syrian neighbor, says, "They were good people," conveying a positive memory despite the language

barrier. Another young person concludes, "We are not so different," based on their experience with a Syrian teacher and neighbor. The participant who formed an assistance relationship uses emotional language: "It's a sad situation..."

Contact can transform the macro narrative of "threat–crowd" into the micro narrative of "familiar–human."

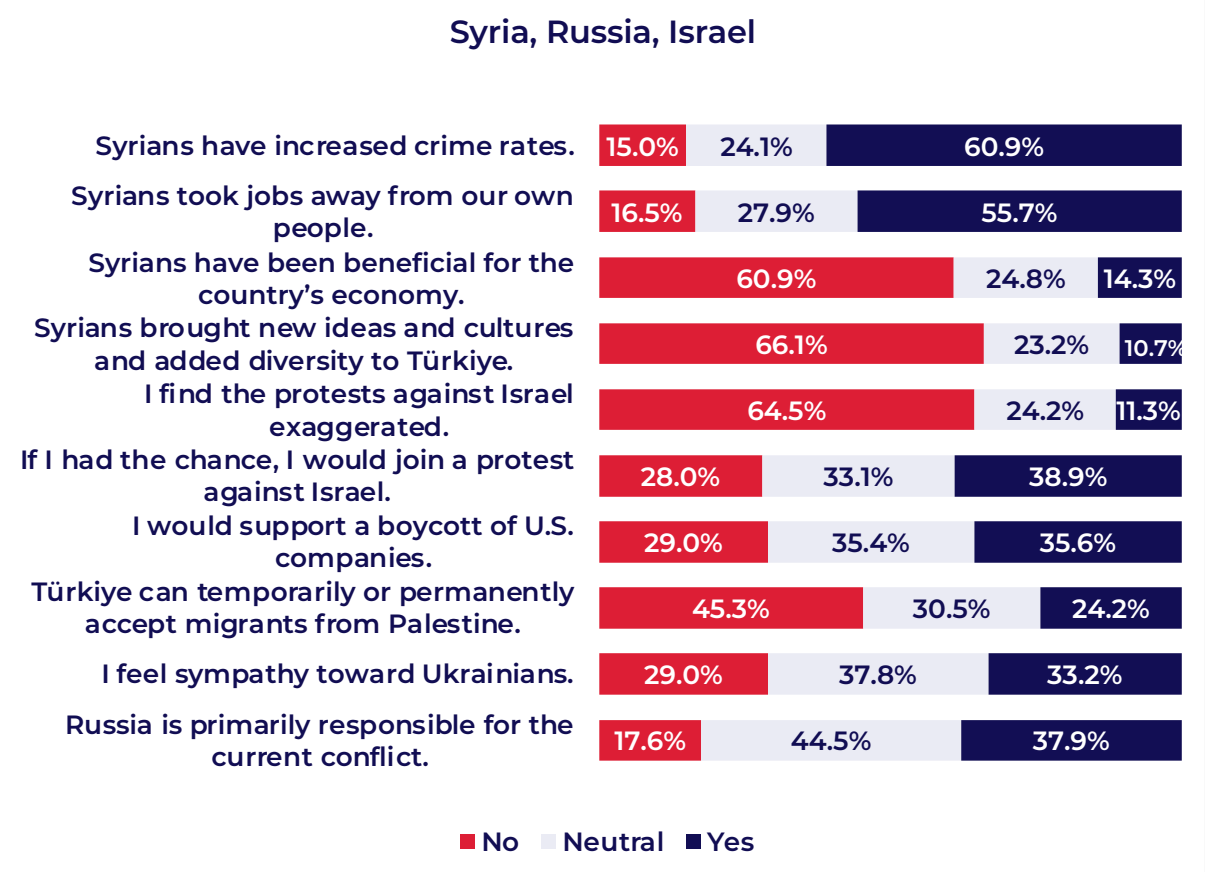


Figure 45. Discussions about Syria, Russia, and Israel

Through qualitative interviews on two conflict topics (Russia–Ukraine and Israel–Hamas), we can summarize how young people perceive the world along two axes: sovereignty/occupation and human cost/moral judgment. In the Russia–Ukraine context, the dominant discourse attributes legitimacy to Ukraine and deems Russia unjust within the framework of borders, sovereignty, and occupation. Accompanying this is a smaller narrative that establishes a gray area of mutual responsibility through the definitions of NATO and "great powers." In the Israel–Hamas context, a sharp moral reaction is predominant, with widespread attribution of systematic "oppression, genocide, and occupation" to Israel. In both contexts, the connection to the issue of migration is notable. While there are more positive statements regarding the acceptance of regular and temporary Ukrainians, acceptance of Palestinians is conditioned by demographic concerns.

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In the context of the tension between Russia and Ukraine, the emphasis on occupation is the main axis, with NATO and realpolitik discourses forming the second layer. The dominant narrative's backbone is the language of sovereignty that underscores Russia's status as an "occupier." In short, a participant who says, "I think Ukraine is right because their country is being invaded" also defines NATO's preference as an independent country's sovereign decision. Similarly, the statement "I think Ukraine is right; after all, it is an occupied region" reinforces this line of thinking. More emotional and moral tones exist within this framework as well. The absolutist judgment, "Even if Russia were fighting the devil, I would still see Russia as wrong," points to a moral stance that transcends political interpretation.

A second layer accompanies this, establishing the framework of "war born of mutual conflict" with an emphasis on NATO. A participant harshly labels Russia a "terrorist state" and paints a more complex picture, implying that Ukraine has been pursuing a policy with NATO for years and that this is also a "war of oligarchs." Another participant, also center-left, uses realpolitik language. He says that he "can understand" Russia's attack but does not view it positively, based on the distinction between threat perception and attack legitimacy.

A minority stance is indifferent or abstains, making conditional references to Russia's legitimacy based on the "historical territory" argument. A young person representing this stance says, "I haven't followed it much. If I remember correctly, there is a land issue, and they may be right." A third discourse questions Ukraine's internal politics and expresses suspicion of Western intervention. One participant says, "The people were manipulated by color revolutions," and combines criticism of NATO with distrust of the Ukrainian government in the same paragraph.

In summary: The majority clearly favors Ukraine in terms of occupation and sovereignty under the Russia–Ukraine heading. A smaller group opens up a gray area with NATO and the "great power" equation. A minority distances itself from the issue, claiming unfamiliarity with the content, and differentiates itself with a narrative of "historical legitimacy."

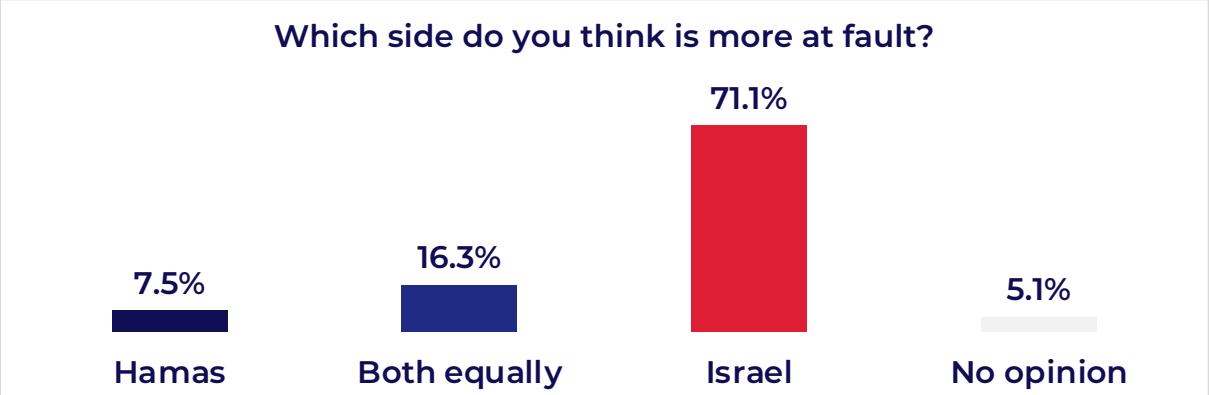


Figure 46. "In your opinion, which side is more at fault?"

When it comes to the Palestinian issue, young people largely blame Israel. While there are reservations about Hamas, especially among secularists, supporting Israel is not an acceptable position. One could argue that there is a general consensus on this issue within society. For example, there is no significant difference in responses based on level of religiosity. However, the picture is somewhat different among nonreligious young people. Only 57% blame Israel, while 25% blame both sides and 13.5% blame Hamas. There is no significant difference in the approaches of those who identify as right- or left-wing. Looking at party preferences, CHP and AK Party supporters differ slightly (79% of AK Party supporters blame Israel, compared to 62% of CHP supporters). Overall, however, it can be said that there is a general consensus on this issue.

The legitimacy of anti-Israel protests is also high. While there is a sense of conscience and responsibility regarding the issue, it is believed that Turkey should not become overly involved, nor should it put its hand in the fire. It is thought that Turkey has already paid a high price in the Syrian conflict and that other states should also bear some of the burden. This is evident in the fact that only 24% support admitting Palestinian refugees into the country.

According to the qualitative study's findings, young people have developed harsh moral judgments about the Palestinian issue along three main lines:

(i) Harsh condemnation and the use of the terms "genocide" and "occupation." The most common stance categorically condemns Israel using strong language: "This is genocide... Israel is unjust." Assessments begin with the phrase "there is an occupying state." This line's emotional impact is evident in resentful formulations such as "Israel is the madman of the world, and no one says anything to it."

(ii) The legitimacy of Palestine and distancing from Hamas (emphasis on the human cost). One group defends Palestine's legitimacy while labeling Hamas's actions as "crimes against humanity." A participant who claims that "both sides are committing crimes against humanity" ultimately assigns responsibility to the occupation and long-term oppression. This participant states, "I would punish Israel." "Every oppression breeds its own rebels." In this line of argument, "civilian casualties" are the main criterion. The statement "We have lost millions of children" frames the debate in terms of human cost rather than politics. Similarly, another participant condemns Israel for its violence against civilians, citing examples of force used during Ramadan in mosques against children.

(iii) The hardline faction openly defends Hamas and rejects Israel's legitimacy. A smaller, yet visible, sub-faction categorizes Hamas as a just war and extends to formulas that reject Israel's existence entirely: "I find Hamas justified... I think there should be no such country as Israel," says one participant, drawing a clear line. Another participant refers to the beginning of October 7 and recalls the "territorial goal/Promised Land" narrative of the past, ultimately siding with Hamas.

(iv) The middle ground that says "both are guilty," but places more blame on Israel. Although they say "both are guilty," this position ultimately holds Israel more responsible. This stance relies on the idea of not taking Middle Eastern politics seriously, and the balance of responsibility generally tips toward Israel. In the conservative vein, the statement "I always blame Israel" is fueled by a sense of ethics and morality.

Three approaches regarding Palestinian victims stand out among young people:

- **Not accepting/setting a threshold.** The majority's response to the question, "Should immigrants from Palestine be accepted?" is "No, we are full," indicating a sense of capacity or carrying threshold.
- **Distribute, organize, and integrate.** A segment proposes "distribution without creating a majority" and "education, taxation, and birth control education," focusing on the spatial and institutional management of the burden.
- **Humanitarian–conditional acceptance**. In smaller groups, the line intersecting at religious brotherhood or humanitarian aid is put into practice with conditions such as "controlled entry and health monitoring."

Ultimately, the tension between high moral sensitivity and cost and risk calculations shapes young people's participation in foreign policy. Young people see protest as legitimate, but they prefer safer channels. The perception of migration and burden is the most powerful adjustment lever in this balance.

The Syrian issue, in particular, shows that foreign policy is perceived as a governance crisis. Criticism of the lack of control and excessive concessions in Syrian policy reflects young people's expectations for rules, planning, and seriousness in domestic politics. This demonstrates that the migrant issue is viewed as not only an identity or security problem, but also a problem of state management skills.

While young people approach the Russia-Ukraine crisis within the framework of international law and sovereignty, they view the Palestinian issue as a historical, religious, and moral cause of global concern. This differentiation reveals that Turkish youth evaluate foreign policy by distinguishing between realpolitik (Ukraine) and universal moral responsibility (Palestine). Despite developing a sharp moral judgment on the Palestinian issue, they restrain their desire to take action based on the belief that Turkey has "already paid a heavy price." The tension between moral impulse and cost/risk calculation is the main factor conditioning Turkish youth's participation in foreign policy.

In summary, foreign policy is not an "external" issue for young people. They view every topic, from border security to the moral approach to international crises, as an extension of the search for justice, merit, and good governance in domestic politics. They seek a balance between pragmatic national interests and universal moral responsibilities.

