

Special Issue

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CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY-TURKEY

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: THE GATEWAY TO CITIZENSHIP

Democratic participation for beginners: what is it, why is it important and how can it be ensured? - **Murat Özbank**

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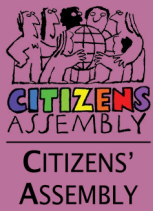
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IN THIS ISSUE

In this issue of **saha** we focus on the theme of political participation. We question the methods and conditions under which citizens can exist in the political arena and their ability to intervene effectively in the decisions shaping their lives. To do this adequately, it is undoubtedly necessary to approach politics and the political field beyond the confines of its usual boundaries. In other words, it is essential to look one step ahead of politics, understood in a narrow sense, and identify the connections or disconnections between different forms of political activity and institutional politics. Taking up this perspective, in this issue we consider a broader political field that also includes non-governmental organizations and social movements.

It is not easy under these circumstances. Society in Turkey is waiting for the upcoming elections with bated breath, to make the most clichéd analogy. Everyone knows that the 2023 elections will be a decisive turning point in many respects. While the meaning of politics is normally narrowed down to merely encompass the electoral process, it is necessary to think about politics both in terms of elections and beyond these elections and their related institutional political structures. Despite all the difficulties, this reframing of the meaning of politics is more important than ever in trying to make sense of our current complexities and dilemmas.

All these debates, tensions, or ambiguities are certainly not unique to our present moment or geographic location. There have been other societies that have passed through such stops in the past, as they are doing today. From a broader perspective, it is possible to identify common tendencies that are shaping the political universe of many societies across the world today. Likewise, the gradual narrowing of the political field through an increasingly technical turn—that is, the exclusion of important issues that are affecting the lives of ordinary people directly or indirectly from the political negotiation process—is a widespread phenomenon. After 1980, as the right and left of the political spectrum increasingly converged, particularly in the context of economic decisions, many essential topics, from employment to social assistance, from urban policies to environmental policies, were perceived as non-political issues. In one sense, we are living in a world in which the belief in political parties and politics as a whole has been shaken; the existence of conventional political parties has not disappeared, but the way they are acting in the political arena has been transformed.

On the other hand, the technicalization of politics and the loss of its political character in a real sense, and thus the decline of democratic participation and the re-emergence of a form of authoritarianism in its place, have had the effect of strengthening other types of authoritarian tendencies. As populist movements and parties, doubtful of the coldness of the world of experts and bureaucrats, are increasing the heat of political negotiation processes, the actual political appearance of the masses as citizens is, once again, being paradoxically hindered. We are witnessing how such formations, which are reducing the participation of citizens merely to that of voting in the elections, and re-establishing the relationship between the leader, the party, and the voters as a one-sided and one-dimensional bond, are reinforcing the crisis of democracy we are experiencing.

Understanding this moment of crisis requires rethinking the relationship between citizenship and politics. This is only possible through a perspective that seeks to understand why the institutional political sphere, the election, and voter concepts are so strong on the one hand, while trying to grasp the meaning of politics beyond the institutional political field and the forms of citizenship that are emerging from this sphere on the other.

DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION FOR BEGINNERS: WHAT IS IT, WHY IS IT IMPORTANT AND HOW CAN IT BE ENSURED?

It is essential to reflect on the different forms and levels of political participation in order to be able to understand contemporary populist regimes and, more importantly, to be able to construct a democratic alternative to them. Political scientist Murat Özbek discusses the criteria of a democratic regime based on the principle of actual autonomy, which would not result in populism, in his article in which he compares two different models of democracy.

In its broadest definition, “democracy” is a style of “autonomy” that allows equal and free people who are sharing a common life in a common time and space (or geography) to govern themselves; that is, allowing people to establish and implement the rules that regulate that common life and to which everyone who

shares it, and the policies that affect it, has to abide together. The prerequisite of the concept of democracy is this principle of “autonomy.” Every community that defines itself as “democratic” claims to be (i) composed of equal and free people, (ii) claims to have implemented this principle of autonomy in one way or another, that

is, by allowing the governed to *participate* in the governing in one way or another. In other words, the question of how “democratic” a community is depends on the extent to which the people who make up that community have a say in the ruling of that community (i.e., in the creation and implementation of the rules



Photo: Eyem Nazler



that everyone is obliged to obey, and the policies that affect everyone) – that is, to what extent they can *participate* in the governing.

It is much easier to implement democracy in this “pure” form among a small group of people. For example, it’s not difficult for seven people who want to establish an association to sit around a table, talk to each other, discuss, convince each other, determine the fields of activity of the association, write the bylaws, create the work schedule, distribute the tasks, supervise the tasks performed, change the ones who’ve been appointed if necessary, etc. As long as an association established in this way continues to operate in the same way, the free members of the association are *participating* equally in the management of the association. In such a scenario, we can assert that the above-mentioned principle of autonomy has been implemented, and, in this sense, the

association is operating in a “democratic” manner.

It gets complicated when we start to think of democracy in the context of larger human communities. For example, when we say that a modern society, composed of more than 60 million equal and free adults with different ethnic and gender identities and with different thought or belief systems, has (or should have) a “democratic” style of government, we probably don’t mean that these 60 million people establish (or should establish) the rules and policies governing their common life by gathering around a giant table. So, how should it work? In other words, how is it possible for adults living in such a large, complex, crowded society with intellectual and conscientious diversity to “participate” in the governing of that society as equal people, and thus implement the “democratic autonomy principle” mentioned above?

In contemporary democracy theory, this question is answered roughly in two different ways. The first model that comes to mind when democracy is mentioned in Turkey, of which the conceptual origins date back to Max Weber, which was popularized by Joseph Schumpeter after the Second World War, and which political theorists call “minimalist” or “competitive elitist,” is based on the principles of the governed people participating in the creation of common rules and policies through representatives.¹ In this model a large number of equal and free people elect a small number of representatives who reflect their political views, and then these representatives gather among themselves and, by talking, discussing, persuading, or agreeing with each other, they make or change the laws that everyone in that society is obliged to obey. The government, which is elected by these representatives in parliamentary systems and directly by the people in

presidential systems, determines and executes policies that will affect the whole society within the framework of these laws. Both the elected legislators and the government, using the executive power, give an account of the laws they are making and the policies they are implementing to the people who are electing them in elections held at regular intervals.

It can be claimed that this “minimalist” model implements the democratic “autonomy” principle mentioned above to a certain extent because, by giving the governed people the right to elect their rulers, the governed also have a say in the governing. However, this model does not give people the right to “participate”, beyond making a choice among the “ruling elites” who both aspire to make laws that the people will be obliged to obey, and to create and execute the social policies that will affect them. This does not allow the participation of the people

It is this “minimalist” approach which therefore provides the intellectual conditions for the re-emergence of all kinds of populism, especially “fascism”, which we now politely call “right-wing populism”. This allows majoritarian one-man governments to present and market themselves as having “democratic legitimacy,” which reduces political participation to merely voting from one election to the next. From this perspective, political legitimacy is therefore defined as having a majority of votes – in short, the reducing of democracy to merely holding elections at regular intervals.

in these political processes with their own views and will. Governing is therefore the job of the exclusively elected rulers; all the governed can do is show their satisfaction or dissatisfaction through the votes they cast in the elections held at regular intervals. The main reason why this approach is called “minimalist” is that it reduces “democratic participation” to the lowest possible level and reduces democracy to the elections held at regular intervals.

From a “minimalist” perspective, “democratic politics” is viewed as a competition between the nominees for the votes of the electorate; the nominees are taken from among the ruling elite who aspire to rule. Politics is almost a “marketing” practice: the politician who wants to be elected is a product that says, “buy me, not him; sorry, choose me, not him!” Meanwhile the constituents are consumers who think, “should I buy him; sorry, choose him, or the other one?” It is this “minimalist” approach which therefore provides the intellectual conditions for the re-emergence of all kinds of populism, especially “fascism”, which we now politely call “right-wing

populism”. This allows majoritarian one-man governments to present and market themselves as having “democratic legitimacy,” which reduces political participation to merely voting from one election to the next. From this perspective, political legitimacy is therefore defined as having a majority of votes – in short, the reducing of democracy to merely holding elections at regular intervals.

Please don’t say, “Well, what else would it be? You previously said: we can’t gather millions of people around a table. So don’t say that electoral, representative democracy is still better than nothing.” My dear readers, if we start by defining democratic politics, like Jürgen Habermas, not as “vote competition” but as a discursive practice of “forming a common opinion and will” among equal and free citizens, as stipulated by the principle of “democratic autonomy,” it makes it easier for us to understand that we don’t have to reduce democracy merely to elections held at regular intervals, even in modern societies that are large, complex, and hold diverse mentalities and consciences.² More clearly, we can

We can describe democracy not just as a style of administration in which “ordinary” citizens cast votes from one election to another but one which also allows citizens to have a say, to express their opinions, to form common views on laws that everyone is obliged to abide by and on policies that will affect everyone – also during those periods in between elections. In this manner, citizens are ensured *participation* in the process of establishing and executing those laws and policies.



Photo: Özcan Yaman

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In this second model, which is called “deliberative” or, as I prefer, “discursive” in contemporary political theory, “elections” are still held at regular intervals, but democratic participation is not only presented as voting every three or five years. On the contrary, democracy is defined as a political system in which the opinions of the “public,” in other words the citizens, guides the legislative activities and government policies; the elected administrations, which come and go with every election, must give an account of all the laws they make and the policies they implement, again to the public, at every turn.³

In this discursive model, “public opinion”

regarding common problems that require social solutions is “created” in a free public sphere open to all citizens who are interested, with the participation of actors such as non-governmental organizations, political parties, and independent media members, universities, through multidimensional and multilateral exchanges of views and filtered through debates guided by the communicative and critical mind. The “common views” of the public, filtered out in this manner, are then negotiated by the elected representatives of the citizens in parliament, taking the form of the legally binding political will of the legislature. The Parliament gives authority and duty to the government to make and implement policies that reflect the will, which has been formed in this manner and, ultimately, the public opinions underlying that will. The government implements the policies it creates with the authority it receives from parliament, through the bureaucratic mechanisms of the state, and finally gives an account of those policies to parliament and, ultimately, to the public.

In the discursive model, elected legislators and governments are

The expertise of non-governmental organizations focused on specific problematic areas and localities also allows governments to create more result-oriented and effective policies. This is another factor that can increase the popularity of governments in the eyes of the public and, thus, their chances of being re-elected.

expected to open their law-making, policy-making, and implementation processes to the participation of non-governmental organizations formed by voluntary citizens; moreover, to listen to their views, consult them, and even consent to being “supervised” by them. What motivates governments and legislators to share their powers with non-governmental organizations and, moreover, to consent to be

controlled by them is not, of course, the conscientious burden of a moral impulse from an unknown source. In discursive democracies, politicians do this to “ingratiate” the public and, thus, increase their chances of being re-elected. Non-governmental organizations are much closer to the everyday lives of “ordinary citizens” when compared to state bureaucracies that are centered and structured on the basis of strict formal rules; therefore, a government that incorporates the perspectives of non-governmental organizations into its policy-making processes can more easily adapt to the current concerns and priorities of the people whose positive views it needs to be re-elected. Moreover, the expertise of non-governmental organizations focused on specific problematic areas and localities also allow governments to create more result-oriented and effective policies; this is another factor that can increase the popularity of governments in public and, thus, their chances of being re-elected.

One of the most healthy and operable criteria of such a democracy model is that the laws made and the policies created and carried out with the participation of civil society can be monitored and audited both by the parliament, as well as by non-governmental organizations, media organizations and, ultimately, ordinary citizens. This can only be implemented in real life if the public sphere is open and the civic space is unrestricted, because only under these conditions can citizens establish, become members of, or work in the non-governmental organizations, media, and think tanks that will track and monitor the activities of legislators and the policies of the government. In such spaces they should be able to express their criticism of the government’s policies without fear of retaliation or intimidation by government officials.

Finally, there is an institutional mechanism in such democracies that ensures that the public sphere is always unrestricted and that the civic space remains open.

There is an institutional mechanism in such democracies that ensures that the public sphere is always unrestricted and that the civic space remains open. The name of this mechanism, which becomes operational with constitutional arrangements that establish a legal order based on fundamental human rights and freedoms, and which is implemented by an independent and impartial judiciary, is the “rule of law.”



Photo: Özcan Yaman

In democracies that do not view participation merely as “just voting in elections”, political power and authority flows from the bottom up. In other words, it flows from the common views of citizens, which have been formed in an environment of free discussion, towards the policies that governments create based on the authority they have received from parliament and implemented through the state bureaucracy.

The name of this mechanism, which becomes operational with constitutional arrangements that establish a legal order based on fundamental human rights and freedoms, and which is implemented by an independent and impartial judiciary, is the “rule of law.” In this mechanism, the legal framework based on fundamental human rights and freedoms determines the limits of what the legislators, governments, and government officials can and cannot do while exercising their powers. Independent and impartial judicial bodies also use this legal framework in particular cases where it is alleged that the government or the administration has exceeded its powers or violated rights. In this respect, “the rule of law” operates like a “nonreturn valve” that allows political power and authority to flow from the bottom up, from public opinion to the government, from the public to the state, and prevents flows in the opposite direction. The rule of law together with an active and conscious citizen mass; a vibrant and well-organized civil society, including an independent, objective, and investigative media; and an open and free public sphere where citizens can freely exchange views, is one of the four main pillars of a healthy and functioning democracy.

In short, in democracies that do not view participation merely as “just voting in elections”, political power and authority flows from the bottom up. In other words, it flows from the common views of citizens, which have been formed in an environment of free discussion, towards the policies that governments create based on the authority they have received from parliament and implemented through the state bureaucracy. It can be asserted that such political systems implement the “democratic autonomy principle” precisely because of this bottom-up direction of political power and authority, and only as long as this direction

of flow is maintained. It is the “rule of law,” the constitutional order based on basic human rights and freedoms, that ensures political power and authority always flows from the bottom up, in accordance with the “nature” of democracy; in other words, the governed guide the rulers.

Political orders that view political participation just as voting in elections, political legitimacy as having a majority of votes, democracy as holding elections at regular intervals, and the rule of law as the political domination of the majority, sooner or later start to struggle in the swamp of populism, or worse, right-wing populism. What guides the rulers gradually ceases to be the same as the views of the ruled, formed as a result of rational debate in an open and free public sphere; on the contrary, the question of what lies the governed will believe, which irrational policies they will support, which oppressive laws they will want to be implemented and how they will be implemented, begin to be determined unilaterally by the rulers. Until one day, you look up and realize that in a political order that used to be minimally democratic, at least with the potential to democratize in a discursive way, where a cry for “freedom” like the one made in the Gezi Park Protests could be heard, the principle of autonomy has been replaced by perception-management, and the political order has been replaced by something that is the opposite of democracy – let’s say with the “Turkish type presidential system!”⁴

Probably if I had said this nine years ago, in late 2013, (as I did⁵), you, my dear readers, might have trusted the wind of resistance blowing behind Gezi and said, “No, it cannot be that bad” (this was the majority view in those days). But can you deny that what we have been experiencing in Turkey, especially since the Gezi Park Protests, is precisely this?



Photo: Özcan Yaman

Fortunately, it’s not too late yet. We have one last election ahead of us, in which we can use our political participation at the minimum level. Maybe this time, we can manage to establish a more fundamental, more stable, more participatory democratic order. But wait a little! For still, if we place all our hopes on this minimal form of participation, and if we don’t dare to take on any responsibility for more, we might also lose this small existing right we have as well!

¹ Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, Harper Perennial Modern Thought, Third Edition, 2008 (First Edition: 1950).

² Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, MIT Press, 1992.

³ The following summary of the discursive model of democracy is partly quoted from a previously published article in *Birikim*. See: Murat Özbank, “Türkiye Demokrasisinde Yanlış Olan Ne?”, *Birikim*, May 18, 2021. For a resource where I discuss this model more extensively, please see Murat Özbank (Compiled and Translated), *Neden Demokrasi, Nasıl İstikrar? Rawls - Habermas Tartışması*, İstanbul Bilgi University Publications, 2009.

⁴ Murat Özbank, “Başkanlık Geleceğimizi Karartır,” (Interview with Şerif Karataş), *Evensel*, 26 May 2016.

⁵ Murat Özbank, *Gezi Ruhü ve Politik Teori*, Kolektif Kitap, 2013.

“We are witnessing the abolition of the whole concept of citizenship”

Turkey has been approaching the slippery slope of elections since the beginning of 2022. This slope became even steeper following the announcement from the Chairman of the Nationalist Movement Party, Devlet Bahçeli, on behalf of the ruling People’s Alliance, that “Our candidate is Erdoğan”, and the six opposition political parties gathered around a table and openly changed the “Turkish type” Presidential Administration. In short, the election is the main agenda.

However, will it be possible to resolve all the deep-rooted issues in Turkey merely by voting? Does voting mean actual participation in the ruling of the country? How can we overcome the reductionist thinking that democratization equals elections? I spoke with philosophy professor Nilgün Toker with these questions in mind. My intention was to request that she evaluate her dismissal from her position at Ege University by the Statutory Decree in January 2017 for signing the Declaration of Academics for Peace, within the framework of the concept of participation. We discussed what participation means conceptually, what it means in terms of practices in Turkey, and how the Gezi Park Protests should be contemplated within this context. Our chat was interrupted due to technical reasons. WhatsApp had crashed. When we re-established communication, we restarted from there.

We couldn’t communicate because WhatsApp was down.

Nilgün Toker: Why was it down?

It crashes every now and then.

N.T.: It’s okay, the Internet may crash soon in Turkey and we wouldn’t know what to do. Maybe Elon Musk will send us satellites for the Internet.

He sent some to Iran, right? Actually, this is something that I wanted to talk to you about. In Iran, the public is basically on the streets in order to participate in the actual decision-making process. They are demanding democracy. But are these figures, let’s say Elon Musk, for example, or other international capitalists, helping for the sake of humanity when such events are going on in Iran or Turkey?

N.T.: Well, if you ask me, Elon Musk would first look at what kind of event we are participating in. After all, Elon Musk is helping his customer base by securing his own market. It’s actually a capitalist attitude. It has a political side, capitalism

always has a political aim, but this aim is always about expanding its own market.

So he is not acting out of humanitarian reasons?

N.T.: I would not describe anything as humanitarian regarding the actions of capitalists. I am not saying that Elon Musk would not take a humanitarian stance personally, I am saying that as a capitalist, sending satellites for Iranian women to connect to the Internet would not be an act of personal aid. Let’s just make this clear from the beginning: What we call humanitarianism has many such impasses. What you call humanitarian support is nothing but seeking a way to make conflicts invisible, without seeking a structural solution. We can see a humanitarian side in Elon Musk’s internet provision to activists in Iran. But is this solution-oriented? We are faced with the humanitarian attitude of the United Nations, which has been criticized for the last 20 years. In the end, the intervention in Iraq or setting up camps for the first

Kurdish migrants at the border had a humanitarian stance. This was nothing but an effort to prevent structural criticism and make certain conflicts and tensions less visible.

Is this one of the pressure valves that is released when the system becomes stuck?

N.T.: Kind of. I think that humanitarianism is also ideologically handicapped. Humanitarianism is different from humanism, of course, and this is mentioned a lot in the West. It can be meaningful when you live in a geography such as the Middle East, where the slightest humanitarian support is required. Therefore, it is not something we push forward conceptually in Turkey. But it is necessary to distinguish between humanitarianism and humanism. Humanitarianism is observed as an area of maneuvering for international mechanisms, it does not contain any structural criticism. Whereas humanism is something different completely.



Photo: Özcan Yaman



Photo: Özcan Yaman

How do we translate these concepts into Turkish?

N.T.: I must admit, I never thought of these concepts in Turkish. It is probably necessary to describe humanitarianism as humanitarian policies since it is more interested in trying to repair the human destruction caused by wars. Turkish concepts have a handicap. For example, humanism also has its types. There is liberal humanism, social humanism ... Liberal humanism is based on the universal protection of human fundamental values, whereas socialist humanism takes equality as the fundamental value of humans. Humanism changes according to what you define as the basic value of humans. Liberal humanism is able to ignore inequality. Humanitarianism, on the other hand, has no relationship with it. What might be translated as humanitarianism is, in fact, a mechanism established by the United Nations (UN) Declaration of Human Rights to compensate and repair the suffering and damage of those who have been treated contrary to human dignity. When described like this, it sounds like there is nothing negative about it. But there is a will behind every mechanism that operates it. The question of what damage, and which treatment

it describes as being contrary to human dignity, comes to the fore here. This is about how the concept is practiced rather than how it is defined. The biggest handicap of some mechanisms based on the UN's Declaration of Human Rights is that for the last 20 years, they have also legitimized a line of action pursued by those who created those mechanisms that is contrary to these values. If the humanitarians had sided with those who suffered in Iraq after the intervention, or in Libya or Afghanistan, the situation would have been different ... At those moments, the hypocrisy we were faced with represented the collapse of the common values of the world. We said that there is a will behind every mechanism. In those cases in which that will is not able to free itself from its relationship with the hegemonic power, humanitarianism turns into a tool for just maintaining its power. This does not mean that I want to give every person who engages in some sort of humanitarian action a negative connotation. For example, the real collapse of humanitarian policies can be observed in Africa, that is, hunger. Humanitarianism describes itself as empowering disadvantaged communities. However, hunger and poverty are not a

Liberal humanism is based on the universal protection of human fundamental values, whereas socialist humanism understands equality as being the fundamental value of humans. Humanism changes according to what you define as the basic value of humans. Liberal humanism can ignore inequality.

disadvantage but a structural relation. They are a structural relation and a line of political struggle. But I'm not saying that helping the poor and hungry is a bad thing. I'm not saying that the actions of doctors who go to places where there is hunger and poverty, or the distribution of diapers and food to people in need, is pointless. I just think that the perspective, which only shows these communities as disadvantaged, is harmful. The injustice behind these events should be revealed. I try not to devalue the act of helping the needy; of course, it is necessary to give food to the hungry and to side with the sufferers. It is like *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo, when the priest gives food

to Jean Valjean, who enters the church to steal the candlesticks, and then talks about injustice. You give food to the hungry person first, that's how it should be.

We started by discussing political participation, and you made a very balanced comment regarding an issue that has been bothering me for a while. I'm asking about this because it is the subject of our conversation. How can we connect this description of yours to political participation?

N.T.: The point where we can establish a connection here is solidarity, not participation.

One of the universal values that the UN is trying to keep alive is democracy, as you just mentioned. Democracy also requires participation. There is a discourse that says that democracy is established when people go to the ballot box to vote. Particularly in countries such as Turkey, where there is a high level of participation in the elections, democracy is deemed to work, as elections are decided with the participation of around 80 or 85 percent of the population. Is the logic "We voted therefore political participation was achieved," the correct one?

N.T.: This is not participation under any circumstances. The election is one thing, participation is another. Let's distinguish between the two. Selection refers to the moment when you make a choice. You approve one of the options presented to you. This contains an element that bears no relationship with participation because the determinants of the elections are merely the choices put in front of you. For example, in countries like ours, most of the referendums, even most of the elections, are of a plebiscite character because we don't have a diversity of democratic participation.

What exactly does it mean to be of a plebiscite character?

N.T.: In our country, all referendums over the last 10 years have been of a plebiscite character, the act of confirming the leader. Most of the elections in Turkey show a plebiscite character. They are about approving the current leader – there is no choice, it is just a matter of approval. It is the same with most of the elections in Russia. There is no diversity of preferences in the elections

In my opinion, the reason why elections are blessed, given such exaggeration in countries like ours is this: The only time the existence of the public will can be demonstrated is when the public goes to the ballot box and votes. We only perceive ourselves as citizens during the elections; we cannot discern a public that is able to establish a relationship with the state other than through elections.

in Turkey. This is a situation where you have to choose one of the two options and the situation is mostly determined by the options. You are subject to options, there is no such thing as participation. When buying a washing machine, you make a choice among the choices. There are many components at work here; you establish some correlations between the money you have and the quality you want, but your range of options is not very extensive. The ballot box is a very blessed thing in Turkey because a system in which people who are defined as citizens can participate in the administration has not yet been established. Tanıl Bora wrote recently: The strongest answer that can be given to the question of what holds Turkish society together is elections. In my opinion, the reason why elections are blessed, so exaggerated in countries like ours, is this: The only time the existence of the public will can be demonstrated is when the public goes to the ballot box and votes. We only perceive ourselves as citizens during the elections; we can't talk about a public that is able

Yes, an election means choosing between the options that are put in front of you, but they may also contain historical moments that can mean political action in itself. Just like in the Istanbul mayoral elections and probably in the next 2023 elections...

to establish relations with the state other than through the elections. This is a society in which an individual is not recognized or described as a citizen by the state except at the moment of the election. I'm not just talking about the history of the last 10 years – this is a relationship that has been established from the beginning. When you present the election as being the only moment when the people can show their will, it becomes difficult for people to bless the election and understand that they were forced to choose one of the two or three choices put before them. It is viewed as the manifestation of social will.

This immediately reminds me of the 1950 elections. Could it be that the events of the 1950 elections were the key juncture that transformed elections into such an important concept in the country? The people went to a ballot box and the next day Turkey's founding party was removed from power. I'm talking about this feeling of "I voted and changed." Could this be a key moment to understand what happened to political life in Turkey?

N.T.: I have not conducted any related social anthropological work, nor have I read anything from this perspective. But your question is correct, it's a good question too. It is necessary to think about this and consult with colleagues working on this issue. 1950 was a crucial turning point. I'm thinking out loud about your question. We saw a similar reaction in the Istanbul mayoral elections. Strangely, the election is both a founding and decisive action, and a moment when the belief in the possibility of change, which is the basis of political action at certain historical moments, is felt by the people of Turkey. This was expressed more in the repeated Istanbul mayoral elections, but it was also showed through the taking of other metropolitan municipalities from the AKP. The belief that society can change through the activity of voting was strengthened. Also, let's say it in quotation marks "changed." From this perspective, it seems correct to refer to the 1950 elections. The single-party period was terminated and the system was changed. Voting against the annulment of the first election in Istanbul mayoral elections and against re-election became a powerful political action. So, let's expand this definition even further: Yes, an election is the act of making a



Photo: Özcan Yaman

point. Let's think about what is behind the concept of participation. You should have the right to participate in decision-making processes. If we are to discuss democratic participation, everyone who will be affected by that decision should have this right equally. So, there is a huge connection between participation and equality. This is the first point. Secondly, participation is an action that cannot be reduced to a representation. Participation demands a contact area where everyone can express their opinions freely. In order to achieve this, you must have the right to freely express an opinion. Which demands the existence of a public space to mediate between opinions. We've known this since the days of Ancient Greece. So, there are two basic concepts under democracy: Equality and freedom. Democracy does not exist without these two. When we say equal citizenship, we mean everyone has equal power to enter the public sphere. I'm not talking about everyone being declared equal. The fact of them having equal power is essential. Such as being able to express their opinion, having the right to make propaganda, having the means of communication to spread this, comparing one's opinions to that of others... This is what political activity is. So, how do we describe the autonomy of being a citizen? The autonomy of being a citizen is that they have an autonomous judgment on the subject while evaluating the events in front of them. How, then, is this judgment revealed? It is revealed in the opinion. Therefore, what we call 'opinion' is a direct expression of citizen autonomy. Let me just explain something here; I'm not referring to something like the statement 'I think yellow is beautiful'. That is a like. Or 'I support Galatasaray' – this is also expressing a like. What we call an opinion is an idea, a judgment, or an assessment that can be passed on and discussed with the others regarding common issues. What the concept of justice should be, how much the tax rate should be, for example, are things that concern others. Everyone should have autonomy, and this is what the dignity of a citizen is. I have an independent judgment, I can make an independent assessment, no one can decide these things on my behalf, and I have the power to reveal this judgment of mine. And if I have these things, then, I'm a citizen. Now let me come to the question you asked, namely the issue of signing the

petition. As in every objection, a group of academics expressed their opinion by saying 'I have a judgment about what happened, I have academic and intellectual additional data that expands this judgment and that supports my evaluation' and exercised their right to be a citizen through making this objection. This is the gist of it. The Academics for Peace demonstrated a civic act regarding what was going on. They stated 'I believe the exact issue is a public matter, that concerns everyone, and therefore I am expressing my own judgment'. What needs to happen in democracies is for my opinion to meet with other opinions and for an environment of negotiation to be created. Declaring that my judgment is a crime rather than a judgement means declaring that I don't have the capacity to make an independent judgement. This exists in all suppressions of freedom of expression. It should also be added that – if being a citizen indicates the power to have an independent judgment, that power should also make you accountable to others. Because citizenship is only possible when those who have the capacity to evaluate it can reveal this capacity and evaluate it together with others. This is not the only thing we have as citizens – this is a category of relation, and it means sharing a common space. That's why every citizen's speech addresses the common space and is about partnership. It includes structural responsibility. This is both a responsibility to your partners, and to the common area, and a commitment to the principles of partnership. What was demonstrated by the Gezi Park Protests or by the Academics for Peace was not arbitrary. On the contrary, they showed that the principles of common life are being owned by members of the common life.

