

Community Volunteers Foundation

Youth Work's Impact on the Social Participation of Young People

Istanbul, 2017



Community Volunteers Foundation
Youth Work's Impact on the Social Participation of Young People
Community Volunteers Foundation Publications
Youth Research and Policies Department

First Edition: İstanbul

ISBN: 978-605-81147-2-2

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PREFACE



For over 15 years, Community Volunteers Foundation (TOG) has been working together with the youth towards bringing about social peace and solidarity.

All across Turkey, the youth actively implement social responsibility projects in order to help resolve various social issues. As such, they not only enhance their own personal development, but also become conscious of the need for coexisting with differences, and translate their energy into social good.

On the other hand, TOG also carries out research, advocacy and lobbying activities so as to contribute to youth policies. This study entitled Youth Work's Impact on the Social Participation of Young People has been carried out in such a perspective. In the scope of this study, we mainly explore the relation between the youth's voluntary activities and their social participation. Furthermore the study also touches upon the problems experienced by the youth for being young, and by extension, their differentiated needs.

This study helps us better understand the positive impact of youth work upon young people. Youngsters who participate in youth work become more active in accessing decision-making mechanisms and influencing decision makers, more sensitive towards social issues, and also, more respectful of differences.

At TOG, we are truly delighted to have carried out such a comprehensive study. We consider that the results of this study will provide a large number of instruments and ideas for institutions which attach importance to youth work, such as local governments and schools. We extend our gratitude to all Community Volunteer youth who contributed to the research process by answering the questionnaire and participating in in-depth interviews, to the Field Department staff who helped carry out the questionnaire across a wide geographic area, as well as to the Youth Support Department, especially to Çiğdem Güler, for mobilizing the TOG scholarship students for transcribing the audio recordings of the in-depth interviews.

Youth Studies and Policies Department



INTRODUCTION

In this study, which focuses on the impact of youth work on the political and social participation of young individuals, it will first be necessary to briefly dwell upon the concept of “political participation” and various approaches to this concept.

During the course of their lives, citizens engage in political participation in different forms and at different levels. While some citizens are content with only casting votes, others may become closely involved in politics, and still others may prefer not to participate at all -in protest or for other motivations-, all with a view towards influencing decision makers at different levels. Undoubtedly, a number of factors are at play in determining the level of this participation. These factors are closely associated with individual preferences as well as the social context of the political culture.

Political behavior cannot be attributed solely to the socio-economic conditions and personal characteristics of individuals, since political behavior represents a choice, whatever the individuals’ education, income level or personalities may be. Individuals decide on how much they will participate to what, and through which forms of participation in the existing political system, through their own will. Mechanisms of political participation may be very diverse. In the light of democracy theories, we may classify forms of participation as conventional, non-conventional and postmodern:

(1) **Conventional Participation:** This form of participation is associated with political parties in a representative democracy. It may include activities such as casting a vote, becoming member of a political party or of its youth organization, or distributing tracts during an election campaign. (2) **Non-conventional participation:** This comprises activities for participating in decision-making mechanisms outside of voting, such as petitioning the local and / or political authorities about one’s immediate community for personal reasons, or joining a boycott or demo. (3) **Postmodern participation:** This would include online protests or membership in NGOs, among others (Yılmaz and Oy, 2014; p. 27).

In contrast to the traditional approaches which tend to reduce political participation to simply voting, postmodern approaches view all forms of an individual's participation in social life as political participation. Participating in the activities of NGOs is likewise characterized as a form of political participation. Based on this observation, we need to underline that membership to an NGO or voluntary participation in its activities also rests on a politically motivated decision.

Various studies suggest that the youth's political participation level is quite low in Turkey. For instance, the "Turkish Youth and Participation" studies published by ARI Movement in 1999, 2003 and 2008 suggest that voting is the most widespread form of political participation among the youth. The percentage of youth casting a vote is reported as 62% in 1999, 53% in 2003 and 48% in 2008 (Erdoğan, 2009; pp. 71-96). However, the youth's membership in political parties and NGOs, or participation in a protest rally or demo is at a very low level. Setting off from this fact, some could suggest that the youth are not interested in the political sphere, or display a low rate of political participation. However, this oft-repeated argument that "the youth are uninterested in political participation" is challenged by an alternative approach: In her research, Demet Lüküslü shows that the youth are not uninterested in the political sphere, but rather react against traditional forms of participation (Lüküslü, 2014; pp. 145-166). Accordingly, the youth display their political stance by employing the political participation instruments of their own choice.

This approach has inspired us in this study to define political participation as not only "voting" or political party membership, but rather as a more comprehensive form of democratic participation (inclusive of citizens' participation in NGOs, social movements, as well as social media protests).

Secondly, we need to briefly discuss the concept of "youth work" whose relation to "political participation" is the focus of the current study:

There is no generally accepted definition of "youth work" valid across Europe or other countries. As a result, there exists considerable diversity when it comes to defining the methodology, scope and groups of youth work. For example, while work for children and youth are bundled together in Greece, the Netherlands and Norway, youth work is largely limited to the ages of 15 to 25 years in other countries such as Spain, Germany and Romania. On the other hand, the important distinction drawn between "youth work working with young people" and "youth work working on young people" tends to vary from one country to the next (Institut für Sozialarbeit und Sozialpädagogik, 2006; pp.16-17).

There are also debates as to when youth work came into being in history. Some historians point to Sunday Schools organized in churches in the late 18th century as the forerunners of regular youth work (Smith, 2013). Nevertheless, others argue that the first example of youth work is to be found in scouting, which was considered to be an education method for bringing up the youth as the citizens of the future (Coussée, 2008; p. 114).

The Council of Europe and the European Union define youth work as "a broad term covering a large scope of activities of a social, cultural, educational or political nature both by, with and for young people." These include activities outside of the school, whose main purpose is to ensure the social participation of young people, enhance social inclusion, and create spaces in the society where the youth can realize themselves in both social and individual terms (Youth partnership, 2017).

In the current study, youth work will be conceived in the spirit of the aforementioned description. We stick to this description since it is the one in use at the European Council and European Union, as well as the Community

Volunteers Foundation -one of the most extensive and comprehensive organizations to engage in youth work in Turkey.

Finally, this report is based on data from the author's master's thesis carried out under the guidance of Pınar Gümüş at Istanbul Bilgi University's Social Projects and NGO Management Master's Program.

Purpose and Scope of the Study

Our primary objective in this work is to measure youth work's impact on the political participation of young people. Youth work places the focus on young individuals (Smith, 2013), builds a learning environment tailed for the needs of the youth (Taylor, 2012, s. 103), attaches importance to volunteer participation (Smith, 2013) and strives to enhance the social participation of youth (Youth partnership, 2017). The question that then springs to mind is "In what way do these features affect the political participation of young people?"

This study has been conducted among the volunteers of the Community Volunteers Foundation (TOG). The reasons underlying this decision are TOG's pioneering role as the first foundation to conduct youth work in Turkey, its vast organizing network and the foundation's perception of the youth as a source. Another factor worth mentioning is the fact that TOG implements a number of projects to enhance the political participation of youth. TOG is the NGO which has performed youth work in the most extensive manner, covering 80 provinces, and also in the most long-running fashion, with 15 years of field experience under its belt. As such, understanding the political participation tendencies of youth volunteering at TOG is of crucial importance for the goals of the current study.

While determining our sample, we capitalized on TOG's extensive network at the national level so as to reach out to female and male individuals volunteering in different activities in various areas (social responsibility projects, peer training, mentoring etc.). The questionnaire and interview sample thus included young people with varying identities (in terms of gender, ethnic origin, etc.) from larger cities such as Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir, as well as from centers with lower levels of socio-economic development and population density (e.g. Çorum, Artvin, Afyon) with a view towards ensuring the diversity of the sample.

Our basic research question is as follows: Does youth work by young individuals, who enhance their political participation to a certain extent by volunteering in an NGO, affect their political participation? How do the activities they participate at TOG, the foundation's view on youth work, and its non-formal youth work methodology impact the political participation of these young individuals? In-depth interviews forming part of the study have revealed differences in the political participation levels of these young people. Shedding light on the factors underlying these differences is among the main objectives of our study. In our field research, we placed an emphasis on the changes in the political participation of youth prior to and subsequent to volunteer work, their choice of political participation forms, as well as their ability to access decision-making mechanisms. Furthermore, we took into account their socio-economic and cultural identities, and tried to determine the influence of these latter parameters on their political participation. Besides, considering that their problems arising from simply being young and other associated factors may affect their political participation, we have analyzed these problems as well.

The study mainly focuses on comprehending the link between the youth's volunteer activities and their political and social participation. That is because, their young age may have an adverse impact on the youth's capability of asserting themselves as actors in decision-making processes.

The main research topics covered by the study are as follows:

- What problems do young people face for simply being young?
- Do youth from different socio-cultural backgrounds have differing needs?
- Do the needs of the youth diverge from those in other age groups?
- Why do some individuals argue that “Youth work is political”?
- Why do some individuals argue that “Youth work is not political”?
- How does volunteer work impact political participation?
- What are the youth’s political participation methods of choice?
- To what extent do the youth participate in decision-making mechanisms at the local and / or national levels?
- Do the youth think that they face barriers in terms of political participation?
- What do the youth need in order to take part in decision-making mechanisms?

Significance of the Study

A number of studies by various institutions and organizations underline the low levels of the youth’s political participation. However, these studies are far from shedding light on the reasons for the youth’s political indifference, and tend to label the youth as apolitical, conformist and disinterested individuals (Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 1999; Istanbul ARI Association for Thought and Social Development, 2002). In actual fact, it is necessary to comprehend why the youth cannot participate or choose not to participate. Due to this reason, it becomes even more important to ask how the youth’s political participation is affected by youth work, which they perceive as a space where they can express themselves and can participate in. As such, uncovering how youth work shapes youth-related decisions in the political area -deemed to be the world of adults- will both help youth organizations reconsider their own activities and also enable decision-makers to revise their youth policies.

Methodology of the Study

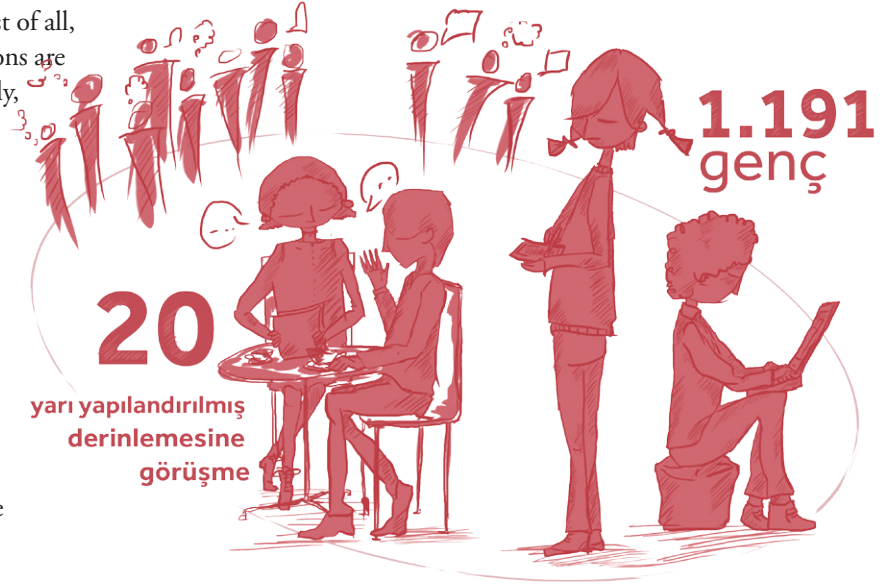
The study has made use of both quantitative and qualitative methods, and gathered data accordingly. Quantitative data has been collected by means of questionnaires while qualitative data has come from semi-structured in-depth interviews. In order to expand the discussion, the discourse analysis method has been employed so as to explore the concepts of “young,” “youth,” “youth work” and participation.

During the study, we have conducted a questionnaire so as to gather quantitative data. The said questionnaire was filled by young individuals aged between 16 and 30 who volunteered for anywhere between 6 months to 5 years at TOG in various provinces across Turkey.

The population of the questionnaire (N: 10.000) is limited to youth who volunteered at Community Volunteers Foundation. The sample consists of 1.191 young individuals. Furthermore, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were held with 20 young individuals. The data were analyzed via the “descriptive analysis” method.

In descriptive analysis, data collected during the interviews are presented to the reader in systematic and transparent

fashion, organized around certain themes. First of all, the data is described, and then these descriptions are supported with direct quotations. Subsequently, the described findings are explained and interpreted, causal relations are explored and various results are obtained. At this stage, the researchers may present certain deductions and forward-looking suggestions based on their own interpretation of the data (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016; pp. 239-240). During the interpretation phase, instead of making generalizations, the researchers present the participants' opinions and perceptions of their lives. The differences and similarities among various participants are outlined (Kümbetoğlu, 2008; p. 169).



A key aspect of the analysis of qualitative data is the codification of data. Codification corresponds to the separation of data into categories so as to make it easier to bring together examples of a similar nature in the final text (Kümbetoğlu, 2008; p. 155).

Study Population and Sample

The objective of the questionnaire was to collect quantitative data for better understanding the youth's political and civilian participation behavior and the connection between their involvement in youth work and political participation. The questionnaire was communicated online to 10.000 young individuals via e-mail. It managed to reach a total of 2.144 youngsters; 1.191 of who responded the questions in their entirety. Accordingly, the assessments are based on the answers provided by these 1.191 young people.

The in-depth interview, on the other hand, was designed to collect qualitative data. As is known, the purpose of the in-depth interview method is to obtain thorough and multi-dimensional data concerning participants' perspectives, experiences, tendencies, ideas, attitudes and habits as regards a specific issue. What is important in in-depth interviews is to create the environment where the participants can freely express their views. In this vein, we directed semi-structured questions at the participants of our study, and any guidance was strictly limited to simply reminding the participant of the context of the conversation.

A total of 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted, with special attention to factors such as geographic spread, gender and socio-economic difference. Each of the interviews was completed in a single session, ranging from 30 minutes to 2 hours in duration. This variation arose from the young peoples' differing interest to the matter at hand, motivation, and duration of volunteer work. The interviews were held in either the TOG coordination centers or at cafes.

In order to ensure that the participating youth may feel at ease and express their opinions freely, we tried to build an environment of trust between the participant and the researcher. The interviews were only audio recorded, the participants were informed that they might take a break whenever they choose to do so, and afterwards all the recordings were transcribed. The transcription adhered to the youth's original words and phrases as much as possible, with only very minimum editing. As such, it became possible to hold discussion on a wide range of topics, yielding a very rich material waiting to be analyzed.

Qualitative research does not have a claim to be representative; therefore we did not strive to form a precise sample while choosing the young individuals to be interviewed. Nonetheless, cognizant of the fact that the youth do not conform to a homogenous identity, we took into consideration certain criteria so as to ensure the diversity of the young people interviewed. These criteria were: (1) Diversity of ethnic background, (2) participation in TOG's various activities, (3) being active in different geographic regions. These criteria were important mainly for ensuring that the sample was not limited to a single geographic region or ethnic background. As such, it became possible to learn about the tendencies of youth in the same age group but representing diverse identities.

Statistical Data on the Study Population and Sample

In our study, N (Total population being represented) = 10.000
n (Study sample size) = 1191
Confidence interval (margin of error) at a confidence level of 95%: 1.60%.

Design of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire featured short and to-the-point questions to prevent the youngsters from being distracted. The questionnaire form comprised a total of 50 questions, the first 23 of which were demographic in nature, while the remaining 27 related to the research topic. It took around 15 to 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

The in-depth interviews, on the other hand, comprised 18 preplanned questions. The exact sequence of the questions (or whether certain questions will be directed or not) varied depending on the answers provided by the interviewee.

During the interviews, we tried to uncover the young individuals' ties to TOG and their experiences in the political arena. Furthermore, it became possible to analyze at length certain answers that we could not obtain in the questionnaires. The following questions yielded these types of answers:

- Why do youth participate in youth work?
- What are young people's expectations from youth work?
- Are there any obstacles to young people's participation in decision-making mechanisms? If yes, what are they?
- How often do the youth utilize political participation mechanisms?
- Is there any relationship between youth work and the political participation of young people?
- Do young people in Turkey consider that the central government, local governments and political parties open up enough space for their political participation?



THE LINK BETWEEN YOUTH WORK AND SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

In this chapter, we present an analysis of the questionnaire and in-depth interviews carried as part of our study. In the first section of the chapter, we provide information about the identity and demographic characteristics of the participating youth, and their conceptualization of notions such as youth, youth work and political participation. The following section focuses on changes and advancements in their political participation arising from their volunteer work at the Community Volunteers Foundation. Study findings help us gauge the effect of youth work on the youth's political participation on the one hand, and provide us with a number of leads about the youth's ties to politics.

In quotations, we did not provide the names of the interviewees, but rather their participant codes. Moreover, we made only slight orthographic corrections while reporting the participants' views, so as not to compromise the originality of what was expressed. While assessing the answers to the questionnaire, we made comparisons with the study *Türkiye'de Gençlerin Katılımı Araştırması* (2014) [The Participation of Youth in Turkey] conducted under the scope of the Network: Youth Participation Project by KONDA Research and Consultancy, as well as the 2015 study entitled the *Toplum Gönüllüsü Gençlerin Profili Araştırması* [Profile of Community Volunteer Youth]. As such, it became possible to compare and contrast the results of the current study with two different data sets on the same topic.

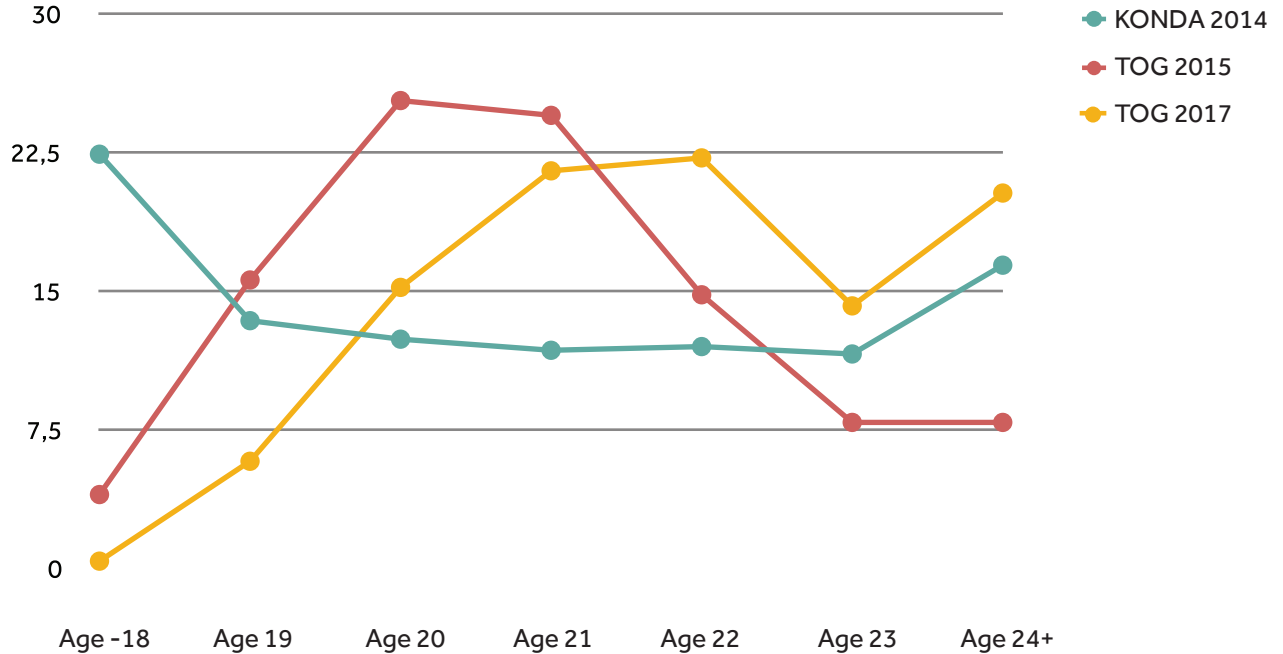
1. BASIC DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS

1.1 Age Range and Gender

The participants' ages vary between 16 and 35 years. This range suggests that the study represents a rather wide age group. The majority of the participants are aged 21 and 22 years, respectively forming 22.2 percent and 21.5 percent of the total. At this percentage, young people aged 21 to 22 years are represented at a higher rate than the remaining age groups.

