

**THE TURKISH YOUTH: VIEWS ON POLITICS, ECONOMIC SITUATION,
AND IMMIGRANTS IN TÜRKİYE***

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Abstract

Based on data from the Turkish Youth Research, this paper examines the views of Turkish youth on politics, the economic situation, and immigration in Türkiye. To achieve this, a brief introduction outlining the research problem and methodology is presented first. Subsequently, the fieldwork data-covering the demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds of Turkish youth, as well as their perspectives on Turkish politics, economic conditions, and immigration in Türkiye—is discussed in detail. Finally, based on this data, a conclusion is drawn. The findings indicate that Turkish youth are generally dissatisfied with current political affairs and economic conditions and tend to hold unfavorable views toward immigrants in Türkiye.

Keywords: Youth, Turkish Youth, Turkish Politics, Economy, Migration, Immigrants.

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Türk Gençliği: Türkiye'de Siyasete, Ekonomik Duruma ve Göçmenlere İlişkin Görüşler

Öz

Bu makale, Türkiye Gençlik Araştırması verilerine dayanarak Türk gençliğinin Türkiye'deki siyaset, ekonomik durum ve göç konusundaki görüşlerini incelemektedir. Bu amaca varmak için öncelikle araştırma problemini ve metodolojiyi özetleyen kısa bir giriş sunulmuştur. Ardından, Türk gençlerinin demografik ve sosyoekonomik geçmişlerinin yanı sıra Türk siyasetine, ekonomik koşullara ve Türkiye'deki göçe bakış açılarını kapsayan saha çalışması verileri ayrıntılı olarak tartışılmıştır. Son olarak bu verilere dayanarak bir sonuca ulaşılmaya çalışılmıştır. Bulgular, Türk gençliğinin genel olarak mevcut siyasi olaylardan ve ekonomik koşullardan memnun olmadığını ve Türkiye'deki göçmenlere karşı olumsuz görüşlere sahip olduklarını göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Gençlik, Türk Gençliği, Türk Siyaseti, Ekonomi, Göç, Göçmenler.

Introduction

The main aim of this study is to explore the views of Turkish youth on politics, the economic situation, and immigration in Türkiye. Türkiye has a significantly younger population compared to the European average, making it essential to investigate the perspectives of this younger generation, who will shape the country's future, to understand how they feel about their nation and its trajectory.

This study is field research with both quantitative and qualitative aspects. The data based on surveys constituted the quantitative aspect of the research, while the part based on observation and secondary data constituted the qualitative aspect. However, it should be stated that the main data collection tool was the questionnaire. The qualitative data collected through observation and secondary data techniques in particular were aimed to test, support and enable more concrete analyses of the quantitative data collected through survey.

The universe of the research was the provincial settlements within the Republic of Türkiye (T.C.). As it is known, T.C. is geographically divided into 7 main regions. These are; Marmara, Black Sea, Aegean, Central Anatolia, Eastern Anatolia, Mediterranean and Southeastern Anatolia. According to TÜİK data, 93.2% of the Turkish population lives in urban centers. For this reason, rural areas were not included in the sample. The research population consists of individuals between the ages of 18 - 25. The research took place in provinces selected based on "the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS)" regional classification, chosen according to population size, encompassing: a) mega and metropolitan cities, and b) relatively medium- and smaller-sized cities. The provinces where the research was conducted during the research process, the numerical and proportional sample distribution on an urban basis and the total of the surveys conducted can be given as follows: The field study is conducted in the following provinces of Türkiye: "Ankara (257-12%), Bursa (145-6,8%), Diyarbakir (106-5%), Erzurum (92-4,3%), Gaziantep (122-5,7%), Hatay (108-5%), Mersin (102-4,8%), Istanbul (375-17,5%), Izmir (196-9,2%), Konya (121 -5,7%), Samsun (100-4,7%), Sivas (78-3,6%), Tekirdağ (102-4,8%), Trabzon (85-4%), Tunceli (52-2,4), Van (99-4,6)" (Çağlar and Çağlar, 2024). Data were collected through face-to-face questionnaires conducted with 2,140 participants in urban centers across 16 provinces of Türkiye. A pilot study was conducted in Ankara. Consequently, a total of 2140 questionnaires were filled in face to face with the subjects and the field work of the research was concluded. It is paid attention in the field that all segments of youth to be represented. Such as gender and age distribution, youth in and out of education process. The

random sampling is deployed to reach research units. Participants answered a total of 51 questions, which are divided into four parts: socio-demographic background, economic conditions, political views, and migration and immigration.

The data entry coordinator re-checked all the questionnaires returned from the field, recorded them in the "Application Monitoring Tables" and coded the open-ended answers to a small number of questions that were not previously coded and some questions. After this, data entry and control were performed on personal computers using the data entry program prepared using the package program designed by PCEdit (The United Nations Software Package for Data Entry and Editing) - (UNFPA) United Nations Population Fund. After the data entry controls, frequencies and cross tables were created using IBM SPSS Statistics Data Editor v20, which offers a statistical program for social sciences. Then, these obtained data, tables, etc. were analyzed, evaluated and presented under the relevant headings.

Türkiye's youth population, according to the Nufusu.com (2023) and Euronews (2022), totals approximately 7,355,618 million individuals aged 18 to 24, a large proportion of whom voted for the first time in the 2023 elections, exercised their voice on Türkiye's future. Given the significance of this group, it is crucial to document their status, challenges, expectations, sociodemographic information, and their views on politics, the economy, and immigration in Türkiye.

As known, youth is a chronological phase during which individuals undergo physical and emotional changes, achieve sexual and psychosocial maturity, gain independence and social productivity, and experience a range of rapid developments (Özbay and Öztürk, 1992, p.12). Youth is a period in which conflicts, anxieties are experienced, anger, rebellion and selfishness are high, and on the other hand, it is a period in which the sense of independence, socialization, search for identity are intensified (Gündüz, 2020, p.1096).

