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Youth, Political Participation, and Awareness: An Empirical Study on University Students' Political Sensitivity

Gençlik, Siyasal Katılım ve Farkındalık: Üniversite Öğrencilerinin Politik Duyarlılığı Üzerine Ampirik Bir Çalışma

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Youth, Political Participation, and Awareness: An Empirical Study on University Students' Political Sensitivity¹

Abstract

Political sensitivity is a significant concept that determines individuals' interest in political events, their level of awareness, and their tendency to participate in democratic processes. Recent studies have shown that political sensitivity is shaped not only through traditional forms of political participation but also through new forms of engagement such as digital activism, the use of social media, and involvement in civil society activities. However, for these forms of participation to be meaningful and sustainable, they must be directly linked to young individuals' level of political awareness. This study aims to examine the levels of political sensitivity among university students and how these levels differ according to various variables. A cross-sectional survey model, one of the quantitative research methods, was adopted in the study. The research population consists of university students studying at public universities in Türkiye, while the sample comprises 401 students. The Political Sensitivity Scale was used as a data collection tool. In the analysis of the data, t-tests and ANOVA were applied. The research findings indicate that the political sensitivity levels of university students are generally at a moderate level. This suggests that while young people follow political developments, this awareness does not necessarily translate into active political participation. The replacement of traditional participation forms with digital activism and politically expressive use of social media requires a redefinition of the concept of political sensitivity. However, the absence of a significant relationship between the duration of social media use and political sensitivity points to the limited role of digital platforms in fostering political awareness. Moreover, demographic variables such as age and place of residence were found to have no significant impact on political sensitivity, indicating that political consciousness is shaped more by personal experiences, social environment, and media exposure. On the other hand, the gender variable showed a significant difference in political sensitivity, with male students reporting higher levels than their female counterparts. Voting experience also emerged as a prominent factor enhancing political sensitivity; students who had voted two or more times demonstrated significantly higher political awareness. Overall, the study highlights the need to strengthen political socialization processes, build a more trustworthy political institution in the eyes of the youth, and promote gender equality in the political sphere to enhance political sensitivity among young individuals.

Keywords: Political Sensitivity, Political Participation, University Students, Social Media, Political Socialization

Gençlik, Siyasal Katılım ve Farkındalık: Üniversite Öğrencilerinin Politik Duyarlılığı Üzerine Ampirik Bir Çalışma²

Öz

Politik duyarlılık, bireylerin siyasal olaylara olan ilgisini, farkındalık düzeyini ve demokratik süreçlere katılma eğilimini belirleyen önemli bir kavramdır. Son yıllarda yapılan çalışmalar, politik duyarlılığın yalnızca geleneksel siyasal katılım biçimleriyle değil; aynı zamanda dijital aktivizm, sosyal medya kullanımı ve sivil toplum faaliyetleri gibi yeni katılım yolları aracılığıyla da şekillendiğini ortaya koymuştur. Ancak bu katılım biçimlerinin anlamlı ve sürdürülebilir olabilmesi, genç bireylerin politik farkındalık düzeyleriyle doğrudan ilişkilidir. Bu çalışma, üniversite öğrencilerinin politik duyarlılık düzeylerini ve bu düzeylerin çeşitli değişkenlere göre nasıl farklılık gösterdiğini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırmada nicel araştırma yöntemlerinden biri olan kesitsel tarama modeli benimsenmiştir. Araştırmanın evrenini Türkiye'deki devlet üniversitelerinde öğrenim gören üniversite öğrencileri oluştururken, örneklemini ise 401 üniversite öğrencisi oluşturmaktadır. Veri toplama aracı olarak Politik Duyarlılık Ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Verilerin analizinde t-testi ve ANOVA uygulanmıştır. Araştırma bulguları, üniversite öğrencilerinin politik duyarlılık düzeylerinin genel olarak orta seviyede olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu durum, gençlerin siyasal gelişmeleri takip ettiğini ancak bu

