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Araştırma Makalesi

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS THE USE OF FORCE

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Abstract

The existence of gender differences in public attitudes has long been debated and it is maintained that women and men have different attitudes towards certain policy areas. One of those areas is the use of force in foreign policy. Women are less supportive of the use of force in foreign policy than men. The reasons for these differences have been tried to be explained through the impact of the factors such as partisanship or ideology; economic marginalization; political marginalization; negative responses to war casualties; feminist consciousness; motherhood; socialization; issue salience. While public opinion surveys have been regularly conducted on foreign policy in Turkey, the gender dimension is rather understudied. In this article, I first argue that there are gender differences in public perceptions towards the use of force in Turkey and I aim to explore the reasons for these differences based on two sets of focus group discussions data gathered in 2021 and 2022.

Keywords: Foreign Policy, Public Perceptions, Gender, Turkey.

GÜÇ KULLANIMI KONUSUNDA KAMUOYU ALGILARINDAKİ TOPLUMSAL CİNSİYET FARKLILIKLARI

Öz

Kamuyu algıları konusunda toplumsal cinsiyetin bir farklılık yaratıp yaratmadığı uzun süredir tartışılmış ve kadın ve erkeklerin belirli politika alanlarında farklı algıları olduğu belirlenmiştir. Bu alanlardan biri dış politikada güç kullanımıdır. Kadınlar dış politikada güç kullanımına erkeklerden daha az destek vermektedir. Bu farklılığın nedenleri parti aidiyeti ya da ideoloji, ekonomik marjinalleşme, siyasi marjinalleşme, savaş kayıplarına verilen negatif tepkiler, feminist bilinç, annelik, sosyalleşme ve konuların önemi faktörleri çerçevesinde açıklanmaya çalışılmıştır. Türkiye’de dış politika algılarına

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yönelik kamuoyu arařtırmaları uzun süredir yapılmasına rağmen konunun toplumsal cinsiyet boyutu yeterince çalışılmamıştır. Bu makalede, Türkiye’de güç kullanımına yönelik kamuoyu algılarında toplumsal cinsiyet farklılıkları olduğu öne sürülerek, bu farklılıkların nedenleri 2021 ve 2022’de toplanmış iki odak grup tartışması verisi temel alınarak açıklanmaya çalışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Dış Politika, Kamuoyu Algıları, Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Türkiye.*

INTRODUCTION

In November 2022, I attended a meeting in Istanbul. During the meeting, two researchers shared the results of their separate public opinion surveys and when they were asked whether there was a difference between the opinions of men and women, they each answered that the differences were insignificant. It was rather surprising for me to hear those answers. For two years, I have been a part of a research project based on focus group discussions on the perceptions of foreign policy in Turkey and we found out women are more critical to military operations than men (Sayan & Şar, 2021; Sayan & Dizdarođlu, 2022). After I shared this finding with the audience, a couple of women found me to tell how much it made sense to them.

This incident led me to conduct further research on the topic and I realized that the researchers had a point. The results of public opinion surveys show men and women share similar attitudes on many issues. However, "the use of force" is not one of them. While also conceptualized as the "gender gap", the differences between men and women in political attitudes and behaviour have long been a matter of debate (Huddy et al., 2008). The earlier studies argue gender differences in public opinion on foreign policy are insignificant (Bardes & Oldendick, 1978; Maggiotto & Wittkopft, 1981; Wittkopft, 1981; Wittkopf & Maggiotto, 1983), whereas later studies argue women are less supportive of the use of force in foreign policy than men (Clements & Thomson, 2022; Fite et. al., 1990; Frankovich, 1982; Hansen et. al., 2022; Lynn, 1975; Shapiro & Mahajan, 1986; Wilcox et. al., 1996).¹ In order to explain the gender differences, the impact of several factors such as partisanship or ideology; economic marginalization; political marginalization; negative responses to war casualties; feminist consciousness; motherhood; socialization; issue salience has been explored.

