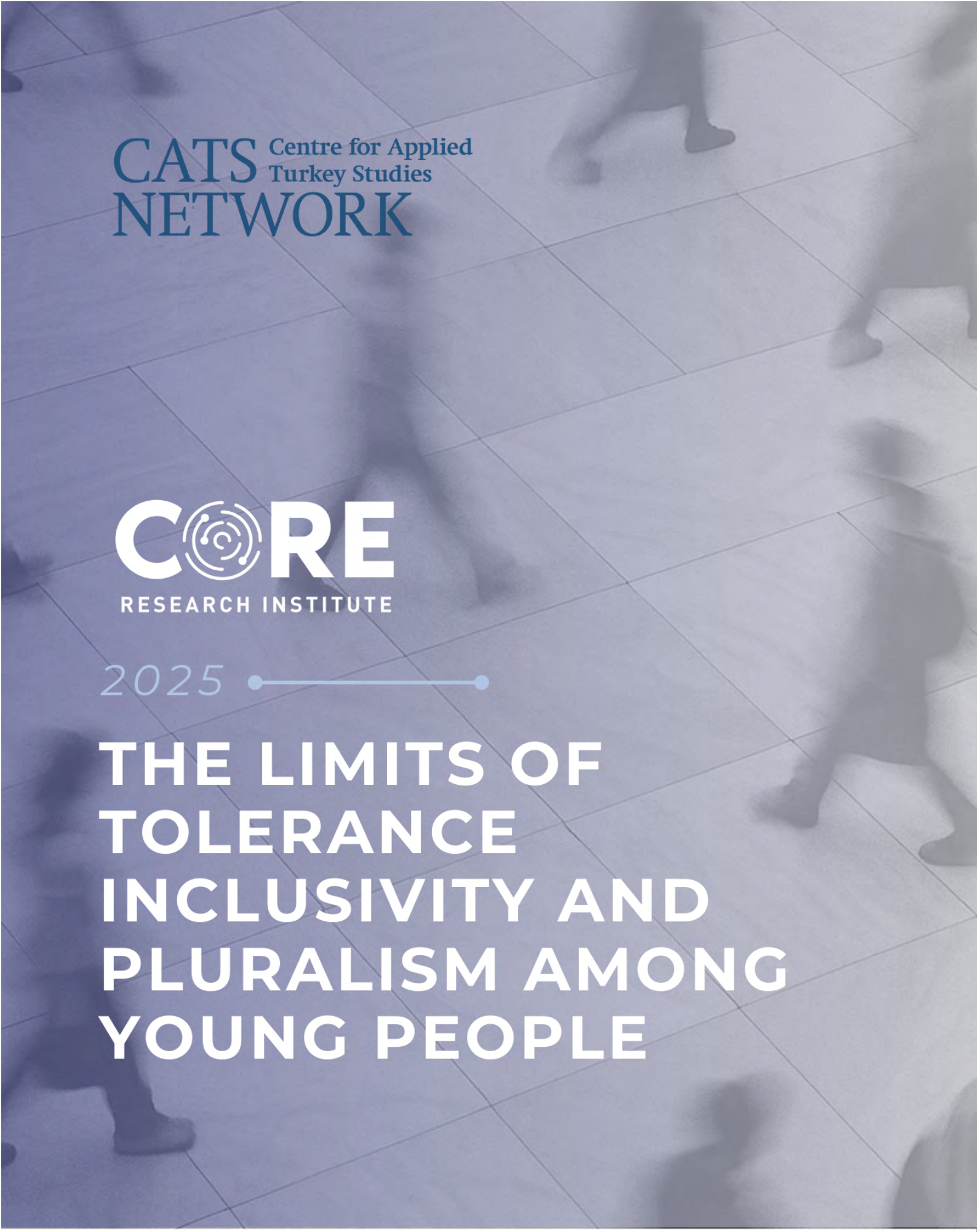

CATS NETWORK Centre for Applied Turkey Studies

CORE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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THE LIMITS OF TOLERANCE INCLUSIVITY AND PLURALISM AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

STIFTUNG MERCATOR

Federal Foreign Office

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THE LIMITS OF TOLERANCE INCLUSIVITY AND PLURALISM AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

2025

Research Team

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1. INTRODUCTION

At a time when economic fragilities and political tensions are intensifying in Turkey, understanding young people's perspectives on democracy, the state, and fundamental values is of critical importance, both for youth policies and for the country's future.

When assessing this report, it is important to recall that "youth" is neither a homogeneous category nor a small one. Students, employed young people, and NEET youth (not in education, employment, or training) face different challenges and problem areas. Ethnic, religious, and ideological diversity further complicates any attempt to ascribe a single set of characteristics to this group. For this reason, the generalising analyses of youth—which we also inevitably draw on in this report—are never applicable to all young people. The data should therefore be interpreted with the understanding that general observations reflect dominant trends and need to be considered together with internal cleavages and variations.

Young people's relationship with democracy is not unique to Turkey; similar debates are unfolding across Western countries. Populism, identity-based polarisation, and tensions accelerated by social media have lowered young people's tolerance thresholds. Pluralism gains meaning only when it is underpinned by equality in practice and by the ability to live together. Research shows that tolerance based merely on "putting up with differences" can lead to a loss of belonging and self-esteem among minorities. One of the key findings of this study likewise indicates that while young people display a certain degree of tolerance, their level of inclusiveness remains weak.

Three core dynamics stand out as reinforcing exclusionary attitudes among young people: the "us versus them" divide sharpened by populism, perceptions of identity threat, and structural fragilities that fuel economic and social exclusion.

International research demonstrates that younger generations tend to attach less importance to democracy than previous cohorts, are more open to authoritarian alternatives, and display lower levels of trust in political institutions. At the same time, an increasingly prominent argument in these debates is that young people are not rejecting democracy per se, but rather criticising the performance of democratic systems. Their dissatisfaction may therefore also be interpreted as a turn away from conventional politics and towards new forms of political participation. Findings from Turkey are largely in line with this global picture. Economic fragilities and institutional erosion further deepen young people's loss of trust. While this strengthens the desire for participation among some young people, it also increases openness to authoritarian solutions among others.

The study employed a mixed-methods design. The quantitative component consisted of face-to-face surveys with 2,401 young people across 12 provinces. The qualitative component included 30 in-depth interviews with young people from diverse backgrounds, as well as Participatory Action Research conducted through nine groups, each meeting for three sessions. Changes in attitudes on themes such as pluralism were tracked through the combined use of quantitative and qualitative insights. Supported by CATS and coordinated by CORE, the quantitative fieldwork was completed in March 2025, and the qualitative fieldwork in August 2025.

To facilitate reading, we present at the outset several key findings distilled from the research results. Overall, our findings point to a pattern of fragile pluralism, characterised by a dual structure between young people's principled support for pluralism and their more restrictive attitudes in practice.

01

"Opportunity squeeze."

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

02

Leaving the family home reduces prejudices.

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

03

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

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

04

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

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

05

Political identity is shifting.

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

06

Secularizing religiosity: faith is personal, politics is distant.

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

07

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

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

09

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

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

11

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

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

08

The vision of a strong state.

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

10

Support for the opposition is higher among young people.

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

12

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

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

13

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

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

14

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

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

15

The environment is a common ground that transcends differences.

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

16

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

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

17

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

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

19

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

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

21

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

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

18

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

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

20

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

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

22

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

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

2. DAILY LIFE AND IDENTITIES

In examining young people's positions with regard to politics and values, the study also addressed certain everyday practices and emotional states, with the aim of capturing data on their socio-cultural characteristics.

In terms of alcohol and tobacco consumption, young people do not differ markedly from the societal average. Approximately 54% report that they do not consume alcohol, while the proportion of young people who smoke (42.6%) remains below that of the general population.

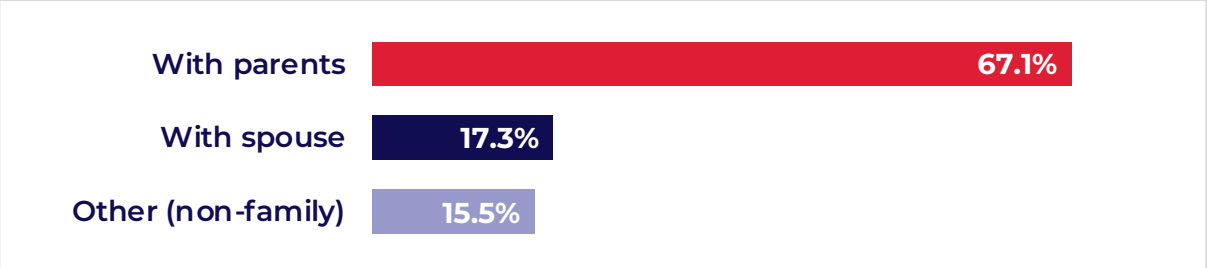


Figure 1. Living Arrangements

The vast majority of young people live with their families; the proportion of those living alone or with friends is very low. This pattern reflects both enduring traditional norms and structural constraints such as high rents, unemployment, and economic precarity. Indeed, even after entering working life, many young people continue to live with their families unless they marry. While co-residence with family provides security, it also limits opportunities for independent living and the pursuit of individual autonomy, and reduces contact with different identity groups—indirectly reinforcing social distance between identities.