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farkındalığın aktif siyasal katılıma dönüşmediğini ortaya koymaktadır. Geleneksel katılım biçimlerinin yerini dijital aktivizm ve sosyal medya tabanlı politik ifadeye bırakması, duyarlılık kavramının yeniden tanımlanmasını gerekli kılmaktadır. Ancak sosyal medya kullanım süresi ile politik duyarlılık arasında anlamlı bir ilişki bulunmaması, dijital mecraların siyasal bilinç oluşturmadaki sınırlı etkisine işaret etmektedir. Ayrıca, yaş ve yaşanan yer gibi demografik değişkenlerin politik duyarlılık üzerinde anlamlı bir etkisinin olmayışı, politik bilincin bireysel deneyim, sosyal çevre ve medya aracılığıyla şekillendiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Öte yandan, araştırma cinsiyet değişkeninin politik duyarlılık üzerinde anlamlı bir farklılık yarattığını ve erkek öğrencilerin duyarlılık seviyelerinin kadınlara kıyasla daha yüksek olduğunu göstermiştir. Oy kullanma deneyimi ise politik duyarlılığı artıran belirgin bir etken olarak öne çıkmaktadır; iki veya daha fazla kez oy kullanan öğrencilerin politik farkındalığı anlamlı biçimde yüksektir. Genel olarak araştırma, gençlerin politik duyarlılığını artırmak için siyasal sosyalizasyon süreçlerinin güçlendirilmesi, siyaset kurumunun gençler nezdinde güven veren bir yapıya kavuşturulması ve toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğinin siyasal alanda yaygınlaştırılması gerektiğini ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Politik Duyarlılık; Siyasal Katılım, Üniversite Öğrencileri, Sosyal Medya, Siyasal Sosyalizasyon

Introduction

Political sensitivity is a concept that refers to the degree of awareness, interest, and reaction that individuals develop towards political events, social changes, and democratic processes (Ektiren, 2024; Alodat et al., 2023). Recent studies show that political sensitivity is one of the most important factors influencing individuals' participation in political processes (Ekinci Sağlam, 2021; Nyberg, 2021; Kirmani et al., 2023). This concept is particularly important when it comes to determining the level of political awareness of young people. Nowadays, political awareness is addressed in various dimensions such as participation in elections, civic activities, digital activism and political information processes (Demir, 2015).

This study approaches political sensitivity not merely as an individual inclination but as a phenomenon shaped by social structures, political culture, and power relations, thereby establishing a direct connection with the discipline of political sociology. Political sociology provides the theoretical framework necessary to understand political sensitivity by analyzing individuals' perceptions of the political system, their practices of democratic participation, and the social dynamics that shape these processes. Examining the political sensitivity levels of university students is critically important for understanding the sociological processes that influence young people's political participation and for strengthening democratic culture. In this context, the study contributes to the political sociology literature by revealing the relationship between young people's political behavior, social structures, cultural norms, and channels of political participation.

In the literature, political awareness is discussed in relation to individuals' access to political information, their reactions to political events and their propensity to participate in democratic processes (Ektiren, 2024). Recent studies have focused in particular on how digitalization influences political sensitivity. For example, it is found that individuals' interest in political processes has increased with the increasing use of social media, but this interest may not translate into active political participation (Gürel and Eyüboğlu, 2023; Ekinci Sağlam, 2021; Castells, 2012). In this context, political sensitivity has become a phenomenon characterized not only by traditional means of political participation but also by digital platforms (Kolotoev, 2022; Demir, 2015).

The importance of political sensitivity is related to people's growing belief in democratic systems and their motivation to take an active role in these systems. According to the literature, people with high political sensitivity react more consciously to political events and participate more in democratic processes (Ekinci Sağlam, 2021; Dalton, 2014). It is stated that political sensitivity is a decisive factor, especially for the participation of young people in political processes (Ekinci Sağlam, 2021; Bennett, 2012).