Youth is also a critical resource for all nations, including Türkiye. Although various studies have periodically examined different youth segments, high school and university students, and age ranges from 15 – 25, or 15 – 30, as well as specific topics (such as political preferences and voting behavior) (Akdağ, 2021; Baş, 2017; British Council, undated; Genar Research, 2018; Konda, 2011; Kondrad Adenauer Stiftung-KAS, 2017; Saadet Party, 2017; Sencar, 2013; SODEV, 2020), none have been as extensive or contemporary as this research. Examining this important demographic from various perspectives will not only enhance understanding of the youth but also provide valuable data for policymakers and strategists. Consequently, a comprehensive field study was

conducted to gather the views, opinions, perspectives, and expectations of Turkish youth.

The primary questions addressed in this paper are as follows: What are the sociodemographic characteristics of Turkish youth? How do they define their identity and values? What are their aspirations and expectations for the future? How satisfied are they with their lives? What difficulties do they encounter in meeting their needs? What are their thoughts about living in Türkiye versus abroad? How do they evaluate Türkiye's economic situation? How do they define themselves ideologically, and where do they place themselves on the ideological spectrum? What are their political preferences and attitudes? Who is the political leader they most admire? If elections were held tomorrow, which political party would they consider supporting? Which political alliance do they prefer? What are their views on the challenges Türkiye faces? Lastly, what are their thoughts and attitudes toward immigrants in Türkiye? These issues were investigated thoroughly during the fieldwork.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Youth, in a sociological context, is not only a biological transitional period but also a specific life stage where the individual confronts social structures, and where forms of identity, belonging, and agency are shaped. Sociological research reveals that while analyzing youth as both a category and a social position, young people are not merely passive transition subjects; they are active social actors who produce meaning (Wyn & White, 1997). In this context, theoretical analyses of youth attempt to resolve individual experience by articulating it with social structures. For example, when looking at the "Biological and Psychodynamic Approaches", Hall (1904) defines youth as a "period of storm and stress" and states that this phase is "the scene of emotional turmoil, contradictory impulses, and moral confusion" (p. 86). Erikson (1968), on the other hand, sees youth as a phase in which an identity crisis is experienced in his theory of psychosocial development: "The young individual must form a sense of self that belongs to him; otherwise, he will be tossed about in a confusion of roles" (p. 128).

Rather than viewing adolescence as merely a transitional period, Arnett (2000) defines it as a developmental stage he calls "emerging adulthood." This period is a period in which young people, usually between the ages of 18 and 25, restructure their identities, independence, and social roles in transition to adulthood. Arnett states that during this period, individuals are able to escape from the responsibilities of earlier ages and are in the process of discovering their lives. This theory explains the adolescence period, especially in Western

societies, through factors such as the prolongation of the education process, and the delay in marriage and starting a family.

The sociological perspective evaluates youth through the lens of youth and social reproduction. Bourdieu (1986) argues that youth should be evaluated in the context of socio-cultural capital: "The cultural capital that individuals possess determines their place in social space" (p. 243). According to this perspective, youth is a threshold where existing class structures are reproduced or transformed. In addition, Bourdieu's conceptualization of habitus explains how individuals' class positions reflect in their patterns of behavior and preferences, showing that youth is an experience shaped by class: "Habitus is a structured structure of past experiences and a structuring structure of future practices" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53). In this context, youth become a field where existing class relations are reproduced or questioned. Furlong and Cartmel (2007) define youth in modern society as "self-directed individuals shaped within structural constraints" and highlight the concept of the "epistemological fallacy of choice". They say, "While young people think they are making choices, they are often actually responding to structural imperatives" (p. 8).

In sociological studies, youth is often examined through the lens of symbolic resistance to dominant cultural norms. The Birmingham School of Cultural Studies highlights youth as key players in subcultural resistance. For instance, Hebdige (1979), in his analysis of punk culture, argues that the alternative meanings young people assign to consumer goods serve as a form of "silent resistance". He states, "Subcultures are stylized, coded acts of rebellion against hegemonic discourse" (p. 17). This viewpoint positions youth not just as passive recipients of socialization but as active contributors to cultural production and agents of change.

When looking at the cultural theory of youth, it can be said that there is a view from subculture to identity politics. For example, Hebdige (1979) defines youth subcultures as a symbolic form of opposition to mainstream culture: "Subculture constitutes a symbolic rebellion against authority by transforming everyday objects" (p. 18). In this approach, youth are in the position of a cultural actor who constructs alternative forms of identity and belonging. Postmodern theorists, on the other hand, see youth as a subject with more fluid and multiple identities. Bauman (2000) defines individual identity in late modernity as "a structure that is constantly being restructured and escapes certainty" (p. 32).

Besides that, Ulrich Beck's (1992) conceptualization of the risk society is functional for understanding the uncertainty environment in which youth find themselves. In late modernity, individuals' life strategies must be shaped more

by individual decisions than by traditional structures. In this context, youth has transformed into a process of “coping with uncertainty rather than organizing the future” (Beck, 1992, p. 135). In this respect, youth become a “category of risk”; issues such as unemployment, insecurity, access to education, and social exclusion turn young people into a vulnerable social group.

When looking at youth in an economic and political context, under the shadow of neoliberal policies, youth has become a group that is economically insecure. Kelly (2006) explains this situation with the concept of “entrepreneurial self”: “The young individual is forced to index all the responsibilities of their life to their individual success” (p. 21). In other words, “The young individual has transformed into a subject who now takes on all the responsibilities of their life, acknowledging that their own failures are also their own responsibility” (p. 22). In this context, youth is evaluated both as a potential economic subject and as a social risk factor that needs to be continuously disciplined. It is defined as an economic actor that is constantly forced to “create its own brand” within the mythology of individual success.

Consequently, from a sociological perspective, youth is not just an age group; it is a socially constructed area woven with power relations. Different sociological approaches demonstrate how youth is understood in class, cultural, and structural contexts. This theoretical framework allows for the analysis of youth as an active component of social transformation rather than a passive transitional category.

