

In The Shadow of Crisis: Social and Political Transformations of Covid-19

Krizin Gölgesinde: Covid-19'un Toplumsal ve Siyasal Dönüşümleri

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted Türkiye in many ways, much like it has affected the rest of the world. This study focuses on examining the effects of the pandemic on individuals. It delves into the experiences of participants during the outbreak, the societal and political implications of implemented policies, and the policies aimed at curbing the spread of Covid-19. The study conducted through a survey involving 375 students from Ardahan University reveals the negative effects of the pandemic on individuals. Situations of distancing, avoidance, and maintaining social distance during the outbreak have triggered feelings of helplessness, fear, and anxiety among individuals. Additionally, policy measures such as social isolation have led to significant changes in individuals' lifestyles. Factors such as remote work, online education, temporary closure of businesses, and the inability to participate in social activities have had negative effects on individuals. The Covid-19 pandemic has created an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear, undermining the trust among people, and profoundly affecting societal order. As the perceived threat of the pandemic diminishes, support for implemented policies has also decreased. This study contributes to our comprehensive understanding of the societal and political transformations brought about by Covid-19.

Keywords: Covid-19 Pandemic, Political Impact, Social Impact, Political Trust, Global Threat, Global Crisis.

Öz

Covid-19 Pandemisi, dünya genelinde olduğu gibi Türkiye'yi de birçok yönden etkilemiştir. Bu araştırma, pandeminin bireyler üzerindeki etkilerini incelemeye odaklanmaktadır. Katılımcıların salgın sürecindeki deneyimleri, uygulanan politikaların toplumsal ve siyasal etkileri ile Covid-19'un yayılmasını durdurmak amacıyla uygulanan politikaları ele almaktadır. Ardahan Üniversitesinde öğrenim gören 375 öğrencinin katıldığı anket yöntemiyle gerçekleştirilen bu çalışma, pandeminin bireyler üzerindeki olumsuz etkilerini açığa çıkarmaktadır. Salgın sürecinde ortaya çıkan uzaklaşma, kaçınma ve mesafeli yakınlık kurma durumları, bireylerde çaresizlik, korku ve kaygı gibi duyguları tetiklemiştir. Ayrıca, sosyal izolasyon gibi politika uygulamaları, bireylerin yaşam biçimlerinde önemli değişikliklere neden olmuştur. Uzaktan çalışma, uzaktan eğitim, iş yerlerinin kapanması, sosyal etkinliklere katılmama gibi faktörler, bireyler üzerinde olumsuz etkiler bırakmıştır. Covid-19 pandemisi, belirsizlik ve korku atmosferi oluşturarak, insanlar arasındaki güven duygusunu sarsmış ve toplumsal düzeni derinden etkilemiştir. Pandeminin insanlar üzerinde oluşturduğu tehdit algısı azaldıkça, uygulanan politikalara olan destek de azalmıştır. Bu çalışma, Covid-19'un toplumsal ve siyasal dönüşümleri üzerindeki etkilerini derinlemesine anlamamıza yardımcı olacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Covid 19 Pandemisi, Siyasal Etki, Sosyal Etki, Siyasal Güven, Küresel Tehdit, Küresel Kriz.

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Introduction

The emergence of serious cases of respiratory illness in the city of Wuhan, China, towards the end of 2019 marked the beginning of a process that has since spread worldwide, affecting societies much like in the past. This outbreak, known as COVID-19, has not only threatened human health since its onset but has also generated social, political, economic, and psychological impacts on societies. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic on March 12, 2020, given the rapid increase in case numbers, the swift spread of the virus across borders, and the rising death tolls, all contributing factors to the pandemic declaration. Efforts to combat the outbreak have included global endeavors towards prevention, immunity acquisition, and treatment of COVID-19 (Tavukçu & Eke, 2021).

Epidemics generally exhibit various characteristic features depending on the era in which they occur. Especially with the impact of globalization, infectious diseases in today's world spread rapidly compared to those in previous centuries, affecting the entire globe. This rapid spread increases the level of threat posed by diseases (Yurdakul, 2015). Due to increased mobility driven by globalization, people have spread the disease more rapidly, making the containment of the outbreak more difficult (Geyik, 2021). It is known that infectious diseases and epidemics lead to mass illness and death. Policies and practices developed against epidemics are of vital importance.

The coronavirus emerged in 2019 and rapidly evolved into a COVID-19 pandemic due to the swift increase in case numbers and its spread worldwide, causing international concern (Kazak et al., 2020). The continuous rise in cases for various reasons, significant loss of life due to the virus, and its lethal impact on almost every age group, particularly those aged 65 and above, have made the pandemic the most significant health issue of the 21st century (İnce, 2021).

The fact that COVID-19 became a global pandemic has led to its social and economic consequences being experienced on a global scale. The pandemic's threat not only to public health but also to the economic system and its functions has complicated efforts to combat the crisis and necessitated the adoption of public policies (Demir & Geyik, 2021). When it comes to a global pandemic, there are numerous other issues alongside the underlying causes and epidemiology of the disease. These include how to address the social, economic, and political crises stemming from the spread of the epidemic and the public health interventions undertaken to prevent, mitigate, and control it (Boin et al., 2016, 2018; t'Hart et al., 2001; Weible et al., 2020).

To mitigate the crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, governments have developed short, medium, and long-term public policies utilizing all administrative, financial, political, and sectoral resources to reduce the damages caused by the outbreak (Yıldız & Uzun, 2020). It is known that among the measures taken to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic in many countries are decisions that restrict social life, which have had various effects on individuals. Epidemics also initiate and propel societal changes and transformations in political, economic, and social contexts. Bieber suggests that the fear generated by the pandemic and the prejudices associated with COVID-19 are likely to be enduring and will shape the post-pandemic world. Moreover, he highlights that the pandemic will contribute to a societal atmosphere of uncertainty and fear. According to him, in addition to the psychological consequences of collective anxiety, the political and social outcomes are likely to strengthen exclusionary nationalism. Additionally,

governmental policy responses to the pandemic pose a risk of transforming fragile democracies into competitive authoritarian regimes (Bieber, 2020).