In today's world, the importance of political awareness is not limited to election periods, but also encompasses the political awareness of individuals in their daily lives. For example, global issues such as climate change, human rights and economic crises are among the most important factors that increase individuals' political awareness (Demir, 2015; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005). In addition, political sensitivity is crucial for individuals to defend their own rights, control administrative decision-making processes and participate in collective actions (Ekinci Sağlam, 2021; Putnam, 2000).

Research on political sensitivity examines the relationship between individuals' reactions to political events and various variables. In particular, recent studies show that individuals' levels of political sensitivity vary depending on factors such as gender, age, education level, social media use and voting experience (Ektiren, 2024; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005). For example, it has been found that social media use increases political awareness, but this awareness does not translate into active political participation (Yang and DeHart, 2016; Boulianne, 2015; Demir, 2015).

In the literature, assessments of young people's political sensitivity are generally addressed with definitions such as "apolitical", "indifferent" or "conformist" (Çam, 2018; Neyzi, 2011). However, these conclusions vary depending on the level of political participation of young people. Especially in societies where voter turnout is low, these definitions may be more consistent. However, in countries such as Türkiye, where youth turnout is high, such characterizations may not fully reflect reality (Uyan Semerci, 2009). Therefore, it is of great importance to consider the historical and sociological context when assessing young people's political sensitivity.

In this study, in which we aim to examine the political sensitivity of Generation Z (Erten, 2019), in which digitalization is very intense (Erten, 2019), an apolitical or conformist approach that ignores the change in the shape and form of sensitivity would be tantamount to turning away from reality and would also be simplistic. Brooks notes that young people prefer a life of pursuing their individual goals over their duties to the state and that they may already be more advanced with technology and the digital world in terms of political sensibility than previous generations (2009). Stockemer (2012) supports this situation, stating that political participation based on political sensitivity has not decreased among young people, but the channels of participation have changed. If we look at the trending topics in social media use, especially X, it is clear that the content on the agenda is related to or related to young people, but it is also clear that more in-depth studies are needed.

Suggestions are made in the literature to determine the political sensitivity of young people and to reach young people and society with a greater political sensitivity, which is undoubtedly an important point for achieving a more democratic system and society. There are studies that show that the openness, transparency and easy understanding of the rules for the functioning of the political environment affect political sensitivity and participation

(Arslan, 2012, p.27). Another fact is that young people on any platform should be educated and encouraged about their rights and responsibilities in order to increase political awareness and participation (United Nations, 2013, p.1). Another important suggestion is that young people's new political tools and political language should be understood in order to move society to a more democratic point with effort and endeavor beyond criticizing young people's political sensitivity (Lüküslü, 2011, pp.48-55). Another very valuable observation is the fact that young people cannot prove themselves in society because they have no or very limited access to socio-cultural self-development opportunities and tools and therefore cannot feel valuable (Cafoğlu and Okçu, 2013). A person who does not feel valuable and important naturally has a very low sensitivity to social problems.

Another aspect that fundamentally influences young people's political sensitivity is their ability to act rationally and think critically. Societies of obedience that prevent critical, creative and reflective thinking cause processes that can lead to a failure to grasp the zeitgeist and a disconnection from all kinds of changes taking place in the world (Undp, 2008, p.93). One of the most fundamental goals of democratic theory is to give those who are in the minority and those who are coded as the other a chance to live with equal rights and freedoms, as opposed to populism. Democratism, which can also be summarized with the philosophy of tolerance towards the other and the recognition that differences are a wealth, is fundamentally opposed to models that focus on the culture of obedience and educate a uniformed human being. Low political sensitivity is detrimental to the culture of democracy as it gives space to those in power and allows for more authoritarian governments; it creates a model of man in which a uniformist culture of obedience prevails and obedience is rewarded rather than a questioning mind (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996). While the lack of political sensitivity leads to a decrease in the questioning mind and the formation of a society of obedience (Facione, et al., 1998), the society of obedience will not allow a questioning mind and thus political sensitivity will decrease, creating a vicious circle.