As a concept, youth is seen as a transition period from childhood to adulthood, and during this period, the young person's personality and identity become clear as he/she undergoes biological, psychological and sociological changes (Baran, 2013, s. 6). This transitional phase between childhood and adulthood is a critical period for psycho-biological and social development, significantly influencing an individual's entire life (Cafoglu and Okçu, 2013, s. 84). The literature and numerous studies “refer to the biological stage before adulthood, categorized as childhood and youth. Considering pre-adulthood under these two headings offers a broad approach, as childhood and youth each differentiate themselves through distinct physical and mental criteria. The definition of pre-adulthood seems largely determined by social constructs” (KAS, 2021, s. 38). Concepts of both youth and childhood have evolved with cultural and historical shifts. According to Ansell (2005, s. 8–9), “childhood was considered synonymous with youth before the 15th century, with children seen as adults once they outgrew physical dependency”. The need to participate in production and economic life also historically defined youth in physical terms. In

its broadest sense, youth once referred to adapting to physical conditions and meeting basic needs independently.

With the advent of schooling in 19th-century nation-states, childhood became its own phase, and youth came to include mental as well as physical development. The youth concept now reflects political, economic, and social evolution of society. Today, beyond mere biological or physiological definitions, youth is seen as a critical factor shaping the political, economic, and social future, symbolizing the intersection of past and future.

Youth, within societies' political and social institutions, resists a universal conceptualization due to diverse cultural codes. However, youth can be universally characterized through the concepts associated with it. Warming (2013, s. 117), while recognizing youth as a complex construct, emphasizes its interpretation as a socially constructed phenomenon. Key concepts defining youth include “identity, family, education, production and consumption, employment and unemployment, media, technology, and the future” (2013, s. 117). In contemporary discourse, youth is examined through these lenses.

In line with this literature, the United Nations (UN) defines youth as a stage of biological, physiological, psychological, and sociological maturation, typically encompassing ages 15 to 24. This range, first noted in the “1981 UN Secretary-General's report”, was formally recognized in 1985 as statistical data. Notably, other UN bodies, such as “UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization)” and the “ILO (International Labour Organization)”, also define youth as ages 15 to 24. UN-HABITAT, however, sets the upper age limit at 32, while “the African Youth Charter” defines it as 35. These variations among global organizations highlight youth as a complex, multifaceted phenomenon that defies rigid definitions.

Individuals' personality traits often reflect their physical environments, indicating that identity—how individuals define themselves—emerges from multiple factors. Identity perceptions are influenced by factors like gender, “culture, cognitive development, socio-economic circumstances, and the political climate” (Bessant, 2021, s. 59). These elements converge during youth, a particularly formative stage, to shape identity. This identity, especially in political and economic contexts, represents valuable data as it encapsulates youth socialization elements. Additionally, today's “youth can articulate themselves more clearly than previous generations. Identity within the context of youth thus relates strongly to socialization” (Bessant, 2021, s. 59); it is considered an established construct, reflective of completed cognitive processes, which can

help predict collective youth actions. Viewed as an age-specific physical and biological stage, youth itself is often perceived as an identity.

“Family and educational institutions form the social structure that shapes identity, falling under youth’s scope in terms of their functionality. This framework also imparts a sense of responsibility, entrusting youth with the mission of raising future generations with socio-cultural distinctions” (KAS, 2021). In present contexts, individuals undergo pedagogical processes, first within the family and then in educational institutions, reflecting society’s-controlled progression. As known, education, family, and social environment are pivotal in shaping identity, ensuring individuals are integrated into society. According to literature, family - where social norms are learned- and education systems -where behaviors are sanctioned or disapproved- set standards by which youth are judged. Consequently, youth represent a crucial facet of human capital, tied to the family and education structures within societies (Nuggehalli, 2014, s. 18-19), and is regarded as a vital resource for national and international advancement.

The designation of youth as a central policy area for numerous institutions and organizations—including umbrella organizations like the United Nations, which emphasize education, occupation, and employment for youth—underscores its importance as human capital. Although youth populations vary by country, most nations prioritize “developing production and employment opportunities for youth. Youth unemployment is a pressing global issue, topping many national agendas. Significant budgets are allocated for projects and research to address youth unemployment, job insecurity, and related challenges, recognizing youth as a crucial component of human capital” (ILO, 2020, s. 43). According to the ILO’s “2012 Global Employment Report, 74.8 million youth aged 15–24 was unemployed in 2011, with global youth unemployment at 12.7%, a figure that has since increased”. The European Commission’s 2012 report highlighted a surge in unemployment to 22.6%, with youth unemployment potentially rising to 50% today (“Ministry of Development of the Republic of Türkiye”, 2015, s. 8-9).

Youth, central to policies for development goals, is also intrinsically linked to the future and its reliance on technology. “Expanding production and employment opportunities for youth and reducing youth unemployment is a critical strategy for the future of occupational opportunities” (ILO 2020). This issue, also discussed in the ILO’s reports, is addressed globally in relation to youth, education, employment, and technology (ILO, 2021). Unemployment’s long-term impact on societal wellbeing contributes to youth dissatisfaction, often as a regressive factor affecting societal development and welfare. Issues like

identity crises, stress, rising crime rates, and substance misuse emphasize the vital role youth play in national stability and progress. Hence, a clear need exists for further academic research to deepen our understanding of youth and the implications for society.

Generation Z as a Global Youth Designation

It should be noted that "Generation Z" does not exclusively refer to youth. When defining the characteristic traits of different generations over time, a common perception emerges due to the overlap between generational distinctions and the fact that Generation Z is currently in its youth phase. This term represents a transitional period between generations. However, it is widely used in research because it aligns with the youth stage and possesses distinct traits that enable a global characterization.

Throughout history, societies have undergone significant turning points, such as revolutions, wars, and large-scale transformations. However, in today's world, these changes occur almost instantly, resembling a domino effect. This rapid acceleration is largely attributed to technological advancements. As discussed in the context of youth, the strong connection between technology and the future is widely acknowledged.

This group differs significantly from previous generations both physiologically and psychologically, forming its own cultural norms. While some view this generation as a "troubled youth" due to perceived identity loss and cultural and linguistic shifts, members of this generation often feel misunderstood by society. Nevertheless, it is assumed that the Internet Youth play a crucial role in shaping political and social values in their societies.

The younger generation could rapidly share their thoughts and concerns, ensuring that their voices reach decision-makers and thereby broadening the scope of democratic participation. A study conducted in Germany reveals that the majority of young people consider democracy the most favorable form of governance. With the rise of widespread internet access, youth have found new ways to engage in political activities, such as participating in digital campaigns like "Online Signature."