8.3. The Kurdish Issue

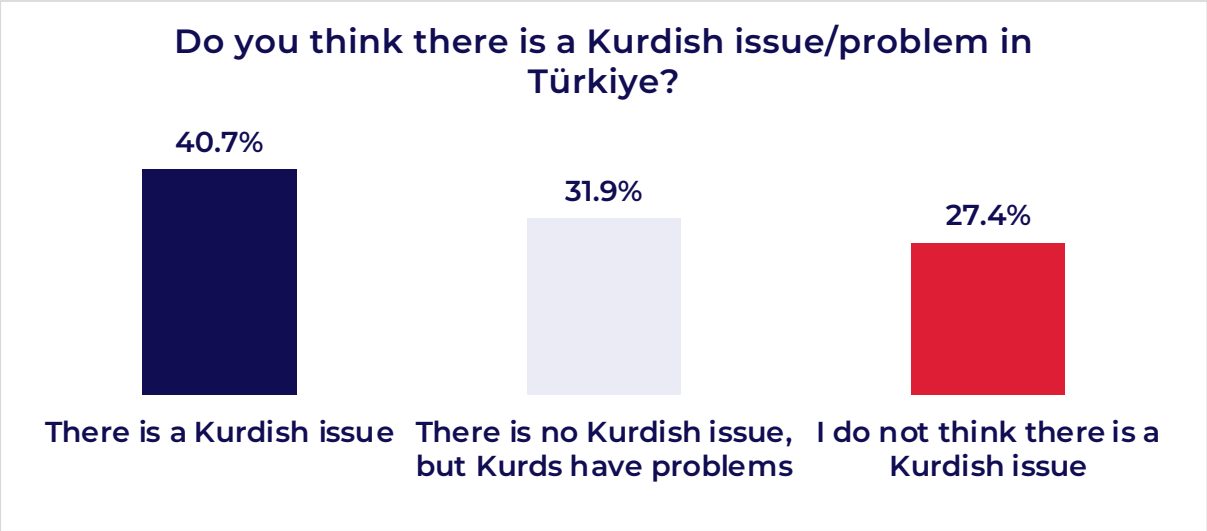


Figure 47. "Do you think there is a Kurdish problem or issue in Turkey?"

We asked participants for their thoughts on the "Kurdish problem" and the issues facing the Kurdish people. First, it should be noted that nationalists tend to oppose the concept of the "Kurdish problem." They oppose the term, fearing that referring to the issue as the "Kurdish problem" is artificial and motivated by separatist intentions. They also view those who use the term as being associated with terrorism. This position is widespread among young people and can be divided into two camps. 27% reject the concept of the Kurdish problem, arguing that the Kurds do not have problems—or at least not anymore. They claim that the aforementioned problems are exaggerated and that there is no lack of rights today. They also argue that what happened in the past is no longer valid. Some who reject the idea of a Kurdish problem acknowledge that Kurds still have problems today. However, they argue that these problems are reflections of regional inequalities and past experiences. 41% argue that Turkey has a Kurdish problem awaiting resolution. Therefore, a significant portion of young people acknowledge that there is a Kurdish problem in Turkey. This shows that a problem often denied or postponed by society at large is more openly accepted by a significant portion of young people.

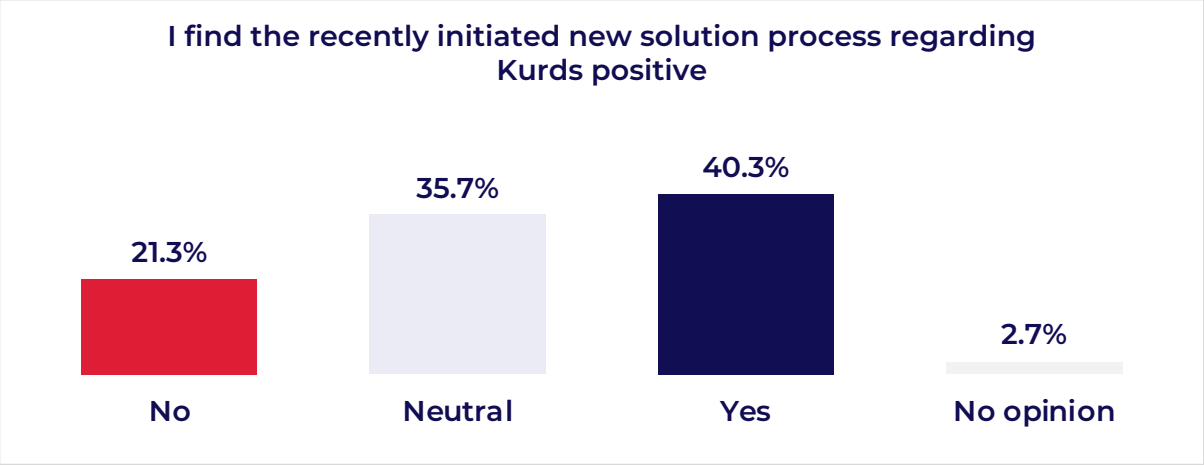


Figure 48. Approval of the new resolution process

A significant portion of young people view the prospect of a new solution process positively. This indicates a strong expectation for peace and dialogue among this group. Only 21% are directly opposed. In general, people are unsure what the solution is and where it is going.

In qualitative interviews, we found that participants were predominantly skeptical when the topics of peace and solution were raised. For instance, one interviewee expressed negativity, saying, "I don't believe anything beneficial will come from the negotiations with the AKP." Another interviewee shared this skepticism, stating, "A solution through bargaining is not credible."

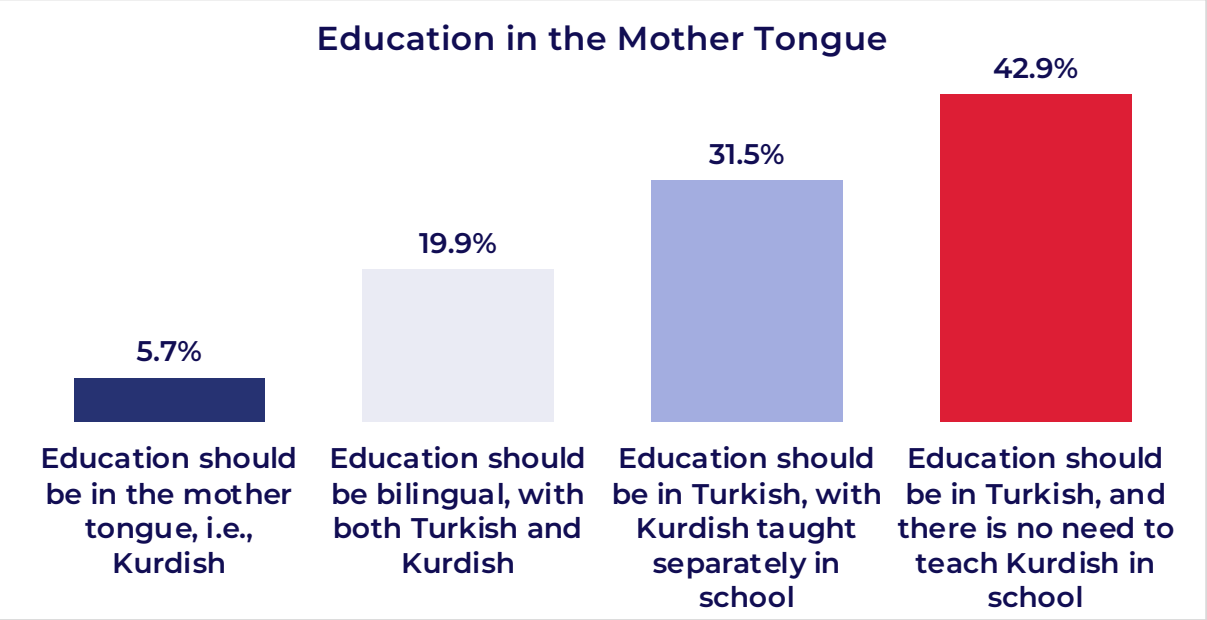


Figure 49. Education in the Mother Tongue

While many young people are distant from the idea of teaching Kurdish in schools, a small group supports the right to their mother tongue. This division shows that the language issue remains a source of tension, even among the younger generation. A significant proportion of young people (43%) view the presence of Kurdish in schools in any form as dangerous. They openly support the assimilation of Kurds and believe that if this does not happen, a generation that could one day rebel again may emerge. On the other hand, at least some of those who reject the idea are open to negotiation. They argue that they have no problem with freedom for the Kurdish language but are concerned that teaching it in schools could negatively affect unity in education.

25% fully support education in the mother tongue. The remaining 32% believe that education in the mother tongue should not exist, though they support the option to learn Kurdish. Overall, it is positive that 57% of young people support teaching Kurdish in schools, at least compared to the past.

In-depth interviews also reveal noteworthy principled consensus and divergence in practice regarding the mother tongue/Kurdish language issue. For 43% of the population, the scope of application is limited to daily life. This group is opposed to the presence of Kurdish in schools, public services, and, for some, all public spaces. The majority is inclined toward the principle that "the mother tongue is a right." However, when it comes to implementation, opinions are divided into three categories:

(i) "Optional Kurdish language classes should be available, but not full mother tongue education."
(ii) "Partial or mixed mother tongue education is possible in the early stages."
(iii) "The language of education should be Turkish only."

The same division is repeated in discussions about Kurdish in official services and the trustee system. While there is widespread opposition to trustees in principle, a distinction in legitimacy is drawn on the grounds of "security," with different treatment of DEM/Eastern municipalities and CHP municipalities. For most young people, the limits of pluralism are defined by a unitary structure and national security. This mindset even exists among those who support mother tongue demands and is accompanied by fears of division.

Principled Discourse on Rights: The idea that "mother tongue is a human demand" is widely accepted.

Participants with diverse ideological perspectives often categorize the demand for the mother tongue as a human or universal right. One participant linked this to the discussion of trustees, stating: "Why should I be governed by someone appointed in Ankara instead of by the mayor I elected? The majority of demands for education in the mother tongue are human rights demands," thus establishing the connection between equal citizenship, representation, and the mother tongue. A similar framework emerged in the focus group, where participants defined the demand for Kurdish education within the context of "equal citizenship" and explicitly mentioned the importance of education in the mother tongue.

This principled acceptance is accompanied by a sense of language loss and deprivation among Kurdish participants. One interviewee said, "Learning math in my own language seems like a 'far-fetched' dream, but when I think about it, my hair stands on end," emphasizing the desire for mother-tongue education, at least at the elementary and middle school levels. They noted that elective courses are insufficient in practice.

Some Kurdish participants advocate for the inclusive use of the mother tongue in early stages, especially in elementary and middle school. An interviewee clarified this line of thinking, stating, "Turkish is already being learned. Language education is provided separately. Other subjects can be taught in the mother tongue." The same group of participants reports that elective Kurdish courses are ineffective, yielding no results due to weaknesses in awareness, consciousness, and participation. Though few in number, some Turkish youth also acknowledge this right.

At the other end of the spectrum is a group that appears nationalist and apolitical. This group opposes education entirely in the mother tongue and puts forward arguments such as "The language of Turkey is Turkish, so education in the mother tongue is not possible," and "There should be only one official language."

While many participants understand and support the demand for mother-tongue education in principle, they draw the line at the indivisibility of the country and security concerns. A nationalist participant assumes that Kurds demand "land and an official language" and characterizes this as a demand that would "divide the country." He opposes bilingualism in official services. Another participant who is not involved in politics denies the existence of the Kurdish issue, stating, "Those living in Turkey are Turks—the official language is Turkish," thereby closing the door to Kurdish in the public sphere. A participant with a center-left/liberal profile tries to frame the issue as one of shared problems of justice and economy. They say that there is no major Kurdish problem and that the language of education should remain Turkish, with Kurdish as an optional subject.

Security rhetoric is not the only factor influencing the negative approach to Kurdish education. Another factor we often hear stems from a pragmatic assessment. The argument that learning Kurdish is "useless" in a country where English proficiency is low and working life is conducted in Turkish is common. This argument is based on the idea that Kurdish has no career value in an environment where status, employment, and educational opportunities depend on proficiency in Turkish and English. One participant argues that Kurdish should be available to learn, but if all classes were in Kurdish, children would not be able to compete with those in Istanbul or get into ITU/ODTÜ. This participant advocates for Kurdish to be taught as a language course in schools. A lawyer who participated in the discussion also favored keeping Turkish as the language of instruction but added, "Kurdish could be an elective course," which falls into the same line of thinking. Similarly, participants from center-left, liberal, and conservative backgrounds viewed the options of "preserving the language" or "local electives" positively.

Kurdish in Education and the Solution Process: Cross-Sections

As expected, full coverage (62.9%) is the norm among DEM voters. DEM voters want Kurdish to be one of the languages of instruction in schools. Opposition to Bahçeli's recent role in the resolution process continues to grow within the MHP (59.8%). Notably, 40% of MHP youth agree with teaching Kurdish in schools. Among AK Party youth, 36.7% are in favor of electing Kurdish as a language of instruction, while 50.4% are against it. Among CHP youth, 29.9% are in favor of electing Kurdish as a language of instruction, while 43.2% are against it. The "elective" language option stands out as a rational balance among both groups. The trend is similar among protest and undecided voters.

Rejection is in the majority among Turkish-speaking youth (52.8%), while native language/bilingualism is clearly dominant among Kurdish-speaking youth (53.5%), and rejection is marginal (9.6%). The "optional" option forms common ground between the two groups at around 30–37%.