The contribution of this study to the literature is to examine the level of political awareness of college students with regard to various variables and to show how these influence the political participation processes of young people. In contrast to previous studies (Bennett, 2012; Dalton, 2014; Demir, 2015; Ekinci Sağlam, 2021), this study examines the factors that influence young people's political awareness in the context of variables such as gender, age, place of residence, social media use and voting experience. The aim is to provide a more comprehensive framework for understanding young people's political participation processes.

Political awareness is considered a critical variable that affects the participation of individuals and societies in political processes and is of great importance for the healthy functioning of democratic systems. The aim of this study is to determine the level of political sensitivity of college students and to analyze the factors that influence this level. Thus, it will be possible to develop recommendations to increase the political participation of young people.

The main objective of the study is to determine the political sensitivity of college students and to analyze their level in relation to various variables. In accordance with the main objective of the study, the following questions should be answered:

- (1) What is the level of political sensitivity of college students?
- (2) Does the level of political sensitivity of college students differ significantly by gender?

- (3) Does the political sensitivity of college students differ significantly according to age group?
- (4) Are there significant differences in the political sensitivity of college students according to their place of residence?
- (5) Do the political sensitivity scores of college students differ significantly according to the frequency of social media use?
- (6) Do the political awareness levels of college students differ significantly depending on their voting experience?

The results of the analyzes conducted in the context of these questions will help to understand which factors influence young people's political awareness and to define strategies to increase the level of political participation of future generations. In this context, the results of the study are an important resource for the design of educational policies and the involvement of young people in the mechanisms of political participation.

1. Method

In this section, information on the research design, population and sample, data collection tool, data collection and analysis are presented.

1.1. Research Design

In this study, which examined the level of political sensitivity of college students and this level in relation to various variables, the cross-sectional survey model, one of the quantitative research methods, was used. The cross-sectional survey model is a research design in that data is collected from a sample representing the population at a specific time within a specific period using one or more data collection instruments related to the subject under study (Atalmış, 2019). In this study, the cross-sectional survey model was applied in the research as the data was collected once using the "Political Sensitivity Scale" from a sample group consisting of college students representing the population.

1.2. Population and Sample

The population of the study is college students studying at state universities in Türkiye. In the study, the random sampling strategy was used to determine the sample that represents the population. In the convenience sampling strategy, data is collected from the most accessible people who meet the criteria (Etikan et al., 2016). In this study, the sample group was determined by targeting college students who are easily accessible to form a sample representative of the population. Information about the study sample can be found in Table 1.

As can be seen in Table 1, there are 400 college students in the sample group, 308 females and 92 males. Of the participants in the sample group, 194 were aged 18-20 and 207 were aged 21-23. While 327 of the participants live in the city center, 74 of them live in rural areas. In addition, 136 participants in the sample group use their social media accounts for an average of 1-3 hours per day, 162 participants for an average of 3-5 hours per day, and 103 participants for more than 5 hours per day. In addition, 91 of the participants had no voting experience, while 157 of them had voted once, 92 twice and 59 more than twice.

Table 1. Demographic Information on the Sample Group

Demographic Information	Parameters	N
Gender	Woman	308
	Male	93
Age	18-20	194
	21-23	207
Place of Residence	City Center	327
	Rural	74
Frequency of Social Media Use	1-3 hours	136
	3-5 hours	162
	More than 5 hours	103
Voting Experience	Never used	91
	One time user	157
	I've used it twice	92
	More than two users	59
Total		401

1.3. Data Collection Tool

The "Political Literacy Scale", which was developed by Kirmani, Hasan and Haque (2020) and translated into Turkish by Ektiren (2024), was used as a data collection tool in the study. The political sensitivity scale consists of a total of 15 items and five factors. The scale is a 5-point Likert scale and consists of the options "strongly disagree", "disagree", "neutral", "agree" and "strongly agree". The internal consistency coefficient Cronbach's alpha of the scale was calculated as 0.86 in the adjustment study and 0.66 in this study.