Findings from the 17th Shell Youth Research study indicate that today's youth are increasingly influential in shaping policies and the future. Traditional forms of political engagement have been largely replaced by newer methods of advocacy and civic participation. The study highlights several key trends (Albert, Hurrelmann, and Quenzel, 2015):

- “A growing preference for flexible work arrangements
- Increasing optimism despite ongoing challenges
- The recognition of education reform as a pressing issue
- The rise of a pragmatic generation
- Growing concerns about immigration
- The expansion of an online work culture
- Unemployment as a major concern”

According to the Youth Study Group Report from Türkiye, young people consider youth unemployment to be one of the most pressing global challenges. The youth unemployment rate has surged to two or three times that of the adult population, particularly in the aftermath of global economic crises, which have fueled political and social movements. The report highlights that the primary catalyst for movements such as "Occupy Wall Street" was unemployment. Frustrated and unemployed young people have been given various labels, including “Şebab-ı Atılın,” “Neets,” “Bumerangs,” “Freeters,” and “Mileuristas” (Ministry of Development of the Republic of Türkiye, 2015: 8-9). This widespread frustration has played a central role in driving social movements. Ultimately, it can be argued that today's youth, particularly in Western countries, are increasingly willing to express their opinions and challenge societal norms.

Youth in Türkiye

Türkiye, in terms of population size, “ranks third among European countries and eighteenth globally. According to the latest 2024 population projections, although Türkiye’s population is expected to increase by 2050” (TurkStat, 2025; IPA (2025), its young population is projected to decline. In 2024, young people made up 15.1% of Türkiye's total population, with 85,372,377 people and approximately 12,872,39 individuals aged 15–24 (TUIK, 2025). “The largest age group within this young population”, according to the 2022 bulletin, is aged 20–22 (30,2%). Specifically, 29,7% of the young population falls within the 15–17 age range, 19.1% within 18–19, 30.2% within 20–22, and 21% within 23–24” (TUIK 2025).

According to TurkStat's projections, the proportion of youth within the total population is expected to drop slightly. During 2007-2008, when Türkiye's young population reached its peak, youth represented 17.6% of the population. However, it is forecasted to decrease further to 14% by 2030, 13.4% by 2040, 11.8% by 2060, and ultimately reach a low of 11.1% by 2080. Notably, while the

average young population in European Union countries is 10.6%, Türkiye's youth population stands at 15.4%, a statistically significant difference" (TurkStat, 2024). The anticipated decline in the youth population is likely to have significant socioeconomic implications in both the medium and long term. The long-term effects of reduced population growth highlight the need to align educational outcomes with labor market demands and to improve young people's ability to secure or create jobs. This decrease in the youth demographic could present challenges for the labor market and social security systems. Consequently, it is essential to boost the economic participation of young individuals and strengthen social support frameworks (Köse, 2024, p. 133).

The table below highlights "various age groups and gender distribution within Türkiye's young population based on 2018 data and projections up to 2023" from TurkStat Population Projection. The 2023 projection, approaching rapidly, shows a slight increase in ages 0–4, reflecting a recent rise in birth rate. However, a decrease is observed in older age groups. The 20–24 age group, representing a critical and productive segment of the labor force, is projected to "decline from 6.674.359 in 2040 to 6.352.484 in 2060". Additionally, according to the "ILO's 2021 COVID-19 Report", Türkiye has a considerable proportion of youth aged 15–24 who are "neither in education nor in employment" (ILO, 2021). At 26%, Türkiye has the highest proportion of youth among EU member states and candidate countries. Given these trends, "several development strategies have been introduced to enhance the living conditions and welfare of Türkiye's youth, recognizing them as a valuable source of human capital" ("Ministry of Development of the Republic of Türkiye", 2018, s. 44).

Table 1. TurkStat Population Projection 2018-2023 (TUIK, 2021)

Age Group	2018			2023		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Total	81.867.223	41.059.075	40.808.147	86.907.367	43.550.799	43.356.568
0 – 4	6.544.781	3.357.981	3.186.800	6.599.993	3.386.114	3.213.879
5 – 9	6.336.787	3.253.192	3.083.595	6.611.610	3.392.094	3.219.516
10 – 14	6.322.223	3.244.584	3.077.639	6.389.780	3.280.588	3.109.193
15 – 19	6.402.806	3.288.016	3.114.790	6.366.376	3.267.709	3.098.667
20 – 24	6.523.846	3.333.076	3.190.769	6.456.912	3.307.626	3.149.286

Source: TÜİK (2021) *Istatistiklerle Gençlik 2020*,
<https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Istatistiklerle-Genclik-2020-37242>

In summary, the youth play a crucial role in shaping Türkiye's future. Their perspectives on the country's economic conditions, political landscape, and immigration issues provide valuable insights for understanding Türkiye today.

Findings and Discussion

In this section, the findings obtained from the analysis are presented proportionally below. To begin, the socio-demographic information and findings related to the participants are provided.

Socio-Demographic Findings

The 56% of participants were women, and 44% were men. In Türkiye, the male-female population distribution varies according to age. The age distributions of participants are as follows: 19.4% were aged 18-19, 32.2% were aged 20-21, 28.6% were aged 22-23, and 19.8% were aged 24-25. Notably, since the previous election was held in 2018 (General Elections and Presidential Elections), approximately 52% of the participants were below voting age at that time. Therefore, young people became a significant factor in the local and general elections held in March and May 2024.

Regarding education level, most participants were 'high school or equivalent school graduates' (63.3%). However, since the survey asked about the highest level of schooling completed, the high percentage of high school graduates reflects the participants' status as current students, primarily university students.

Among the young population surveyed, 27.4% held paid jobs, while nearly three out of four did not. This high percentage of non-employed respondents likely reflects their status as students and contributes to the high rate of youth unemployment. These findings are also supported by other studies (Orkunoglu Şahin, 2020, s.137).