		Kurdish in Education			New Peace Process		
		Mother tongue or bilingual	Elective	Kurdish should not be taught	Yes	Neutral	No
	Total	**25.6%**	**31.5%**	**42.9%**	**41.4%**	**36.7%**	**21.9%**
Mother Tongue	Turkish	17.3%	29.9%	52.8%	36.3%	39.5%	24.1%
	Kurdish	53.5%	36.9%	9.6%	58.6%	26.8%	14.6%
Party Preference	AK Party	12.8%	36.7%	50.4%	46.8%	38.2%	15.1%
	CHP	26.9%	29.9%	43.2%	34.3%	39.2%	26.5%
	Dem P.	62.9%	28.8%	8.3%	56.3%	28.2%	15.5%
	MHP	14.9%	25.3%	59.8%	50.0%	38.4%	11.6%
	Protest vote	26.7%	30.0%	43.3%	39.1%	43.5%	17.4%
	Undecided	25.6%	35.9%	38.5%	31.7%	26.1%	42.2%

As elements such as security, the political context, and transparency take center stage in perceptions of the resolution process, the boundaries between parties become permeable. People seek a clear timetable, concrete goals, and transparency regarding the parties involved; uncertainty leads to a negative outlook.

Support is high among young DEM Party members (56.3% in favor). Significant support is also evident among young people in the MHP (50.0%) and AK Party (46.8%). Among young CHP members and protesters, a notable percentage identify as "neutral" (39.2% and 43.5%, respectively). Among the undecided, "No" stands at a notable 42.2%.

Among native Kurdish speakers, the majority vote is Yes (58.6%). Among native Turkish speakers, however, caution prevails (Yes: 36.3%; Undecided: 39.5%). This indicates a significant undecided group that is sensitive to the framework of the process.

Overall, 21.9% vote Yes, 36.7% are neutral, and 41.4% vote No. The "neutral" column indicates a broad waiting area.

Cross-sections of Kurdish Language Education in Turkish Schools

		Kurdish in Education		
		Mother tongue or bilingual	Elective	Kurdish should not be taught
	Total	**17.3%**	**29.9%**	**52.8%**
Income Group	Low	17.1%	25.8%	57.1%
	Lower-middle	13.5%	27.8%	58.8%
	Middle	22.0%	33.5%	44.4%
	Upper-middle	16.9%	32.1%	51.0%
Belief	Non-believer	25.5%	45.3%	29.2%
	Skeptical	19.6%	48.7%	31.7%
	Believer	16.5%	26.5%	57.0%
Religiosity	Low	22.2%	27.0%	50.8%
	Medium	13.2%	34.5%	52.2%
	High	18.4%	28.2%	53.4%
Nationalism	Low	30.5%	19.0%	50.5%
	Medium	13.6%	36.5%	49.9%
	High	16.5%	29.0%	54.5%
Ideology	Left	26.6%	24.7%	48.6%
	Center	10.3%	39.2%	50.5%
	Right	12.6%	30.5%	56.9%
Presidential Runoff (2nd Round) Vote	Erdoğan	10.6%	31.7%	57.7%
	Kılıçdaroğlu	23.3%	29.8%	46.8%
	Protest vote	13.9%	30.6%	55.6%

In order to closely examine alternatives for teaching Kurdish in education according to different variables, we only examined the Turkish sample, excluding Kurdish youth.

Among Turkish youth, there is a tendency toward full coverage among those with low levels of nationalism who identify as left-wing and have no religious beliefs. Among those who identify as right-wing with high levels of nationalism or religiosity, there is a strong tendency to reject. Voting preferences in the 2023 presidential election also confirm this alignment (Erdoğan voters: 57.7% rejection; Kılıçdaroğlu voters: 23.3% mother tongue/bilingual).

There are no significant differences among income groups, though the lower and lower-middle groups are somewhat more rigid than the middle and upper-middle income groups.

The categories that value the optional option the most are moderate nationalism (36.5%), moderate religiosity (34.5%), and centrist ideology (39.2%). This trio tends to act within a discourse framework that allows room for individual choice while preserving public unity.

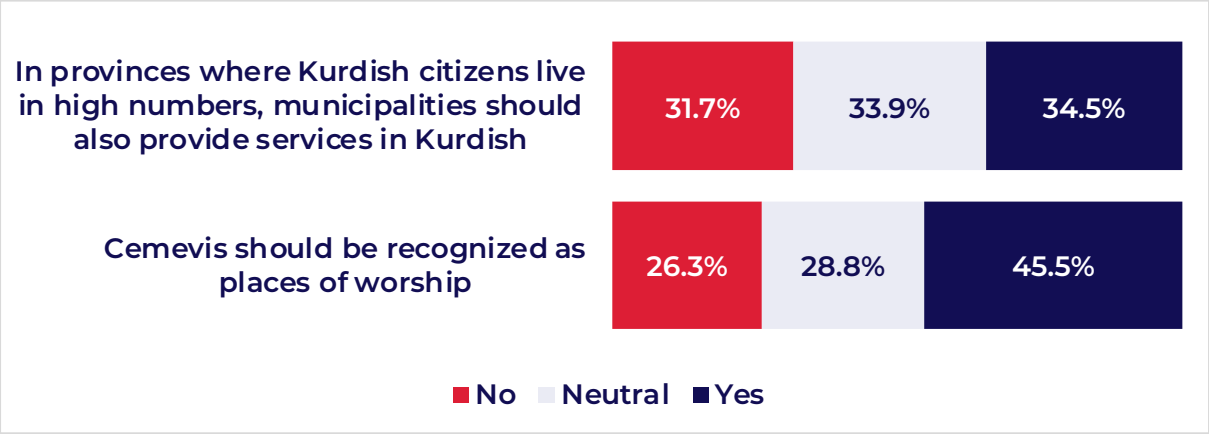


Figure 50. Rights

Opinions on the use of Kurdish in official services are even more fragmented. There is a spectrum ranging from outright opposition, to conditional or partial acceptance, to widespread support. Examples of these views include the belief that bilingual services are unnecessary, hesitant approval ("It may be necessary, but I don't wholeheartedly support it"), and clear support ("It would be better if it were available everywhere"). One nationalist view clearly opposes it, citing the principle of a single official language.

Trustees: A "Legitimacy Gap" within the Opposition

Young people generally have little interest in trustee practices. However, a distinction producing a legitimacy gap between DEM/Eastern municipalities and CHP municipalities is widespread. One participant said, "Appointing trustees to the elected representatives of a party represented in parliament goes against 'the freedom of the people,'" while another participant found the appointment of trustees acceptable due to "support for terrorism." A participant from Urfa does not find the presence of trustees in the east disturbing but emphasizes that the trend toward CHP municipalities is "now disturbing."

This division is similar to the "principle-acceptance gap" regarding Kurdish and mother tongue issues. While the emphasis on democratic principles and representation is maintained, the "security-terrorism" threshold triggers a difference in legitimacy.

Consequently, a significant proportion of young people believe that the rights of ethnic, religious, and cultural minorities should be recognized. Conversely, a significant segment of youth are more rigid on this issue, exhibiting authoritarian tendencies and openly taking discriminatory positions. Overall, this shows that young people are open to both pluralism and equal citizenship, as well as authoritarian and exclusionary citizenship practices.

8.4. Nationalist Attitudes

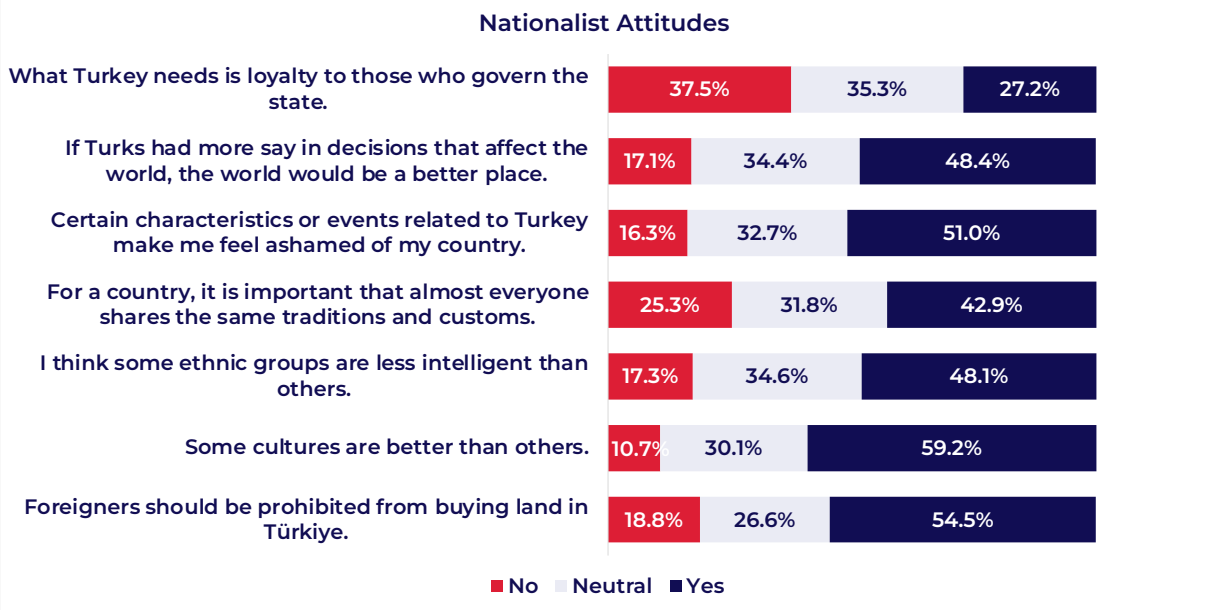


Figure 51. Nationalist Attitudes

Nationalism is a prevalent trend among young people. Identifying as a nationalist and having a strong sense of belonging to Turkey are both widespread. The idea that "the Turk has no friend but the Turk" still holds true. There is always suspicion toward foreigners. Additionally, the perception that Turks have better characteristics than other nations is prevalent. While nationalism generally means loyalty and belonging to the country for the majority, a segment of the population perceives it as an exclusionary and polarizing concept. Along with claiming Turkish identity, there is also a tendency to look down on certain cultures and nations. Although the belief that some cultures are superior to others is widespread, there is also a strong emphasis on the need for the country to be homogeneous. Notably, 48% agree with the statement that some ethnic groups are less intelligent, while only 17.3% disagree.

We examined the cross-tabulations of the two aforementioned statements to investigate prejudices against differences and attitudes toward cultural diversity more thoroughly.

		Ethnic Prejudice			Cultural Homogeneity		
		No	Neutral	Yes	No	Neutral	Yes
	Total	**17.3%**	**34.6%**	**48.1%**	**25.4%**	**31.7%**	**42.9%**
Income Group	Low	17.0%	37.2%	45.8%	25.1%	31.6%	43.3%
	Lower-middle	19.1%	34.7%	46.2%	24.9%	34.1%	41.1%
	Middle	16.4%	35.0%	48.6%	27.1%	29.5%	43.3%
	Upper-middle	16.4%	30.7%	52.9%	25.2%	30.9%	43.9%
Belief	Non-believer	28.7%	35.1%	36.3%	36.3%	30.4%	33.3%
	Skeptical	13.8%	40.9%	45.4%	22.7%	42.0%	35.3%
	Believer	16.7%	33.7%	49.5%	24.8%	30.4%	44.8%
Religiosity	Low	16.7%	40.2%	43.1%	40.2%	36.6%	23.2%
	Medium	14.3%	36.5%	49.1%	25.4%	39.8%	34.8%
	High	18.8%	32.8%	48.4%	22.8%	27.0%	50.2%
Nationalism	Low	24.2%	37.0%	38.8%	44.9%	34.6%	20.5%
	Medium	14.0%	45.1%	40.9%	24.9%	39.8%	35.3%
	High	16.8%	28.3%	54.9%	19.4%	26.6%	54.0%
Ideology	Left	18.1%	34.1%	47.8%	35.4%	25.7%	38.9%
	Center	14.2%	36.8%	49.0%	19.1%	39.4%	41.5%
	Right	19.4%	32.9%	47.8%	17.8%	33.0%	49.2%
Presidential Runoff (2nd Round) Vote	Erdoğan	16.7%	33.2%	50.1%	18.3%	33.1%	48.6%
	Kılıçdaroğlu	18.7%	34.4%	47.0%	30.9%	27.6%	41.5%
	Protest vote	14.4%	36.9%	48.8%	24.4%	37.9%	37.7%
Mother Tongue	Turkish	15.7%	32.8%	51.6%	21.4%	31.8%	46.8%
	Kurdish	22.4%	40.4%	37.1%	39.0%	31.1%	30.0%

We examined two critical statements to see where young people's attitudes toward pluralism and differences became more rigid: "Some ethnic groups are less intelligent than others" (ethnic prejudice) and "Everyone in a country should have the same traditions and customs" (cultural singularity). In social psychology, these two indicators represent the axes of "in-group favoritism" and "out-group threat perception" and provide insight into how open young people are to diversity.[2]

The findings show that although the younger generation has high democratic demands and expectations of equal citizenship, tendencies toward identity insecurity and cultural protection are clearly persistent.

Overall, 48.1% of young people hold strong ethnic prejudices, and 42.9% adhere to cultural singularity. Only 17.3% are free of ethnic prejudice, while 25.3% are open to cultural pluralism. These rates reveal that more than half of young people view cultural diversity as risky and that pluralistic attitudes are fragile. Cross-analyses reveal the socio-cultural dynamics that shape these tendencies.

Across income groups, ethnic prejudice does not vary significantly; even in high-income groups, acceptance reaches 53%. This shows that exclusionary attitudes cannot be explained solely by economic vulnerability. Rather, the emphasis on cultural security and "indigenousness" persists across generations. Non-religious youth exhibit the least prejudice.