1.4. Data Collection and Analysis

Prior to collecting the data for the study, approval was obtained from the social sciences ethics committee of a state college and research permission was obtained from the college where the students in the sample group were studying. Once the necessary written approvals had been obtained, the sample group for the study was determined and data was collected from 424 college students using the "Political Sensitivity Scale". 23 college students were excluded from the data set due to missing or incomplete scales. Thus, data from 401 college students were included in the study. The data was collected during the academic year 2024-2025 in face-to-face interviews.

To determine the most accurate and effective analyzes to answer the study's problem questions, the normal distribution of the data set was first examined. To examine the normal distribution of the data, descriptive statistical information was analyzed on both the overall value and the variables. The descriptive statistics for the data obtained from the sample group are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of the Sample Group

Parameters		N	\bar{X}	se	Median	sd	Skewness	kurtosis
Total		401	3.48	0.02	3.47	0.48	0.56	0.37
Gender	Woman	308	3.45	0.03	3.47	0.45	0.58	0.48
	Male	93	3.58	0.06	3.60	0.55	0.36	-0.07
Age	18-20	194	3.49	0.04	3.47	0.51	0.57	0.22
	21-23	207	3.48	0.03	3.47	0.45	0.52	0.49
Place of Residence	City Center	327	3.48	0.03	3.47	0.48	0.61	0.41
	Rural	74	3.49	0.05	3.47	0.47	0.32	0.26
Frequency of Social Media Use	1-3 hours	136	3.52	0.04	3.47	0.51	0.36	0.01
	3-5 hours	162	3.43	0.03	3.40	0.44	0.59	0.65
	More than 5 hours	103	3.51	0.05	3.47	0.49	0.69	0.51
	Never used	91	3.48	0.05	3.47	0.51	0.69	0.22
Voting Experience	One time user	157	3.44	0.04	3.40	0.45	0.53	0.77
	I've used it twice	92	3.45	0.05	3.47	0.43	0.35	0.67
	More than two users	59	3.66	0.07	3.60	0.52	0.44	-0.52

As can be seen in Table 2, the values for skewness and kurtosis of the total values of the sample group and the values for the various variables were found to be between +1 and -1. Histograms and density graphs of the data were also analyzed. As a result of all examinations, it was determined that the data were normally distributed or, in other words, did not deviate excessively from the normal distribution (Çokluk et al., 2021; Sönmez Çakır, 2019; Uysal and Kılıç, 2022). Considering the descriptive statistical information about the data set, it was decided that the data set was suitable for parametric tests. To determine the appropriate parametric tests, the homogeneous distribution of the data was examined. For this purpose, the Levene homogeneity test was applied. The results of the Levene homogeneity test are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Levene Homogeneity Test Results

Parameters	Statistics	sd1	sd2	p-value
Gender	2.19	1	399	0.008
Age	-0.27	1	399	0.081
Place of Residence	-0.05	1	399	0.995
Frequency of Social Media Use	1.95	2	398	0.140
Voting Experience	1.70	3	395	0.160

The Levene homogeneity test was used to determine whether the political sensitivity of college students differs significantly according to gender, age, place of residence, frequency of social media use and voting experience. Since the political sensitivity of college students is assessed by averages, the homogeneity test was not applied. As can be seen in Table 3, the data was found to be non-homogeneous only for the gender variable. Taking all this information into account, the Welch test was applied for gender, the independent samples

t-test for age and place of residence, and ANOVA for the social media usage frequency and voting experience variables (Ross and Willson, 2017). Since the result of the ANOVA for voting experience was significant, the Scheffe test, one of the post hoc tests, was also applied to determine which groups differed significantly (Kayri, 2009). In addition, three levels were established for the political sensitivity of college students: low, medium and high. The formula $\text{range width} = \text{range} / \text{number of levels}$ was used to evaluate these levels. As a result, the range of 1.00-2.33 was determined as low, 2.34-3.66 as medium and 3.67-5.00 as high (Çalışkan and Çoklar, 2022). The JAMOVİ program was used to analyze the data, with a confidence interval of 95% and an error rate of 0.5.