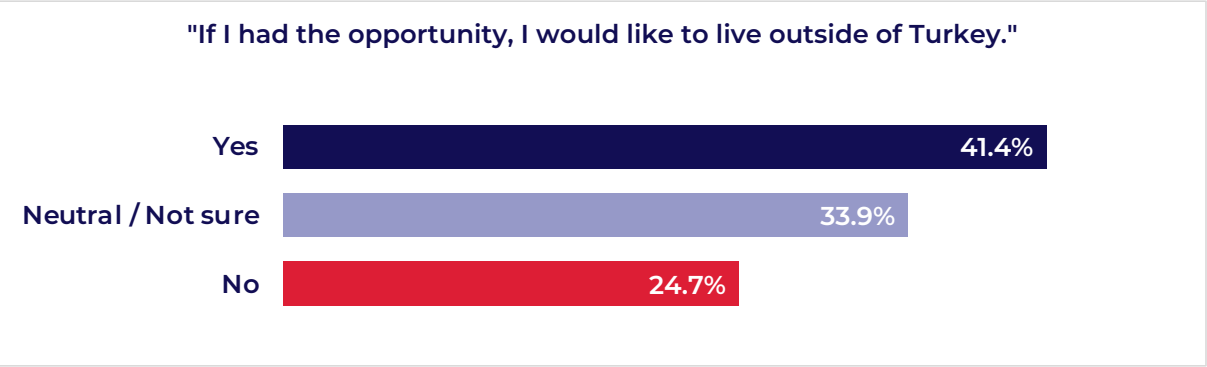


Figure 2. "If I had the opportunity, I would like to live outside of Turkey."

As in previous years, the desire to live abroad remains high among young people. This aspiration is not driven solely by a motivation to leave Turkey; it is also rooted in the wish to see other places, pursue self-development, and improve socio-economic status. At the same time, in-depth interviews reveal that even those who express a strong desire to live abroad harbour significant reservations. Widespread perceptions of rising discrimination in Western

countries dampen the intensity of this aspiration. While intentions are high, limited opportunities increase the risk of frustration among young people.

As will be discussed in subsequent sections, expectations of opportunity associated with the EU and the West are strong among young people; however, perceptions of discrimination against migrants and concerns about "not belonging" act as a brake between intention and action. English-language proficiency and international experience constitute another area in which inequalities are pronounced. Only 13% of young people consider their English to be sufficient, while 43% report that they do not speak English at all. Similarly, only 13.3% have travelled abroad at least once in their lives. Those with access to private schooling, language courses, or international opportunities retain advantages in language skills and mobility, while the vast majority lack such resources. Proficiency in English and access to passports and visas thus generate a new form of "mobility capital" inequality among young people.

When the relationship between Turkish youth and politics is examined across the axes of ideology, belief, identity, and experience—drawing on both quantitative data and qualitative findings—it becomes clear that young people do not constitute a single political bloc. Rather, their expectations, concerns, and orientations display a fragmented structure. Turkish youth interpret politics through a triangle of **identity, values,** and **experience**; while classical ideological positions continue to function as reference points, they are reconfigured and acquire new meanings.

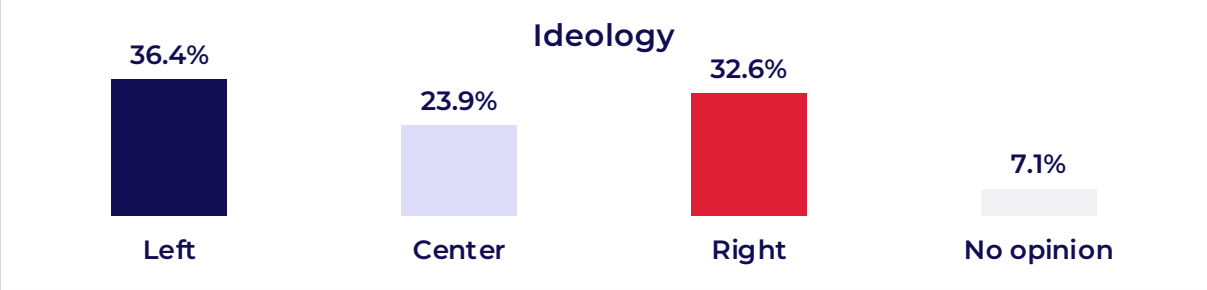


Figure 3. Ideology

Thirty-six per cent of young people define themselves as left-wing, while 33% identify as right-wing. A further 31% position themselves outside this axis. This distribution suggests that ideology functions less as a binding identity for young people and more as a reference point.

Qualitative interviews indicate that, for many young people, the left–right divide is largely reduced to positions of government versus opposition. This ideological loosening directs young people to make political choices on the basis of values, lifestyles, and everyday concerns rather than rigid ideological affiliations. At the same time, it points to a hybrid tendency: young people articulate demands that combine cultural security traditionally associated with the right and emphases on freedom and justice commonly linked to the left, thereby forming a new centre. This configuration may also be read as a potential **"search for synthesis."** Even if young people continue to use ideological labels, they appear to reject the rigid and conventional templates of both the left and the right, while selectively embracing values from each side—for instance, spirituality and cultural security from the right, and freedom and justice from the left—thus potentially shaping a new political centre.

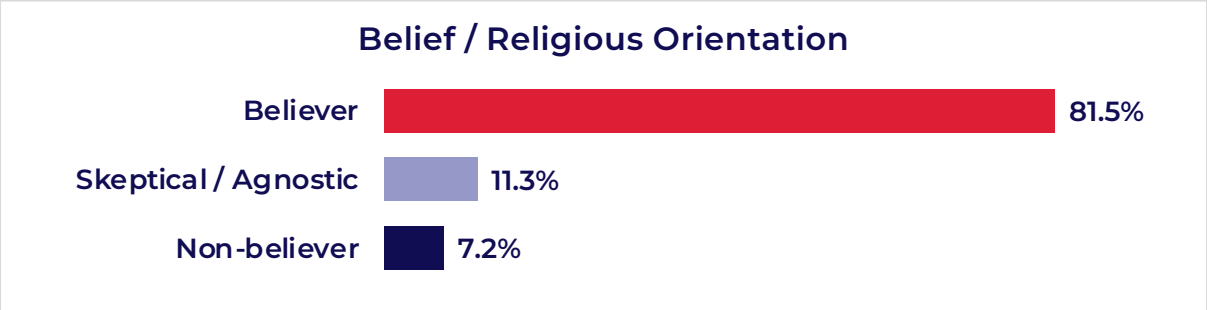


Figure 4. Belief / Religious Orientation

The tendency of young people to distance themselves from religion is not as pronounced as is sometimes claimed in public debate. Based on responses to questions assessing belief in God and doubts about God's unity, 81.5% of young people state that they believe in God and have no doubts about this belief. However, this belief is lived out in a more individualised and flexible form of religiosity rather than through traditional religious practices. Rather than a decline in faith, what is observed is a process of individualisation of religion, accompanied by a weakening of life organised around religious obligations. While this may appear theoretically problematic at first glance, a category of secular religiosity is on the rise.

3. POLITICAL TRUST, AND PARTICIPATION

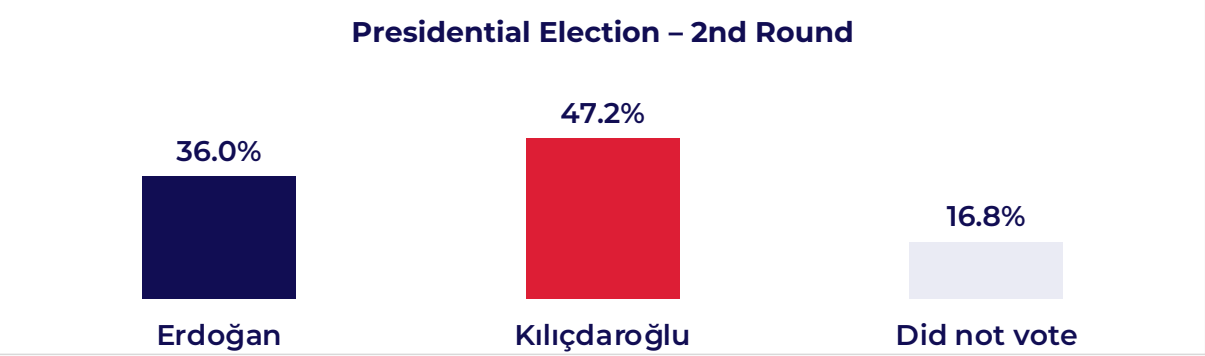


Figure 5. Second Round Votes for the 2023 Presidential Elections

While the 2023 election results show that Erdoğan received 52.2% of the vote and Kılıçdaroğlu 47.8% in the overall electorate, this pattern is reversed among young people: 47.2% supported Kılıçdaroğlu, compared to 36% for Erdoğan. However, two points warrant particular attention. **First, a higher tendency towards opposition among young people does not mean that all young people are oppositional; a substantial proportion—36%—continue to support Erdoğan.** Second, a significant share of young people, amounting to 16.8%, did not vote for either candidate. **In other words, a considerable segment of youth can be said to position itself outside the existing binary polarisation, rejecting both the current government and finding the opposition unconvincing.** Consequently, assuming that young people are "entirely oppositional" on the basis of a majority leaning towards the opposition risks overlooking the political diversity within this group.

