Evaluation of the Relation between Democracy and Political Participation Over Türkiye

Demokrasi ile Siyasal Katılım İlişkisinin Türkiye Üzerinden Değerlendirilmesi

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ABSTRACT

Political participation is one of the most defining features of democratic practices that date back to ancient Greece. In this way, people can both express their demands and expectations and have a say in the administration through political participation. However, political participation is not always at the desired level and may encounter some problems. Although these problems vary from country to country, they may have different reasons such as population structure, gender view, and management approaches. With the change in the understanding of democracy, the forms of political participation have also differed. In this study, the relation between democracy and political participation is examined. A literature review was conducted in the study. In the study, how the military coup in Turkey in the 1980s affected political participation and the obstacles to political participation and democracy in Turkey in the 1980s were examined. After the military coup, political participation was blocked and efforts were made to open ways for political participation with the transition to democracy. It was concluded.

Keywords: Democracy, Political Participation, Political Culture, Türkiye.

ÖZ

Tarihi Antik Yunan'a kadar giden demokrasi uygulamalarının en belirleyici özelliklerinden birisini siyasal katılım oluşturmaktadır. Vatandaşlar siyasal katılım yoluyla hem talep ve beklentilerini dile getirmekte hem de yönetimde söz sahibi olmaktadır. Ancak siyasal katılım her zaman istenilen düzeyde olmamakta ve bazı sorunlarla karşılaşabilmektedir. Bu sorunlar her ne kadar ülkeden ülkeye farklılık gösterse de nüfusun yapısı, cinsiyete bakış, yönetim anlayışları gibi birçok farklı gerekçesi olabilmektedir. Demokrasi anlayışındaki değişimle birlikte siyasal katılım şekilleri de değişime uğramıştır. Bu çalışmada demokrasi ve siyasal katılım ilişkisi irdelenmiştir. Çalışmada literatür taraması yapılmıştır. Çalışmada Türkiye'de 1980'li yıllarda yaşanan askeri darbenin siyasal katılımı nasıl etkilediği ve Türkiye'de 1980'li yıllarda yaşanan siyasal katılım ve demokrasi önündeki engeller incelenmiş olup askeri darbe sonrasında siyasal katılımın önünün kesildiği, demokrasiye geçişle birlikte siyasal katılım yollarının açılması yönünde mücadele edildiği sonucuna varılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Demokrasi, Siyasal Katılım, Siyasal Kültür, Türkiye.

Introduction

Although the concept of political participation, that is closely related to democracy, has been defined in different ways from past to present, there has never been a period in which these two concepts were not related. In direct democracy and representative democracy, political participation was given importance and individuals took part in political life. However, this political participation and its processes were not the same in every period and were affected by various factors. The special situations of the countries also influenced political participation. For example, the military coups in Turkey prevented the institutionalization of democracy and became a serious obstacle to political sharing.

Although the phenomenon of political participation dates back to the times when the ruler/governed distinction emerged, it has become indispensable in today's world where politics is more prominent (Arı, 1993, p. 4). Rulers have used different methods over the centuries to ensure their legitimacy (Aydın, 2019, p. 2121). One of these ways is political participation.

Political participation has undergone significant changes over time. While it took place in the form of direct participation of citizens in assemblies and meetings in ancient Greece, it is seen that participation is achieved through representative democracy in modern democracies. Representative democracy includes a competitive, free, and fair order within itself (Açar, 2020, p. 138). Representative democracy has some dead ends. Significant differences may arise between citizens' expectations from the political institution and the decisions taken. The resulting incompatibility may cause society's negative view of the political institution and dissatisfaction with the decisions taken (Ünalmış, 2019, p. 332).

The understanding of democracy has changed significantly, especially in the last hundred years. People's influence on government structures was practiced through elections from the 19th century to the mid-20th century (Eriş and Akıncı, 2019, p. 36). In the late 19th century, individuals' desire to make decisions and participate in he ruling system. Icreased due to the problems arising in representative democracy practices (Alabaş, 2022, p. 2). Since the second half of the 20th century, it has been thought that "democracy should be democratized" (Eriş and Akıncı, 2019, p. 36). The involvement of the public in decision-making processes is one of the most important concrete indicators of democratization. In political participation processes,

voters are affected by various psychological, and political factors, especially the socioeconomics ones. It is also affected by factors (Özdemir, 2019, p. 253, 256). Restrictions imposed by political institutions due to their reluctance to include individuals in political life affect political participation processes. In other words, it causes blocks to political participation paths.