2. Findings

This section first presents the results on the degree of political sensitivity of college students, followed by the results on the question of whether the political sensitivity of college students differs significantly according to gender, age, place of residence, frequency of social media use and voting experience.

2.1. Political Sensitivity Level of University Students

Descriptive statistical information was used to determine the political sensitivity levels of university students. Descriptive statistics on the political sensitivity of university students are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics on Political Sensitivity of University Students

N	\bar{X}	se	Median	Mod	sd	Lowest	Highest
401	3.48	0.02	3.47	3.40*	0.48	2.33	5.00

* There are multiple modes. Only the first one is reported.

The examination of Table 4 shows that the average score of college students on the "Political Sensitivity Scale" is 3.48. This result shows that the political sensitivity of college students is at a medium level. It was also found that the median was 3.47 and the mode, which is the most frequently observed mean, was 3.40. It was also found that the average of the participants with the lowest score was 2.33 and the average of the participants with the highest score was 5.00, so the range was 2.67.

2.2. Investigation of University Students' Political Sensitivity According to Gender Variables

In order to determine whether the political sensitivity of college students differs significantly according to gender, a t-test for independent samples was carried out. Since it was found that the variances were not homogeneous when the data obtained were grouped by gender, the result of the Welch test was analyzed. The result of the Welch test is shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Welch Test Result

Group	N	\bar{X}	Median	s.d.	s.e.	Stat	sd	p-value
Woman	308	3.45	3.47	0.45	0.03	2.10	399	0.037**
Male	93	3.58	3.60	0.55	0.06			

Note: μ Female \neq μ Male

Table 5 shows that the result of the Welch test is significant. This result shows that the level of political sensitivity of college students differs significantly in favor of male students.

2.3. Investigation of University Students' Political Sensitivity According to Age Variables

In order to determine whether the political sensitivity of college students differs significantly according to gender, a t-test for independent samples was carried out. The results of the t-test for independent samples are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. t-Test Results for Independent Samples

Group	N	\bar{X}	Median	s.d.	s.e.	Stat	sd	p-value
18-20	194	3.49	3.47	0.51	0.04	-0.27	399	0.79
21-23	207	3.48	3.47	0.45	0.03			

Note: μ 18-20 \neq μ 21-23

When analyzing Table 6, no statistically significant difference is found between the political sensitivity of college students in the 18-20 age group and the political sensitivity of college students in the 21-23 age group. In fact, the mean, median, standard deviation and standard error values of the two groups are quite close to each other. In other words, it was found that the political sensitivity of college students does not differ significantly depending on the age variable.

2.4. Investigation of University Students' Political Sensitivity According to the Variable of Place of Residence

In order to determine whether the political sensitivity of college students differs significantly depending on the residence variable, a t-test for independent samples was carried out. The results of the t-test for independent samples are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. t-Test Results for Independent Samples

Grup	N	\bar{X}	Median	sd	se	Stat	sd	p-value
Urban	327	3.48	3.47	0.48	0.03	-0.05	399	0.961
Rural	74	3.49	3.47	0.47	0.05			

Note: μ City Center \neq μ Rural

When examining Table 7, no statistically significant difference was found between the political sensitivity of college students living in the city center and the political sensitivity of college students living in rural areas. In fact, the mean, median, standard deviation and standard error values of the two groups are quite close to each other. In other words, it was found that the political sensitivity of college students does not differ significantly depending on the variable of place of residence.

2.5. Investigation of University Students' Political Sensitivities According to the Variable of Frequency of Social Media Use

ANOVA was used to determine whether the political sensitivity of college students differs significantly according to the frequency of social media use. The results of the ANOVA are shown in Table 8.