Schraff (2021) highlights the exceptional challenge posed by the Covid-19 pandemic for democratic societies, emphasizing the necessity of comprehensive and society-wide measures to control the pandemic as a common existential threat. According to him, imposing extensive restrictions on individual rights and freedoms to control the outbreak challenges citizens' trust in political institutions. Amat et al. (2020) discuss various democratic dilemmas, particularly between globalism and nationalism, public health and civil liberties, and political and technocratic governance, pointing out the uncertainties surrounding how democratic institutions can cope with the virus and to what extent, along with how citizens' preferences will evolve with the crisis and government responses, potentially shifting towards a new social and political equilibrium.

The conceptualization and structuring of pandemics constitute a complex political issue. When it comes to diseases such as COVID-19, the inherently complex nature of the problem means that initial knowledge about the best ways to address it is often insufficient. Much can be said about the illness, but potential solutions to its spread are not fully understood. In the case of a new pandemic situation, the knowledge base required to design measures is uncertain. According to Naumann et al. (2020), many policy analyses related to COVID-19 focus on the types of policies implemented to control its spread. The issue that seems important to explore, according to them, is the social and political consequences of isolation/restriction policies.

How policymakers perceive a problem and how it is presented to them by experts is crucial in the policy-making process. There are many aspects that make the COVID-19 crisis a complex political issue, such as coping with COVID-19 uncertainties: the new nature of the crisis and the importance of crafting policies to deal with it. However, one significant aspect of the COVID-19 pandemic is its novel character. Given the many unknowns about the virus, it would be appropriate to say that it differs from previous crises. This new situation means that policy responses around COVID-19 are not only characterized by unknowns but are also more contentious and highly uncertain than many better-known crises such as forest fires, earthquakes, or cholera outbreaks that typically draw from best intervention practices derived from past experiences (Capano et al., 2020).

The "first Covid-19 case in Türkiye was detected on March 11, 2020" (Sağlık Bakanlığı, 2020). Türkiye initiated its response to the pandemic from the onset of the outbreak. When evaluating the public policies implemented in Türkiye during the Covid-19 pandemic and the country's response to the outbreak, it is observed that controlled application examples and measures were taken in the initial three months of the pandemic through developed policies and measures since the onset of the outbreak in the country. During this period, Türkiye emerged as a significant actor, emphasizing international solidarity through the measures taken and implemented methods (Akgün & Çelik, 2020).

According to Mettler and Soss (2004), public policies frame the meaning and origins of societal issues by identifying target groups for government action and defining solutions. Policies convey messages about the underlying nature of a problem and shape citizens' perceptions of an issue by following specific types of solutions, as seen in examples of individual or societal responsibility issues or policy instances addressing public or private problem situations.

In an existential crisis environment, it is important for policy issues to be technically, scientifically, and expertly led. In Türkiye, the establishment of a scientific council during the pandemic has ensured the adoption of an inclusive approach in designing and implementing effective, evidence-based health policies under expert leadership. Evidence-based policy design and implementation have made evidence-based policy analysis possible and strengthened it. Türkiye has implemented health policy instruments early, rapidly, and effectively. Specifically, it has embraced evidence-based tools, including informational campaigns promoting “stay at home,” “social distancing,” and personal protection, alongside numerous significant policy instruments such as curfews, travel restrictions or bans, quarantines, and closures of schools and workplaces. Moreover, a crucial point is the framing of the COVID-19 pandemic as an existential “threat” and a “battle” against a “foe” to be fought with “solidarity” (Bakır, 2020).

Whether a government acts early, swiftly, and vigorously in any policy area depends on its capacity to mobilize and effectively implement its decisions, engaging both its administration and the society (adapted from Wu et al., 2015, cited in Capano et al., 2020). In Türkiye, the rapid deployment of the healthcare system, establishment of a scientific council, and the formation of solidarity networks at local levels across the country have been significant defense mechanisms against the effects of the crisis (Poyraz, 2019). According to Capano et al. (2020) in their study ‘Mobilizing Policy (In)Capacity to Fight COVID-19: Understanding Variations in State Responses,’ Türkiye is one of the countries that has proven reasonably successful in halting or reversing the COVID-19 pandemic. Measures related to the Covid-19 pandemic have included the suspension of flights, installation of thermal cameras at airports and border crossings, temperature checks for passengers, and quarantine measures for entering Turkish citizens. Other implemented practices during the pandemic include the closure of sea, air, and land borders to foreigners, the quarantine of Turkish citizens returning to Türkiye starting from January 31, 2020, the cessation of mutual flights to all countries, the continuation of the “ALO 184 Ministry of Health Communication Line” as the “Covid-19 Consultation Line” and applications such as the “Hayat Eve Sığar” (Life Fits Home) app (Akgün & Yalman, 2022). With the onset of the pandemic, efforts to combat Covid-19 have included meeting the need for masks and other medical devices, as well as implementing vaccine development methods, which are important indicators.

Explaining differences in the timing and nature of interventions in a crisis depends on the nature of the crisis itself. Rapid and severe crises demand more from leaders and systems than their slower-starting counterparts. The COVID-19 pandemic began as a rapidly moving, severe, transnational crisis (Capano et al., 2020).

In the process of combating the COVID-19 pandemic, the question of success or failure is debated among experts. According to Amat et al., the responses of national governments to the COVID-19 crisis in many countries have necessitated unprecedented policy interventions. The highly contagious nature of the virus, the presence of numerous asymptomatic infected individuals, and the absence of a vaccine meant that social distancing was crucial in combating the spread of the virus and preventing the collapse of the healthcare system. Social distancing can be achieved through citizens’ cooperation and voluntary compliance. However, such intervention requires a significant sacrifice, internalizing social distancing for the greater good of society. Such an intervention necessitates a high level of trust in other citizens’ behaviors - that they will adhere to instructions provided by public officials and health experts - at a time when trust in experts and governments is diminishing (Amat et al., 2020).

The societal and political impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic are multifaceted. Considering the role of social relationships on human health, the adverse effects of the pandemic are inevitable. It can be argued that the Covid-19 pandemic has negatively impacted individuals and led to various changes in societal institutions such as family, education, economy, and politics.