At this point, the concept of an "acceptable citizen" comes to mind
N.T.: Yes, suggested by Füsün Üstel.

For example, the opinions of some citizens are acceptable or valuable for the current government, whereas some are not acceptable, and others are even directly declared a crime
N.T.: Such a hierarchy poses a problem. But I want to highlight that it is necessary to distinguish between opinions and likes. The opinion is also different between individual or group preferences. What you develop from your own position

is not an opinion but an appreciation. Developing an opinion means getting out of your own individual, subjective position, and advocating an idea which can be generalized. That idea must claim its ability to be generalized. We describe those that do not carry this claim as an 'ideological attitude'. We are in a world of new regimes where some ideological attitudes or subjective tastes and values are in a hierarchical relation with others. Much more so in Turkey. This actually means the denial of the principle of direct equality. It means that not all members of society, citizens, are seen as equal. I think this is outdated. In the past, some citizens were not seen as acceptable. I think that what we are witnessing now is the complete abolition of the concept of citizenship. There are no more citizens. The question of who should be included in the field of citizenship was our field of struggle in the past. We sought and demanded equality from that point. What I've been trying to convey from the beginning is the point we're now at: Who is a citizen? A person with independent judgment capacity who is vested with immune, unrestricted rights. This person is the person who is a member of the common space and is the bearer of a partnership in that space of partnership. In order for citizenship to be possible, a partnership is required, which means common principles and common values. There should be a vision in which society is comprised of a common connection. I suggest that our new regime has a management style which abolishes this partnership connection. On the contrary, I think that disrupting this connection increases the power of management. That's why I think that what the new regime has essentially eliminated is equality and partnership – that's why the discussion over the question of who can enter into the area of partnership and who can't is a thing of the past. I've said it before on another occasion, and let me repeat it here: In the past, we were arguing over who is a citizen, but now, thankfully, none of us are citizens. That's why I think the issue is one of regaining civic honor and dignity. The political issue before us is the question of how we build a democracy that will establish a common relation based on the principle of equality of differences. I think this is the place where all issues related to participation will be resolved. ☸

“The course which the elections take in Turkey marks a symbolic civil war”

Turkey’s voter turnout is steadily high. But how should this dynamic be interpreted? Seeking an answer to this question, Ahmet Insel and I took a tour d’horizon, taking in the general characteristics of the political regime in Turkey and the dominant political and cultural patterns.

Turkey is preparing for the 2023 elections. Participation in the polls has been increasing in recent years. Why is this?

Ahmet Insel: The participation rate shows how vital the determination of power through the act of elections is for the voters. If the voter turnout rate were to drop to 30 percent or 20 percent, as is the case in some countries, it would indicate that the issue of determining who takes power through the elections has lost meaning in the eyes of the electorate. In such cases, we could say that the voters chose not to go to the polls because the election had lost its meaning or because they believed that changing power was not possible through elections. The participation rate therefore indicates voters’ views of politics and democracy.

It is not the most important indicator, but a significant one. In the United States, for instance, which is defined as one of the cradles of liberal democracy, turnout in presidential elections remains at around 50-55 percent. Which means that the president has won the approval of about 25 percent of the community when elected. In addition, with a series of obstacles, some US citizens of voting age are prevented from being registered on the electoral roll. Various difficulties are presented, particularly to African-Americans and newly-citizen Latino people. The participation rate is therefore even lower when compared to the resident population who are of voting age. In the United States, the president is elected with less than 25 percent of the electoral age community.

We should pay attention to two things when looking at the election turnout in Turkey. First, the turnout was high in the 1950s – for example, it was 89 percent in 1950 and 88 percent in 1954. In 1957 it decreased noticeably to 76 percent. But there is no system in which everyone who is of voting age is registered in the electoral roll. Those who need to be registered in the electoral roll but are not are 10 percent, maybe 15 percent. The voting age is also important. Between 1934 and 1961 the age at which people could start to vote in Turkey was 22. From 1961 to 1995 it was lowered to 21. It has been age 18 since 1995. This is a difference which should be taken into account when comparing participation rates. There is also a segment of people who have gone abroad since the early 1960s but were not deducted from the electoral register, and who could not vote because there was no opportunity to vote abroad at the time. This naturally lowered the participation rate a little more in the 1960s.

Do you mean the ones who went to Germany as workers?

A.İ.: Yes, in the 1960s. Since they did not have the right to vote abroad at

that time, they could only vote if they happened to be in Turkey on the date of the election. But most of them were still considered as voters. This was one of the factors which decreased the rate of participation in the election. In 1961 the turnout was 81 percent, which is relatively high. But then that rate started to decline, up until the 1977 election. In 1969 it was 64 percent. This was the lowest turnout in parliamentary general elections since 1950. After 1980, it was compulsory to participate in the elections in Turkey, although this was not sanctioned.

I think there was a fine.

A.İ.: There was a fine. Those who did not participate in the election from 1983 onwards were fined in many polls, but these administrative fines were never collected. Later, these debts were wiped out. This punishment is still in effect today. The Supreme Electoral Council finally determined the administrative fine as being 22 TL. But it’s a practice which has just remained on paper, with no effect. The reason for this high participation rate cannot be attributed to the virtual administrative fine. Perhaps it can be said that the administrative fine

Voters, those who support or oppose power, define elections as a matter of life and death. Likewise, the government and the opposition also turn the elections into a matter of life and death. This high participation rate is one of the leading manifestations of the extreme and harsh polarization of some issues in Turkish society. The elections have increasingly constituted a moment of intensified struggle for hegemony, a multidimensional culture war.

was slightly effective in the participation rate in the 1983 elections.

In 1983 and 1987, turnout was over 90 percent. Since the 1991 election, the turnout has always been above 80 percent, except in 2002. In 2002, it was 79 percent (which doesn’t represent



Photo: Emel Kurma



Photo: Özcan Yaman

much of a decrease compared to the general trend). Turnout was 83 percent in June 2015 and 85 percent in November 2015. In the 2018 elections, the domestic turnout was 88 percent, and the total turnout was 86 percent. Even overseas participation, at 50 percent, is a high turnout figure compared to the overseas participation rates of other countries. There are more significant differences in turnout between the constitutional amendment referendums. Participation in the 1987 and 2017 referendums was very high (95 percent and 85 percent). In contrast, participation in the 2007 and 2010 referendums was lower (67 percent and 73 percent). These two different turnout groups show the extent of positive and negative meaning and importance which voters attached to proposed constitutional amendments.

Participation in the elections is very high in Turkey, and there have been almost no unregistered voters since 2005. This was the year when, upon turning 18, voters started to be automatically registered by the Supreme Electoral Council through an address-based population registration system without the need for the person to apply. In contrast, voter registration is voluntary in many countries. This, in turn, leads to the situation where a significant portion of the potential voter population

doesn't appear to be voters. In France, voter registration is close to 90 percent. In the United States, on the other hand, it didn't exceed 70 percent in 2012! With the automatic registration system in Turkey, nearly 100 percent of citizens who are of voting age and residing in the country are on the voter lists. Therefore, the voter turnout, which reached 87-88 percent in the last elections, is a leader among the world rankings. It makes sense in another way. Overseas voters are given the opportunity to vote during a period of one week to ten days, while resident voters living in the country have only one option to vote: to go and vote in person from 8am to 5pm on Sunday.

What does this mean?

A.İ.: This mainly stems from the fact that voters, those who support or oppose power, define elections as a matter of life and death. Likewise, the government and the opposition also turn the elections into a matter of life and death. This high participation rate is one of the leading manifestations of the extreme and harsh polarization of some issues in Turkish society. The elections have increasingly constituted a moment of intensified struggle for hegemony, a multidimensional culture war, particularly since the 2000s. This is not a selection between programs, or

proposals, where it is mainly economic policy alternatives which are discussed; in these instances the order is believed to continue substantially unchanged, it is merely the preference of managers choosing a little more social spending or a little more market economy. In Turkey, I'm exaggerating a bit, perhaps, but it is somewhat true, the elections are held in an atmosphere of symbolic civil war. Cultural warfare is an expression of that.

By cultural warfare, do you mean a conflict of lifestyles?

A.İ.: It is a matter of life and death which has been brought about by its transformation into a struggle over lifestyle. It's a matter of life and death for both sides. If I am to exaggerate and caricature somewhat, there is severe resistance and reaction among those positioned against the AKP. Against an interference into their lifestyle, and the escalation of this interference. It is necessary to separate the majority of Kurds who are represented by HDP from those who are against the AKP. Their reasons are, of course, quite different. Essentially, the demands for the recognition of Kurdish identity at the level of equal citizenship are prominent. Indeed, there are additional topics such as women's rights, workers' rights, sensitivity to environmental

problems, a peaceful resolution of the issues, and the actual protection of fundamental rights and freedoms. The vast majority of AKP supporters are mobilized by the concern that they will lose what they have achieved, or what they assume they have achieved thanks to the AKP, when power changes. It transforms their political choices from that of choosing between ordinary government alternatives, into a symbolic civil war, a culture war, and a moment of the intensification of a civilizational conflict. When I say 'culture', it should be understood in a multidimensional way. Elections have been extremely important thresholds for the last twenty to twenty-five years marking this ground of conflict between an authoritarian culture and a relatively democratic culture, a religion-centered understanding of society and a secular one, patriarchal-male-dominated traditions and approaches that emphasize gender equality, etc. In this field of conflict, which appears today to be roughly divided into two between AKP-MHP supporters and AKP-MHP opponents, there are important conflicts and struggles within both blocks. Since the supporters of AKP/Tayyip Erdoğan and their opponents are roughly the same in terms of numerical strength, AKP/Tayyip Erdoğan has not been able to consolidate his power with a vast difference or an overwhelming superiority. The AKP's highest vote was 49.8 percent, which they achieved in the June 12, 2011, elections. This lags far behind the 90 percent vote rate in the staged elections of open dictatorial regimes. On the other hand, being the sole figure in power for the last two decades has led to party-state integration and an escalating concentration of power, leading to massive inequality in the race dominating the elections. This has been accompanied by a policy of pressure and intimidation, which has become increasingly widespread over the past six years, with prison sentences and successive criminal and civil cases.

We can see the divisions in Turkish society and the extent of this social conflict most concretely through the elections. Most of the voters who support the government are continuing their support even though they are not happy with the policies which are being implemented. Although unsuccessful in many respects, the government is

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losing very few votes. It has been able to cling on to power as a result of its own electorate perceiving the election as being a war of life and death – even though this electorate understands that the government has done wrong, even if the daily policies are hurting them, even if they are struggling economically (faulty policies in recent years have caused a severe economic crisis), they are still guided by the question of “what will we do if they lose power.” The government, or to put it more accurately, Tayyip Erdoğan and his entourage, are making the most of this fear. It will suffice to mention his latest definition of AKP youth as conservative revolutionaries; he urges people ‘don't forget your grudges, your anger’; he says ‘we will raise religious, vindictive youth’; he makes constant reminders about the practices of the CHP in the 1930s; he makes reminders about the past mistakes made, such as not accepting headscarved women into universities. We can extend the list much further. He doesn't target the economic policy proposals of the CHP or the opposition in general; instead he constantly builds his discourse around these subjects of lifestyle and turns the elections into a struggle of life and death by drawing attention to cultural symbols and keeping them alive. On the one hand this leads to high turnout for both sides, but also to marginal shifts from one election to another and from one block to another.

When we compare the high participation rate with other European countries, I notice the following – various methods

are being developed to increase participation in many countries. A voter can take another voter's power of attorney and vote in their place. The option to vote by post or online is now available in many countries. People are allowed to vote without going to the ballot box physically. In some countries, the ballot box is open for two or three days. They make every effort to encourage voting. However, from time to time, turnout is still below 60 percent.

It is different in Turkey. The polls are set up on a Sunday; the elderly, the disabled, and the sick, everyone is expected to go to the polls that day, no matter who they are. And 88 percent of voters do go to the polls that day and vote. This is not common in other countries. In an early election such as November 2015, which was held on an unexpected date, turnout was still very high. Voters did not hesitate to change their holiday schedules. Another positive outcome of the high level of participation (if it is actual participation) is that it makes cheating during and after the election difficult.

How do you interpret the following comment: 'Turkey is actually a country that has not fully established its regime'.

Expanding on this, could the sharp opposition and the great enthusiasm of the opponents' participation in the ballot box be due to their efforts to stabilize the regime in line with their own value judgments and worldviews?

A.İ.: Regime and issues of cultural division are, of course, at the heart of this. Also, note that voters place a high value on the right to vote in Turkey, based on a century-old tradition. However, in many countries with a much older and more established voting tradition, the turnout is much lower than in Turkey today. I believe there's another reason which we should place more emphasis on. Members of Turkish society do not see each other as being members of the same society with equal rights, even on paper. They don't define citizenship universally. As such, Turkish society is basically a community within the boundaries of the state's sovereignty in terms of demographics, but the quality of existing as a 'society' in sociological terms is quite poor. We can track this very easily, both geographically and culturally. When we look at the distribution of votes on the map, we see a country divided

into three colors. The Mediterranean and Aegean coasts are a different color; the north of Central Anatolia, the Black Sea, and Eastern Anatolia regions are different again, and Southeast Anatolia is yet another color. The map is very clear. And the differences in votes between these regions are not just a matter of a few points – they are overwhelming. We can talk about differences in polarized votes. This being the case, there are three conflicts or fault lines being used by the current power. The first is the Alawite-Sunni conflict. The government can use this conflict whenever it needs. Since the Sunnis are the majority, being their leader naturally brings the majority to power. There's a sectarian conflict. Of course, we do not know the exact proportion of the Alawite population, but it's between 12-15 percent. This population rightly feels threatened.

Second, there is an ethnic-based conflict. In the conflict over the Turkish-Kurdish divide, the Kurds' demands for equality and the minimal demand for separation (or autonomy for some) and, in particular for almost all of them, the demand for the recognition of the Kurdish identity as being equal citizens, arouses a great reaction among a significant portion of Turks. Therefore, while it can be said that there is a Kurdish problem in Turkey, it should also be stated that there is a Turkish problem. This is expressed as division anxiety, but its primary source lies in the obsession of Turks, the Turkified ones, to see themselves as members of a privileged upper identity. Turks have an issue with their ability to live side by side with other identities and their inability to accept different

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identities, which is, in fact, a problem of the Turkish identity. The AKP uses this identity problem whenever it suits them. Sometimes, as in the case of the settlement process, they pretend to solve it if it serves their purpose. When they see they are losing votes, as on the eve of the 7 June 2015 elections, they turn around and immediately embrace their position as the indomitable advocates of a Turkish/Sunni/conservative identity. They start attacking their opponents from this position. In fact, we can say that President Erdoğan understood the course of events before the June 2015 election and suddenly slammed down the brakes. On June 7, 2015, the fact that the MHP got 16 percent of the votes and the HDP 13 percent was, in a way, the outcome of the attraction and reaction created by this "solution process" which led the AKP to lose votes via two different ways. We know how they re-took these votes six months later, through a policy of blood, violence, and hatred.

The third fault line is a conflict over lifestyle. There is a division between the secular/modernist and conservative/religious lifestyles. This conflict leads to one dominating over the other. Both sides have experienced this pressure both in the past and recently. Therefore, both sides see the other as an imminent and clear danger.

We can also add the conflict line which capitalism brings to these three conflict areas. The conflict between workers and capitalists. It is also a fundamental one. But the three I listed, ethnic, sectarian, and cultural conflicts, suppress this fundamental conflict.

After all, AKP and Tayyip Erdoğan are trying to position themselves as the natural representatives of the Sunnis, who are the majority, the conservatives, who are the majority, and the Turks, who are the majority. This claim to be the representative of the national identity, that is the Turkish-Sunni-male dominant identity, became even stronger after 2016. As soon as President Erdoğan realized that his strategy based on Sunni and conservatives would not be sufficient to keep him in power, he held on to the radical nationalist rhetoric. Since it is not otherwise possible to compensate for 20 years of attrition, he can prevent his electorate from being dissolved

in this way for now and still maintain votes oscillating between 30 and 40 percent. However, this strategy has created a large mass that does not want to cooperate with the AKP or President Erdoğan in any way, who aim to defeat him. This demographic feels under siege and threatens to become increasingly ossified. I call it a symbolic civil war; this description gives us some idea of which direction we would go in if there were accidentally no elections in Turkey.

So, does the ballot box function as a valve?

A.İ.: One of the most important qualities of democracy is its capacity to resolve intra-community conflicts without resorting to violence. In Turkey, the government no longer has the capacity to resolve issues without resorting to violence because it has abolished democracy. However, the ballot box still remains meaningful and essential for a significant portion of the citizens of Turkey. The majority continues to value the legitimacy formed by the elections. I don't name this as a weakness. That is why when Erdoğan says, "We are Democrats," the only proof he can give is, "We accept the legitimacy of the polls." An extremely important phenomenon, which stops these conflicts from turning into total internal conflict, is the importance given to elections. It is not the only one, but it is the primary condition required to peacefully exit from dictatorship/autocracy and establish a regime with the minimum democracy. The government must ensure that the elections are clean, correct, and fair for this opportunity to remain open and for it to maintain its validity. Otherwise, faith in the ballot box will collapse and it will lose its function as a valve, as we just discussed. In this event we'll be driven down a completely different process.

Isn't the fact that participation is limited to the polls an issue in Turkey? We have problems such as a low rate of unionization, the inability of non-governmental organizations to strengthen, and low participation in local administrations. Participation in the polls is high, but how do we read disorganization in other areas of politics?

A.İ.: This sign indicates that general and local elections have a meaning beyond political participation. We cannot say that Turkish society is a participatory society.



Photo: Aysun Ataç

In Turkey, the government no longer has the capacity to resolve issues without resorting to violence because it has abolished democracy. However, the ballot box still remains meaningful and essential for a significant portion of the citizens of Turkey. The majority continues to value the legitimacy formed by the elections.

Participation in elections in unions, chambers, or associations, and elections in the universities, is very low. Ayşe Buğra, Fikret Adaman, and I conducted field research on union organizations in the mid-2000s. We found the following in the research – some people chose not to become union members just because of the word 'organization'; they did not state the word 'organization' aloud, either at home or in cafes. Due to the terror associated with the term "organization" which was injected into Turkish society after the 1980 military coup, people

immediately think of terrorism and the relevant articles of the penal code, which is still the case. The social horror created by the term 'organization is', indeed, one of the factors. As a result right-wing, conservative trade unions and parties use the term 'establishment' and 'establishing' instead of 'organization' and 'organizing'.

On the other hand, Turkish society has little tradition of solidarity regarding political and social issues. An example of this caught my attention in our leftist movement, and I said it after the Izmit earthquake in 1999. Leftist organizations in Turkey do not have solidarity organizations or foundations for the general public, like the leftist organizations in Europe. Since this emerged very clearly as a need after the earthquake, a formation called Solidarity Volunteers emerged within the Freedom and Solidarity Party (ÖDP), but it did not last. It faded a few years later. Izmir Solidarity Volunteers was established in 2020. It is a local organization and maybe it can inspire other regions. However, in countries such as Germany, France, and Italy, left-wing organizations and parties have solidarity organizations in

the form of associations or foundations, not only for their own members but for all segments of society in need. These are not political but social solidarity organizations. They do the same thing as the Red Cross, the state, or conservative church organizations, but with a secular, progressive, and egalitarian approach. They do this in order to exist in society. There are very limited examples on the left in Turkey. For instance, Sarmaşık Association in Diyarbakır comes to mind. The government immediately shut it down for alleged involvement with a terrorist organization. From this example, we should not forget that the state in Turkey is suspicious of organizations that oppose it. The AKP state supports conservative religious foundations and charities. That's why they're nothing more than a cog in the wheel of state-led solidarity. Consider the extent of hatred towards the Association for Supporting Contemporary Life during the AKP period. After all, we are experiencing de-unionization and de-institutionalization in Turkey. In an environment where the power of these forms of organization is diminishing day by day, the fact that participation in the polls is so high should mean something else.

It is said that the sign of power is the ability to produce consent. I wonder if the quality of being a subject has been transferred in the social genes of these people, who were previously subjects and obedientaries in the Ottoman Empire and became the people of Turkey following the establishment of the Republic? In other words, has a general behavior pattern along the lines of “let’s give our consent in the polls and not interfere with the rest” been established? I’m trying to get to this point – in recent years, almost half of society sees the leader of the AKP as some kind of sultan, and the AKP government is encouraging this by sparking the Ottoman dream. In short, are we experiencing a re-manifestation of the Ottoman period?

A.İ.: This was the case not only during the Ottoman but also the single-party period. It would be going too far to say that we are experiencing the same thing again, but there is a high tendency in Turkish society to accept the authoritarian behavior of the person or power that represents their cultural codes. I don’t know of any other country where the term “president” is used to the same extent. Everyone in Turkey is the president. Everyone is called president, starting from the lower-level manager

of the union. We call all managers presidents, regardless of whether they are members of associations, municipalities, or sports clubs.

We are a presidential society, but people are conflicted about which president to line up behind. This protects us a little from totalitarianism. Can a social gene analysis be made based on this? I’m always a little skeptical of such approaches. It is a fact that we are a society with high authoritarian tendencies at all levels, and it is equally common to be subject to authority. These two tendencies already complement each other, and one does not exist without the other. Of course, it does not mean that these trends will not change at all over time. Today, the revolt against patriarchal, male-dominated culture somewhat erodes these authoritarian motives.

I guess we are not the only ones who have tended towards authoritarian identities in recent years. Orban in Hungary and Putin in Russia come to mind immediately. We can even say this about the former president of the United States, Trump.

A.İ.: Viktor Orban was re-elected in 2022. He has been elected consecutively and has been in power since 2010. He

won the last election with 55 percent of the vote. Opposition parties, though united around a single candidate, have failed. The war that started with Russia’s attack on Ukraine also allowed Orban to consolidate his position within the country. There are similarities between the regime that officially defines itself as an “illiberal democracy” in Hungary and the autocratic regime in Turkey. After the success of the last election, Orban took an even more oppressive path. On the other hand, there is the China example, which requires the most attention. An authoritarian capitalist system in which single-party rule continues. It’s a powerful political center of attraction, but it’s just as difficult, even impossible, to replicate. Most authoritarian regimes are defined as populist by making extreme generalizations. For example, we cannot name Putin as a populist, but he’s conducting an expansionist Russian and Orthodox nationalism policy. It’s possible to say that President Erdoğan is a nationalist-religious populist, but the regime’s nature is far beyond populism; it aims to establish a cultural/political hegemony. The “Myself” regime can, therefore, also be called Erdoğanism. On the other hand, if the question is whether he is implementing neoliberal policies, I would have answered yes in the 2000s,



Photo: Özcan Yaman

Most authoritarian regimes are defined as populist by making extreme generalizations. For example, we cannot name Putin as a populist, but he’s conducting an expansionist Russian and Orthodox nationalism policy. It’s possible to say that President Erdoğan is a nationalist-religious populist, but the regime’s nature is far beyond populism; it aims to establish a cultural/political hegemony. The “Myself” regime can, therefore, also be called Erdoğanism.

but today my answer would be no. I think neoliberals would tear their hair out if they consider Erdoğan’s policies. Even the extremely low-interest rate policy applied only during very high inflation proves that the definition of neoliberal is now obsolete for Erdoğanism. So is the position of the central bank and budgetary practices. On the other hand, he is using a widespread social policy as a tool of political legitimacy. It is the “I did,

and it’s done” version of the state-driven market economy. The outcomes also correspond to this model.

There are a few common features of different authoritarian-national capitalisms, including Erdoğanism: First, unlike 20th-century fascism, and Nazism, they do not have a problem with capitalism; they do not try to change capitalism. 20th-century fascism at least symbolically channeled the reaction to the capitalist economic regime. At that time, blocking socialism was one of its main goals, but not anymore. They more or less all accept the market economy, but they try to implement it through comprehensive state interventions. These government interventions may aim to produce social support or to protect businesses, but they work harder to distribute profits to their immediate circles because the government makes it a way to consolidate its power by transferring a part of the profit to itself.

Second, they continually articulate a nostalgia for greatness left over from a lost past. Orban constantly reminds the people of Hungary of the Treaty of Trianon, which was signed between the victorious Allied States of the First World War and Hungary in 1920. It is the equivalent of our Sevres Agreement. He

keeps talking about his dream of a great Hungary. Since he gave the right to vote to Hungarians living outside the country, Hungarians living in Romania, Slovakia, and Serbia have voted for Orban by almost 90 percent.

Just like in Turkey.

A.İ.: The foreign voter support for the AKP in Turkey does not reach 90 percent; fortunately, it is around 60 percent. But of course, the AKP gets more of these foreign votes than it receives from those living in Turkey. The reason for Orban’s high rate is that most of those Hungarians living outside of Hungary are just across the border. For example, Putin clearly stated that one of the reasons for invading Ukraine was to create the unity, solidarity, and greatness of ancient Russia. He laid this rhetoric aside when faced with the Ukrainian resistance. President Erdoğan expresses the same thing in Turkey. He tries to revive this idea in some way when he threatens Greece with the words, “We might come suddenly one night.” This is also how we can consider Turkey’s military presence in Syria and Cyprus. Turkey has around sixty thousand soldiers outside the country’s territory. The opposition has not made any kind of noise, criticism, or pursued a line of questioning over what this means. They’re not naming what they’re doing there. There is an irredentist



Photo: Özcan Yaman

nationalism in Turkey that goes beyond the AKP and MHP, including within the secular environment. This also exists in Russia and Hungary. And all the parties feed on it. This includes complicity in the major crimes, which the Turkish or Sunni majority have committed, those who define themselves as the dominant element of society, in the recent past – in 1915, the 1930s, the 1950s, and the 1990s. The denial of crimes in Russia during the Tsarist and Stalin eras is no different. Recently, the Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, Mustafa Şentop, returned Garo Paylan’s proposal to declare the dates September 6-7, 1955 a “Pogrom Memory Day” on the grounds that the word ‘pogrom’ “blames and accuses the history and common history of the Republic of Turkey and the Turkish Nation.” This is not even to mention issues such as the Armenian genocide and the Dersim genocide. The attitude of all the opposition, other than the HDP, towards attempts to accuse and blame this “glorious past” is almost the same. This includes some of the Turkish socialist movements. There is a deep conflict with complicity, a partnership of suppressed irredentist desire, a state of mutual fear, grudge, and hatred, and a tendency to sit on the sidelines, as if the worst is always waiting behind the door.

Third, a defense of cultural identity. The dominant discourse across the leadership of Xi Jinping, Putin, Orban, and Erdoğan is, “Our authentic cultural identity is under threat. Threatened by Western civilization” or, as Orban claims, “threatened by Muslim refugees”. If we use Erdoğan’s language, “Our national and domestic identity is under threat.” The effort to create a movement through this ideology is common between all of them. In a study published with a professor friend in France, we described this as authoritarian-national capitalism. Expressed as national socialism in the 20th century, the excessively domineering, racist, violent-obsessed political-social imagination now manifests itself as national capitalism, but in many ways, it differs from that of the last century.

You haven’t given any examples about Trump. Do you evaluate Trump differently?

A.İ.: The source of Trump’s march to power was a conservative counter-

revolutionary movement that has been rising in the USA since the 1970s. He should be considered the pinnacle of that movement. Conservatism against the civil rights of African-Americans, the right of women to abortion, and the defense of gender equality, reinforced by white supremacy. As I mentioned earlier, in the United States, Republicans are trying to make it harder for Latin American and African-American people to register on the electoral roll. They worry that the votes of these groups will go to the Democrats. This is an understanding of the conservative revolution, which started from the times of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan and aimed to end Keynesian/social democratic policies, neutralize the regulatory institutions formed by them, and replace them with a completely free market society. It is a counter-revolutionary revolution. We cannot necessarily define revolutions as the changes made by socialists, leftists, and progressives that will bring freedom and equality in every way. Revolution means the destruction of the existing structure and the replacement of it with a new one. It could be by a fundamentalist order, like the one newly introduced in Iran, or like the one Trump is trying to introduce. President Erdoğan has already told the young people who came to listen to him at the TÜGVA meeting, “You are conservative revolutionaries.” Apparently, Tayyip Erdoğan and his circle are trying to mobilize a dynamic of authoritarian, religious-nationalist social formation. But this requires destruction first.