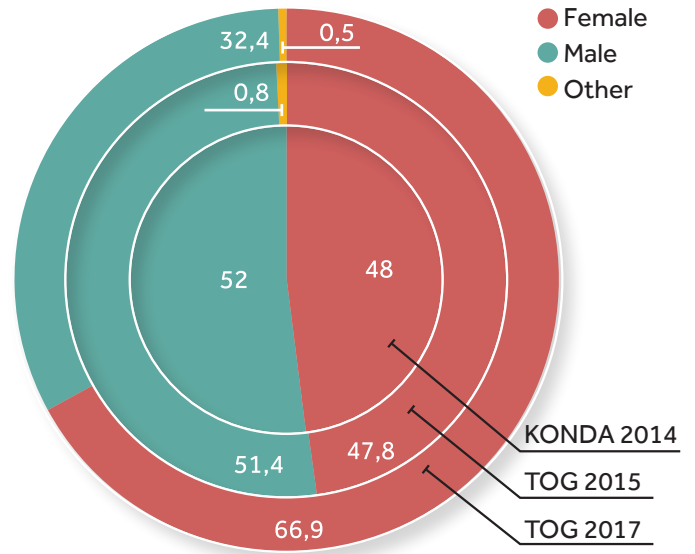


Chart 1: Age Range of Participants



66.9% of the participants stated their gender as female, 32.4% as male, while 0.5% stated that they did not wish to indicate a gender. It is seen that women are overrepresented in this gender distribution. The question on gender was directed as an open-ended question. The answers of the participants were later coded as female and male.

Chart 2: Gender of Participants (%)



1.2 Findings on Education

The large majority of the participants (90.9%) study at public universities. While 80.2% are in primary formal (daytime) education, 18.2% are in secondary (evening) formal education. Most of these young people (88.1%) attend four-year faculties and colleges. The percentage of those attending two-year vocational colleges is 3.9%. 0.2% of the participants are in high school, 2.2% in a master's program, and 0.3% in a PhD program, while 5% did not attend any education program at the moment of interview.

Chart 3: Type of University (%)

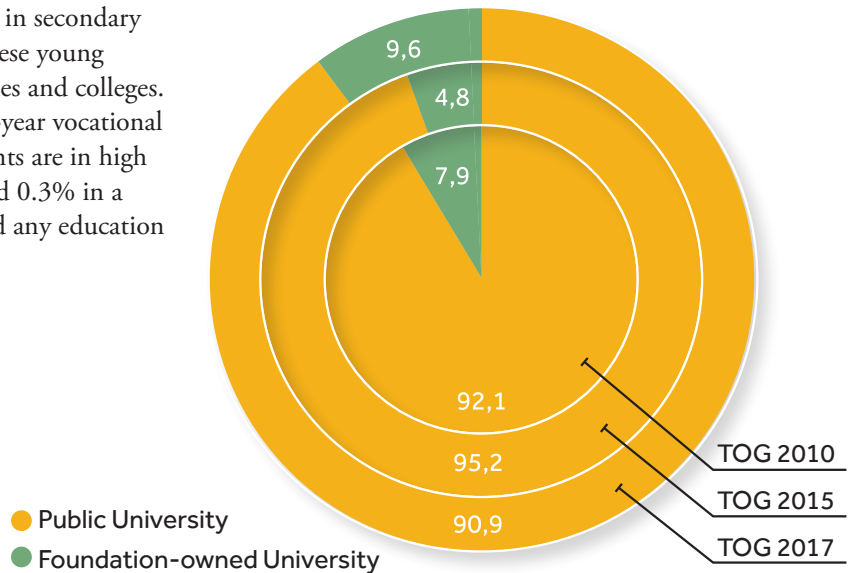


Chart 4: Type of Education (%)

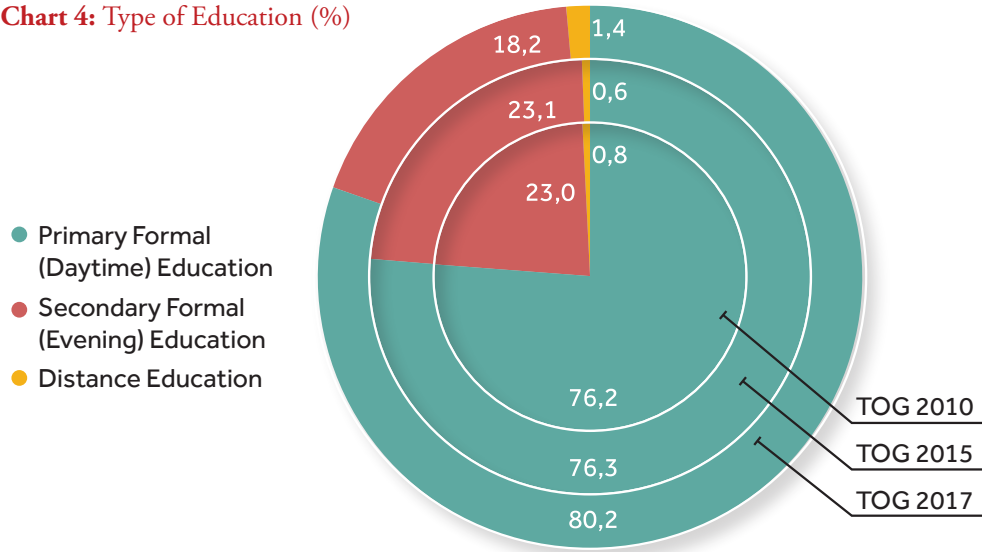
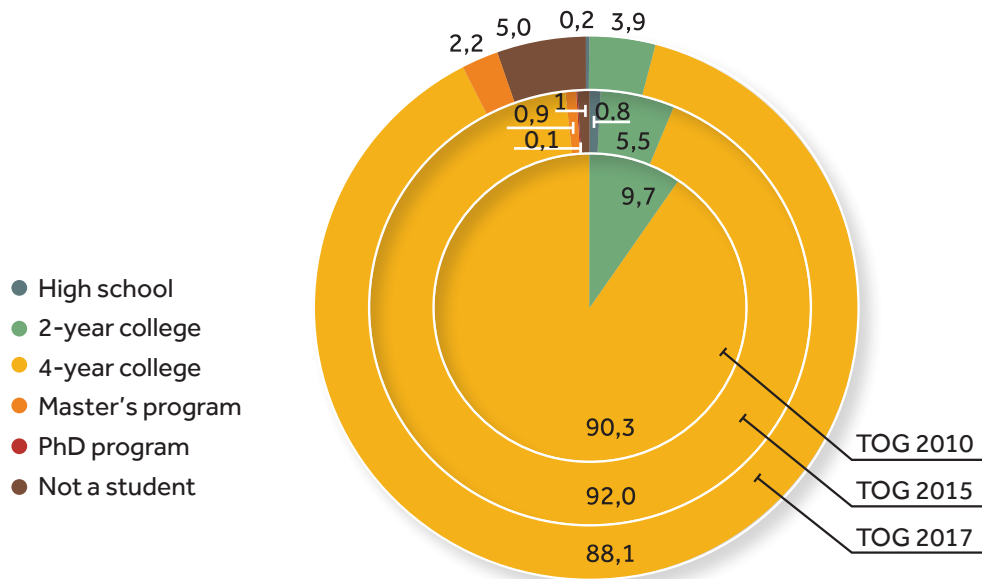


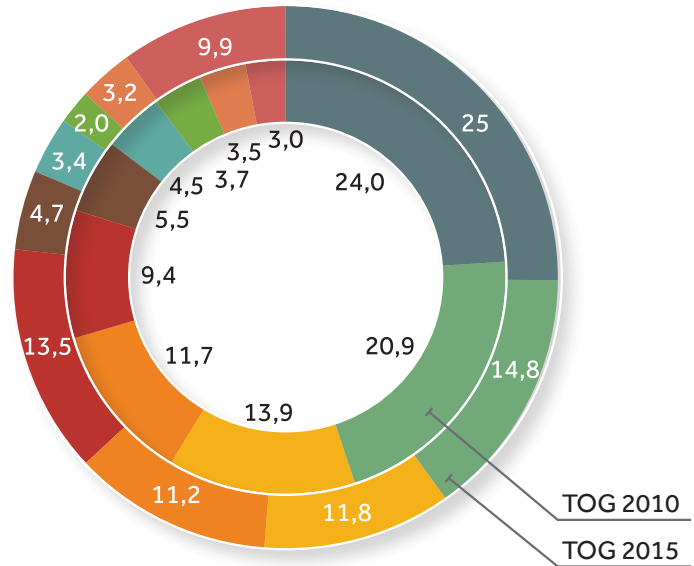
Chart 5: Education Level (%)



The largest number of TOG-member youth study engineering at the university, followed by economic and administrative sciences, and then education and teaching. These three categories constitute 64.7% of the total.

- Engineering
- Economic and Administrative Sciences
- Education, Teaching
- Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, Health Sciences
- Social and Political Sciences
- Literature, Linguistics
- Natural Sciences
- Professional Programs
- Law
- Other

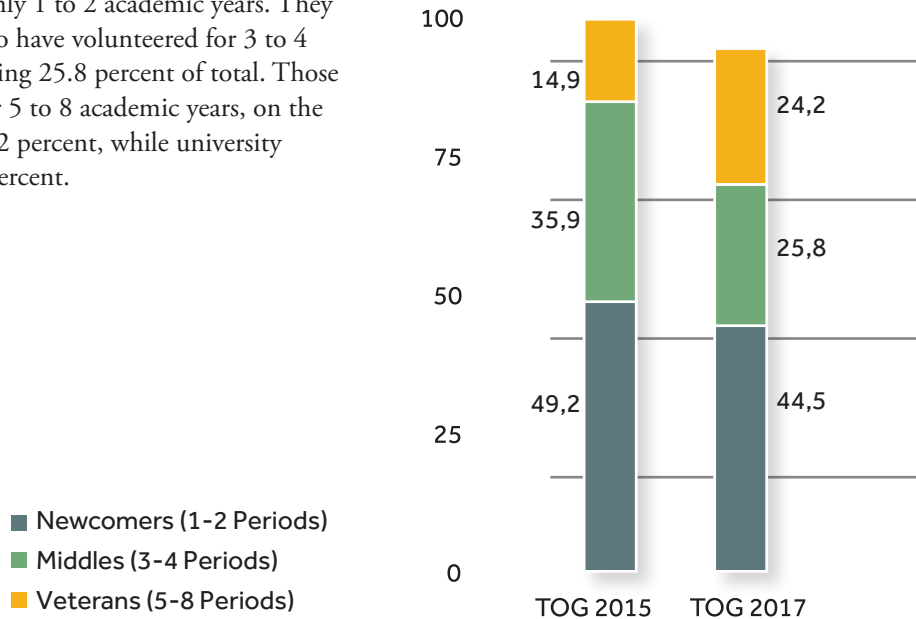
Chart 6: Fields of Study (%)



1.3 Experience at TOG

44.5% of the participants are newcomers to TOG, having volunteered for only 1 to 2 academic years. They are followed by those who have volunteered for 3 to 4 academic years, constituting 25.8 percent of total. Those who have volunteered for 5 to 8 academic years, on the other hand, make up 24.2 percent, while university graduates represent 6.1 percent.

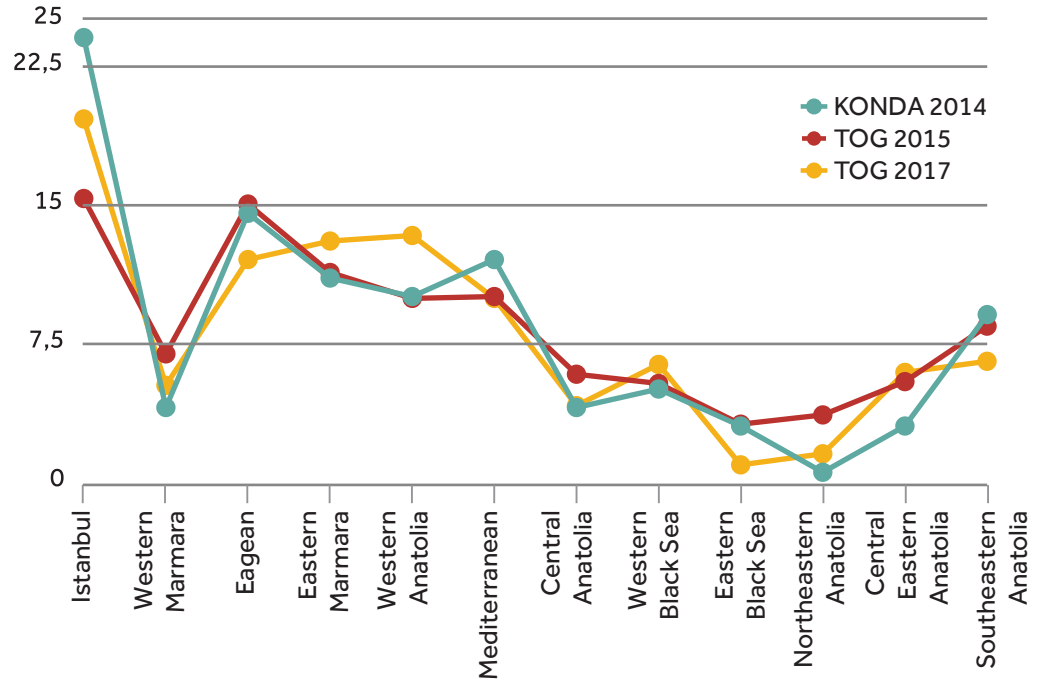
Chart 7: Experience at TOG



1.4 Geographic Breakdown

The participants were asked both the province where they lived for the longest period, and also the province which they are currently residing in. The youngsters currently reside in cities in all of the regions in Turkey. The reason why most participants hail from Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir is that the TOG's organization is stronger in these cities compared to others.

Chart 8: Geographic Breakdown of Participants



1.5 Ethnic Identity and Religion

The questionnaire allowed the participants to tick more than one ethnic identity and religion; however, the large majority chose to self-identify as "Human, world citizen, or from Turkey", willingly avoiding those categories pointing to an ethnic background.

Chart 9: Ethnic Background

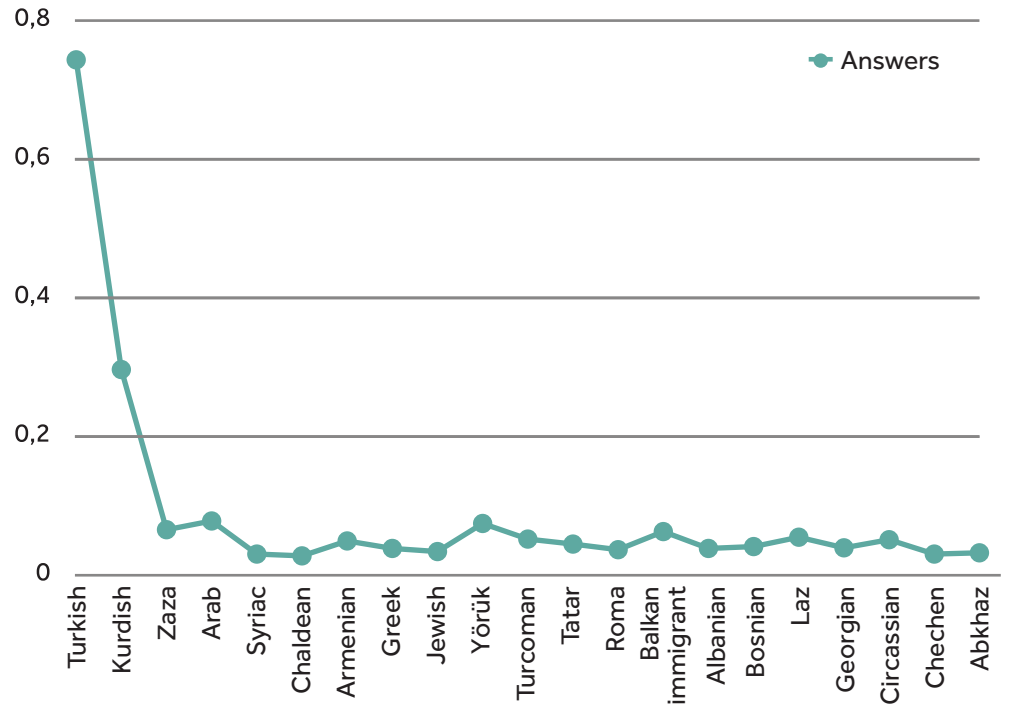
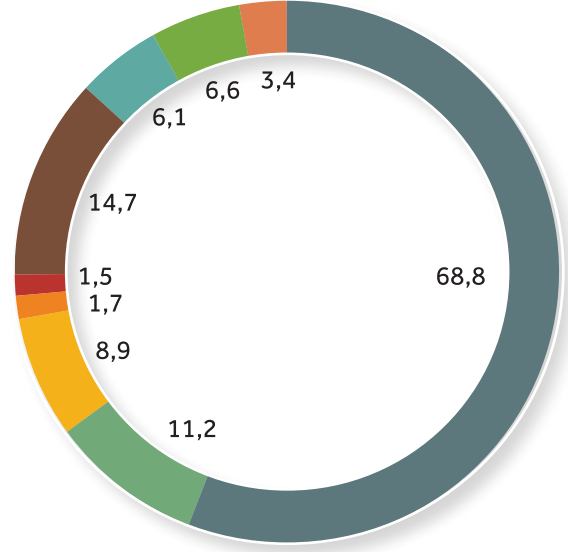


Chart 10: Religion

- Muslim
- Sunnite Muslim
- Alevi
- Christian
- Jewish
- Deist (Not believing in a specific religion but in the presence of a supreme force)
- Atheist (Not believing in any religion or supreme force)
- Agnostic (Considering it impossible to know whether a supreme force exists or not)
- Other



1.6 Expenditure and Income Level

TL 958 is the average of all respondents' answers to the question "What is your personal monthly expenditure inclusive of all spending such as housing, education, transport, telecoms, utility bills, daily life, social activities, holidays, travel, etc.?"

The participants' income consists of pocket money from families, public or private scholarships, and wages. 60% of all these young people state that they have to work to meet their monthly expenditure. 41.6% of them indicate that they have to work an average of 6 to 12 hours per week. 36.5% of those who work earn less than TL 150 in return.

Chart 11: Average Monthly Income (TL)

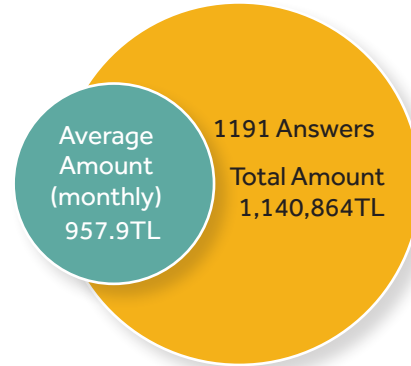
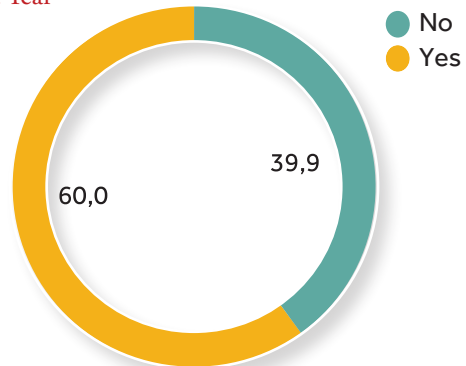


Chart 12: Those Who Worked for Money in the Last Year



2. PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTION OF YOUTH

In the second part of this study, the young individuals were asked to define the conception of youth as found in the literature on the matter, depict the condition of being young, and name the experiences that they associate with being young. In this section, we engage in a discussion of the perceptions of youth, based on the relevant ideas and experiences shared by the youth who participated in the in-depth interviews. Their answers not only reveal how they are perceived by the society at the present, but also, what kind of a perception they would prefer.

Participant youth associate being “young” with the notions of “energy, dynamism and enthusiasm”. According to them, the most common challenge that they face is the fact that young people are not trusted by society. Young people have also frequently complained about being considered as “untrustworthy, unworthy, ignorable, the protagonists of not today but tomorrow.”



3. PARTICIPANTS' VIEW OF THE SOCIETY'S PERCEPTION OF YOUTH

In the interviews, the participants also converged around a criticism of the society's lack of trust towards the youth. Lending an ear to this criticism is crucial for better grasping the youth's sentiments and bolstering their social participation.



A case in point is the following quotation:

When you look from a general perspective, being young in Turkey is a real challenge. Because, from the very beginning, you are always preparing for some exam... It is as if they are always telling you, "You're young, so sit down, take a step back, you won't understand it."... It is generally tough to be young, because they also see you as a future savior, and because of that, they don't want you to do anything today. They always demand you to prepare for the future, but in fact you are young, and feel the urge to do something right now. You have to do something for yourself. Overall, it is tough to be young in Turkey. (RLİ1's ideas on being young).

Youth feel that their thoughts are not held in high esteem. Furthermore they frequently complain that the adults do not give young people the chance to gain experience:

The thing is, there are expectations from the youth, but not any expectations of the youth doing something today. I see the youth as a group who is stopped in its tracks with the words "Hold it, wait for your turn, we worked so hard to reach where we are." As such, we are considered important only for the future (UNİ3's ideas on being young).