Across the country, a significant portion of the young population enrolled in education is outside the labor force, indicating an untapped potential. Of those employed, the majority (58.4%) worked as laborers, while 13.5% were civil servants, 12.1% had qualified professions, and 10.3% were tradespeople. Economic challenges appear to impact students significantly. Of the participants, 61.3% reported economic difficulties, while only 12.6% reported no financial issues. Moreover, 84.4% stated that they had reduced their spending due to

economic constraints, indicating the high impact of the country's economic situation on young people. Although 50.4% had trouble covering educational expenses, a substantial figure, suggesting that financial challenges are an obstacle to a quality educational experience. Internet and phone service expenses are also a significant issue, with 51.4% of students reporting difficulties in covering these costs. Given the importance of internet access for educational purposes, reducing these barriers would likely improve the quality of education. Nutritional expenses also posed challenges, with over half (55.4%) of students having trouble, while 24.7% reported no issues, and 20% rated their difficulty level as moderate. An examination of the data from the SEKAM (2013) project titled "Youth in Türkiye" which asked participants about their most significant issues, identified the top five concerns as education, moral degeneration, acquiring a profession, difficulty finding employment, and a lack of understanding from their families. This study also redefines these problems in a similar context.

Concern about the quality of modern life is a characteristic feature of contemporary society, and in parallel with developing technologies, the individual's sense of seeking quality in life has also developed (Pacione, 2003, p. 19). When asked about their life satisfaction, only 17.3% expressed satisfaction with their current lives. In contrast, 30% reported dissatisfaction, while 52.5% were neutral, expressing neither satisfaction nor dissatisfaction. The Life Satisfaction Survey (LSS), guided by Future Expectations indicators, assesses individuals' subjective happiness, social values, overall satisfaction in key life areas, and contentment with public services. In 2014, 61.2% of young people aged 18-24 reported feeling happy, while 77% of those aged 18-29 expressed hope for the future (Baş, 2017: 268). In addition, according to the Millennial Dialogue Report on Türkiye's millennial youth, 72% of respondents expressed general satisfaction with their lives, while 73% reported feeling optimistic about the future (TDE, 2025). In the youth survey conducted by the Serhat Development Agency in 2018 in the TRA-2 region, the rate of young people who declared that they were happy was 64.6 percent (Serka, 2025, s. 36). These data highlight a significant shift in attitudes from 2014 to 2024. As known, life satisfaction issues faced by young people, primarily stemming from economic and socio-cultural factors, can lead to pessimism. This makes it challenging for them to approach the future with confidence. Such circumstances may result in depressive behaviors and can manifest as internal conflict. Consequently, as the weight of their concerns—rooted in both past and present conditions—grows, it becomes increasingly likely that they will lose hope for their future (Serka, 2025, s. 203). In addition, it can be said that the findings regarding the life satisfaction of young people also point to another remarkable dimension. As Docquier and Marfouk

(2006) emphasized, the decline in education, work, earnings and general life satisfaction may indicate a decline in social welfare and may also bring about problems such as the departure of highly qualified young people from the country.

Regarding their primary goals and aspirations, 46.7% of participants cited "having a good life" as their top priority. Starting their own business was a goal for 17.5%, while 16.1% aspired to wealth. Other responses included "getting married and establishing a family" (8.1%), "obtaining a good education" (6.2%), and "finding a job" (5.3%). Helping young people identify their life purpose can enhance their potential, enable them to use their energy more effectively, and make their efforts in life more meaningful. Conversely, a lack of clarity about their purpose can lead to uncertainty about their identity and future, feelings of insignificance, and a depletion of their life energy (Budak and Yıldız, 2022, p. 49).

Participants were also asked if they would prefer to live in Türkiye or another country if given the choice; 63% expressed a desire to live elsewhere, while 37% preferred Türkiye. Among those wishing to relocate, Germany, the USA, and the UK were the most popular destinations. Their reasons included better living conditions (47.8%), greater freedom (20.7%), a lack of personal safety in Türkiye (16.8%), and better job opportunities abroad (14.7%). These findings indicate that Turkish youth generally harbor negative feelings and thoughts about their country. However, it is important to highlight that a well-educated and skilled workforce is crucial for the future of any nation.

Regarding their relationship with religion, more than half (56.6%) stated that they believe in God but did not consider themselves very religious. A total of 23.7% identified as very religious believers, while 7.8% described themselves as Deists and 6.7% as Atheists. An additional 5.2% chose not to respond to this question. These findings indicate that Turkish youth adopt a relatively liberal perspective on religious beliefs and practices compared to older generations. They tend to identify less with religious labels and embrace a more secular viewpoint.

Views on Economic Conditions of Türkiye

This section includes the participants' opinions and evaluations regarding Türkiye's economic situation. Firstly, evaluations of Türkiye's economic development level are presented. When asked about Türkiye's level of economic development, nearly three-quarters of the participants (73%) stated that "Türkiye is an underdeveloped or developing country". The percentage of those who consider Türkiye to be a moderately developed country is 22.9%, while only 1.7% view Türkiye as a highly developed or developed country.

Participants were also asked to assess the success of the government's current economic policies. A group of 48.7% rated these policies as absolutely unsuccessful, and this percentage rises to 80.6% when including those who found them unsuccessful to any degree. Conversely, only 3.9% of participants found the government's economic policies absolutely successful or successful. When evaluating Türkiye's overall economic situation, more than half (55.9%) described it as very bad, while 30.3% rated it as bad. In total, 86.2% of the participants perceived Türkiye's economic situation as bad or very bad, with only 2.6% describing it as good or very good. Less than half of the participants identified as having any political affiliation, suggesting that the negative views on the economic situation are based more on personal economic experiences rather than political biases. Regarding income distribution, a majority of 88.7% stated that income distribution in Türkiye is unbalanced and unequal, while only 0.7% perceived it as balanced and equal.

When considering these findings collectively, it becomes clear that Turkish youth view Türkiye as a developing country. In 2003, Türkiye was the 18th largest economy globally, and by 2021, it had climbed to 11th place, showcasing significant growth. However, current challenges such as a low growth rate, inability to maintain potential growth, a high current account deficit, substantial budget deficit, soaring inflation, a high demand for external financing, a disorganized tax structure, and low savings rates are evident in the economic landscape. These issues understandably contribute to the negative perceptions held by the youth.

When questioned about unemployment in Türkiye, a significant proportion (84.6%) stated that unemployment rates in Türkiye are very high. Only 1.2% felt there was no unemployment issue, and 10.4% considered current unemployment levels to be normal. Those who acknowledged unemployment were asked to identify its causes, with multiple answers allowed. Of these participants, 36.2% attributed unemployment to inequality of opportunity in Türkiye, 34.6% to a lack of government investment and resulting job scarcity, and 29.9% to issues within the education and training system.