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

Support for the opposition increases among younger age cohorts, while protest-oriented tendencies decline among young people aged 25 and above who are newly entering the labour market. Among young people from higher-income backgrounds, support for the opposition exceeds 60%. Conversely, support for Erdoğan appears to be increasingly concentrated among young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

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

Voting preferences among young people do not constitute a single bloc; rather, they vary across lines of ideology, belief, and identity. As expected, support for the opposition increases

along the left–secular axis, while support for the government strengthens along religious and nationalist lines.

As religiosity increases, support for the government rises, whereas non-belief or low levels of religiosity are associated with support for the opposition. This indicates that the link between religion and politics in Turkey persists among young people, albeit in a transformed form: rather than ritual adherence, a sense of cultural security has become the decisive factor.

Support for the government also increases among those with a nationalist identity, while among young people identifying as Kurdish, support for the opposition and the DEM line is particularly pronounced. Overall, the picture suggests that political orientations are shaped less by policy programmes and more by concerns related to identity security and representation.

Cross-tabulations point to a three-dimensional map: (i) as sensitivities related to cultural protection (religiosity–nationalism) increase, orientation towards the government strengthens; (ii) as emphasis on universal values and meritocracy increases, orientation towards the opposition grows; and (iii) within the protest pool, hesitation is shaped by concerns related to performance and trust.

Levels of trust in political leaders among young people are generally low; no leader scores above 5 out of 10. Trust tends to be confined to leaders associated with one's own political milieu. Many young people struggle to identify a figure who they feel fully represents them. The search for leadership is shaped less by ideological loyalty than by expectations of honesty, competence, and ethical governance. The frequent responses such as "no one," "there isn't anyone," or "this doesn't fully convince me either" to direct questions about presidential candidates indicate that the current political spectrum fails to offer a leadership profile that aligns with young people's ideals.

4. PERCEPTIONS OF THE EU

Young people view the EU positively as a space of freedom, prosperity, meritocracy, and mobility, while at the same time maintaining a degree of distance due to concerns about discrimination, double standards, and sovereignty. Perceptions of the EU are shaped less by ideological affiliation and more by a cost–benefit calculation.

6.1. General Attitudes Toward the European Union

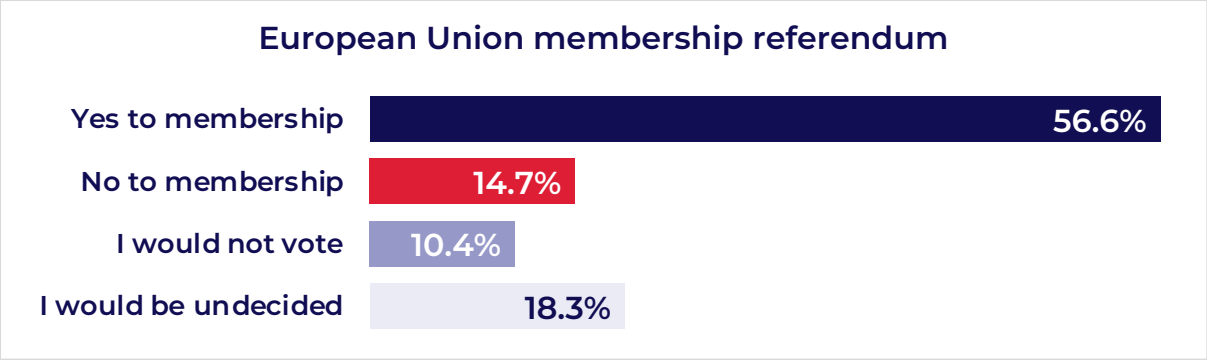


Figure 6. European Union Referendum

According to Eurobarometer's 2025 data for Turkey, 32% of the general population view Turkey's EU membership positively, 17% negatively, while a majority—51%—evaluate it as neither positive nor negative. The findings of this study, however, indicate that young people's attitudes are more favourable than those of the general population. Support for EU membership among young people is relatively high (56.6%), while opposition remains low (15%). The combined share of those who are undecided or state that they would not vote constitutes a sizeable group (28.7%). Qualitative findings further reveal that even young people with reservations tend to view the EU as an external anchor that could "put Turkey back on track." Expectations related to the rule of law, the effective functioning of rules, and meritocracy emerge as the main drivers of support.

Those who adopt a more distant stance towards the EU primarily cite concerns about discrimination, Turkey's exclusion, and the risk of a loss of sovereignty. Nevertheless, the traditional narrative of "taking Western technology but not Western values" appears to be weakening; the West is increasingly evaluated more positively in areas such as the rule of law, equality, and environmental protection.

Support for the EU is strengthened by expectations of access to opportunities and of a rules-based regime:

- Support is higher among men (60.1%), while indecision is more pronounced among women (30.9%).
- Support increases with age (reaching 59.1% among those aged 26–29), while indecision declines; as experience grows, pragmatic assessments become more prominent.
- Support is higher among those living outside the family home, while opposition is relatively more common among married young people.

- Support rises in higher-income groups (62.3%), while opposition is more concentrated among the middle-income group; as information and planning clarity increase, the perceived cost of uncertainty declines.
- Religiosity and nationalism are the variables that most clearly differentiate attitudes towards the EU. As religiosity increases, support declines (65.9% among those with low religiosity, compared to 54.9% among those with high religiosity). As nationalism intensifies, indecision and opposition increase.
- Differences by mother tongue are particularly striking: support is very high among Kurdish youth (67.5%), while opposition remains quite low (8.1%). In this group, the EU generates a stronger normative hope linked to expectations of rights and equality. Among Turkish youth, support is more limited (53.7%).
- Along the ideological axis, the pattern is clear: support is very high on the left (71.2%); on the right, support declines (42.1%) and indecision increases. In the centre, pragmatic support predominates (58%). The pool of undecided respondents is concentrated largely among women, younger age groups, those with middle-income backgrounds, and those positioned along a moderate nationalism line.

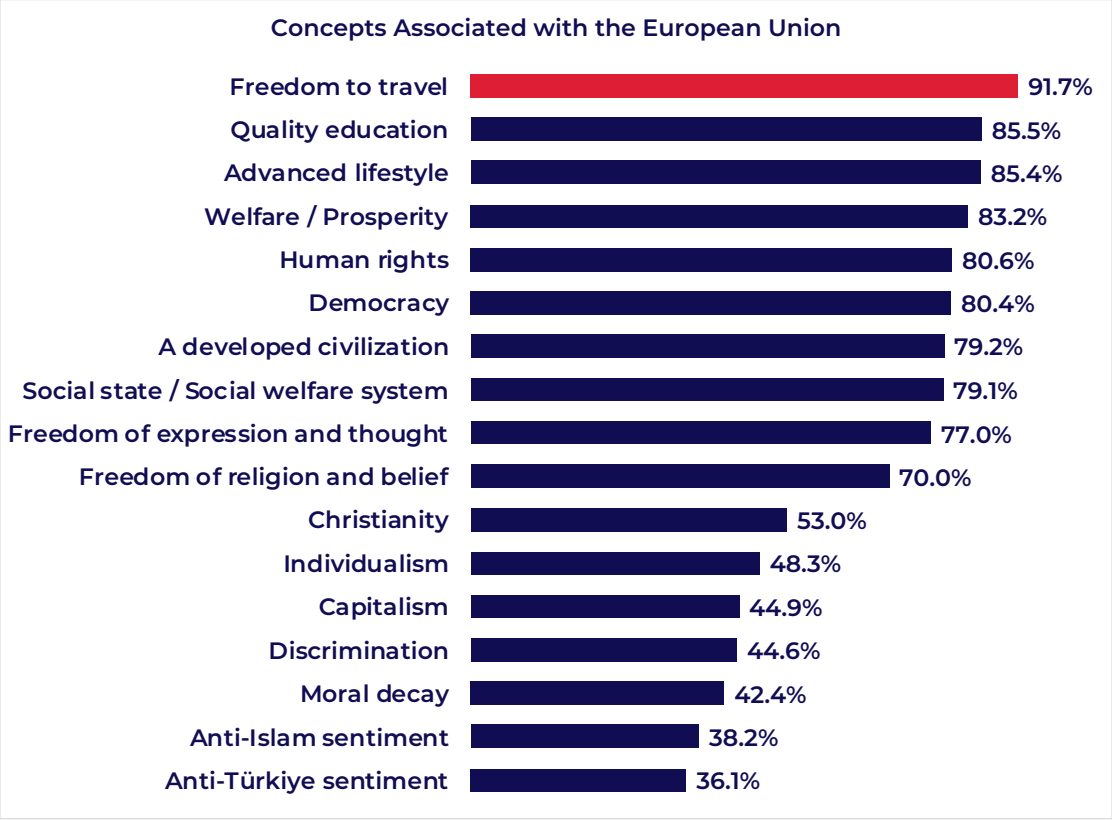


Figure 7. Concepts Associated with the European Union

In young people's minds, the EU is most strongly associated with freedom of travel, education, democracy, prosperity, and human rights. Harsh negative associations such as anti-Turkish or anti-Muslim sentiment remain limited. At the same time, perceptions of discrimination, double standards, and exclusion are present at notable levels (in the 36–45% range). This indicates that perceptions of the EU simultaneously contain elements of hope and caution.

