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FACTORS AFFECTING THE POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION PROCESS OF UNIVERSITY YOUTH: THE CASE OF NİĞDE*

Abstract

Socialization, which is defined as the process of internalizing the cultural values, norms and behavioral patterns of the society in which the individual lives, has various sub-dimensions. One of these subdimensions is political socialization. Political socialization refers to the process of adopting the political culture of the society of which the individual is a member. In this process, which starts in early childhood and continues throughout life, various socialization agents are effective for individuals. Among these agents, family, the education system/school, peer groups, political events, and media play a significant role. The effects of these factors vary according to the life stages of the individual; they can be effective at different levels in childhood, youth, adulthood and old age. This study aims to determine the main factors affecting the political socialization processes of university students by focusing on the political socialization process in youth. The study population was determined to be the students of Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University, and this university mainly includes young people from the Central Anatolia Region but also from different regions of Türkiye. The sample of the study was limited to students receiving higher education on a faculty basis, and a total of 566 students from 12 different faculties were questioned within the scope of the research. The collected data were analyzed via SPSS-25 software, which employs chi-square tests, t tests, ANOVA, and factor analyses. The findings indicate that the three most influential factors in the political socialization process of university students are political events, the education system/school, and family. Significant differences

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were identified between students' class levels in terms of the education system/school and family factors.

Keywords: Political Socialization, University, Youth, Education, Niğde

ÜNİVERSİTE GENÇLİĞİNİN SİYASAL TOPLUMSALLAŞMA SÜRECİNİ ETKİLEYEN FAKTÖRLER: NİĞDE ÖRNEĞİ

Öz

Bireyin içinde yaşadığı toplumun kültürel değerlerini, normlarını ve davranış kalıplarını içselleştirme süreci olarak tanımlanan toplumsallaşma çeşitli alt boyutlara sahiptir. Bu alt boyutlardan birisi de siyasal toplumsallaşmadır. Siyasal toplumsallaşma, bireyin üyesi olduğu toplumun siyasal kültürünü benimseme sürecini ifade etmektedir. Erken çocukluk döneminde başlayan ve yaşam boyu devam eden bu süreçte bireyler üzerinde çeşitli toplumsallaşma araçları etkili olmaktadır. Bu araçlar arasında aile, eğitim sistemi/okul, akran grupları, siyasal olaylar ve medya gibi unsurlar öne çıkmaktadır. Söz konusu araçların etkisi bireyin yaşam evrelerine göre değişkenlik göstermekte; çocukluk, gençlik, yetişkinlik ve yaşlılık dönemlerinde farklı düzeylerde etkili olabilmektedir. Bu çalışma, gençlik dönemindeki siyasal toplumsallaşma sürecine odaklanarak üniversite öğrencilerinin siyasal toplumsallaşma süreçlerini etkileyen temel araçları belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırmanın evreni Niğde Ömer Halisdemir Üniversitesi öğrencileri olarak belirlenmiş olup, bu üniversitenin ağırlıklı olarak İç Anadolu Bölgesi'nden olmakla birlikte Türkiye'nin farklı bölgelerinden gelen gençleri bünyesinde barındırdığı göz önünde bulundurulmuştur. Çalışmanın örneklemi, fakülte bazında yükseköğrenim gören öğrencilerle sınırlandırılmış ve araştırma kapsamında 12 farklı fakülteden toplam 566 öğrenciye anket uygulanmıştır. Toplanan veriler SPSS-25 programı aracılığıyla Ki-Kare, T testi, ANOVA ve faktör analizlerine tabi tutularak değerlendirilmiştir. Elde edilen bulgular, üniversite öğrencilerinin siyasal toplumsallaşma sürecinde en etkili üç toplumsallaşma faktörünün siyasal olaylar, eğitim sistemi/okul ve aile olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Eğitim sistemi/okul ve aile faktörleri açısından öğrencilerin öğrenim gördükleri sınıf düzeyleri arasında anlamlı farklılıklar tespit edilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Siyasal Toplumsallaşma, Üniversite, Gençlik, Eğitim, Niğde

Introduction

Socialization can be defined as the process through which an individual internalizes the cultural values, norms, and behavioural patterns of the society in which they live. The political dimension of this process is referred to as political socialization, which denotes the process by which individuals acquire the political culture of their society. The process of political socialization is a dynamic, lifelong interaction between the individual and the sociopolitical environment, shaping the individual's attitudes and values regarding the political system through both direct and indirect influences (Easton & Dennis 1965; Alkan 1979).