You mentioned China, Russia, Turkey, and Hungary in the east (though Hungary is a little to the West), then we moved to the USA. Europe is in the middle of this map. Is the conservative revolutionary movement getting stronger there?

A.İ.: The rise of the extreme right has been one of the most critical issues on the political agenda in many European countries in recent years. Orban is the most outstanding representative of this. Hungary is a pole of authoritarian-national capitalist attraction within the European Union. The rise of the ultranationalist AfD has stalled in Germany for the past five years. The rise of the extreme right that we can trace in France, Spain, Italy, Belgium, and the Nordic countries is remarkable. In Italy,

The main reason for the rise of the extreme right in Europe is the tendency to preserve cultural identity; that is, the fear and hostility of foreigners. They essentially see Islam as a destructive cultural threat. This is a wave which was created by feeding on the horror of the Islamist terrorist attacks in Europe after the September 11 attack on the Twin Towers.

the leader of the far-right party has been elected the prime minister for the first time. They are the founding party of the government in Nordic countries. In France, the far-right candidate received 42 percent of the votes in the second round of the presidential election. In 2027, their odds of winning the election have increased. One exception is England. The main theme of the far right in Britain was to leave the EU. They ran out of material after Brexit. Then, due to the devastating economic consequences of leaving the EU, the far-right lost a lot of ground. The main reason for the rise of the extreme right in Europe is the tendency to preserve cultural identity; that is, the fear and hostility of foreigners. They essentially see Islam as a destructive cultural threat. This is a wave which was created by feeding on the horror of the Islamist terrorist attacks in Europe after the September 11 attack on the Twin Towers. In mid-October, the analogy made by EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Borell, reflected the subconscious of the majority in EU societies. Borell likened the EU to a garden of prosperity, peace, and freedom, and most of the countries outside this garden to the jungle. When he stated “the jungle can invade the garden,” the difference between what he was trying to express and what he concretely expressed could be a subject for Lacanian analysis.

Anti-foreigner or anti-migrant sentiment is on the rise in Turkey as well.

A.İ.: Since the far-right party has been in power in Turkey, anti-migration has become the theme of the opposition. The opposition is trying to use anti-



Photo: Özcan Yaman

migration as an argument against the government. However, we have seen how the widespread hidden racism in Turkey has emerged once again on this occasion. Supporters or opponents of the government are also primarily united in this area.

The right is very strong in Turkey. I don’t know if the right would have such an overwhelming superiority in other countries, if society were to be split into two, but Turkish society generally has a tendency towards the right. Let me get back to the issue of political participation. How should we interpret the extent of participation in sects and religious structures in recent years?

A.İ.: Most of Turkish society is conservative and follows the status quo. There is also a problem that the majority of Turkish society does not like to live with differences. Therefore, these differences are not only about migrants. They don’t want their neighbor to be Alawite or Kurdish. The majority of who we might name secular, for example, would prefer that their neighbors are English or French rather than Kurds, or especially Arabs. There is also a social structure in which everyone is confined to their own congregation. I

mentioned earlier that it is necessary to ask whether it can be named a ‘society’ in a sociological sense. Is it a society or a community? A community is something else. In this case, participation is partially realized in the structures which everyone considers to be close to themselves; where they can do their job; associations, and similar organizations with those who share the same religious and cultural codes. The public spaces where society members could previously come together have narrowed, been decimated, or perhaps no longer even exist. Thanks to the central placement exam, the university still maintains this atmosphere of togetherness to some degree, despite many other significant drawbacks. But it does not have the same effect as thirty years ago. For example, there is no common newspaper or media that people from almost all walks of life and political views read and follow. The schools are thoroughly segregated.

Once upon a time, it was called mainstream media...

A.İ.: *Hürriyet* was read by the right-wing, the left-wing, Alawites, and Sunnis. They would get angry at it, perhaps think it was state-controlled; nevertheless, they would not fail to check on it daily. It

was once the same for *Sabah*, *Milliyet* newspapers. Now we have no common media. Everyone is informed through the channels that give them the information they want.

This is what they say about social media – that users are creating their own echo chambers.

A.İ.: Echo chambers in Turkey have spread to encompass the whole of society. Going back to the initial topic of participation, the high turnout in the elections does not mean that voters act and vote as objectively as possible. In an environment of highly effective passions, fears, obsessions, and manipulation, the overwhelming majority of voters vote with the belief that if the ruling party loses, they will perish, or if they win the election again, they will no longer keep us alive. The high turnout remains a beacon of hope for a democratic future and has a far more profound, existential meaning than the election of MPs and a president. Shifts from one block to another remain relatively marginal despite great economic and political turmoil. Treating this as a manifestation of a civil war pattern that exists widely in society may seem exaggerated, but it needs to be considered. ☹️

THE BALLOT BOX

Elections, hence the image of the ballot box, have an exceptional place in Turkey's political culture. Various political groups, from those skeptical to those who see the ballot box as the only source of legitimacy, have occupied themselves with this image in our democratic history for more than a century. In this article, Tanil Bora depicts the collective meanings attributed to political participation, tracing the discourses established around the ballot box from the early republican era to the contemporary AKP period.

The ballot box is a powerful symbol, even an icon, of elections and the parliamentary electoral system. It is a symbol that objectifies contempt from those perspectives which are skeptical of parliamentarism or which questions it in its established form. First, let's briefly examine the debates and polarizations around the image of the ballot box in Turkey's century-old political history. Then, let's screen the "ballot box idioms" which give a clue about shifting political culture.

Ballot box "suspicion"

Memduh Şevket Esendal, who was the general secretary of the CHP

between 1942-1945, during the last phase of the single-party rule, satirized professionalized partisanship in his story entitled "Democratic elections" in which he mocked the election process: "You collect signatures, put up your candidacy, then go out to the villages and hire people, they throw around some papers for you, then you become a deputy." Esendal was from the conservative wing of the CHP. Whether conservative or "revolutionary" a significant number of those who were politically socialized through the single-party political experience (of course not all), looked upon the elections, *the ballot box*, the

most potent image of the elections, with sarcasm. They were convinced that the main decision maker was not and should not be the box. From this perspective, there was a high risk that the ballot box would become a repository of the exploitative confusion of the ignorant majority, who were still considered politically immature.

Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, the respected literary and intellectual of the early republican period, wrote in *Ulus* on 2 November 1957, that many French scientists and intellectuals such as "Renan and Taine" suddenly flinched as they

A significant number of those who were politically socialized through the single-party political experience (of course not all), looked upon the elections, *the ballot box*, the most potent image of the elections, with sarcasm. They were convinced that the main decision maker was not and should not be the box. From this perspective, there was a high risk that the ballot box would become a repository of the exploitative confusion of the ignorant majority, who were still considered politically immature.

approached the ballot box and returned without using their voting rights. Their inner voice had told them, "How can you hand over the fate of your people to these people, when you don't know who they are or what they will do?" The box was the symbol of the "unknown"... However, the same Yakup Kadri did not fail to romanticize the "ballot box" of modern democracies in *İkdam* at a much earlier date, June 19, 1923, on the occasion of the first general elections of the Turkish Republic. I will quote his lovely piece of text at length:

"For the voters, the 'ballot boxes' are like an enigmatic enclosure of national destiny. Everyone believes deeply that public calamity will come out of this, just like peace. This is why the hand of every elected who puts his ballot in the box trembles with the grace of an expert of necessity, who casts an evil eye on the window of a saint's tomb... This is why the ecstasy and enthusiasm we see in the election locations of the ballot boxes, which are the manifestation of the national will, have become a revelation to us as one of the manifestations of the ideal of democracy among the popular strata."

This romance, expressed on the occasion of the elections in the exciting first days of the Republic (and note: the opposition protested, the ruling "First Group," so to speak, played single-player), was the expression of an ideal. As mentioned earlier, we were still far from that level of maturity at this stage...

Ballot Box security

The skepticism of the "Republic elite" about the elections manifested itself in the first elections after the transition to a multi-party life. Since the ruling party did not trust the ballot box, these elections were held in conditions reminiscent of the famous "election with sticks" of the Committee of Union and Progress in 1912. When the opposition Democratic Party (DP) boycotted the local elections in May 1946, protesting the method of "open vote, secret classification," some CHP executives complained personally that the officers "put too many votes in the ballot boxes to increase the participation rate." In the general elections held in July of that year, the overt manipulation of power was decisive. The abduction of ready-made "mysterious polls" in their votes were commonplace in this election. Osman Bölükbaşı, the leader of the later Republican Peasant Nation Party, who failed to be elected as a DP candidate in 1946, protested that the election chests were being manipulated, stating that "For us, the real vote is the heart of the nation."

DP spokespersons attributed their victory in the 1950 general elections mainly to the fact that



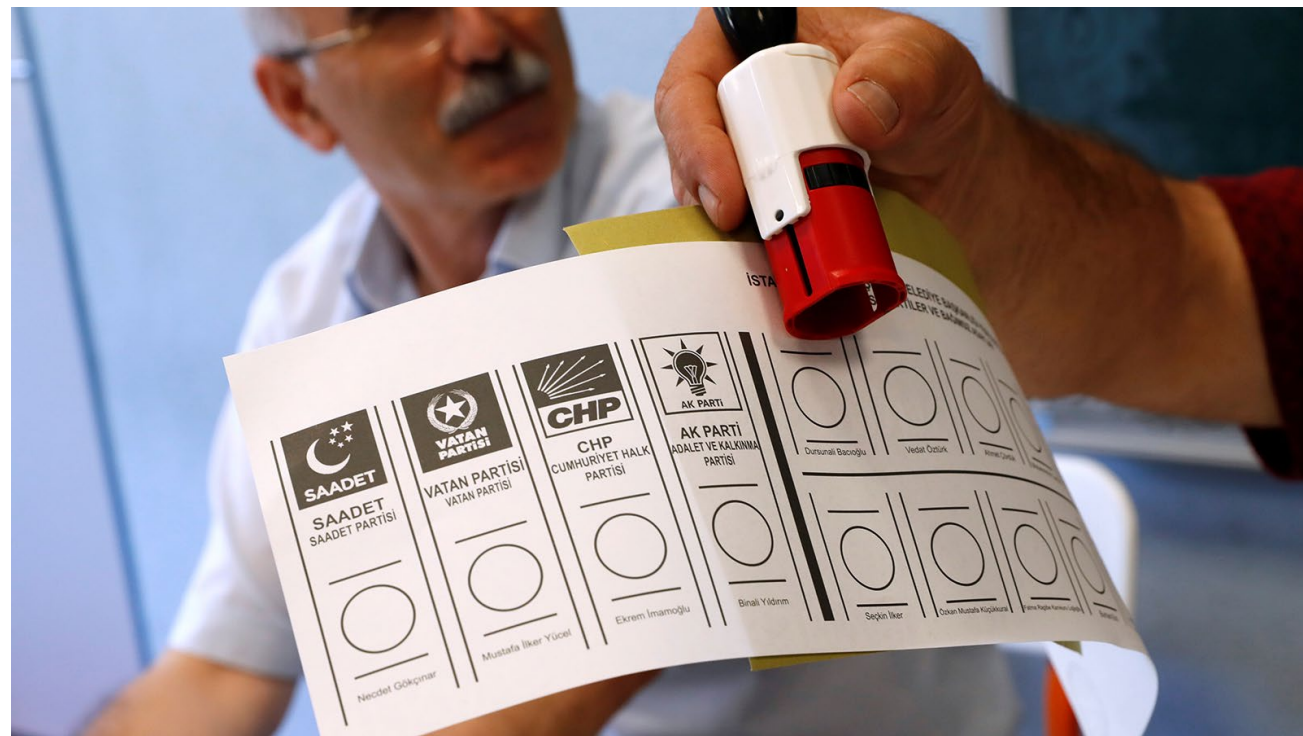
ballot box security had been provided. For them, the favor of the "heart of the nation" was thus manifested. Ballot box security was no longer a matter of discussion.

However, from the eve of the military coup of May 27, 1960, this political approach, which saw the ballot box as the source of absolute political power, began to be questioned. DP's concept of "national will" and the obtaining of a majority at the ballot box legitimized its unlimited power, which did not leave any room for the separation of powers. This insight paved the way for a despotic administration. The 1961 Constitution, which limited power through the separation of power and judicial control, was informed by this bad experience.

"Ballot box democracy"

Continuing the mission of the DP, the Justice Party's (AP) emergence from the ballot box as the second party in 1961 and their coming to power in 1965 brought debates over the ballot box to a more heated level. AP leader Süleyman Demirel vigorously expressed the nationalist discourse of "believing in the ballot box." His words at the beginning of the 2000s reflect a vision that attributes metaphysical meaning to the ballot box: "The box is bizarre. No one can know about it." From this perspective, the obscurity of the box expresses the mysterious wisdom of the people.

The left-wing public was concerned that nationalist willpower despotism, in its broadest definition, would be revived and that social reforms expected after May 27 would fail. As is the case all over the world, the rise of left-wing radicalism and the non-parliamentary opposition movement brought this concern to the extent of loathing elections and parliament. In this atmosphere, the ballot box became the image of the corruption of the elective parliamentary system. The work of famous cartoonist Tonguç is typical in this respect: We see Demirel's head reaching out from the ballot box, with the caption: "They landed in İzmir, we pushed them into the sea... They came out of the ballot box". The cartoons in which the ballot box bears the stamp of the "USA" (USA) more clearly confirm the belief that the parliamentary electoral system was being guided by US imperialism.





Kurtuluş Gazetesi, 1965.



Source: Social History Research Foundation of Turkey

neglected in the empowerment of the people. On the other hand the ballot box was discredited across the majority of the left. In the left-Kemalist circles of the period, the term used to belittle the parliamentary electoral system was “ballot box democracy.” It was a term that mocked the reduction of democracy to such a sleazy “thing” as the ballot box. In fact, Osman Köksal, one of the members of the May 27 junta, used the term “ballot box coup” for the election. Doğan Avcıoğlu, who invested in the “progressive” mission of the army and an influential intellectual of the period, stated in *Devrim* magazine that Allende could not be trusted to come to power by election in Chile, under the title “Ballot box socialism in Chile!”

This was too much for the CHP, which had become the address of a reformist left, not a revolutionary left, as was the case for Aybar. The spokespersons of the Middle Left movement in the CHP, especially Bülent Ecevit and Turan Güneş, distanced themselves from “extreme leftism that does not believe in the ballot box.”

Nihat Erim, the first prime minister appointed by the military administration, who gave a memorandum on March 12, 1971, forcing the government to resign and crushing the whole left with violence (killings, executions, and mass arrests) by moving towards armed struggle, stated on April 9, 1971: “Democracy is no longer a ballot box democracy.”

*
In the 1970s, there can be no discussion about the “meaning and importance” of the ballot box as there was in the 1960s. Interestingly, during the government of the Nationalist Front, Uğur Mumcu wrote in the *Cumhuriyet* newspaper on January 12, 1976 that Demirel had “given up on the ballot box he used to praise” and longed to rule the country with constant martial law. This was a period when the left, in general, was becoming stronger, and the CHP was the major party. An exceptional “ballot box” incident of the period was the independent socialist candidate Fikri Sönmez winning the mayorship of the Fatsa district of Ordu in 1979. Sönmez, who attempted to establish a participation model based on neighborhood committees in line with the understanding that “not only the

Mehmet Ali Aybar of the Turkish Labour Party tried to explain that the justification “I came out of the ballot box” used in this period would not provide a right to absolute power and that elections were not the only way to practice democracy: “With your logic, governments come out of the ballot box, but remember this: The history of nations does not come out of the ballot box.” However, Aybar did not doubt that the ballot box was a mechanism that could not be



Propaganda poster by FİDEF, 1983

order of exploitation should change, but also the political order whose democracy is based on ballot boxes,” was arrested and forcibly dismissed after only six months after a fierce anti-communist vigilance.

AKP's ballot box

We witness that the ballot box image was again subject to a debate reminiscent of the '60s in the “28 February Process”, also known as the “post-modern coup.” The overwhelmed government resigned under pressure from the military command team, which was reacting to the “anti-secular actions” of the major ruling partner, the Welfare Party (RP). Those who supported this intervention at the time frequently reiterated that “democracy cannot be reduced to the ballot box.” Although this discourse supported the initiative of secularist-modernist non-governmental organizations, the primary determinant was the conservative-republican attitude that did not want to surrender the survival of the nation-state to the will of the voters, which was open to manipulation.

The Justice and Development Party (AKP) government, which was established after the 2002 elections, was interpreted as a rematch of February 28 and presented itself in the same way. Challenging the (online!) memorandum given by the Chief of General Staff in April 2007 regarding the Presidential election, the government



called early elections (that is, to the “ballot box”) and got out by 12 points, increasing its votes to 46.5 percent, which was a clear rematch. In the following years, AKP spokespersons –i.e., on February 27, 2020, Public Superintendent Şeref Malkoç – would say, “28 February was completed by democracy and the polls.”

The AKP legitimized its power, which it was increasingly fortifying and turning into a kind of party-state after 2015, with its mission of defeating the “military tutelage” and based its legitimacy on the ballot box that represented the “national will.” Party leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made the ballot box a matter of honor. In 2013, he announced “the ballot box is the honor of democracy. He who does not respect the ballot box does not respect himself, his people, and his history.” AKP lost the majority in the June 2015 election for the first time, and the election was renewed on November 1, 2015. The electoral supremacy, which was regained “thanks to” terrorizing the environment through creating an atmosphere of severe threats to security, was described as a “ballot box revolution” by the ruling media.

President Erdoğan repeated his “ballot box = honor” equation before the 2019 local elections: “The ballot box is our honor. It is the unbreakable, unshakeable, indestructible castle of the national will. The ballot box is a very important achievement of our nation by paying a price and struggling.” A few weeks after these words, he decided to renew the election by not “recognizing” the result of the Istanbul metropolitan municipality elections, which meant violating the “honor of the ballot box.” Ekrem İmamoğlu won the first election by a few thousand votes, increased the difference by about eight hundred thousand in the repeated election, which saved the “honor of the ballot box.”

It should be noted that in the elections held after the major Gezi protests in 2013, doubts and concerns about ballot box security and counting votes became systematic. In a way, the 1946 “spirit” is back! Opposition political parties have increased their efforts to ensure ballot box security and the “protection” of votes, and independent citizen initiatives have emerged for this purpose.

Ballot box “discourse”

Let us reiterate that the ballot box is a powerful political image. It is an “object,” a word that symbolizes the meaning attributed to choice; it is romanticized as an image of the will of the nation or the people. Let’s repeat that the ballot box is an icon.

The ballot box iconography is equipped with an exciting array of idioms. Political challenges with the “ballot box” have a long history. Pressure groups and constituencies balance their voting power on the scales and warn, “See you at the ballot box” or “Answer at the ballot box.” Opposition parties claiming that the government has fallen from power call for an election as soon as possible, challenging them by saying, “Bring the ballot box!” Political parties –usually governments– who do not respond to the call for early elections are humiliated by the insult of “fleeing the polls.”

The strong image of electoral victory is “burying in the ballot box.” The lighter version of this phrase, which implies heavy defeat, is “not being able to get out of the ballot box” – that is, not being able to be elected or not being able to succeed in the election.

“Go to the polls!” is the call to celebrate the elections as a “celebration of democracy.” The scenes of “going to the polls” are indispensable folkloric images of the election days.

The phrase the “message of the ballot box” or “message from the ballot box” establishes the polls as an anonymous subject of national will and political common sense in the mind.

The fact that a political effort that seems effective and gives morale to its perpetrator and the cheering of this effort does not reach the expected result in the elections is again met with the expression “not being reflected in the ballot box.” The question of whether a political formation, a reaction, a support, or an opposition will “be reflected in the ballot box” is a matter of innumerable expectation and speculation. Of course, this “tension” has the result of reducing politics to the election results.

The symbol of the folklore of “not reflected in the ballot box” in Turkey’s



political history is Osman Bölükbaşı, whom we have mentioned before. Bölükbaşı himself made a humorous point about his party’s failure to receive votes to the same degree as its massive rallies: “We have an abundance of threshing with no grain. The Turkish nation has long stems but remains scarce in grain. You are productive in the squares, you will not spare me your applause, but when you go to the polls, you vote for someone else.”

As a condition of the “reflection of a potential political support to the ballot box,” the ability to “lead the voter to the ballot box” is mentioned. This is an important item of organization in elective politics. What is meant is that other than determined voters, loose voters who are not too engaged with their sympathizers, party, or politics are mobilized to vote. This mobilization is sometimes achieved through strong campaigns, psychological impact, and sometimes directly by “carrying” the voters “as present” accompanied by the party members.

The favorite phrase associated with ballot box security is “to look out for the ballot box.” The ballot box is protected by preventing the opposing party members from terrorizing or misleading the voters or making them cast multiple votes, preventing the ballot boxes from being hijacked, the ballots from being stolen, or the ballots from being filled with fake ballots, and overseeing the proper counting.

“Not going to the polls” or “the ones not voting” is a critical and fearful phrase in electoral politics. Sometimes it describes being indifferent to politics and apoliticism. This phenomenon undoubtedly erodes the dignity, power, and even legitimacy of elective parliamentary politics. Sometimes “not going to the polls” is a conscious choice, an expression of protest, a boycott. Often, anti-system or radical parties resort to this way. (However, as in the case of the 1946 local elections, an in-system opposition party protests the election security disaster and urges its voters not to “go to the polls.”) For example, in the 1979 elections, a number of revolutionary socialist organizations implemented “ballot box boycotts.” The CHP mobilized the left-wing voters with the slogan “the only way out is to vote” against the slogan of these politics “the only way out is the revolution”.

We see that CHP spokespersons are again recently repeating the slogan, “the only way out is the ballot box.” With this, the will not to indulge in methods

“other than the ballot box” is implied. On the one hand, what is indicated is incitement to military intervention, which is the common accusation targeting the CHP, but on the other hand, it is street politics. “The only way out is the ballot box” dogma with this second aspect is problematic, as it reduces politics to electoral activity and, moreover, criminalizes street politics.

* When concluding, let’s add that this abundance of images and phrases around the ballot box replaces the “advertisement” of electoral parliamentary politics. The constant circulation of the word “ballot box” serves a function that legitimizes election competition and legitimizes politics within the parliamentary electoral system. I will refer to the term “folklore” once again; the word “ballot box” is a powerful popular image of politicization. In terms of political participation, as we discussed in this article, the fact that it can turn into an image of a restrictive function as well as an encouragement should not be overlooked.

¹ This appears in his book *Gödeli Mehmet*, Bilgi Publishing House, Ankara 2007 (2nd edition), p. 135.

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“Politics is not part of daily life”

Turkey is approaching one of the most critical elections in its political history. Although the fixed votes remain quite static, the tendencies of undecided voters, which constitute a significant portion, are of great importance at this critical juncture. In addition to this, one in three voters in the 2023 elections, a cluster of about 20 million, are expected to be under the age of 30. We discussed with Erman Bakırcı from KONDA Research and Consultancy the subject of young voters, the significance of party leadership and the tendencies of voters whose dominant approach to political participation has traditionally been to go to the polls from one election to the next.

The first step towards participating in politics is having an interest in politics. Do you think the voters are interested in politics?

Erman Bakırcı: When we say voters, we are talking about 64 million people, 64 million singularities. But when we're conducting research and explaining them, we're forced to break them down and make some reductions. After all, we don't have the opportunity to interview 64 million people. While there is a practical side to making these reductions, there is also the risk of erasing the diversity and differences.

We expect approximately one out of every three people who vote in the 2023 election to be under the age of 30. This makes a cluster of about 20 million voters. I would firstly like to suggest a framework for understanding who the youth are and who the voter is.

Part of the electorate is interested in politics, to the point of following it. They keep track of what's going on, although not necessarily to a very sophisticated degree. But this interest is often misunderstood. For example, when we conduct research, the research approaches their political awareness through the following measure – such and such happened, and the voter didn't react to it. The voter doesn't take notes while watching the news or doesn't write regularly in their diary

about the speeches of political party leaders and isn't prepared to answer the questions of a research company knocking on their door. But the demands, expectations, and ideas of the voters evolve over time. It doesn't mean that daily consequences and experiences have no effect. They have an effect, but it may not be instantaneous during the hustle of everyday life. Secondly, the issue of interest in politics is multi-dimensional. There are quite a few people who think that dealing with politics serves as a catalyst for social mobilization. The main problem here is the question of what politics you're dealing with. In other words, if you act in a structure, which is compatible with the existing order, such participation is welcomed by those who favor that structure. But if the politics you are dealing with aims for fundamental changes in the current order, or if there is a possibility of somehow taking a position against the state, or if there is even a perception of this, people are afraid to actively engage in politics. Interest and dealing are therefore interrelated elements. Those who are interested have a very low rate of dealing with politics.

The situation of young people is even more crucial here. We can say that one out of every three voters in Turkey is under the age of 30, so their participation in the polls is one of the factors that will have consequences; but on the other hand young people don't have a high

If we look outside our own bubble, it can be observed that ideological affiliation is not very strong across society. It is even weaker for young people. One of the essential factors in this is that most people who we call 'young' today were born in metropolitan areas.

ideological commitment. It's not high in Turkey at any rate. If we look outside our own bubble, it can be stated that ideological affiliation is not very strong across society. It is even weaker for young people. One of the essential factors in this is that most people who we call 'young' today were born in metropolitan areas, but their parents were not. Generally, when people are born in a metropolis, they live with more multiplicities, multi-dimensions, multi-identities, and diversities. In the countryside, you tend to live with people who are similar to each other, but when it comes to metropolises such as Ankara, Istanbul, and Izmir, you live with large crowds. In other words, the problems brought about by living in the metropolis cover up identity problems to an extent and encourage people to share real issues.

There is a difference with young people; young people are very desperate and



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outraged today. Their relationship to politics is based on despair, not hope. This makes the possibility of young people going to the polls and their participation in politics quite fragile. In other words, it is not possible to predict with absolute certainty that they will not go to the polls, but there is a possibility that they won't go. If politics cannot inspire hope and convince young people that they can solve their problems by going to the ballot box, the participation rate of young people in the ballot box may decrease, which will seriously affect the election result.

Isn't this a more passive relationship than previous generations? The previous generations did not wait for someone to attract them to go into politics. They would say 'There are problems, let's try and solve them'. They would even go so far as to say, "Let's change the world, not only Turkey." The relationship of this generation with politics looks quite different in this sense.

E.B.: I certainly can't say this is true for all young people, but the spirit of the time has changed. Just as the world in the 40s did not exist in the 70s, the world in the 70s did not exist in the 90s, so the world in the 90s does not exist now. It's not just

about getting involved in politics. Their relationship with life in general is more fluid. They don't want to get too involved in hierarchical structures with very rigid boundaries. Still, this doesn't mean that they don't have definitions of what is good, accurate, or beautiful. It's just they don't really follow the old patterns. It's possible to say this.

The question to ask at this point is – what should politics do to attract you, to look attractive to you? The older generations had a political view, a stance, and an ideology; they would consider their options accordingly. Is there a value base through which these generations can measure this attractiveness?

E.B.: First, the structures of existing political parties are not attractive to this generation. That's one of the basic issues. They're very rigid. They expect the struggle in the party to result in a hierarchical promotion. So, they consider their own benefits a little bit more at this point. Furthermore, just as we cannot state that older generations always made their choices based on ideological backgrounds, we also cannot say that this generation are entirely detached from ideology. Compared to the '70s

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and the 80s, yes, they're more detached. This can be explained by the spirit of the time. But there are also the following factors in the current structures which might play a role: firstly the structures of the parties are very rigid; secondly, they think there's a possibility that others who enter the party can get ahead of them; thirdly, if a problem needs to be solved in society, they still see the option of solving it through politics. But let me also say that while some people understand politics as holding the solution to their problems, a large group of people thinks that these problems can't be solved. But still, the question remains – why don't they go into politics? There's no hope. There is no political structure that can speak their language, be like-minded, and communicate with them



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in an understandable way. The political structure usually works in the following way – we have a pattern, we have been organizing this way for fifty years, and we want to continue organizing like this for another fifty years.

We're undergoing a transformation of the period of time, a transformation of an era. Young people, especially those living in metropolitan areas, have transformed, but the structures of political parties have not kept up with this transformation. The second issue is that, similarly, the membership rates in NGOs and trade unions are low. Confidence in the legal system is low across Turkish society. Being a member of a union or an NGO creates anxiety about potential trouble this might bring in the future. This anxiety leads young people to avoid entering these fields. We cannot oppose this transformation – on the contrary, politics must find the tools and methods to keep up with it.