Participant youth also indicate that the society is afraid of their energy.

Accordingly, youth and student movements, protests and organizations are perceived as threats in Turkey. Young individuals' political activity is considered be dangerous and thus hindered. In recent years, the rise in the number of detained students, various campaigns for academic freedom, protests in universities, and the media's perception of young people during the Gezi Park protests were cases in point. (Yücel and Lüküslü, 2013; p. 18).

I think they're afraid of young people. They are aware of the energy that resides in young people, but since they are afraid, they exploit that energy. They are afraid that young people will break apart the establishment. They fear that the long-running customs and traditions of the society will be torn apart. I think, from the perspective of existing conservative groups, there is the fear that women and men will join together and challenge the social order, that men put on earrings and girls wear short skirts, and also that we may try to achieve gender equality and disrupt the current status quo. (RAD4's ideas on being young)

On the other hand, young people are seeking new spaces for expressing themselves, owing to this lack of trust. One of them indicates that NGOs offer such a space to young people, in the following words:

"Adults support us, but do not really trust us, I think. They are not aware of our power, of what we are capable of. The state's policies are well-known to all. So there isn't much of a space for the youth. In the public sector, at least. There are NGOs, however, and we tend to go to such places" (TNS6's ideas on being young).

When young people find an arena to express themselves, they feel productive and active. All the activities that they participate in at the Community Volunteers Foundation allow young people to differentiate themselves from their peers:

At the foundation [TOG is meant here] or at the university, you can become a bit more productive and active. Young people are supposed to be productive and active, but you see the very opposite situation when you look at the society at large. I think that people in our region [Diyarbakır] are especially at a disadvantage in this respect. They need to be much more productive, but in fact they go around in circles. So there is a huge difference between the young people at the university or foundation on the one hand, and the young people in my community on the other. One side is very active and productive, while the other is very passive, making no progress (NAD3's ideas on being young).

Young people often suggest that, as the areas where they can express themselves multiply, adults change their perspective on young people. For instance, the young people interviewed stated that their families noticed a change in them after they became actively involved in social responsibility projects at the Community Volunteers Foundation, which also increased their families' confidence in them:

İNMI: *For example, we cannot fully express ourselves within our family either. Because we're young. In their eyes, there is no dispute as to what a young person can or can't do. In fact, the role attributed to you by the society is very clear-cut. It's like, they can do this, but not that...*

It's hard to break through these stereotypes. It will take some time for the society to relieve itself of these.

Researcher: *Don't they trust young people?*

İNMI: *No they don't, but in fact they should. Because we witness that, as young people achieve things and others see this, those who used to say we could not accomplish anything tend to change their mind. So, once we find a space to express ourselves, we expand this space further and further. We demonstrate people that we can make a difference. What counts is to find the right space for this and then make good use of it.*

The youth who participate in the study complain that the society has a homogenous perception on youth and criticize this. The participants consider that this perception fails to understand them. Furthermore, they also indicate that falling outside the society's homogenous perception on youth creates a disadvantage for them.

This argument is in tune with Lüküslü's (2009) observation that the "youth myth" in fact creates an otherized youth identity. Accordingly, young people falling outside the homogenous youth category underpinned by this youth myth are otherized, and categorized as dangerous. For instance young people who are thinner-addicted, unemployed, ethnic or religious minorities, or who listen to different genres of music or simply dress up differently can be otherized for not belonging to the category of desirable youth. "The perception of 'youth as threat' has come to include youth subcultures, minority groups, the urban poor, urban marginals, and young people with political affiliations" (Yücel and Lüküslü; 2013, pp. 17- 18).

One participating youth expresses in these words how the other sub-identities that intersect with the youth identity make life even harder for young people:

Ethnic background becomes a problem, sexual orientation becomes a problem. All of these... Being young is already tough, but if you are young and gay, or young and Kurdish, then life becomes even tougher. (RP11's ideas on being young).

Young people think that their freedoms are restricted by the idealized conception of youth prevalent in the society. Breaking apart this conception may make it easier for young people to express their own identity.

Being young is very difficult in Turkey. If in another country, the young people enjoy, say, 50 percent of their freedoms, then in Turkey, we can speak about only 5 percent. Young people in Turkey cannot go around freely in mixed gender groups; they are called marauders [çapulcu], viewed as potential psychos, branded as terrorists, labeled as gross if they grow a beard or considered to be -I am sorry to say- whores if they wear low-cut tops, and cannot wear mini skirts, The society constantly tries to fit young people in a very strict mold, holds all kinds of debates about them, does not trust the youth, but then suddenly declares them to be 'our present and our future' in an abstract fashion when the need arises; and then when it comes to practice however, they go "you youngsters are worthless, stay clear, the veterans are here" (ŞAM1's ideas on being young).

The young interviewees agree that there is no trust towards the youth in Turkey. Young people do not want to be seen as individuals undergoing some preparation for the future; instead, they want to exist here and now, and to be accepted and appreciated by the society as they are. The social prejudices which brand young people as useless prevent them from expressing their ideas freely, and from fully living out their identities as they really are. Therefore, young people are obliged to stay away from acts of social participation that may help them express themselves.

4. IDENTITIES IN CONFLICT

The participants frequently criticize the argument that the youth have a homogeneous structure, and this point is debated in the academic literature as well. Here, we may take up the opinions of two thinkers, whose ideas overlap with those of young people: According to Pierre Bourdieu, youth do not have a homogeneous structure. Different young people of different social statuses in the same society may have diverging needs. Young people differ from each other depending on their economic situation and education, whether they have a job or not, or what kind of work they do (Cited in Yaman, 2013; p. 38).

François Dubet, on the other hand, argues that, although young people of different social statuses differ from each other in terms of various characteristics and needs, they do share some common features since they are all influenced by the same socio-cultural environment (Cited in Yaman, 2013; p. 38).

During the research, we observed that traces of both of these opinions were present among the interviewees. The respondents indicated that youth living in different cities and as part of different sub-cultures have diverging needs and problems, but also underlined that they do have certain problems and needs in common. During the interviews, the young people expressed the difficulties of being young in their city, but also made comparisons to their peers dwelling in other Turkish cities. They especially compared the eastern and western provinces of Turkey and stated that the opportunities in these areas are not equal. Some young individuals also discussed how their gender identity affected their experience of being young.



Young people living in Turkey's eastern provinces expressed that their experience of youth is different from their peers in the west. Two young people living in Diyarbakır conveyed their experience and feelings as follows:

Here [in Diyarbakır], one matures a bit earlier. That is, we come of age much younger since we have a large number of responsibilities. You have a responsibility in life. There is an ongoing political process, and it is not limited to just casting a vote in elections. What's at stake in this region is our very life. It shapes and guides our lives, so we mature much earlier in the context of such conflict and war. That's why it's hard. It's also hard to be a kid. In this land, you become a youngster without fully enjoying your childhood, and then become an adult without enjoying your youth. That's why it's different. (RAD4's ideas on being young).

Another young individual underlines that young people living in the east and the west have different items on the agenda and are troubled by different issues, also indicating that for example the tough conditions that she faced in a social responsibility project do not exist in other provinces and that people in her province are at a disadvantage due to these conditions.

First of all, in this region [Diyarbakır], you start life with a disadvantage for being a woman and also for being Kurdish. Here, we grow up too quickly. The youth mature very rapidly. Last summer, I joined the Science Ambassadors project and travelled to Eskişehir and Çankırı, and then to Ankara. I observed the youngsters out there: They trouble themselves over very simple issues that we would not even consider to be problems here... So you start thinking: Which is more real, our life here or their life over there? That's a big question. They take many things for granted over there. I found it very strange that, while we have to struggle for even the least important things down here, the ones in the west make problems out of the slightest thing. Last summer was my first visit to the west; and I observed these in Eskişehir and other provinces. The young people here have to struggle. They struggle to live their life. We are also in a struggle to protect the lives of others here. For example, we also travelled to Cizre and Şırnak this year. Then, I saw that the conditions were much worse there, and then started thinking whether their experience in Cizre is more real than ours in Diyarbakır. The entire Cizre is a pile of debris now. Just thinking of it makes me very bad. But people there, despite everything, despite having lost their children and spouses, are still so brave and resolute. I admire them so much. There is such a huge gap between the realities of the east and west, that I think the youth in this region are at a serious disadvantage but nonetheless very brave and resolute (NAD3's ideas on being young).

Young people state that, although they live in the same period, they have differing needs and expectations in different regions. A young individual living in Muğla explained this inequality of opportunities and attitudes as follows:

How should I put it, the conditions are in fact different, and I lived in different parts of Turkey. I lived in Şırnak for 10-15 years, actually for 18 years. I have been living in Muğla for the last four years now. I saw and observed that everything is different: The conditions provided to the youth are different, the roles that the society attributes to them are different, and there are also different political factors. All of these restrict the youth and constrain their space in many locations (İNM1's ideas on being young).

During the interviews we observed that the youth's lives are adversely affected not only by the cities that they dwell in, but also by gender roles. A young female volunteer living in Istanbul expresses in these words her parents' differential treatment of her and her brother who is almost the same age:

I'm 21 and study gender. But it is very annoying to still have to ask for permission for doing something. For instance, when I was selected for a seasonal project on gender, I could participate only after my brother gave his permission and he persuaded my mother. That seems tragic to me. Once, while I was contacting a number of panelists for a talk on dating violence and was under a lot of stress, I explained to my parents how the panel was going to be - mom and dad looked at me with pride, saying "You have made so much progress, speaking with so sophisticated sentences and expressing yourself so clearly. Just when I was about to thank them, they got up and told me, "Take your brother's plate to the kitchen as well." Gender, I think, makes it very difficult for young women to become independent. I have had to fight for all the freedoms that I enjoy now. My brother and I were born into the same family, but I had to struggle to obtain the rights that my brother has enjoyed since birth. I would have been much stronger, if I were a bit more independent economically.

Young individuals want people to realize that they have different characteristics in terms of ethnicity, religious belief, sexual orientation and needs. In this regard, one young individual says:

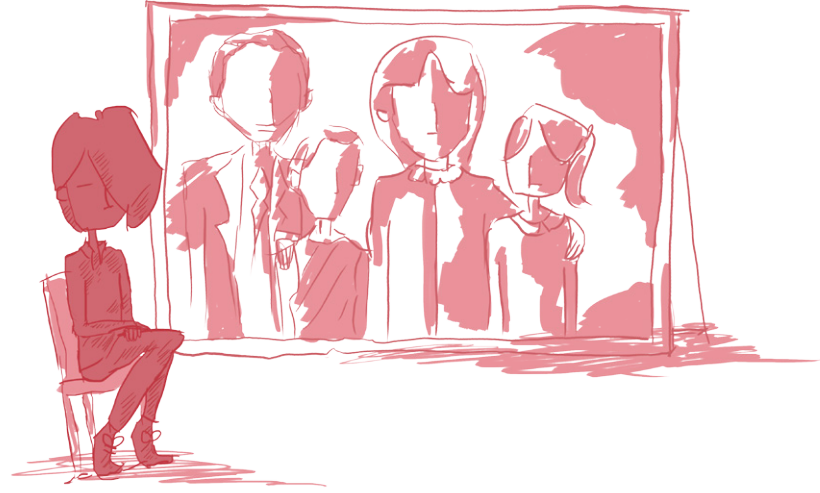
It's hard being young. If you start discussing the freedoms in Turkey, you can say at most two or three positive things. All the remaining human rights and freedoms are ignored. It's so hard being young. Being an individual means adapting the religion, identity and lifestyle of your choosing. In Turkey, we are faced with a mindset that seeks to reduce all of this into a single option. This is likewise imposed on young people, and the taboos surrounding the youth become ever harsher. Young people, however, believe that they can change a lot if given the opportunity. (ŞAM1's ideas on being young).

Young people have both similar needs that arise from being young, but also differing needs due to their diverging social identities. Differing needs arise from the different ethnic identities, religious beliefs or sexual orientations that young people have. On the other hand, young people also have shared problems owing to the social structure in which they live, such as absence of social policies, limited economic support, and widespread social prejudice.

5. RELATIONS WITH THE FAMILY

Some of the respondents underlined the connections between being young and being dependent on the family and continuing one's university education. For instance:

EÇD2 states that 'I consider myself as a young individual, but I live with my family, and feel as if I were a kid when it comes to deciding the hour at which I must be back at home.'



Another young person states that families require the youth to live in line with their expectations, and indicates that this prevents the youth from expressing themselves:

What families mean by the phrase "You are young" is "You must study, after the university find a job, and then get married and have kids." But outside, one sees people who are dancing, people who are reading books, people who want to make a difference. But for families, the only thing that counts is to study, and to get married... (AIS1's ideas on being young).

On the other hand, even if young people work in temporary jobs during their studies, they need their family's support to make ends meet. This high level of dependency on the family, coupled with intense emotional bonds with the family due to the prevailing culture, has a strong impact on the youth's decisions about their lives. During the interviews, one young person depicted this situation as follows:

This dependency limits young people, or at least creates a burden on their conscience. That is because, you are dependent on them and they give you financial support; so, you have to do as they say. This places a burden on the conscience of the young, inevitably limiting them in what they can or cannot do (BRİ2's ideas on being young).

Aside from the youth's dependence on their families in both economic and emotional terms, one of the most important reasons why young people choose to go to another city for university education is that, they want to move away from social pressure and become freer in making decisions.

Being young is easy and pleasant here. İzmir is at least a city which appeals a bit more to students, a city where they can live comfortably. What I mean by comfort is the absence of pressure. It means that the society doesn't frown upon the slightest thing. To give a very simple example, here, you don't get beaten up or rebuked outside for going out and walking side by side with your girlfriend. That's what I mean by comfort (BRİ2's ideas on being young).

In Turkey, there are two important factors that determine the level of young people's relation to their family: First, financial difficulty, making ends meet; second, culturally strong family ties. Both factors mean that young people have strong bonds to their families. These strong bonds create pressure on young people and prevent them from making their own decisions independently for many years.

6. THE PROBLEMS FACED BY THE YOUTH

In the in-depth interviews, the youth have named the major problems that they face as (1) the education system, (2) financial difficulty, (3) unemployment and (4) lack of social opportunities in the city where they live.

6.1 Education

The low quality of the education system has an adverse impact on the youth. The interviewees emphasized that the education system at the universities is not emancipatory and that the education system is incompetent:

I think our biggest problem is education. We have a really incompetent education system. After years of education based on rote learning, we enter university. And the same thing continues at the university... The university environment should be a much freer one, and for my part, I am really unhappy about the lack of proper education, and absence of freedoms (TNSG's ideas on being young).

6.2 Financial difficulty

On the other hand, the existing system does not allow making any change to social inequalities in favor of the disadvantaged people. Young people and children with different economic and social backgrounds study at different schools from elementary school onwards, and live in separate neighborhoods and living spaces, which prevent them from interacting with each other. Children and youth from higher income families study at private schools. Thus, different social groups cannot meet and get to know each other in the public space during their childhood and youth. (Yentürk, 2012; pp. 67–69). One of the young people interviewed states that economic status plays a critical role in determining which young individual will study in which department, stating that low-income youth cannot access the opportunities offered at private schools, which in turn leads to social inequality in the society at large:

There are very few spaces where young people can actively express or show themselves, where they can realize themselves. There is an inequality of opportunities. Take schools as a very simple example: You study, you try to enter a certain university department, you take the exam, you get a good grade, but then, someone else enters that department simply because their financial situation is good. Thus they can study at much better departments under better conditions. That is, there is no equality of status among the youth. (İNM1's ideas on being young)



6.3 Unemployment

The global economic crises of recent years have had a negative impact especially on the youth, leading to huge increases in youth unemployment levels. For example, according to the OECD, youth unemployment in 2016 was 47.4 percent in Greece, 44.5 percent in Spain, 37.8 percent in Italy and 27.9 percent in Portugal (OECD, 2016). According to Turkish Statistical Institute's data, youth unemployment rate was 18.5% in 2015 in Turkey. This rate stood at 16.5% among young men and 22.2% among young women (TÜİK, 2016, No: 24624). Looking at the data for 2016, we see that unemployment has risen further. In 2016, the unemployment rate among young individuals aged between 15 and 24 was 22.6% (TÜİK, 2016, No: 24624); and as of January 2017, this figure has further climbed to 24.5% (TÜİK, 2017, No: 24626).

According to Demet Lüküslü, economic crises extend the time period during which young people are financially dependent on their families. The period of youth, which is seen as a transition from childhood to adulthood, ends when a young person finds a job and reaches economic independence. Economic crises prolong this period and place young people in an ambivalent situation (Yücel and Lüküslü, 2013; s. 11).

As Denstad points out, as a result of economic crises, a young graduate can find either a low-paid job or become part of the unemployment statistics. As long as they are unable to support themselves, they continue to live in their family home and remain dependent on the family's financial and other support. These days people become financially self-sufficient at a much more advanced age than in previous generations. This raises the upper age limit of the category called youth. (Denstad, 2014, p. 21).

I am 26 years old. Now I have to look for a job. I am almost 27 and there is social pressure on me. Issues like creating a proper family, becoming a mother, and such questions... And when I apply for a job, they will ask me if I have any experience in the field... But I'm young, I naturally don't have the experience. So you get answers such as, "We are looking for someone young, but also experienced." As a woman, I have a further disadvantage in this country. Because you always come across guardians of morality. You may run into them in public transport, or in any field of daily life. I mean, I am made to feel that I'm a woman, even when just buying a bottle of water and receiving the change. (ERI's ideas on being young).

6.4 Cities Are Not Youth-Friendly

A factor which shapes the experience of being young is whether one's city is youth-friendly or not, that is, whether young people have various opportunities to socialize. The respondents said that they feel much more comfortable if a city has public places where young people can spend a lot of time. Since they are active as volunteers, they indicated that the presence of NGOs in a city is an advantage.

I am from Giresun, and honestly, there is not a single foundation or association there where I can work as a volunteer. It was here [Samsun] that I got into contact with an NGO. (TNS6's ideas on being young.)

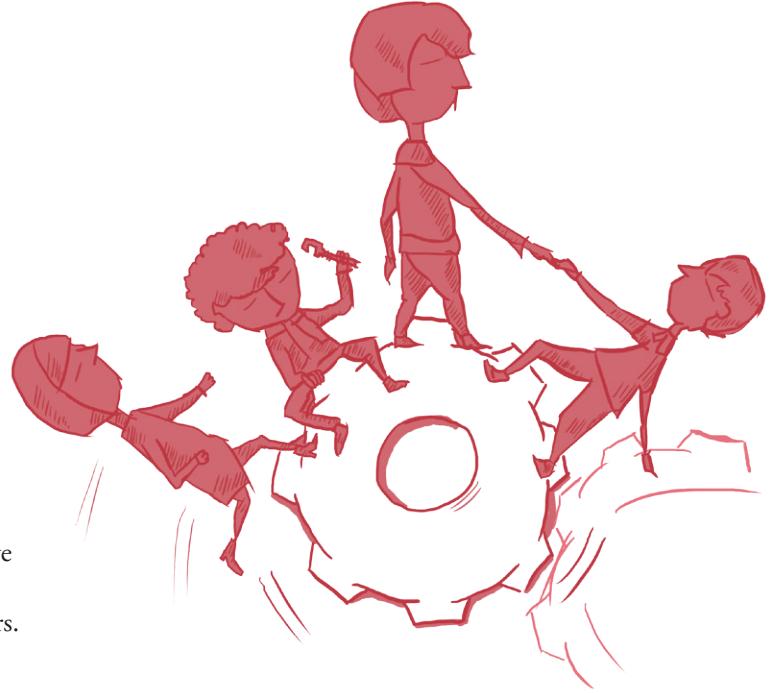
Although young people have diverse identities, almost all of them demand that their cities become youth-friendly. They define a youth-friendly city as a place with social activities, where they can go out, and find places to relax such as libraries and cafés.

I think Ankara is a city that is more pleasant for young people, because there are a lot more places for the young, there are youth-friendly libraries and bookstores, and it is considered natural for young people to hang out on Friday or Saturday nights. In Istanbul, however, I didn't see an area with a specifically youthful character (AÇA1's ideas on being young.)

The youth list their shared problems as (1) the education system, (2) financial difficulty, (3) unemployment and (4) lack of social opportunities in the city where they live. Education takes up a large portion of one's life. Young people are of the opinion that the education system in Turkey bitterly fails in training free, independent individuals. They also state that they are not able to obtain the skills that they need in professional life. Financial difficulty, on the other hand, leads to social inequality among young people. The social policies pursued by the state remain inadequate, and there is a yawning gap between young people with different social statuses. The inadequacy of the education system and financial troubles make it harder for young university graduates to find a job. The business community seeks competent employees and considers the youth to be inadequate and without experience. Aside from the quality of their university education, the social opportunities offered by the cities where they live in has an important effect on the lives of young people. In their cities, young people want to be able to spend more time in various social activities.