The first group of factors underlined is partisanship or ideology. In the US context for example, it is argued that women support Democrats more than men and are more likely to identify as liberals; that would, in turn, lead them to support less militaristic policies (Frankovich, 1982; Hansen et. al., 2022; Wirls, 1986). Togeby (1994) argues left-wing mobilization is a factor for gender differences in Denmark. Similarly, feminist consciousness is considered a factor for less support for the use of force (Conover, 1988). According to Conover, the process of

¹ The concept of "gender" in this article does not imply a binary position but is used in accordance with the data gathered from the participants of the focus group discussions.

becoming a feminist makes women more aware of their values and express their policy preferences (Conover, 1988).

The second group of explanations focuses on the marginalization of women. In terms of economic marginalization, as women are already more disadvantaged than men economically, they may see the cost of war as a factor that contributes to their economic marginalization (Lizotte, 2017). A related explanation is the political marginalization of women. As women are less likely to receive higher levels of education and be in positions of power, they are politically marginalized from foreign policy and its decision-making process (Lizotte, 2017). That may also lead to less interest in foreign affairs, therefore having less information.

The third group of explanations is related to the value differences. The maternalistic explanation argues motherhood leads women to accommodate the values of empathy and caring (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Hartsock 1983; Ruddick, 1985). The socialization explanation claims different socialization processes of men and women cause different attitudes (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Ruddick, 1985). The casualties explanation argues that women have more negative responses such as fear or worry about the costs of war and particularly to war casualties (Bendyna et. al., 1996; Eichenberg, 2003).

The fourth group of explanations focuses on the nuances of the reasons and means of the use of force in foreign policy. According to Togeby, the salience of foreign policy issues in a country is a determinant factor for gender differences (1994). A similar approach by Einchenberg (2003) suggests that the purpose of the use of force matters for support.

On the other hand, a variety of studies argue to find little or no evidence for motherhood (Bendyna et. al., 1996; Conover & Sapiro, 1993; Fite et, al., 1990; Togeby, 1994); partisanship (Conover & Sapiro, 1993; Fite et, al., 1990); feminism (Bendyna et. al., 1996; Togeby, 1994); having less information (Togeby, 1994; Wilcox et. al., 1996); ideology (Bendyna et. al., 1996; Fite et, al., 1990); socioeconomic differences (Bendyna et. al., 1996; Fite et, al., 1990); and mixed results for socialization and feminist identity (Conover & Sapiro, 1993); having less information and ideology (Bendyna et. al., 1996).

Against this theoretical background, I analyze perceptions of women towards the use of force in Turkey's foreign policy through focus group discussions. Domestic and international conditions of states shape their choices of foreign policy tools among diplomacy, economic aid, trade relations, military power, deterrence, peacekeeping operations, sanctions, intelligence, etc. With regards to Turkey, different dimensions of militarization of its foreign policy such as military operations, establishing military bases in other states, military expenditure, and development of the military-industrial complex has become a widely debated topic (See Adar & Toygür, 2020; Kardaş, 2020; Martins et. al.,

2023; Mehmetcik & Çelik, 2022). Particularly during the last decade, Turkey conducted cross-border operations in Iraq and Syria; provided military assistance to Azerbaijan and Libya; involved in NATO and UN operations while also maintaining its military presence at several locations (Aksoy, 2021).

While research on public opinion in Turkey towards foreign policy had been regularly conducted (See Global Academy; Kıratlı, 2016; Akgün et. al., 2011; GMF, 2015; 2022), focus on the gender dimension had been limited. As an early example, in a cross-national study, Wilcox et. al. (1996) investigates the existence of gender differences in the support for the First Gulf War in Ankara in addition to the other 10 cities. Among 11 cities, Ankara and Lagos are the only cities where the authors have not found any gender differences (Wilcox et. al., 1996). They raise two possibilities; women in Muslim societies are not willing to voice their opinions on foreign policy issues or salience of foreign policy issues (Wilcox et. al., 1996, p. 79).

Based on my analysis, I argue that there are gender differences in public perceptions towards the use of force in Turkey. I make three further arguments about gender differences: first, women give more straightforward answers than men -either negative or positive-; second, men tend to have a broader perception of national security while women tend to focus more on border security; third, women give more importance to war casualties than men.

In the next parts, I first introduce the methodology I have employed; and then discuss the findings of the research.

METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, I use two sets of focus group discussions data gathered by the Istanbul Political Research Institute. In 2021, six focus group discussions with 49 participants, and in 2022, eight focus group discussions with 48 participants were held in Istanbul, Turkey. The first criterion for the distribution of the participants was their party identification. The supporters of the ruling bloc; *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party-AKP), and *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* (Nationalist Action Party-MHP); and the opposition parties of *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (Republican People's Party-CHP); *İyi Parti* (The Good Party-İYİP); *Halkların Demokratik Partisi* (People's Democratic Party-HDP); *Demokrasi ve Atılım Partisi* (Democracy and Progress Party-DEVA) were included in the research. The other criteria were gender, and age while forming the focus groups.

In total, the focus group participants consisted of 51 women and 46 men. Each focus group discussion lasted between 90-120 minutes. The same set of questions related to Turkish foreign policy was asked to the participants. The answers were analyzed through Nvivo software. The analysis in the article is based on the individual answers that participants gave to the questions "How do you

evaluate the military presence of Turkey in other countries? Do you support Turkey's cross-border operations?". Table 1 below shows the distribution of the focus group participants.

Table 1: Profiles of the Focus Group Participants

	Year	Group	Gender	Age	No of Participants
Ruling Bloc	2021	Voters of AKP (5) + MHP (3)	Women (5) + Men (3)	Below 35	8
	2021	Voters of AKP (6) + MHP (4)	Women (7) + Men (3)	Above 35	10
	2021	Voters of AKP (4) + MHP (3)	Women (4) + Men (3)	Above 35	7
	2022	Voters of AKP (4) + MHP (2)	Women (3) + Men (3)	35 and below	6
	2022	Voters of AKP (4) + MHP (2)	Women (6)	Above 35	6
	2022	Voters of AKP (4) + MHP (2)	Men (6)	Above 35	6
Opposition	2021	Voters of CHP (4) + HDP (2) + İYİP (2)	Women (2) + Men (6)	Below 35	8
	2021	Voters of CHP (6) + HDP (4)	Women (5) + Men (5)	Above 35	10
	2021	Voters of CHP (3) + İYİP (3)	Women (4) + Men (2)	Above 35	6
	2022	Voters of CHP (2) + İYİP (2) + HDP (1) + DEVA (1)	Women (3) + Men (3)	35 and below	6
	2022	Voters of CHP (2) + İYİP (2) + HDP (1) + DEVA (1)	Women (6)	Above 35	6

	2022	Voters of CHP (2) + İYİP (2) + HDP (1) + DEVA (1)	Men (6)	35 and above	6
Hybrid	2022	Voters of AKP (1) + MHP (1) + CHP (1) + İYİP (1) + HDP (1) + DEVA (1)	Women (3) + Men (3)	Above 35	6
	2022	Voters of AKP (1) + MHP (1) + CHP (1) + İYİP (1) + HDP (1) + DEVA (1)	Women (3) + Men (3)	Above 35	6
Total					97

Research on public opinion is generally done through quantitative methods. However, using qualitative methods enable researchers to ask in-depth questions and gain rich data that cannot be easily captured by quantitative methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Within the scope of this research, focus group discussions made it possible to identify different narratives and the thought processes of the participants. On the other hand, it is not possible to generalize the results of these findings to the entire population. Still, some findings are strong enough to reach several arguments that are discussed in detail in the next parts.

PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS THE USE OF FORCE

First of all, it is important to underline that the participants do not consider the use of force in foreign policy as the best option and their preference is for using other foreign policy tools. However, when the question is narrowed down to the actual military operations that Turkey has been involved in, it is possible to understand the variety of perceptions that they possess. When asked "How do you evaluate the military presence of Turkey in other countries? Do you support Turkey's cross-border operations?", five different narratives about the use of force in foreign policy have emerged during the focus group discussions:

1. If the state/government considers the use of force necessary, then it is necessary.
2. The use of force is right for the state interests but the government is doing it wrong.

3. The use of force is costly. Particularly during the current state of economic hardship, it brings more difficulties.

4. It is legitimate to use force for protecting the country, particularly for protecting the borders. Using force in non-border areas is unnecessary (such as in Afghanistan).