In Türkiye, the employment rate stands at 66% for men, while it is significantly lower at 31.9% for women. Additionally, the labor force participation rate has decreased from 53.6% to 53.2%, reaching its lowest point since November 2023. Meanwhile, the youth unemployment rate has increased slightly from 14.9% to 15.0%, representing the highest level since July 2012 (Trade Economics, 2025). It can be inferred that concerns about the future, particularly

the fear of not being able to secure employment easily, have significantly influenced these findings.

Acknowledging the Turkish Lira's devaluation in recent years and its resulting inflationary impact, participants were asked if and how this situation had influenced their consumption habits. According to the responses, 84% stated they had limited and reduced their consumption in the past year. Meanwhile, 13% reported no change in their consumption, and only 3% indicated an increase in consumption over the past year. Based on findings, it would not be wrong to say that the high inflation experienced in Türkiye in recent years has significantly weakened the purchasing power of young people.

Views on Political Conditions of Türkiye

In this section, participants' opinions and evaluations of Türkiye's political situation and issues are explored. Firstly, participants were questioned about their views on the management style of the current government. They were asked to what extent they found certain practices appropriate. When asked if they found the government's administration style effective, 70.4% stated they did not consider it efficient, while only 6.2% found the practices appropriate. In terms of justice practices, 81.2% found them unfair, while just 3.8% considered them fair. Similarly, 83.8% of participants disapproved of the government's economic policies, with only 3% finding them appropriate. Furthermore, 75.7% viewed the government's current education policies negatively, and just 4.1% approved of them. It is clear that Turkish youth are not happy with the current political and economic management of the country.

On privatization practices, 66.9% of participants felt the government's approach was incorrect, while 5.2% approved, and 28% neither approved nor disapproved. Regarding minimum wage policy, 75% found it insufficient, with only 4.8% deeming it sufficient, and 20.2% held neutral opinions. For environmental policies, 56.9% did not approve of the government's approach, 34.6% were neutral, and 8.5% approved. The government's climate and environmental policies saw the lowest approval rates (6%), the 73,3% disapproved. Additionally, regarding human rights practices, 73.3% disapproved, while 6% approved. The sale of real estate to foreign nationals was opposed by 81.1% of participants, with just 3.3% in favor, while 15.5% were neutral. Based on these findings, it is possible to say that Turkish youth mostly have negative opinions about the current government's approach to privatization, environmental policies, real estate sales to foreigners and basic human rights in the country.

When asked about their satisfaction with Türkiye's current administration, 69.6% expressed dissatisfaction. A group of 20.9% viewed the it as moderate, and only 2.2% were highly satisfied. Regarding Türkiye's future, 39.4% of participants expressed hope, while 27.2% felt pessimistic. A further 22.6% stated that Türkiye's situation has remained the same and is unlikely to change, with only 6.2% optimistic about Türkiye's future. Almost all young participants (98.4%) believed there were problems in Türkiye, while only 1.6% said otherwise. Among those who acknowledged issues, economic conditions were cited as the most significant (16.5%), followed closely by unemployment and justice at 15.3% each, nepotism and corruption at 14.8%, the education system at 14%, terrorism at 12.2%, and security issues at 11.9%. Economic conditions, justice, and unemployment were the most prominent issues. On public sector recruitment, 71.3% of participants believed it lacked competence and merit, while 19.1% felt it was partially based on merit, and only 2.4% believed it was entirely merit-based. Overall, 97.6% indicated that recruitment does not fully or partially adhere to merit. In other words, almost all of the Turkish youth stated that there are problems in Türkiye. It was also determined that economic problems and unemployment were at the top of the list of these problems. However, a significant majority stated that there was no merit and talent-based recruitment in public sector employment.

When asked about their political orientation, more than half (51.4%) did not identify with either the right or left, and 19.5% declined to answer, possibly due to the current political climate. 12.8% identified as center-left, and 7.4% as center-right. Far-right and far-left affiliations were low at 2.3% and 5.2%, respectively. These results suggest that criticisms of government practices are objective rather than politically motivated. In terms of ideological identity, 37.6% identified as "Atatürkist," 17.1% were apolitical, and 12.8% did not answer. These findings align with the earlier question on political spectrum, indicating that traditional political identities are less meaningful among today's youth. Another important finding of the study is that Turkish youth, compared to previous generations, no longer define themselves with old sharp ideological identities. This situation can be considered a positive development for Türkiye. Because the fact that the youth have moved away from the habit of ideologically alienating each other is of great importance in terms of social unity and the culture of living together.

Political party membership among participants was 4.8%, compared to a national average of 16%, with 13.5% of these members affiliated with the AK Party. Of the young people who participated in the 2018 general elections, 47% had previously voted, with 53% abstaining. Among voters, CHP was most popular

at 33.6%, followed by AK Party at 14.9%, while 28.4% declined to answer. Looking at current voting intentions, 79.6% said they would vote if an election were held tomorrow, while 9% would abstain, and 11.4% were undecided. Among those willing to vote, 33.8% preferred CHP, while 33.6% did not disclose their choice, and AK Party's support had dropped to 7.1%. Among non-voters, 65.5% cited distrust in political parties, and 31.4% felt voting would not make a difference. Regarding alliances, 46.7% favored the "Millet Alliance," while 10.3% chose the "Cumhur Alliance." Notably, 20.4% were undecided, and 22.5% opposed both alliances. Opinions on the concept of alliances were divided: 36.2% viewed them positively, 31.6% negatively, and 32.2% had no opinion.

When asked if they followed Türkiye's daily news, 85.5% said yes, and social media and internet sources were the most common platforms (52%), followed by TV channels at 22.9%. Newspaper readership was the lowest at 6.3%. Social media is used actively by almost all young people, with 42% spending 1–3 hours daily, 34.6% spending 4–6 hours, and platforms like "WhatsApp (87.6%), YouTube (76.1%), Instagram (73.7%), and Twitter (X) (41.7%)" were the most used. Most participants used social media as an instrument such as to make friends, watching videos, playing games with few using it for research or personal development. This generation was born into an era of rapid technological development and globalization. Representing the global youth population, this generation has effortless access to information and is highly proficient in using digital communication tools. Having grown up in a technologically advanced world after the new millennium, they prefer to build social connections through social media. Due to these traits, they are often referred to as the "Internet Youth" on a global scale.