[2] Tajfel and Turner's concept of "in-group favoritism" and Stephan and Stephan's "Integrated Threat Theory" framework, which defines "perceived threat from out-groups," provide a reference point for explaining these variables. Both ethnic prejudice and cultural singularity reflect the social-psychological basis of young people's reflexes to protect group boundaries.

Profiles where belief in God is absent or questioned show significant decreases in both ethnic prejudice and cultural singularity. In contrast, prejudice increases among skeptical or religious youth.

Religiosity is one of the strongest determinants of exclusion. As religiosity increases, both ethnic prejudice and cultural singularity increase as well. Similarly, as nationalism increases, so do exclusionary attitudes; there is a tendency toward closure reaching 54% in cultural singularity, especially at high levels of nationalism. This shows that, among young people, nationalism has become a kind of cultural defense reflex rather than a sense of belonging.

There is no significant ideological difference between the left, center, and right; this suggests that ethnic prejudice is more established as a cultural norm than an ideological stance. The difference becomes apparent in cultural singularity, which decreases on the left and increases on the right. Nevertheless, the data indicates that the left-right axis has limited explanatory power for such exclusionary judgments among young people.

Among young people who voted for Erdoğan in the 2023 presidential election, ethnic prejudice exceeds 50%, while cultural singularity reaches 48.6%. Notably, even among Kılıçdaroğlu voters, ethnic prejudice remains high at 47%. The situation is no different among those who cast protest votes or did not vote. These findings show that ethnic prejudice among young people is not merely a position produced by the ruling party–opposition divide, but rather a general and structural norm.

The native language variable is a decisive factor. Ethnic prejudice and cultural singularity are significantly higher among Turkish-speaking youth, while exclusion is significantly lower among Kurdish-speaking youth (37% and 30%, respectively). One could argue that having an identity that demands rights and belonging to a community that directly experiences exclusion fosters a more inclusive and pluralistic political psychology.

These findings highlight the depth of young people's concerns about cultural security and the limits of pluralism, despite their high expectations for democracy and equal citizenship. Although young people advocate for freedom of expression, they can be more cautious, even leaning toward majoritarianism, when it comes to identity and cultural differences.

Data on ethnic prejudice and cultural singularity reveal that the democratic demands of the younger generation are broad yet fragile. In other words, young people who are fundamentally open to "rights and freedoms" can quickly resort to security-oriented language when confronted with identity differences. This tension is one of the sharpest breaking points between democratic demands and the cultural protection reflex among young people.

8.5. Perception of Religiosity

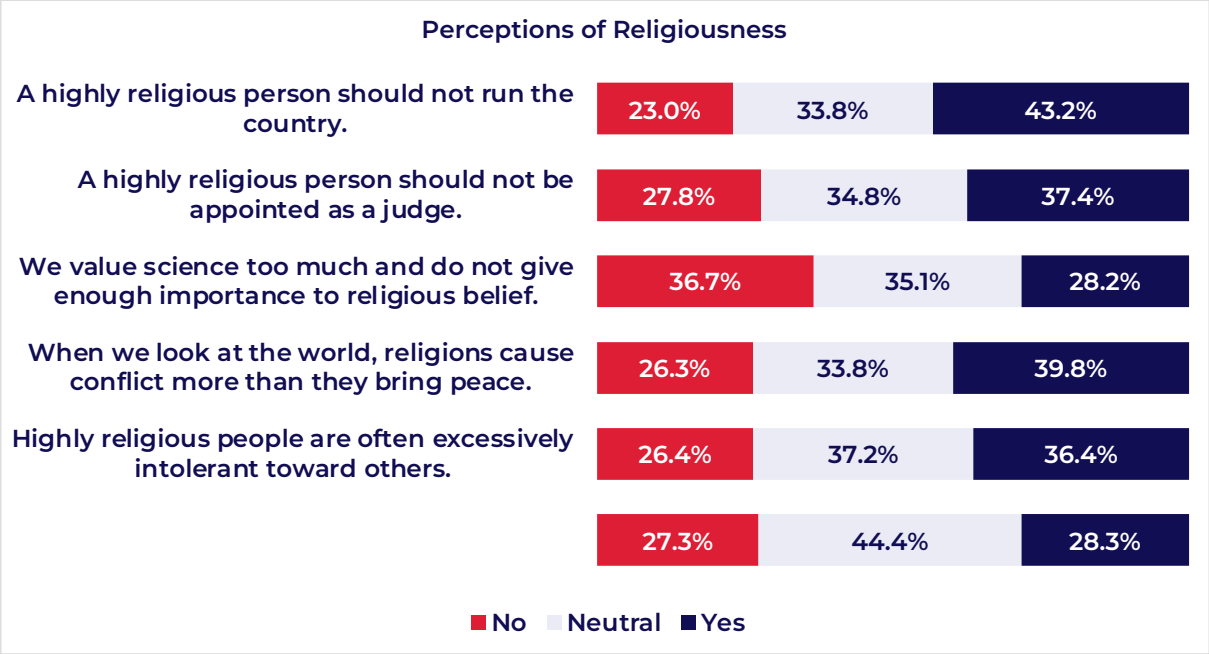


Figure 52. Perceptions of Religiousness

Young people have diverse perceptions of religiosity. For some, it means strict adherence to daily practices and rituals, while for others, it is a more flexible and individual form of belief. While the majority believe in God and consider themselves religious, quite a few hold prejudices against religious people. Around 43% oppose public administration under the control of religious people. Around 40% hold negative views, such as believing that overly religious people are intolerant and that religions cause conflict rather than peace (only 26% disagree). Therefore, even if the idea that young people are distancing themselves from religion and faith is not true, it is also true that young people prefer a more secular lifestyle and are distant from overly religious people, even if they do not have a low level of faith.

8.6. Gender

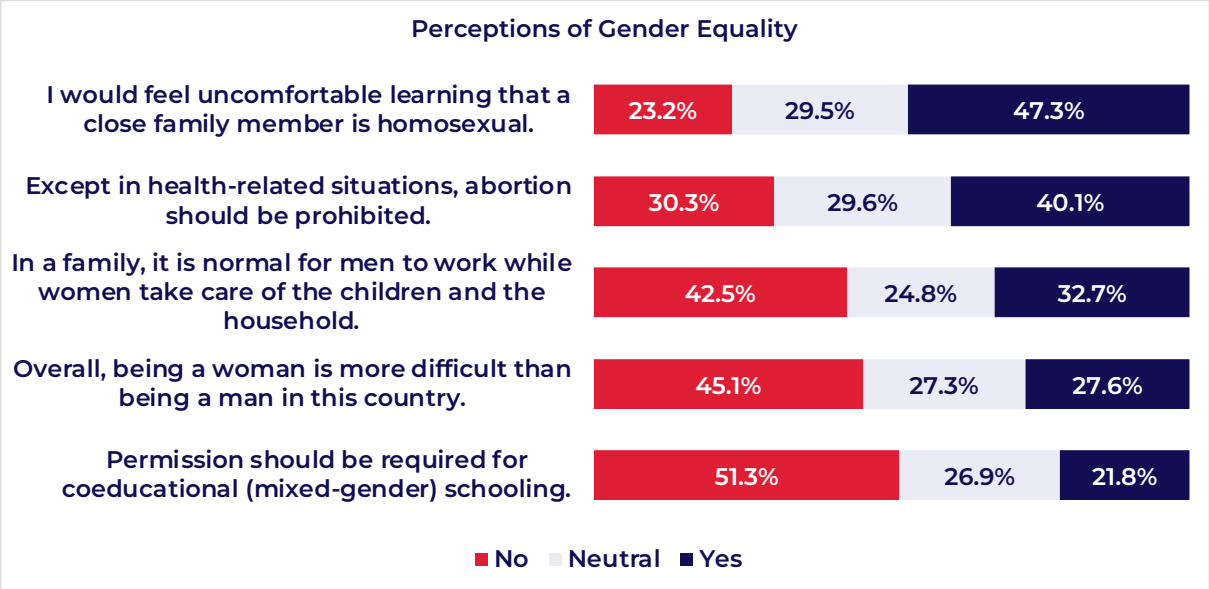


Figure 53. Perceptions of Gender Equality

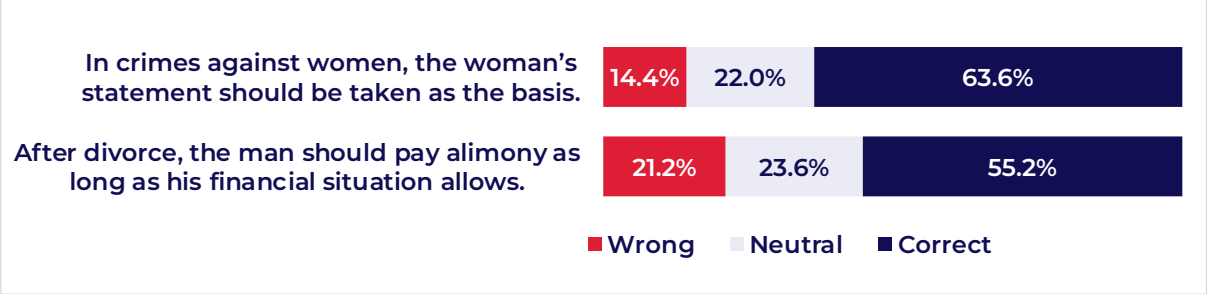


Figure 54. Perspectives on Gender-Related Legal Issues

Compared to previous generations, young people have a more egalitarian approach to gender issues. A large segment advocates for gender equality. However, a significant group still defends traditional roles. Rhetorically, a positive attitude toward women working has become the social norm. Nevertheless, significant limitations and conditions exist behind this positive attitude. Stereotypes such as the idea that certain jobs are not suitable for women, that women's work disrupts the family order, and that women neglect childcare are frequently expressed. Indeed, 43% of respondents disapprove of women working and of fathers taking care of children. Homosexuality remains taboo, with only 22% approving of the right to express it publicly. Only 30% believe that abortion is a right.

Young people's conflicting attitudes toward women's participation in the workforce become clearer when it comes to supporting women's rights (e.g., declaration, alimony).

The Ontological Framework of the LGBT+ Approach: The "Illness–Orientation–Problem" Axis

In-depth interviews and focus groups reveal that attitudes toward homosexuality are shaped by two perspectives. The first perspective is the widespread tendency to view the issue as a matter of individual freedom and accept it in the private sphere. The second perspective addresses the issue within the framework of social order, problematizing public visibility due to its effects on other individuals and, in particular, on family structures. Many participants tolerate homosexuality as an individual preference or orientation in the private sphere but distance themselves from its visibility in the public sphere, such as parades, flags, and symbols, as well as increased media representation. A smaller segment embraces the language of rights and equality in both spheres, while a group of primarily conservative nationalists constructs a pathologizing medical/moral framework using the discourse of "disease/decadence" or "a problem to be worked on."

The data shows that homosexuality is associated with three socio-psychological discourses:

(1) The orientation and diversity line: This discourse rejects the disease narrative and relates the issue to equal citizenship, freedom of expression, and freedom of association. Even when the concept of preference is mentioned, it is mostly in the context of "non-discrimination/respect for lifestyle." For example, one participant states, "Neither... It's an orientation," moving beyond the illness/choice dichotomy. In the same discussion, the emphasis is on equality and peaceful action. Similarly, another participant takes a descriptive rather than normative position, stating, "It's definitely an orientation; it cannot be defined as an illness."

Young people who adhere to this rights-based, freedom-oriented approach embrace the definition of orientation and consider visibility legitimate. The discourse of "equal citizenship" and state protection against violence emerges (observed in a minority segment).

(2) The private sphere–public sphere boundary: Many young people are uncertain and ambivalent about this issue: They avoid making definitive judgments due to personal narratives and media debates. In this group, there is discourse about how trans experiences have become popular in recent years and how homosexuality's influence on social media and digital platforms has increased. "I'm in between... I think there's been a bit more advertising lately." However, the same person speaks in an accepting and protective manner when recounting how a transgender friend was bullied in school.

In general, this broad middle group tolerates homosexuality in the private sphere, saying, "Let them live at home." They distance themselves from widespread visibility, flags, and representation in the media.

(3) The pathologizing line: A large group of people, primarily conservative nationalists but not exclusively, view homosexuality as a "problem to be worked on" or a "disease," using arguments related to family, reproduction, and social order. Within this group, narratives of affectation and social media performance combine with a tendency to explain sexual orientation as a matter of will or interest. Those who embrace the idea that homosexuality stems from affectation also reject the term "illness." Illness is not something one has control over; however, these individuals are gay by choice, for the sake of affectation, or to take advantage of the situation, especially through social media performance. They frame visibility as a risk through debates and narratives about "influencing children" on Netflix and other series.

A common pattern in this category is "don't interfere in private life, but restrict it in public." This idea, summarized as "everyone should live as they wish in their own home," often frames public visibility as propaganda, criticizing it with an emphasis on family and moral order. The increase in representation on social media and TV through Pride marches is at the center of this tension.

Media and Promotion Debate

Media representations fall into two categories. The more prominent view is that increased visibility is negative due to the risk of encouragement, corruption, and influencing children. It is often said that Netflix and digital content accelerate perception change. On the other end of the spectrum, a small group views representations as "a reflection of the existing diversity in society" and "a tool for normalization." The private-public distinction carries over into the media sphere in statements such as "I watch it myself, but it could encourage others."