7. YOUTH'S PERSPECTIVE ON YOUTH WORK

In this section we will dwell upon the youth's perspective on volunteering and youth work as revealed in the in-depth interviews conducted with young TOG volunteers.



In these in-depth interviews, the active young people who actively volunteer at TOG list their motivations for participating voluntarily in youth work as (1) making a difference, (2) offering social activities, (3) helping people, (4) and getting to know differences and overcoming prejudices.

The youth's main motivation in participating in volunteer work is the trust given to them within the foundation, and the initiative in taking decisions -which is far from the case in the society at large. As such, young people feel empowered in making a difference and enhance their social participation through the projects that they realize.

There are organizations within the foundation and they take their own decisions. After joining the foundation, I saw that no one from the outside intervenes in the organizations. The decisions are taken within the organizations, and then the administration is consulted, like, "We thought of something like this, what do you say?" The administration only says "Yes you can do that, but wouldn't it be better for you if you first attended such and such a training; or, receive a basic training program before starting to work with kids, like what you should do when a child hugs you; alternatively, if you will work on ecology, then first get an ecological literacy training" and so forth... (RP1's ideas on volunteer work).

A young individual who complains about the ethnic- and gender-based inequalities in the society, states that s/he participates in youth work because s/he thinks that s/he can make a change by volunteering at TOG:

I feel that the state fails in certain areas and I think that individuals should take the initiative. But taking this initiative should not mean performing some kind of leadership, not at all. I think that young people can make a difference by forcing their conditions as much as they can; that's why I am volunteering. Being with these young people makes me happy. At least, instead of just complaining about a problem, I am happy to be able to intervene and so feel satisfaction (IUA2's ideas on youth work).

Since the cities they live in do not provide more social opportunities to young people, they turn to voluntary activities so as to socialize and to express themselves.

I come and do volunteer work here. I feel comfortable here, because of both my family and school. The activities here help me unwind. Spending time with children, and participating in aid projects and others help me unwind. For example, the only thing my peers at the university do is go to a coffeehouse and play rummikub, just like ordinary people. That is not exciting at all; that does not show that they are young. But the people I encounter here are different from them. (FVD1's ideas on volunteer work)

On the other hand, a young individual who associates volunteer activities with assistance answers the question "What does volunteering mean for you?" with the word "conscience". This young individual believes that there are groups in the society who need assistance, and indicates that s/he feels more comfortable when touching upon their lives through volunteer work.

Researcher: *What does volunteer work mean for you?*

EUI3: *Change. And also conscience. It really makes you feel your conscience. I feel more comfortable when actually doing something. It is as if I had an obligation to do that, and relax once I do it.*

One of the most important points raised by the young people is that volunteer work helps them interact with different social groups in Turkey. In this way, they can create a shared space to get to know and understand each other, and feel that they produce together for a common future.

The conditions in the lives of young people increase the need for such a common space. For example, the interviewed youth have frequently stated that the current education system reinforces discrimination and xenophobia.

Young people stated that they understood the importance of the coexistence of differences thanks to volunteer work, and that they started to understand and accept differences and realized their own discriminatory / exclusionary tendencies after becoming a volunteer at TOG. Volunteer work has contributed significantly to enhancing young people's understanding of peace, reconciliation and co-existence.

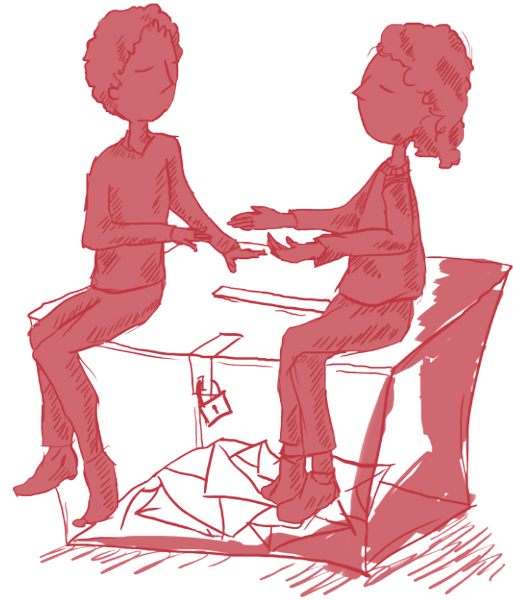
FRS4: *I mean, I think I've discovered myself here, and I don't know if you have noticed, but I smiled when you asked "What kind of a change?" Because I think that I have fully discovered myself at TOG. That is I was previously, so to speak, a racist; that much I understand now. After getting into contact with TOG, I started to think about how to conceive of other races, peoples and nations. You know sometimes Facebook shows you your older posts, and I realize that back then I wrote ridiculous things of which I am ashamed now, and I delete them right away. That is what TOG showed me: Respect for differences.*

Researcher: *You say "I was a racist"; what is being a racist like, and in what way do you think you are different now?*

FRS4: *I mean it is not exactly "Let them all die, damn dirtbags." I don't know what can be a good example, for instance, I used to think "Why should anyone speak Kurdish, we live in Turkey. If they live in Turkey, then they have to speak Turkish". (FRS4's ideas on volunteer work).*

Although the motivations of young TOG volunteers for volunteer work differ from one other, the youth work that they are involved in increases or sustains their social participation.

8. WHAT DOES POLITICAL PARTICIPATION MEAN FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATING IN YOUTH WORK AT TOG?



In the questionnaire, young people were asked the open-ended question, “What do you think political participation means?” The answers were categorized as follows: The three most common answers are, affecting political decisions (19.31 percent), expressing political ideas (16.29 percent) and voting (13.10 percent). I have no idea (9.74 percent), being political (8.73 percent) and taking action (8.65 percent) are the second group of most common answers. Joining a political party (7.72 percent) came very close. The answers “It is unnecessary” and “democracy” received the same level of response (3.78 percent). The answers which could not be included in any category were collected under “other”, which constitutes 8.9 percent of all responses.

The cloud of the most common words used in the answers of the young people is shared below.

Figure 1-1: Meanings of Political Participation

Q36 What does political representation mean for you?
 Answered: 1192 Skipped: 0



An analysis of the answers shows that the youth mainly associate political participation with “affecting political decisions”, “expressing political ideas” and “voting”, thus indicating us which instruments they deem to be the most important.

In contrast to various arguments from previous studies on the topic, the current study shows the youth are very much interested in politics, and view the main aspects of political participation as affecting political decisions and expressing political ideas. What is striking here is that, although the most conventional form of political participation, namely voting, is deemed important, it is not considered to be the primary means of political participation for the youth. From here we may reach the conclusion that it would be wrong to consider the youth as apolitical, and that they feel closer to non-conventional means of political participation.

In the in-depth interviews, young people stated that the most frequent means of political participation they employ is “voting”, and that they consider it to be important. However, the fact that voting is so common may also be due to the fact that young people are not given enough place in other decision-making mechanisms, or that they can access voting in an effortless fashion.

For me, voting represents becoming an individual. Because it is the only right that's given to me right now. Sometimes it feels like voting is the only say that I have. For instance, I was excited when I voted for the first time. I had thought that I could really change something. So, I went to the ballot and cast a vote. That's why I vote every time. When I'm voting, I realize that I'm an actual individual. When voting papers come home... (AIS1's thoughts on political participation)

Voting is sometimes viewed as a responsibility, and sometimes as the most direct way to affect decision-making mechanisms considering other means of participation. On the other hand, young people also stated that a free and democratic society can be created only when access to all political participation mechanisms is easy and available to citizens.

It's important to vote and also to take to the streets. Because you just can't solve all problems by voting, and then you need to come out on public squares, shoulder to shoulder, in solidarity. We have tried this a number of times. You know they say, "A right is not given but taken"; if you are being deprived of your rights, then you should not hesitate to take to the streets or join social media campaigns, if that's how you will get it back. Or if I will obtain my rights by petitioning the prime minister's office, then that's what I should do. (ŞAM1's thoughts on political participation)

According to the results of the questionnaire, only a very small proportion of young people (7.7 percent) define political participation as membership to a political party. The fact that political participation is not associated with political party membership can be an indicator of the general distrust towards political parties.

As shown by KONDA's study entitled The Participation of Youth in Turkey (2014), only one fourth of the youth in Turkey are either political party members or want to become one. So, a large majority of the youth are not members, and do not wish to become one.

Among the youth, there is also a quite large proportion of people who define political participation as expressing one's political ideas freely. However, restrictions on the social media, which is the area where they express themselves most often, create a feeling of pressure. A young person living in İzmir elaborates on this issue as follows:

The youth cannot be very active in this area, because there's constant pressure. Let me take up the freedom of expression: There are hundreds of young people who are currently in prison because of their Facebook posts. There are a lot of young people, college students or others, arrested for their Twitter messages. The other youth who see this are in fear. They think, when I do something, I will be arrested likewise. The right to stage a protest is a legally recognized right in our country and there is no requirement to receive prior permission to organize a rally. Although

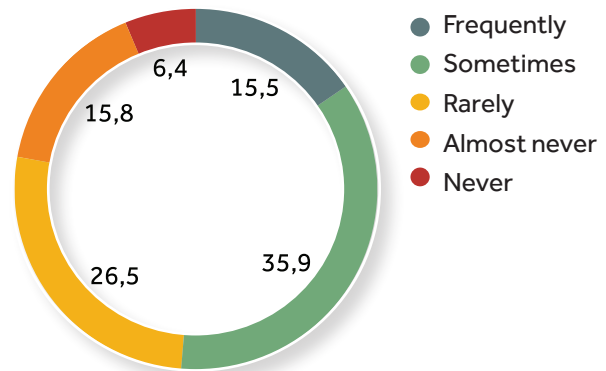
there isn't a requirement of prior notification, the police crack down on numerous protests, resulting in people getting killed, arrested, taken into custody, gassed or beaten with truncheon. As a result the youth, including myself, hesitate, asking "Will something happen to me if I participate?" (BRİ2's thoughts on political participation).

Political participation for young people can have multiple meanings such as influencing political decisions, sharing political ideas, and voting. While voting may still seem to be the most common form of political action among young people, it should not be ignored that the youth have very limited access to non-conventional and postmodern forms of participation outside of voting.

8.1 How Important is Politics in the Youth's Day-to-Day Conversations?

An analysis of the answers given by young people to the questionnaire reveals that politics is on their agenda, although to a limited extent. The percentage of those who say 'I almost never talk politics' or 'I never talk politics' in conversations with friends is 22.1 percent. In in-depth interviews, it is seen that young people living in the eastern provinces are much more concerned with politics in daily conversations when compared to those living in the west.

Chart 13: How Often Do You Talk Politics in Daily Life?



A young person interviewed in Diyarbakır expresses as follows what priority politics has in her/his life:

Politics is usually our only agenda. Politics and our work at TOG, or our friends at TOG. Because you have no other life here. You simply have a political life. So, I doubt that it would be possible to turn your back on it. We fell upon such a period in politics that it does not matter where you stand on the political continuum - the right, left or center. Living in this geography is enough. That's why we're so involved, so immersed. It's politics in the morning, politics in the evening. In short, when you are born as a Kurd, you are already politicized in this country. (RAD4's thoughts on political participation).

Youth active in youth work, when compared with the Turkish average, discuss politics much more in their daily lives. This may be related to their interest in social issues, and their desire to be more active in influencing decision-makers.

8.2 Is the Youth Political, Apolitical or Depoliticized?

In Turkey, most post-1980 research on youth argue that young people do not talk about politics with their peers, are not interested in politics, and do not trust political institutions such as political parties, government and the Turkish Grand National Assembly. (Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 1999; ARI Association for Thought and Social Development, 2001; Survey on Turkish University Youth, 2003). In line with these findings, the post-1980 generation has been frequently branded as apolitical. In our study, we placed in the questionnaire a question that read “Are the young people in Turkey apolitical, political or depoliticized?” and also tried to understand at length what the youth think about this issue, by means of the interviews. The responses given by the youth are important for letting us know their thoughts about political mechanisms.

In the study the youth gave quite close answers to the question “Are the young people in Turkey apolitical, political or depoliticized?” The phrase “Young people are apolitical” received the answer “Yes and no” at a percentage of 44.33. Likewise, the phrase “Young people are political” was answered as “Yes and no” by 47.19%. On the other hand the phrase “young people have been depoliticized was answered as “Yes and no” by 41.23% of respondents. From here we deduce that young people are reluctant in expressing their opinion on the issue. These answers are quite consistent with each other, suggesting that the youth choose not to reveal their thoughts.

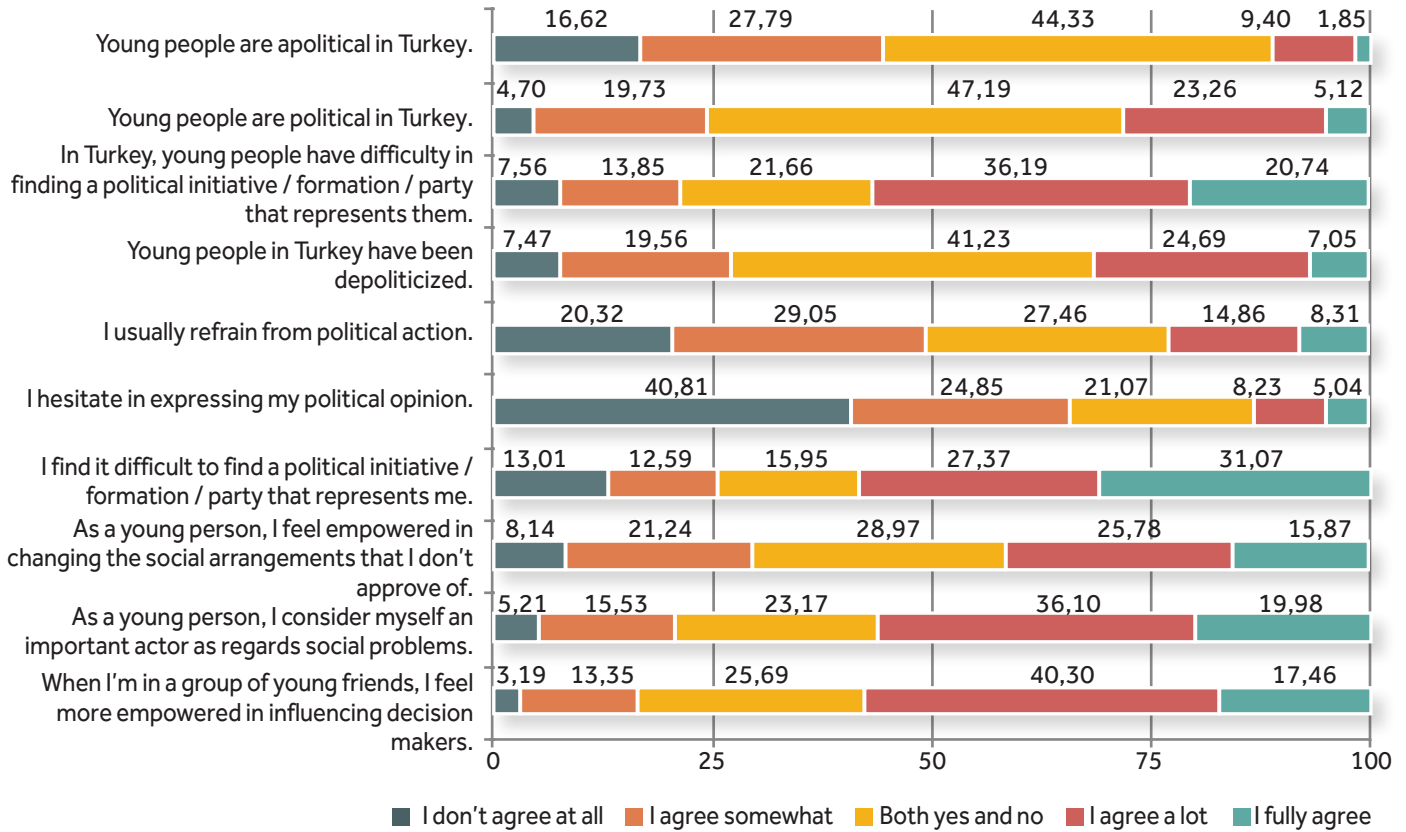
In the in-depth interviews, we reached the opinion that these answers may arise from four reasons: First is the complexity of the concepts. For the youth, the words “political and politics” may be quite confusing. They usually don’t have a precise idea as to what the terms mean. During the interviews FRS4 makes the following definitions of the political and the “social”:

I think, political action refers to those protests criticizing what the government does not do. Non-political actions, however, are social actions. LGBT protests, for example, are not political in my view. Or take the marches for women’s rights or against domestic violence, the March 8th rally. To me, these are social, not political actions.

Secondly, the word “political” evokes to young people something polluted, dangerous, to be avoided. For example, during the interview, FRS4 talked about the connotations of “political” as follows:

”The political is something cold for me. When the word political is mentioned, what springs to my mind are men dressed in dark suits.”

Chart 14: Phrases about Political Participation



The third reason is that the youth do not trust politics. According to RPİ1, the youth avoid politics for the following reason:

Because, they have no faith in politics. They don't believe they can change anything politically. When you take a political action, when you take part in a protest, you get clubbed and arrested. You get abused and lose your faith. So you don't believe that you can change anything by means of politics. For example, it is not possible for us to have a say in the parliament. You may say, well there are human rights. But there are no people at the parliament who care about human rights. Because, Turkish politics is not based on that. And since politics is not rights-based, people naturally steer away from politics.

The final reason is the idea that the Community Volunteers Foundation has no connection to any political ideology. The volunteers interpret this idea in different ways. During their volunteer work, in any activity or project, they consider that the foundation should not be associated with politics and therefore view politics as taboo. For this reason, questions about political participation were sometimes met with reaction in the questionnaire or in-depth interviews. In in-depth interviews, some participants expressed their reservations when answering questions about political participation.

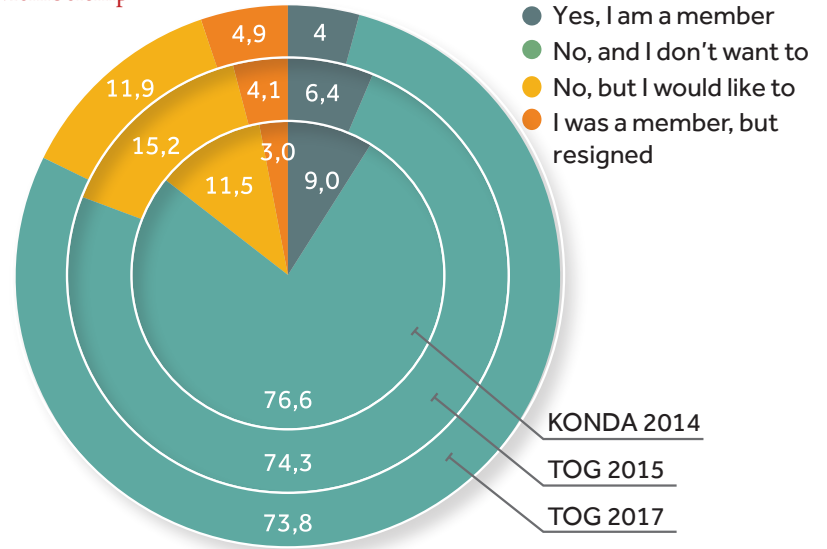
8.3 Political Party Membership

Within the scope of our research, we asked questions to participants concerning “political participation”, and “political party membership” so as to learn their views on political parties.

In response to the phrases “In Turkey, young people have difficulty in finding a political initiative / formation / party that represents them” and “I have difficulty in finding a political initiative / formation / party that represents me”, respectively 56.93% and 58.44% of the young participants have said “I agree”, suggesting that there is no political formation that represents the youth in Turkey. These data may help us understand why the young people choose not to become political party members. As long as political parties choose not to take into consideration their needs and problems, the youth will feel that they are not represented and display skepticism towards these parties.

Different surveys concerning young people’s membership in political parties have yielded quite similar results. In the KONDA survey, the percentage of political party membership is 5.5% for women and 12.2% for men, and the overall membership rate is 9% (2014, p. 43). A similar trend is observed in the TOG Profile (2015) sample: The percentage for political party membership among young people at TOG is 6.4% (p. 77). This rate seems to have fallen slightly in our research as 4.03% declare themselves to be a political party member.