Political participation has undergone a serious transformation over time. While in the past political participation was limited only to voting, today it is possible to participate in politics in many different ways. Especially developing communication channels make it easy for people to access political participation. Political participation, which in the past showed itself only in the form of voting, might now also be seen as participating in a municipality's survey (Eriş and Akıncı, 2019, p. 36). Municipalities, sharing their activity reports and being accountable to citizens about their activities paves the way for citizens to express their expectations and wishes more easily. In this way, citizens are encouraged to participate in politics.

The aim of this study is to examine the relation between democracy and political participation and to identify the political participation problems that Turkey faced in the 1980s. The study consists of three parts. The first part of the study focused on the concept of democracy. In the second part of the study, political participation, factors affecting political participation and problems encountered in political participation are discussed. In the last part of the study, political participation in Turkey in the 1980s is criticized.

1. Democracy

Democracy is the method that keeps people with different thoughts and lifestyles together (Akıncı, 2011, p. 24). When we look at societies, we can see that people with different thoughts, beliefs, and lifestyles have different perspectives on elections and political participation, and these differences can be reflected in political administration. At this point, it is an undeniable fact that democracy is an important factor in keeping all these people together.

There are different definitions of democracy. As Schmidt (2001, p. 13) states, the concept of democracy, which dates back to ancient Greece, emerged from the combination of the words "demos" (people) and "kratos" (sovereignty). The concept of democracy can be defined as the rule of the majority of the people. Alabaş (2022, p. 4) defines democracy as citizens exercising their ruling rights. Although

the way how sovereignty is used varies, democracy can be defined as the self-government of the people. Fuller (1996, p. 10) sees democracy as an extraordinary form of government.

Robert Dahl (2001, p. 9) thinks that for democracy can emerge in different geographies when the conditions are suitable. The idea of democracy did not disappear completely after the collapse of the Greek City-states. The re-emergence of democracy was possible with the new intellectual structure that emerged in the New Age.

Although direct democracy was implemented in ancient Greece, with the changes over time, there was a transition from direct democracy to representative democracy (Eriş and Akıncı, 2019, p. 50). In ancient Greece, the geographical features and population of the polis "city" were suitable for direct democracy (Akıncı and Koyuncu, 2023, p. 3). The rapid increase in population made the applicability of direct democracy impossible and there was a transition from direct democracy to representative democracy (Eriş and Akıncı, 2019, p. 50).

In different periods of history, philosophers did not adopt an attitude so close to democracy. Scholars such as Plato and Aristotle did not think that democracy was good. Although Aristotle has a more moderate approach to democracy than Plato, both of them were against the idea of people having equal rights (Akıncı and Koyuncu, 2023, p. 6). The negative meaning attributed to democracy has changed over time. Especially since the end of the Cold War, the concept of democracy has been given a positive meaning (Akıncı, 2015, p. 41). Today, some liberals, including F. A. Hayek, sees democracy as a means of protecting individual freedoms and internal peace (Mouffe, 2002, p. 15).

In the understanding of democracy based on the principle of equality, direct or representative democracy is a necessity for the administration to be legitimate (Akıncı, 2011, p. 24). The main determining feature here is that in democracies, people determine the rules of administration and elect the administrators (Karaçor, 2009, p. 123).

There is also a relationship between democracy and political stability and development. As stated in Akıncı (2015, p. 45); "*It can be said that there is a mutual interaction between democracy and development. When there is a stable political structure in a country, on the one hand, there will be rapid development in that country, and on the other hand, further steps will be taken in the context of democracy and human rights. Stability will ensure development, and development will ensure the establishment of democracy.*"

Situations such as the danger of patronage relations are among the problems faced by democracy. The reason for this is that when democracy is mentioned, the first thing that we recognize is the election (Aydın, 2019, p. 2131-2132). Elections are one of the complementary elements of democracy (Karaçor, 2009, p. 124).

Democracy may face some problems. Situations such as patronage relations or the danger of recruitment fraud are among the problems faced by democracy. This situation is generally seen in countries that are not democratically developed. However, problems such as "reluctance towards politics" may also occur in democratically developed countries (Aydın, 2019, p. 2132).

Political parties are political organizations formed Under a certain certain program that can seize power through elections in a democratic environment or use the powers that the government has. It is important for political representation that political parties organize without obstacles and enter into a free power race (Aliefendioğlu, 1999, p. 96). It is important for political parties to organize political campaigns so that they can influence their citizens in elections (Güven, 2017, p. 176). Political campaigns only gain meaning through political participation.

2. Political Participation

While it is possible to explain the concept of political participation in a narrow sense as voting, it is possible to define it in a broad sense as passively following political issues and participating in political issues from every point. Individuals are under the influence of some factors in political participation in a broad or narrow sense (Özdemir, 2019, p. 253-254).