Asked about their favorite politician, Mansur Yavaş was chosen by 42%, Ekrem İmamoğlu by 16.3%, and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan by 11.1%. Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, a prominent candidate from the six-party alliance, was favored by only 2.6%. For the Presidency, Yavaş was the top choice (53.5%), followed by İmamoğlu (21.8%) and Erdoğan (14.7%), suggesting a strong preference for Yavaş as a candidate. When comparing the current Presidential Government System to the previous parliamentary system, 74.3% felt the parliamentary system was better suited for Türkiye, while 25.2% favored the Presidential Government System.

Asked about future issues facing Türkiye, almost all participants (98.3%) anticipated challenges. Economic problems were most cited (89.2%), followed by immigration problem (48.8%), and terrorism and radicalism (37.6%). When the responses were collectively analyzed, the most prominent three issues were

economic problems (32.2%), immigration (27.3%), and terrorism and radicalism (15.8%). When analyzing the youth's views on Türkiye's future, it is noted that the country may face significant challenges, with economic issues and those stemming from migration being the most critical.

Views Concerning Immigrants in Türkiye

In this section, the opinions and evaluations of research participants regarding immigrants in Türkiye are presented. When asked to evaluate the current government policies and practices towards immigrants in Türkiye, nearly all participants (91.8%) stated that they disapprove of the current policies and believe they should be changed. A very small segment (2.3%) expressed approval of these policies, stating they should be continued as they are. Regarding aid provided to immigrants, nearly two-thirds of the participants (62.7%) believed that only the immigrants' basic needs should be met. The second largest group (26.8%) indicated that immigrants should not receive any assistance. A small group (4.9%) stated that Türkiye should meet all needs of immigrants. When asked about the adaptation of immigrants to Turkish society, a large group (87.1%) expressed doubt that immigrants would integrate into Turkish society. In contrast, a small group (4.5%) believed that immigrants would adapt and integrate.

Participants were also asked what should be done with the immigrants currently residing in Türkiye. A majority (67%) stated that all immigrants should be sent back to their home countries. The second largest group (14.3%) believed immigrants should be sent to other countries. Only a small group (1.4%) felt that immigrants should be allowed to stay in Türkiye. Negative sentiments towards the presence of immigrants were evident, with 91.4% of participants expressing dissatisfaction with their presence. Additionally, 90.1% felt that immigrants disrupt Türkiye's demographic structure, and 78.8% believed that immigrants do not significantly contribute to the Turkish economy. These findings indicate a general negative attitude among participants toward immigrants in Türkiye.

When asked whether immigrants pose a threat to Türkiye's future, 80.8% of participants stated that they do, while only 8.4% believed they do not. Similarly, when asked if granting citizenship to immigrants is appropriate, 89.6% of participants said it is not, and they do not approve of citizenship being granted to immigrants. Only 4.4% found it acceptable. Participants were also questioned about whether immigrants should have the right to vote in Turkish elections. Here, 92.6% felt it is inappropriate for immigrants to vote, while only 4% approved of immigrants having voting rights in Türkiye.

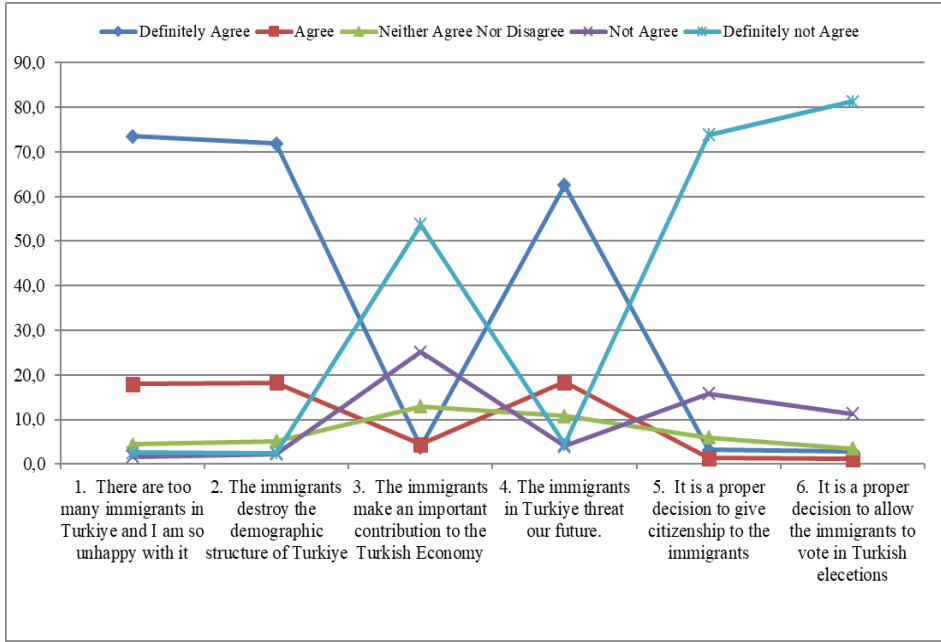


Figure 1. Thoughts on Immigrants

This chart is designed to summarize the results given above. Among the mentioned issues, those with the highest levels of dissatisfaction are, respectively, immigrants voting in elections, the granting of citizenship, and concerns about their numbers being too high and disrupting the country's demographic structure. In other words, the immigrant's problem has been one of the important discussion topics since the first day. It is possible to say that especially in Türkiye, which is the country hosting the largest refugee population among the countries in the world, there are important concerns among its citizens about the demographic changes that may occur in the future and the disharmony that the refugees will create. It is possible to say that this issue is a common concern not only for the youth but also for the majority of all citizens.

Conclusion

This paper is based on primary data collected through a field survey conducted in 16 provinces across Türkiye, categorized by regions according to NUTS1. Researchers' observation notes were also utilized in both analysis and evaluation. The findings of the study are presented under subheadings based on various topics. The following conclusion is drawn from these findings: "Turkish

youth are, above all, far from uninformed about what is happening in the world; they are not merely seeking pleasure and are certainly not carefree, as some allege. On the contrary, they have opinions about almost everything—from education to politics, from unemployment to immigration” (KAS, 2021, s. 378).