6.2. Perceptions of the West and the EU

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

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

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

EU countries are perceived as having differing levels of prestige in the eyes of young people. Countries such as Germany and the United Kingdom stand out due to their strong economies and educational opportunities, while others are viewed more neutrally or negatively. Countries perceived as posing a threat to Turkey and to society, such as Israel and Armenia, as well as countries seen as culturally distant from Turkey and associated with lifestyles from which distance is deemed desirable—such as Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and Iran—receive notably low prestige ratings.

To better understand young people's attitudes, respondents were asked whether, if given the opportunity, they would like to live in a range of different countries. Among these, the United Kingdom stands out not only because of country-specific conditions but also due to the motivation of language acquisition. Germany consistently ranks highly, both because of its level of development and the size of the Turkish-origin migrant population. Supported by qualitative findings, responses to direct questions indicate that, beyond the UK and Germany, the Scandinavian countries, Canada, and Switzerland emerge as the most preferred destinations to live in, owing to their levels of prosperity, freedoms, and sensitivity to discrimination.

One of the key findings of the study is that young people mentally place Europe (particularly EU countries) and the United States into separate categories. **The United States is associated with assertive power politics, whereas the EU is linked to a rules-based order and social-state mechanisms. As a result, much of what is framed as anti-Western sentiment is in fact directed primarily at the United States.**

The findings indicate that Turkish youth's cultural orientations are fundamentally Western-centred and aspirational; however, these orientations vary even within Europe depending on expectations of emotional and social integration. Most importantly, this cultural differentiation now maps onto Turkey's own internal geography, drawing a pronounced East–West line between metropolitan centres and provincial areas. Young people evaluate EU membership not in ideological terms but through an opportunity-oriented lens, with the expectation that the EU would "put Turkey back on track" strengthening support.

For a broad segment, the West represents a necessary model that provides what Turkey currently cannot; yet this appreciation coexists with a certain distance at the level of cultural

politics. These two orientations—institutional appreciation and cultural hesitation—can coexist even within the same individual. The data suggest that a pragmatic "yes" and a moral or identity-based "distance" operate simultaneously; while EU literacy remains limited, the image of the West is nevertheless strong.

Cultural orientation is Western-centred, but emotional proximity is located in the Mediterranean, libertarian values are associated with the Scandinavian countries, Switzerland, and Canada, linguistic orientation converges on the United Kingdom, and institutional admiration is concentrated on Germany. This constellation points to the simultaneous presence of a desire for "warmth-seeking sociability" and a need for predictable institutions. In recent perceptions of the United States, narratives emphasising discrimination, imperialism, and excessive capitalism have become increasingly salient; negative sentiments towards the West are thus more frequently projected onto the US.

In sum, young people's perceptions of the EU rest on a balance between cultural affinity with the West and concerns related to identity and sovereignty. For young people, the EU functions both as an exit option and as a cultural test: support is driven by pragmatism, while distance is rooted in considerations of security and identity.

5. PERCEPTION OF DEMOCRACY

The findings show that young people do not perceive democracy as an abstract regime, but rather as a concrete system that shapes justice, meritocracy, and living conditions. For young people, democracy represents freedom of expression and the hope for change through elections; however, current practices are seen as falling short of this ideal. The perceived erosion of justice and meritocracy constitutes the primary source of declining trust in democracy.

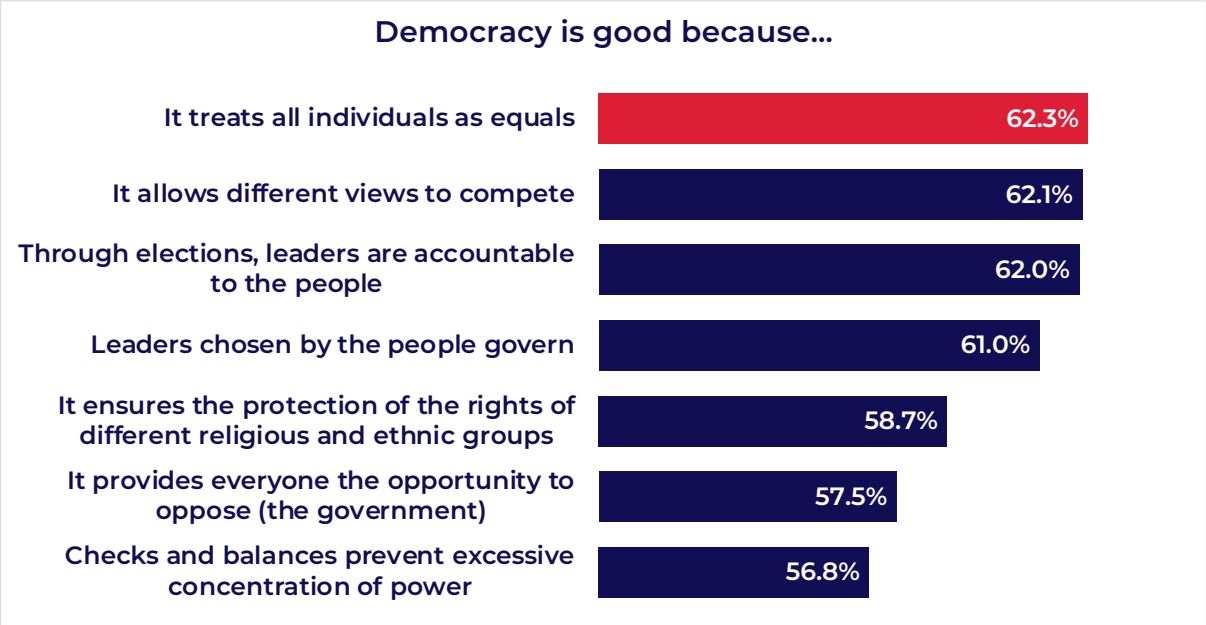


Figure 8. "Democracy is good because..."

For young people, democracy is a form of governance that is valued yet perceived as insufficient. Rather than being understood primarily as an ideal system, democracy gains meaning for many young people as a framework that must be preserved because it allows for the peaceful transfer of power through elections. At the same time, a strong emphasis on the social role of the state coexists with critiques of authoritarianism. Institutional erosion, polarisation in the media, and a weak sense of representation lead young people to reduce their understanding of democracy from normative principles to its minimum functional attributes.