5. Even if there are borders, some cross-border operations are not right. Each state is responsible for its own security. Why would Turkish soldiers die in other countries, while their citizens take refuge in our country (particularly for Syria, and Iraq)? The citizens of these countries should fight their own wars.

In accordance with the results of the focus groups, while the first three narratives are shared by both women and men, the fourth and fifth are almost entirely shared by women. Among 49 men, only two of them were openly against the cross-border operations of Turkey. Whereas, among 51 women, 21 stated that they do not support the cross-border operations while 10 supported and 7 of them had conditional support. Therefore, I argue that there are gender differences about the use of force in foreign policy. Among the reasons for supporting the use of force, there are state/party/leader decisions, national security, showing strength, and economic benefits, and for not supporting there are economic costs, partisanship, war casualties, and issue salience. In the next parts, I break down each narrative.

Supporting the Use of Force

As stated above, 10 women declared their support for the use of force. For women, who support the use of force, an important factor emerges as the state/party/leader. The words "state", "party (referring to AKP)" and "Recep Tayyip Erdoğan" are often used interchangeably by these participants. These participants argue that if the state/party/leader considers the use of force as necessary or appropriate, then it is necessary or appropriate. For them, the use of force shows the strength of the country. Among these participants, party identification emerges as the most common characteristic; eight of them are AKP, one of them is MHP and one of them is DEVA supporters. That finding may point out the importance of partisanship for the support of the use of force.

"We use our votes in referenda for example, but for military matters, it is right not to ask the opinion of people and act in accordance with state interests. People criticize sending our soldiers to Syria but states make long-term plans. It shows our strength to the countries at our border. I am proud. Our need is to send soldiers. I see it positively" (37, Woman, AKP).

"It is related to the strong stance that Turkey has in its foreign policy. I think it shows our strength" (31, Woman, AKP).

"I am proud. It shows our strength. It is also an investment for further projects" (34, Woman, AKP).

“It is good because we have to clean outside to clean inside. That's why I think military operations are necessary. They are all at our borders” (28, Woman, AKP).

“I do not have much knowledge, but if our soldiers are going then, it is out of necessity. Why would a state send their children to wars otherwise? I do not know the details much, but I support” (43, Woman, AKP).

“I consider it positively. It is intimidating for the countries that are against us. Mr. Erdoğan does the operations wherever he sees necessary” (45, Woman, AKP).

Similarly, men, who straightforwardly declare their support for the use of force, are mostly AKP and MHP supporters and they underline the security needs.

“We are strong now. We go wherever we want. I like the strong stance of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. It is good that he challenges everyone” (35, Man, AKP).

“It is good to send soldiers. It is for protection” (38, Man, AKP).

“It is in our benefit to be there militarily. As Mr. Bahçeli says, when our soldiers gain sovereignty there, we will obtain their natural resources. Maybe we will settle in those places in 20-30 years” (35, Man, MHP).

However, the answers that most men give to the question of the use of force are rather vague. They tend to be less straightforward than women either for declaring their support or objection. For that reason, it is not very easy to classify their answers. Rather than providing their own preference, these participants tend to discuss the rationale behind the military operations from the lens of the state. For them, the first reason behind the military operations is the demands of NATO, the USA, etc. and the second reason is national security. The supporters of the opposition parties may raise criticisms about how the military operations are being conducted, or whether they are conducted for the government interests rather than state interests, but most of them still discuss the use of force as a national security issue.

“We are not there with our free will. It is what NATO demands. Not because of showing our strength” (23, Man, HDP).

“It is a power conflict. Esed was a friend of the President, then they had a conflict of interests. When that happened, what did we do? We wanted a strong Syria that is an ally. So, we supported the Muslim Brotherhood. They also exist in Egypt. Every state supports such groups in other states... Esed is harassing you. So, you approach the groups who are closest to you” (27, Man, İYİP).

“Turkey did not bring Syria to the border. Turkey is not the main actor there. There are two main actors; the USA and Russia. Turkey is in a dilemma about which one to choose. You are obliged because it is your border” (28, Man, İYİP).

"I think it is right but we are doing it wrong. Historically, you must use power to protect your interests. But what we do is just sending soldiers. We do not have an accompanying political power. We just send soldiers to their death" (35, Man, CHP).