It is known that in the past, major epidemics have occurred, crises have arisen, and societies have been affected. Unlike past epidemics, the Covid-19 Pandemic has spread rapidly on a global scale due to increased urbanization, the widespread dissemination of technology and transportation facilities worldwide, easy individual access to these facilities, and the intensity of social mobility. Prior to globalization, health-related issues arising in any region of the world were considered local problems, whereas today, this situation has become a global issue.

The aim of this study is to examine the effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic on individuals, which, like many other countries, has affected Türkiye in various ways. The study investigates the social, political, and individual impacts of the Covid-19 Pandemic. It aims to explore participants' experiences during the pandemic and examine the social, political, and individual effects of implemented policies.

1. Method

In this study, the perspectives of young people on the COVID-19 pandemic, their experiences during the pandemic, and the political and social impacts of the policies implemented were investigated. A survey was conducted with students from Ardahan University. The total number of students is 3209. Although the sample size was calculated as 343.19, surveys were administered to 375 students within the scope of the study. The study employed a quantitative research method, utilizing a survey as the data collection technique. The survey consisted of both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Data analysis was conducted using the SPSS 20.0 software package. The reliability was measured using the Cronbach (1955) method. The Cronbach's Alpha value in this study is ,931. The sampling technique used in obtaining the sample was as follows: N =Population size; n =Sample size; t = Theoretical value based on the t-table at a specific level of significance (1.96 for a confidence interval of 0.05); p = Probability of the event to be examined occurring; q = Probability of the event to be examined not occurring; d = Margin of error. The sample size was calculated with a 95% confidence interval, and the total number of students was 3209. The sample size was determined to be 343.19. Although the sample size was calculated as 343.19, a survey was administered to 375 students within the scope of the study.

$$n = \frac{N.t^2.p.q}{d^2.(N-1)+t^2.p.q}$$

$$n = \frac{3209.(1,96)^2.(0,5).(0,5)}{(0,05)^2.(3209-1)+(1,96)^2.(0,5).(0,5)} = \frac{3081,92}{8,98} = 343,19$$

2. Findings

The findings below are presented to reveal the social, political, and individual impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1. Distribution of Participants According to Socio-Demographic Characteristics in the Study

Participant Profile		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	175	46,7
	Female	200	53,3
Age	18-25	343	91,5
	26-35	26	6,9
	36-45	6	1,6
Marital Status	Unanswered	1	,3
	Married	17	4,5
	Single	355	94,7
	Other	2	,5
Employment Status	Unanswered	3	,8
	Yes	46	12,3
	No	326	86,9
	Total	375	100,0

Of the participants, 53,3% were female and 46,7% were male. When examining the distribution of participants by age, 91,5% of the participants were in the 18-25 age range. 6,9% of the participants were in the 26-35 age range, while 1,6% were in the 36-45 age range. As observed, a significant majority of university students, comprising 91,5%, fall within the young population aged 18-25. 94,7% of the participants were single, while 4,5% were married. 0,3% of the participants did not respond to the question, and 0,5% provided other responses. 12,3% of the participants stated that they were employed, while 86,9% indicated that they were not employed in any job. 0,8% of the participants left the question unanswered.

Table 2. Participants' and their families' experience with coronavirus and the loss of relatives during the pandemic.

		Frequency	Percentage
Participants' situations of contracting Coronavirus	Unanswered	2	,5
	Yes	122	32,5
	No	251	66,9
The situation of any member of the participants' families contracting Coronavirus	Unanswered	4	1,1
	Yes	185	49,3
	No	186	49,6
The situation of participants having deceased relatives during the pandemic	Unanswered	30	8,0
	Yes	88	23,5
	No	257	68,5
	Total	375	100,0

32,5% of the participants reported contracting the Coronavirus, while 66,9% stated they had not. Among the participants, 49,3% had family members who contracted the Coronavirus, whereas 49,6% did not have any infected family members. Regarding the pandemic's impact on participants' families, 23,5% mentioned experiencing the loss of a family member due to the pandemic, while 68,5% indicated no such occurrence in their families. 6,9% of the participants preferred not to answer the question, while 1,1% left it unanswered.

Table 3. Avoidance of Social Interactions

	Frequency	Percentage
Unanswered	15	4,0
Strongly Disagree	61	16,3
Disagree	39	10,4
Undecided	53	14,1
Agree	119	31,7
Strongly Agree	88	23,5
Total	375	100,0

55.2% of the participants reported avoiding social interactions during the pandemic, while 26.7% stated that they did not experience such a situation. 4% of the participants did not respond to the question, while 14.1% remained undecided. Avoidance of social interactions or maintaining distance is among the effects of the pandemic on individuals. Measures taken to prevent the spread of the virus, such as restrictive social measures, have led to feelings of anxiety, worry, and fear among individuals. The avoidance or maintenance of distance that developed during the pandemic has also brought about feelings of helplessness, fear, and anxiety, leading to changes in individuals' lives and future.

Table 4. Decrease in Trust Among Individuals in Society

	Frequency	Percentage
Unanswered	29	7,7
Strongly Disagree	47	12,5
Disagree	40	10,7
Undecided	59	15,7
Agree	83	22,1
Strongly Agree	117	31,2
Total	375	100,0

53,3% of the participants reported a decrease in trust among individuals in society during the pandemic, while 23,2% disagreed with this notion. 15,7% of the participants remained undecided on this matter. The proportion of participants who did not respond was 7,7%. As indicated in Table 3, 55,2% of the participants stated that they avoided/distanced themselves from people during the pandemic. These two pieces of data are supportive of each other. The physical distancing behavior adopted during the pandemic seems to have transitioned from physical closeness to social distancing (avoidance of people) over time. Restrictive measures implemented to prevent the spread of the virus have had adverse effects on individuals.

Table 5. Situation of Adverse Effects on Social Relationships

	Frequency	Percentage
Unanswered	69	18,4
Strongly Disagree	33	8,8
Disagree	20	5,3
Undecided	45	12,0
Agree	79	21,1
Strongly Agree	129	34,4
Total	375	100,0

55,5% of the participants believe that social relationships were adversely affected during the pandemic, while 14,1% disagreed with this notion. 12% of the participants remained undecided on this matter. The proportion of participants who did not respond was 18,4%. Participants perceive that social relationships were negatively impacted during the pandemic. The percentage of participants who believed that social relationships were adversely affected during the pandemic is 55,5%. Participants emphasize not feeling safe and the decreased trust among individuals in society, indicating that social relationships were negatively affected during this period.