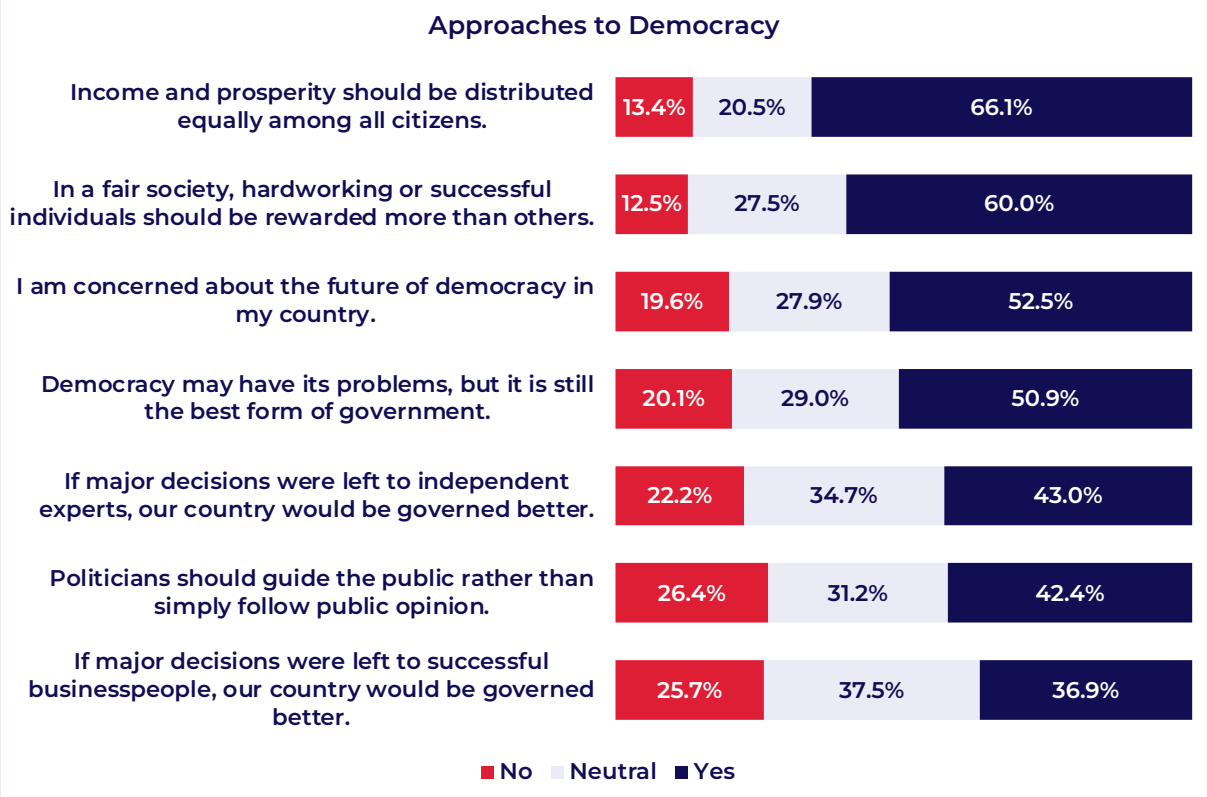


Figure 9. Approaches to Democracy

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

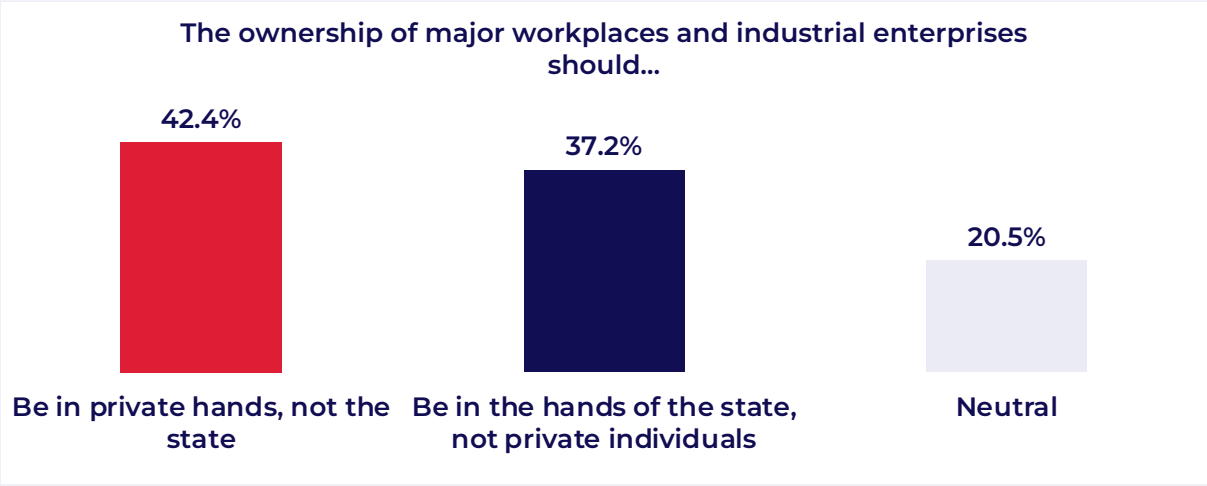


Figure 10. "The ownership of large workplaces and industrial establishments..."

Young people do not favour an authoritarian state, yet they do not object to state intervention in certain areas. Opinions are divided between state ownership and private ownership when it comes to large enterprises. Those who support state ownership emphasise justice, equality, and the public good, while those who favour the private sector highlight dynamism, efficiency, and the capacity for innovation.

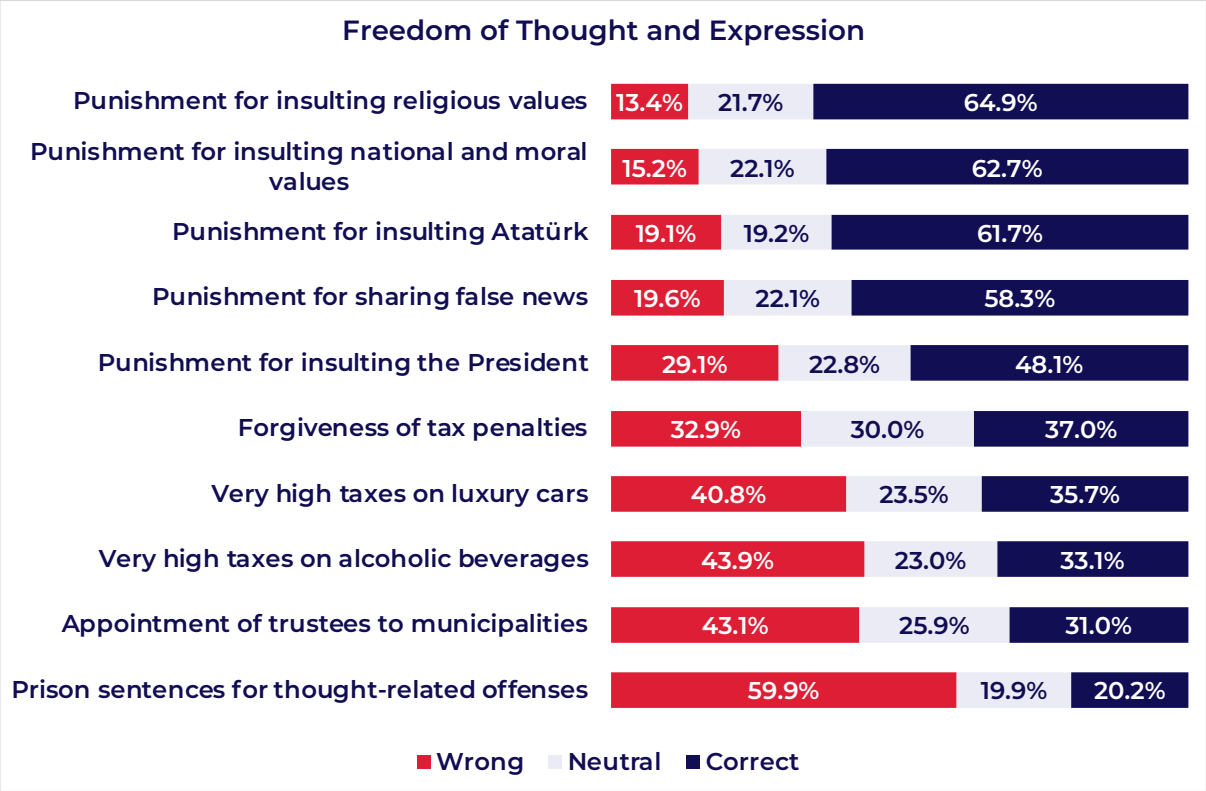


Figure 11. Freedom of Thought and Expression

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Young people's perceptions of the state correspond to a dual model in which a protective state and a controlling state operate simultaneously. Young people experience the state both as an instrument expected to deliver public goods—such as welfare, justice, and meritocracy—and as an apparatus that can generate harm through restriction, corruption, and political pressure. The state is thus perceived as both close and distant: a source of security for young people's futures and an authority that shapes and constrains their present.

Taken together, the interviews indicate that young people's perceptions of the state rest on two simultaneous expectations: (i) a strong demand for a social state that provides justice, security, and welfare, and (ii) a clear awareness that the state's authoritative capacity can entail risks of rights erosion in areas such as freedom of expression, political participation, and local representation. **As a result, young people position the state with two faces at once: a guaranteeing state (justice, meritocracy, social protection) and a controlling or restrictive state (trusteeship, centralisation, punishment).**

6. SENSITIVE ISSUES, TOLERANCE, AND PLURALISM

This section examines the most challenging test cases of young people's understanding of pluralism. The report focuses on the deep divisions in young people's views on "sensitive" issues at the core of identity politics, such as the Kurdish question, gender roles, religiosity, nationalism, and LGBTI+ rights. The findings allow us to characterise young people's approach as one of conditional tolerance. Rather than constituting unconditional acceptance, pluralism is shaped along a line of constant tension between universal rights and red lines such as "national security," "social order," and family or moral values.

While young people theoretically support freedom of expression, the influence of populist discourses leads many to consent to restrictions on the exercise of these rights on the grounds that they threaten social harmony, national and moral values, or political stability. Young people's approach to pluralism thus operates along a fine line between tolerance and inclusiveness. Those who adopt inclusive positions on certain issues may display exclusionary attitudes on others, with these distinctions becoming more pronounced as the issues in question become more sensitive. Inclusiveness tends to remain valid only insofar as it is perceived not to disrupt "national identity" or the desired social order. This dynamic becomes particularly concrete in sensitive areas such as the Kurdish question, homosexuality, and migration.

Migrants

The findings show that young people do not perceive foreign policy merely as an abstract "game of chess" played between distant states, but rather as a concrete reality that directly affects their everyday lives, security, and economic futures—most notably through the issue of Syrian refugees.

In young people's readings of Syria, two distinct yet intertwined dimensions emerge: criticisms directed at the state's Syria policy, and everyday concerns related to the presence of Syrian refugees.