Conservative nationalist participants often reference sin and disease. However, while some tolerate private-sphere contact and/or relationships, they draw the line at public advocacy and collective action. This position is fueled by the perception of homosexuality as a contagious threat rather than an individual orientation.

Setting aside those who completely reject homosexuals' existence, even the more tolerant have their limits. For these individuals, the emphasis on "invisible visibility" is noteworthy. For these young people, visibility is a practice that gains legitimacy depending on the context. However, when it appears outside of context, it is considered provocative or disturbing. Contextual actions, such as Pride Week, are seen as somewhat more legitimate. However, carrying the rainbow flag at "irrelevant" venues or rallies can be considered "disturbing." In this context, visibility is perceived as propaganda, expressed with an emphasis on family and moral order.

The liberal perspective, held by a minority, views representations as an accurate reflection of life: "They show things that are already normal in life," says one participant, interpreting the representation as a process of normalization rather than exaggeration. Similarly, another participant says, "These people are part of society. Naturally, they will be reflected in cinema," accepts visibility as legitimate.

However, it is also said that some humorous and/or extreme slogans within the movement (politically ineffective, alienating society) have produced a backlash, with people saying, "It alienates society from you."

Trans Visibility: Popularization, Exaggeration, and Empathy

There are two simultaneous feelings about trans visibility: On the one hand, some claim that social media has popularized and exploited this topic for advertising purposes. The statement "I think it's become a bit more of an advertisement lately" exemplifies this sentiment. On the other hand, participants describe the difficulty of living openly and being subjected to male peer bullying. One participant objects to the forms of visibility, saying, "Trans individuals... exaggerate a lot," and focuses on the "style of expression."

The Impact of Contact: Familiarity and Change of Perspective

Personal contact is a transformative factor among young people. Those who report regular contact with LGBT+ individuals in their circle of friends tend to be more tolerant in their personal lives and more open to public visibility. We observe that radical exclusionary attitudes soften over time through contact and friendship.

Many participants who say, "I don't react," have a history of friendship with LGBT+ individuals. Another participant describes their radical exclusionary attitude during their youth, saying, "...they needed to be eliminated... Then, I was able to overcome this," explaining how they became independent from state discourse. The importance of forming friendships is emphasized. Similarly, a participant who describes accepting their trans friend in high school "without reacting differently" notes the lasting impact of early exposure.

The interviews only marginally touch on specific legal demands, such as marriage. Therefore, the institution of marriage is outside the scope of the discussion. Nevertheless, the idea that "the state should not interfere in the private sphere" is implicitly accepted as common ground, even among those who distance themselves from visibility.

Ultimately, many young people recognize homosexuality as an individual right while limiting public visibility in the context of social order, family structure, and values.

These findings demonstrate that young people frequently adopt what could be termed a rhetorical equality stance on gender and LGBT+ issues. While they embrace the principles of equality and freedom in discourse, they maintain cultural, familial, and societal concerns that restrict these principles in practice.

8.7. Identities and Tolerance

This section outlines the "hierarchical tolerance" of Turkish youth. Hierarchical tolerance is a sociological concept that describes a situation in which some identities are tolerated while others are excluded.

In the literature on political culture and social psychology, hierarchical tolerance refers to a graded, conditional, and layered system of acceptance among identities rather than to tolerance based on equal rights.

In liberal thought, tolerance is defined as accepting the rights and freedoms of others. However, even within hierarchical tolerance, there is an asymmetry of power:

- I show tolerance, and you are the one who needs it.
- My identity is the norm, and yours is the exception.
- My values are considered natural, while your behavior requires tolerance.

Tolerance is not the same for every identity. There is order and hierarchy. Those close to the center are included and those far away are excluded. Tolerance is conditional and varies according to behavior, context, and visibility.

In summary, hierarchical tolerance conflicts with pluralistic democracy because it does not ensure equal rights, citizenship, non-discrimination, or symmetrical relations between identities.

In this context, young people assign the innermost circle to indigenous-religious identities, the middle circle to immigrants and historical minorities, and the outermost circle to groups centered on body and morality.

One of the most concrete ways to understand living with different identities is to examine areas of daily life where people interact most intensely. For example, when we ask young people if they would feel uncomfortable working in the same workplace or if identity is a factor in deciding whom to marry, the real limits behind abstract statements about pluralism become apparent. Such questions serve as a powerful litmus test for measuring young people's mental distance from different identities because, unlike abstract levels of acceptance, the workplace requires daily interaction, trust, and cooperation. Past studies have phrased this question as, "I wouldn't want them as my neighbor." However, the transformation of neighborly relations, especially in large cities, has limited the effectiveness of this type of question. The vast majority of the younger generation has no experience with neighborliness. Being a neighbor has no meaning or value. Therefore, we addressed the issue through work and marriage decisions.

Preferences about who one can stand next to at work reveal which identities young people consider part of the community and which they consider outsiders. Some identities are seen as culturally or ethnically distant, while others are normalized. The data shows that tolerance thresholds for different identities vary dramatically, that behavioral and lifestyle codes can produce stronger exclusion than ethnic and religious affiliations, and that some groups are positioned in the closest circle in terms of personal distance.

The table below depicts this hierarchical proximity-distance map in the minds of young people.

	Does not bother me at all	Somewhat bothers me	It bothers me
Drug addict	4.7%	21.3%	74.0%
Heavy drinker	11.1%	29.3%	59.6%
Gay	12.4%	23.7%	64.0%
AIDS patient	15.6%	23.3%	61.1%
Afghan	19.9%	32.6%	47.5%
Syrian	22.2%	33.2%	44.6%
Jewish	24.5%	30.6%	44.9%
Armenian	28.3%	31.6%	40.1%
Greek/Greek Orthodox	32.2%	31.5%	36.3%
Gypsy/Roman	33.9%	32.2%	33.9%
Atheist	35.1%	28.0%	36.9%
Communist	41.2%	27.2%	31.5%
German	47.8%	27.7%	24.5%
Very religious	59.2%	28.4%	12.5%
Ultra-nationalist	60.8%	25.6%	13.7%
Alevi	63.0%	22.7%	14.3%
Kurdish	66.8%	21.0%	12.2%
Islamist	67.0%	22.5%	10.6%
Headscarf wearer	75.3%	16.6%	8.0%

The peak of exclusion is determined by the contexts of the body and morality: Neither immigrants nor minorities... Young people are most intolerant of drug addicts, alcoholics, and LGBT+ individuals. They are not wanted in the workplace either. This shows that young people's conservatism is primarily rooted in moral and bodily integrity.

When we asked about discomfort with different identities, however, we encountered a very different picture in terms of attitudes toward the identities on the list. Drug addicts (74%), AIDS patients (61%), and heavy drinkers (approximately 60%) were ranked as the most discomforting. These three groups are associated with the codes "exposure to infection/risk" and "habit-morality." A superordinate group is formed in which behavior and health risk are stigmatized rather than identity. Discomfort with homosexuals is high at 64%, placed on the morality and lifestyle axis. Migrants and ethnic-religious minorities are in the second tier: Afghanis (47.5%), Syrians (44.6%), Jews (44.9%), Armenians (40.1%), and Greeks (36.3%). Prejudice against Germans was significantly lower at 24.5%, and distance from Western foreigners was weaker compared to Eastern/Muslim immigrants. The lowest levels of discomfort are associated with headscarf-wearing (8%), Islamist (10.5%), Kurdish (12.1%), ultra-religious (12.4%), and ultra-nationalist (13.6%) identities. Native religious and political belief clusters are normalized in terms of workplace sharing.

		Religiosity			Nationalism			Ideology		
	Total	Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High	Left	Center	Right
Drug addict	**74.0%**	72.0%	66.1%	78.2%	81.0%	56.6%	81.1%	69.9%	68.0%	80.5%
Gay	**64.0%**	42.7%	55.3%	71.9%	66.4%	54.2%	68.5%	55.9%	57.6%	77.5%
AIDS patient	**61.1%**	47.6%	51.7%	68.0%	64.2%	44.8%	68.9%	59.4%	50.3%	70.9%
Heavy drinker	**59.7%**	41.5%	50.7%	67.1%	53.8%	50.1%	66.5%	51.4%	57.6%	69.6%
Afghan	**47.5%**	45.5%	43.5%	49.8%	46.7%	38.5%	52.6%	47.2%	47.3%	46.1%
Jewish	**44.9%**	31.7%	37.9%	50.6%	42.5%	37.2%	49.8%	35.0%	39.2%	59.2%
Syrian	**44.6%**	40.2%	40.6%	47.3%	44.7%	34.7%	49.9%	45.6%	43.8%	42.0%
Armenian	**40.1%**	26.8%	35.9%	44.4%	37.3%	36.0%	43.2%	29.1%	37.3%	53.5%
Atheist	**36.8%**	22.0%	29.5%	43.0%	38.3%	33.7%	38.1%	26.3%	33.6%	49.2%
Greek/Greek Orthodox	**36.3%**	21.1%	31.0%	41.5%	33.8%	32.0%	39.4%	26.6%	33.1%	48.5%
Gypsy/Roman	**33.8%**	19.9%	31.0%	37.7%	31.4%	29.8%	36.9%	26.8%	30.5%	44.5%
Communist	**31.5%**	19.9%	25.3%	36.6%	29.1%	28.7%	33.9%	19.7%	28.7%	44.5%
German	**24.5%**	15.0%	18.5%	29.1%	21.2%	21.2%	27.3%	16.0%	21.5%	36.1%
Alevi	**14.2%**	4.9%	9.8%	18.2%	11.4%	14.3%	15.3%	9.6%	13.3%	20.5%
Ultra-nationalist	**13.6%**	24.4%	13.5%	11.9%	27.7%	14.6%	8.8%	17.5%	13.5%	9.8%
Ultra-religious	**12.4%**	24.8%	14.1%	9.6%	19.3%	14.7%	9.2%	16.8%	13.3%	7.8%
Kurdish	**12.1%**	9.3%	8.7%	14.4%	6.9%	12.0%	14.0%	10.0%	10.5%	15.7%
Islamist	**10.5%**	16.7%	9.9%	9.8%	14.6%	12.4%	8.3%	12.7%	10.7%	8.6%
Headscarf wearer	**8.0%**	10.6%	7.8%	7.7%	9.6%	11.2%	5.8%	8.4%	9.3%	7.2%

First, looking at the cross-tables, it is clear that discomfort increases in many categories as religiosity rises. The most striking jumps are:

- Gay: 43% among the less religious and 72% among the more religious.
- AIDS patients: from 48% to 68%; heavy drinkers: from 42% to 67%.
- Jewish people increased from 32% to 51%, Armenians from 27% to 44%, and atheists from 22% to 43%.
- In contrast, an inverse gradient is seen in categories that could be considered "within the community." The more religious one is, the more accepted one is, even among the extremely religious (from 25% to 10%), Islamists (from 17% to 10%), and those who wear headscarves (already low, from 11% to 8%).

When we compare data with nationalism, we see a U-shaped curve in some areas. Tolerance is relatively high at moderate levels of nationalism. While discomfort rates rise at low and high levels of nationalism in most categories, they fall at moderate levels. Examples include drug addicts (81%-57%-81%), AIDS patients (64%-45%-69%), Afghans (47%-39%-53%), Syrians (45%-35%-50%), and Jews (43%-37%-50%). This U-shape suggests that prejudices harden at both ends of the spectrum: cosmopolitanism and sharp identity politics. The middle ground produces the most practical and contact-oriented attitudes. As expected, there is one exception: discomfort is low among ultra-religious people and Islamists with high levels of nationalism. The religious-nationalist alliance is also reflected in workplace norms.

Along the ideological spectrum, reservations stemming from morality and order are evident on the right, while those stemming from religious extremism are evident on the left. Lifestyle and immigrant issues are significantly elevated on the right: the "I would be uncomfortable" rates for homosexuals, people with AIDS, heavy drinkers, Afghans, Syrians, Jews, Armenians, and Greeks are markedly higher on the right than on the left and center. Conversely, discomfort toward the ultra-religious and ultra-nationalists is higher on the left and center than on the right. Discomfort toward Alevis, which is low overall, increases on the right. There

is also a clear increase toward the right for atheists. The headscarf issue receives low ratings across all ideological segments, with minimal differences.