Taşdelen defines the concept of political participation as "citizens being active in political life and effective in the decision-making process. It also means having knowledge at local and national levels, developing attitudes, and engaging in political behavior" (Taşdelen, 2011, p. 166 cited in Sarışahin, 2018, p. 4).

Many points, such as people making decisions, playing an active role in the decisions taken, and guiding them, fall within the scope of political participation (Eriş and Akıncı, 2019, p. 35). Karaoğlu (2009, p. 18) express the scope of political participation as follows;

"*In the theory of liberal democracy, political participation includes elements such as the right to vote and to be elected,*

getting authority in local governments, freedom of expression and association, and human rights, enriching these with effective rights. Besides, it is also essential to establish a pluralistic understanding of politics and grant freedom of expression to different identities."

As can be understood from this definition, political participation gives people with different identities and thoughts various rights such as being able to express their thoughts freely, protecting of human rights, and being authorized in general and local governments through political participation.

The form of participation made through legally accepted methods is ordinary participation (Arı, 1993, p. 5). The legitimacy of political authority is strengthened through ordinary political participation. Ordinary political participation includes many situations such as voting and contacting politicians (Sarışahin, 2015, p. 39). Illegal participation involves going against the system and not following the rules. (Özdemir, 2019, p. 253).

There are many ways to participate in politics. With the development of technology, while the act of voting was included in the classical understanding of democracy, a transition was made to the understanding of participatory democracy. In the classical understanding of democracy, citizens would elect the people who would govern them through regular elections. In participatory democracy, citizens take part as actors in the process of communicating their wishes and needs. (Eser and Sarışahin, 2019, p. 53). Political participation allows citizens to protect their interests by electing representatives from among themselves. In a democratic environment, managers must receive the support of the governed (Güven, 2017, p. 176).

The table 1 shows the participation rates in general elections in Turkey between 1950 and 2018. When the table is examined, it is seen that there are differences in participation rates based on the data by year. From time to time, there have been some obstacles to participation in elections, which is the most fundamental value of political participation. As can be seen, the participation rate in the elections increased significantly after the 1980 coup.

The table 2 shows voter distribution by year. The number of domestic voters is increasing every year. This is an indication that there is interest in political participation. The highest number of domestic voters was in 2023. When the numbers of voters abroad were examined by year, it was determined that there was no significant change. When domestic and

international voters are examined in total, it is determined that there is a continuous increase, but it is possible to state that the year in which the total is highest is 2023.

Table 1

Participation Rates in General Elections in Turkey (1950-2018)

Years	Participation Rates
1950	89.35
1954	88.63
1957	76.68
1961	81.41
1965	71.36
1969	64.34
1973	66.81
1977	72.41
1983	92.36
1987	93.38
1991	83.91
1995	85.2
1999	87.19
2002	79.14
2007	84.25
2011	83.16
2015	83.92
2015	85.23
2018	86.24

Source: (https://www.verikaynagi.com/grafik/turkiyede-genel-secimlere-katilim-oranlari/).

Table 2

Distribution of Voter Numbers by Year (2014-2023)

Years	Domestic Voters	Overseas Voters	Total Voters
2014	52.894.115	2.798.726	55.692.841
2015 June	53.741.838	2.866.979	56.608.817
2015 November	54.049.940	2.899.979	56.949.009
2017	55.313.222	2.972.676	58.291.898
2018	56.322.632	3.044.837	59.367.469
2023	60.721.745	3.423.759	64.145.504

Source:(https://www.ysk.gov.tr/doc/dosyalar/docs/14Mayis2023CBSecimIstatistik.pdf page: 3).

It is possible to understand how interested citizens are in democratic processes from their political participation (Gürses, 2015, p. 56). Many factors such as age, gender, and education affect political participation (Eser and Sarışahin, 2016, p. 38). Education increases the desire to participate in political life. Some variables such as profession, income, and education affect political participation (Sarışahin, 2015, p. 19-20). Individuals determine their political attitudes and behaviors by being influenced by the society they live in (family, school environment, legal regulations, religion, etc.). (Yolçu, 2017, p. 41).

The problem of political participation manifested itself with representative democracies. While citizens provide political participation without any intermediary in direct democracies, they have started to use intermediaries in representative democracies (Eriş and Akıncı, 2019, p. 51). Since it is impossible for the entire public to make direct decisions in political processes, non-governmental organizations have become intermediaries between the administration and the public regarding political participation (Ünalmış, 2019, p. 341).

Decisions made by political elites determine who and how much will benefit from public facilities. Not every segment of society can benefit from social assistance at the same rate. In this process, so many factors such as the under-representation of women, inequalities, and lack of solutions to problems lead to inadequacies in the representation of women (Gökçimen, 2008, p. 54). A lot of parameters, such as low female representation in parliaments and more centralized local government regulations, negatively affect democracy and participation (Eriş and Akıncı, 2019, p. 51).