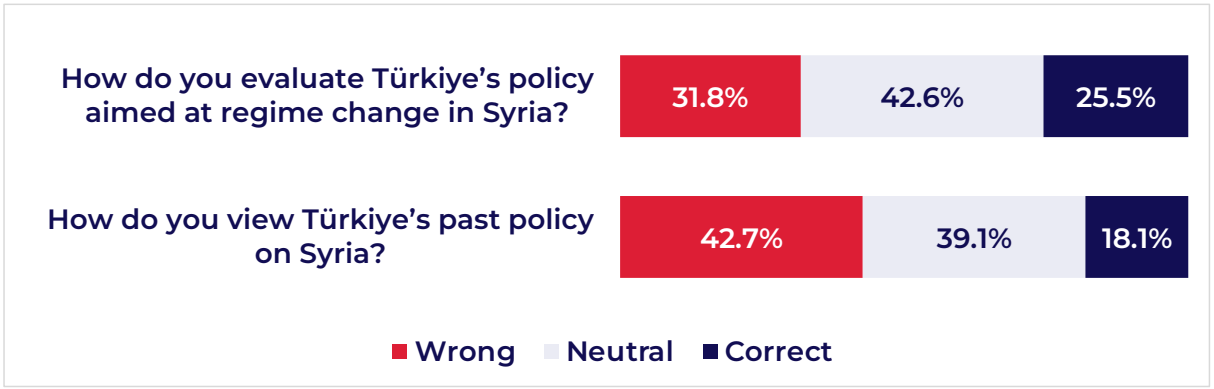


Figure 12. Syria Policy

As in the wider society, young people predominantly hold negative sentiments regarding the issue of Syrians. A large majority of young people adopt a critical stance towards Turkey's Syria policy, with a widespread perception that these policies impose a social burden domestically while also negatively affecting Turkey's position in foreign policy.

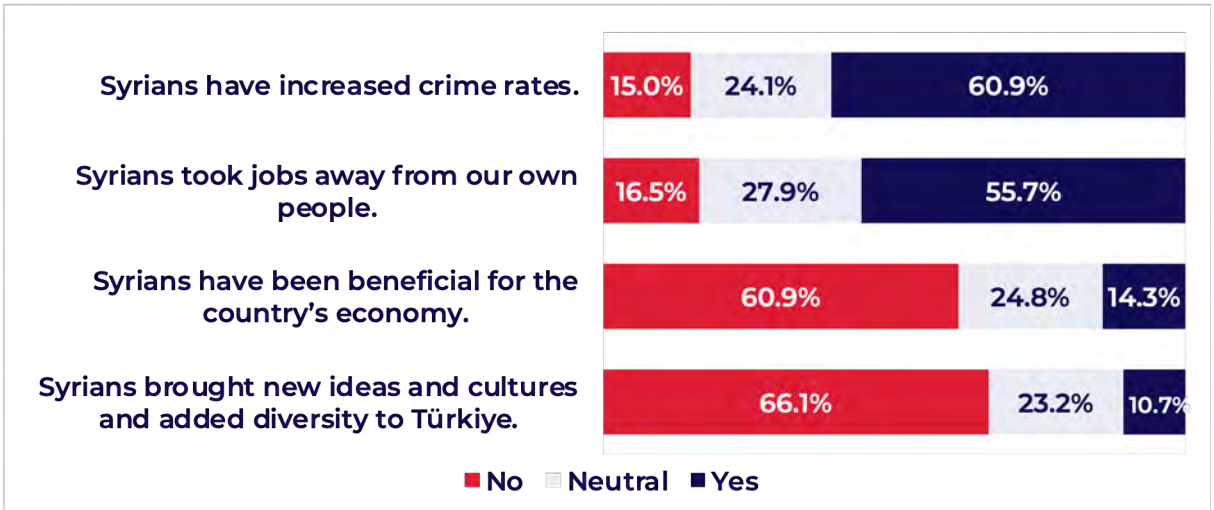


Figure 13. Discussions about Syria

The presence of Syrians as a large population in Turkey generates significant concern among young people. In this regard, populist narratives resonate strongly with youth. There is a widespread perception that Syrians are associated with higher levels of crime and violence, enjoy privileged access to services such as healthcare and education, and receive economic assistance—developments that are collectively seen as causing harm to society and the economy. In addition, Syrians are frequently described as being culturally distant from Turks, with lifestyles and everyday practices perceived as disturbing.

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

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

The Kurdish Issue

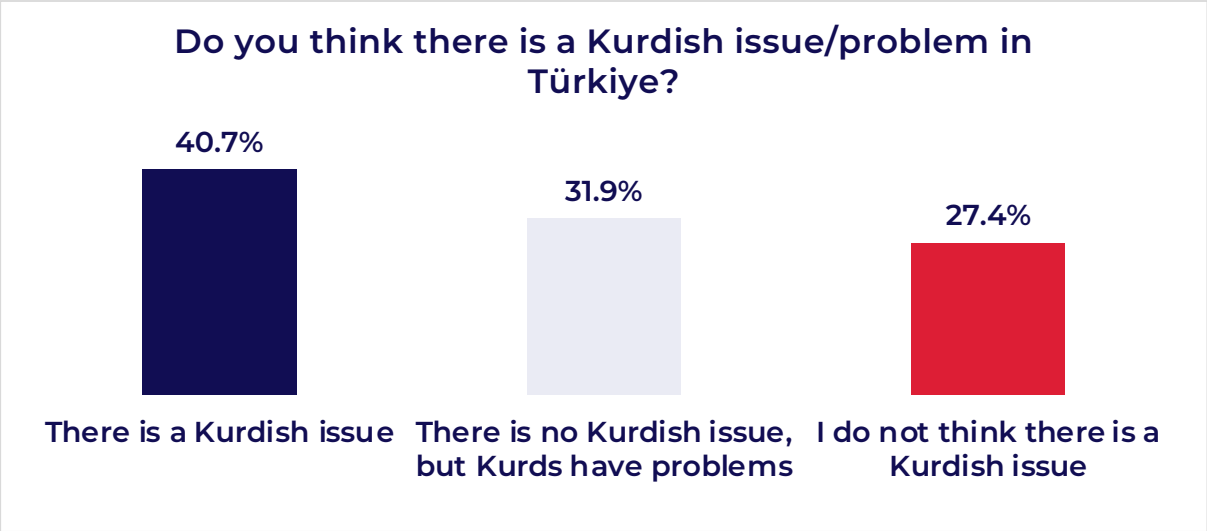


Figure 14. "Do you think there is a Kurdish problem or issue in Turkey?"

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

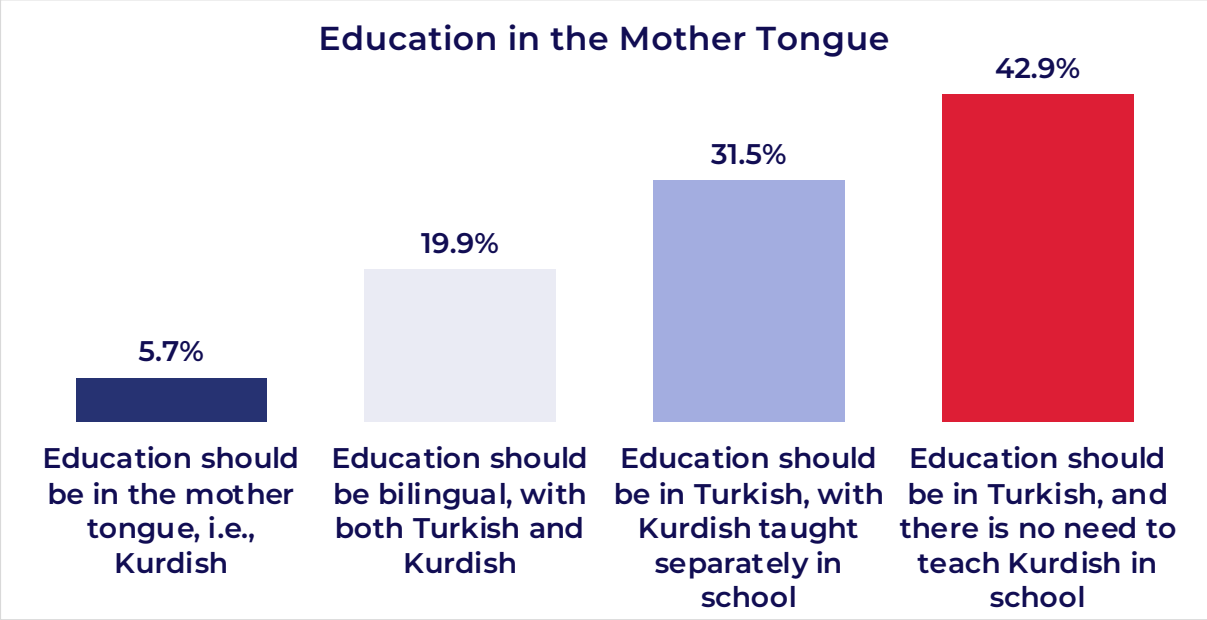


Figure 15. Education in the Mother Tongue

A significant share of young people adopt a cautious stance towards the teaching of Kurdish in education, while a more limited segment supports the right to mother-tongue education. This divergence indicates that the language issue remains a line of tension even among the younger generation. A considerable proportion of young people (43%) view the presence of Kurdish in schools, in one form or another, as risky; some more openly support the assimilation of Kurds, expressing concerns that otherwise a future generation might emerge that could "rebel again." At the same time, at least part of this oppositional group is not entirely closed to dialogue. They state that they do not object to the free use of Kurdish, but express reservations that teaching it in schools could undermine unity in education.