"We should be everywhere that we need to be. But with good intentions. Libya was about the Mediterranean and natural gas. We opened a corridor for ourselves and sent soldiers. When it comes to Syria... Do you support Russian soldiers in Ukraine?" (50, Man, CHP).

"I think it is strategic. They act in accordance with the interests of the Turkish Republic. They want to resolve conflicts there. But also, this is how strong states act: you help them strategically and tomorrow your relations improve and your trade volume increases there" (35, Man, MHP).

When the narratives of the participants who support the use of force in foreign policy are analyzed, it is possible to make three conclusions; the ones who straightforwardly support the use of force are mostly supporters of the government bloc (AKP and MHP), therefore partisanship matters for the direct answers. However, not all of the participants provide direct answers, which brings us to the second conclusion; women tend to give more straightforward answers -either supporting or objecting- than men, and thirdly, the importance of partisanship decreases in the vague answers that men give. Even if they criticize the government, they tend to rationalize military operations as a national security issue. Therefore, partisanship plays a mixed role in that sense.

No or Conditional Support to Use of Force

Among women participants, 21 of them stated that they do not support the cross-border operations of Turkey whereas only two men gave the same answer. As can be seen from the Table 2 which shows the negative answers, war casualties, and the issue salience emerge as the most important factors; the other reasons are understood as partisanship and economic costs.

Table 2: Reasons for No Support

ID	Partisanship	Economic Costs	War Casualty	Issue Salience
P1	x	x		
P2				
P3	x		x	x
P4				x

P5				x
P7			x	x
P8			x	x
P9			x	x
P10			x	x
P13				x
P16			x	x
P17	x			
P18		x	x	
P38				x
P40			x	
P41			x	x
P42			x	x
P45	x		x	x
P46	x		x	x
P49			x	x
P50			x	x

Here are some examples from the participants about their objection to the use of force:

“Why do we help Azerbaijan or other countries? Our country comes first” (49, Woman, CHP).

"I am against our young citizens going to Libya, Afghanistan, or Syria. Why do our people die while they come here and enjoy their lives? Everyone is against this" (44, Woman, MHP).

“Syrians prefer to come here rather than fighting in their country and our youth become martyrs? What are our soldiers doing there?” (36, Woman, AKP).

“I do not want our soldiers to be there” (36, Woman, AKP).

“I do not want them to come here for the holiday while my soldiers are dying for their country. I do not support the war or anyone dying. Either from us or them but I do not want my people to pay the price” (38, Woman, CHP).

“We gain enemies but cannot produce solutions. Our soldiers are dying for no reason. It really upsets me. Why would they die? There has to be a middle way. Developing policies, talking, thinking...” (38, Woman, CHP).

“I do not support. Why do our soldiers die there? It really upsets me to give martyrs for Syria” (36, Woman, HDP).

“I do not support our sons to be martyrs. There is nothing to support there” (42, Woman, CHP).

“Our borders are drawn with *Misak-ı Milli* [National Pact]. We are only responsible for protecting our borders. As long as we protect our borders, the other places should not be our concern” (37, Woman, AKP).

“It is sufficient for our soldiers to protect our borders” (44, Woman, MHP).

“I think it is ridiculous. Everyone should protect their own country. No need to send Turkish soldiers everywhere” (45, Woman, AKP).

Seven women argued they only support the use of force under certain circumstances. Table 3 below shows the reasons for conditional support. Here again, the war casualties and issue salience are the dominant factors.

Table 3: Reasons for Conditional Support

ID	Partisanship	Economic Costs	War Casualty	Issue Salience
P19			x	x
P22			x	x
P25			x	x
P27			x	x
P32			x	x
P43			x	x

P48	x		x	x
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The quotations below demonstrate the reasoning of the participants:

“Our military existence there shows how successful we are. If they can provide their security 100%, there is no problem. However, if they cannot, I do not want it” (38, Woman, MHP).

“It is good to have soldiers in Syria, for protection. However, their men should also do their military service. Our soldiers are well-trained and they show the strength of our country. They are there to help, to protect. In the end, our President found it appropriate. So, I think it is ok. But their men should fight their wars first. If they need extra help, then maybe we can help. But not the untrained soldiers. I do not support untrained soldiers to go there, only the professional ones” (34, Woman, MHP).