		Living arrangement			Presidential Election – 2nd Round		
	Total	Living with parents	Living with spouse	Living independently	Erdoğan	Kılıçdaroğlu	Protest vote
Drug addict	74.0%	78.1%	80.7%	48.8%	80.4%	68.0%	73.7%
Gay	64.0%	67.7%	71.0%	39.9%	75.9%	55.4%	60.2%
AIDS patient	61.1%	64.2%	67.6%	40.2%	69.8%	56.5%	53.4%
Heavy drinker	59.7%	63.3%	66.2%	36.4%	69.9%	50.2%	62.6%
Afghan	47.5%	48.8%	50.5%	38.8%	47.5%	46.6%	49.3%
Jewish	44.9%	48.3%	48.6%	26.4%	58.8%	33.2%	46.9%
Syrian	44.6%	45.9%	47.1%	36.1%	44.7%	44.6%	44.2%
Armenian	40.1%	42.1%	45.4%	25.6%	53.8%	27.1%	44.7%
Atheist	36.8%	38.7%	40.8%	24.5%	49.2%	25.4%	40.9%
Greek/Greek Orthodox	36.3%	38.5%	38.9%	23.7%	49.0%	25.2%	38.2%
Gypsy/Roman	33.8%	35.4%	37.4%	23.5%	43.1%	24.9%	36.9%
Communist	31.5%	32.7%	35.0%	22.6%	43.1%	20.4%	37.4%
German	24.5%	26.5%	26.3%	13.7%	36.4%	15.9%	22.5%
Alevi	14.2%	14.9%	14.7%	11.3%	19.3%	11.5%	12.7%
Ultra-nationalist	13.6%	13.0%	13.5%	16.7%	10.1%	16.7%	16.0%
Ultra-religious	12.4%	11.4%	13.0%	16.4%	8.1%	16.8%	11.9%
Kurdish	12.1%	12.7%	11.6%	10.5%	13.9%	11.6%	11.1%
Islamist	10.5%	9.9%	9.7%	14.3%	8.3%	13.4%	10.0%
Headscarf wearer	8.0%	7.1%	7.5%	12.9%	6.9%	9.3%	8.4%

In conclusion, when examining prejudices against identities through workplace sharing, the discomfort threshold rises the most in the categories of health and habit risks (e.g., addiction, infectious diseases, and excessive drinking), as well as morality and lifestyle. Immigrants and historical minorities fall in the middle, while native and religious political identities fall at the bottom. As religiosity increases, so does the distance between lifestyles and beliefs. A U-shaped pattern emerges in nationalism. In right-wing ideology, discomfort based on immigrants, minorities, and lifestyles is relatively higher. In contrast, on the left, discomfort based on extreme religiosity or nationalism is relatively higher. This structure suggests a tolerance map in which criteria of functionality and norm compliance in everyday working life are more important than debates about macro identities.

The percentage of people who say they will not marry

	I won't marry	I'll stay single	I could get married
Afghan	75.50%	17.80%	6.60%
Syrian	70.90%	21.00%	8.10%
Armenian	67.70%	20.30%	12.00%
Gypsy/Roma	66.40%	24.60%	9.00%
Greek/Hellenic	63.60%	22.40%	14.00%
Atheist	62.50%	21.70%	15.70%
Communist	54.50%	24.30%	21.20%
German	42.20%	22.80%	35.00%
Alevi	35.60%	25.70%	38.70%
Very religious	29.70%	30.50%	39.90%
Kurdish	26.90%	22.70%	50.30%
Islamist	25.30%	23.30%	51.40%
Ultra-nationalist	24.30%	29.00%	46.70%

When we asked young people about their marriage preferences, the differences between identities became even more pronounced. The table clearly illustrates the social distance that young people perceive between themselves and different identity groups. The data shows that young people have a clear "us versus them" hierarchy in their minds with multiple layers.

1. The Outermost Circle: Foreigners and Historical Others

At the top of the list are the groups with the highest "I would not marry" rates. These groups can be divided into two main categories:

- **Current Immigrant Groups:** Afghan (75.5%) and Syrian (70.9%) are the groups that are most clearly rejected. This demonstrates how anti-immigrant attitudes, as identified in previous sections, translate into clear boundaries in personal relationships.
- **Historical Non-Muslim Minorities and Roma:** Armenians (67.7%), Gypsies/Roma (66.4%), and Greeks (63.6%) have the highest rejection rates after immigrants. This reveals that social distance is shaped not only by the current migrant crisis, but also by deep-rooted historical, religious, and cultural divisions.

2. Middle Ring: Ideological and Religious Red Lines

In this ring, distinctions based on worldview and belief are more prominent than ethnic or national identity.

- **Atheists (62.5%):** A lack of faith is a significant red line for marriage among young people. This confirms that, although young people do not want religion in politics, it still plays a central role in their personal lives.
- **Germans (42.2%):** This data is a key finding, showing that perceptions of foreigners are not uniform. The rate of opposition to marrying a German is more than 30 times lower than the rate of opposition to marrying an Afghan or Syrian. This proves that young people view Western and Eastern/Muslim foreigners differently.

- **Alevis (35.6%):** The 35% resistance to marrying an Alevi shows that the sectarian fault line in Turkish society persists among young people. However, the 38.7% who say "I could marry" reveal that this boundary is permeable.

3. The Closest Circle: Acquaintances and Local Others

At the bottom of the list are the groups with the lowest "I would not marry" rates, which is one of the report's most interesting findings.

- **Kurds (26.9%):** Despite the country's most fundamental political fault line—the Kurdish issue—more than half of young people (50.3%) say they could marry a Kurd. This finding strongly confirms previous analyses that "Kurds are seen as a 'native and national' element." The conflict in the political sphere does not translate into the same degree of closeness in the personal and social spheres.
- **Islamists (25.3%) and ultra-nationalists (24.3%):** The fact that these two political identities are seen as the least of a barrier to marriage by young people shows that they view these identities not as outsiders, but as part of the community and legitimate partners. Even if one is politically opposed to these identities, they are not considered unacceptable in a personal sphere such as marriage.

This picture clearly shows how little young people understand pluralism. The strictest and most insurmountable boundaries are associated with ethnic and national identities, especially those of non-Western foreigners. However, even the most polarizing political identities in Turkey (Kurdish, Islamist, and Ultra-Nationalist) are much closer and more acceptable than these external boundaries.

		Religiosity			Nationalism			Ideology		
	Total	Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High	Left	Center	Right
Afghan	**75.6%**	78.9%	71.0%	77.2%	76.3%	67.0%	79.9%	78.9%	70.2%	72.1%
Jewish	**72.2%**	67.1%	66.3%	75.9%	75.3%	63.5%	75.8%	71.8%	61.5%	77.7%
Syrian	**70.9%**	73.6%	68.2%	71.7%	69.1%	63.0%	75.7%	73.8%	67.3%	66.5%
Armenian	**67.7%**	60.6%	64.8%	70.4%	66.7%	61.0%	71.7%	65.7%	61.5%	71.1%
Gypsy/Roma	**66.4%**	62.2%	61.1%	69.7%	66.9%	61.2%	69.0%	65.2%	58.8%	70.5%
Greek/Hellenic	**63.6%**	50.0%	60.1%	67.6%	59.0%	58.8%	67.6%	59.2%	58.3%	69.2%
Atheist	**62.6%**	40.7%	54.3%	70.4%	62.5%	58.6%	64.7%	54.7%	56.4%	72.5%
Communist	**54.5%**	32.1%	47.0%	62.0%	51.9%	47.3%	59.2%	41.9%	51.0%	67.3%
German	**42.2%**	25.6%	36.5%	47.9%	40.0%	36.7%	45.9%	33.5%	38.0%	53.8%
Alevi	**35.6%**	19.1%	26.3%	43.0%	24.0%	32.1%	41.1%	27.0%	28.9%	47.8%
Very religious	**29.6%**	48.4%	30.0%	26.3%	36.3%	25.9%	29.6%	42.9%	25.0%	18.9%
Kurdish	**27.0%**	19.5%	18.9%	32.2%	14.1%	20.2%	34.6%	25.6%	20.7%	31.7%
Islamist	**25.3%**	39.8%	23.2%	23.9%	30.9%	21.3%	25.8%	37.0%	17.3%	19.8%
Ultra-nationalist	**24.3%**	35.4%	22.6%	23.3%	36.3%	23.6%	21.0%	34.3%	20.7%	16.4%

	Total	Living arrangement			Presidential Election – 2nd Round		
		Living with parents	Living with spouse	Living independently	Erdoğan	Kılıçdaroğlu	Protest vote
Afghan	**75.6%**	78.0%	78.7%	61.5%	74.1%	73.1%	79.1%
Jewish	**72.2%**	76.0%	75.6%	51.8%	78.2%	65.6%	74.0%
Syrian	**70.9%**	72.5%	76.1%	58.2%	68.7%	70.0%	73.7%
Armenian	**67.7%**	70.7%	72.0%	50.1%	72.7%	60.3%	72.1%
Gypsy/Roma	**66.4%**	68.7%	71.7%	50.7%	70.6%	60.2%	70.2%
Greek/Hellenic	**63.6%**	65.1%	70.3%	49.6%	70.7%	55.1%	68.3%
Atheist	**62.6%**	64.4%	67.9%	48.5%	74.7%	52.9%	63.4%
Communist	**54.5%**	55.5%	60.9%	43.1%	69.7%	42.2%	57.7%
German	**42.2%**	42.5%	51.2%	31.0%	54.5%	33.2%	42.5%
Alevi	**35.6%**	35.5%	43.5%	27.5%	47.3%	27.2%	36.9%
Very religious	**29.6%**	30.0%	27.1%	31.3%	19.8%	38.8%	25.7%
Kurdish	**27.0%**	26.6%	31.2%	23.7%	32.4%	24.8%	22.5%
Islamist	**25.3%**	25.3%	20.0%	31.5%	18.8%	33.5%	17.9%
Ultra-nationalist	**24.3%**	23.8%	23.2%	27.8%	16.7%	31.7%	23.8%

Fundamental Red Lines: Religiosity, Nationalism, and Ideology

As young people become more religious, the percentage who say they would "never" marry an atheist or communist increases. Concurrently, as religiosity rises, the distance from marriage to non-Muslim minorities, such as Armenians and Greeks, grows.

Nationalism establishes the most distinct "foreign" boundary. As nationalist sentiment rises, a clear wall is erected against intermarriage with outsiders, particularly Afghans, Syrians, Armenians, and Greeks. Conversely, a similar pattern is observed among those with low levels of nationalism, probably due to cultural distance.

Interestingly, as nationalism increases, the preference for not marrying a German also increases, though not as sharply as the preference for not marrying a Syrian. This shows that a distinction is made between Western and Eastern foreigners.

Nationalism does not cause as sharp an increase in marriages with Kurds as it does with other immigrants, which confirms that Kurds are seen as part of the same identity.

Political views create a mirror effect. As expected, right-wing youth are completely opposed to marrying atheists and communists, while left-wing youth are also averse to marrying the ultra-religious and Islamists.

Centrists act as a buffer, reducing these tensions. Centrists are more open to marrying people from minority groups or Alevis than those on the right or left.

In summary, two main factors influence young people's marriage decisions: Religiosity, beliefs, and worldviews determine red lines. Nationalism, on the other hand, determines how far they will go, especially in relation to foreigners and immigrants.

Factors That Increase or Reduce Distance: Lifestyle and Politics

Leaving the family home breaks down barriers. One of the clearest findings is this: Young people who live away from their families (alone, with friends, or in dorms) are much more open to intermarriage than those who live with their families. This effect is most pronounced among groups that are usually the most distant. Living away from family normalizes the idea of marrying an atheist, an Armenian, or a communist. This demonstrates that exposure to different lifestyles and establishing an independent life significantly reduces social prejudices.

Voting preferences also influence whom people marry. Young people who vote for Erdoğan are less open to marrying atheists, communists, and minorities, while those who vote for Kılıçdaroğlu are more open to these groups. However, Kılıçdaroğlu voters are less likely to marry someone who is extremely nationalistic.

The protest group that did not vote for either candidate presents an interesting profile. This group has one of the most rigid attitudes toward immigrants and minorities. This suggests that they combine distrust of the system with cultural conservatism.

Everyday life practices, particularly leaving the family home, are the strongest factor in reducing social distance. On the other hand, political identities form clear and predictable blocks in marriage preferences.

Consequently, the social tolerance map of young people can be described as layered rather than egalitarian: moral and physical risk result in the harshest exclusion, historical and ethnic distance result in a moderate level of exclusion, and local political and religious identities result in the highest level of acceptance. This structure reveals a conflict between the liberal tone of value statements and the practical limits of everyday life.

09

PLURALISM INDEX

9. PLURALISM INDEX

In this section, we will present the "Pluralism Index", which reflects the differences we have identified in the areas in which young people have the most difficulty understanding pluralism. The index shows their positions on the inclusiveness and exclusion axis and the freedom of thought line.