Table 6. Perception of Restricted Freedom

	Frequency	Percentage
Unanswered	28	7,5
Strongly Disagree	47	12,5
Disagree	36	9,6
Undecided	43	11,5
Agree	102	27,2
Strongly Agree	119	31,7
Total	375	100,0

The opinions regarding the perception of restricted freedom during the pandemic are presented in Table 6. 58,9% of the participants believe that their freedoms were restricted during the pandemic, while 22,1% do not share this belief. 11,5% of the participants remained undecided on this matter, and 7,5% did not respond to the question.

Travel freedom, defined as the ability of an individual to move from one place to another as desired and to move freely, is considered one of the fundamental human rights. With the pandemic, measures such as social isolation and temporary quarantines were implemented in many countries worldwide to prevent the spread of the virus. This situation has resulted in adverse effects on individuals.

Table 7. Perception of Increased Internet and Social Media Usage

	Frequency	Percentage
Unanswered	20	5,3
Strongly Disagree	29	7,7
Disagree	31	8,3
Undecided	44	11,7
Agree	93	24,8
Strongly Agree	158	42,1
Total	375	100,0

The proportion of participants who perceive an increase in internet and social media usage is 66,9%, while the proportion of those who believe that internet and social media usage has not increased is 16%. 11,7% of the participants stated that they were undecided on this matter. The proportion of participants who did not respond is 5,3%. The advancement in communication technologies, the digitization of communication tools, and the pervasive presence of the internet in all aspects of life have led to the reconstruction of the social sphere. Social media, as a space

for socialization, has led to changes in social relationships, the development of different social interaction patterns, and transformations in societal relations.

Table 8. Perception of Changes in Consumption Habits

	Frequency	Percentage
Unanswered	26	6,9
Strongly Disagree	39	10,4
Disagree	31	8,3
Undecided	59	15,7
Agree	95	25,3
Strongly Agree	125	33,3
Total	375	100,0

58,6% of the participants believe that their consumption habits changed during the pandemic, while 18,7% reported not experiencing such changes. 15,7% of the participants expressed uncertainty on this matter. The proportion of participants who did not respond is 6,9%. It is indeed a fact that individuals' consumption habits have changed during the Covid-19 pandemic, amid increased anxiety due to measures such as isolation, quarantine, and restrictions. The altered consumption habits, influenced by digital platforms and social media, represent significant factors encountered in individuals' lives during the pandemic.

Table 9. Inclination towards Products Perceived as Healthy

	Frequency	Percentage
Unanswered	27	7,2
Strongly Disagree	44	11,7
Disagree	35	9,3
Undecided	60	16,0
Agree	91	24,3
Strongly Agree	118	31,5
Total	375	100,0

55,8% of the participants reported an increased inclination towards products perceived as healthy during the pandemic, while 21% disagreed with this notion. 16% of the participants expressed uncertainty on this matter. The proportion of participants who did not respond is 7,2%. The fear and anxiety experienced during the pandemic have directed individuals towards products perceived as healthier.

Table 10. Perception of Increased Preference for Natural Products

	Frequency	Percentage
Unanswered	25	6,7
Strongly Disagree	49	13,1
Disagree	32	8,5
Undecided	62	16,5
Agree	91	24,3
Strongly Agree	116	30,9
Total	375	100,0

55,2% of the participants indicated that natural products were preferred more during the pandemic, while 21,6% disagreed with this notion. 16,5% of the participants expressed uncertainty on this matter. The proportion of participants who did not respond is 6,7%. The fear and anxiety experienced during the pandemic not only directed individuals towards products perceived as healthier but also brought attention to the increased preference for natural products.

Table 11. The State of Changes in Personal Hygiene and Cleanliness Habits

	Frequency	Percentage
Unanswered	12	3,2
Strongly Disagree	32	8,5
Disagree	22	5,9
Undecided	39	10,4
Agree	123	32,8
Strongly Agree	147	39,2
Total	375	100,0

72% of the participants stated that they paid more attention to hygiene and changed their cleanliness habits during the pandemic. 14,4% disagreed with this notion. While 10,4% of the participants expressed uncertainty, 3,2% did not respond to the question. Within the framework of policies implemented during the pandemic, the importance of hygiene has been emphasized, with experts providing educational statements highlighting the significance of hygiene through media channels such as press releases and social media. This indicates trust in experts and the internalization of policies implemented within the pandemic context.

Table 12. The Situation Regarding Free Covid-19 Testing

	Frequency	Percentage
Unanswered	36	9,6
Strongly Disagree	62	16,5
Disagree	41	10,9
Undecided	49	13,1
Agree	105	28,0
Strongly Agree	82	21,9
Total	375	100,0

49,9% of the participants stated that free Covid-19 testing was conducted, while 27,4% disagreed with this view. The proportion of undecided participants is 13,1%. The proportion of participants who did not respond is 9,6%. During the pandemic, many countries around the world experienced difficulties in accessing healthcare services, with impoverished individuals unable to access these services. In Türkiye, many complementary healthcare services are provided to citizens free of charge. During the Covid-19 pandemic, treatment processes for infected individuals were carried out. Additionally, it is known that priority was given to the disadvantaged segments of society in treatment processes and related services.

Table 13. Perceptions of the Adequacy of Efforts to Prevent the Spread of the Disease

	Frequency	Percentage
Unanswered	19	5,1
Strongly Disagree	138	36,8
Disagree	62	16,5
Undecided	87	23,2
Agree	40	10,7
Strongly Agree	29	7,7
Total	375	100,0

53,3% of the participants do not find the efforts to prevent the spread of the disease adequate, while 18,4% consider the efforts to prevent spread adequate. 23,2% of the participants expressed uncertainty on this matter, while 5,1% did not respond to the question.