“I think everyone should protect their own country. Then, we can go as a last resort. It was ok in Syria up until a point, there was a war. But now, there is no need. Their own citizens need to protect their country. Their own youth” (34, Woman, AKP).

“We need to look at the reasons for the operations. If they are against terrorism, then it is ok. The soldiers are there to protect us. But if it is for Syrian people, I will never support. It is their domestic affair. I am particularly upset about the untrained ones going to borders” (46, Woman, İYİP).

“I do not want soldiers to die. They should not cross the borders unless it is really necessary. I feel upset when they are martyred for Syria or other countries” (37, Woman, DEVA).

When the narratives are analyzed, it is understood that these participants think that if the operations are aimed to provide border security, then they perceive the use of force as legitimate. Therefore, the "issue-salience" is defined as border security. The participants who share this view consider that border security must be provided for the security of the country. In line with that argument, they tend to consider the use of force in non-border areas such as Afghanistan as unnecessary. A different dimension is related to the countries like Syria or Iraq from where Turkey hosts large numbers of refugees. Proponents of this view question why Turkish soldiers have to fight and lose their lives for another country while their citizens seek refuge in Turkey. Participants think that their own citizens should fight their own wars. "Martyrdom" is often voiced as an objection point. The responses show war casualties and issue salience are the major determinants for those who do not support or only conditionally support the cross-border operations of Turkey.

One of the theoretical explanations that try to explain gender differences is motherhood as mentioned above. Indeed, six of the participants refer to motherhood in their opposition to the use of force:

"I do not think it is good to interfere in other countries' domestic affairs. Because they organize operations at some places but our soldiers die. We hear martyr news every day. If we have to defend our country, I will go as a patriot like how women did during the Independence War. But I do not want my son to become a martyr for others. No parents would approve of that. Therefore, I do not approve of any of the policies of this government" (53, Woman, CHP).

"Why would my son, nephew, and relatives go to their countries? I supported my nephew to do paid military service. They distanced us from military service. Is it easy to raise a child? I am happy not to have a son. Raising that child, sending him to military service. And then what, hanging flags for martyrdom? Is it a good thing?" (54, Woman, İYİP).

"I used to like to say 'everything for the state'. I do not anymore. I cannot say that if my child dies because of it... We never saw flags at villas. Martyrs are always from poor families. They always send the poor to the borders. Why are they going to Syria or Libya?" (36, Woman, HDP).

However, not all of the participants who refer to motherhood are mothers, and also not all mothers agree with those statements. Some mothers do support military operations and the martyrdom of soldiers for the sake of the state interests. Therefore, it is not possible to claim actual or potential motherhood plays a role in perceptions against the use of force.

On the other hand, there are participants, both men and women, who underline the economic costs of military operations. They particularly focus on the current economic problems that they face. Still, while women directly state their objection to the use of force due to their costs; men prefer to underline economic costs but do not state a clear answer whether they support it or not.

"Whose interests? People's? Government's? Or business'? Any interest for people? No. Enrichment of rich families does not bring you any benefits" (22, Woman, HDP).

"There is a cost to military operations. And we pay for it. We spend our national income on some war that we do not know much about. It is not small amounts; it is quite large amounts. In addition to that, unemployment, economic problems, and injustices are important to be underlined. Because while they live luxuriously at the top, the rest of the people are sentenced to minimum wage. We cannot afford meat or fruits. This is a serious problem but the rulers of this country do not experience that" (43, Woman, HDP).

"They always told us in the class that we are the grandsons of Ottomans, we reached the gates of Vienna, etc. Like there will be wars every day and we will

conquer the world every day. But people do not see that they are hungry and they are impoverished every day. Wars and poverty... We will continue to be poor until we resolve this issue and continue to be armed.” (36, Man, CHP).

Although most of the participants who underline this issue are from lower-income households, not all low-income households problematize the economic costs. Hence, it is not possible to conclude that the economic marginalization thesis provides a meaningful explanation. On the other hand, all women who have not answered this question are from lower-income households. This finding may point out their economic and political marginalization but further research is needed to arrive at any conclusions.