Young people do not like the current structures; they are hopeless, they find these structures rigid, and they don't see a future for themselves there. What are their expectations from political parties? How can these parties reach young people? Has any research been conducted on this? What can Kılıçdaroğlu, Akşener, or Erdoğan do to attract the attention of young people?

E.B.: We don't have such a clear formulation, but we can look at what

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young people are interested in, their ideas at different moments, and how the parties relate to them. For instance, nature, the environment, and climate change are the issues at the forefront of young people's conscience. If the said parties can't enact these policies, they're already missing a potential way to connect to young voters. Young people care about such issues. While parties continue to obsess over debates about identity politics, they are missing out on issues that can reach young people. It's obvious that they face a situation unlike before, but I'm not sure the extent to which political structures want to include young people in their parties after receiving the vote. We need to address this too. In terms of political parties, voting is considered enough to 'do' politics.

For example, political parties have a women's branch and a youth branch. As a result the area in the center becomes like a defined area for "non-young men" to do politics. This arrangement has no value in life. We all hold discussions on social media, and the age or gender of the person who comments on your post may not matter so much there.

Political parties should forget these hierarchies, but they're still the bearers of such hierarchies. Of course, some politicians and structures are trying to mitigate this, but it still remains inadequate.

In fact, we can see this hierarchy being reproduced in the convention declarations of political parties, the outcome documents of some meetings, and recently in projects such as the century vision. They start with democracy and the economy, and environmental problems and the climate crisis are just added at the end. I guess young people notice this distinction, that the politician has it on their program. But do they look to see if they have a sincere attitude and preparation towards protecting the environment?

E.B.: Some voters will certainly buy this, depending on their level of knowledge. In the last few elections, some politicians tried to connect with young people through rap music because this is what they listen to. But these methods did not, and will not, work. It doesn't matter

what they listen to. The more important questions are – where do they listen to it, why do they listen to it, how did the listening venues form? For example, there is a rap boom in the more recently established districts of Istanbul which now have a large population. Why did this happen? What does it matter if politicians listen to rap music, go to rap concerts, or sing a duet with singers if they have not also comprehended the transformation happening there and developed a language accordingly... It's not that easy. In fact, these strategies involve a degree of contempt; they listen to it, and say 'okay, let's sing a folk song, who needs a party program'? You can solve the political issue with a Black Sea folk song, an Aegean folk song. That's not how it works. The youth issue, in particular, is not like that at all.

There are two things that need to be separated: First, the question of whether politics is the only solution to the problems. I guess this is where we get stuck because, unfortunately, the only solution at the moment seems to be politics. We face a government, even an entire political system, which is occupying and intervening into our intimate living space, squeezing us to vote. On the other hand, there is a complaint about the low participation in political parties and even NGOs. This complaint follows this logic - we're creating all these programs and events, but participation is very low, the number of members is not increasing, and members are not paying their dues or only paying their dues but nothing else. Are these structures also open to participation? Do you have any data about this?

E.B.: The key point about participation is anxiety. Participation declines when the anxiety barrier begins. Secondly, there is no politics in the first step of people's daily lives. Politics is not included in life so much. In the last three or four years in particular, people who have experienced the severe economic crisis, who have trouble with their livelihoods and who worry about the future, don't think, 'okay, let's get into politics with a very motivated mind and change this.' They're only in a position to make a living for their own households. This should be resolved at some point. The possibility that there is another method other than the ballot box is not taken into consideration. There

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are those who think this, of course, but they are only a very small part of society. As a result of this the voter turnout in Turkey is very high. In other words, voters who don't go into the political field try to express themselves through their votes. This is the reason we see participation rates such as 85-86 percent. In the last presidential elections it decreased to 70 percent, but apart from this, it has always remained within the 80-85 percentage band. As we have just mentioned, if the turnout remains at these rates, this would be an indication that young people are participating in the elections to a large extent. But when participation drops below the 80 percent threshold, those who are not participating will likely come from the youth, which will seriously affect the election results.

We know that the electorate has attempted to open up new areas of political participation. An example of such political work occurring outside politics was shown through structures such as Oy ve Ötesi. How do you evaluate these processes?

E.B.: Let me make the point that the excitement generated by some non-governmental organizations or supra-political structures such as Oy ve Ötesi is very valuable. In these spaces citizens came together to do what politicians could not do. But at the same time the relationship between these structures and established political structures should feed each other. I'm not saying let's leave the entire political field only to the control and rule of established political parties. This is not what I mean. Autonomous ideas and actions that act to solve different problems are important for the political sphere. In fact, we are

very rich in this regard. Especially in terms of ecology, there are many local clusters, which may be small in terms of numbers of people, so we don't come across many of these clusters in the field when we conduct a survey. There must be a learning relationship between this field and the structure of political parties. The MPs should not go to a demonstration and tweet from there; they should have intellectual feeding areas. Both areas should be independent of each other, but they should be able to continue feeding each other. I'm not talking about any party in particular, but the feeding grounds of political parties in general. Think of it like a basin. If the participation of citizens in local governments in Turkey is already very limited, and if civil society is very limited, the only option is to join political parties. If political parties don't embrace people easily or if people don't participate, the only solution should be to expand the social basins from where each political party feeds. The small capillary networks in those basins are the movements of ideas and actions that may not seem very important in number but which can join together to solve local and different problems. It is necessary to join together the rivers of these movements and the basins of political parties.

Could the election that Ekrem İmamoğlu won be an example of these two sides feeding each other?

E.B.: You make the right point. We researched this as well. The main difference between the first and second elections was that the second time the demographic of 'hopeless youth without an ideology' went to the polls, some with hope, others with the angry question of "come on man, why was the election canceled?" One of the main constituents of the 800,000 difference in votes was these young people who didn't go to the polls in the first election.

There is also the existence of the following situation – if you intend to introduce a system of recycling garbage to your neighborhood, you can't find a participation mechanism. There seems to be a lot of online participation mechanisms, but it is debatable whether these are also open to actual participation on the ground.

E.B.: Sometimes we ask this question in our surveys – 'have you ever written a petition?' We also ask – 'What is your

method of requesting?’ Tweeting is one form of requesting, and notifying from an application is also another... But here’s the interesting point. Previously, if a petition were to be written, the whole apartment would get together and apply with the same petition. In contrast the current applications have become individual applications. Even if we live in the same apartment, we don’t tend to say ‘let’s go and get a signature from my neighbor and we can make an application together’. Instead we make an application from where we’re sitting, from our micro-space, as our individual selves. That’s one of the main differences with the past. The application methods have changed, but the issue of acting together has also changed. The processes have become much more singular.

Following on from that, let’s talk about social media as a method of participation. It may be a singular method, but it also seems to be open to participation as an effective method. What do you think about this?

E.B.: Almost 90 percent of Turkish society uses social media. The Internet and social media are the primary sources of following the news, especially for young people. Even if they want to confirm a piece of news, they still use social media to a large extent, but less than 40 percent comment and share the country’s agenda on social media. Around 60 percent don’t post at all. Those who say they post frequently are only around 10 percent - a figure which came from our findings before the disinformation law came into effect. This suggests we don’t live in a reality in which everyone is always posting every idea on social media. That’s one of the main points I want to make about this. Is social media a participation tool despite this? Yes. People turn their demands and expectations into campaigns there, and they voice them. But it would be quite wrong to say that social media equals Turkish society. Even this question is very difficult. Which social media? The demography which uses Twitter and Instagram are different; Facebook is different again. In this respect, social media is important as a form of political participation. The fact that a subject is a trend topic on Twitter indicates there is a sensitivity about it. But the fact that a topic is not a trend topic does not mean that the matter is of little importance or that few people

care about it. Social media is a medium that feeds on society but can also offer us illusions. It is useful to approach social media with some distance and filtering. The voices we hear on social media are the voices of this society, but it is very likely that they do not represent the whole of society. The power of a voice on social media and its power within society are often not the same. It should also be considered that there are fake accounts. Despite all these comments, I think that social media is both an important form of political participation and an important political field in terms of creating the possibility for people to come together with different ideas and personalities, and have an understanding of different views.

Based on the Gezi protests, we can say that it is an arena of organization.

E.B.: Indeed, it has been an important arena in terms of organization, but we may also be merely creating our own bubbles here. I only tend to follow people like me. If I’m a conservative, I might think “I live in such a conservative society”; someone else might think it’s a largely Marxist community.

Regarding your field, can we say that opinion polls are a form of political participation?

E.B.: If we agree that political participation is an effort to be involved in some processes to influence the choices of those in government, participating in opinion polls can be considered political participation. I’m not against it, but I think it’s only a passive form of participation. That is, we prepare a sample and send our interviewers to some neighborhoods. They knock on the doors and meet with the households face to face. The essential question of participation in this case is “would you like to participate in our survey” when somebody knocks on your door. If they answer ‘yes’ to this question, knowing that the survey’s content is political, then perhaps we can consider it to be political participation. But the voter isn’t waiting with their ideas written down in their notebook for an interviewer so that they can influence the political mechanism.

But these surveys have become an influential element in politics.

E.B.: To the extent that when we asked, “Do public opinion surveys change

The influence of research companies is a bit legendary in society. Nowadays, it is said that research companies should investigate who should be a candidate, conduct surveys, etc. But according to which findings of which research company will political parties make their decisions?

people’s minds?” the majority said ‘yes’; and when we asked, “Did they change your mind?”, we got the answer ‘no’.

It seems to affect political parties. For example, they research young people’s expectations, and they use rap songs because young people listen to rap.

E.B.: I believe this effect is a bit overrated. I’ve been in this field for ten years. After all, we have to ask the question ‘what is research?’ You come to us with an issue, a question. We turn that issue into a research question and elaborate on that question. According to the sample we create using a scientific method, we go to the field. We collect data. Then, we come and give you an answer. We talk about a couple of things: The first is projections of the intellectual structure of society. We’ll present the current state. No research can be said to be absolutely accurate. They all have their margin of error. Sometimes they’re wrong, and sometimes they’re not. We research and communicate the findings to the person asking the question. What they do with the findings is entirely up to them. They may agree with us on this issue, or they may not. The influence of research companies is a bit legendary in society. Nowadays, it is said that research companies should investigate who should be a candidate, conduct surveys, etc. But according to which findings of which research company will political parties make their decisions? Among the research companies, some do not hide their close relations with some political parties. There are different research companies, and your choice may determine the outcome.

We can say that parties such as ANAP and DYP were liquidated by an election. Of course, there was a substantial structure behind it, but this might not



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even be a question for Demirel or Ecevit, or they would have a transformation such as an internal party leader change, cadre reset/liquidation. How do you explain the electorate’s keen attitude here?

E.B.: In the political science literature, terms such as “critical election” and “critical reorganization” are used for such cases. We haven’t seen such an election since 2002. When we analyze the 2011-2018 elections, we see that the same parties remained in the power. There has been little change. It’s been a stagnant period.

Consequences such as the 2001 economic crisis and the earthquake shaped the outcome you mentioned. Of course, crises are not the only causes. The representation of conservative thought in the political arena is the subject of a very long discussion. Only during the establishment of the AK Party, have we seen a rupture between citizens and the existing parties. The AK Party combined that rupture with the international conjuncture and read and implemented it well. When we look at the situation today, let me tell you roughly that this is not the case. People are hopeless about politics, but it does not seem there will be a critical election. This is the case today, and we don’t know what the next period will bring. You can see the results

of the polls, there is a decrease in the AK Party’s votes in all of them, but it is still the first party in almost all of them. When considering the 20-year period, there is a decrease from 49 percent, even with the coalition with the MHP, but we do not see a move like before.

Two things have been critical recently: The first is the entrance of HDP to the elections as a party with the confidence that it can pass the ten percent threshold; and the second is the establishment of the İYİ Party. These two parties have become the forces that have determined the balance between the AK Party and the other sides.

An important indicator in politics is the fact that voters have given credit to these two parties. İYİ Party was established despite the existence of the MHP and HDP, whose votes are unpredictable.

E.B.: When we knocked on the door of voters ten years ago, approximately 60 percent of those who defined themselves as Kurds would say AK Party. Now it’s down to 15 percent. These votes have gone to the HDP, and they are also positioned against President Erdoğan.

There are three reasons for this decline: First, the Kurds; second, the young people; and lastly, the economic crisis.

Two things have been critical recently: The first is the entrance of HDP to the elections as a party with the confidence that it can pass the ten percent threshold; and the second is the establishment of the İYİ Party. These two parties have become the forces that have determined the balance between the AK Party and the other sides.

The economic crisis is the common denominator. Unless the AK Party takes a step in this regard, it does not seem likely it will increase its votes. Economic dissatisfaction is very high. Although the opposition does not give people confidence that it can manage better, this is not enough for Erdoğan; he must reverse the perception of the economic crisis and offer people some economic development. Economic reasons are essential for young people, but there is also a lifestyle pressure here. Young people are more modern and more involved in life. Political interventions in their lifestyle have been an essential factor in their increasing distance from the AK Party.



Photo: Özcan Yaman

Kurds also have demands for their identity and democracy. It will be challenging for the AK Party to reach 50 percent of the votes if it cannot make a move on the economic crisis, a move on the lifestyle of young people, and a move for the Kurds. Yet I still don't think this election will be a critical one. At least, I don't believe it will be.

Another circumstance regarding this election is, on one side, the existence of a "leader" like Erdoğan, and on the other side, the "candidate" of the alliance. How will the voter demonstrate loyalty, fanaticism, or objectivity to the party, the leader, or the program? How will people evaluate the different weights on these two scales? Will they vote for the candidate on the one hand and vote for the party leader on the other, or will they consider both as candidates?

E.B.: In the public opinion polls, when we ask the question, "What determines your voting preference," we generally divide the voter into five categories: supporter voter, ideological voter, leader-dependent voter, non-partisan voter, and last-minute voter.

The leader-dependent voters are in the band of 24 percent, and ideological voters, that is, those who say, "I vote because my political opinion is close to that party," are in the 30 percent band.

While the number of leader-dependent voters in the AK Party is high, the number of ideological voters is higher amongst the CHP voters. Leader dependency is one of the issues that is muller over a lot. People are leader-dependent because the leader of the AK Party has leadership features. That is to say, they are not leader-dependent, saying they won't vote if there's no leader. For example, if we asked the same in the '77 elections, CHP voters would also be leader-dependent because of Bülent Ecevit. At that time, right-wing voters would be ideological voters. These are temporary concepts, and politics should not be discussed according to people's use of concepts. Besides, in general we're not that fond of a leader. It's more important to have someone to do the work. If a party doesn't get a lot of votes today, we can't just explain this by claiming that the leader doesn't do leadership; it's not just the leader's *aura*. What the leader offers to society, their political background, and the arguments they use are also important.

But there is also a fact in this election: while Kılıçdaroğlu is criticized for not being a leader, Erdoğan is glorified for being a leader. Leadership may be overrated, but there is a leader currently in power. Perhaps the scale looks crooked since Kılıçdaroğlu is so pressured on this issue.

E.B.: I agree, but the votes CHP gets should not be made in connection with Kılıçdaroğlu's leadership qualification. If Turkey's founding party, such as the CHP, cannot express itself to society, there's no single reason for this. It's a bit of an easy argument. The citizen does not develop political opinions only by considering the leader. Suppose you're in provincial town A, does the district head of the party shake your hand or not? Are they chatting with you or not? If you don't have these contacts, if the party's capillaries don't work, or isn't able to find the proper method to work, there must be a problem. The leadership gives *an aura*, it can make people a little more motivated when they vote, but if you believe in a political idea, you don't vote for the other party's leader because they act like one. There is no leadership which is independent of all personal experiences and knowledge.

What are people's sources of information about politics?

E.B.: People's sources of information are television, the Internet, the street, and the social environment. Television is an important issue. The numbers of those who don't watch the news on TV are increasing every year. Young people in particular, and those with a high level of education, watch less TV. Nevertheless, television, and media, is the most crystallized form of political polarization. There is a TV channel close to every political opinion. This is an area where everyone can coexist with his or her opponent. Everyone thinks the other one is not telling the truth, so there's a bubble situation here, too. Let's put it this way –Fox News viewers and A News viewers don't get together.

The second information area is the street, the social environment. Here, it is an important factor whether the person lives in the countryside, the city, or the metropolis. As I mentioned at the beginning, metropolises are crowded, they are places with different social, political, and ethnic identities and are much more suitable for making encounters. The countryside and towns are smaller, with more similarities and fewer differences. It is harder for a change of opinion to occur there. In other words, it is necessary to penetrate these spaces in order to make a change there. ☺

Interview with Mesut Yeğen

Interview by Cafer Solgun

"The 150-year system changed when Kurdish political representation could not be hindered"

In the build up to the 2023 elections, both political alliance blocs understand that Kurdish voters have become crucial. Their support can ensure victory for one side and defeat for the other. We talked with Mesut Yeğen, who has conducted extensive research on the Kurdish issue, about the performance and practices of Kurds' participation in politics.

What form did the Kurds' participation in the political process take in the last era of the Ottoman Empire, which ended with the proclamation of the republic in 1923, including the period of "National Struggle"?

Mesut Yeğen: What we call "political participation" in this period was the work of a group of elites and minorities. This is the case for Turks, Kurds, and other peoples and tribes that made up the Ottoman Empire. There were no significant differences between the representations and representatives of certain tribes. They were represented in the same way and by the same kind of elites. The representatives of each tribe were similarly divided or differentiated among themselves. Each tribe had more modern and traditional elites, those who interacted with the world market or with new ideas about the world and who participated politically through these ideas. However, although the Kurds were one of the largest groups among the tribes that formed the Ottoman Empire, they were not among the influential groups in proportion to their size. Kurdish elites were few in number, but they are not so different from the Turks, Armenians, and Greeks of the time. The Kurdish elite of the period was in organic continuity with the traditional elite, perhaps a little more than the others.

If we concentrate on the post-1918 period, the main form of participation in political life was conducted through the bureaucracy. Some Kurdish bureaucrats and intellectuals were part of the

There is little to be said regarding Kurdish participation in politics during the single-party period. This, of course, doesn't mean that the Kurds did not participate in politics at all during this period. Of course, Kurds tried to participate in Turkish politics through associations such as the Azadi and means such as rebellion, but this was both a short-lived and extraordinary form of participation.

Ottoman bureaucracy, especially in Istanbul and Diyarbakır. Through these bureaucrats, the Kurds helped to shape the destiny of the Ottoman Empire or, rather, their own destiny. They also participated, albeit in small numbers, through associations, communities that correspond to today's political party, and their media organs, such as newspapers and magazines. In other words, what we call political participation today was not practiced en mass and basically took place within this framework.

In terms of objectives, three groups can be identified between 1918-1923, during the period of national struggle. The first two groups seem to have been more concentrated in Istanbul and were not very different from each other. The first group consisted of Kurds who believed they should remain in the Ottoman political union and have some kind of autonomy. Despite being in the same circle or society, others believed that the Ottoman Empire had come to an end, that the Wilson Principles of self-determination heralded the dawn of another world, and that Kurds should strive for independence like the Greeks

and Armenians. The third group consisted of Kurds residing in Kurdistan, Kurdish cities, who united their destinies with those waging the National Struggle. Most of this third group of the Kurdish elite did not think of their future as being independent from those waging the national struggle and actively supported it because they owed their "elite" status to the liquidation of the traditional elites, who had been strong in Kurdistan at the beginning of the 19th century, and the Armenian genocide.

We can therefore discuss three different groups and ideas. The first are those who thought of their destiny and future as being alongside that of Mustafa Kemal. The second are those who sought an autonomous Kurdistan, in the event of the Ottoman Empire continuing. And the third group, which we can call the independents, believed "The Ottomans have no future, let's take care of ourselves." This is how we can classify those who stood out during the national struggle. During this period, the participation of the Kurds in politics was higher through the actions of these three groups of elites.

How about the single-party period?

M.Y.: There is little to be said regarding Kurdish participation in politics during the single-party period. This, of course, doesn't mean that the Kurds did not participate in politics at all during this period. Of course, Kurds tried to participate in Turkish politics through associations such as the Azadi and means such as rebellion, but this was both a short-lived and extraordinary form of participation, as you know. The more usual and continuous state of participation in this period was entering politics through becoming Turkified. Members of large families, such as the Babans who lived in Istanbul, became Turkic and joined politics and the state administration by combining their destinies with Turkey's destiny. I am not sure if their actions can be considered to constitute Kurdish participation in politics.

Opportunities and means of political participation in the Single Party period were very limited, and most of those who participated in politics on behalf of the Kurds were deputies appointed from Ankara, as was the case for other segments. Since the Kurds' more "authentic" forms of participation were hindered, it is hard to talk about actual political involvement on behalf of the Kurds. The Sheikh Said uprising in 1925, the ensuing Law of Takrir-i Sükun, and the shift which turned the regime more authoritarian altogether canceled the possibilities for the Kurds to genuinely participate in politics. A small number of Kurds who intended to get involved in politics either retreated to parts of Kurdistan not accessible to the state or tried to be effective through organizations such as Xoybun by crossing into Syria and Lebanon. But after the suppression of the 1930 Ararat Revolt, that vein also weakened. After the events of 1938, not much of a trace was left of it.

Apart from the 1946 elections, which are known to have been fraudulent, the Democratic Party (D.P.) came to power in the first free elections held after the transition to the multi-party political system. Did the Kurds give any significant support to the D.P. at that time?

M.Y.: It is hard to make a statement along the lines of the Kurds "did this or that" in large numbers, considering the election

results of 1950. Some voted for the D.P., but some tended to stay with the CHP. In fact, if I am not mistaken (I studied this a long time ago and I can't remember the numbers off the top of my head), I believe the Kurds supported CHP with a slight majority. But an essential question to ask would be where and which Kurds gave more support to the D.P.; and which ones gave more support to the CHP. If my memory serves correctly, the following pattern can be discerned: Kurds who felt that a real political change was possible through elections were more supportive of the D.P. But Kurds who felt the pressures of the state more harshly, or those who had no hope of change, continued to support the CHP. But I'm only giving a very vague impression. In terms of the 1950 elections, we can't talk about a general Kurdish attitude such as the one which exists today.

There was Mustafa Remzi Bucak, who was elected a member of parliament from the Democratic Party.

M.Y.: Yes, Mustafa Remzi Bucak was the Diyarbakır MP from the Democrat Party between 1950 and 1954. He brought to the agenda the massacre that was carried out in Van, Özalp, which is the subject of Ahmed Arif's famous 33 Bullets poem. In one of his speeches, he likened the administration in Kurdish cities to the British colonial administration in India. He is important in these respects. Perhaps the following could be inferred from Mustafa Remzi Bucak: Those who were watching what was going on in Ankara more closely may have shown a little more interest in the D.P. by saying, "the situation is changing." Otherwise, as I said, there was no scenario in which all the Kurds were suddenly supporting the D.P. Following this, a scenario which came close to this was generated. After the change of power, and when it was understood that this change was permanent, the situation changed. But this was not the case in the first stage.

On May 27, 1960, there was a coup d'état. The leaders of the notables of the Kurdish tribes were brought to Sivas camp immediately following the coup. This event is also known as the "55s incident". They were kept in a concentration camp, despite not being in any organization or organizational efforts, because they were perceived as a "potential danger." Later, T-KDP was

founded by Faik Bucak and his friends. There was a left wind in the world and in Turkey in the 60s. As Turkey moved towards military intervention in 1971, the Turkish Workers' Party (TİP) was founded, and many leftist organizations were established. There were student youth movements, and Kurdish students also organized under Revolutionary Eastern Cultural Centers. In my opinion, this is a period when the Kurds were pretty lively and active in influencing the political process.

M.Y.: Yes, however, before the 60s and beyond, there were a few significant events which are essential to understanding the Kurds' adventures concerning participation in politics. Let me talk about them.

Some young Kurdish people gradually started to come to the big cities after 1945. They socialized among themselves, primarily through student dormitories. The Tigris Dormitory is a well-known example. Or the medical or law school students got together. Here, we encounter political participation mainly through cultural motives. But what made this political participation even more vibrant was the "revolution" or "coup" in Iraq in 1958. After that "coup" or "revolution" in 1958 Mela Mustafa Barzani returned to Iraq, and Kurds and Arabs became almost equal in the new Iraqi constitution. The Kurds got excited, and this almost triggered an uptick of Kurdish participation in Turkey's politics as Kurds. In the same period, when Turkmens were subjected to a massacre involving Kurds in Kirkuk and when CHP MP for Niğde Asım Eren made a retaliation proposal by referring to the Kurds of Turkey in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, a group of Kurdish students in the universities issued a harsh message of condemnation. As far as I know, this was the first mass action of the period and, therefore, an essential milestone in the Kurds' intervention in Turkey's politics.

In the 60s, something more important happened, and a party called the New Turkey Party, which can be said to be from the right-wing tradition, received a large number of votes in Kurdish cities, well above the average in Turkey. YTP (New Turkey Party), which included Yusuf Azizoğlu, one of the Diyarbakır deputies of the D.P. period and the Minister of

Photo: Özcan Yaman



Health after 1960, received the Kurds' special attention in this period, and many famous Kurdish figures and intellectuals of the period started working in this party. YTP should be considered as one of the crucial moments in the involvement of Kurds in Turkish politics.

After the 60s, Kurds began to use legal political tools more effectively and brought their issues to Turkey's political agenda through political parties, associations, newspapers, etc. TİP, Eastern Rallies, then the establishment of DDKOs, magazines, organizations... the Kurds showed a great deal of political participation in this period. But only part of this activity might be characterized as "Kurdish" in nature. The revival of political involvement in the 60s was notable from a Kurdish perspective, but it is clear that politics, in general, was being revived in Turkey. Politics was opening up to the masses and crowds. Despite articles such as 141, 142, and 163, the framework of politics expanded a little after 1960. This paved the way for more intense and effective participation for the Kurds and the left in Turkey's politics. On the one hand, the 1961 Constitution served the function of revitalizing politics in Turkey, opening it up to different social segments, that is, to trade unions and students. On the other hand, it allowed the Kurds to express their demands or

their dissatisfaction arising from their Kurdishness. This was roughly the scene before 1970.

The right-left polarization occurred during the 70s, which resulted in the coup d'état of September 12, 1980. There were youth movements, revolutionary organizations, Kurdish organizations, and the PKK, which declared its establishment in 1978. I believe there was also a break from Turkey's politics during the course of this period.

M.Y.: Yes, in fact, it is possible to find the seeds of today's Kurdish movement and the mass and intense participation of Kurds in politics in the 1970s. A similar scene to today was also present in Kurdish cities in the 70s. Then, too, the Kurds had very intense and enthusiastic political participation in Turkish politics. In this respect, we tend to assume that the Kurdish movement became massively politicized and took part in politics with the establishment of the HEP (People's Labor Party) and its entry into the elections, but this is not a completely correct assumption.

For example, Mahdi Zana was elected as Mayor of Diyarbakır in the elections he entered as an independent candidate in the 1977 elections.

M.Y.: Yes, Mahdi Zana is the best-

In the 70s, Kurds were participating in politics more intensely through various legal means. They demonstrated heavy political involvement in politics through rallies, newspapers, magazines, independent deputies, or through winning independent mayorships. Armed activity was not the primary element even in 1978 (when the PKK was founded).

known figure. Likewise, Urfan Alpaslan in Ağrı and Edip Solmaz in Batman won the elections they had entered as independent candidates and became mayors. These events indicate that it's true that Kurds chose to break away from mainstream political parties and return to their own fields and organizations. Debates from this period, "Is it a form of colonialism or not?", "Should we form separate or joint organizations?" are famous. However, this disintegration did not immediately lead to a dominant armed struggle. For a long time, unarmed and mass activity was the dominant tool among the Kurds. All these mayorship examples we talked about



Photo: Özcan Yaman

and independent deputies going to the parliament indicate this. In this period, Kurds were participating in politics more intensely using various legal means. They demonstrated heavy political involvement in politics through rallies, newspapers, magazines, independent deputies, or through winning independent mayorships. Armed activity was not the primary element even in 1978 (when the PKK was founded). The armed activity only came to monopolize Kurdish politics after 1984.