Chart 15: Political Party Membership

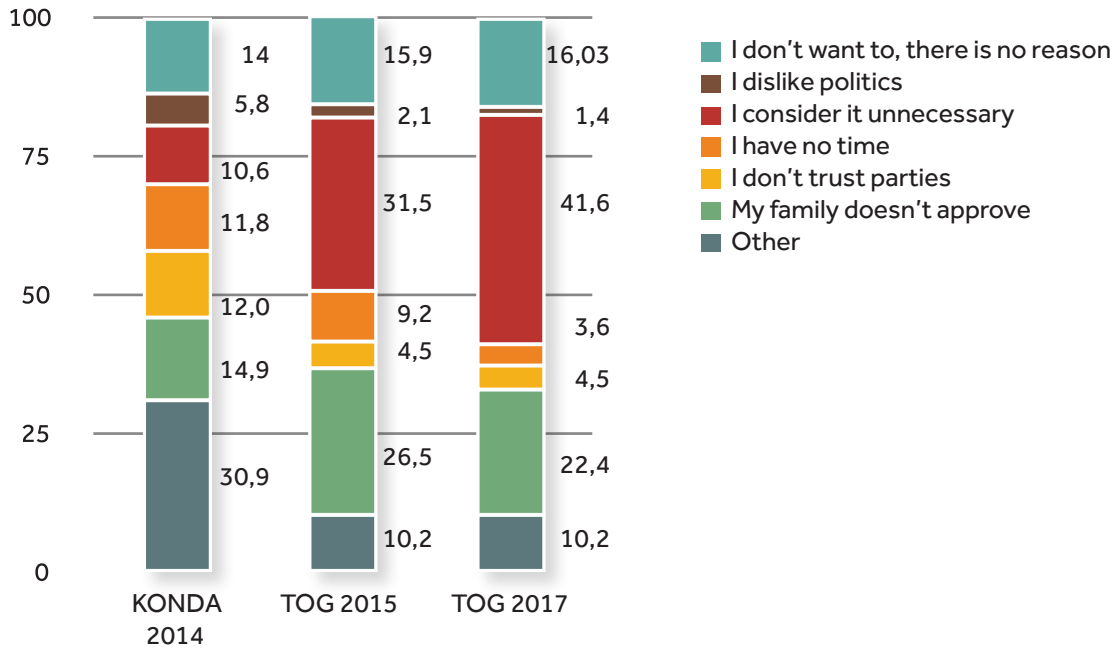


The fact that young people are not members to political parties cannot be explained away with the argument that young people are uninterested in political issues; otherwise, we cannot analyze the matter at length. It is necessary to understand the reasons underlying this choice by young people, and to remove the obstacles before their participation in political participation mechanisms.

41.67% of respondents state that they are political party members since they do not trust any political party. This percentage is higher than the 31.5% figure yielded by the TOG Profile Survey of 2015 (p. 78). As can be seen, the youth’s distrust towards political parties is on the rise.

According to the KONDA (2014) survey, on the other hand, the main reasons for not being members of political parties are listed as dislike of politics (14.9%), considering it unnecessary (12%), lack of time (11.8%) or busy work and education schedules (4.7%). Other major reasons are mentioned as fear and lack of trust (10.6%), the family’s disapproval or hindrance (5.8%). Answers categorized under the title “There is no suitable party” account for 5.8% of all answers (p. 46).

Chart 16: Reasons for lack of interest in party membership



In the in-depth interviews, young people likewise often stated that they did not trust political parties at all. A young person interviewed in Istanbul argues as follows:

First of all, I don't believe in any political party. Because every party puts forward something that it believes in. CHP [Republican People's Party] does this with Atatürkism, AKP [Justice and Development Party] with religion, MHP [Nationalist Action Party] with the Turkish flag. So, I don't fully believe in any of them, and don't want to take part in any of them. However, one party is right in certain issues, and another on other issues. If I were to be involved in one party, then I would think, "Well this party had done such and such before, but the other party had said such and such, which was also important." In reaction, the other party members would react to me, saying, "Are you not of our political line?" That's because the country has been polarized too much. When you adopt a political line, you have to admit that it is completely true, without any mistake. Well, that doesn't make much sense to me, because I never lived my life that way. Every perspective may have mistakes, and these mistakes cannot be overcome unless we sit down and discuss. So, I didn't want to go join any political party. Because, I'm having problems about this political issue even in my own family. I have been to Diyarbakır many times, and was there during the Sur events. I'm telling my parents, "Listen, there's something else going on there. What's shown on television is not accurate, you must listen to the other side to understand what's really happening." They respond, "How did you turn out like this in our family, how can you think so?" Because, people stand at the very extremes these days. You can't sit down and have a sound discussion with anybody. Trying to explain something about these issues to people who have been brainwashed and blinded by a political party is completely in vain. (RP11's thoughts on political participation)

Many other young people like RPI1 think that political parties make people single-minded and intolerant towards dissident voices. That's the main reason why the youth stay away from political parties. Furthermore, the youth also consider that political parties pay attention to them only during election times:

“Political parties are fully involved in relationships of interest. They think, if we get so many votes, then we will control this place. I wish they could stop thinking like that and really pay attention to people's actual problems. That's why I do not feel a sense of trust towards them.” (AIS1's ideas on political parties).

Young people want to be taken seriously by political parties, to be remembered not only during the run-up to elections, and to be included in every decision process concerning themselves.

A young woman, who used to be a member of the youth branch of a political party, indicates that she distanced herself from this organization due to the hierarchy and gender inequality within this party:

Back then, I was trying to get to know politics. But due to the fact that I was studying at a private college, I was subjected to certain prejudices. Because, they thought that I came from a socialist organization. I was subjected to such a prejudice. Other than that, I also realized that it was a male-dominated structure. In fact, although they said that women were also active, it wasn't true. Women were never allowed to take a front seat, and were always relegated to the lower echelons of the hierarchy. (UNI3's thoughts on political participation).

Finally, during the interviews, young people cited another reason for not trusting political parties as political parties' incapability of understanding young people and inability to formulate concrete proposals to meet the needs of young people:

I recently checked out CHP's party program to see what they say about young people, what studies they have conducted. They have produced something about 60 pages long. I read a few of the articles. I can't remember it exactly right now, but it didn't inspire trust in me. They have just said 'We'll do this and this', and stopped at that. It didn't appear very sound to me. I looked at other party programs as well, checking out what policies they suggest. There are things like 'We'll do this and this for the youth, we'll give them freedom' and so on. Always the same. It doesn't look like anything concrete will come out of those. (TNSG's ideas on political parties).

9. INTEREST IN SOCIAL MATTERS

49.37% of the respondents to the questionnaire have chosen not to tick the phrase “I usually refrain from political action.” This high percentage may be attributed to their volunteer work at Community Volunteers Foundation. That is because, TOG’s committed to “*encouraging the youth to contribute to the solution of societal problems via voluntary projects and thereby enhancing their participation to social life*” (TOG, 2015; p. 111).



Another important issue is whether the youth who have mobilized in the face of a social problem feel themselves sufficiently empowered to resolve this problem. The phrase “*As a young person, I feel empowered in changing the social arrangements that I don’t approve of*” was ticked by 41.65% of all young participants, and this percentage rises further when they do not feel alone, when they constitute a group of young friends. 57.76% of the participants say “*When I’m in a group of young friends, I feel more empowered in influencing decision makers.*”

Young people stated that they considered themselves to be important actors in the face of social problems. The phrase “*As a young person, I consider myself an important actor as regards social problems*” was approved at a rate of 56.08%. All these data indicate that young people are not indifferent to social matters, on the contrary, they are willing to become more active if more space is created for young people in decision-making mechanisms.

Naturally, it should not be overlooked that one reason why this ratio is so high is that the young people participating in the study have conducted various social responsibility projects under the umbrella of TOG. These projects enable young people to feel stronger and more hopeful.

As was stated, a large proportion of young people see themselves as an important actor in the face of social problems. Especially when they’re in a group of friends, they feel more confident about handling such issues. A young interviewee from Diyarbakır explains why s/he feels stronger when s/he is together with other young friends:

It definitely makes me feel stronger. Because, although we all do not share the same political stance, we are people, young people who have joined forces to change things. First of all, this makes me strong. Also, I think that, given the current situation, we are doing the best we can. Because it is useless to try to play the hero alone. That is, confronting the police, standing out, or being in the front rank of protests will achieve nothing. That is, it will not change anything in this process, nor make us heroes. They can simply shoot us down and we will be reduced to a statistical figure. So, I believe that the space created by TOG is very precious... I am very comfortable at TOG, and I feel stronger. Because, I am side to side with people who share the same vantage point with me. Honestly, I don’t know whether outside TOG, there are any other initiatives open to everyone in Turkey. I don’t know if there is another such place where people can express themselves and act freely, without limiting someone else’s freedom (RAD4’s ideas on political participation).

One of the major factors that make young people feel empowered is not feeling alone. At the projects they realize in TOG, they act together as a team, supporting and empowering each other:

I feel empowered about changing existing problems. Here (at TOG) we try to correct any problems we detect, but it is difficult to do likewise in Turkey given the current situation. It may be possible only if a shared path is decided upon. Otherwise, for example I can't do it alone. Even if I tried to do that, others around me would not think like me and lend me their support, so I would fail. At TOG, I feel stronger. That is, force emanates from unity (FVD1's thoughts).

Feeling empowered is sometimes associated with the sense of confidence. One of the young people interviewed stated that s/he felt more confident after coming to TOG and seeing that s/he was not alone.

Seeing that I am surrounded with like-minded people makes me feel strong. Because, there are people whom I can trust, join forces to make a difference in this place. I feel confident just thinking that I won't be alone. (İNM1's thoughts).

Young people's self-confidence in turn makes them more active when it comes to social issues. One young person expresses that when the youth become able to change social rules, they will consider themselves as important actors:

I feel empowered about changing social rules, because I have certain spaces for this purpose. This space may be TOG, or the youth assemblies. I can also make my voice heard on my own. Because I trust myself. This is mainly thanks to TOG. TOG gave me this self-confidence. It is maybe thanks to TOG that I can speak so freely, and express these ideas so easily. (EUİ3's thoughts).

We may say that, in our in-depth interviews, we observed that young people's interest in social issues, especially as regards 'others', has increased after starting to volunteer at TOG. Once young people start volunteer work at the foundation and participate in training programs on LGBTI, women, children and minority rights, they start to organize campaigns and hold awareness-raising activities on these issues. They say that they break through their prejudices in this manner. Their social media posts start to focus more on these issues.

9.1 Internet Usage

According to Turkish Statistical Institute data, as of 2015, three out of every four young people were internet users in Turkey. While the rate of internet usage among young women was 68.9% in 2015, this percentage was 85.1% among young men (TÜİK, May 2016). Turkey comes third in the world in terms of Facebook usage.

Given that the use of the internet is so widespread, one may ask how much young people use social media tools to share societal messages. Youth active at TOG share messages on social issues at a percentage well above the Turkish averages. According to a KONDA survey (2014), 20% of the youth state that they shared messages with a social content on the social media (p. 57). In 2017, this ratio fell to 46.5%, but it was nonetheless above the average of Turkey.

It is considered that this decline is related to the rise in the number of arrests for social media posts, especially after the Gezi protests. According to the Ministry of Interior's December 2016 data, 3710 social media users were

prosecuted in the previous 6 months, 1656 of whom were subsequently arrested. (*Hürriyet*, May 2017).

During the interviews, a young individual stated that s/he is no longer actively using social media because of a fear of being arrested:

I transitioned here from Istanbul University. I spent 21 days in prison due to a Facebook post I shared while at Istanbul University. I studied at Istanbul University for two years and then came here. Since I got out of that process and arrived here (İzmir), I could not use social media for anything political. Because, in that process, my family was very badly affected. And I am still a freshman now, although it is my third year at university. I have to graduate. For this reason, I cannot actively use social media for political purposes. (BRİ2's ideas on political participation).

On the other hand, some young people at TOG launched an online petition via social media. Initiated in January 2017 under the title Change the Definition of 'Young', the campaign aimed to revise the Turkish Language Institute's definition of the word young. Young people penned the following campaign text: "Turkish Language Institute, at its Dictionary of Contemporary Turkish, defines the word 'young' using phrases such as 'mentally immature', which fall very short of pointing to young people's excitement, ambition, and potential to assume responsibility and make a difference." As such, this campaign is a crucial example of how the youth take initiatives on issues concerning themselves directly. The campaign used the hashtag #GençtirDeğiştirir [Youth Make a Difference] and has reached 1383 people" (Change.org, 2017).

Although the internet is widely used by young people and remains indispensable in their daily lives, we have observed that the youth are very cautious about online activism or social media posts.

Within the scope of our study, we also asked the youth a number of questions about the extent to which they take actions such as protest rallies, social media posts, and donation campaign around social causes.

9.2 Participation in Protest Rallies and Demos

According to a KONDA study (2014), the ratio of young people who had taken part in a protest rally or demo in the previous three months were 10 percent. Young people's membership in non-governmental organizations more than triples their tendency to participate in protest rallies or demos, from 7 percent to 23 percent. (p. 58).

At the TOG Profile Survey (2015), this percentage reached 33.9 percentage (p. 86), although our study showed that it fell to 31.9 percentage. We believe that the factors underlying this drop may be the very tense political atmosphere of the last two years, the increasing incidents of violence, the July 15 coup attempt, and numerous bans on rallies, protests and demos under the state of emergency.

In in-depth interviews, young people mainly stated that taking to the street for protest was more important than many other forms of political participation. In their view, joining protest rallies and demos represents "*unity, power and organization.*" It makes them feel that they're not alone. When asked, "Around what issues do you take to the streets?" they responded that their foremost concern was the struggle for rights. They also try to make sure that the protests they participate in are not organized by political parties.

I participate in rallies on LGBTI rights, human rights and animal rights. I take part in such actions but do not participate in those organized directly by parties (UTS5's ideas on political participation).

Another young interviewee states that s/he may take to the streets for any issue that concerns her/himself, her/his community or the society at large, and that s/he has done so in the past. However, s/he indicates that lately, the excessive use of force by the police against protests, and policies of oppression and deterrence keep her/him from participating in rallies.

At the moment, I can join a protest for any reason. I may take to the streets for any issue which I deem important for my life, for the people around me or for the society. But as I said, the policies of deterrence... To put it simply, you go out on the street and you join a march, but if there are say five demonstrators, then there are a hundred police officers against them. It should not be so. Previously I used to join the rallies no matter what, without thinking if there are a hundred policemen against five demonstrators; I simply joined if I considered the demo just. After what I recently experienced however, I stopped myself. (BRİ2's ideas on political participation).

In the questionnaire, participation in protest rallies and demos yielded the lowest rates of political participation behavior. Although young people consider that joining protest rallies and demos help them feel empowered and show solidarity with groups fighting for rights, the low rates compared to other forms of participation is directly associated with the violence directed at demonstrators.

9.3 Sending an Online Message About a Social Issue

In our questionnaire we asked the participants “Did you send an online message related to a social problem in the last week?” 46.52% answered in the affirmative, while 53.48% said that they had not taken such an action.

A comparison of these figures with the KONDA (2014) survey shows that the participants to our youth study outperform the Turkish average in terms of sending online messages with a social content. Data from the KONDA (2014) study indicated that only 20% of respondents had written an online message about a social problem in the last week (p. 58). On the other hand, our figures represent a drop compared to the figures of the TOG Profile survey data (2015). TOG (2015) survey had revealed that 59.8% of participants had sent such an online message in the past week (p. 86).

9.4 Supporting Donation Campaigns

Another question directed at the youth in the questionnaire is whether they participate in donation campaigns or not. 39.55% of respondents have said yes, and 60.45% no to the question “Have you ever sent an SMS message to make a donation to a campaign you saw on TV, internet or social media?”

The participants of our youth study are seen to be above the Turkish average in this respect when compared with the (2014) survey (where 28.1% of the youth answered yes and 71.9% no) (p. 57); however, there is a remarkable drop in comparison to the TOG (2015) survey. In the TOG Volunteer Profile Survey (2015), 53% of respondents said yes, and 47% no to this question (p. 86).

9.5 Filing a Complaint about a Problem to a State Institution

According to the KONDA (2014) study, one out of every ten young people transmit a complaint to a state institution about a problem. The percentage increases as people get older. Those with a higher income level tend to bring more complaints as well. Among students, university students file the largest number of complaints. Members or volunteers of a political party tend to file the largest number of such complaints (25 percent). As was the case with protest rallies and online activism, NGO membership increases the percentage of complaints. 16% of NGO members file complaints versus only 7% of those who are not members (p. 59).

According to the TOG Profile Survey (2015), 31.1 percent of the youth brought complaints (p. 86). When we look at the results of the 2017 study, it can be seen that this rate has tilted upwards to 35.43 percent in a slight increase over the previous years.

During in-depth interviews, we observed that the government's decision to appoint trustees to municipalities in the eastern provinces, especially in the last months of 2016, has weakened young people's ties to local government. Young people, who say that they used to go to the municipalities to make various demands, now don't go there much.

On the other hand, we observed that when young people move to another city for university education, they do not embrace their new city as much as the city they used to live in. In other words, young people who say 'I have filed a petition' generally do not bring a complaint to the state institutions in their new city, but rather to the state institutions in the cities where they feel that they belong to, and where their family tends to live.

Chart 17: Questions About Social Participation

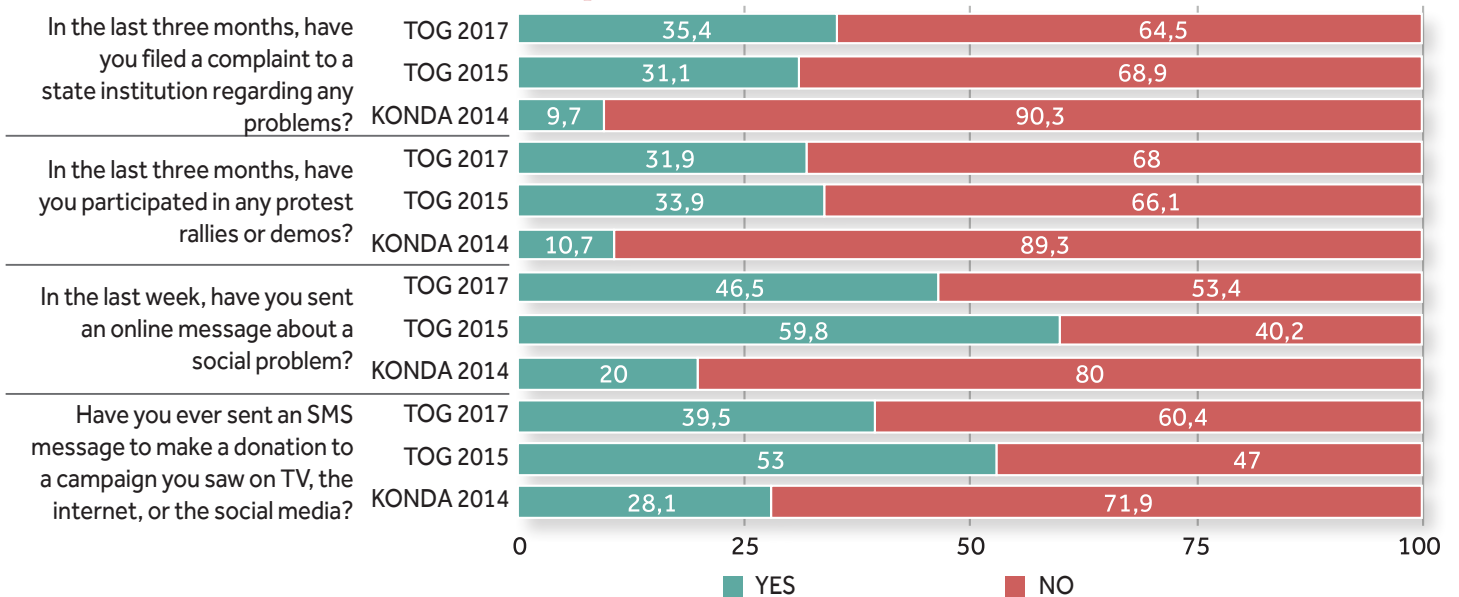
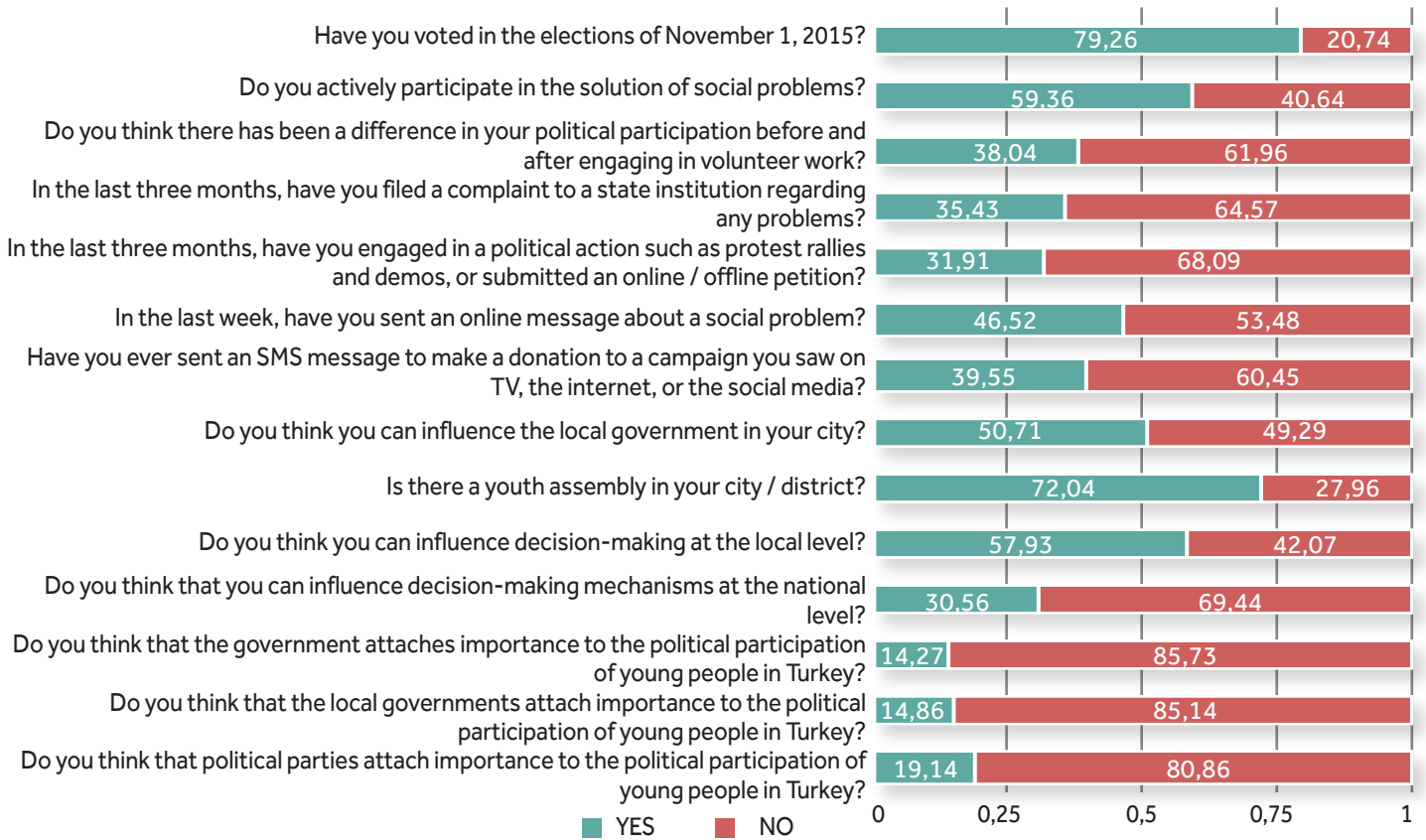