In terms of partisanship, supporters of opposition parties are voicing their disapproval of government policies however, not all of those who do not support or give conditional support to the use of force are supporters of opposition parties.

How to Explain Gender Differences?

Therefore, the findings suggest that there are gender differences in perceptions towards the use of force; women are less supportive of use of force than men, and war casualties and issue salience are more important for women, but why? The findings of this research do not support the motherhood explanation. Partisanship and marginalization explanations bring mixed results. It seems partisanship is a factor when there is direct support but it does not make a difference for men and women. Economic and political marginalization seems to matter to a degree, particularly for the ones who have not answered but still I do not have enough evidence to suggest that it is the cause of gender differences. Within the scope of this research, no impact of education or age is found, and the feminist consciousness could not be investigated. However, three recurring issues can be interpreted as factors that support the socialization explanation.

The first one is related to the conceptualization of national security. Men tend to see use of force as a vital part of national security and most of them define national security broader than women. In accordance with this view, national security also includes supporting like-minded groups in other states, aiding them for the removal of hostile governments, benefiting from other countries' natural resources, or benefiting from preferential trade relations; and the use of force is legitimate when conducted with those aims. On the other hand, most of the women are more cautious about the purpose of the use of force or whether they are worth sacrificing the lives of soldiers. For most of the women, providing border security is sufficient.

The second one is related to how women give more straightforward answers than men. One interpretation can be that it is more acceptable for women to object to the use of force than men, particularly when they voice motherhood. On the other hand, men are expected to confirm more “militaristic” values (Altınay, 2004).

Lastly, and probably related to the previous two points, it is observed that some men refer to their own memories of compulsory military service. Most of the time those memories do not even make a meaningful contribution to the issues that are being discussed, yet they share them:

“We paid our military service by serving to commanders for 18 months. But we received training. It was not actually being a soldier though. I wish it were not like that but this is how the world is. Otherwise, we could spend the resources for other needs” (42, Man, AKP).

“I paid my military service in 2006 and lost 28 friends there. But some generals were spending the resources for their own pleasure” (35, Man, İYİP).

Therefore, it is possible that their broader understanding of national security as well as their inability or hesitation to express clear opinions are derived from the socialization that compulsory military service has brought to men (See also Altınay, 2004; contributions in Sünbülüoğlu, 2013).

CONCLUSION

The article investigates gender differences in perceptions towards the use of force in foreign policy based on two sets of focus group discussion data. The findings support existing literature about the existence of gender differences in public attitudes towards the use of force (Clements & Thomson, 2022; Fite et al., 1990; Frankovich, 1982; Hansen et al., 2022; Lynn, 1975; Shapiro & Mahajan, 1986; Wilcox et al., 1996). Although the use of force is not the first choice in foreign policy for any of the participants, there are different perceptions towards Turkey’s actual military operations. Analysis of the focus group discussions reveals the use of force is supported on the basis of state/party/leader decisions, national security, showing strength, and economic benefits. Use of force is conditionally supported or not supported on the basis of economic costs, partisanship, war casualties, and issue salience. Based on these reasons, it is possible to identify five different narratives; if the state/government considers the use of force necessary, then it is necessary; the use of force is right for the state interests but the government is doing it wrong; the use of force is costly; it is legitimate to use force for protecting the country, particularly for protecting the borders; even if there are borders, some cross-border operations are not right.

When we break down each narrative, we can observe that first, women give more straightforward answers than men about their support or objection to the use of force. Most of the men give vague answers even though they raise criticisms on the basis of their party identification or economic costs. Second, those who openly declare their support for the use of force are mostly supporters of the government bloc (AKP and MHP), therefore partisanship matters for the direct answers but gender does not. Third, men have a broader perception of national security than women. Most of the women see the use of force and sacrificing the

lives of soldiers, as unnecessary unless it is for the protection of borders. Therefore, for each case of use of force, they assess the issue-salience and they perceive issue-salience based on border security. Within the scope of this research, I have not found any evidence supporting the motherhood explanation, and the feminist consciousness explanation has not been investigated. Although I believe it is possible to interpret gender differences under the light of socialization explanation, further research is needed to make conclusive arguments.

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