As you know, September 12 was a coup that aimed to redesign Turkey as a state and society. In the context of the Kurdish issue, a strict denial policy was adopted. Diyarbakır Prison and its practices reveal this denial policy most strikingly. A new situation emerged, starting with the PKK's raids on Eruh and Şemdinli on August 15th. HEP was founded in 1989. In the 1991 elections 21 HEP members entered the parliament from the SHP lists. Could you make a general assessment for the situation regarding

September 12, the 80s and then the 90s?
M.Y.: September 12 crashed through the entirety of Turkish politics like a bulldozer, especially through opposition politics. But it cut through Kurdish politics like a slightly heavier bulldozer. The repression and brutality of September 12 in Kurdish cities was much more severe. Diyarbakır Prison is always mentioned in this respect, but September 12 manifested itself very differently not only in prisons but also in civilian life in Kurdish cities. For example, there was martial law in other cities of Turkey until the middle of 1983-84, but martial law was not lifted in certain Kurdish cities. It was then turned into a state of emergency and continued. The state of emergency lasted until perhaps the early 2000s and was only lifted within the framework of E.U. reforms. So it continued for almost 20 years. While part of Turkey was released from the conditions imposed by September 12 around 1989 or so, the Kurds remained continuously under those conditions, almost never escaping them, sometimes experiencing

While part of Turkey was released from the conditions imposed by September 12 around 1989 or so, the Kurds remained continuously under those conditions, almost never escaping them, sometimes experiencing their intensification. But this is what happened: While this environment of oppression continued, on the other hand, the tendency of Kurds to participate in civil life and civil politics became stronger.

their intensification. But this is what happened: While this environment of oppression continued, on the other hand, the tendency of Kurds to participate in civil life and civil politics became stronger. First, through these so-called *serhildans*,

If we generalize roughly, in fact, Kurds have been expressing themselves in Turkish politics mainly through legal struggle and political party activities since the late 90s. We can say this. This is what the process after 2015 shows. While the state is criminalizing all legal political activities, the Kurds continue to insist on legal political activities.

and then through the establishment of the HEP, the Kurds participated in politics intensively, and a great rupture occurred. A tradition that manifests itself today in the HDP was born, flourished, and took root there. This means that the Kurds have almost invariably been involved in politics as a separate political party with their own identity for the last 30 years. The debates of the separate organization came into being in the 70s and gained this identity in the 90s.

I think it is unrealistic to use definitions such as "Kurdish voters say this, Kurdish voters' tendency is this" in reference to previous periods. But it is possible to talk about a phenomenon called the "Kurdish voters" from the 1990s until the present day. While the war and conflict atmosphere continued on the one hand, Kurdish legal politics developed on the other.

M.Y.: Yes, let me say that it seems that the PKK is still continuing its policy of armed struggle policy in the present day. But it is as if the political struggle, which has been more dominant since 1999, is the struggle of political parties. The Kurds mostly express themselves through this. And this situation has become permanent. Yes, the armed activity continues, but it is very weak compared to the past, and as I said, it continues intermittently. Political activity has continued to grow stronger until the present day. If we generalize roughly, in fact, Kurds have been expressing themselves in Turkish politics mainly through legal struggle and political party activities since the late 90s. We can say this. This is what the process after 2015 shows. While the state is criminalizing all legal political activities, the Kurds

continue to insist on legal political activities.

In recent years, there has been an obvious situation. It is also frequently mentioned in the predictions, foresight, and evaluations for the 2023 elections. Kurdish voters are crucial and have the power to make the side they support win and bring defeat to the side they don't support. But while the "national will" continues to be glorified, the matter changes when the will of the Kurdish voters is in question.

M.Y.: I would like to underline the following development regarding this. First, for a long time, the Turkish state tried to prevent Kurds from legally participating in politics through the use of pressure. In other words, all the Kurds who wanted to engage in legal politics could be imprisoned at any time, and many were already in prison. This has been happening since 1994, when immunities were lifted, and DEP deputies

were hastily arrested and thrown into prison. It is what the state has done all along. But more importantly, it wanted to prevent Kurds' political participation through the election threshold. The Kurds made two great "actions" against this. First, Kurdish politics quickly increased the number of independent deputies through excellent organization. Secondly, when the president started to be elected by popular vote, and the Kurds competed with their own candidates, they saw in the 2014 presidential election that they could reach a potential exceeding the 10% threshold. In the 2015 elections, the HDP received more than 12 percent of the votes and became the third-largest political party in parliament. After that, Turkish politics had to redesign itself. In other words, when it realized that it could not prevent Kurdish political representation, which it had tried to prevent through political pressure and a 10 percent election threshold, it renewed the whole system. The



Photo: Emel Kurma

collapse of the negotiations in 2015 and the coup attempt in 2016 also created a very favorable climate for this. This presidential system was initiated with the contribution of the MHP. The primary motive of the presidential system was the desire to marginalize the influence of Kurdish politics on the general politics of Turkey. Then, buoyed by the “Yenikapı spirit” and so on, all Turkish politics were placed on full alert against the Kurdish issue at various levels. The political coup-like process which occurred on November 4, 2016, followed on from this.

The Turkish state felt compelled to change the 150-year tradition of parliamentary rule that had begun in 1876 when it could not prevent the Kurds’ political representation or when the political representation of the Kurds had reached a size to channel Turkey’s politics. This was supposed to deal with the Kurdish issue more effectively or neutralize the representation of Kurdish politics. In terms of numerical indicators, Turkish politics has not been very effective in this regard. So the HDP gets more than 10 percent of the vote. It is clear that many deputies will be elected in the 2023 elections. However, it seems that the Turkish state has achieved a result that is close to what it wants

The Turkish state felt compelled to change the 150-year tradition of parliamentary rule that had begun in 1876 when it could not prevent the Kurds’ political representation or when the political representation of the Kurds had reached a size to channel Turkey’s politics. This was supposed to deal with the Kurdish issue more effectively or neutralize the representation of Kurdish politics.

qualitatively. The quantitative magnitude of Kurdish politics has not changed, but its qualitative impact on Turkish politics is unfortunately not as great as in 2015. This new situation is partly related to the revision of the system. It is about the over-extension of the executive against the legislature, against the judiciary, and the concentration of all powers in the president. But it is partly related to the fact that the whole spectrum of Turkey’s politics can be alarmed and mobilized by

the “survival” discourse. In other words, when in need, political parties, including the CHP (there is no need to talk about other parties), can all line up behind the survival discourse. Or, all political parties, including the CHP, can do “what is necessary” in quotation marks to meet the regime’s needs.

For HDP or Kurdish voters, the determination that they cannot have a qualitative impact on politics to the extent of their quantitative power is essential. In terms of the current situation...

M.Y.: I tried to say it elsewhere. Kurds or HDP are considered as the “key party”, as “very strong,” and as the “play maker”. This is true, but we are faced with being a playmaker or being a key party in a system that does not benefit the Kurds. This is about the revision of the system and the hegemony of the survival discourse that I just mentioned. However, behind all this straining there are also issues related to Kurdish politics itself and the fact that the Kurds are acting as a key in a way that does not benefit the Kurds. Even though it has decreased to almost zero, the fact that armed activity has not been suspended has caused a loss of legitimacy, which is an essential factor behind this situation. As such,



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the value of the important statements being made by the HDP decreases. What does this mean? It means if the PKK activity had been stopped today, it would probably be beneficial for the Kurds that Kurdish politics holds a critical position in Turkish politics. On the other hand, I have to say that I do not think that the HDP can do anything more to get the PKK to lay down its arms. This depends on other factors and requires another level of intervention. Therefore, it is not the fault of HDP that Kurdish politics is not qualitatively effective; that’s the point I’m trying to make. This ineffectiveness is mostly related to the change in the government system, the fact that the mentality of the main actors in Turkey hasn’t changed, and that the PKK hasn’t laid down arms.

On the other hand, there is the question of whether a new picture can be formed after the election. I am not hopeful in the short term in this regard either. In other

words, if we talk based on the dynamics of Turkish politics, I do not expect a very different atmosphere to emerge in the next year or two after the 2023 elections. The pressure on Kurdish politics, the administration of municipalities by trustees, or the apparent pressure in Kurdish cities, etc., may decrease partially. Still, as I said, I do not see the general impact of Kurdish politics on Turkish politics to change drastically.

If the Kurdish voters make a specific preference as a block, so to speak, wouldn’t this have an effect that would force the current system to reform? In case of a political stalemate, wouldn’t there be a need for reform or an updating of the system based on this?

M.Y.: If a very democratic climate occurs, yes, but this does not seem likely. After all, the CHP’s situation is obvious. The Deva Party and so on are ineffective; the İYİ Party is an influential actor. Here’s what I think: The main actors of Turkish

politics, including the CHP, have now seen that the Kurdish issue is manageable as it stands today. In other words, although the Kurds are a great political power, the Kurdish issue, and the Kurds are now manageable without disturbing the main balances of Turkey’s politics. The PKK has been neutralized, trustees govern municipalities, HDP politicians are in prison, and there is no great upheaval in Turkey just because all of this is happening. I mean, the regime can easily cope with the discomfort caused by the Kurds. This will be a situation that all political actors will want to benefit from. There is currently no dynamic in Turkish politics that is pushing the Kurdish issue to a more reformist and liberal point. Neither abroad nor at home. However, this does not mean that this situation will continue indefinitely. Although the dynamics of democracy in Turkey and the world are weaker than before, there are also signs that these dynamics will get stronger again. ☸

“If you feel despairing, remember this crowd”

At a time in which all the anti-democratic qualities of the one-man system are being felt with full force, social movements are arguably experiencing their weakest period in the history of Turkey. Nevertheless, the women’s movement is experiencing the opposite momentum and is possibly going through its most organized period. Beyhan Sunal talked with Fidan Ataselim, Yelda Koçak, and Berrin Sönmez about the dynamics of the women’s movement on the ground and in politics.

We are experiencing a situation in which political participation is limited to the act of voting. We rely on politics to transform lives, but we cannot seem to go beyond voting in this respect either. But this is not the case with women ...

Let’s start with the phrase, “the personal is political.” Do women who describe politics this way open the possibility of broadening the field of political participation?

Yelda Koçak: While we need an in depth discussion into the meaning of the notion “the personal is political”, it has opened a huge space for us regarding political participation. First, it has clarified the source of obstacles preventing women’s participation in politics and boldly opened

I think that the slogan “the personal is political” is no longer merely a slogan but constitutes a crucial layer of feminist politics. In the beginning, yes, it was very effective in making violence visible and public, but it was not limited to this.

these obstacles up to discussion. When we say, “the personal is political” we first understand that violence at home is not about the home. It shows that, regardless of whether violence is happening in this room or not, or whether what happens in that room stays in that room, this is not a unique, individual, or personal question but a reflection of the continuity of the patriarchal order at home. Saying “the personal is political” provides a context for the violence, and a context for the invisibility of labor in the house. Apart from the commodity production of women, the forms of invisible labor evident in practices of reproductive labor, childcare, care for the elderly, or housework brings added value when considered in terms of the market. This has paved the way for a discussion about how a job with financial gain cannot be considered as just part of private sphere but needs to be socialized and publicized. In other words, understanding the exclusion of women from public space and their confinement to private space (in the private-public space dichotomy), not to mention the problems they experience in that private sphere, as political problems helps to pave the way for the active participation of women in politics and encourages a more holistic political approach. I think that the socialization of the solution, which notably included the state’s attempts to cover up domestic violence with the words “he is your husband, he is your father, he is your brother, shut up and sit down,” has removed one of the obstacles to women’s entry into politics. It’s the same in terms of labor. Limited participation for women in the public sphere, and the difficult conditions of that participation, have ensured that duties in the private sphere are not always seen as being connected to the public sphere. In other words, a woman who is active in a political party needs to first take care of her child’s schoolwork, and then make time for the party after that; first take care of household chores, and then spare time for the party afterwards. I can honestly say that the barriers we have mentioned have been considerably reduced, as she will not be exposed to violence from her

husband, father, or the men in the house, she will not be banned, and she will be able to join the party.

Berrin Sönmez: In addition to what Yelda said, I also think that “the personal is political” is no longer merely a slogan but constitutes an essential layer of feminist politics. In the beginning, yes, it was very effective in making violence visible and public, but it was not limited to this. It should also be noted that all subordination in the private sphere is part of a vast, extensive policy. I think of this in conjunction with the concept of “patriarchal bargaining” or “bargaining with the patriarchy.” When we say “the personal is political” we understand that, in this bargain with the patriarchy, states entered into a power-sharing agreement with the man of the family, house, or household, and the subordination of women at home began in conjunction with the recognition of his power in the house. With this slogan and this policy, which has gradually become a concept and an important layer of feminist theory, women’s participation in politics and all areas of social life has gradually increased, and we have really become policymakers. In other words, by disclosing one of the mechanisms of forming that patriarchal policy, women are in a position to produce policies towards equality and to impose these policies in politics. It is extremely important in this respect, and its function never ends; it always continues. This act of transforming politics has transformed women. It is transforming men, too, and society at the same time. One last word on “the personal is political” – in our country, and others, the equal rights of women in every space, both in the family and in society, supports the democratization of society.

Fidan Ataselim: It was mainly women’s participation in the political sphere that was being prevented. In other words, when it was understood that there was a kind of gender inequality that was being covered up, that this issue was being presented as if was not a matter of concern to others and that it was purely a private matter between two people,





Photo: Özcan Yaman

this marked the beginning of the waging of the struggle for the private sphere to be political. This understanding brings an acknowledgement that many issues in life, and life itself, is about politics and is political. There is an interaction, a dialectical relationship, but since the subject is gender inequality, it was always the issue of women's rights that was attempted to be pushed out of politics. The understanding provided by "the personal is political" therefore constitutes the struggle to show that this was not so, to point out that the private sphere is political and to wage a fight for it.

I want to step in and ask: the areas of women's participation have expanded, but the working areas of women's organizations primarily still focus on violence against women and the prevention of femicide – that is to say urgent, vital problems facing women. We are talking about how "the private sphere is political," but everything is currently being framed by the perspective that "femicide is political".
F.A.: The establishment of the We Will

Stop Femicide Platform, to give an example of our organization, corresponds to such an analysis. Femicide is one of the major issues in society. When we question what policies should be made or what is being confined to the private sphere, there is disagreement regarding the 'most critical' 'top priority' issues facing women. We have separate organizations as a result of this. The goals of each of these and the points we consider essential are different, but, indeed, they all contribute to our ultimate salvation.

Of course, valuable work was already being carried out in the movement before a platform was established which specifically focused on the murders that were being ignored and consigned to the inner pages of the newspaper. Our contribution to this movement was that, by focusing on femicides and naming this as the most critical problem, we created an organization, a movement, and a policy that is systematic, holistic, continuous, organized, and able to spread throughout the whole country, not only

Femicide is a criminal act, which marks the crystallization of all the inequalities produced by the hetero-patriarchal system, which we encounter as the fatal state of the male-dominated capitalist system

a single province. This does not mean that we're saying that it is only femicide which is political. Femicide is a criminal act, which marks the crystallization of all the inequalities produced by the hetero-patriarchal system, which we encounter as the fatal state of the male-dominated capitalist system. By explaining this, we believe that the struggle to stop it will inevitably necessitate the holistic struggle which should be waged against all the problems we face.

As a positive example, I think the struggle to stop femicide has removed many obstacles to political participation. Women who participated in women's assemblies to stop femicide gained

experiences there that were not limited to producing holistic politics. For example, based on our egalitarian feminist approach, we have developed a social approach by saying that we should fight against many other inequalities that society is facing, in the same way as we are fighting for gender equality.

There are many organizations in the women's movement, as in other areas of politics. While in these other areas of politics multiple organizations normally bring division, I guess in the case of women, this corresponds to more solidarity. Let's talk about the way these women's organizations interpret political participation.

B.S.: We can call it reproduction by mitotic division. The high number of women's organizations doesn't appear to be a matter of division because it has a multiplying effect. For example, earlier, feminists were said to be one percent of society, and feminists used to say, "even if we are only 1 percent, we work for the 99 percent". Right now, that thinking is behind us. The proliferation of feminist organizations has been very effective in spreading to the locals. We can see feminist organizations in districts, cities, and even the most remote corners of Anatolia. Unfortunately, the feminist organizations in Central Anatolia are still tiny, but they are enormous compared to fifteen or twenty years ago. Men's politics is based on rivalry. It would be very romantic to say that there is no competition between women's organizations, but this competition at least has certain rules and frameworks, and feminism does not produce a competitive model. Of course, there may be personal differences and organizational differences. Still, the common women's interests, women's policies, and the effort to establish an organization of common interest prevent women's organization from producing the same rivalry as men's politics. We can at least talk and discuss things internally. This is how we can improve this solidarity. Through equality, a non-hierarchical structure, and creating pluralistic decision-making mechanisms, which is precisely what we want from society... These are the foundations of feminism, and the more feminist organizations move in this direction to achieve them, the more the brutality of competition diminishes.

Indeed, solidarity of the oppressed is easy; unfortunately, women are still oppressed in society. Solidarity is very easy in such a situation, especially since women's gains have been under severe threat in recent years. But it took a great effort to develop a common policy on issues such as the Civil Code or the Penal Code twenty years ago. The result of that long effort was a far-reaching co-existence of organizations; as was TCK 103. Then the case of alimony occurred. The struggle twenty years ago was to create a new policy and achieve further gains. What we are doing today is trying to create a line of resistance, in order not to lose those existing gains. We are able to organize around this because we still have the same problems, no matter how many organizations exist. The spread of the protests over Masha Jina Amini in Iran across the whole world stems from this fact. We need to talk about not only national but transnational, cross-border feminism. With networks extending from the local to the national, from the national to the global, women worldwide can easily develop proposals to solve their problems together and unite.

F.A.: In my opinion, multiple organizations should not be defined as a division – not only in the field of women but also in the struggle of the working class, the struggle of ecology, or the struggle against speciesism. There are reasons why different formations come together around different ideas. You participate in whichever collective structure, organization, platform, party, institution, democratic mass organization, or whatever formation you find closest to your mindset. At the same time, the relationship that these structures and these collective formations establish with each other is also essential. So I don't think of it as a division but as an inevitable reality.

If we believe in the existence of democracy, we should not defend monism. The existence of only one view against political power should not be what we aim for. On the contrary, the question remains how we determine the common goals that we will share with these different views, and how we establish various alliances in this direction. In this sense, different alliances may be emerging; subject-based or function-based. I think pluralist

Multiple organizations within the women's movement do not mark an artificial difference, an artificial diversification, or an artificial organization, but are a result of the diversification of policies regarding the women's movement, feminism, and gender equality.

associations provide the basis for joint action. What we mean by this is that everyone should form their organization in line with their collective decision. But they should still also conduct their politics as a front, acting together with other institutions and collective formations. The original ideas should not die out in this form of organizing – if they did it would eliminate productivity and the dynamism of organizing. That's why we believe it's important to organize at different levels and with various layers of alliance relations and get-togethers.

Y.K.: I find it very progressive to have so many organizations in the women's movement. In this respect, the organization is not an artificial difference, an artificial diversification, or an artificial organization; on the contrary, it is the result of the diversification of policies on the women's movement, feminism, and gender equality. For example, one women's organization may be focused on women's employment, another one works with working women, another deals with women in the youth movement, and another conducts an in-depth study into gender equality in education. This provides a political diversity that enriches feminist politics, the women's movement, and the struggle of women. Ultimately, despite this political diversity, the women's movement in Turkey has achieved tremendous success in the last two or three years – while it had achieved it before, it has now become increasingly skillful. It may sound arrogant, but I believe this is even guiding Turkey's macro politics, pointing out its ability to unite around minimal commonalities, and organizing around a common goal when appropriate. In other words, a religious women's organization, a women's organization that emphasizes secularism, or a women's organization that is in the



labor movement can unite around the same ground and produce a common voice when centuries-old rights are being attacked. This is so valuable.

The platform, for instance, is a very valuable experience. This enables a structure in which those organizations and NGOs with different opinions and priorities, are able to come together. The women's movement does it very well. There is more than one platform, and sometimes we see that the components

of these platforms are intertwined; they come together on this or that platform. This political diversity, political richness, and organizational richness lead to the creation of stronger politics through the uniting together around minimal commons. In turn, this is an essential contribution to the overall political picture of the women's movement.

F.A.: One of the determinants of participation in politics is the question of how participation will occur, that is, how

it works. In our experience we, as the We Will Stop Femicide Platform, adopt a parliamentary-style organization in the provinces. In other words, we make all the decisions with the women who attend, and want to attend, the council meetings. We have assemblies where we put into practice the knowledge that everyone has, with an equal say. We have observed that this style has had a large impact on levels of participation.

I would suggest that we've set an example of how direct democracy can really work, amongst all this weariness and prejudice. There are women's assemblies all over the country, and these are not just general assemblies. For example, young university women have a separate university women's council which focuses on their unique problems. I, for example, cannot attend those meetings. High school women's councils have a separate assembly, and there are coordination boards where all these decisions are raised, and coordinators come together. It's a process which occurs through boards. And it's not just limited to one province. It's a constant struggle. I want to emphasize this.

In its functioning, there is no hierarchal order which says 'let us talk more, and let the newcomer listen'. We believe that the assemblies, that is, the crowd, the women as a crowd, should talk and discuss their own goals, the goals of their organizations, and of course, take joint decisions. We have been putting these decisions into practice for years.

We have experienced that this is a significant factor which enables women to be the subject of the struggle. For example, collective structures, such as the Women's Platform for Equality platform (EŞİK), continue their meetings systematically every Wednesday, even if only via Zoom. Representatives and people from the women's organization can participate in the theme-based meetings and make decisions across the broadest grounds in those Wednesday meetings. This creates an environment of trust.

B.S.: The HDP and the İYİ Party never come together anywhere, and they have also made statements declaring they will not join together. But both parties were present at the meeting

in Van, and they participated in the speeches to the same degree, expressing their opinions and taking a joint stance. This was extremely important. When we talked to friends from both parties, they said they were happy with this partnership and would not turn it into a political opportunity. In fact, the women's movement has the potential to bring together the most extreme parties across the country. The EŞİK (Women's Platform for Equality) Forums have proved this once again. I believe this is how we can transform politics. We've come a long way and we still have a long way to go.

Can we say that women have conquered the street too? While the mobilization of political movements on the streets is always seen as problematic (perhaps because the street is always feared, with

Feminism is practiced on the street from the farthest corners of society, from the most distant capillary veins; whatever our issue is, it is put forward, and policies are advanced, from there. As a result, women cannot abandon the street, no matter how much the state puts pressure on it.

the idea that it cannot be controlled) the women, on the contrary, are on the streets. Women are always on the ground, be it in the night marches on March 8 or in front of the courts. How would you describe the politics of women on the street? With no hierarchy, but solidarity, open to participation, unyielding, following ideas ...

B.S.: Going out on the street is extremely important for women's organizations. Activism is done on the street, and the school of feminism was actually born on the street. Academia is present, theorists are present, and the law is crucial, but on the other hand, we see that academics don't conceptualize the demands made on the streets. Feminism is practiced on the street from the farthest corners of society, from the most distant capillary veins; whatever our issue is, it is put forward, and policies are advanced, from there. As a result, women cannot abandon the street, no matter how much the state puts pressure on it. Additionally, it is essential to hold onto the street because of the extent to which women are constantly excluded from the public sphere, which is particularly intense in Muslim countries. The ability to say "the nights and the streets are ours" holds great significance. This attachment to the street helps feminism to explain itself to all segments of society, introduce itself, and make its voice heard. As we're witnessing now, women are creating spaces for themselves not only

in the main arteries of the cities (partly because the state does not allow them to occupy the main arteries) but also in small places. There is much focus on the dates 25 November and 8 March. Men's politics choose to index women's policies on these dates, as if they only need to be discussed twice a year. We women have therefore extended November 25 to last one and a half months and March 8 to last another one and a half months. We are not limited to this time period either; the courts are vital. It's crucial to follow up on women's and juvenile cases. These follow-ups are carried out both legally and in front of the courts in a way that will make solidarity visible and announce it to society. This is a form of action that perhaps was not thought of as being important in the 1970s but which is indispensable today.

Existing on the streets is not just about making ourselves visible there; it's also about weaving solidarity with each other on the street. Every marking of March 8 and November 25 provides us with the opportunity to reunite with each other with new experiences and develop our ability to produce a common policy. It's partly for this reason that we refuse to abandon the street. If the street is a measure of democracy, if protests are a right and an indicator of freedom, then women are claiming these things today. They are doing it, but detention orders are being issued, and closure cases



Photo: Eylem Nazlier

are filed regularly for many women's organizations. Friends in Diyarbakir say that these detentions are happening on specific days. On those days, they tidy their house and get ready to be taken before going to bed at night. The women are detained, most often in the morning, with a lot of noise. The state carry out these detentions in a way that puts more social pressure on the women by alerting the whole street – that is, by exposing those women to the neighborhood they live in.

F.A.: Unfortunately, we face problems such as being confronted with death threats every day (still, in this century), not being able to walk on the streets without looking behind us, enduring problems in the home. These problems are leading women to raise their objections with a louder voice. Along with modernization, men and women

are questioning their lives more and struggling for their rights more. For this reason, we're witnessing how male sovereignty is increasingly insistent and is trying to stop women's progress through acts of violence. We can also see how the men's opposition to women's progress is being helped by political power and state mechanisms, and they're becoming partners in this position.

Since women, as a social category, are trapped more frequently in fatal situations, it is women who are being hurt more... The women's movement and the feminist movement have contributed significantly to the increase of such opposition and the rise of objections. In this sense, building horizontal relationships are preferable, and we understand that this has positive outcomes. As a member of a women's organization, I think appearing in large

We stated that we would not accept the decision to withdraw from the convention upon one man's decision made in the middle of the night; and we would not come to the hall and repeat our statements in a polite manner. That hall has room for thousands of people, and it was overflowing with women for four days. Hundreds of women came to the hall; they did not only make a plea but they turned that hall into a street, into a city square.

crowds for one or two days in the year should give us hope, but we should also not be content with this.

If we don't ensure that our actions are turned into an organized and systematic force, if we don't produce a policy, and if it's not a policy that has been produced by all of us through conquering the squares and streets together, then we won't be in a position to get results. I believe it is also vital to turn those crowds and substantial gatherings that give us hope into an organized, politically continuous struggle, with a policy, and a distinguished phrase. We are trying to act accordingly towards this aim. I consider this to be important. Otherwise, we won't achieve anything. We would only get together like this for one or two days a year. But we can't ignore the other days of the year. That's why I want to underline the need for political goals, a political program, and, again, an organized struggle.

Y.K.: We have a beautiful slogan, "We will not abandon the streets, nor the nights." It is always said that the great squares are the souls of the cities, and the events of those places express the spirit of that society. When it's Galatasaray Square, we think of the Saturday Mothers; when



Photos: Tamer Arda Erşin

it's Taksim, 1 May 1977 comes to mind, or when we say Beyazıt Square, we think of the protest site of another period, the generation of February 28 or 1968. In Ankara, Tandoğan is remembered by the May Days, and the Station is remembered for something else after 10 October 2015. In the squares, the voices of social segments become louder. For this reason, it is also important in terms of legitimacy for a social movement to go to the streets, especially to go to the squares (rather than the streets which have been determined by the state, order, and power) and to speak out in places where they can touch the social texture. It is crucial, for example, for those legendary women's night walks, which we welcome with astonishment and pleasure every year despite all the obstacles, to take place in Taksim or Siraselvilir. Although they are prohibited, it is essential that we always head toward Taksim Square. Despite everything, women flow there on 8 March. It may be the only serious action that a woman has participated in, perhaps in her life, but she will go there. Last year, there was a banner with the slogan "If you feel despairing, remember this crowd." This

poster summarizes the enthusiasm of 8 March, but I would like to add that the women's movement in Turkey is very creative in general. This also makes us revolutionary. We find a way every time, against all the bans, every obstacle or winding path, every obstacle of power. When it is forbidden to go to the main square, we block the metrobus. During the protests for the Istanbul Convention, for example, women were creative enough to block the very dangerous metrobus path that can only follow a straight course. Another example is the Istanbul Convention hearings, which we practiced in a very revolutionary manner. The Council of State building holds a different position, in terms of the issues it deals with, its existence, its symbolization of the state, and its stance in history, than a simple courthouse or a heavy criminal courtroom. The Council of State is the highest courtroom in the country, where the citizen and the state come face to face. We created a revolutionary situation at every moment of the Istanbul Convention hearing proceedings. We stated that we would not accept the decision to withdraw from the convention upon one man's decision made in the

middle of the night; and we would not come to the hall and repeat our statements in a polite manner. That hall has room for thousands of people, and it was overflowing with women for four days. Hundreds of women came to the hall; they did not only make a plea but they turned that hall into a street, into a city square. It was our will that stated 'If you forbid us from taking the squares, we will turn every place we occupy into a square'. This is a very important point. We are a movement which is being kneaded by this creativity, this revolutionary spirit, and dynamism. Why is this the case? This power is usurping our rights and interfering with our living spaces. We can be well-organized and creative. But we can also break out of our shells.