The changes in Türkiye's youth population over years present both opportunities and considerable challenges, along with long-term risks. It is crucial to develop comprehensive policies that address the specific needs of Turkish youth.

“The educational level of participants is significantly higher than that of their parents, with more than half having completed high school or an equivalent degree. Compared to their parents, there is an increased number of youths who speak a language other than Turkish, with English being the most widely spoken foreign language. They believe that they don't receive enough attention and care” (KAS, 2021, s. 378). They feel they are not given needed opportunities to improve their abilities and to contribute more to Türkiye. They often feel left to their own devices. Additionally, they expressed dissatisfaction with current education system, stating that frequent changes to educational and examination systems have only led to despair and pessimism. Most of the youth do not have a regular income and primarily rely on their parents' financial support.

It is found that “the Turkish youth are generally positive about male-female relationships outside of marriage and find such a relationship as normal. It is possible to say that they exhibit an open-minded and understanding approach. Further, the Turkish youth (80%) believe that men and women are equal, and 10.6% even think that women are superior to men” (KAS, 2021, s. 378-380).

Today, young people face challenges across various domains, including psychological, sociological, physiological, ideological, economic, and intergenerational conflicts. While youth issues differ by region and country, they are often categorized and analyzed under similar themes (UN, 2017). Among these, education and unemployment are particularly prominent. Turkish youth is particularly concerned about economic crises, unemployment, and poor educational quality in Türkiye. They also identify issues such as preferential treatment, corruption, nepotism, favoritism, the lack of equal employment opportunities, an excessive number of universities, and a surplus of unemployed university graduates as significant problems facing the country.

Turkish youth show relatively low interest in intellectual activities. That is, they rarely read books outside of textbooks. Although some have attended

theatre plays at some point, they very rarely enjoying opera, ballet, or classical music performances. Instead, they generally spend their free time surfing the internet and playing games on their computers or mobile phones.

In addition, almost none of them are affiliated with or work for NGOs. They follow current affairs in Türkiye and around the world primarily through their mobile phones. Many Turkish youth indicated that if given the chance, they would relocate and build their future in Western countries, ideally in Europe and the Scandinavian region.

The Turkish youth expressed significant dissatisfaction with the current Turkish political administration. A considerable portion does not view Türkiye's future as bright and is not hopeful about it. They identified various challenges in Türkiye and attributed these issues to politicians. They think that all politicians, including those in government and opposition, along with the President, are accountable. That is, opposition parties share responsibility for the problems experienced in Türkiye. While some who hold this view support the current government, they argue that opposition parties have failed to present a viable alternative, "thus enabling the AKP to remain in power and contributing to the problems faced. The Turkish youth is quite sensitive to environmental issues, human and animal rights, feeling that these topics receive insufficient attention in Türkiye. The most mentioned issues are violence against women and child sexual abuse" (KAS, 2021, s. 378-380).

"The Turkish youth have gradually distanced themselves from political ideologies, unlike the youth of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s" (KAS, 2021, s. 380). Although the most expressed ideological identity is "Atatürkist-Kemalist," a significant group (18.8%) did not identify with any ideology, declaring, "I have no ideology" or "I am apolitical". This shift can be considered as a significant development. Despite the prevalent polarization and marginalization in Türkiye, youth are increasingly moving away from ideological categorizations, which represents a notable advancement in terms of social unity and coexistence. Turkish youth generally express a lack of trust in political parties, the justice system, journalists, television producers, clerics, law enforcement, politicians, and the President. In contrast, they express the most trust in scientists and the military.

Compared to previous generations, Turkish youth show less concern for relatives and neighbors. They care more about their friends. During this time, young people tend to gravitate towards their friends, believing that these peers understand them better. However, family love remains crucial, which is why parents continue to serve as a significant source of trust for young people (Ekşi,

1982). Their primary goals are to be ethical individuals and to achieve financial success. However, they express dissatisfaction with their current lives, reporting conflicts primarily with their parents. They make most life decisions either independently or jointly with their parents.

“Turkish youth do not trust global powers such as NATO, the EU, the U.S., Russia, China, England, and France” (KAS, 2021, s. 380). They express slightly more trust in Germany than in the other countries surveyed, likely due to the significant Turkish population living there and the presence of relatives. A substantial proportion of Turkish youth (42%) support Türkiye's eventual full EU membership, while 40.5% are uncertain about the issue and 14.2% oppose it.

The Turkish youth have also shown sensitivity to immigration issues, which can be seen as a “social phobia.” In particular, there is a growing anti-immigrant sentiment toward Syrian and Afghan immigrants, a topic that has garnered widespread discussion in recent years. Consequently, Turkish youth have expressed disapproval of the current immigration policies in Türkiye.

First and foremost, it is essential to support young people in their journey toward becoming individuals. While the youth phase is a natural part of development, it is a critical pre-adulthood stage that requires careful management and guidance. It is not just the responsibility of parents; everyone has a role to play. To help young people emerge from this phase as mature and prepared individuals, collaboration among families, schools, social environments, media, and current management systems is essential. By understanding and supporting these young individuals through their challenges and helping them find solutions, we can foster a stronger society. It's important to remember that today's youth will become the parents, teachers, leaders, lawyers, artists, and engineers of tomorrow. The educational challenges, unemployment, social issues, economic hardships, and the expectations placed on them are not burdens they should bear alone (Kayatürk, 2025).

To assess the outcomes of economic and social policies shaping the future of Turkish society and to inform the development of new initiatives, it is vital to launch comprehensive, longitudinal research programs. These programs should regularly monitor the social transformation of young people across various parameters. In other words, we must adhere to the principle that “those who cannot design their future cannot manage it.” Given this reality, it is crucial for Türkiye's future that policymakers and decision-makers prioritize research focused on youth and collect scientific data. This information should guide the creation of a brighter future for the country.

Çıkar Çatışması Bildirimi: Yazarlar, çıkar çatışması bildirmemiştir.

Ek Beyan: Çalışmaya 1. yazar %50, 2. yazar %50 oranında katkı sağlamıştır.

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