3. Political Participation In Turkey

Even after the transition to multi-party life in Turkey, the lack of institutionalization of democracy negatively affected political life. Many thoughts, such as the lack of tolerance towards the opposition and the fact that the people are not conscious enough to participate in determining the administration, have been effective in the failure of democracy to be institutionalized. However, over time, there have been important developments that allow the public to actively participate in management (Akıncı and Usta, 2015, p. 51).

Migration from villages to cities accelerated in Turkey in the 1950s. The education the people in rural regions received and the changing living conditions also affected the mentality of the masses migrating to the city. This situation, which became more evident in young people, has caused them to be more reactive than other segments of society. Despite this, violence and terrorist incidents, especially in the 1970s, dragged the country into chaos. It was aimed to prevent this environment by seizing the government with the military coup on September 12, 1980 (Küçük, 2019, p. 21).

Many institutions such as universities and media organs were seen by the coup council as the main cause of chaos (Küçük, 2019, p. 37). Since these institutions and NGOs are seen as the cause of chaos, the obstacles imposed have narrowed political participation considerably.

According to the Constitution of 1982, associations, professional organizations, workers' and employers' unions could not pursue political aims or participate in political activities. These institutions were prohibited from working together or supporting any political parties. They could not accept aid from political parties and participate in demonstrations other than their own. Strikes and lockouts for political purposes were prohibited (Tanör, 1989, p. 18-19; Parla and Öncü, 1990, p. 11-35; Akıncı, 2013, p. 19).

After returning to multi-party life in 1983, civil society began to be widespread in Turkey. The expansion of freedom areas was decisive in the spread of NGOs. Obstacles to civil society began to be gradually removed.

After the 1980 military coup, serious changes began to appear in social life with the adoption of the Constitution of 1982 and the transition to a free-market economy in the country. In particular, the reflection of the free-market approach and liberal values in the economic and political fields caused radical changes in the context of social change and political participation.

For the first time in Turkey, political parties were guaranteed by the Constitution of 1961. In 1965, their legal status was regulated by the Political Parties Law No. 648. The activities of political parties were suspended as of September 12, 1980. In addition, political parties were dissolved before the Consultative Assembly was opened. Compared to the Constitution of 1961, the Constitution of 1982 narrowed the freedom areas of political parties more. The bans imposed by the Constitution of 1982 led individuals and non-governmental organizations to prefer to stay out of politics (Aliefendioğlu, 1999, p. 101-102, 114). Regulations made to depoliticize society caused political participation to decrease significantly.

An example of another problem encountered in political participation; Süslü (2022, p. 61) stated in his study that there was a decrease in the number of female MPs with the transition from the single-party period to multi-party life. Following the coup of September 12, 1980, with the transition to civilian politics and the reactivation of the parliament in 1983, the number of female MPs began to increase again. The reason for this situation was that many male politicians were banned from politics. With the subsequent elections and the abolishing of political bans in 1987, the number of women in parliament decreased (Süslü, 2022, p. 61). This situation is valuable in terms of the revealing effect of gender on political participation.

Conclusion

Social and legal developments have led to changes in all areas of life, and therefore people's lifestyles and the mindsets of people have also changed. These changes have enabled citizens to ask for a greater say in the political arena. Individuals are not content with just participating in elections, they have become willing to influence political decisions. Individuals want to actively influence decision-making processes through different political participation.

Compared to the past, individuals' expectations towards democracy have changed and increased even more. Democratic constitutionalism began to be questioned and it was thought that political participation means were not sufficient in terms of representative democracy. For this reason, new ways of political participation were sought.

There are many factors that affect individuals' political participation. Various factors such as socioeconomic, education, psychological, and age appear as the factors affecting political participation. However, many reasons such as gender differences, the administration not wishing for citizens' political participation and therefore not informing the public sufficiently, and electoral problems are among the problems encountered in political participation.

In Turkey, citizens carry out political participation in different ways such as elections and attending meetings.. We have moved far away from the concept of participation limited to just voting in elections. Individuals' political participation varies due to reasons such as education, age, socioeconomic status, and these differences also affect public expectations. It is possible to say that there was not enough political participation in Turkey in the 1980s, the subject of this study, due to the military coup and various restrictions. However, constitutional changes and the removal of political obstacles over time increased political participation.

When democracy and political participation in Turkey in the 1980s are examined; It seems that the effects of the September 12 military coup were quite active for a long time. Due to the military coup, it was not possible for citizens to participate in politics until the 1983 elections. At that time, there were serious obstacles to political participation, and this made citizens stay away from politics. With the Constitution of 1982 and subsequent constitutional developments, these restrictions decreased over time and political participation gradually increased.

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