You say that the women's struggle is well organized because they are under so much pressure and oppression. But the workers, for example, are also oppressed and under great pressure and it is not the same story there. In general, when politicians list the country's problems, they list the various items and say 'we will solve the women's problems and environmental issues'. But, as



Photo: Hakan Ottaş

you also criticize, they do not appear in the parliament or in front of the courts during the Istanbul Convention discussions. Is it because making politics for 'career politicians' involves some kind of career plan? Could the manner that women are embracing these problems reflect their personal desire to achieve them and to seek a sincere solution, rather than merely following a career plan? I value two features of the women's movement in particular: sincerity and following through with action. In other words, women can meet in front of the courtroom in a crowded and sensitive manner, even for an event that occurred ten years ago, with the same spirit as on the first day.

Y.K.: I totally agree with what you're saying. I would add that I think what political parties lack is an understanding of the issue of the grassroots. For example, unions don't make much progress because they cannot bring threshold issues which are facing organizations to the agenda by talking to the workers and spreading it to the grassroots. But women talk about their problems with other women; that is, the organizational model that we conceptualize as being horizontal, egalitarian, and non-hierarchical is overcome with the participation of every woman and by making every woman part of the agenda. In my opinion, this is the reason for its success. For example, we discuss the slightest change in the penal code with domestic workers, academics, lawyers, students, and young girls. We're spreading it across the whole community.

B.S.: There are really no women present in the decision-making mechanisms. These problems will probably be overcome as the numbers of women increase in the decision-making mechanisms. Ensuring gender equality in political parties, trade unions, bar associations, and all institutional structures is very important in this respect.

Also, it might seem a bit outdated now, but women's branches have definitely played an important role in women's participation in politics. What do you think the position of women's branches is in the women's movement today?

Y.K.: As someone who participates in both the women's movement and a political party, I don't know if it can

be called outdated, but I think it is important to have units that carry out women's studies in political parties, whether we call it a women's branch or a women's assembly. In fact, it is no problem if we say women's branches, but I think that the women's units of political parties should be strengthened, activated, and be able to pave the way through using power taken from the women's movement. I don't think it's an effective method if we leave political parties to the monopoly of men, if we withdraw to the women's movement and fight only there. We are, ultimately, trying to explain what we have to say in the women's movement to political parties. The global feminist movement is gradually moving away from this essentialist approach. To hear and listen to the demands and priorities of women from a female perspective, to act with a holistic policy, and to make alliances, when necessary, with a view that does not discriminate between women, men

To hear and listen to the demands and priorities of women from a female perspective, to act with a holistic policy, and to make alliances, when necessary, with a view that does not discriminate between women, men or LGBT+ is an up-to-date and essential issue that should be discussed both for the global feminist movement and for the feminist movement in Turkey.

or LGBT+ is an up-to-date and essential issue that should be discussed both for the global feminist movement and for the feminist movement in Turkey. In this context, women's branches need to



Photo: Hakan Otta

be strengthened, and they need to be strongly supported in order to enable women to participate in parties, at the level of management, and within management mechanisms. This is necessary to prevent men from making their patriarchal bargains within all the mixed structures, whether within parties or trade unions. For this reason, working in harmony between the women's movement and the women's units of political parties will bring more benefits to both the women in the parties and the women's movement – we know that the demand in today's world is not for thirty or forty percent of the quota, but fifty percent and the zipper system is on the agenda. If these are applied, women's branches will prevent men from making patriarchal bargains in the zipper system. Men are currently using the quota in favor of women who work in harmony with themselves, who bargain, and work in a way that does not cause them any problems. These women turn a blind eye to women's rhetoric and the demands of women when necessary and engage in patriarchal bargaining. Strengthening women's organizations within the party is necessary to break through this. Women's branches need to be well-organized enough that men don't let women into a cockfight amongst themselves. These branches should be well connected with women, and the women's movement should support and strengthen women within the parties. The women in the parties should be able to go back to the women's movement for strength if necessary. This is very important. This concept seems to me to be a situation that needs to be constantly reproduced and organized, but it is not outdated.

B.S.: I am also one of those who used to think that women's branches were outdated. I think they were once successful at paving the way for women to participate in politics, but over time they have prevented the evolution of political parties toward equality. We've seen this in many parties up until recently. They do not say 'we should have another female politician'; instead, let alone one quota, they allocate two or three and say 'set them among yourselves'. This is still the case in the AKP. They actually prevent women's solidarity by making women compete with each other. They ensure that male

political rivalry continues there as well, within the women's branches. However, there have been changes over time, and many parties have added women's units to the central decision-making bodies. This was an important step. The goal now is to ensure that women's branches have their own private budgets. When women's branches have budgets that they can use independently of central organizations and decision-makers, women politicians will be much more empowered. This should also apply to unions.

In other words, every opportunity, which is given to women, should somehow lead to those women paving the way for other women. In addition to the budget, participation in the central executive boards should not be limited to the head of women's branches. There are various units under the woman's branches. It is necessary to form representatives, permanent members, and compulsory members to increase the presence of women in those units. At EŞİK Platform, we always want appointments to be made primarily by women's units with the participation of the managers of women's units and a few others for meetings with political parties. We try to show solidarity in front of male managers there. Female units say they're encouraged by us. They warn their center 'if they do such and such, the women's movement will make criticisms and make them change their minds'. We can get information from them about what is going on within political parties and regarding the parliament's agenda. So we feed each other. The powers of women's branches should be increased gradually and supported, without becoming a limiting field.

F.A.: I can say that since political parties are ultimately a structure that address and appeal to the whole society, and which produces politics for the whole society, it is essential to know what ideas they have about women, what policies they plan to implement, what kind of promises they will make. This is an integral part of their duties and responsibilities. The issue is where these will be produced. Some say it should be in the women's branches, others say the presidency of women's policies. Let me give an example from my party – I'm also part of the Labor Movement Party and

there's a women's organization within the party. It's called the "Socialist Feminists of the Labor Movement Party." Each party names the women's structure within itself differently.

I would like to add that I don't think it should be called a branch anymore. Being described as the 'branch of something' is a thing of the past. I think this will also improve in time, but it is an absolutely necessary step, and it is also an important factor in terms of participation in politics. I think conducting a separate study on women and having a separate unit better facilitates women's political participation.

Y.K.: We have also witnessed how women's branches have created a vicious circle, meaning that qualified, hard-working, and more time-devoting staff are confined within that area. Other fields remain in the hands of men, which leads to the perception that women can 'only' exist in women's branches. When we consider the vice presidents of the various parties, from the law, human rights, to the environment, etc., those in charge are always men, and women are confined to the women's branches and women's units. However, women should not be stuck in those areas, and lawyers and economists should also be women. This means redefining women's branches and updating the tasks of women's units and the goals they are setting forward. Women's branches should be able to take on all kinds of duties within the party and train staff in all areas of the party. The obsolescence of women's branches is actually the approach that is squeezing women into these areas. The participation of women in the work of political parties in the election process is very valuable, but it is often the case that this process is appreciated a little at the beginning and then forgotten about. Women complain about this a lot. They say 'they come to us at election time; we work hard, we are the ones knocking on the doors, visiting the houses, we are the ones holding the house meetings, asking for their votes. They are present with us in the neighborhoods, but they forget us when they are elected as a deputy, mayor, or this and that'. Transferring more popular and well-known women from the outside, as if there are no women already working in the party or no existent women's labor, hurts women and distracts them from politics. ☹️

Refusing to collect seeds as a form of resistance

Bengü Kurtege Sefer, lecturer at Nişantaşı University, Department of Sociology, discusses how women's cooperatives, which aim to include women in the production process and integrate them socio-psychologically into society, have deviated from their initial purpose and are instead exploiting women's labor along lines of class and gender. She discusses this argument in depth in her article entitled "Rethinking the Discourse of Women Collecting Seeds: Women Refusing to Collect Seeds in Women's Cooperatives and the Approach of Public Institutions to Women." We talked at a micro level about the functioning of women's cooperatives in Turkey, and discussed why a women's cooperative that aimed to collect flower seeds in Istanbul failed in 2017.

What is the status of women's cooperatives in the general context of cooperative efforts, which are on the agenda again in Turkey? How did women's cooperatives emerge, how have they progressed, and what is their position today?

Bengü Kurtege Sefer: In recent years, women's cooperatives have been on the agenda in relation to maintaining small production, finding solutions to food problems, fighting rural poverty and creating employment for rural women. We can observe that women's cooperatives are being encouraged by both the state and local government units. As you know, Istanbul and Ankara metropolitan municipalities have taken some steps in this regard. Women's cooperatives are being encouraged in order to contribute to meeting the city's food needs, particularly the organic food demands of the middle class and upper class in the city. Beyond that, a collaboration between consumers and women's cooperatives is also being encouraged. That's why it's such a hot topic.

Women's cooperatives were being encouraged all over the world, particularly in the year 2012, by many international organizations, including

From reading the texts which these international organizations published, we can say that women's cooperatives have generally been presented and idealized as a democratic, participatory, bottom-up organization model based on the principle of volunteering. Women's cooperatives started to increase in Turkey, especially after 2012, as a manifestation of this international approach.

the International Fund for Agricultural Development and UN Women. From reading the texts which these international organizations published, we can say that women's cooperatives have generally been presented and idealized as a democratic, participatory, bottom-up organization model based on the principle of volunteering. Women's cooperatives started to increase in Turkey, especially after 2012, as a manifestation of this international approach. Turkey's first women's cooperative was established in Izmir in 1999, operating in the livestock sector. Since then they've rapidly increased in number. Since 1999, women's cooperatives, whose managers and members are all or mostly women, have been operating under the Ministry of Food, Agriculture, and Livestock (it became the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry after 2018). In 2013, Women's Initiative Production and Business

Cooperatives were established in collaboration with international policies.

I regret to say that there are no regularly published statistics on women's cooperatives. In light of the information which I received from the Ministry, the picture at the end of 2019 is as follows: There are 140 Women's Initiative Production and Business Cooperatives in total, and 40 Agricultural Development Cooperatives, which are managed or partnered by women. 74 of them are operating in the field of agriculture. The production fields of cooperatives are mainly food, ornamental plants, greenhouse, and animal husbandry. When we consider their number in terms of agricultural development, we see that 20 of 40 women's cooperatives are operating in the livestock sector. 13 of them are serving in the food sector. From another data set which we have access



Photos: Citizens' Assembly-Turkey

to we see that there were 30 women's initiatives in 2015 and 115 in 2016, but we don't know their distribution by sector. The number of Agricultural Development Cooperatives decreased to 56 in 2016, 43 in 2018, and 40 in 2019.

The main problem at this point is the issue of the sustainability of these cooperatives. The cooperatives which were established under the initiative of non-governmental organizations are somehow, for whatever reason, not continuing their activities. Considering this from a gender perspective, I find it extremely useful to evaluate the governance understanding of policies and local governments and women's experiences in cooperatives. If we evaluate the relations of these cooperatives with civil society and public institutions from a gender perspective, I think it will go a long way towards answering the question of why cooperatives cannot continue their activities.

Under whose demands are cooperatives mainly being established? Are they in

line with women's demands or with regional governments'?

B.K.S.: There is, of course, no clear data on this, but I would like to give an example from my project. The person I spoke to from Özyeğin Rural Development Unit told me, "If women's cooperatives are not established in line with demand from the grassroots, they will collapse like a sand castle." Public institutions consider women's cooperatives as a business. There's a queen bee in every women's cooperative, so to speak. In other words, we can say that the question of whether or not women's cooperatives continue depends on the individual success of women. State institutions do not provide any help because they do not want these structures to turn into cumbersome businesses. In fact, it would be accurate to say that they establish them and then leave them. They are not interested in problems such as the production process, sales process, or the issues women face in the operation of the cooperative. For example, I talked to a women's cooperative in the Polatlı district of Ankara. They were working in the production of carrot jam and beet

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molasses for Big Chefs. A development agency in Ankara stated that, although there was no demand, they had a cheese-making machine and could produce cheese. It gave the machine to the cooperative and employed a food engineer to train the women on how to make cheese. The women started to produce cheese, but the building had no storage area. Since the cheese could not be sold immediately, it went off. This project didn't last because it was a top-down project. In fact, the projects and activities only create a productive and sustainable area as long as they align



with woman's demands, abilities, and knowledge.

What is the primary source of problems regarding the sustainability of women's cooperatives?

B.K.S.: I think this is directly related to the conservative policies of the current government towards women's labor. The approach to cooperatives in Turkey can be described as conservative – that is, patriarchal. This is what we see in all macropolitical documents. When we look at the activities of the women's cooperative, it is presented as a form of organization that emphasizes domestic production areas such as sewing, food production, child care, glass making, felt, souvenirs or organic food production. This turns it into a form of organization that has the effect of increasing the women's workload. No matter how we look at it, women's labor becomes worthless in these cooperatives. Rural women exist as food producers, housework producers, jewelry designers, or babysitters within them.

In addition, the management units see women's cooperatives as economic enterprises. As a result, they have to

pay corporate tax and Value Added Tax (VAT). By making regulations on positive discrimination, these taxes can be abolished, or the establishment costs can be reduced. I think this would contribute a lot to the sustainability of women's cooperatives.

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Can one interpret this perspective as both exploitative and sexist?

B.K.S.: In fact, cooperatives are becoming an increasingly exploitative formation. This attitude in the state's macropolitical approach, which is based on empowering the "rural women", opens the door for decisions on cooperatives that are disconnected from the social-economic context in which women are living. In other words, we can say that gender relations are directly affecting women's establishment of cooperatives and their functioning. Age, class, and education are the main factors that are directly affecting them.

We read about women's cooperatives being praised in the studies in the literature. However, in a cooperative in Ankara, for example, women are not allowed to participate in activities which might disrupt their housework. In another example in Düzce, we know that women's cooperatives are directly affected by the conflict over home vs. work roles. In fact, other women are being entrusted by their husbands to female managers who are deemed to have more "masculine" characteristics. This formation has very interesting dynamics. In some cases,



the women working in the cooperatives establish sisterly relationships to survive. On the other hand, both the governance approaches and the strategies that managers and partners are using to deconstruct them are reproducing sexist perspectives.

In addition, there is a direct link between women's cooperatives and entrepreneurship. In other words, women with "entrepreneurial spirit," as I mentioned earlier, are actually being asked to form cooperatives. The state is supporting the cooperation of women of a particular class who are educated and have some capital. We can see this clearly in the official documents.

Nonetheless, cooperatives are not empowering women economically. Transforming into a cooperative creates other types of employment, apart from entrepreneurship. In fact, we can say that women's labor is being exploited in different ways. In other words, the "empowerment" approach of women's cooperatives is one of disapproval. Age is also a very important dynamic. Women between the ages of 35-50, which we can define as nearly middle age, are

more likely to become members of a cooperative. Young women find it harder to be involved because they cannot overcome the home vs. work role conflict mentioned earlier. Many cooperative managers view the establishment of a nursery as an unnecessary expense. The formation of these nurseries would make it much more convenient to include the younger age group in these cooperatives. These are important factors that hinder the employment of women.

Do you have a definition of the ideal women's cooperative?

B.K.S.: I can talk about an ideal in which the hierarchy is broken, and solidarity comes to the fore at every chain of the process – from the beginning of the cooperative to the sale of the product. Women's cooperatives need to be protected from relations of exploitation and market mechanisms. At this point, I believe that local governments have a lot to do. The macropolitics need to be changed so that women can actively participate in the implementation processes. Women's demands and experiences need to be placed at the center. Relations of exploitation can be prevented only after that. Otherwise,

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they are articulated through the patriarchal capitalist production process.

What should be changed in the cooperative process when we look at the current situation in Turkey? What responsibilities should local governments take on regarding this issue, especially regarding gender inequality?

B.K.S.: Local governments can engage in



highly effective transformative activities for women's cooperatives. For example, they can help with rent, the participation in fairs, opening stands, and paying bills. In addition, they can provide logistical support. They can allocate the building or treasury land for their use. They can take steps to improve the production and marketing capacity of women's cooperatives and their ability to sell without intermediaries. I think the first problem is that municipalities are showcasing women's cooperatives. Municipalities are using women's cooperatives to create a good corporate image in the public. Besides, they aim to take under control some women's cooperatives that are seen too powerful.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality planned a joint project in 2017-2018. Within the scope of this project, the women were requested to collect the seeds of five imported flower plants at a very low fee. The aim was to produce them through women's cooperatives and use them in Istanbul's urban landscape. With this aim in mind the Provincial Directorate of Agriculture and Forestry paid 7,000 Liras to rent a private property and build a greenhouse there. Officials from the Directorate of Agriculture and Provincial Forestry provided training for the women. However, none of the 30 women wanted

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to participate in this project because, besides the fact that the production phase was spread over a very long period, they were not guaranteed receiving any regular income during this process. These women are already engaged in housework, as well as producing on their own land. They saw it as an extra workload. That's why they didn't want to be involved in the project.

Are there any international examples of cooperative policies which can be defined as "bottom up" or "not top down" and which take women as their subjects?

B.K.S.: A cooperative federation in Nicaragua is traveling from city to city trying to identify the problems of local women's cooperatives. They have determined from their investigation that

the two major problems facing women are landlessness and inability to get loans. This finding was presented as a report to the policymakers. As a result, it led the way to the enacting of a law to allow women's cooperatives to receive low-interest loans. Indeed, it is possible to achieve a shift in macropolitics by considering local policies. We can find examples like this in many parts of the world. However, currently no such network exists in Turkey.

What is the status of refugee women in the cooperatives, those who are the "disadvantaged among the disadvantaged"?

B.K.S.: The issue of Syrian women in Turkey becoming cooperatives is also a critical one. An exemplary women's cooperative in Gaziantep called SADA was established for Syrian women. This cooperative, which was established by the ILO, seems to be quite efficiently meeting its founding purposes from the outside – but this is not the case in reality. Syrian women cannot be cooperative managers legally. As a result, a shadow board was formed. In other words, the Turkish people established the cooperative and make all the management decisions. It's a highly hierarchical relationship. Syrian women, who are the subject, became objects in the production of the cooperative and are just workers in a sense. ☹️

Interview with Cemal Sataloğlu

Interview by Hazal Ocak

“The council acts as a notary”

As Turkey heads to the 2023 general and presidential elections, political news is hot on the agenda. Many regard the upcoming elections as a turning point both for themselves and the country. As citizens, politics is always present both in our private and professional lives, but the extent to which we can participate in politics is a big question mark. Is it the same situation for a member of parliament who has been elected by the people? We talked to Cemal Sataloğlu, who has been a member of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IMM) and Beykoz Municipality councils since 2019, about his entrance into politics, his experiences in these two different councils, and what really happens behind closed doors.

Please tell us a little bit about yourself. Let's start with yourself and how you got into politics.

Cemal Sataloğlu: I was born in 1974. I'm a financial advisor. I became actively involved in politics, working for the CHP, in 2013, but my interest in politics dates back earlier. The period of actively working, taking time, and being in the struggle coincided with the period before 2013 and 2014. I thought I owed it to politics. I realized that politics was being practiced only through discourse and that there were some deficiencies to be filled, and I became interested in it. I felt the lack of opposition based more on evidence and more on documentation. Therefore, all my speeches in the assembly are information-based. I have been involved in politics in this way since 2013. After the preparatory phase, it always took effort. Anyone can get on the podium and pontificate for an hour, everyone does this, but I chose not to do that. I think there's a loophole in politics. I'll continue like this.

What were you doing before you joined the CHP?

C.S.: I enrolled in Uludağ University, Finance Department, in 1992. I graduated in 1996. In the early days of university education, the incidents at the university were much more evident, but my

I thought I owed to politics. I realized that the politics practiced was only through discourse and that there were some deficiencies to be filled in, and I got interested in it.

struggle against injustice, lawlessness, and unfairness started there. I became



involved in politics with CHP in 2004. I was putting a little more emphasis on my professional career at that time because I needed to land on my feet. Here's the thing about politics. In my opinion, colleagues who enter politics must have achieved professional economic independence first. After achieving financial independence, it's possible for the road towards a different and correct political struggle to open up. I was a member of the CHP for about ten years, maybe 15 years. But I was inactive. I didn't attend party practices on the field but attended the meetings. I wasn't very prominent. I started my own business. I

had my own economic struggle. Then I felt the need to be a little more active. I became active by taking into account the warnings of the people around me, who were encouraging me to be more active.

How did you decide to become a councilman?

C.S.: I didn't have the idea of running for council in my mind. I was a member of the district branch of the party. I was working with the then council members in Beykoz. I was born and raised in Beykoz. I've always lived in Beykoz, except for the 4-year break when I was at university. We all see the reproaches of the people around us. We are complaining ourselves.

Politics is actually within life. Life is politics. Political institutions and political organizations determine life. And complaints about the municipality are a local manifestation of that. There are always complaints. There were deficiencies in finding solutions. For example, it is very simple. There are disruptions in the work of the local municipality. They cannot find to whom to address the issues that are waiting to be solved. I became a council member to address these problems, to reach out to people, to bring people's problems to the agenda, and provide solutions to these problems in the municipality.

My usual style in local politics is this: When I go to the field, I listen to the problems of any citizen. I don't ask anyone, "which party did you vote for, who did you vote for earlier, what is your view." Locally, there is a pavement problem and a water problem. The issues are quite micro. I take notes about them, and I follow up and solve them. When I'm with those people, there's more happiness once that problem is solved. My goal in politics is to solve people's problems and help them. In my three and a half years of membership in the council, I have pursued only this goal and have been successful. This is how politics is actually done. You have to touch them. There is always a reproach when you go to a coffee shop, sit in a village square, or visit the shopkeeper. I listen; your problems may be beyond me – sometimes the local municipality and sometimes the central municipality has to take care of them, but even just listening helps. I'm trying to guide people. That's my understanding of politics. And it will continue to be so.

What positions have you held in politics?

C.S.: In my political background, I previously served as the district vice president, responsible for local governments in 2017 and 2018. I was following all the council meetings at the time. I was taking notes. I was supporting my fellow council members in my field. I was also writing and helping with the reports they prepared, from their speech texts to the style of parliamentary questions. That's how I was involved in politics. As the district vice president, I provided technical support to the council members from 2014 to 2019. It was somewhat like a technical consultancy. In 2019, I became a member of both the district and the IMM Council.

In your opinion, what is the role of political participation of a council member in the district council? Can they take an active part? How do you evaluate this?

C.S.: Whether they can take an active role or not is up to the individual councilor himself because local politics is part of life. Even if you are not in politics, politics enters your life. By taking an active role, we mean we can put a local problem in a position where more audiences can hear it. That's the solution to the problem. There might be a problem in a

For local politics to be more active and efficient, some local actors must also attend parliamentary meetings and express their opinions. The headmen, for example, should have a say and a vote in the municipal council regarding their agenda and neighborhood problems.

tiny alley in a tiny village. It goes beyond Beykoz. It goes to Istanbul. It could even go national. Everyone becomes aware of that problem. They are aware of it. Or, a problem that some people might not have been aware of, perhaps related to the actions of the current central government but remaining at a local level, can come to the attention of a larger scale and find its place on the national agenda.

In fact, local politics has the following problem – it's about legislation. Some local actors also need to attend parliamentary meetings and express their opinions for local politics to be more active and efficient. They're supposed to be involved, but it's about legislation.

Failure to do so is an issue for local politics in their ability to solve problems. I think the headmen, for example, should have a say and a vote in the municipal council regarding their agenda and the problems in their neighborhoods. This enables the citizens of the headman to take part more effectively. He may have a more precise position about issues which the councilman doesn't or can't know. It causes the problems to be resolved faster, but of course, there is a problem with the legislation.

What is the problem with the legislation?

C.S.: In municipal law, it is clear who the municipal council members are and who will attend the meetings. For example, the headmen can be included in this process with an article. They can articulate the matters related to their neighborhood both by having the right to vote and being the elected representative of the neighborhood. Some municipal council members at the city council meetings may be elected from different neighborhoods, sometimes even from another district. They don't know the neighborhood, streets, or avenues of the district where they were elected and served as a council member, but they have the right to vote for the area. The

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legislation can be amended, but since it is not, local councils are a bit lame. They're not very active; they just serve as notaries. If the government has the majority, they don't even bother to explain it to the opposition. They don't feel the need to share with the members of the opposition council or even with their own council members, the mayor's, or his deputies' own municipal administration. They serve as notaries. So, I don't think municipal councils are in a position to serve active politics in our country because they don't have the right to express their opinion or have enough say in the decisions taken by

the administration. This stems from the presidential system.

Please lead me through a county council's day. Sometimes we observe how, even the discussions on the issues concerning the city and the district are cut short at the council meetings.

C.S.: On the first day, issues related to the agenda come up in the municipal councils. Issues related to the agendas are referred to the commissions. In most municipalities, the commissioners of the ruling party provide information when the problem is taken to the commission. The opposition gets information from the commission members of the government through questions and answers. Some issues need to be seen and identified in the field. Unfortunately, nothing has been done about this. The meeting is a formality in the districts where the members of the ruling commission are the majority; they are just carried out to say they've been "done." In my political life, I have never witnessed an occasion in which an opposition council member has expressed an opinion against a proposal brought by the ruling party in the commission and that opinion has appeared in the commission report. It's all a formality. The issues determined by the mayor and deputy mayors according to their local policies are referred to the municipal councils, then to commissions, and are not discussed at length, only on paper. For example, in Beykoz Municipality, the reports are handed to the commission on Mondays. The council meeting is on Wednesday. At 10:30, for example, the council starts. The commissions gather before 10:30 in the morning, at 9: 00. For 10, 15, or 20 minutes, members of the ruling party's council talk about the issue, as far as they know them. If we haven't prepare beforehand, if we haven't studied our lessons, if we haven't prepared for the matters referred to the municipal

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Photo: Emel Kurma

council, and if we have not worked on it in the field, we would have no awareness of what is going on. No questions can be asked. The issue passes unanimously in the parliament. When we discuss it there, they say, "You can discuss in the parliament, speak there and express the counter opinion."

The question, "Did you not speak at the relevant commission?" may arise during the assembly.

C.S.: Yes, in the assembly, they say, "We discussed this at the commission; you can express your counter opinion." Politics is a case of counting on the fingers. You must talk for as long as it takes. If you are not sufficient in number, in terms of those who accept or those who do not accept, the matter is either accepted or not, and it's over. That's why I call it a notary. They do not offer a situation where issues are discussed and explained at length because the government continues to practice with the understanding of 'I did it, and it is done'. Councilors do not have much influence in the current system.

Is it different in the IMM Assembly?

C.S.: The metropolitan municipality is more corporate in structure. Reports are discussed for months in the metropolitan municipality. It's possible for them to be discussed because the number of A.K. Party commission members is not in the majority there. For example, a commission decision or a report that

comes to the parliament's agenda, a report determined by the administration, passes the commission, and comes to the parliament months later. It's discussed in Congress. It is passed either unanimously or by majority votes. That's not how it works in the district council. This process is more democratic in the IMM Assembly. There is also a problem in terms of the requested documents. For instance, there was an increase in capital in a municipal company in the district council; they did not submit the documents. You can never know what will happen. We communicated this matter and clearly stated "you did not submit the documents." But we didn't get anywhere. The president said it was a question of voting, and the issue was closed. It is not likely that anything like this would happen in the IMM. The CHP is currently in power in IMM, and AK Party is in opposition. However, if the AK Party management wants information or a presentation about any affiliate, they hold meetings with the person in charge of that company. They are provided with any kind of document they want in that capacity, and they make decisions accordingly.

Is the chance of participating in politics currently higher in IMM? What do you think?

C.S.: Yes, it is higher there, but it's the same as in the district municipalities. I hear the same things from my fellow council members in different districts.

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You witness the problems the council members are facing regarding political participation in the IMM and district municipalities. How do you think they can be solved?

C.S.: City councilors are not affiliated with the mayor, they are independent. But I don't think of district councils as containing separate executive and legislative bodies at the local level. They are just under the mayors' hegemony. There are debates during the assembly, and we ask for explanations. For example, after the assembly, I hear sentences starting like "You made



People are happy with solving very simple problems. You know the metro is being built in different districts of Istanbul – they were as pleased as if we had built the metro there. Their problem was merely that they wanted a road bump.

a good point, but..." Some changes need to be made, and the relevant legislation needs to be amended. It needs to be made more independent. Members of the assembly need to be strengthened further. The headman example, for instance, is a must. The atmosphere would immediately become more democratic if the headman attended that assembly, spoke about their neighborhood, and has the right to vote because you can't vote around the headman. The people have elected the headmen. You have to listen to the headman. You have to consider the information provided by the headman. I think it can be effective.