Chart 18: Questions about Political Participation



In order to find out the extent to which young people can participate in social decision-making processes, questions were asked in both the survey and in-depth interviews. Taking their responses into consideration would contribute to the development of mechanisms that may enable young people to become more involved at local and national levels. As such, the problems experienced by young people in terms of participating in and influencing decisions about public life will be better understood and young people will be able to participate in decision making processes in a more fair and egalitarian manner.

We had already indicated above that the concept of participation was not limited to voting. The scope of participation should cover all decisions and actions that have an impact on young people's lives.

Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life defines youth participation in a similar vein:

“Participation in the democratic life of any community is about more than voting or standing for election, although these are important elements. Participation and active citizenship is about having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and where necessary the support to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions

and activities so as to contribute to building a better society.” (European Council, 2003).

During our in-depth interviews with young people, they have frequently emphasized that they should have the right to make decisions on issues that affect them directly. However, the extent to which young people have access to local and national decision-making mechanisms is debatable. In interviews, the youth criticized adults for not opening up a space for young people to participate in decisions and stated that only the youth themselves can know what is best for themselves. The youth want to be considered active protagonists of social life, and demand that their potentials and talents be taken into consideration. As such, it is clear that the youth’s social and economic conditions must be improved to help them become more active in social life. For instance, the number of youth who receive a public scholarship are very limited, most youth can’t meet their housing needs without assistance from families, and youth assemblies generally do not welcome outside participation; all of which combine to restrict the youth’s space and prevent them from expressing themselves.

A young individual from Diyarbakır, states that the following changes should be carried out to increase the participation of young people in decision-making mechanisms in Turkey:

They must view young people as individuals. They need to give young people a say. Currently, decisions about young people are taken without the involvement of young people. That’s really wrong. Nobody knows me better than myself. I can express myself in the best way. So, I think I should be present in such decision-making processes.

In other words, it is necessary to accept the youth as individuals and lend an ear to them to learn about their problems. Only in this way, can the problems be resolved - that is, by learning about problem from the real protagonists and seeking a solution together with them. But in Turkey, decision-makers try to understand others’ problems through some sort of empathy. They think, ‘Young people would want such and such a solution’. No one asks the youth what they really want (RAD4’s ideas on political participation).

In order to fully understand the extent to which young people can participate in decision-making mechanisms, it is necessary to distinguish between local and national mechanisms.

9.6.1 Participation in Local Decision-Making Mechanisms

At the European Council, youth participation at the local level is described as “*the youth’s right to be included in daily life, assume duties and responsibilities and influence life processes in a democratic manner at the local level*” (Boukobza, 1998; p. 10). As can be seen in this definition, participation is a right and in order to ensure that the youth can exercise this right, the local governments, related agencies and institutions must create all the necessary conditions.

57.93% of respondents answered in the affirmative to the question “Do you think you can influence decision-making mechanisms at the local level?” During our in-depth interviews, young people stated that they can bring about social change most practically at the local level. They contribute to such a change through the social responsibility projects that they conduct. A young person from Samsun indicates that since it is difficult to access MPs or the government, it is easiest to access decision-making mechanisms at the local level. For instance, the Pinhole Youth Center in Samsun is the most important tool enabling young people to communicate with the municipality:

I believe that I am involved in local decision-making processes, because there is a youth center. We work on projects in a problem-oriented manner. In the youth center, we are involved in a decision-making mechanism. I think that

we have a say, and it is in our hands to make a difference (AIS1's thoughts on political participation).

Young people are very happy to be treated as interlocutors when they visit the municipality. Community Volunteers Foundation's Pinhole Youth Center in Atakum, Samsun collaborates with Atakum Municipality, allowing young people to participate more easily in the local government's decisions. Young people think that the mayor lends an ear to and values young people. Being able to make their voices heard and seeing that their opinions are taken seriously also increase the young people's trust in local government.

If the decisions taken at the local level have an impact on the lives of young people, then they should have the ability to have their voices heard and to shape the outcome in order to meet their needs. As such, if young people do participate in a decision-making process, it will be more likely for their needs to be met. A young person interviewed in Istanbul recounts a past experience:

It is said there are 251 thousand students in Manisa. Every district has created its youth assemblies. I was part of the Salihli assembly. We conducted surveys at the universities to learn about what the youth need and what should be built: amphitheater, planetarium, gym... The youth participated in the survey. The survey in Salihli pointed to the need for a planetarium, which we subsequently created. We collected funds for that purpose, sold books, etc. After collecting enough money we opened up a planetarium in Salihli. This helped increase the youth's participation, since young people demanded something, took action, and made it happen (RP1's ideas on political participation).

However, it is quite difficult to influence and be involved in decision-making mechanisms. In Turkey and many other countries, the adults keep a hold on the reins of power and governance. Young people can be involved in decision-making processes only to a very limited extent. A young interviewee says the following about the matter:

In Turkey, it is not easy for a young person to take part in local government, or influence decision-making. Because, adults tend to think 'Those born yesterday don't understand anything, how can they govern us, no way!' (SAM1's ideas on political participation).

Inviting young people to help solve local problems which interest them can also bring about brand new perspectives or original ideas. The youth assemblies established under municipalities are just the tools that can create the space needed by the youth. A young person interviewed in İzmir emphasizes the importance of youth assemblies as follows:

Youth assemblies make young people's voices heard. They act as a bridge to convey the wishes and demands of young people to the decision-making mechanisms (ER1's ideas on political participation).

Another issue that stood out in our in-depth interviews was that, even when young people are aware of the youth assemblies (72,04 percent of the total), they may not want to participate or may remain passive after participation. The biggest reason for this is the youth's belief that the assemblies are not impartial, and are generally guided by this or that political party.

I participated in youth councils, but they are too politicized. They're not at all like a youth assembly. I would have continued to participate had they actually been places where young people did something, where the problems of young people were discussed. But they don't seem to be so. They're very partisan (RP1's ideas on political participation).

Some young people who cannot find the space to participate in local government try to contribute to their local communities through various projects at TOG. A young individual from Diyarbakır shares the following thoughts:

I can achieve a lot here (at TOG). Of course, we cannot eliminate all local problems through our projects. But at least we are making an effort (NAD3's ideas on political participation).

9.6.2 Participation in National Decision-Making Mechanisms

60.44% of respondents answered in the negative to the question “Do you think you can influence decision-making mechanisms at the national level?,” which is much higher than was the case with local mechanisms.

During our in-depth interviews, we observed that, the youth's reasons for thinking they cannot influence national decision-making mechanisms are very similar to those for not joining political parties. They consider that alternative ideas are not given any importance, there are very few young MPs in the parliament, and there is no trust towards the youth. One young person argues that the government is not interested in the youth's participation, as follows:

I think the government pays no attention to it, because it wants something else: Designing its own people. Designing its own youth. It wants to impose its policy on people and oblige them to continue their lives in that way. As such, I believe that it does not give anyone any say, not only the youth (RAD4's ideas on political participation).

The way to ensure that young people feel as equal and important as other individuals in the community is to remove the barriers to their participation in both national and local decision-making mechanisms. In this way, young people will be able to address their needs and problems directly. This will greatly increase their sense of belonging to the society at large.

9.7 NGO Membership

Across Turkey, there are a total of 281,181 associations¹ (May 2017, Dernekler.gov.tr). According to 2013 data, there are 785 associations related to youth issues and 340 related to students.² According to 2012 figures, the total number of youth and student-related associations account for 1.2% of all associations (Şebeke infografik, 2012).³

1. However, the number of active associations comes to 110.402, after subtracting the 170.779 associations which were closed down.

2. On the other hand, although it is not official statistics, the online database named Map of the Youth Field administered jointly by TOG and Youth Services Center Association under the project “Your Rights, Youth Rights!” and financially supported by EU-Turkey Delegation Civil Society Facility Turkey Networks and Platforms Grant program, features information on the institutions active in the youth field in Turkey. Map of the Youth Field is an online database and data source which categorizes the youth organizations in Turkey by city, type of organization, field of activity, type of activity and presence of young people within management (2017, Genclikalanıharitasi.org).

3. The figure could not be updated after 2013, since the General Directorate of Associations took out the category of ‘youth’ from the classification chart in its official website.

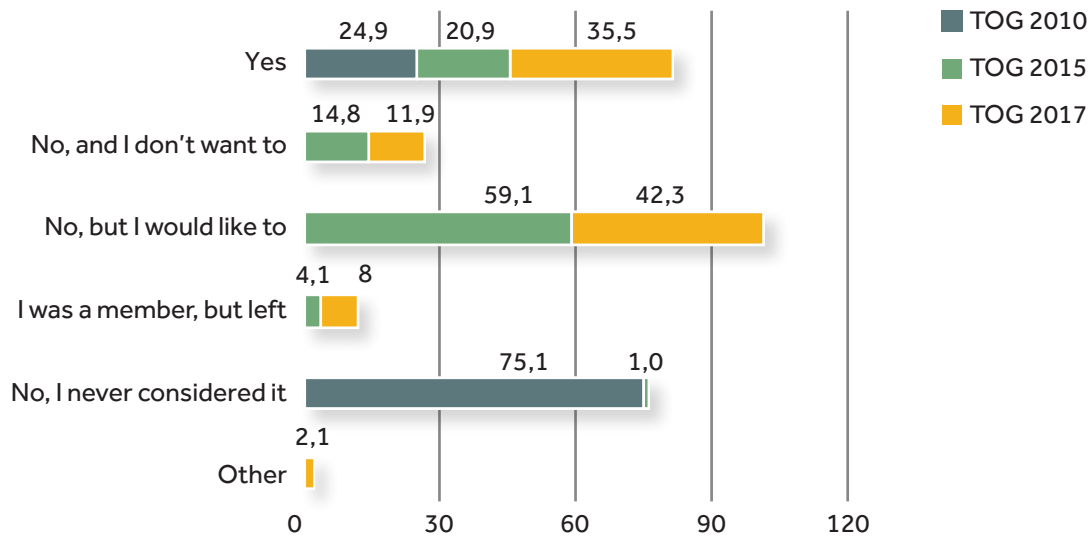
The KONDA (2014) survey shows that only 27% of the youth are members of an NGO. Of these, 44% are also members of a university club or community, and 8.9% are members of a professional chamber. As for the nature of these platforms, chambers or clubs, more than half of them can be described as organizations of solidarity (p. 90).

During our interviews, we observed that the youth tend to stay away from rights-based organizations, which can be largely attributed to their families concerns arising from political issues. A young person from Diyarbakır recounts parents' reactions as follows:

Take the banned foundations. Numerous foundations were banned and closed down in Turkey. My parents are really afraid of me participating in this foundation (TOG). I frequently invite them here. My mother came over once, but the place was closed. When my father comes to town, I want to invite him so that he can see that it does not have political connections. If it were political, I myself would not take part. At the moment it is very hard for me to participate in such a thing. (FVD1's ideas on political thought).

35.52 percent of the respondents who participated in the survey stated that they are members of an NGO other than TOG. 42.32% stated that they are not members of another NGO but want to become a member, while 11.92% indicated that they do not want to.

Chart 19: Membership in an NGO other than TOG



The KONDA (2014) survey shows that, across Turkey, 27% of the youth are members of an NGO or university club (p. 90). Considering that the youth who participated in our study are already TOG volunteers, it can be argued that joining TOG enhances the youth's motivation towards taking part in other NGOs and participating in political processes.

9.8 Trust in Institutions

An analysis of the youth's "level of trust towards institutions" and "level of influence over these institutions" shows that the youth feel very limited trust to both public and private institutions. In addition, young people do not really believe that they can change these institutions. This idea goes parallel to the youth's lack of hope towards making a change in politics even when they are interested in politics. For this reason, they prefer to keep a distance in political terms.

Chart 20: Trust in State Institutions I

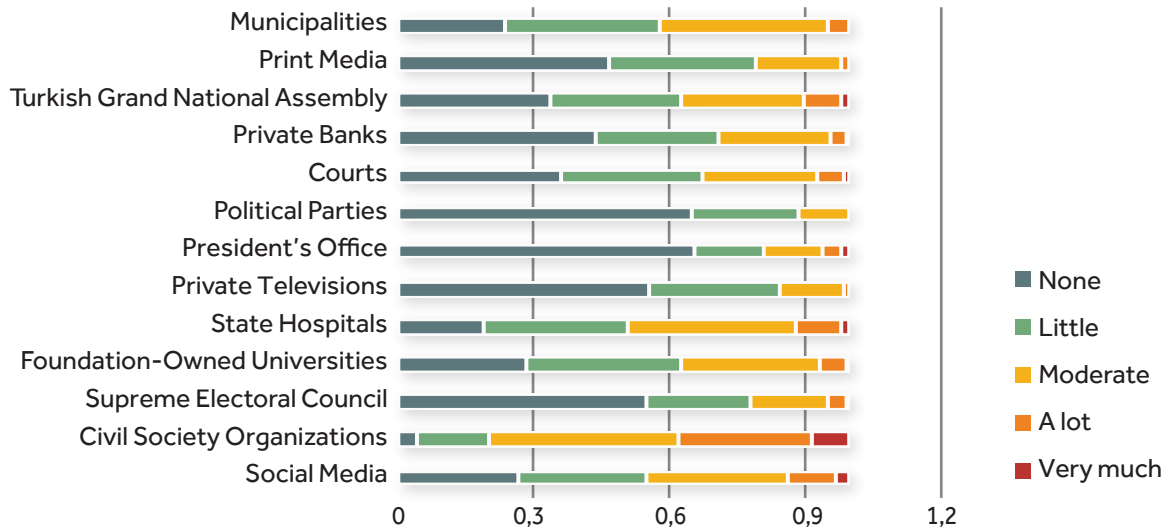


Chart 21: Trust in State Institutions II

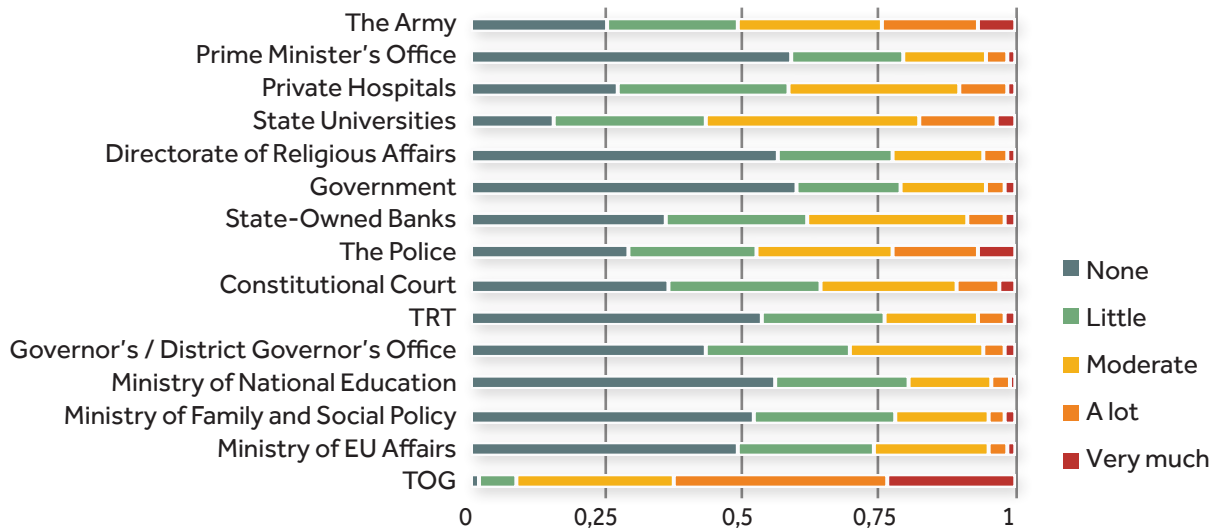


Chart 22: How Much Do You Believe You Can Change State Institutions As a TOG Volunteer? I