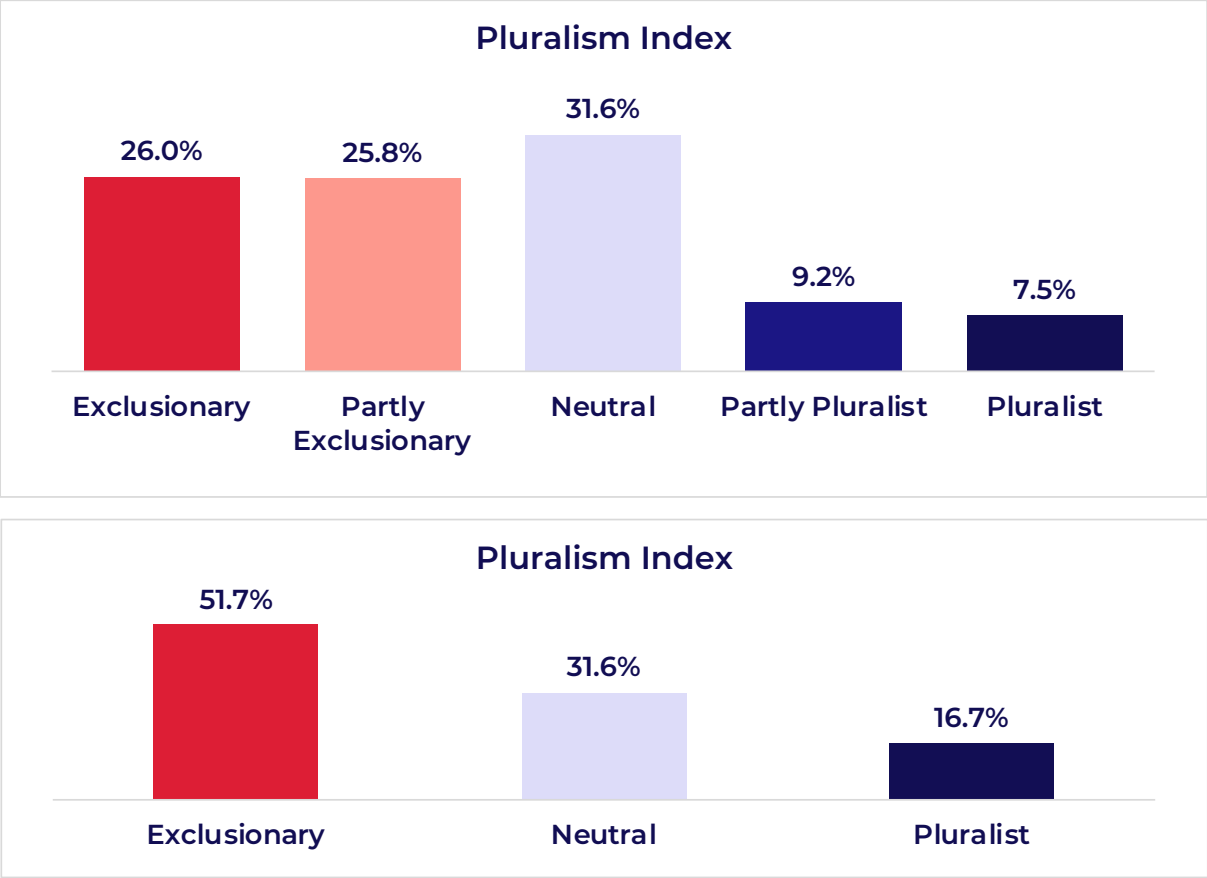


Figure 55. Pluralism Index

Young people's perception of democracy is shaped by both abstract values and their daily experiences and observations. We developed a scale based on their responses to topics such as democracy, freedom of thought, and tolerance of different identities. On the scale's 5-point categorization, 7.5% of respondents are the most positive in terms of liberalism and pluralism across all topics. Those who lean toward pluralism, with certain exceptions, constitute 9.2%. Calling the sum of these two groups the "inclusives," they constitute 16.7% of the most democratic segment of young people. Conversely, 26% exhibit a negative attitude in every category. Including those who are slightly more positive on some issues, the majority (52%) can be defined as "excluders." These individuals do not show a propensity for pluralistic democracy, but rather lean toward authoritarianism in favor of the majority. Thirty-two percent are caught between pluralism and authoritarianism.

In summary:

The 17% inclusive minority: This group is the segment closest to the report's "ideal democrat" profile. They defend democratic and pluralistic values under all circumstances. This group is small but principled.

The 32% swing group: This group vacillates between pluralism and exclusion depending on the issue and context. It is the most open to persuasion and negotiation.

The 52% exclusionary majority: The largest group shows no inclination toward pluralistic democracy and focuses more on the priorities and security of the majority. This group has more pronounced authoritarian tendencies.

Cross-Tables of the Pluralism Index

		Exclusionary	Neutral	Pluralist
Gender	Female	52.0%	32.0%	16.0%
	Male	51.5%	31.1%	17.3%
Household income	Low	57.2%	25.2%	17.6%
	Low-Medium	55.8%	27.4%	16.8%
	High-Medium	49.3%	34.3%	16.4%
	High	39.9%	43.9%	16.2%
Work	Student	48.7%	34.0%	17.3%
	Employed	52.8%	32.3%	14.9%
	NEET	52.6%	27.6%	19.8%
Age Group	18-21	51.7%	30.3%	18.0%
	22-25	51.4%	34.2%	14.4%
	26-29	52.2%	30.0%	17.8%

		Exclusionary	Neutral	Pluralist
Social media	Facebook	53.0%	31.4%	15.6%
	Twitter	47.1%	34.4%	18.6%
	Instagram	53.2%	29.1%	17.7%
	Tiktok	51.5%	31.9%	16.6%

		Exclusionary	Neutral	Pluralist
Second Round Votes for the 2023 Presidential Elections	Erdoğan	68.1%	23.6%	8.3%
	Kılıçdaroğlu	39.7%	37.0%	23.3%
	Protest	51.5%	36.3%	12.2%
	New voters	49.7%	26.2%	24.1%
Interest in politics	Not interested	50.2%	31.6%	18.3%
	Moderate	49.5%	35.2%	15.3%
	Relevant	58.2%	23.9%	17.9%

		Exclusionary	Neutral	Pluralist
Religious	Not at all	37.4%	29.7%	32.9%
	In the middle	45.7%	37.8%	16.5%
	Extremely	57.1%	28.9%	14.0%
Nationalist	Not at all	43.5%	29.9%	26.7%
	Neither	48.0%	36.0%	16.0%
	Extremely	56.4%	29.7%	13.9%
Ideology	Left	37.9%	35.6%	26.5%
	Center	51.8%	35.9%	12.3%
	Right	66.6%	23.9%	9.5%
	No opinion	53.8%	32.0%	14.2%
Native language	Turkish	55.8%	30.9%	13.3%
	Kurdish	37.5%	34.4%	28.1%
Religion	Non-religious	39.2%	39.8%	21.1%
	Skeptical	45.7%	37.2%	17.1%
	Believer	53.7%	30.1%	16.2%

There is no significant difference in pluralistic tendencies between women and men; the inclusive rate is 16% for women and 17.3% for men. However, it is noteworthy that the "exclusionary" tendency is as high among women as it is among men (around 52%). This table shows that gender does not affect how people perceive pluralism, and that young women and men have similar political values.

As income increases, the tendency to remain neutral increases and exclusion decreases. Among the high-income group, the exclusion rate drops to 40%, while the neutrality rate rises to 44%. However, the inclusivity rate remains in the 16–18% range across all income groups. This table shows that increased income reduces exclusion but does not increase pluralism. In other words, prosperity softens exclusion but does not automatically strengthen pluralistic values.

The inclusion rate is 17.3% among students, drops to 14.9% among workers, and rises to 19.8% among NEET youth. Conversely, there is no similar pattern in terms of exclusion. Fifty-three percent of NEET youth and working youth have exclusionary attitudes. The exclusion rate is slightly lower among students at 48%.

Inclusivity stands at 18% among 18–21-year-olds and 17.8% among 26–29-year-olds. In other words, there is no significant difference as age increases. However, the drop to 14.4% among those aged 22–25 is noteworthy; this group is likely entering the workforce and taking on more responsibilities. This graph illustrates the fluctuations in values at different stages of youth.

The rate of inclusivity is highest among young Twitter users, at 18.6%. On Instagram and TikTok, the rate is around 17%. Among Facebook users, the rate drops to 15.6%. As this table shows, different social media platforms create small but meaningful differences in political values. Twitter, in particular, aligns with a more pluralistic youth profile.

The inclusivity rate is significantly higher among those whose native language is Kurdish, at 28%. Of course, the inclusion of attitudes toward Kurds and education in their native language in the index is a factor. However, it should also be noted that Kurdish youth have a more

pluralistic attitude toward issues other than those concerning Kurds. Having an identity that demands rights has a positive effect on pluralistic approaches.

Exclusionism is at 68.1% among young people who voted for Erdoğan, while pluralism is at 23.3% among those who voted for Kılıçdaroğlu. These stark differences reveal that political preferences are directly linked to pluralistic values. Voting behavior points not only to political parties, but also to worldviews.

The inclusiveness rate among young people who did not participate in the election or who cast blank ballots is low, at 12.2%. In contrast, the rate among new voters is 24.1%. These results suggest that first-time voters have a more pluralistic outlook, while protesting leads to more extreme stances.

The inclusivity rate is 18.3% among young people who are not interested in politics and 17.9% among those who are. The lowest rate is among those with a moderate level of interest (15.3%). These results suggest that those with "moderate" interest in politics tend to be more exclusionary or neutral. Disinterest or high interest, on the other hand, opens the door to more pluralistic attitudes.

Inclusivity is highest among non-religious young people (21.1%), followed by skeptics (17.1%), and lowest among religious young people (16.2%). As this table shows, pluralistic values are higher among non-religious young people. However, the difference is not dramatic; religion alone is not decisive. Correlations are higher with levels of religiosity, though. Inclusivity reaches 32.9% among nonreligious individuals and drops to 14% among highly religious individuals. The table reveals an inverse relationship between religiosity and pluralism.

As nationalism increases, inclusiveness decreases. Among those who say "I am not nationalistic at all," it is 26.7%, while among those who are "extremely nationalistic," it drops to 13.9%. This demonstrates that nationalism fosters a more exclusionary value framework.

Among young people, inclusiveness is 26.5% on the left and 9.5% on the right. It is even lower among young people in the center (12.3%). The table shows that young people on the left embrace pluralistic values more than those on the right, who reinforce exclusion. Those in the center tend to "stay in the middle."

10 ASSESSMENT

10. ASSESSMENT

Not indifferent, but distant. Not hopeless, but anxious. Not conformist, but pragmatic.

At first glance, the research shows that young people are not the excitable, engaged, rebellious, radical group that usually comes to mind. The qualities that have been considered defining characteristics of young people in modern society since the second half of the 20th century no longer seem to apply to today's youth, having been replaced by others.

On the contrary, young people are not apathetic, hopeless about the future, conformist, or bigoted, despite the common lament that "today's youth are very different from us," a sentiment that has existed in almost every era. In fact, the results show that broad conclusions such as "Today's youth are not very youthful. They are tired, hopeless, and indifferent" are incorrect. Young people have changed; however, this change is too complex to be reduced to rigid concepts. The beliefs and attitudes that indicate change are somewhere in between.

Their opinions and attitudes demonstrate their connection to life and the outside world in various ways and degrees. They are generally cautious rather than conformist when it comes to life and power. They are social liberals rather than state fetishists. They are local, yet they do not like being confined to one place. They embrace the Republic's understanding of citizenship and national identity.

From Agora Activism to Digital Activism

Young people are not, as they are often and unfairly labeled, self-absorbed and indifferent to the world. They also do not appear apolitical. If they are closed off anywhere, it is to their personal screens and the digital environment. It is there that they engage in politics. This is where they are political. Not every moment and not on every issue, but in areas that interest them, they are political enough to avoid boredom. They are more inclined toward digital activism than toward the traditional activism of modern societies. The spirit of the times, as well as the authoritarianism of the regime that makes Agora activism costly, seems to have increased young people's inclination toward digital activism. This change in the medium of activism shows that we should reconsider our assertion that young people have become apathetic. Rather than being apathetic, young people engage with the medium they know as much as they want. They don't engage in politics all the time and everywhere, but rather occasionally and in certain places.

Not Conformist Either

It is true that radical ideologies and attitudes do not appeal to young people. However, it is premature to conclude that young people are conformists. It's unclear whether the "lack of radicalism" that appears to be conformism is related to an absence of appealing radical ideas or ideologies. Likewise, attitudes and tendencies that appear to be conformism can be partly explained by a cautious desire to avoid the wrath of an authoritarian regime. Rather than conforming to hedonism or indifference, young people exhibit an "immunity" that can be explained by caution and the absence of an appealing ideological position. Their attitudes on issues where it is easy and cost-free to take a clear position—such as the environment or

corruption—suggest that we can speak of fragmented and rational conformism rather than general conformism among young people.

Not Statist Either

Although liberalism in economics has lost prestige significantly in Turkey and among young people, as it has everywhere and in all sectors, young people are not drawn to economics or statism in general. They complain about deepening inequality and incompetence in particular, and they support a social state that provides citizens with access to basic opportunities through public assistance. However, they do not seem to favor strict state control of the economy.

They favor a strong, protective, social state that provides citizens with opportunities in the face of social problems. However, they are also wary of a state that intervenes in cultural or individual spheres. The average attitude toward the state and the economy can be summarized as social liberalism. They desire a strong, effective, and social state, not an interventionist one.

Return to Ziya Gökalp

Like liberalism, globalism, and universalism, the West is not enjoying its heyday in Turkey, as is the case everywhere and among all segments of society. Among young people, the tendency to be local or "whatever they are" is strong. Rather than universalist or Western identities, nationalism and localism, or more accurately, "being local," are in vogue. However, closed-off nationalism and localism are not the main trends among young people. There is an acknowledgment that the West or the world has aspects that are better than ours, especially when it comes to civilization, technology, and the way things are done. This trend, which can be summarized as an openness to civilization and an acceptance of what is better without abandoning or feeling uncomfortable with being national and local, shows that Ziya Gökalp's conciliatory approach is back in vogue. Gökalp's pragmatic centrism, expressed in the phrase "Our culture is the civilization of the West," has also caught on with young people.

"Let us remain ourselves, but let us live like them." "The cost of not giving up our local and national identity should not be giving up civilization and a good life." These are the sentiments of the average young person.