Table 14. Perspectives on the Distance Learning Program

	Frequency	Percentage
Unanswered	16	4,3
Strongly Disagree	151	40,3
Disagree	82	21,9
Undecided	51	13,6
Agree	37	9,9
Strongly Agree	38	10,1
Total	375	100,0

20% of the participants hold a positive view on the distance learning program, while 62,2% hold a negative view. 13,6% of the participants expressed uncertainty on this matter, while 4,3% did not respond to the question. One of the most significant changes in the field of education during the pandemic, encompassing preschool to higher education, is the transition to distance learning. During this period, instructional activities were conducted through live online classes (Güngörer, 2020). Education is one of the most affected institutions by the Covid-19 pandemic. Education facilitates individuals' socialization from preschool to higher education. In the context of the pandemic, access to digital education platforms in distance and online education activities may have been hindered by socioeconomic factors.

Table 15. Opinions on the Stay-at-Home Order

	Frequency	Percentage
Unanswered	19	5,1
Strongly Disagree	98	26,1
Disagree	46	12,3
Undecided	70	18,7
Agree	90	24,0
Strongly Agree	52	13,9
Total	375	100,0

37,9% of the participants hold a positive view on the Stay-at-Home Order, while 38,4% hold a negative view. 17,7% of the participants expressed uncertainty on this matter, while 5,1% did not respond to the question. The measures taken to prevent the spread of the disease during the pandemic have influenced individuals' daily lives and practices within those lives. As a societal impact, the Covid-19 pandemic has affected families and individuals within families in various ways.

Table 16. Opinions Regarding the Life Fits Home Application

	Frequency	Percentage
Unanswered	23	6,1
Strongly Disagree	83	22,1
Disagree	39	10,4
Undecided	68	18,1
Agree	96	25,6
Strongly Agree	66	17,6
Total	375	100,0

43,2% of the participants hold a positive view on the Life Fits Home application, while 32,5% hold a negative view. 18,1% of the participants expressed uncertainty on this matter, while 6,1% did not respond to the question.

Table 17. Individuals' Perceptions of Access to Healthcare Services

	Frequency	Percentage
Unanswered	31	8,3
Strongly Disagree	81	21,6
Disagree	50	13,3
Undecided	65	17,3
Agree	92	24,5
Strongly Agree	56	14,9
Total	375	100,0

39,4% of the participants believe that access to healthcare services is provided to individuals, while 34,9% disagree with this view. 17,3% of the participants expressed uncertainty on this matter, while 8,3% did not respond to the question. In Türkiye, many complementary healthcare services are provided to citizens free of charge. During the Covid-19 pandemic, treatment processes for infected individuals were conducted. Additionally, it is known that priority was given to the disadvantaged segments of society in treatment processes and related services.

Table 18. Opinions on Measures Targeting Individuals Aged 65 and Over and Those Under 18

	Frequency	Percentage
Unanswered	20	5,3
Strongly Disagree	80	21,3
Disagree	46	12,3
Undecided	94	25,1
Agree	81	21,6
Strongly Agree	54	14,4
Total	375	100,0

The proportion of participants holding a positive view on measures targeting individuals aged 65 and over and those under 18 is 36%, while the proportion holding a negative view on these measures is 33,6%. 25,1% of the participants expressed uncertainty on this matter. The proportion of participants who did not respond is 5,3%. Particularly concerning the measures implemented to restrict the movement of individuals under 18 and those aged 65 and over, it can be said that this situation has led to a unique social experience within society. The attempt to confine life to homes for protection during the pandemic, and the compulsion associated with this, have deeply affected individuals.

Table 19. The Situation of Covid-19 Leading to the Exclusion of Individuals Aged 65 and Over from Society

	Frequency	Percentage
Unanswered	23	6,1
Strongly Disagree	50	13,3
Disagree	39	10,4
Undecided	81	21,6
Agree	83	22,1
Strongly Agree	99	26,4
Total	375	100,0

According to 48,5% of the participants, Covid-19 has led to the exclusion of individuals aged 65 and over from society. 23,7% of the participants disagree with this notion. 21,6% of the participants expressed uncertainty on this matter. The proportion of participants who did not respond is 6,1%. Social exclusion is a condition that occurs outside individuals' own will. It can be argued that individuals aged 65 and over have faced such a situation during the Covid-19 pandemic. While old age embodies respect in our culture, the pandemic has led to distancing, disconnection, and a weakening of shared values among individuals. Particularly, the content shared on social media platforms targeting elderly individuals supports this observation.

Table 20. Participant Perceptions of Individuals Diagnosed with Covid-19 Being Ostracized from Society During the Early Stages of the Pandemic

	Frequency	Percentage
Unanswered	22	5,9
Strongly Disagree	49	13,1
Disagree	42	11,2
Undecided	78	20,8
Agree	89	23,7
Strongly Agree	95	25,3
Total	375	100,0

44,5% of the participants expressed the belief that individuals diagnosed with Covid-19 were ostracized from society during the early stages of the pandemic, while 24,3% disagreed with this notion. 20,8% of the participants expressed uncertainty on this matter. The proportion of participants who did not respond is 5,9%.

Table 21. The Situation Regarding the Potential Impact of the Increase in Scientific Data Related to Covid-19 on Changing Perceptions of the Disease and Those Afflicted by It

	Frequency	Percentage
Unanswered	20	5,3
Strongly Disagree	41	10,9
Disagree	36	9,6
Undecided	77	20,5
Agree	106	28,3
Strongly Agree	95	25,3
Total	375	100,0

According to 53,6% of the participants, perceptions of the disease and those afflicted by Covid-19 have changed as scientific data related to Covid-19 has increased. 20,5% of the participants disagree with this notion. 20,5% of the participants are undecided on this matter. The proportion of participants who did not respond is 5,3%. As scientific data related to Covid-19 increases, perceptions of the disease and those afflicted by it have changed.

Table 22. Participant Views on the Perception that Work-from-Home/Flexible Work Arrangements are Positive Practices for Social Welfare

	Frequency	Percentage
Unanswered	24	6,4
Strongly Disagree	62	16,5
Disagree	51	13,6
Undecided	90	24,0
Agree	85	22,7
Strongly Agree	63	16,8
Total	375	100,0

Participant opinions regarding the perception that work-from-home/flexible work arrangements during the pandemic are positive practices for social welfare are presented in Table 22. In this context, the proportion of participants holding a positive view on these practices is 39,5%, while the proportion holding a negative view is 30,1%. 24% of the participants expressed uncertainty on this matter. The proportion of participants who did not respond is 6,4%.