Do you have a goal in politics for the near future? Where do you want to be, ideally, in politics?

C.S.: In politics, there is no such thing as 'I will just do this for a year'. We may not be in politics next year. No one knows what's going to happen. I am a local council member, and I want to solve the problems of Beykoz to the best of my abilities with the support of IMM or the district municipality, but I do not know how things will proceed. I want to be with citizens in the field and serve them continuously because they keep having

the same issues in my region. I want to solve the problems of people who have the same issues. It makes me happier.

Can you give an example?

C.S.: For example, there was a very simple issue in Beykoz. It happened when I first became a council member. There is a place called Kılıçlı in Beykoz. It was a village which had been transformed into a neighborhood under a metropolitan law. We visited there, and the headman told me, "There is no bump in front of the school. A very simple bump. The cars drive fast. There are students and children on the road. But we haven't been able to solve this issue. I have tried for five years and I haven't been able to do it." I asked him in surprise, "How can you not solve such a simple problem? How can the IMM or the district municipality not solve this problem?" After some digging, I found that a decision is needed. In other words, you cannot build a bump whenever or wherever you like; it needs to be subject to some processes. These processes need to be followed. No one was interested. We took care of that process with the IMM's support. The problem was solved. When I visit that village, they greet me as if I've done a great job. People are

happy with solving very simple problems. You know the metro is being built in different districts of Istanbul – they were as pleased as if we had built the metro there. Their problem was merely that they wanted a road bump.

Let me tell you a more straightforward story. There is a collapse on a wall in Ali Bahadır Neighborhood in Beykoz. There's a landslide, a collapse, but no one's laid hands on it. You build a 50-meter wall there. You'd think you'd turned that village into Paris. As if you made it a European city. The problem is, as far as I've seen and observed, local politicians should spend more time with the people. They are not supposed to just be a public representative on paper. We only know who the deputies are after the elections are over. They only visit the people at election times. I think politics should be about solving people's problems. I'm trying to do that in my own way, with my own power. Just solving problems. Maybe I'll be a councilman, and maybe I'll be something else; maybe I won't be anything. In these three and a half years of struggle, I am always proud, and when I look back, I am pleased to see the respect and love in people's eyes. I don't know what will happen next.



Photo: Emel Kurma

Interview by Nida Kara

Youth, expectations and politics between yesterday and tomorrow

The young population born in the year 2000 and after will be voting for the first time in the general elections to be held in 2023. As a result, 6 million young people, who constitute 12 percent of voting constituents, are the center of attention of politicians. While it is unclear the extent to which political parties can reach young voters with their result-oriented election campaigns, surveys and research consistently point to common problems: financial difficulties, inequality of opportunities and concerns about the future. We talked to young people from GoFor, Roma Youth and Young LGBTI+ about youth participation in politics and what the upcoming elections mean for them.

There are approximately 6 million young people who will vote for the first time in the general elections scheduled for 2023. These 6 million young people, who constitute 12 percent of the voting constituents, are also affecting the discourse and election activities of politicians. But how much do these election activities actually appeal to young voters in practice?

Ela Evliyaoğlu: We can answer this question based on research we conducted as GoFor in August last year. This research was conducted using both fieldwork and data from a focus group. According to the results, the young people who participated in the research describe how they participate in decision-making processes using methods that differ from traditional participation methods and follow politicians using different medium to traditional propaganda tools. The main source of this is social media and we found that young people believe CHP is the political party that is using social media the best.

Barış Azar: I think that trying to speak for or on behalf of young people is the most important mistake that political parties make when working with young people. It is necessary to hand the microphone over to young people, to listen to them, to ensure that young people have a voice within the political parties and to produce policies together with young people. In

the absence of this, we are unfortunately encountering political discourse that fails to understand the demands of young people.

Cem Pekbalıkçı: We met with five political parties as part of the “Demand It” program, which we conducted with GoFor. During the interviews, we realized that, with the exception of one political party, there are so many differences between what we are saying and what they are saying... We realized that they do not think in the same way that we think, although they think that they do – this is a distinction that can only be understood by young people. There is a gap between what politicians think and what we think.

Pinar Vatansever: I find that politicians who try to appeal to the youth in their discourses, are, frankly, sweet but very inadequate. Maybe their intention is to show that they can understand us, that

There is a gap between what politicians think and what we think.

they are following the spaces where we hangout. But this remains very insincere and unrealistic. For instance, I don't think many politicians watch Twitch or hang out on YouTube in their normal time, which is not something important. Methodologically, they are making mistakes, intentionally or unintentionally. Young people don't want politicians who try to influence them through social media or new generation jargons. They want to be heard and to be able to participate. Young people face thousands of problems. They have economic difficulties, they cannot find shelter, they cannot feed themselves adequately, they cannot engage in social activities, they cannot defend their rights, they cannot voice their opinions, they cannot

participate in politics when they want to. They are forced to obey. They cannot be represented. It is very obvious when politicians try to lure young people by saying “come, let's take a walk together there” while simultaneously never discussing these problems.

What do young voters expect from this election? A more democratic country or a better job, economy and social life?

E.E.: Again, there are some clear topics that stand out in the research we just mentioned. These are also factors that

Young people don't want politicians who try to influence them through social media or new generation jargons. They want to be heard and participate. Young people face thousands of problems.



Photo: Eylem Nazlier

will affect voting behavior. The first one is the elimination of economic problems and finding a job. Then come freedoms and rights. In particular women's rights, animal rights and environmental sensitivity are among the topics that young people are paying attention to.

B.A.: My personal opinion is that the economy cannot recover without a democratic country. Without creating an environment where young people can express themselves freely, where the state does not interfere in the private sphere and where their social rights are ensured, any steps to improve the

Youth branches of political parties are always used for what we can call "errands". Like hanging flags, making preparations, etc. That's why they never actually listen to serious suggestions and contributions from young people. How right is it to have a say in something we are not the subject of?

economy will only have short-term effects, not permanent ones.

C.P.: Youth branches of political parties are always being used for what we can call "errands". Like hanging flags, making preparations, etc. That's why they never actually listen to serious suggestions and contributions from young people. This is something that makes young people angry. How right is it to have a say in something we are not the subject of? For those who are not in education, the first concern is a decent working life. In other words, for young people who do not continue their education after high school, their priority is a standard of living where they can easily earn a living and participate in social activities. This is not a big thing, but in our current situation it's a luxury. For young people who are still studying, they demand equal opportunities in education. The current inequality of opportunity in education is one of the most pressing problems in Turkey.

P.V.: Actually, I think these are also related. But right now, the expectation to have a good job, economy and social life seem to be the highest priorities. The reason for this is that – unless they

Compared to previous surveys, in our research we found that only the rate of young people's membership of political parties has increased. We can guess that the reason for this is the hope of finding a job.

have these things, they cannot even engage in a discussion on behalf of democracy, and the most visible problem right now is about these opportunities or impossibilities. While they are experiencing these problems, they can't find the time and space to participate in decision-making mechanisms in any civil society organization or individually, or to question what democracy actually is or is not.

What is the rate of political organizing of Generation Z compared to previous generations? Even if they are not actively organized, what is their attitude towards politics?

E.E.: Each generation criticizes the next generation for not being political enough. Generation Y was also political, generation Z is also political. It's just



Photo: Özcan Yaman

that the two generations have different methods. The rate of organization, as we define it, is low. Compared to previous surveys, in our research we found that only the rate of young people's membership of political parties has increased. We can guess that the reason for this is the hope of finding a job. However, they are highly organized and connected in digital environments. For example, they organize through hashtags on Twitter to react to social events. They organize through online signature collections and social media groups. In this respect, they are highly organized, but since they are not active in the same place as the decision-makers in politics at the moment, it appears as if they are not actively organized.

B.A.: As generations change, organizing areas and practices change. Likewise, approaches to politics also changes. Instead of engaging in long and big debates like they used to, they use a sharper language. This might be seen as destructive from the outside, but instead of debating fundamental rights it can be a progressive and empowering act to make fun of those who open these rights up to debate. To give an example from a contemporary debate – it is pointless

for Generation Z to discuss LGBTI+ rights, because this is a debate for older generations. For them, this is already a basic human right and there is nothing to discuss.

C.P.: Roma young people are political. We were able to observe this more clearly after the last election. They can quickly organize around an issue and voice their demands. And in this way, they can actually change the agenda. This has led politicians to take more of a stance towards the youth. In fact, Generation Z can be said to be more political than Generation Y. The main reasons why young people are more political are the development of social media, the faster sharing of information and the foundations laid by the Gezi protests.

P.V.: I think Generation Z has a different approach than our traditional political approaches. In general, they have a problem-oriented political stance rather than a radical approach. For example, in 2020, the constant changing of the date of the university exam disturbed all young people and they managed to keep it on the agenda on Twitter for days. At that time, young AKP supporters were also among those involved in the social

media campaign. Since this problem also affected them, they also tweeted their objections to the exam dates. Young people do not have radical views. They just expect a governance mechanism where there is social justice, where their wishes are heard, where they are represented and where there is no oppression. Young people have very little trust and participation in political parties. They are aware that most of the promises currently being made are on shaky ground and that the problem regarding who will win a seat is just a minor part of a broader problem. The fact that political parties do not produce discourse on their behalf in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, do not take a stance and are not active, alienates young people from them. In addition, the fact that political parties are not inclusive, that their hierarchical system is very rigid and that there is a culture of obedience, pushes young people away from these political structures.

Does the feminist movement, whose influence started to be felt more after 1980, have any contribution/impact/awareness raising for young women voters?

E.E.: Of course, it does. The women's



Photo: Tamer Arda Erşin

movement is undoubtedly one of the most successful movements in Turkey. We understand this best when it is reflected in the policies of global companies. Even the capitalist order has to change its strategy and implement the demands of society. When we look at voting preferences, not only in Turkey but also in many parts of the world, it is observed that the first group that has the potential to change its vote is women, regardless of age. We see that women's voting preferences differ from men according to the waves of feminism.

B.A.: The feminist movement is one of the biggest mass movements in Turkey. Since it derives its strength from organized struggle, it can continue to be on the streets and be visible even as the pressure on it increases and spaces are restricted. This means it has the power to influence the streets and the public. We saw a clear example of this during the protests against the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention. Since feminist discourse is fed by everyday life, it produces a direct response in the electorate.

P.V.: There is definitely awareness, but it remains limited to that between organizations. I haven't seen political parties doing much work on politics which affect women, other than by opening women's branches. The issue is how much space is provided for the potential of women to emerge. Unfortunately, women continue to struggle under social pressure and the responsibilities imposed on them by society. Women are also struggling to work in politics. In parties, women are often assigned the role of a man's assistant.

In addition to GoFor Turkey, do you have any information about the work being done with young voters? If so, which issues are organizations like yours working on more?

E.E.: Of course, the reason why young people are attracting attention during this election period is that they represent a large voting mass. For this reason, political parties often conduct research to measure how they can get votes from young people. Although the results of this research often differs depending on the method and questions asked, a

There are various campaigns for the political participation of young people within the women's movement, LGBTI+ movement, Kurdish movement and Roma movement. These campaigns are also very significant since young people from different identities have different demands and needs.

few common themes emerge. These can be summarized as increasing job opportunities and producing an environment that respects freedoms. In connection with these, the reasons why young people are choosing to migrate is also among one of the popular topics researched.

B.A.: Young voters should not only be considered as potential voters; however political parties mainly work towards this aim. On the other hand, we also see campaigns where young people holding various political views are organizing

Each generation is born into a reality which is different from the previous one. From the moment they were born, Generation Z was born with access to, and the possibilities of, the digital world and era, and this has affected their practice of following and participating in politics. I think one of the most accurate definitions that can be used to describe Generation Z is that it is a generation that does not adapt to traditional, conventional methods.

to make their demands visible. These are efforts that can transform the political environment. There are various campaigns for the political participation of young people within the women's movement, LGBTI+ movement, Kurdish movement and Roma movement. These campaigns are also very significant since they indicate how young people with different identities have different demands and needs.

P.V.: The Akdeniz Youth Association, which is also a member of GoFor, is starting a women's political academy this month. They are organizing this academy for young women who have future plans in local participation mechanisms. Apart from this, there is also an organization called the Interface Campaign, created by young people. In this campaign, they meet with political parties and carry out lobbying and advocacy activities regarding the lack of representation of young people.

Generation 68, the post-coup generation, the 90s generation, millennials... What does the new generation, defined as Generation Z, see or define itself as?

E.E.: There is a particular question which we like to ask a lot, I would like to start by asking that question – which Generation Z? Generation Z, as it is referred to in media, is only one group of this generation. Are we talking about the NEET (i.e. neither in school, work nor vocational training) Generation Z?



Photo: Özcan Yaman

The unemployed Generation Z? Or the student Generation Z? Students in rural areas, students in metropolitan areas? LGBTI Generation Z or Generation Z women who have children? In fact, we need to look at whether Generation Z defines itself or whether Generation Z is defined by others. What we know is that each generation is born into a reality which is different from the previous one. From the moment they were born, Generation Z was born with access to, and the possibilities of, the digital world and era, and this has affected their practice of following and participating in politics. I think one of the most accurate definitions that can be used to describe Generation Z is that it is a generation that does not adapt to traditional, conventional methods.

B.A.: Although generational definitions are important for making some generalizations based on the socio-political environment of the time, things are more complicated today. With the change in communication

For young LGBTI+ individuals, this election will be waged between those who have declared war against their future and existence, and those who have not been able to raise their voices against this hate policy but who basically say that they respect human rights.

tools and the globalization of the field of communication, it is becoming increasingly difficult to define a singular generation. The Generation Y, of which I am a part, was defined as the "Why Generation" in English, meaning the generation that asks questions. Now there is a generation that has moved beyond this point of questioning, has its own truths, its own tools and does not accept the language of the old. I think this generation has more power to transform.

C.P.: Being defined as Generation Z bothers young people. When we look at the political history of Turkey, we see that right-wing governments have generally dominated the political scene. But the new generation has completely shifted away from the center-right and moved towards the left. One of the main reasons for this is that young people are having difficulty accessing even the most basic needs. Another reason is that the AK Party, which has been in power for the last 20 years, is also close to the right-wing.

P.V.: Like every generation, Generation Z is not a homogenous group. This generation has very different socio-political approaches. If we try to arrive at a general definition, the biggest change of this generation is the Internet and social media. Generally, this is a generation that does not hold any radical views, that organizes on the basis of problems, that cannot stand oppressive governments, that can make references to politicians and their policies, that wants social



Photo: Özcan Yaman



justice, and that wants to be able to produce and to exist.

What are the expectations of young LGBTI+s from this election? What will they be considering and demanding when going to the ballot box?

B.A.: For young LGBTI+ individuals, this election will be waged between those who have declared war against their future and existence, and those who have not been able to raise their voices against this hate policy but who basically say that they respect human rights. After 2015, the oppression and hate policies against LGBTI+'s increased gradually. An environment of polarization was sought to be created through anti-LGBTI+ sentiment. The government's statements on this issue, increasing hate speech in the media, restrictions and bans on LGBTI+'s freedom of expression and freedom of association are positioned on one side, while those who hesitate to voice LGBTI+'s demands for equal citizenship are positioned on the other side.

Young LGBTI+ individuals want politicians who can talk about their agenda without hesitation, who will listen to them, and who have embraced LGBTI+ rights. While anti-LGBTI+ opposition is on the agenda in the new constitutional debates, they want someone to come out against this

and voice the constitutional demands of LGBTI+s. Young LGBTI+ individuals who have not been able to access the right to education, who are squeezed into certain areas in employment, who cannot access the right to health without being subjected to stigmatization, who are discriminated against in housing, want someone to stand up, understand what they are going through and produce a policy to combat it.

SPOd and the Young LGBTI+ Association produced protocol texts for candidates during the previous election periods. A protocol text is being prepared again for the upcoming election. Young LGBTI+ individuals will go to the polls with the question of who signed these texts, who is listening to the demands of LGBTI+s and who promises to do so.

Another important issue is to ensure election security for LGBTI+ individuals. Sometimes there are members of the ballot board who do not want to let people vote because their gender expression does not match the gender written on the identity card. Or there are LGBTI+ individuals who do not vote because they think they will be discriminated against at the ballot box. In this regard, political parties should provide training to members of the ballot box board and observers in election

trainings, and LGBTI+ individuals should be able to vote without discrimination. **Is there any data on the employment of young voters, who will vote for the first time, in education and working life? We are familiar with the situation defined as youth unemployment, but how well do first-time voters fit into this definition?**

E.E.: TurkStat has data on this subject. Other than that, it's hard to find data that summarizes the entire demographic. According to the unemployment report for August, the seasonally adjusted youth unemployment rate is 18 percent.

B.A.: According to TurkStat data, the rate of young people who are neither in education nor in employment is 24.7 percent. This rate rises to 28.7 percent for young women. While young people say that they cannot continue their education due to economic reasons, other young people who have taken a break from education cannot find jobs.

C.P.: Drug addiction is the main problem in areas with a high Roma population. This stands out among very basic issues such as education, employment and housing. A person's physical and mental health is of utmost importance, and drug addiction seriously hinders this. Therefore, the main agenda of the Roma population is the fight against drug addiction. Looking back over the last

twenty-year ruling period of the current government, Roma neighborhoods are currently experiencing their worst situation.

P.V.: The most important election promises for young people aged 18-30 is employment. 48.3 percent prioritized employment promises over other issues. The biggest factor in the pessimism and hopelessness of young people and their desire to go abroad is actually the employment problem. They are very worried about finding a job and making a living.

What is the definition of a "political leader" for young voters? How should a political leader behave, according to them? What are the factors that make a politician a "leader"?

E.E.: We don't have a full definition or recipe, but research shows that there are ideas about what a leader should focus on. They focus very naturally on leaders introducing comfort in matters that affect their lives. Of course, Turkey's strong presence in the international arena is not to be underestimated. However, the definition of strength differs from the old to the young.

B.A.: I can make an observational comment on this subject; young people want political leaders who speak their own language, who understand them and are similar to them. Although not actually young, politicians who are younger than the average age of politicians in Turkey can communicate better with young people. Unfortunately, the number of politicians who talk about the issues that actually touch their lives, such as the freedom of the Internet, tools that the modern world can access but which we don't have access to, the absence of organizations such as Eurovision, Rock'n Coke, censorship institutions such as RTÜK, the inability of young people to travel the world like their peers due to the exchange rates, high taxes levied on electronic devices, etc. is very few.

C.P.: In my opinion, looking at examples from across the world, it may sound utopian, but leaders who act closer to the people such as "the president who cycles to work on a bicycle" or "the president who travels without protection" appeals to the youth more. I think the concept of populism fits this very well. One out

of every two or three people who I've asked defines a political leader as a politician who stands with their people. For example, last year's forest fires showed us how slow the bureaucratic process is. Bureaucracy, which conflicts with politics, is also affecting the attitude of young people. Compared to previous generations, young people also have the following view: social and political deeds carried out by a politician are not a blessing, they are a duty. In other words, for us, the politician who does their duty for and with the people fits the definition of a leader.

P.V.: According to young people, a political leader should listen to and implement the decisions of young people by organizing together, and finding solutions for issues such as the climate crisis and migration. And they should also explain how to implement these solutions. They should be kind and knowledgeable. They should place an importance on participation and governance. They should be able to create an administrative system from the local to the center. They should be able to stand up and raise their voice. To give an example, most parties so far have not made any statements about LGBTI+'s rights because they are afraid of losing votes. I think this fear stems from a very poorly studied oppositional stance. Rather than choosing an unjust way for the sake of getting votes, politicians should raise their voice on these issues and influence the people they are supported by.

These young voters, who will be newly added to the Turkish election life, have never experienced any government other than the AK Party government. How do they interpret this? Do they have any information about the governments of previous periods and the previous political climate of Turkey?

E.E.: Some do, while the younger ones don't seem to know much. However, they are well-informed about the AK Party period and are well aware of the fact that they have not lived under any government other than the AK Party. **B.A.:** This situation can also reduce the belief of young people in the ballot box. The belief that a vote won't change anything is something I hear from young people a lot. At this point, we can also claim that campaigns urging young

At this point, we can also claim that campaigns urging young people to vote have little effect. We are talking about a very strong group that will vote for the first time, but it is also a group which does not have much faith in politics. They are aware of the political climate, but their trust in the ballot box is quite fragile due to ineffective political discourse.

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C.P.: There are two different youth profiles: Those who are close to the government and those who are against the ideology and actions of the government. Young people supporting the government hear the following rhetoric: 'before this government came to power, there was a crisis and we suffered a lot'. They, too, can hide themselves in a glass jar in line with this discourse. When we look at the other side, they approach the situation more critically. Yes, there have been problems in the past, but the citizens of this country have already given the current government twenty years. Young people also think that there will not be a sudden change with the results of the upcoming election. For this reason, they are very angry with the current government.

P.V.: Usually they have an idea. While the current political situations are tiring them, I think there is a curiosity about how it was in the past. Also, rather than the current political climate in Turkey, they mostly examine what kind of government exist in other countries, what lifestyles and political processes take place at a global scale, and compare them what they see in Turkey. That's why we are actually experiencing a deep generational conflict. Generation Z sees normal today what past generations see as luxury. 🌐

ONLINE POLITICS IN COMMUNICATIVE CAPITALISM

Where do social media, and communication technologies more generally, stand in social and political processes? In the past two decades, this question has sparked hot debates in the context of many political events that have attracted global attention. While some have hailed technology as a harbinger of a happy future, others interpret technological developments as evidence of the increasing surveillance power of the ruling governments. In this article, communication scholar Emre Tansu Keten contextualizes social media in relation to the transformation of capitalism through tracing the debate over the role of social media in recent social uprisings.

On December 17, 2010, Tunisian peddler Mohamed Buazizi set himself on fire in front of a government building in protest against the authorities' confiscation of his fruit stall. Buazizi lost his battle for life in hospital on January 3, 2011, by which time the video of his protest, shot by his cousin and circulated on the Internet, had reached hundreds of thousands of people. This video played an important symbolic role in transforming the anger that had been brewing in Tunisia for some time into an uprising. As a result of the uprising the country's dictator, Ben Ali, was forced to flee the country, together with all the money he had stolen.

Coming after the Iranian protests in 2009, the Tunisian Revolution became a topic of debate as the second social movement directly linked to social media networks, and the first to succeed. The widespread circulation of Buazizi's protest video, the use of social media platforms to organize people for the protests, as well as the allegations of corruption against Ben Ali and his wife in the Wikileaks documents, which had leaked a year before the uprising in Tunisia, in a country which has the highest rate of Internet usage in the Arab region, further enraged people, and heightened calls to explain the uprising through new communication technologies.

However, the uprising was not limited to Tunisia and spread first to the Arab region and then to Europe and the US. The Egyptian Revolution, in which young people who had organized via a Facebook group played an important role, succeeded in dethroning the dictator Mubarak despite the government's complete shutdown of the Internet. Indeed, the complete shutdown of the Internet led people to take to the streets in even larger numbers, to see what was actually going on there. Despite the shutdown, online communication continued through other means and became proof that the Internet could never be completely shut down. Occupy movements became widespread in Spain with the initiatives of the 15M Movement, which was founded through a group on Facebook by those inspired by these uprising movements, and in the US with the call from Adbusters magazine on their blog with explicit references to Tahrir and Madrid. A wave of uprising swept the world.

From techno-optimism...

While the most prominent cause of this wave of rebellion was the policy of saving capital and placing the burden and cost of the 2008 economic crisis on the shoulders of the masses, Western liberal columnists, wanting to refrain

from prejudicing capitalism, tried to depict them as the natural result of the opportunities provided by social media. These writers, publishing generally in the US and other advanced capitalist countries, gave their articles about these protests titles such as "Facebook Revolution" and "Twitter Revolution", and interpreted them as the fall of the rotten dictators who had been irrationally existing for years, thanks to the new communication opportunities opened by the Internet and social media. As soon as these new communication technologies, developed by Western companies, broke down the rigid censorship and communication barriers that had long existed in these countries, this argument went, people began to come together and overthrow their outdated governments. In other words, the West was again bringing democracy to "underdeveloped" geographies, this time not with weapons, but with communication technology.

Thanks to these technologies, democracies would become even stronger on a global scale, citizens would be able to participate in politics in a more informed and conscious way, since there would be no obstacles to the sharing of information and everyone would easily be able to share their opinions, and



Photo: Özcan Yaman

While the conceptualization of the "Twitter Revolution" referred mainly to the political revolutions, which had occurred in the countries that managed to eliminate their dictators, it also had a utopian aspect, foreshadowing a transformation in the nature, form and quality of politics all over the world in favor of democracy.

it would become much more difficult for new dictators to replace the ones that had disappeared from the stage of history. While the conceptualization of the "Twitter Revolution" referred mainly to the political revolutions, which had occurred in the countries that managed to eliminate their dictators, it also had a utopian aspect, foreshadowing a

transformation in the nature, form and quality of politics all over the world in favor of democracy.

While this technologically determinist and techno-optimistic perspective on social movements was greeted with enthusiasm, there were also those who tried to understand "what was happening" in a more distanced manner, emphasizing the advantages of new communication technologies. For example, Manuel Castells, who described this wave of action as "networks of rebellion", argued that these networks were not only being formed through the Internet, but that social media platforms were also connecting social networks that already existed in real life, and that these larger networks were thus becoming the political dynamic of the time. According to Castells, the hybridization of cyberspace and urban space was leading to the emergence of a third space, which he called the space of autonomy, and this space was becoming the main ground on which these uprisings were based. Moreover, this space gave the uprisings a viral quality, and it was precisely for this reason that these protests were able to spread across a wide geography at an

unprecedented rate.¹ In other words, according to Castells, the Internet functioned as a facilitating tool and space rather than an ontological justification for the protests. Elsewhere, the author made the following remark with regard to the relationship between society and technology: "Technology by itself cannot be to the benefit or detriment of societies either. It primarily reinforces existing or potential tendencies."²

Paolo Gerbaudo, who held a similar perspective on the 2011 uprisings, argued that social media was being used as an effective tool to bring together people who were otherwise dispersed and acting individually, in a certain time-space, to produce common slogans that could represent crowds and to set goals.³ Gerbaudo argued that social media should be treated as a choreographer that determines the ways in which people come together, and tried to demonstrate that the idea of a horizontal, hierarchy-less and leaderless political movement developed through these protests did not reflect the reality but that, on the contrary, all these uprisings were based on a soft and fluid leadership. Marxist communication scholar Christian Fuchs



Photo: Faruk Bilal

also remarked that it was not the emotional hashtags on social media platforms that was giving the uprisings their power, but the bodies in the squares. He argued that while there was no dichotomy between online and offline protest communication, rather that the two go hand in hand in a dialectical relationship, the main factor causing political networks to grow on social

media was the strengthening of politics in the squares and on the streets.⁴

...to techno-pessimism

Alongside these techno-optimistic and balanced assessments of the relationship between the 2011 uprisings and the Internet, a techno-pessimistic explanation also emerged during the uprisings. Evgeny Morozov, for example,

argued that while social media sites are presented as an opportunity for freedom from censorship and liberation, these platforms can also have the opposite effect, enabling people to be profiled, monitored, surveilled and drowned in official propaganda.⁵ In this sense, he claimed that the more people with identifiable identities exist on these sites, the more advantageous this will be for

repressive states. In addition, he wrote that the dominant nature of social media platforms has the effect of inhibiting political debate, lowering the general intellectual level and strengthening manipulation.

Not long after the 2011 uprisings, the techno-optimistic mood regarding the relationship between the Internet and

politics gave way to a techno-pessimistic mood, sometimes even to a state of moral panic. The main reason for this was that, while the 2008 economic crisis was met with a left-wing wave of resistance, right-wing populist and fascist policies gained strength when this wave retreated. As right-wing populist leaders came to power in many countries, the Internet and social media platforms

Not long after the 2011 uprisings, the techno-optimistic mood regarding the relationship between the Internet and politics gave way to a techno-pessimistic mood, sometimes even to a state of moral panic. The main reason for this was that, while the 2008 economic crisis was met with a left-wing wave of resistance, right-wing populist and fascist policies gained strength when this wave retreated.

became associated not with democracy but with right-wing extremists, conspiracy theories, government trolls, fake news and the loss of truth. Those who had deemed social media to be inherently democratizing a few years previously began to write about how the ability of millions of people to freely disseminate their opinions was leading to the most outdated beliefs and emotions of the masses gaining power. This perspective reached such a height that, with the election of Trump and the Brexit referendum, it was declared that we are transitioning to a post-truth era in which emotions, not facts, are the norm and that the driver of this transition is new communication technologies.