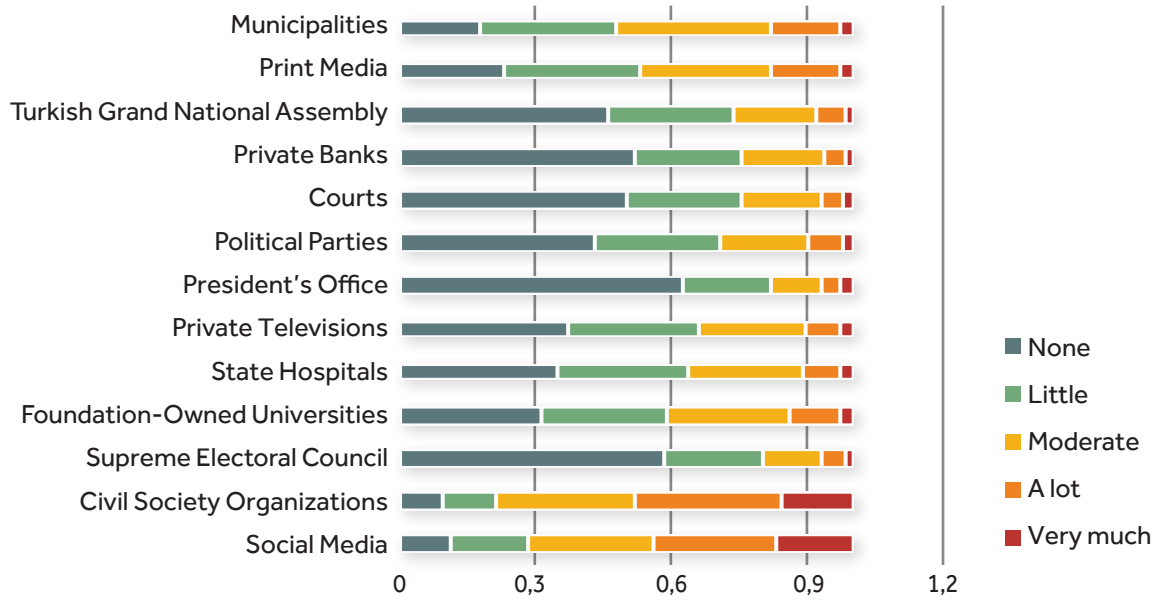
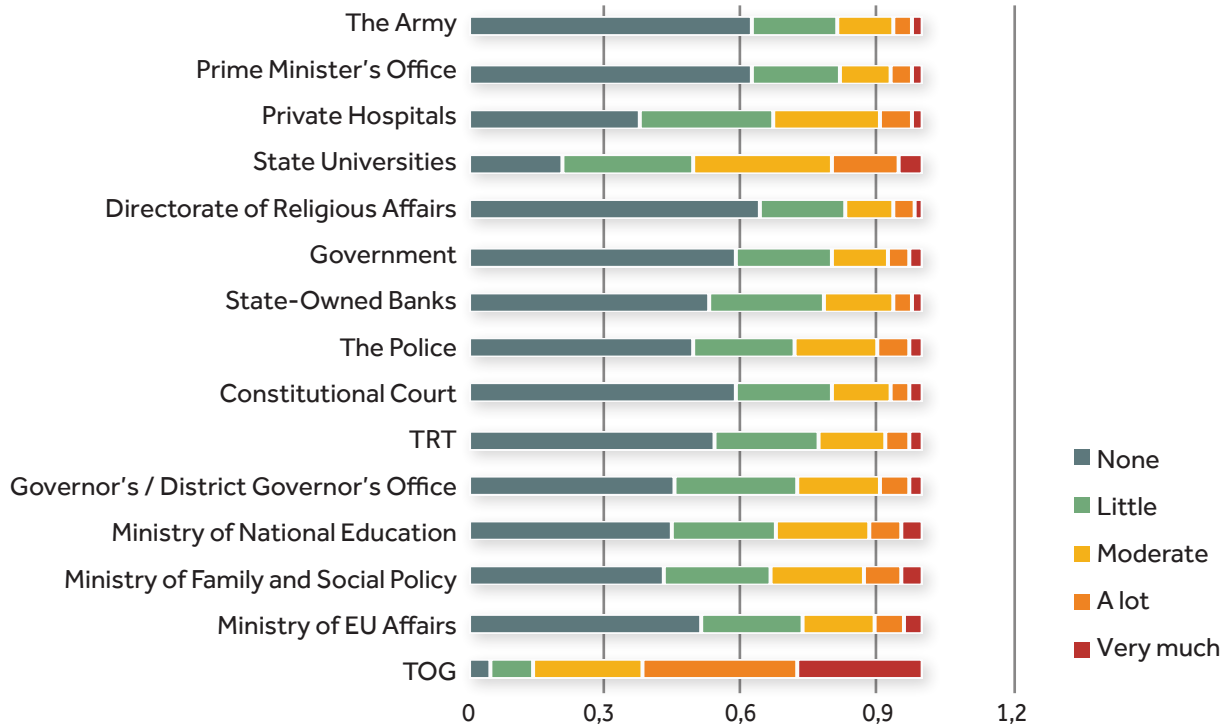
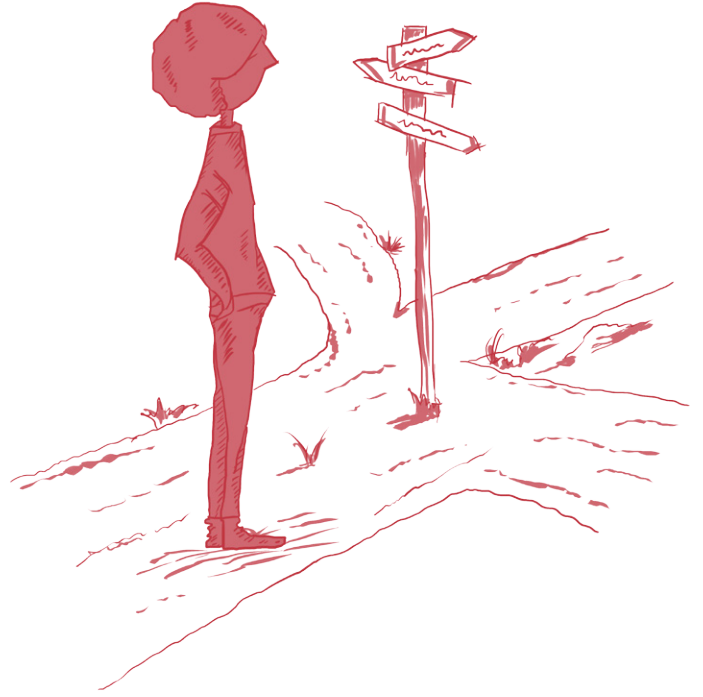


Chart 23: How Much Do You Believe You Can Change State Institutions As a TOG Volunteer? II



10. HOW DOES PARTICIPATION IN YOUTH WORK AFFECT POLITICAL PARTICIPATION?



In this part of the study, we analyze young people's responses about how youth work affects political participation, as provided during the in-depth interviews. Setting off from these answers, we discuss how the political attitude and behavior of young people are formed, and how and where their political activism starts.

There is a large diversity as to how young people's political attitudes and behavior are formed, and where and how their political activism starts. Some volunteers indicate that they have become more active after youth work, while others learned about politics in their family environment.

When the youth were asked to compare their "political participation prior to and after beginning volunteer work", 38.4% stated that there indeed was a change. More detailed answers as to whether this change represented an increase or decrease could be obtained during in-depth interviews with young people.

We may say that the changes in the political participation of youth can be divided into three categories. In the first category are the youth who take up active politics due to their family's political background, their own university majors or university activities, or the impact of NGOs during or after their involvement in TOG. The second category consists of young people who have joined TOG but have had to rein in their political involvement. Individuals in this category put an emphasis on the idea that "No political ideology is prioritized within TOG" so as to change the direction of their political actions. In the final category, we find those who state that their political involvement has risen significantly due to their volunteer work at TOG. The youth who fall into this category indicate that there has been an increase in their political participation owing to the foundation's seminars and advocacy work around the themes "general acceptance of respect for differences", "importance of coexistence" and "human rights". All three groups state that they are more respectful of differences than they used to be. Even those youngsters whose political activism dates back indicate that after being involved in TOG they have participated in more political work towards not personal gain but rather an egalitarian and just world for everyone. In particular, the youth tend to take to streets, organize petition campaigns or share social media messages much more often for those individuals excluded from society, whose opportunities are very limited. We will elaborate on the aforementioned three categories below.

10.1 Those Politically Involved Prior to Youth Work

For the youth, their close ties with the family and economical and emotional dependency are important factors keeping them from taking free decisions in their daily lives. While raising their children, families strive to keep them away from politics, thus preventing their involvement in collective action and depoliticizing the youth. BRİ2, who left her/his parents' town to study at university, indicates that her/his political involvement started after her/his family's pressure ended and increased due to the effect of university life. After starting university, s/he came into contact with TOG, which added diversity to her/his political engagement and encouraged her/him to focus on children's rights:

I was quite involved in these things even before joining TOG. There is no tradition of political activism in my family, nor in my hometown Adıyaman, nor in my community. I got engaged after starting university. The situation of the country was quite obvious. What you can do in Adıyaman was very limited and so I couldn't really do that much. Upon arriving in Istanbul, however, I discovered what I can do and became much more active. One important factor was that I studied at Istanbul University. Moreover, the pressures on me had ceded. I had the chance to extend my limits after arriving in Istanbul. Once I joined TOG, I took part in projects related to children, and became much more sensitive to their problems. For instance, whenever I saw kids on the street, I started thinking, 'Do they need anything, can I do anything for them?' I got much more involved in children's rights.

A young individual who was the member of a political party's youth branch during high school years indicates that this political activism comes from the family and background. However, s/he adds that it is only after coming to TOG that s/he realized that political engagement is not limited to political party activism:

I was politically involved before joining TOG. I was active in this sense. I was a member of a political party's youth branch... My political stance was affected by TOG in the following manner: I realized that I could be active through TOG as well. I saw that I did not have to be part of a political formation to make a change. The NGOs are important. What counts here is principles, I think... You can create a political effect by volunteer work at TOG as well, since what we do here is a part of Turkey's political landscape. Work on refugees or gender is very political, too, in fact. (UNİ3's ideas on political participation).

Likewise, another young individual whose political activism started prior to volunteer work indicates that TOG and youth work added a more comprehensive character to this activism. S/he states that s/he used to express herself only on issues which affected her/him directly, but after joining volunteer work, s/he started to be active on issues related to the nature, LGBTI rights and other social matters as well:

Previously, I would take political action only if something happened in Mardin, or there was a threat towards the Kurdish identity. Now, however, I can also take action against the destruction of nature in Artvin or at the LGBTI pride march. Before, I would not have participated in these. I also take part in activities related to local issues in Mersin. I think that these are all thanks to TOG. There will be no progress if I think only of myself, stay away from issues that don't concern me directly. Let's say there are three groups: x, y, z. If y is not involved when x is in trouble, if x and z don't get involved when y is in dire straits, then all of these groups will be eradicated. But if they join forces then they will all be safe. That's one of the good things I learned at TOG: Seeing things more comprehensively (ŞAM1's ideas on political participation).

In the previous sections, we had analyzed the youth's political party membership and shown that membership levels are very low both among TOG youth and across Turkey. A young individual, who says that s/he is not apolitical, indicates that NGOs (TOG in particular) create a space supportive of the youth's participation, and prefers this space for this reason:

I view NGOs as a space where you can make a difference without being directly involved in politics. Because, you are not under the umbrella of a political party, but try to influence decision mechanisms and intervene in the problems that you identify. Everything is much easier if you are in an NGO that provides such opportunities. That is, you do not need to get involved in politics at all... I vote. I join petition campaigns. I participate in rallies if I agree with the cause. I participate in demos. I am not apolitical at all. As a political scientist, I don't want to be involved in party politics directly, but I am engaged in activities to put forth my political stance (RP1's ideas on political participation).

10.2 Those Who Changed the Direction of Their Political Participation after Youth Work

During the interviews, we observed that especially the young people living in the eastern regions revised their political activities upon joining TOG. A young individual from Diyarbakır states that her/his political activism became more reconciliatory after TOG:

I already follow a political line. But when solving local issues, I say to myself, 'You need to leave your own political line aside.' Sometimes, I tend to act with a more nationalist perspective, but within the foundation, I try to check myself. So, I had a political position before, and I have a position in the foundation as well. There hasn't been a radical change, but I try to control myself when under the umbrella of the foundation, because I have accepted that this foundation has no ideology or political line. Nevertheless, it doesn't tell you that you as an individual can have no political line or ideology. I really appreciate that. When I had first read its principles, I went 'What does this mean?' but as I got more involved, I realized that every point of view can be represented here. But I accepted that the foundation itself will follow no specific political line. I did not change, I stuck to my previous political position. That is, I am lucky since I can do what I always wanted to do under the umbrella of this foundation (NAD3's ideas on political participation).

For Community Volunteer youth, social responsibility projects are an important tool to better discuss social problems. In this way, they can enhance their participation and are also more readily accepted by the society. Youth work has a transformative effect on young people as well. A young person interviewed says the following:

In the past, in response to current events I would say, let's take to the streets, organize a protest, make our voices heard. People would give a reaction, try to question and change things. Then I saw that those efforts were in vain. For example when you join a protest about the Soma mine accident, it is considered to be a political action and you are seen as a political person. Sometimes, you are even branded as a terrorist. But, when you take action to actually change something, then the society tends to accept it, no one can judge you then. This is the change that TOG has achieved. Instead of staging a protest or changing slogans, it seems more effective to me to take actions to make a difference. On the other hand, I used to take to the streets only around issues which concerned me directly; now, I do so around anything I consider to be just, regardless of what social class or group is involved. If there is a problem that needs to be addressed, I try to take action as much as I can (İNM1's ideas on political participation).

10.3 Those Whose Political Participation Increased After Youth Work

Youth work also constitutes an area where the youth can enhance their political participation. The Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, adopted in 2003 by the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities stipulates that the youth should possess the necessary rights, opportunities, spaces, possibilities and support to participate in a meaningful way in the initiatives and decision-making mechanisms that affect their lives (European Council, 2011; p. 35). It was observed that the youth participating in the study had access within TOG to such rights, opportunities, spaces, possibilities and support in order to increase their political participation. When a similar support comes from local governments, families and universities as well, the youth can multiply their channels of participation, and access wider means of self-expression.

Upon joining TOG, the youth can participate in different peer training programs. Especially rights-based training programs concerning "human rights, youth and social rights, gender education, etc.," provide opportunities for young people to get information on these issues.

These training programs not only help young people raise their awareness on these issues, but also show their reaction in a number of ways when faced with a violation of rights:

After joining the foundation, I became much more interested in gender issues. I didn't know much about it beforehand. Nor did I know a lot about animal rights; I learned about those. In a project I conducted, I got to know more about children's rights as well. I started sharing posts on Twitter about these issues. When I am disturbed by something or want to support something, I retweet messages (TNS6's ideas on political participation).

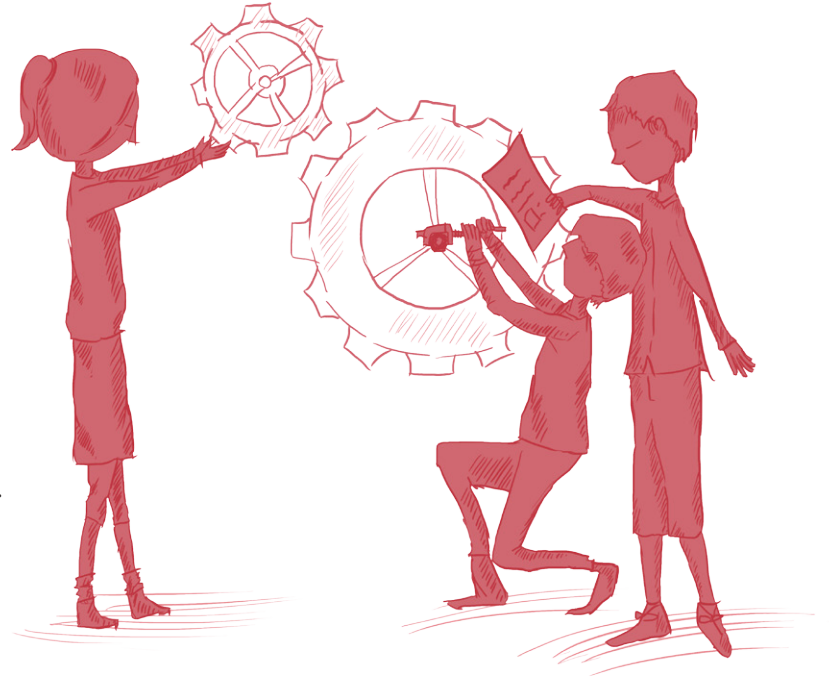
65.56% of the young people who participated in the survey stated that they did not agree with the phrase, "I hesitate in expressing my political opinion." A young person interviewed in Samsun stated that s/he has started to express her/his political views with more ease after starting to volunteer in TOG. S/he also indicated that her/his awareness of the existence of different identities in society rose since volunteering at TOG:

My priorities changed after joining TOG. My social media posts changed a lot, too. For example, I was very afraid of sharing my thoughts. Of getting a harsh reaction. But now, despite the very controversial political environment, I said in my class that I would vote for HDP [Peoples' Democratic Party] and explained the reality. Likewise, I wrote and shared texts on the social media. I shared news on Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ without fear. I tried to express their opinions. Indirectly, I went through such a transformation. Moreover, I never had any antipathy towards LGBTI individuals, but did not really know much about them. There were not many in my community, so I was not informed, but then learned much more about it (FRS4's ideas on political participation).

Volunteering at TOG increases the youth's self-confidence. Under the roof of TOG, young people are supported to turn their ideas into reality via social responsibility projects. One of the things they consider most valuable in this process is being respected as an individual. One young interviewee expresses in the following manner how s/he felt important during volunteer work and how it brought about a positive change in her/his political participation:

The thing is, I was always active on Twitter. But after starting to participate in rallies, filing petitions, engaging in volunteer work, my life changed in many ways. I became more self-confident after starting to volunteer. Maybe I

simply realized what I am capable of. Volunteer work played a big role in creating this self-confidence. Could I have gained such confidence only through the university? Maybe. But I think this place has affected me, too. What kind of an effect? Well, I suppose the sense of being taken seriously by someone else. It was very important for me here (UTSS's thoughts on political participation).



CONCLUSION

Turkey is a country with a rather young population. According to Turkish Statistical Institute data (2015), young people in the age group 15-24 constitute 16.4% of the overall population. Yet it is still debatable how much these young people, who constitute such a large portion of society, are represented in decision-making mechanisms or can access these mechanisms. Most of the studies conducted up until date have argued that voting is young people's preferred instrument of political participation. In addition, these studies have suggested that young people are uninterested in political participation and insensitive to social issues, thus bolstering the argument that post-1980 young generations are "apolitical, depoliticized, selfish, indifferent and impassive."

Nonetheless, while analyzing the youth's political participation, it is necessary to take into account their views about political mechanisms. For instance, if we consider only the Turkish youth's low party membership figures, then we could jump to the conclusion that they do not want to join political parties or wish to influence decision-making mechanisms. If we listen to why the youth do not want to become party members, however, then it may be possible to eliminate the barriers that they face or to reorganize existing structures so as to ensure that the youth are included. As such, all social sectors including youth may take part in decision-making mechanisms in an egalitarian and just manner.

In order for young people to actually have a say about the decisions and actions that affect them, local and central governments, and political parties should attach more importance to youth participation. Furthermore, the youth need structures to express themselves such as youth assemblies or student councils. These structures need to be youth-friendly, treat the youth with respect and in an egalitarian fashion, and be flexible enough to meet the needs of the youth.

On the other hand, the youth should be informed about instruments for participating in decision-making mechanisms, and provided the necessary rights, opportunities, spaces and support.

In this study, which explores youth work's impact on the political participation of youth, we focused on the political participation tendencies among young people who volunteer at Community Volunteers Foundation, which carries out youth work through a very extensive network across Turkey. We observed the problems faced by the youth simply for being young, their differing needs, their political participation methods of choice, and the degree to which they can participate in local / national decision making mechanisms. Our findings can be summarized as follows:

The study has shown that the society's lack of trust towards the youth tops the list of problems encountered by young people. One of the young individuals we interviewed during our research indicates that they receive little support from the society, although they really need it:

FVD1: For example, when I join a project, I work in an active manner. Maybe I am more active than even the coordinators themselves. There, the coordinators support me and even inform the rest of the group saying 'She is the most ambitious of the volunteers'. When I am supported in such a manner, I get really excited. Once you feel that excitement, you similarly participate in other projects to feel appreciated and supported in the same way. That is, one obviously gets motivated after receiving such support. So, you reach an important level at TOG. I suppose the youth are supported in places outside of TOG as well, but I didn't see any.

The other issues encountered by the youth are "problems in the education system, financial difficulty, unemployment and lack of social opportunities in their city". The youth also state that their universities do not offer a free environment. The education system is incompetent, and fails to provide a space where they can develop themselves. Moreover, the education system fails to offer equal opportunities and thus prevents the youth from studying at the department of their choice. Despite the prevalence of financial difficulty, only a very limited number of youth have access to scholarship, and therefore numerous young people have to take up part-time work. However, since part-time work is not well paid, their dependence on their parents persists. The high level of dependence on the family as well as intense emotional ties to parents have a crucial impact on the youth's capability of taking decisions about their own lives. The family, with which the youth have strong bonds, becomes the only address that they can turn to for financial support. As such, the youth shape the direction of their political activities in line with their parents' habits, or alternatively, choose to stay away from politics all together. The youth's dependence on their families persists due to unemployment. Another problem that the youth complain about is the lack of social opportunities in the city where they live. The experience of being young is affected a lot by whether one's city is youth-friendly or not, or whether it offers youth social opportunities or not. Young people state that they feel much more comfortable in a city with places where they can spend time. They conceptualize a youth-friendly city as a place with social activities, where they can hang out and spend time in spaces such as libraries and cafes. In this sense, students studying in large cities turn out to be much more satisfied compared to their peers in small towns. The reduction of social pressures leaves the youth free, and so they can express their identities in a more comfortable manner, far from their family's domination.

The youth we have interviewed do not form a homogeneous whole, although they have some common needs and problems for living in the same epoch. Their needs and problems tend to be diverse due to living in different cities, and belonging to different genders, sexual orientations and / or sub-cultures. Some youth make comparisons in particular between the east and the west and emphasize that these regions do not provide the same opportunities; meanwhile others underline that gender identity has an influence on the experience of being young.