Table 8. ANOVA Results

	Sum of Sq.	sd	Mean of Sq.	F-stat	P-value
Frequency of Social Media Use	0.75	2	0.37	1.64	0.195
Residual values	90.39	398	0.23		

The examination of Table 8 shows that there is no significant difference between the political sensitivity of college students who use social media 1-3 hours, 3-5 hours and 5 hours or more per day. In other words, it was found that the political sensitivity of college students did not differ significantly according to the frequency of social media use.

2.6. Investigation of University Students' Political Sensitivities According to the Variable of Voting Experience

The ANOVA was used to determine whether the political sensitivity of college students differs significantly depending on the variable voting experience. The results of the ANOVA are shown in Table 9.

Table 9. ANOVA Results

	Sum of Sq.	sd	Mean of Sq.	F-stat	P-value
Voting experience	2.26	3	0.75	3.35	0.019**
Residual values	88.59	395	0.22		

Looking at Table 9, it is clear that there is a significant difference between at least two groups of college students who never voted, voted once, voted twice and voted more than twice. To determine between which groups there is a significant difference, the Tukey test, one of the post hoc tests, was applied. The results of the Tukey test are shown in Table 10.

Table 10. Tukey Test Results

Comparison						
Group 1	Group 2	\bar{X} diff.	se	sd	t-stat	p _{scheffe}
More than two voters	Two-time voter	0.23	0.08	395	2.83	0.047**
	One-time voter	0.24	0.07	395	3.21	0.017**
	Never voted	0.20	0.08	395	2.47	0.110
Two-time voter	One-time voter	0.01	0.06	395	0.13	0.999
	Never voted	-0.03	0.07	395	-0.42	0.982
One-time voter	Never voted	-0.04	0.06	395	-0.60	0.948

Table 10 shows that the political sensitivity of college students who have more than two electoral experiences differs significantly from the political sensitivity of college students with two electoral experiences and one electoral experience. This significant difference is in favor of college students with more than two electoral experiences.

Discussion

According to the findings of the study, university students' political sensitivity is at a moderate level. This result indicates that individuals have developed a certain level of awareness regarding political developments and social issues; however, this awareness does not necessarily translate into active political participation. In the literature, it is stated that political sensitivity among young adults is shaped by various factors such as educational level and social environment (Ekinci Sağlam, 2021). Nevertheless, the moderate level of political sensitivity observed in this study suggests an insufficiency in the political socialization process.

Among the main factors affecting individuals' political sensitivity are political socialization, democratic participation practices, and personal experiences (Ektiren, 2024). While political sensitivity is observed at higher levels in societies where political socialization is strong, in countries like Türkiye, where political culture varies depending on historical and socio-economic factors, political sensitivity levels may differ among individuals. For university students, the fact that political sensitivity does not translate into active political participation can be associated with concepts frequently emphasized in the literature, such as political apathy and political efficacy (Sağlam, 2021).

Furthermore, young people's forms of political participation are undergoing a transformation. Instead of traditional political participation models, digital activism, social media campaigns, and online collective movements have emerged as new platforms through which young people express their political sensitivity (Demir, 2015). In this regard, evaluating political sensitivity solely through voting or party affiliation may prevent a comprehensive understanding of young people's political participation patterns.

The findings indicate that being interested in politics and participating in political processes are different concepts. Individuals may follow political developments and possess knowledge about political issues, but this awareness does not necessarily guarantee active political engagement. It would not be incorrect to state that one of the major sociological reasons for the relatively low level of political sensitivity among young people today is a crisis of trust in political institutions. In the literature, it is emphasized that young people often perceive politics as a domain controlled by interest groups and believe that political mechanisms fail to produce meaningful results for them, which supports this interpretation (Ekinci Sağlam, 2021).