Simultaneously, the belief that the Internet is able to resist centralization and cannot be taken under control by states and corporations as an autonomous and free structure was shattered. On the contrary, while technology companies increased their control and regulation over social media platforms in line with revenue models in which they make profit through selling confiscated user data to advertisers; the cyber policies of China and Russia, which have achieved significant control over the Internet within their respective national borders, came to the fore as an example



Photo: Faruk Bilal

for other countries. Surveillance, access restrictions and Internet censorship have become widespread on a global scale during these years, while many countries sought to establish domestic and national cyberspace through stringent policies. Edward Snowden's revelations revealed that the NSA in the US was collecting and storing the data of ordinary users, while the Cambridge Analytica affair revealed that Facebook was selling user data to companies without any regard for the principles of confidentiality and privacy and that these companies were providing manipulative, personalized propaganda content targeting the sensitivities of individual voters.

As a result, it never occurred to anyone to refer to the new wave of 2019 uprisings in Lebanon, Chile, Iraq, Iran, Ecuador, Hong Kong and Haiti, in which social media platforms were more widespread and being used more intensively, as the "Twitter Revolution". This was because the technological determinist point of view that had defined the Internet as spontaneously revolutionary in 2011, this time declared it to be a counter-revolutionary mechanism that reinforces racism, sexism and conspiracy theories – with exactly the same lack of method.

Like all other technological innovations, the Internet and social media are neither entirely positive nor entirely negative in essence in general, but rather offer possibilities and limitations for political participation and democracy. These possibilities and limitations are largely determined by the economic and political structure of these platforms and the algorithms developed accordingly.

Communicative capitalism and politics

Like all other technological innovations, the Internet and social media are neither entirely positive nor entirely negative in essence, but rather offer possibilities and limitations for political participation and democracy. These possibilities and limitations are largely determined by the economic and political structure of these platforms and the algorithms developed accordingly. According to Jodi Dean, social media is a very unfavorable space for the establishment and organization of critical politics and even for productive political debate. This is because a criticism presented on social media, given the algorithmic structure of the Internet in general, is not perceived as a criticism but functions only as another idea that

has been fed into the mainstream flow. As a result it is not so much the content of the criticism, but its quantitative contribution to the flow that comes to the fore. What is important for the structure of the Internet is that the flow continues - without slowing down - so that no single idea can influence it. The exchange value of the message exceeds its use value: "A contribution [message] does not need to be understood. It just needs to be repeated, reproduced and transmitted."⁶

Dean argues that in such an environment, messages that are comprehensive and detailed enough to slow down the flow will receive less interaction, so the clearest, most understandable and easily shareable message form will dominate.

This, in turn, increases the influence of Internet trolls assigned with blurring the communication environment through manipulation and disinformation, while compressing political debates into verbal battles and petty bickering. If we are to examine the Turkish Twittersphere, even if leaving aside the strong influence of government trolls, it is apparent that general political debates are taking place in the form of verbal battles over whether certain daily events are true or false, in which those events are taken out of their context and detached from any intellectual background. Thus, social media is dominated by a state of political non-discussion in which it is not the details of facts and events which matters, but whether they actually exist or not; in which discussion passes swiftly from one event to another and the flow is uninterrupted instead of accumulative, presented in a continuous present tense and always dampened by inconclusiveness. This inconclusiveness only serves to strengthen the voice of the powerful – that is, the political power in real life. It is in this respect, that the AKP government's years-long campaign of moral panic over disinformation and fake news, and its final step of passing a censorship law, can be understood.

Moreover, this structure of social media, which makes political debate impossible, has neutralizing consequences not only for mainstream politics but also for critical and revolutionary politics. The most prominent outcome of these developments is the proliferation of a culture based on "gotcha" and "you are actually this in reality".⁷ Mark Fisher describes this culture, which he calls the Castle of Vampires, as follows: "The first law of the Castle of Vampires: Individualize and customize everything. The Castle of Vampires claims in theory

to be in favor of structural criticism, but in practice, it takes nothing but individual behavior into account. What holds the Castle of Vampires together is not solidarity, but mutual fear - the fear of ex-communication, beings exposed and condemned."⁸ Thus, the possibility for each individual to disseminate their own political opinion and participate in debates is weakened by the tendency to repeat certain patterns, draw boundaries around these patterns, and measure these patterns not by politics but by individuals. In this sense, the way critical politics exists on social media does not create an alternative to the online form of mainstream (lack of) politics.

Creating opportunities

Social media platforms are commercial enterprises built on the failure of the holistic view, of patience, attention and dialogue which is demanded by political criticism and alternative politics; instead they prioritize a fragmented view, speed, distraction and monologue, proceeding with a scheme of sharing, interaction, personal data and profit. As a result, it is very difficult to think of cyberspace, which has been taken over by a few gigantic companies that have become monopolies, as a public space where political criticism and critical politics can be established.

However, as we have observed in the experiences of the social movements that have emerged in various countries since 2009, social media has played an important role in bringing activists together, spreading their words and sharing their experiences with the world. For example, the ongoing protests in Iran, which were mobilized by the murder of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini by the morality police, have been able to make their voices heard and expose

In summary, while social media is not suitable for the establishment of critical politics, it offers various advantages in terms of strengthening the voice of politics that has been established in real life.

state violence through the use of social media; the hair-cutting protest in support of these protests was also carried out, and became widespread, across these platforms. In other words, this is an example of how a social movement that was organized in real life and that gained its power on the streets, has used social media to spread the word, share its experiences and gain support from people across the world.

In summary, while social media is not suitable for the establishment of critical politics, it offers various advantages in terms of strengthening the voice of politics that has been established in real life. For example, Tiktok, which has been widely used and discussed in recent years, offers important opportunities to understand the political and cultural demands of, and to reach out to, the working class.⁹ In this respect, the task of bottom-up politics is to develop a communication strategy for social media that does not get trapped in the algorithmic barriers of the platforms and, in the long run, to fight for the reconstruction of the Internet in the public interest, freeing it from the domination of monopolies that only aim to make more profit.

¹ Manuel Castells, *İşyan ve Umut Ağları: İnternet Çağında Toplumsal Hareketler*, translated by Ebru Kılıç, İstanbul: Koç University Press, 2013.
² Manuel Castells, Martin Ince, *Manuel Castells'le Söyleşiler*, translated by Ebru Kılıç, İstanbul: Bilgi University Press, 2006.
³ Paolo Gerbaudo, *Twitler ve Sokaklar*, translated by Osman Akınhay, İstanbul: Agora, 2014.
⁴ Christian Fuchs, *Dijital Kapitalizm Çağında Marx'ı Yeniden Okumak*, translated by Diyar Saraçoğlu, Ankara: Nota Bene, 2021.
⁵ Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*, New York: PublicAffairs, 2011.
⁶ Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics*, Duke University Press, 2009.
⁷ Nato Thompson, *İktidarı Görmek: 21. Yüzyılda Sanat ve Aktivizm*, translated by Erden Kosova, İstanbul: Koç University Press, 2018.
⁸ Mark Fisher, *Vampirler Şatosundan Çıkmak, E-Skop*, <https://www.e-skop.com/skopbulten/vampirler-satosundan-cikmak/3460>
⁹ Tiktok'un işçiler tarafından siyasi kullanımının değerlendirilmesi için: Emre Tansu Keten, *Sosyal Medyada Gösteri Sahnesini Genişletmek: Tiktok Örneği, Eleştirel Perspektiften Platform Çalışmaları* içinde, der. Gülşah Başlar ve Selin Tüzün Ateşalp, Dora Yayınları, 2022.

E-PARTICIPATION IN CITIES

In order to achieve a city where all living beings are happy and everything functions effectively, we need a form of administration that involves not only elected or appointed officials but also various groups composed of those people and beings that live and function in that city. Itr Akdoğan, research director at the Economic and Social Research Foundation of Turkey, discusses the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for participation in urban administration, e-participation, and urban e-participation.

Participation and ICTs

Participation can be defined as the active involvement of civil society, consisting of urban stakeholders and unorganized citizens, in the decision-making processes, planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation stages of urban governance. This requires access to information, institution-institution, citizen-citizen, and institution-citizen interaction, and the existence of conditions to enable these elements to act together. Participatory governance can only be made possible when these conditions are met. Such conditions ensure that decisions regarding the city will not be made by the political elite alone. As a result participation can be defined in different ways: Participatory-like, which roughly means that you may feel like you're participating, but are in fact being persuaded rather than deciding; partial participation, where you can, at most, only influence the decision of those with decision-making power; and *full participation*, where you make decisions together, with equal rights.¹ Arnstein's ladder analogy points out that the process of participation can take different forms and not all of them will be the kind of process that empowers the citizen.²

At the beginning of the WWW era, which started with the development of the Web at CERN in 1993, it was believed that this networked structure would change the balance of power in a structure, leading to the source of information losing its

clarity, and the source and destination of information becoming untraceable. The parties who receive and give the message, in the classical definition of communication, would become intertwined, and both parties would be able to play both roles, thus sharing the power to possess information. In this scenario, once you enter a network in a network society you will become closer to those in the network than with those from outside. Facilitated access and interaction will, theoretically, bring the ruler and the ruled closer together, thus enabling the strengthening of democracy. New spaces of expression will open up for those who cannot otherwise make their voices heard, and since Web 2.0 facilitates the transmission of larger files faster, the culture of sharing will increase and more diverse information will be able to be distributed faster. With its features of timelessness and spacelessness, the necessity of being in a hall with a certain capacity of people at a certain time will be eliminated, and more citizens will be able to participate in decision-making processes. But, in contrast to this vision of the optimists,³ critics argue that the web is not wholly democratic owing to the existence of the digital divide, surveillance, online hate, echo chambers, information pollution, the inability to digest excessive information, the fact that online does not automatically mean transparency, censorship of access, commercialization of blogs, and offline anti-democratic behaviors being reflected online.⁴ The regular Internet Freedom

ICTs could potentially be used to develop democratizing practices, but they will not be able to achieve this on their own. Administrators, those who are willing to utilize the benefits of these tools for democratic governance, are required. Decision-makers, on the other hand, have up until now predominantly chosen to utilize these technologies for better governance.

reports produced by Freedom House⁵ confirms this anti-democratic orientation. In other words, as with all other technologies, ICTs can be used for both good and bad.

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governance. From an administrative point of view, ICTs have made it possible to carry out their work faster, more easily and at lower costs. But the potential democratizing properties of the same technology have not attracted as much attention.

E-participation in municipalities in Turkey

Municipalities in Turkey have chosen to utilize ICTs for better publicity and better service delivery. Municipalities are mainly using their websites to provide information about the municipality, mayors, organizational charts, units, services, events or to facilitate transactions such as applications and payments through e-municipality pages. Social media accounts and mobile applications, on the other hand, have been used as bulletin boards and service providers, respectively, rather than for interactivity.

However, the use of ICTs by municipalities in Turkey is increasing. The guide for municipalities' post-election five-year strategic plans recommends that municipalities conduct a technology and information infrastructure analysis when preparing the plan.⁶ It recommends that this analysis identifies both the current state of systems and hardware and the future state of the infrastructure. The content of the analysis remains service-oriented, with criteria such as effectiveness and development potential, and the examining of good practices. Technological factors in the PESTLE analysis considers capacity and utilization. The same guide also recommends that the plan should be participatory.

While it suggests preparing internal and external stakeholder analyses, it also adds participation to the headings in the corporate culture analysis. However, the guide does not link participation with technology. There is no reference between the two in either dimension. This confirms that municipalities in Turkey are still using ICTs mainly to provide better services and that the potential democratic dimension of these technologies is not being included in the planning.

The United Nations Department of Social and Economic Affairs (UNDESA) has published the UN e-Government Survey Report every two years since 2001. In the first report produced in 2001⁷, Turkey ranked among the middle level countries in terms of e-government, while in 2022 it ranked very high on the Online Services Index (OSI), along with 11 other upper-middle-income countries.⁸ The report attributes this shift in ranking to high levels of human capital development, investment and infrastructure development. Turkey ranks 48th in the world in the e-Government Development Index (EGDI) and 18th in the e-Participation Index (EPI). The criteria for the e-Participation Index are a) e-informing: sharing public information with or without request; b) e-consultation: asking citizens' opinions on public services and policies; c) e-decision-making: empowering citizens by co-designing policies and services.

The UNDESA e-Government Index also includes local governments. The number of cities analyzed is increasing in every round with the expanding survey content.

The ranking of Turkey as 18th in the world in the e-participation index, and the ranking of Istanbul as first alongside Berlin, Paris, Madrid and Reykjavik in the local e-participation index, despite the democracy, civil rights and freedom indices having plummeted in the last decade,⁹ highlights the reductionist methods of these indices and suggests the need for a discussion over what is expected from e-participation.

Among the 40 cities selected in 2018, Istanbul ranked 12th in the Local Online Service Index (LOSI). In the 2022 index, which examines the most populated cities across the 193 UN member states, Istanbul ranked 11th in the LOSI list. This means that the city meets 85 percent of all assessed characteristics. The index's indicators for e-participation are as follows: social media accounts (which seems to be the most frequently met criterion, fulfilled by 86.3 percent of the world's municipalities), filing complaints, information about the budget, information about municipal council meetings, information about



Photo: Emel Kurma

public events, the ability to express opinions online, providing open data, providing open metadata, announcing upcoming e-participation events, participatory zoning plan, e-mail response quality, municipality's e-mail response speed, participatory budget, feedback to consultation processes, reporting of any discrimination, live communication, e-voting.

The ranking of Turkey as 18th in the world in the e-participation index, and the ranking of Istanbul as first alongside Berlin, Paris, Madrid and Reykjavik in the local e-participation index, despite the democracy, civil rights and freedom indices having plummeted in the last decade,⁹ highlights the reductionist methods of these indices and suggests the need for a discussion over what is expected from e-participation. Designing the tools in the above indicators with the help of ICTs and ensuring the active

involvement of city residents in municipal decision-making mechanisms are two different processes. For example, in many municipalities, the meetings of the municipal council, which is the decision-making body, are broadcast live and information about their decisions can be found on the websites. However, the agenda of the council is not shared in advance, even though it is included in the Municipal Law No. 5393. As such, while it is an important mark of transparency for these meetings to be live streamed, by not offering access to the agenda in advance, provision of the relevant information, which is necessary for participation, is not possible. While such partial transparency is a plus for such indices; publishing decisions that have already been taken on the web does not constitute e-participation, but only serves as a municipal e-bulletin. These examples can also be replicated for other indicators.

When it comes to e-participation, various examples found on municipal websites and mobile applications are good illustrations of the 'participatory-like' definition mentioned above. These applications can make citizens feel like they are participating in the decision-making processes. In cities where local democratic governance is limited, citizens who desire it but cannot access it can fantasize about accessing political power through such examples.¹⁰ They may believe in such scenarios in order to feel as if they have power. However for various reasons, including restrictive political culture and legislation¹¹, lack of digital skills, and the digital divide, these fantasies inevitably collapse. Fantasizing is not a bad thing. On the contrary, it is the driving force for striving for change - including for the democratization of the city, the subject of this article. Since fantasy provides us with the necessary tools for critical social analysis, observing the perceptions of city administrators and residents through this lens makes it easier to understand what is lacking in the city and what is being used to compensate for this lack. This provides an understanding both of what is lacking in the e-surveys of municipalities and the tweets of citizens, while simultaneously, by doing so, providing a realization of the democracy that they haven't been able to produce.

Examples of e-participation in municipalities

In addition, we can observe increasingly varied dimensions of ICTs being used in municipalities despite political, cultural and technical constraints. Although holistic e-participation practices are not yet widespread and have various limitations, different examples of different stages of participation might provide inspiration for those who want to act in this regard. In order to examine these examples analytically, it may be helpful to take the five stages of citizen empowerment suggested by the International Association for Public Participation as a framework: informing, consultation, inclusion, collaboration, empowerment, and monitoring and evaluation.¹²

- **Informing:** roviding citizens with balanced and objective information so that they can understand the issues.

Ankara Metropolitan Municipality's

Transparent Ankara website provides detailed information on maps, from excavation sites to street-by-street jurisdictional boundaries or bicycle lanes. It always downloads these on xls format data under the following headings: culture, arts and sports, transportation, environment and health, society, education, science and technology and general.¹³ Open data portals can be a good example of participation, as raw data is relatively more objective than processed and interpreted data. Open data portals are becoming increasingly common in Turkey - Istanbul, İzmir and Balıkesir Metropolitan Municipalities have open data portals. It is important that this data is updated as often as possible and that as many citizens as possible are aware of its existence. (Şeffaf Ankara - <https://seffaf.ankara.bel.tr>)

- **Consultation:** Obtaining citizens' opinions on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.

During the preparation phase of the 2020-2024 Strategic Plan, Kadıköy Municipality established a digital platform to obtain the opinions of citizens. The platform, which was not closed during the implementation process that started after the approval of the plan, publishes statistical information about the neighborhoods, strategic plan, corporate reports and announcements. Residents can communicate their ideas to the municipality through tools such as project scoring, evaluation surveys and suggestion forms. The platform also includes the reports of the neighborhood meetings which were held during the strategic plan preparation phase. If a map had been produced which showed how these ideas from citizens had been incorporated into the plan, this example could have inspired the next phase. (Anlat Kadıköy - <https://anlat.kadikoy.bel.tr/>)

- **Inclusion:** Working directly with the public in the process of keeping abreast with their concerns and aspirations.

This is a data-driven decision-making platform using spatial data for more accurate gender equality

policies. The platform consists of interactive maps where women's representation and municipal services and aids, which have been prepared using the neighborhood-scale age, gender, education, marital status and household demographic data of Eskişehir residents and grouped by multiple reciprocity analysis, are added to the base maps. This tool facilitates the evaluation of existing spatial policies and more accurate future decisions. Eskişehir residents can inform the municipality about particular streets where they don't feel safe, along with the reasons, on the same digital tool. The municipality then has the chance to take the necessary measures on those streets and communicate their actions to the applicant. In this way, the voice of the citizens is included in decision-making, with the aim of making the city safer and more women-friendly. My Purple Map is based on a municipality-civil society-international organization collaboration.¹⁴ While this is an example of e-participation which has the potential to empower both the municipality and the citizen, it can only have a meaningful impact on municipal decisions if a wide audience becomes aware of it and uses it. (Eskişehir Büyükşehir Belediyesi - <http://morharitam.eskisehir.bel.tr>)

- **Collaboration:** The aim is to partner with the public at every stage of the decision-making process, including generating alternatives and identifying better solutions.
- **Empowerment:** SWE have yet to come across an e-participation practice in Turkey's municipalities for the stages where the public makes the final decision.

Urban e-participation is not limited to tools developed by municipalities. Civil society organizations can also use ICTs for urban e-participation. For monitoring and evaluation, for example, MoDeL (<https://kentekatilim.org>), a platform developed by a civil society organization that municipalities and civil society can use together, facilitates informed participation. MoDeL facilitates the transparent, understandable and interactive monitoring of the goals, targets and indicators listed in municipality strategic plans. Proposals for

cooperation on planned activities can be submitted to the relevant departments of the municipality in the form of an e-petition through the platform. This tool is still mostly being used for access to information. The collaboration suggestion feature, on the other hand, is not yet being used sufficiently due to the perception that the municipality will not listen to the voices of civil society. However, municipalities can try to dispel this perception by inviting their citizens to participate through e-participation applications.

How can urban e-participation be improved?

In order for the above examples to become more widespread and for a holistic e-participation practice that encompasses multiple stages of participation to be developed, the following suggestions may be useful:

• Addition 1 to the participant list: ICTs

The first condition of participatory governance is that those who have the power to make and implement decisions are ready to share this power. Utilizing ICTs through processes, which have been designed in accordance with the definition of 'full participation' mentioned above, will enable e-participation. There are two points to be underlined here. First, ICTs alone cannot create democratic governance. City administrators must be aware of this. They should be careful not to fall into the trap of social determinism while stipulating this condition.¹⁵ The more restrictive social determinism is, which implies that technology is shaped by the people who use it, the more incomplete technological determinism, which argues that society is shaped by technology, may be. However, the interactionist approach proposed by Castells and others, in which technology and society mutually influence each other, can help in the discussion and design of e-participation.¹⁶ What do I mean by this? Rather than planning participatory practices and then transferring them to web or mobile applications, it is necessary to include technology as a participant in the planning phase. It is necessary to listen to the different, new possibilities



Photo: Emel Kurma

of behavior and analysis which are enabled by technology and allow them to facilitate a new approach to decision-making. In other words, the “e” in the beginning of e-participation can be better utilized for democracy if the design of e-participation includes not only local governments and citizens, but also the technology that brings them together.

• **Adopting the principle of inter-operability**

The principle of inter-operability, which is made possible by ICTs, should be implemented between the municipality’s own departments. We have observed that this principle, which means that one unit can benefit from the data and solutions developed by another without having to spend the same resources, is not currently being adopted in municipalities across Turkey. In this scenario both the municipality’s own units and all decision-makers in the city, i.e. municipalities and provincial directorates, and administration, would operate this principle, leading to both lower cost and more participation within and between institutions, especially in large cities.¹⁷ This would provide a democratic and

resource-efficient urban management option.

• **Multidirectional communication**

Multidirectional communication, made possible by ICTs, should be implemented. It’s not currently possible to observe interactions offered by technology in the municipality-citizen relationship. Municipalities mostly prefer unilateral communication, rather than applications compatible with the network structure of the Internet. In unilateral communication, information is disseminated in a unilateral direction and websites and social media play the role of television, with citizens remaining passive. We observe that this form of communication is often also not accessible – for example, the content on the websites, mobile applications and social media accounts of municipalities in migrant-intensive cities is only in Turkish, and the availability of disability-friendly website applications are very limited. However, since ICTs allow municipality-citizen, citizen-citizen, municipality-municipality interaction through multi-directional communication via the same tool and the same content, if this feature could

be utilized, it would have the potential to increase interaction, which is a prerequisite for participation. This interaction could facilitate the flow of information and ideas, and make participation a regular democratic practice between elections, rather than a process that comes to the fore only during election time.

• **Addition 2 to the participant list: objects**

When it comes to e-participation, where decision-making is realized through ICTs, the actors of the process may no longer be limited to local governments and citizens. With the Internet of Things, objects can also be participants in the decision-making process. Street lamps, buses, trees, garbage containers can become decisive in both the decision-making and implementation process regarding their function and existence. If the Internet of Things technology is used in the design of e-participation and objects are included in the process, it may be possible to achieve a city in which living beings are happy and objects function smoothly. In this way, e-participation acts as a reminder that participatory governance is not a goal but a means to an end.

FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR » Citizens’ Assembly

Combating plastic pollution caused by pesticides in Kaz Mountains and Edremit Bay

We are working on reducing the plastic pollution caused by the use of pesticides in Kaz Mountains and Edremit Bay with the support of the UNDP Global Environment Fund’s Small Grants Programme. The study, which will be conducted between October 2022 and September 2023, will be carried out in cooperation with Çanakkale Local Development Association, Gülpınar Sustainable Living Association, Çanakkale Troia Women’s Initiative Production Business Cooperative, and Çanakkale Production and Marketing Cooperative. Our objective is to conduct a field study researching the disposal of pesticide packaging and plastic wastes used in agriculture in the Kaz Mountains basin, which includes Çanakkale and Edremit Bay. In this respect, we wish to ensure a change in behavior, in the long run, to reduce the amount of pesticides and plastics being used in agriculture in the basin. This phase of the study aims to design and implement an alternative participant and local waste management model, with all stakeholders seeking to reduce plastic pollution caused by the use of pesticides in the basin.

In line with this general objective, the data will be analysed to reveal the status of pesticide use and pesticide packaging disposal in the region, and include the reflections of farmers, agricultural engineers, and agricultural



pesticide dealers on the problem; Relevant legislation and good practices in Turkey will be examined comparatively with examples from the world, and suggestions for the improvement of waste management will be developed; Guidelines will be prepared for different stakeholders regarding the implementation of the model. Following

these guidelines, other activities and village meetings will be held in the districts where the activity is being conducted. Such public posts aim to contribute to raising awareness on the disposal of pesticide packaging waste and to reduce the plastic pollution caused by pesticide use in the region in the long term by motivating a behavioral change.



¹ C. Pateman (1970), *Participation and Democratic Theory*, Cambridge University Press.
² S. Arnstein (1969), “A Ladder of Citizen Participation,” *JAIP*, volume 35, no.4, pp: 216-224.
³ For optimistic views, see I. Akdoğan (2014) *Dijital Politik Fanteziler*, İletişim.
⁴ For pessimistic views, see I. Akdoğan (2014) *Dijital Politik Fanteziler*, İletişim.
⁵ <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net>
⁶ http://www.sp.gov.tr/upload/xSpKutuphane/files/2nABM+Belediyeler_Icin_Stratejik_Planlama_Rehberi.pdf
⁷ <https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/Reports/Benchmarking-E-Government-2011>
⁸ <https://desapublications.un.org/sites/default/files/publications/2022-09/Web%20version%20E-Government%202022.pdf>
⁹ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/turkey/freedom-world/2022>
<https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2021-download-success/>
¹⁰ Akdoğan (2014), *Dijital Politik Fanteziler*, İletişim.
¹¹ For example, the restriction of the diversity of information due to websites and social media content blocked by Law No. 5651 on the Regulation of Publications on the Internet and Combating Crimes Committed through These Publications.
¹² https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/Spectrum_8.5x11_Print.pdf
¹³ For debates on the employment of open data by municipalities on a global scale, see E. Erginli and M. Tülek (2019) *Kentsel Politikanın Desteklenmesi İçin Yeni Araçlar: Açık Veri Platformları ve Dijital Kent Panelleri*, TESEV..
¹⁴ The information for stakeholders and the framework can be accessed on the homepage of the website. This platform was developed with the same name for Ankara Metropolitan University. <https://morharitam.ankara.bel.tr>
¹⁵ C. Marvin (1998) *When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking About Electric Communication in Late 19th Century*, Oxford University Press.
¹⁶ M. Castells, M. Fernandez-Ardevol, J.L. Qiu and A. Sey (2007) *Mobile Communication and Society, A Global Perspective*, MIT Press Cambridge, Massachusetts, London.
¹⁷ Anyone interested can take a look at the Open Agile and Smart Cities network, which aims to operate these principles at a global level <https://oascities.org/>

Civil society capacity regarding local public policies

Another study aims to increase the knowledge and awareness of individuals and the active participation of local initiatives and non-governmental organizations in the policy-making processes to support their collective and institutional capacity and to develop a basin-based local policy approach. In this respect, the project partner of our study, which we will start conducting with the support of the Embassy and Consulate General of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, is the Netherlands-based PAX for Peace organization. The activities of the study, which will last for a year starting from December 2022, will be conducted in four basins covering Istanbul, Çanakkale, Balıkesir, Edirne, Tekirdağ, Kırklareli, Kocaeli, Yalova, and Bursa provinces around the Marmara Sea, and in Mersin. The activities to be carried out within the project's scope aim to increase the interest, knowledge, awareness, and participation opportunities of civil society and local organizations to develop, implement,

monitor and evaluate basin-based local/regional policies which aim to produce social resilience in these basins.

Social resilience can be defined as the capacity of the relations and rules that hold the social structure together to cope with crises and disasters, to adapt to the newly formed situation in the face of social fault fractures, and to develop themselves in a good direction. In this sense, resilience-enhancing policies should support the changes in the ecosystems that create social systems and the adaptability of the socio-ecological structure. Beyond empowering individuals, it prioritizes establishing relationships that will provide collective resilience, develop organizations, and support existing structures and relationships.

We will conduct a study to determine the factors that are the source of the prominent social issues at the local level. This study will be conducted in

coordination with the non-governmental organizations and civil initiatives which we contacted for our former activities in the relevant basins. The social resilience analysis process will be carried out around focus-themes, which will be determined with the participants through prioritizing the issues that form the basis of social vulnerability. In light of this analysis, a focus-theme-specific study will be carried out with the aim of finding which local public policies aiming at social resilience should be implemented. The strategic plans and performance programs of local governments in these areas will be monitored and evaluated. By benefiting from the expertise and experience of PAX for Peace in workshops and training activities, a method for social resilience analysis at the basin scale will be followed. In conclusion, through this project, we aim to increase the monitoring and evaluation capacity of civil initiatives and to mobilize local governments to develop public policies focused on social resilience.



Photo: Özcan Yaman