Furthermore, the data we collected through the questionnaire and interviews help us determine which instruments of political participation the youth opt for. When compared with the Turkish averages, the youth engaged in volunteer work have much higher percentages of participating in rallies and protests, sending online messages about social problems, supporting donation campaigns and / or filing a complaint with state institutions about a specific problem. However, the findings also point to a drop in these percentages compared to the TOG Profile survey dating back to 2015. The very tense political environment of the last two years, rising number of violent incidents, the government's policies, and the ban on numerous rallies and demos during the state of emergency declared in the wake of the failed coup of July 15 are some of the reasons for this drop. Many times, the respondents indicated that they hesitated in expressing their opinions on the social media or joining rallies for fear of getting arrested. As a result, the youth tend to refrain from becoming members of rights-based NGOs.

Another important topic we wanted to explore during the study was the extent to which young people are involved in decision-making mechanisms. 57.93% of the youth think that they can influence decision-making mechanisms at a local level, while only 30.56% do so when it comes to the national mechanisms. Only 14.86% consider that local governments pay sufficient attention to the political participation of youth. Likewise, only 14.27% think that the central government attaches enough importance to the political participation of youth. These figures show that the youth want to take part in decision-making mechanisms, but decision-makers do not open up enough space for the youth. Another important finding is that the youth are more active in influencing local decision-making mechanisms. TOG's collaboration with municipalities allows young people to establish direct contact with mayors and other decision-makers. The activities organized by young people via Youth Assemblies also strengthen the trust towards the youth, urging decision-makers to pay attention to their opinions. However, the youth are more suspicious of municipal youth assemblies, and refrain from becoming members. This is quite similar to their tendency to stay away from political party membership. Arguing that these latter assemblies are not autonomous and that individuals with alternative opinions are not paid any attention there, the youth tend to stay away from these assemblies. Neither do they believe that they can have much of an influence on national decision-making mechanisms. Nonetheless, 59.36% of all volunteer youth state that they play an active role in solving social problems. As such, the youth are not uninterested in social developments, but they simply cannot find space for themselves in national or local decision-making mechanisms, which in turn makes TOG a more precious area for volunteer work.

For instance, the youth's exclusion from conventional political participation mechanisms obliges them to seek new spaces to express themselves. They duly consider volunteering at Community Volunteers Foundation as an instrument for expressing their needs:

EÇD4: Volunteering at TOG may be a means for the youth to get together and resolve their common problems. There is no discrimination based on language, religion or race here. I am here as I am: Maybe we can break the majority's prejudice in this fashion.

RAD4: Our efforts in the scope of volunteer work constitute a stance, an ideology. It is our work. Here we display our position, our perspective on life and take action accordingly.

Finally, in the scope of this study which explores the relation between volunteer work and political participation, we analyzed how young people's political attitude and behavior, political activism are formed and where they begin. The answers to these questions turned out to be very diverse among the youth. While some volunteers

state that their political activism began simultaneously with their youth work, others indicate that they have become politicized in their families.

When the youth were asked to compare their “political participation prior to and after youth work”, 38.4% pointed to a change. This change was positive in some cases and negative in others. During the study, we observed that this change in political participation fell in three categories. The first category consists of young individuals whose active political activism goes back to their families’ habits, their university major or university activities, and the NGOs they were involved in prior to or after joining TOG. The youth falling in this category state that, although they were already active previously, TOG has given them a free space which they had not encountered in political parties or groups. They indicate that they express themselves better here. They consider that is TOG is distant to politics -which they view to be polluted- but is nonetheless effective for influencing policies. Joining TOG adds diversity to the political activism of the youth in this category, as they start to embrace a more comprehensive approach that includes the demands of other groups (such as women, LGBTI+ individuals, children, Kurds and Alevis).

In the second category are those who are active in TOG, but rein in their political participation. Those in this second category uphold the principle that “no political ideology can be prioritized at TOG” and thereby alter the direction of their political activism. The youth in this category mostly comprise Kurdish volunteers. They shift their political activities to a more reconciliatory ground, and focus on coexistence within the society at large.

The final category is constituted by those who state that their political participation has increased considerably after participating in volunteer work at TOG. The youth in this category indicate that there has been an increase in their political participation owing to the foundation’s seminars and advocacy work around the themes “general acceptance of respect for differences”, “importance of coexistence” and “human rights”. The youth in this last category mostly live in provinces where TOG has closer ties to local governments. They state that they have started to feel more important at TOG, and that they have started being listened to. As such, they become politically more active without hesitation.

All three groups state that they are now more respectful of differences than they used to be. Even those young people whose political activism dates back indicate that since getting involved in TOG they have participated in more political work towards not personal gain but rather for an egalitarian and just world for everyone. In particular, such youth tend to take to streets, organize petition campaigns or share social media messages much more often for those individuals excluded from society, whose opportunities are very limited.

Once we take into consideration all of these data, it becomes obvious that youth work is an instrument which helps enhance youth participation in a meaningful manner. As such, we believe that youth work provides numerous ideas and tools to institutions which attach importance to youth participation such as local governments and schools.

Since the youth constitute the core of youth work, which encourages them to participate voluntarily in activities, take on responsibilities and get together in an informal organization, they become more sensitive towards social issues, become aware of their own rights, embrace those different from themselves, and act together for a better future.

This study points to the close relationship between youth work and the youth's political participation. Youth work creates a space for the youth. Thanks to this space where they can feel more important and free, the youth become more active in terms of accessing and affecting decision-making mechanisms.

In this respect, we hope that the current study will provide input to discussions around the youth's political participation in Turkey. Numerous qualitative and quantitative studies of recent years tend to argue that the youth are apolitical. However, these studies focus only on the result and fail to discuss the reasons underlying the low levels of participation. As such, we put forth a number of suggestions: Policies should be developed to eradicate the barriers before the youth's participation to decision-making mechanisms, political parties should be more inclusive towards the youth, youth organizations should employ informal training methods and specially designed workshops/seminars to encourage the youth's participation. Thereby, we hope that the study will make a contribution to the activities of political parties, local governments and youth-centered NGOs.

On the other hand, this study is of special importance for TOG as well. At TOG, we conduct such periodical studies to measure the impact of our efforts and to comprehend the profile of our volunteers. We believe that, by doing so, we can shape our activities so as to respond to the needs of the changing profile of our volunteers. At the same time, the findings of such studies allow us to make an in-house assessment of our impact. Setting off from the results of this study, TOG can design informative seminars / workshops, booklets or activities to help the youth make more active use of participation instruments. Furthermore, the study will help us create up-to-date policy documents for decision makers, concerning the needs of the youth.

BREAKDOWN OF ALL RESPONSES

Table 1: Age Range of Participants (%)

Age	KONDA 2014	TOG 2015	TOG 2017
Age -18	22,4	4,0	0,4
Age 19	13,4	15,6	5,8
Age 20	12,4	25,3	15,2
Age 21	11,8	24,5	21,5
Age 22	12,0	14,8	22,2
Age 23	11,6	7,9	14,2
Age 24+	16,4	7,9	20,3

Table 2: Gender of Participants (%)

Gender	KONDA 2014	TOG 2015	TOG 2017
Female	48,0	47,8	66,9
Male	52,0	51,4	32,4
Other		0,8	0,5

Table 3: Type of University (%)

Type of University	TOG 2010	TOG 2015	TOG 2017
Public University	92,1	95,2	90,9
Foundation-owned University	7,9	4,8	9,6

Table 4: Type of Education (%)

Type of Education	TOG 2010	TOG 2015	TOG 2017
Primary Formal (Daytime) Education	76,2	76,3	80,2
Secondary Formal (Evening) Education	23,0	23,1	18,2
Distance Education	0,8	0,6	1,4

Table 5: Education Level (%)

Education Level	TOG 2010	TOG 2015	TOG 2017
High school		0,8	0,2
2-year college	9,7	5,5	3,9
4-year college	90,3	92,0	88,1
Master's program		0,8	2,2
PhD program		0,1	0,3
Not a student		0,9	5

Table 6: Fields of Study (%)

Department	TOG 2015	TOG 2017
Engineering	24,0	25
Economic and Administrative Sciences	20,9	14,8
Education, Teaching	13,9	11,2
Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, Health Sciences	11,7	11,8
Social and Political Sciences	9,4	13,5
Literature, Linguistics	5,5	4,7
Natural Sciences	4,5	3,4
Professional Programs	3,7	2
Law	3,5	3,2
Other	3	9,9
Total	100	

Table 7: Experience at TOG (%)

Experience at TOG		TOG 2015	TOG 2017
Newcomers	1-2 Periods	49,2	44,5
Middles	3-4 Periods	35,9	25,8
Veterans	5-8 Periods	14,9	24,2
TOTAL		100,0	100,0

Table 8: Geographic Breakdown of Participants (%)

TÜİK-İBBS Code	Region Where Participant Currently Resides In	KONDA 2014	TOG 2015	TOG 2017
TR1	İstanbul	24,0	15,3	19,6
TR2	Western Marmara	4,0	6,9	5,2
TR3	Aegean	14,5	15,0	12
TR4	Eastern Marmara	11,0	11,3	13
TR5	Western Anatolia	10,0	9,9	13,3
TR6	Mediterranean	12,0	10,0	9,9
TR7	Central Anatolia	4,0	5,8	4,1
TR8	Western Black Sea	5,0	5,3	6,33
TR9	Eastern Black Sea	3,0	3,1	0,9
TRA	Northeastern Anatolia	0,5	3,6	1,5
TRB	Central Eastern Anatolia	3,0	5,4	5,9
TRC	Southeastern Anatolia	9,0	8,4	6,5

Table 9: Ethnic Background

Options	Answers	Options	Answers
Turkish	74,30%	Roma	3,68%
Kurdish	29,65%	Balkan immigrant	6,29%
Zaza	6,56%	Albanian	3,86%
Arab	7,82%	Bosnian	4,13%
Syriac	3,05%	Laz	5,48%
Chaldean	2,79%	Georgian	3,95%
Armenian	4,94%	Circassian	5,12%
Greek	3,86%	Chechen	3,05%
Jewish	3,41%	Abkhaz	3,23%
Yörük	7,46%	Total Answers	1113
Turcoman	5,21%	Unanswered	78
Tatar	4,49%		

Table 10: Religion (%)

Options	Answers
Muslim	68,87%
Sunnite Muslim	11,20%
Alevi	8,91%
Christian	1,70%
Jewish	1,53%
Deist (Not believing in a specific religion but in the presence of a supreme force)	14,76%
Atheist (Not believing in any religion or supreme force)	6,19%
Agnostic (Considering it impossible to know whether a supreme force exists or not)	6,62%
Other	3,48%
Other (Please indicate)	
Total Answers	1179
Unanswered	12

Table 11: Average Monthly Income

Options	Average Amount	Total Amount	Answers
aylık/TL	957,9042821	1140864	100,00% 1191
			Answers 1191

Table 12: Those Who Worked for Money in the Last Year

Options	Answers
Yes	60,03% 715
No	39,97% 476

Table 13: How Often Do You Talk Politics in Daily Life?

Options	Answers
Frequently	15,45%
Sometimes	35,85%
Rarely	26,53%
Almost never	15,79%
Never	6,38%

Table 14: Phrases about Political Participation

	I don't agree at all	I agree somewhat	Both yes and no	I agree a lot	I fully agree
Young people are apolitical in Turkey.	16,62%	27,79%	44,33%	9,40%	1,85%
Young people are political in Turkey.	4,70%	19,73%	47,19%	23,26%	5,12%
In Turkey, young people have difficulty in finding a political initiative / formation / party that represents them.	7,56%	13,85%	21,66%	36,19%	20,74%
Young people in Turkey have been depoliticized.	7,47%	19,56%	41,23%	24,69%	7,05%
I usually refrain from political action.	20,32%	29,05%	27,46%	14,86%	8,31%
I hesitate in expressing my political opinion.	40,81%	24,85%	21,07%	8,23%	5,04%
I find it difficult to find a political initiative / formation / party that represents me.	13,01%	12,59%	15,95%	27,37%	31,07%
As a young person, I feel empowered in changing the social arrangements that I don't approve of.	8,14%	21,24%	28,97%	25,78%	15,87%
As a young person, I consider myself an important actor as regards social problems.	5,21%	15,53%	23,17%	36,10%	19,98%
When I'm in a group of young friends, I feel more empowered in influencing decision makers.	3,19%	13,35%	25,69%	40,30%	17,46%

Table 15: Political Party Membership (%)

Political Party Membership	KONDA 2014	TOG 2015	TOG 2017
Yes, I am a member	9,0	6,4	4
No, and I don't want to	76,6	74,3	73,8
No, but I would like to	11,5	15,2	11,9
I was a member, but resigned	3,0	4,1	4,9
Other			3,2

Table 16: Reasons for lack of interest in party membership (%)

Main reason for not joining a political party or youth branch	KONDA 2014	TOG 2015	TOG 2017
I don't want to, there is no reason	30,9	10,2	10,2
I dislike politics	14,9	26,5	22,4
I consider it unnecessary	12,0	4,5	4,5
I have no time	11,8	9,2	3,6
I don't trust parties	10,6	31,5	41,6
My family doesn't approve	5,8	2,1	1,4
Other	14	15,9	16,03

Table 17: Questions About Social Participation (%)

Participation in social issues		YES	NO
In the last three months, have you filed a complaint to a state institution regarding any problems?	TOG 2017	35,4	64,5
	TOG 2015	31,1	68,9
	KONDA 2014	9,7	90,3
In the last three months, have you participated in any protest rallies or demos?	TOG 2017	31,9	68
	TOG 2015	33,9	66,1
	KONDA 2014	10,7	89,3
In the last week, have you sent an online message about a social problem?	TOG 2017	46,5	53,4
	TOG 2015	59,8	40,2
	KONDA 2014	20,0	80,0
Have you ever sent an SMS message to make a donation to a campaign you saw on TV, the internet, or the social media?	TOG 2017	39,5	60,4
	TOG 2015	53,0	47,0
	KONDA 2014	28,1	71,9

Table 18: Questions about Political Participation

	YES	NO
Have you voted in the elections of November 1, 2015?	79,26%	20,74%
Do you actively participate in the solution of social problems?	59,36%	40,64%
Do you think there has been a difference in your political participation before and after engaging in volunteer work?	38,04%	61,96%
In the last three months, have you filed a complaint to a state institution regarding any problems?	35,43%	64,57%
In the last three months, have you engaged in a political action such as protest rallies and demos, or submitted an online / offline petition?	31,91%	68,09%
In the last week, have you sent an online message about a social problem?	46,52%	53,48%
Have you ever sent an SMS message to make a donation to a campaign you saw on TV, the internet, or the social media?	39,55%	60,45%
Do you think you can influence the local government in your city?	50,71%	49,29%
Is there a youth assembly in your city / district?	72,04%	27,96%
Do you think you can influence decision-making at the local level?	57,93%	42,07%
Do you think that you can influence decision-making mechanisms at the national level?	30,56%	69,44%
Do you think that the government attaches importance to the political participation of young people in Turkey?	14,27%	85,73%
Do you think that the local governments attach importance to the political participation of young people in Turkey?	14,86%	85,14%
Do you think that political parties attach importance to the political participation of young people in Turkey?	19,14%	80,86%

Table 19: Membership in an NGO other than TOG (%)

Membership in an NGO other than TOG	TOG 2010	TOG 2015	TOG 2017
Yes	24,9	20,9	35,5
No, and I don't want to		14,8	11,9
No, but I would like to		59,1	42,3
I was a member, but left		4,1	8
No, I never considered it	75,1	1,0	-
Other	-	-	2,1

Table 20: Trust in State Institutions I **Table 21:** Devlet

	None	Little	Moderate	A lot	Very much
Municipalities	23,85%	34,09%	37,36%	4,37%	0,34%
Print Media	46,60%	32,41%	19,06%	1,51%	0,42%
Turkish Grand National Assembly	33,84%	29,05%	27,12%	7,98%	2,02%
Private Banks	44,00%	27,12%	24,43%	3,69%	0,76%
Courts	36,36%	31,32%	25,10%	5,63%	1,60%
Political Parties	65,24%	23,59%	10,66%	0,42%	0,08%
President's Office	65,66%	15,28%	12,85%	4,11%	2,10%
Private Televisions	55,50%	28,72%	14,19%	1,34%	0,25%
State Hospitals	19,48%	31,40%	36,94%	10,08%	2,10%
Foundation-Owned Universities	28,63%	33,92%	30,56%	6,13%	0,76%
Supreme Electoral Council	55,00%	22,92%	17,38%	3,61%	1,09%
Civil Society Organizations	4,37%	15,79%	42,15%	29,14%	8,56%
Social Media	26,70%	28,38%	31,32%	10,58%	3,02%

Table 21: Trust in State Institutions II

	None	Little	Moderate	A lot	Very much
The Army	25,19%	23,68%	26,87%	17,21%	7,05%
Prime Minister's Office	58,86%	20,40%	15,53%	3,61%	1,60%
Private Hospitals	27,12%	31,15%	31,57%	8,65%	1,51%
State Universities	15,03%	27,96%	39,29%	14,36%	3,36%
Directorate of Religious Affairs	56,42%	20,99%	16,62%	4,28%	1,68%
Government	59,87%	19,14%	15,70%	3,27%	2,02%
State-Owned Banks	35,68%	26,28%	29,39%	6,63%	2,02%
The Police	29,05%	23,34%	25,02%	15,70%	6,88%
Constitutional Court	36,36%	27,96%	24,94%	7,89%	2,85%
TRT	53,40%	22,67%	17,04%	5,04%	1,85%
Governor's / District Governor's Office	43,41%	26,45%	24,35%	4,03%	1,76%
Ministry of National Education	55,92%	24,35%	15,53%	3,02%	1,18%
Ministry of Family and Social Policy	52,06%	25,94%	17,13%	2,94%	1,93%
Ministry of EU Affairs	49,20%	24,69%	21,41%	3,36%	1,34%
TOG	1,76%	6,47%	29,05%	39,21%	23,51%

Table 22: How Much Do You Believe You Can Change State Institutions As a TOG Volunteer? I

	None	Little	Moderate	A lot	Very much
Municipalities	17,55%	30,31%	34,26%	15,20%	2,69%
Print Media	22,84%	29,97%	29,30%	14,86%	3,02%
Turkish Grand National Assembly	45,93%	27,62%	18,47%	6,05%	1,93%
Private Banks	51,64%	23,76%	18,22%	4,62%	1,76%
Courts	50,21%	25,02%	17,63%	5,04%	2,10%
Political Parties	43,07%	27,54%	19,23%	7,72%	2,43%
President's Office	62,72%	19,31%	11,17%	4,11%	2,69%
Private Televisions	37,11%	28,97%	23,26%	7,56%	3,11%
State Hospitals	34,68%	28,88%	25,36%	8,40%	2,69%
Foundation-Owned Universities	31,57%	27,37%	26,78%	11,42%	2,85%
Supreme Electoral Council	58,52%	21,33%	13,35%	4,87%	1,93%
Civil Society Organizations	9,40%	12,09%	30,39%	32,16%	15,95%
Social Media	11,34%	17,13%	27,54%	27,20%	16,79%

Table 23: How Much Do You Believe You Can Change State Institutions As a TOG Volunteer? II

	None	Little	Moderate	A lot	Very much
The Army	62,13%	18,81%	12,76%	3,78%	2,52%
Prime Minister's Office	62,30%	19,56%	11,25%	4,37%	2,52%
Private Hospitals	37,45%	29,81%	23,26%	7,22%	2,27%
State Universities	20,74%	28,46%	30,81%	14,44%	5,54%
Directorate of Religious Affairs	64,23%	18,47%	10,83%	4,62%	1,85%
Government	58,86%	20,91%	12,51%	4,87%	2,85%
State-Owned Banks	53,23%	24,94%	15,45%	4,11%	2,27%
The Police	49,37%	22,17%	18,47%	6,97%	3,02%
Constitutional Court	58,61%	21,24%	13,10%	4,37%	2,69%
TRT	54,24%	23,01%	14,27%	5,46%	3,02%
Governor's / District Governor's Office	45,09%	27,29%	18,14%	6,72%	2,77%
Ministry of National Education	44,67%	22,92%	20,57%	7,39%	4,45%
Ministry of Family and Social Policy	42,82%	23,76%	20,57%	8,40%	4,45%
Ministry of EU Affairs	51,13%	22,59%	15,95%	6,47%	3,86%
TOG	4,70%	9,74%	24,10%	33,84%	27,62%

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Community Volunteers Foundation Youth Work's Impact on the Social Participation of Young People

"It is tough to be young in Turkey..." We've heard this sentences from almost all young people we had interviewed. Future concerns, financial inadequacies, the education system which causes uniformity, family and community pressures, unemployment and more... Young people think that they are not understood, they can not adequately express the needs and demands of themselves; adults and decision-makers ignore to recognize them in Turkey.

This research allows us to hear the needs and demands of the youth more closely. Young people tell about being young and side of youth. They tell about how the youth work creates the space that can express themselves inside.

In this way, this research becomes a source for civil society workers, university administrations, local and national decision-makers to understand young people and to create equal opportunities for young people.



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