The status of employment and individuals' ability to secure a job hold significant value in terms of sustaining life and improving quality of life. Additionally, employment status is crucial for individuals' socialization, political preferences, and political participation. During the Covid-19 pandemic, various sectors experienced challenges, leading to the halt of economic activities. Partial, remote, rotating, or flexible working hours and arrangements emerged in many sectors, resulting in active workers being away from their work environments and causing changes in societal life, such as the distribution of roles and responsibilities within families. The changes in the working life due to the pandemic, including job reductions, halting of activities in certain sectors, loss of employment for workers, increased fear of the future, and adverse effects on individuals, have occurred.

The societal and political impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic are multifaceted. Considering the role of social relationships in human health, the negative effects of the pandemic are inevitable. According to Breznau (2021), the Covid-19 pandemic has increased both real and perceived social risks in all societies, especially those related to employment and health, which could potentially undermine overall well-being. Risk perceptions create a psychological burden in individuals' lives and can lead to fear-based behaviors. Some studies suggest that disasters leave a lasting impact on individual risk perceptions, thereby increasing the likelihood of perceiving risks in the future, which in turn could heighten the probabilities of negative effects and reduce societal well-being.

Table 23. Perception of Increased Unemployment Rate

	Frequency	Percentage
Unanswered	67	17,9
Strongly Disagree	29	7,7
Disagree	26	6,9
Undecided	39	10,4
Agree	69	18,4
Strongly Agree	145	38,7
Total	375	100,0

57,1% of the participants reported that the unemployment rate increased during the pandemic, while 14,6% disagreed with this notion. 10,4% of the participants expressed uncertainty on this matter. The proportion of participants who did not respond is 17,9%.

During the pandemic, the economic contraction affected employment as it did in many other areas. The pandemic profoundly impacted the workforce, particularly national economies. The closure of non-essential businesses and the macroeconomic consequences of the global COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a sudden impact on the labor market, leading to layoffs and short-term employment. Additionally, many employers expanded opportunities for remote and flexible work arrangements, allowing employees to work from home. However, workers not involved in essential sectors, those unable to work remotely, faced an increased risk of virus

transmission (Nauman et al., 2020). The closure of businesses and layoffs by companies forced to restrict or halt their economic activities due to prolonged lockdowns represent the short-term visible impacts of the pandemic (Geyik, 2021).

Table 24. The Effectiveness of Social Assistance Programs in Improving Social Welfare

	Frequency	Percentage
Unanswered	25	6,7
Strongly Disagree	101	26,9
Disagree	54	14,4
Undecided	82	21,9
Agree	74	19,7
Strongly Agree	39	10,4
Total	375	100,0

30,3% of the participants believe that the provided social assistance programs are effective in improving social welfare, while 41,3% reported that they do not agree with this view. The proportion of participants expressing uncertainty on this matter is 21,9%. The proportion of participants who did not respond is 6,7%. Monetary and fiscal measures have been taken in many parts of the world to alleviate economic difficulties. As mentioned earlier, various sectors have faced challenges during the pandemic. In Türkiye, economic support and assistance have been provided, and fiscal measures have been taken. However, while 30,3% of the participants believe that the provided social assistance programs are effective in improving social welfare, 41,3% reported that they do not agree with this view.

Table 25. Concerns about Economic Hardships

	Frequency	Percentage
Unanswered	17	4,5
Strongly Disagree	50	13,3
Disagree	37	9,9
Undecided	57	15,2
Agree	92	24,5
Strongly Agree	122	32,5
Total	375	100,0

57% of the participants expressed concerns about economic hardships, while 23,2% stated that they did not have such concerns. 15,2% of the participants remained undecided on this matter, while 4,5% did not respond to the question. The economic slowdown due to the impact of quarantines during the pandemic may lead to social issues reaching new dimensions. One of the institutions negatively affected by the Covid-19 pandemic within society is the economy. Factors such as the closure of businesses and slowdown in exports contribute to significant problems such as unemployment and financial hardship. This situation exacerbates economic anxiety among individuals. During times of crisis, household incomes have decreased. However, during such periods, households tend to show less resistance to rising taxes and are more compliant with public policies. The Peacock-Wiseman displacement theory is relevant to this situation. It is also possible to state that the decline in economic activities during the pandemic has led to a reduction in public revenues (Geyik, 2021).

Table 26. Participant Perceptions Regarding the Increase in Inequalities Within Society

	Frequency	Percentage
Unanswered	24	6,4
Strongly Disagree	46	12,3
Disagree	33	8,8
Undecided	77	20,5
Agree	74	19,7
Strongly Agree	121	32,3
Total	375	100,0

52% of the participants reported an increase in inequalities within society during the pandemic, while 21,1% stated that they did not agree with this notion. 20,5% of the participants remained undecided on this matter. The proportion of participants who did not respond is 6,4%. In their study examining the effects of Covid-19 policies in Germany, Nauman et al. found that data generally indicate a higher rate of short-time work, transition to unpaid leave, or layoffs among individuals with lower levels of education. The likelihood of losing a job for those without tertiary education is twice as high as for those with tertiary education. Among those who continued to work and were able to work approximately the same hours in January 2020, graduates were more likely to work remotely compared to non-graduates, the majority of whom continued to work on-site. In summary, tertiary education reduces the risk of job loss while also providing the privilege of remote work. Nauman et al. (2020) also point out that the negative consequences of COVID-19 quarantine exacerbate existing social inequalities. These include a high degree of partial income loss for low-educated workers due to job loss, transition to unpaid leave, or short-time work. These workers, even if they can maintain their jobs, will face high risks of infection due to their physical presence in the workplace. These social inequalities are linked to political attitudes and policy assessments. The tendency of those with lower levels of education (exposed to social inequalities) to be more critical of lockdown policies and instead emphasize that the economic costs outweigh the social benefits is confirmed.