Full support for mother-tongue education stands at 25%. An additional 32% oppose full mother-tongue education but favour the option of teaching Kurdish as an elective subject for those who wish. Overall, the fact that a large majority of young people—57% in total—support the teaching of Kurdish in schools in some form (at least compared to the past) presents a relatively positive picture.

A similar pattern of division reappears in debates over the use of Kurdish in official services and the practice of appointing trustees (kayyum). While principled opposition to the appointment of trustees is widespread among young people, a line emerges that differentiates legitimacy on the basis of "security" considerations—manifested in differing attitudes towards DEM/municipalities in the East and CHP-run municipalities. For many young people, the boundaries of pluralism are ultimately drawn along the lines of the unitary state and national security. Even among those who support mother-tongue demands, this boundary often coexists with concerns about fragmentation and division.

Nationalist Attitudes

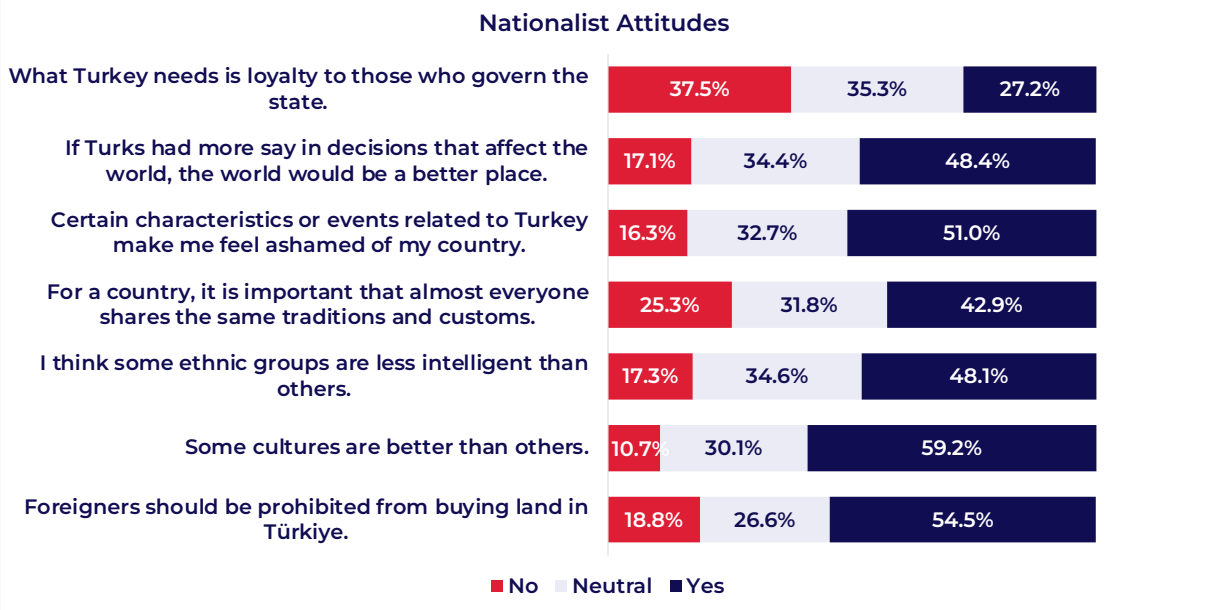


Figure 16. Nationalist Attitudes

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

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

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

We examined two critical statements to see where young people's attitudes toward pluralism and differences became more rigid: "Some ethnic groups are less intelligent than others" (ethnic prejudice) and "Everyone in a country should have the same traditions and customs" (cultural singularity). In social psychology, these two indicators represent the axes of "in-group favoritism" and "out-group threat perception" and provide insight into how open young people are to diversity.[1]

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

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

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

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

prejudice and cultural singularity. In contrast, prejudice increases among skeptical or religious youth.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Gender

Young people's approaches to issues of gender are more egalitarian compared to previous generations. A broad segment supports gender equality between women and men. However, a sizeable group continues to uphold traditional gender roles. Expressing support for women's participation in the workforce has increasingly become a social norm at the rhetorical level. Yet behind this apparent endorsement, significant limitations and conditions persist. Stereotypes such as the belief that certain jobs are unsuitable for women, that women's employment disrupts family order, or that it undermines childcare responsibilities are frequently articulated. Indeed, as many as 43% view it as inappropriate for a mother to work while the father takes on childcare responsibilities.

Homosexuality likewise remains a taboo issue: only 22% approve of the right to public demonstrations related to sexual orientation. Support for abortion as a right is similarly limited, standing at 30%.

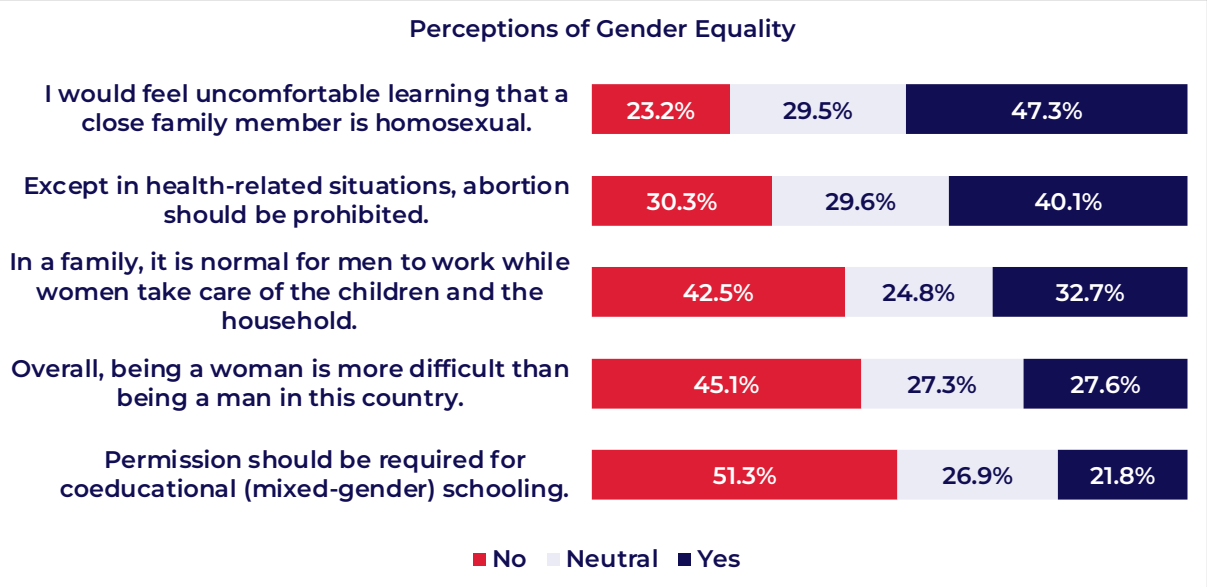


Figure 17. Perceptions of Gender Equality

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

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

nationalists constructs a pathologizing medical/moral framework using the discourse of "disease/decadence" or "a problem to be worked on."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7. IDENTITIES AND TOLERANCE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The percentage of people who say they will not marry