The Republic is Us

Young people have a strong belief in God, and religiosity and nationalism are widespread. However, instead of an "us" that extends beyond Turkey's borders or consists of Muslims or Turks, the idea of an "us" or "nation" that consists of the Republic's borders and citizens seems to have been internalized. Non-citizen Syrians, although considered "understandable" because they fled war, do not seem to be one of us. However, Kurds, whose demands for recognition are not so well respected, are considered one of us, for better or worse. While Syrians remain outside the boundaries of what is local and national, Kurds are considered local and national even though their demands for recognition are not viewed favorably. This situation shows that the Republic's understanding of "us" or "nation," defined by citizenship and surrounded by national borders, has been accepted and internalized.

Like any research, this research is context-dependent. In two senses: First, it reflects the context in which it was conducted. Second, it reflects the context in which it was conducted.

The context in which the research was conducted can be described in many ways. However, the world and Turkey that we have experienced for some time can probably be described as follows: While the world is undergoing a major and accelerated transformation in terms of productive forces, economic policies, and political structures, Turkey continues to be the country we know while also changing.

The world is undergoing another major technological transformation, evidenced by innovations such as digitalization and artificial intelligence. Neoliberalism, established in the 1980s, has lost credibility and is being dethroned. Organizations such as the United Nations, which provided stability after World War II, are rapidly weakening. Turkey's transformation accompanies this major global shift. Turkey is experiencing an authoritarianism in which lawlessness and arbitrariness are stronger than ever before, while simultaneously finding itself in the midst of regional upheaval.

The context of the research is reflected in the results. The anxiety and hopelessness indicated by the results can be interpreted as a consequence of the significant changes in productive forces and technology, as well as Turkey's regional context and experience with authoritarianism. Similarly, the observed transformation in young people's engagement with life and politics may be related to the world's major technological transformation. The strong desire for a social state observed among young people can be related to the loss of prestige experienced by neoliberalism worldwide and the strengthening of nationalist and localist tendencies. This can be linked to processes such as the dissolution of the UN and the bipolar world.

Young people appear to be anxious and hopeful. They are anxious and cautious because they live under an authoritarian and impoverishing regime. They are also increasingly fragile, which is why they seem to favor a strong, social state. In other words, the research shows how it feels to be young while the world changes, the country becomes poorer, and the regime becomes more authoritarian. Rather than saying their attitudes and behaviors are uncharacteristic of their age, it is more accurate to say they are young people in a changing world and a poorer, more authoritarian country. Although their attitudes appear to have changed, their expectations have not. Even if they are hopeless, anxious, and distant, they still want prosperity and democracy. In other words, the expectations of the 20th century seem to have mixed with the attitudes of the 21st century. If young people have changed, it is because the world or the country has changed. That seems to be the situation.

11

POLICY INSIGHTS

11. POLICY INSIGHTS

Discussions about youth often get stuck between abstract ideals and pessimistic predictions. However, this research shows that Turkish youth are neither completely apolitical nor radical. On the contrary, they represent a complex, flexible, pragmatic, and highly adaptable social universe. Their distant relationship with politics, the balance they expect from the state between "fatherly affection" and "freedom," and the boundaries they draw around identities explain why current policies have hit a wall.

The following policy notes highlight the practical and transformative implications of these findings.

The Diversity of Youth

Although young people are anxious and see the future as uncertain, this does not make them passive. On the contrary, they develop flexible strategies in their daily lives, calculating costs and demonstrating an ability to manage the present. They do not define themselves through rigid ideological principles, but rather through pragmatic reflexes that adapt to the situation. This makes them inconsistent, but also transforms them into individuals who can adapt quickly when needed.

They are not detached from politics. However, the language and rhythm of politics emotionally exhaust them. The rising age at which people leave home and the delayed attainment of economic independence keep families dependent on one another. Happiness and anxiety, optimism and hopelessness, coexist.

Simply listening to or calling on young people is not enough to enable their participation; the structures, forms of organization, and decision-making mechanisms must also be rejuvenated. There is a need for youth-centered designs, not just "calling on young people." They should be offered flexible organizational models and decision-making mechanisms where they can take the initiative and come and go as they please, rather than rigid hierarchies.

Interest in politics: Not participation, but exhaustion as a barrier

Young people's distance from politics is not simply a lack of interest. Rather, it is a barrier consisting of three factors: "ineffectiveness," "fear of punishment," and "emotional cost." Constantly following politics and encountering images of crisis and conflict creates emotional burnout. Therefore, "selective exposure" is preferred over active, continuous participation. Politics is now perceived as a burden rather than an area of interest.

Young people are reluctant to speak out because they do not feel safe, yet they are sensitive to injustice. Their sensitivity manifests in micro-political areas rather than organized politics, such as digital campaigns, boycotts, consumption behaviors, and volunteering.

In order for young people to find a place in politics, channels must be flexible, allow for transience, and not create burdens or carry legal and social risks. Politics must be removed from macro-debate arenas and broken down into micro-political channels that connect with everyday life, expectations, and areas of interest. Rather than fragile ones, transient and fluid organizational models can rebuild young people's relationship with politics. Research findings show that youth organizations must be based on three fundamental principles: flexibility

(structures that allow entry and exit), low risk (participation channels that do not incur legal, social, or economic costs), and horizontality (mechanisms in which authority and responsibility are shared, and young people are design partners). These principles facilitate establishing more lasting and sustainable relationships for young people in political and social activities.

State Imagination

Young people have two seemingly contradictory expectations of the state: they want it to be strong and protective, yet modern and transparent. They want it to "bring society together" when necessary, yet not restrict individual freedoms. This desire for the state to serve as both a shield and a guarantor is directly related to young people's search for security in a world full of structural uncertainties.

They question whether the education they receive in Turkey will be useful, if effort will be rewarded, and if meritocracy will work.

This uncertainty leads young people to ask, "Why should I study? Why should I work?" Therefore, it is necessary to provide young people with opportunities, clear goals, predictable paths, and a social structure that rewards effort.

The EU Hope

For young people, the EU is not just a place of economic opportunity. Rather, it is a symbol of their aspirations for a high quality of life. The EU's appeal lies not only in its technical capacity and technology, but also in its way of life, which is characterized by the rule of law, low uncertainty, a functioning justice system, and meritocracy.

However, cultural concerns have not completely disappeared. Concerns such as moral decay, excessive individualism, and cultural dissolution still exist, but they are much weaker than in previous generations. Today's youth are not a generation that observes the West from afar. They are a generation with relatives and acquaintances living there, and they have intense contact with Western societies. They believe they can adapt while preserving their own culture, a belief much stronger than in the past. The only serious obstacle to EU membership is concern for national pride, stemming from the possibility that Turkey's independence could be compromised or that it could be "colonized."

In short, the EU has the potential to symbolize a fair, predictable, and unobstructed life for young people, free from favoritism.

Interest in Foreign Policy and the Environment

This research reveals one of the most important transformations: foreign policy is no longer an "external" issue for young people, but rather a direct internal policy issue. They view conflicts, such as those in Syria, Palestine, and Ukraine, through a geopolitical lens as well as through the prisms of the security, economic, identity, and governance dimensions of their daily lives. Issues such as migration, border security, refugee policies, and international justice directly impact young people's political assessments. Therefore, the traditional

understanding of foreign policy as an area of expertise belonging solely to the state no longer resonates with young people.

Young people value connecting with their peers in other countries, negotiating crises and conflicts, and transforming international issues into horizontal exchanges of experiences. For this generation, foreign policy is not just a matter for governments to decide; it is a social issue in which young people want a say. Therefore, they expect foreign policy decisions to be more transparent and open to social negotiation.

A similar transformation is also seen in environmental issues. Young people no longer view the environment as an abstract future risk on a global scale. Instead, they see it as a concrete issue affecting their lives today. Issues such as forest fires, water scarcity, air pollution, and urbanization directly affect young people's sense of belonging to their homeland. The environment is not just an ecological issue; it is also seen as a matter intertwined with national security, quality of life, and security. Thus, environmental policy is not just a technical management issue to young people; it is a strategic area concerning daily life, social justice, and political responsibility.

Together, these two topics reveal a clear trend: Young people are bringing issues that were once considered the realm of high politics into the realm of social control and democratic debate. Foreign policy and the environment are the new political thresholds for youth. Meeting this threshold requires new participation mechanisms that address the local impacts of global issues and empower young people as active participants.

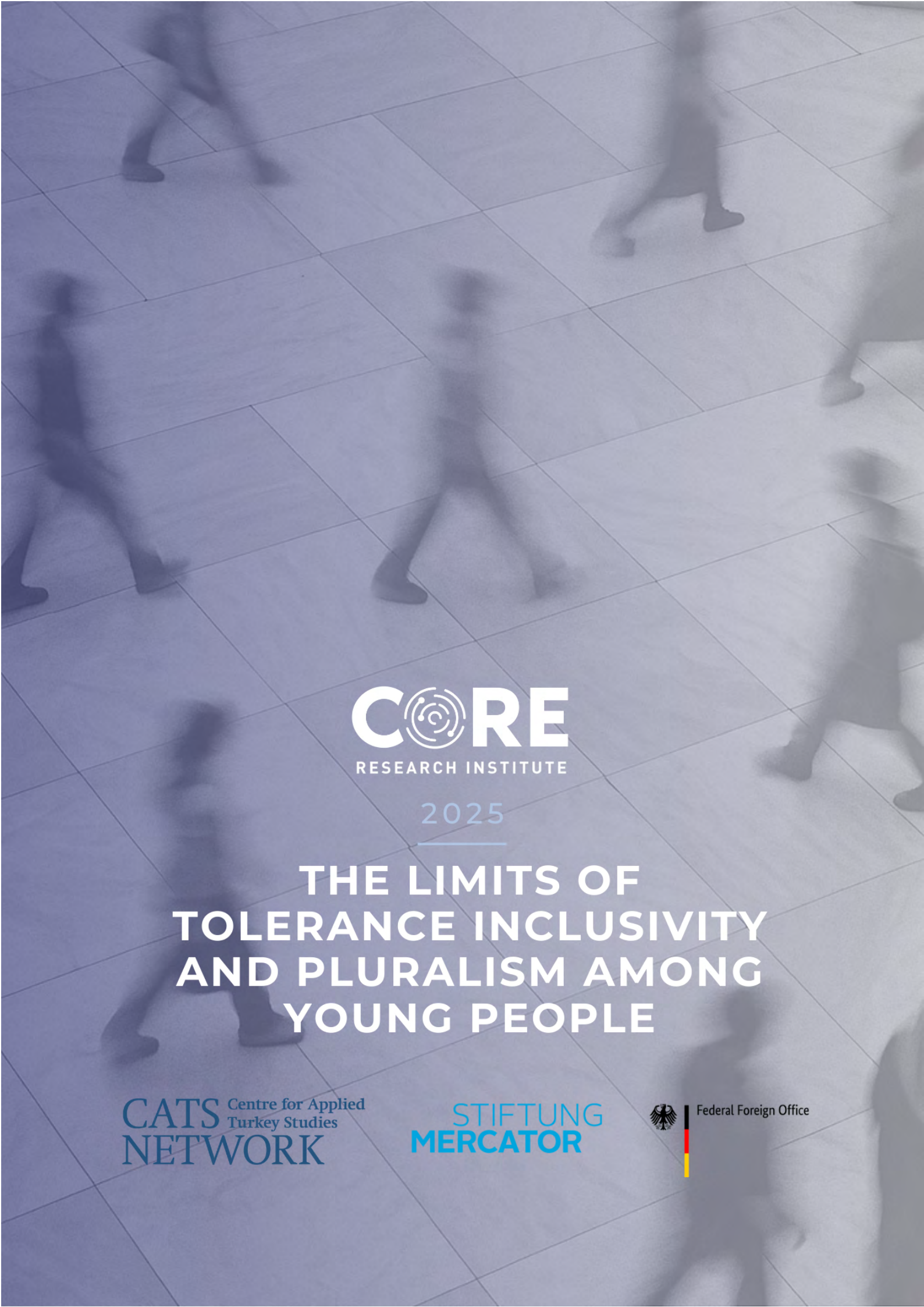
Living Together: Boundaries are loosening in the private sphere but tightening in the public sphere

Young people's perception of living together is based on a delicate balance of similarity and difference. Similar people are accepted, while those who are different are distanced. The source of fear is the possibility of a shift in cultural hegemony. Young people are quite concerned about what will happen if Turkey is taken over and the dominant culture shifts.

Young people's attitudes toward different identities suggest a preference for hierarchical tolerance over egalitarian pluralism. This form of tolerance ranks identities according to cultural proximity, moral risk, and conformity to social norms rather than maintaining an equal distance from all identities. In this framework, identities based on behavior and lifestyle are in the outermost circle; immigrant and historical minority identities are in the middle circle; and indigenous religious-national identities are in the innermost circle. Here, tolerance functions not as a democratic right but as a privilege contingent on conditions determined by the majority. This structure produces an understanding of pluralism that is broad in the private sphere but narrow in the public sphere among young people.

Therefore, while differences are widely tolerated in the private sphere, there are serious restrictions regarding visibility in the public sphere. The "be different but invisible" mindset is one of the strongest barriers to pluralism among young people. Contact has the capacity to break down prejudices; however, it can also have the opposite effect due to the rapid generalization of negative examples.

Intercultural integration policies are necessary to transform young people's cautious pluralism. Combating discrimination is not only ethical, but also a structural necessity for the sustainability of coexistence. In the long term, the coexistence of communities that do not interact while living in the same neighborhood is not possible.



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