Existing studies on the formation of political trust highlight two important determinants. The first is that evaluations of economic performance shape political trust, while the second is that social (interpersonal) trust serves as a significant determinant of political trust. When comparing the role of social trust and economic evaluations in the formation of political trust, economic evaluations exhibit a more dynamic character (Schraff, 2021).

Table 27. Views on Which of the Situations Arising During the Covid-19 Pandemic Was More Effective

	Frequency	Percentage
Unanswered	21	5,6
To prevent the spread of the pandemic, some workplaces suspending/restricting their activities	12	3,2
Implementation of remote work to prevent the spread of the pandemic	8	2,1
Decrease in work or income due to the pandemic	21	5,6
Closure of schools and transition to remote learning	24	6,4
Inability to spend time with family and close relatives	10	2,7
Inability to socialize with friends or social circle	11	2,9
Inability to participate in social and sports activities (cinema, theater, sports, outings, etc.)	3	,8
Inability to travel	10	2,7
Remote work, remote learning, closure of workplaces, decrease in income, inability to participate in social activities, inability to travel, and inability to communicate with family and social circle	195	52,0
Remote work, remote learning, inability to participate in social activities, inability to travel	36	9,6
Inability to spend time with family, relatives, social circle, inability to participate in social activities	16	4,3
Suspension or restriction of workplace activities, decrease in work or income	8	2,1
Total	375	100,0

Participant opinions regarding the situations arising during the pandemic are presented in Table 27. 52% of the participants identified the most impactful aspects of the pandemic as remote work, remote learning, closure of workplaces, decrease in income, inability to participate in social activities, inability to travel, and inability to communicate with family and social circle. 9,6% of the participants defined the most impactful aspects as remote work, remote learning, inability to participate in social activities, and inability to travel, while 6,4% mentioned the closure of schools and transition to remote learning, and 5,6% indicated the decrease in work or income due to the pandemic. The detailed list of factors affecting participants is provided in the table above. 5,6% of the participants did not respond to the question. During the pandemic, remote work, remote learning, closure of workplaces, decrease in income, inability to participate in social activities, inability to travel, and inability to communicate with family and social circle had negative effects on individuals.

Table 28. Whether Practices During the Pandemic Led to a Change in Political Preferences

	Frequency	Percentage
Unanswered	21	5,6
Definitely caused	86	22,9
Caused	51	13,6
Undecided	105	28,0
Did not cause	58	15,5
Definitely did not cause	54	14,4
Total	375	100,0

Table 28 presents whether the practices during the pandemic led to a change in political preferences. 36,5% of the participants stated that the practices during the pandemic caused a change in their political preferences, while 29,9% indicated that these practices did not cause

any change in their political preferences. 28% of the participants expressed uncertainty on this matter, while 5,6% left the question unanswered. Public opinion influences policymaking, and policies, in turn, influence public opinion. Restriction/isolation policies have political, social, and psychological consequences. How threatened individuals feel by COVID-19 significantly shapes their attitudes and behaviors. Perceptions of threat play a crucial role in shaping attitudes and behaviors (Naumann et al., 2020).

Table 29. Compliance with Restrictions Imposed in the Fight Against the Covid-19 Pandemic

	Frequency	Percentage
Unanswered	68	18,1
I fully complied with all imposed restrictions.	178	47,5
It cannot be said that I fully complied with the restrictions (mask, social distancing, etc.).	48	12,8
I initially complied with the restrictions, but later stopped complying.	63	16,8
I did not comply with any of the restrictions.	11	2,9
It cannot be said that I fully complied with the restrictions; I complied initially but later stopped.	7	1,9
Total	375	100,0

47,5% of the participants stated that they fully complied with all imposed restrictions, while 16,8% indicated that they initially complied with the restrictions but later stopped doing so. Additionally, 12,8% reported that they did not fully comply with the restrictions, and 2,9% stated that they did not comply with any of the imposed restrictions. Furthermore, 18,1% of the participants did not respond to the question. According to Mettler and Soss (2004), policy-based sources can have very different effects and reactions depending on individual and group characteristics. In studies examining Covid-19 policies in Germany, such as those conducted by Naumann et al. (2020), it is emphasized that during the first weeks of quarantine, most policies received tremendous support, with over 90% of the population supporting the closure of public institutions like schools and universities, border closures, and the ban on public gatherings of more than a hundred participants. Quarantine/isolation and stay-at-home measures were also widely supported. While some were more critical of measures such as the closure of public transport and the tracking of infected individuals' cell phones without permission, approximately one-third still supported such policies. Over time, as awareness of the economic costs of restrictions increased alongside decreasing case numbers, support for all policies steadily declined. The sharpest decline was observed in support for the closure of public institutions, dropping from around 95% in the first week to about 40% in early May. Stay-at-home orders were equally subject to criticism, with slightly less than 10% of the population supporting them in May. Other measures, including the ban on international travel and gatherings of more than a hundred people, also lost support. If threat perceptions are very low, individuals may not support or strictly adhere to closure policies. The steady decrease in threat perceptions and perceived risk may explain why public support for and overall positive evaluations of the benefits of closure policies gradually diminished over time. The more threatened individuals feel, the higher their level of support for closure policies, and the less positive their overall evaluations of the benefits of such policies.

3. Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has elicited varied responses in the realms of social interactions, political frameworks, and economic structures across societies. Its impacts on societal and political landscapes are intricate and manifold. This study endeavors to analyze the repercussions of the pandemic on social, political, and individual dimensions, recognizing its pervasive influence akin to global trends. It seeks to delve into individuals' experiences amidst the pandemic, assess the societal and political ramifications of enacted measures, and provide an overview of strategies aimed at mitigating COVID-19 transmission. Within this context, the pandemic has engendered adverse effects on individuals, characterized by practices like distancing, avoidance, or cautious behavior. These responses have elicited feelings of vulnerability, fear, and anxiety, leading to shifts in individuals' lifestyles and aspirations. Amidst the pandemic, life experiences have been marked by heightened insecurity and unpredictability, with a paramount emphasis on security amid the outbreak.