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

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

1. The Outermost Circle: Foreigners and Historical Others

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

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

2. Middle Ring: Ideological and Religious Red Lines

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

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

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

3. The Closest Circle: Acquaintances and Local Others

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

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

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

8. PLURALISM INDEX

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

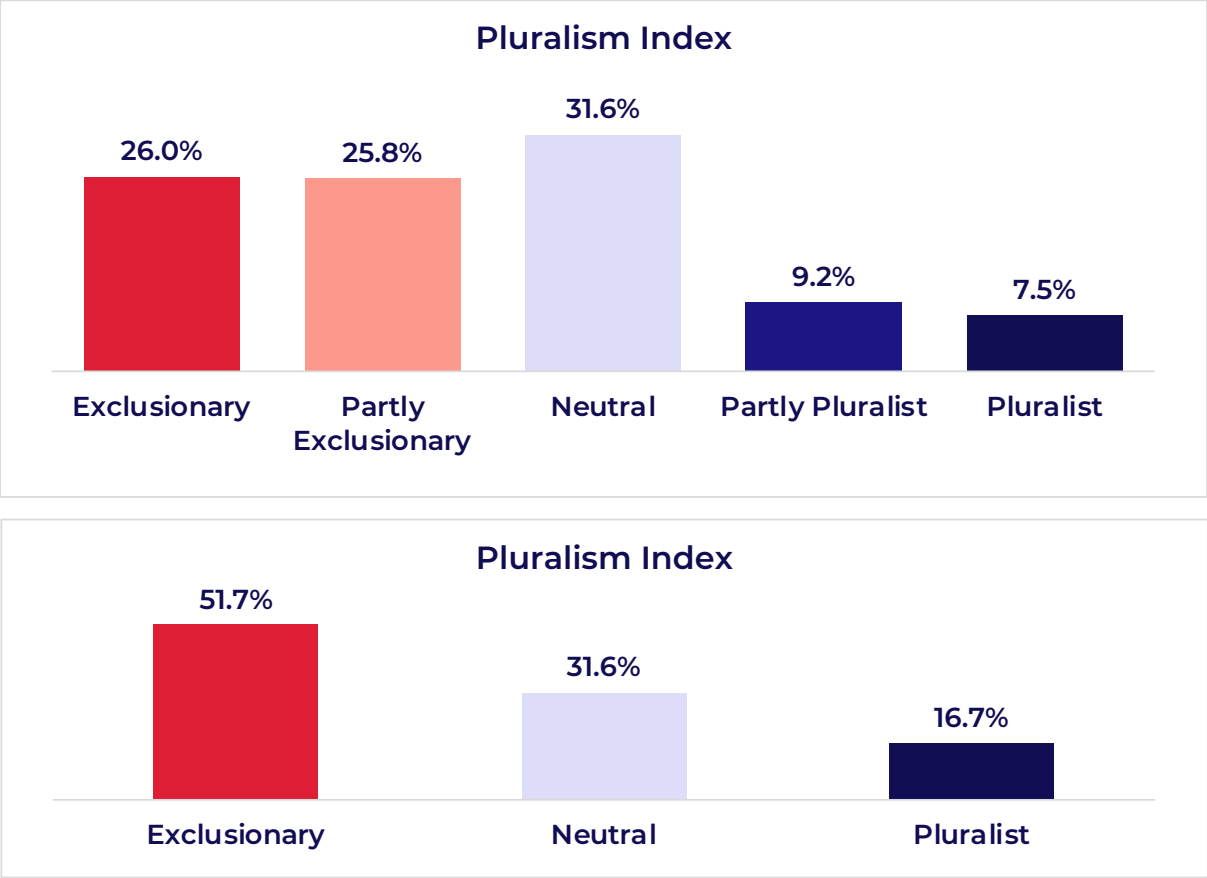


Figure 18. Pluralism Index

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

In summary:

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

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

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

There is no substantial difference between women and men in terms of pluralism tendencies: the share of those classified as inclusive stands at 16% among women and 17.3% among men. What is striking, however, is that exclusionary tendencies among women are almost as high as among men (around 52%).

As income increases, exclusionary attitudes decline, while the tendency to remain "in the middle" rises. In the high-income group, the exclusionary share falls to 40%, while the proportion of those positioned in the middle increases to 44%. The rate of inclusiveness remains relatively stable across all income groups, hovering between 16% and 18%. This pattern indicates that rising income mitigates exclusionary tendencies but does not expand pluralism. In other words, greater prosperity softens exclusion but does not automatically strengthen pluralist values.

Among those whose mother tongue is Kurdish, the rate of inclusiveness is markedly higher, at 28%. This is partly due to the inclusion of attitudes towards Kurds and mother-tongue education in the index. At the same time, it is important to note that Kurdish youth display more pluralist attitudes even on issues beyond these specific questions. Carrying an identity that articulates rights claims appears to positively shape pluralist orientations.

Among young people who voted for Erdoğan, the rate of exclusion stands at 68.1%, whereas among those who voted for Kılıçdaroğlu, pluralism rises to 23.3%. This sharp contrast demonstrates that political preferences are directly linked to pluralist values. Voting behaviour thus signals not only party choice, but also underlying value orientations.

Among young people who did not participate in the election or cast a blank vote, inclusiveness remains low at 12.2%. By contrast, among first-time voters the rate rises to 24.1%. This pattern suggests that young people voting for the first time tend to hold more pluralist perspectives, while protest-oriented electoral behaviour may be associated with more rigid positions.

Inclusiveness among young people who are uninterested in politics stands at 18.3%, compared to 17.9% among those who are politically interested. The lowest rate is observed among those with a moderate level of interest (15.3%). This finding indicates that young people with a "moderate" interest in politics are more likely to adopt exclusionary or ambivalent positions, whereas both disengagement and high levels of political interest can open space for more pluralist attitudes.

Among non-believing young people, the rate of inclusiveness is 21.1%, compared to 17.1% among those who are sceptical and 16.2% among believers. This suggests that pluralist values are somewhat stronger among non-believing youth. However, the differences are not dramatic, indicating that belief alone is not a decisive factor. Correlations are stronger with

levels of religiosity: inclusiveness rises to 32.9% among those who are not religious, while it falls to 14% among those with high levels of religiosity. This points to an inverse relationship between religiosity and pluralism.

As levels of nationalism increase, inclusiveness declines. While 26.7% of those who state that they are "not nationalist at all" fall into the inclusive category, this figure drops to 13.9% among those who identify as "extremely nationalist." This suggests that nationalism tends to produce a more exclusionary value framework.

Among young people on the left, inclusiveness stands at 26.5%, compared to just 9.5% among those on the right. Among those positioning themselves at the centre, pluralism is even lower (12.3%). This pattern indicates that young people on the left are more likely to embrace pluralist values, while the right reinforces exclusionary tendencies. In the centre, a stronger inclination towards remaining "in the middle" comes to the fore.

9. ASSESSMENT

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

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

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

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

From Agora Activism to Digital Activism

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

Not Conformist Either

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

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

Not Statist Either

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

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

Return to Ziya Gökalp

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

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

The Republic is Us

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

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

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

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

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

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

10. POLICY INSIGHTS

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

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

The Diversity of Youth

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

State Imagination

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

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

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

The EU Hope

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

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

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

Interest in Foreign Policy and the Environment

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

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

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

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

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

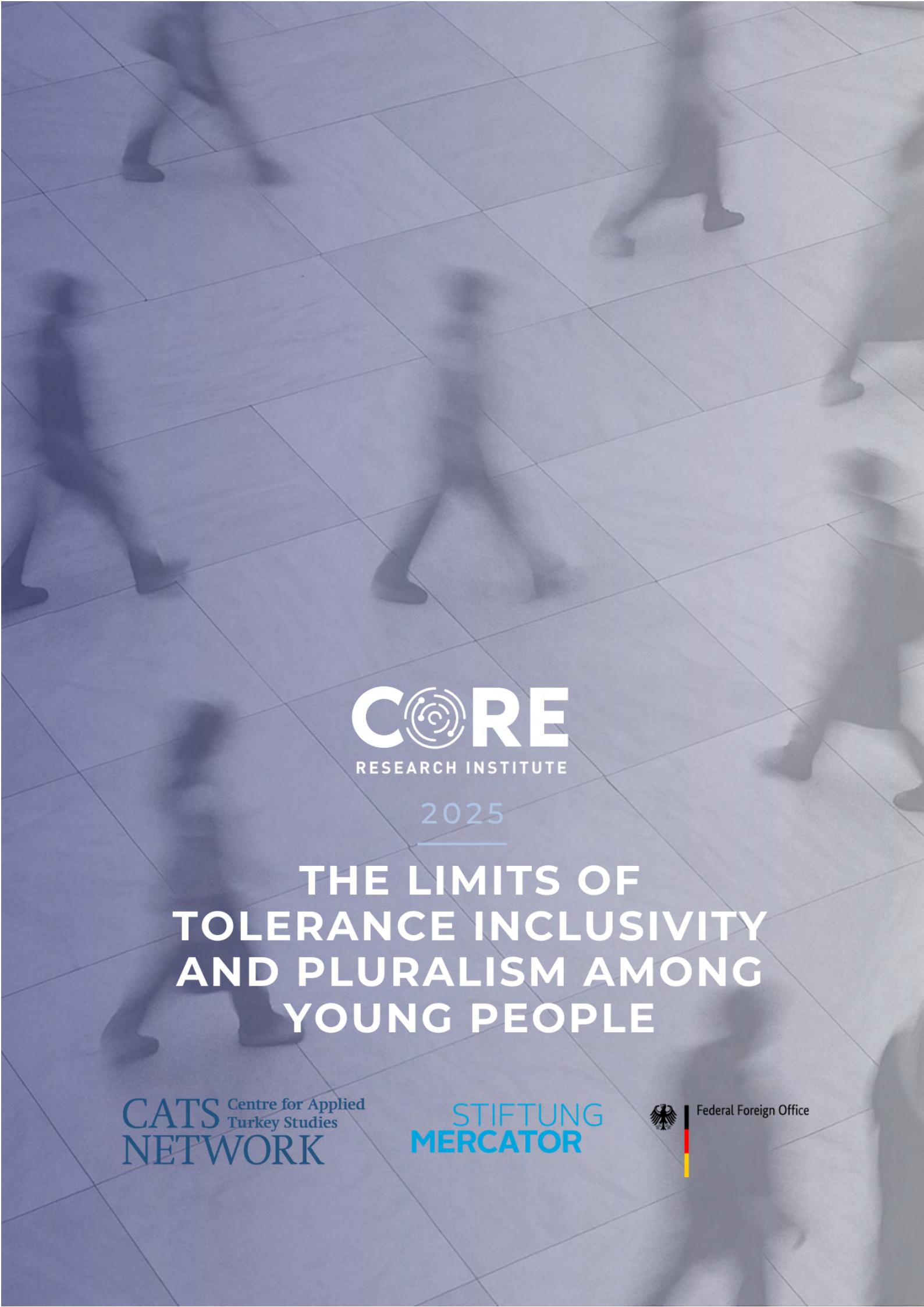
Living Together: Boundaries are loosening in the private sphere but tightening in the public sphere

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

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

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

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



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