The findings of this study also reveal that male students have higher levels of political sensitivity compared to female students. The literature also points out that political socialization processes are shaped by gender roles and that males tend to interact with political issues from an earlier age (Ektiren, 2024). This suggests that gender roles act as a determining factor in individuals' political awareness and participation levels.

In order to increase women's participation in political processes, democratic systems should develop more inclusive policies. Supporting female candidates in political parties, increasing women's involvement in political decision-making mechanisms, and developing projects through civil society organizations that encourage women can help reduce this gap (Ekinci Sağlam, 2021). Moreover, the increase in education levels and women's integration into the workforce may transform political socialization processes and enhance women's political sensitivity.

The study's findings also indicate that there is no significant difference between age and political sensitivity. Regardless of their age, young individuals demonstrate similar levels of political sensitivity. This finding differs from studies that traditionally emphasize the effect of age on political consciousness (Ektiren, 2024). While the literature suggests that political interest increases with age, today's young people are exposed to political events at earlier ages, especially through digital media and social networks (Demir, 2015). This suggests that the traditional influence of age on political socialization has weakened. The limited age range in this study might also explain the lack of a significant relationship between age and political sensitivity.

The study further indicates that the rural-urban divide does not have a significant effect on political sensitivity. While it has traditionally been argued that political awareness and participation are lower in rural areas, advancements in transportation and communication technologies have reduced this gap (Demir, 2015). When viewed through the lens of globalization and the shared characteristics of Generation Z, such as being digital natives, it can be stated that the differences between rural and urban areas, as well as class distinctions, have become less pronounced.

According to the findings, there is no significant relationship between the amount of time spent on social media and political sensitivity. Although the literature suggests that social media increases individuals' interest in political events, some studies, including this one, show that social media usage does not directly translate into political participation (Ekinçi Sağlam, 2021). While social media facilitates access to information and raises political awareness, this awareness does not necessarily turn into political action. Digital platforms allow individuals to follow political developments but can also lead to the consumption of politics as a superficial commodity (Köksal and Erol, 2021).

The findings suggest that social media functions primarily as a passive information-gathering tool and that political participation is influenced more by personal motivations and social environment. This indicates that social media alone is not sufficient to increase political sensitivity and that other components of political socialization must also be considered.

Finally, voting experience emerged as a significant factor that enhances political sensitivity. Voting allows individuals to interact directly with the political system and helps them internalize political processes (Ektiren, 2024; Sağlam, 2021). Individuals who develop a voting habit become more sensitive to political events and follow democratic processes more actively (Kirmani et al., 2020).

Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that university students' political sensitivity is generally at a moderate level. This indicates that young people show a certain degree of interest and awareness regarding political and social developments, but this awareness does not always translate into active political participation. The results also show that gender significantly affects political sensitivity, with male students demonstrating higher levels of sensitivity than female students, while age, rural-urban differences, and time spent on social media do not have a significant impact. Conversely, voting experience stands out as one of the key factors that increases political sensitivity.

These findings highlight the need to strengthen the political socialization processes that shape political sensitivity. Developing policies aimed at increasing women's participation in political processes will contribute to young people feeling more represented in democratic systems. Another important result is that although social media is an important tool for raising political awareness, it is insufficient on its own to promote political participation. This indicates the need for mechanisms that enable young people to transform the knowledge they acquire in the digital environment into political action. Political socialization should not be limited to the transmission of information but should be addressed as a holistic process that incorporates social, cultural, economic, political, and environmental factors to build a society open to innovation and to pave the way for development.

In conclusion, increasing university students' political sensitivity requires collaboration between educational institutions, political actors, and civil society organizations. Strengthening voting awareness, implementing policies that support gender equality, and improving political socialization mechanisms will help establish a stronger democratic culture. The study's findings suggest that if young people's crisis of trust in the political system is addressed and political participation channels are made more accessible, their political sensitivity will likely increase. Therefore, identifying not only the current level of young people's political sensitivity but also long-term strategies to improve it is a critical necessity for the future of democratic societies.

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