Throughout the pandemic, the practice of maintaining physical distance has transitioned into what is now recognized as social distancing, involving a deliberate effort to keep a distance from others. The implementation of restrictive measures aimed at curbing virus transmission has adversely affected individuals. 55,5% of participants note negative impacts on social relationships, highlighting a perceived erosion of trust and heightened feelings of insecurity within societal interactions.

During the initial phases of the pandemic, 44,5% of participants perceive individuals with COVID-19 to have been stigmatized, yet as scientific knowledge about the virus advanced, attitudes towards the disease and infected individuals shifted (53,6%). The challenging environment induced by the pandemic has evoked sentiments of isolation, internal strife, fear, and anxiety among individuals.

It is widely acknowledged that public sentiment influences policy formulation, while policies in turn shape public perception. The imposition of restrictive measures carries political, social, and psychological implications. The degree to which individuals perceive the threat posed by COVID-19 influences their outlook and conduct. Recent research suggests that anxiety and the pursuit of security influence political assessments, particularly when individuals are deeply affected by the severity of the pandemic. Contemporary studies on the establishment of political trust underscore two pivotal factors. Firstly, assessments of economic performance impact political trust, while secondly, interpersonal trust holds significant sway over political confidence. Comparatively, economic evaluations exhibit a more dynamic role in shaping political trust when juxtaposed with the influence of social trust.

Amidst the pandemic, efforts to mitigate virus transmission have precipitated shifts in both familial routines and occupational landscapes, notably through the implementation of remote work arrangements. Consequently, there has been a restructuring of roles and duties within households from this standpoint.

In tandem with endeavors to curb viral transmission, numerous countries worldwide have enacted measures such as social isolation and temporary quarantines. These interventions have engendered adverse consequences for individuals, notably heightened levels of anxiety and stress, which have manifested as apprehensions regarding mortality, future uncertainties, and loss of familial connections. The closure of borders, shifts in interpersonal, societal, and global interactions, and disruptions to transportation networks have fostered sentiments of

isolation and eroded trust. This situation, marked by curtailed personal liberties, has cultivated a climate characterized by pervasive fear and anxiety.

The progression of communication technologies and the ubiquitous integration of the internet into various facets of our existence have prompted a reconfiguration of the social landscape. Social dynamics are evolving alongside the rise of social media platforms as hubs for social engagement, fostering the emergence of novel interaction patterns and altering societal relations. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, measures like isolation, quarantine, and restrictions have amplified levels of anxiety, prompting individuals to increasingly rely on the internet and social media platforms to sustain their social connections, surpassing pre-pandemic usage levels.

It is evident that individuals' consumption patterns have undergone transformation during the COVID-19 pandemic. These shifts in consumption habits, influenced by digital platforms and social media, represent significant facets of individuals' experiences during this period. Among the observed changes are a notable inclination towards products perceived as healthier (55,8%), a preference for natural items (55,2%). The prevailing state of fear and anxiety has prompted individuals to gravitate towards healthier options and natural products, thereby impacting their eating and drinking behaviors. Moreover, a substantial 72% of participants reported heightened attention to hygiene practices during the pandemic, resulting in modifications to their cleaning routines. Within the context of pandemic-related policies, emphasis on hygiene has been underscored, with experts disseminating educational content through various media channels, including press, broadcasting, and social media, indicative of public trust in expert guidance.

One of the sectors profoundly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic is education, which plays a pivotal role in fostering individuals' socialization from early childhood through higher education. Throughout the pandemic, the transition to remote and online educational modalities may have encountered barriers stemming from socioeconomic disparities in accessing digital learning platforms. A notable 62,2% of participants expressed dissatisfaction with the efficacy of remote education implementation.

Amid the pandemic, precautionary measures were enacted, encouraging individuals to remain at home unless essential, aimed at curbing disease transmission. This societal response has reverberated throughout families, impacting individuals of all ages in various ways. While 37,9% of participants perceived the stay-at-home measures positively, 43,2% expressed favorability towards the "Hayat Eve Sığar" (Life Fits Home) application. Furthermore, distinct social dynamics emerged concerning the confinement of individuals under 18 and over 65, altering societal interactions. The imposition of home confinement measures has profoundly influenced individuals, with 48,5% of participants acknowledging the exclusion of those aged 65 and over from societal engagements. Social exclusion, beyond individuals' control, has affected older adults during the pandemic, leading to a sense of distancing, disconnection, and a weakening of shared values. The dissemination of targeted social media posts further underscores this phenomenon, accentuating the challenges faced by elderly individuals amidst the pandemic.

Employment status and job opportunities are paramount in enhancing individuals' quality of life and fostering social integration. However, the employment landscape significantly influences social interactions. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, sectors faced substantial challenges, with economic activities grinding to a halt in many instances. This prompted the

emergence of alternative working arrangements such as partial, remote, rotational, or flexible schedules, resulting in workers being distanced from their traditional work environments and altering familial roles and responsibilities. These shifts in the work environment, coupled with job losses and disruptions in various sectors, exacerbated fears about the future and inflicted adverse effects on individuals. A notable 57,1% of participants observed an uptick in unemployment rates during the pandemic. Measures such as social isolation, closures, and curfews, implemented to curb virus transmission, had detrimental economic ramifications. To alleviate financial hardships, economic support and assistance were extended to individuals facing workplace closures, layoffs, or income reductions, aiming to sustain livelihoods and mitigate adverse financial consequences.

During the pandemic, 52% of participants cited remote work, remote learning, workplace closures, income reduction, inability to engage in social activities, travel restrictions, and limitations in communicating with family and friends as the most significant impacts on their lives. These circumstances, including remote work, remote learning, workplace closures, income loss, social isolation, travel restrictions, and communication barriers, have collectively imposed adverse effects on individuals amidst the pandemic.

Among the participants, 47,5% reported full compliance with all pandemic-related restrictions. Conversely, 16,8% initially adhered to the restrictions but later ceased compliance, while 12,8% did not fully comply, and 2,9% did not comply at all. The COVID-19 pandemic has become a worldwide crisis, instilling uncertainty and fear while eroding trust in both interpersonal relationships and institutions. It has sparked introspection regarding societal values, significantly influencing social dynamics.

As the perceived threat of the pandemic wanes, there has been a decline in support for implemented policies.

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