Political socialization begins in the early years of human life and continues throughout an individual's lifetime. The factors affecting political socialization processes in different periods of human life, such as childhood, youth, adulthood and old age, and their degree of influence may differ. An examination of the literature in the field of political socialization reveals that factors such as family, educational institutions, peer groups, political events and media are effective in individuals' acquisition of political identity.

Although it is accepted that the process of political socialization begins in childhood and continues throughout life, these factors are effective at different rates at different stages in an individual's life. Youth is considered one of the stages in which the individual is most open to forming his political attitude and identity. In this context, studies on the political socialization processes of young individuals, such as university students, are highly important in terms of the intergenerational transmission of political culture and democratic participation processes (Banks & Roker, 1994; Niemi & Hepburn, 1995). In this respect, revealing the extent to which university education contributes to the political socialization process and the tools through which students' political identity acquisition is shaped will contribute to a better understanding of political behaviour.

This study aims to determine the factors affecting the political socialization processes of university students by focusing on the political socialization of the youth period. This research aimed to determine the main factors affecting students' political attitudes and behaviours and to analyse these effects in terms of demographic variables (gender, faculty, class level, etc.). In this context, the main research questions of the study are as follows:

- Which factors are effective in the political socialization processes of university students?
- Does the education system, especially university education, affect students' political attitudes and behaviours?
- How does the family factor influence students' political interest and participation?
- Do demographic variables such as gender, faculty and class level significantly influence the political socialization processes of university students?
- Is there a relationship between the political interest of university students and their intention to vote?
- Does the political party membership of the father and mother affect the political interest of the student?

This research, which seeks answers to these questions, aims to contribute to the political socialization literature by presenting findings to determine the factors affecting the





political attitudes of university youth. The results of this study are expected to contribute to the literature on understanding the political attitudes of young people and to help develop new perspectives on the political socialization process. In this context, first, conceptual information about political socialization is given below, and then the findings obtained from the field research conducted on university students are shared.

1. Conceptual Framework: Political Socialization

Socialization is defined as the process of acquiring the cultural values, norms and behavioural patterns of the society in which an individual lives. As a subdimension of socialization, political socialization refers to the process by which individuals acquire the political culture of their society. In its broadest sense, political socialization can be described as “the process in which an individual’s views, attitudes, and values regarding the political system are shaped through lifelong direct and indirect interactions with their sociopolitical environment” (Alkan 1979: 8). Political socialization is of critical importance for all political systems, particularly nation-states. The establishment of political legitimacy in newly formed nation-states, as well as the maintenance of stability in well-established political systems, necessitates the orientation and education of individuals under their sovereignty in line with the norms and expectations of the political system. Through this process, individuals’ sense of commitment and loyalty to the political system is reinforced, ensuring the continuity of the system. For this reason, political systems define individuals within their societies as “citizens” and develop mechanisms to educate them in accordance with the expectations of the political system (Easton 1957; Hyman 1959; Easton & Dennis 1965).

In addition to internalizing the cultural values of the society to which the individual belongs throughout his life, he adapts to the social political culture by learning the political structures and processes. This phenomenon, which is called the political socialization process, progresses under the influence of various factors that shape the political formation of the individual within the framework of elements such as political tendencies, behavioural patterns and principles, making him or her an active element of the current political system (Beşirli, 2005: 252). This process is a “political learning process” that strengthens the individual’s ties of belonging and commitment to the political system. This process, which starts in early childhood and continues throughout the life of the individual, can change and transform dynamically with the effects of environmental factors (Easton & Hess, 1962: 246). Although the process of political socialization takes place mainly in the form of the individual adopting the political culture of the society in which he or she lives, it also allows the individual to influence and direct the society politically. Therefore, defining this process as a one-way socialization process in which only the individual is affected by society as a passive subject is incomplete. In this context, political socialization should be considered a dynamic process that is shaped by the mutual interaction between the individual and society and continues





throughout life. Political attitudes do not exhibit a static structure throughout the life of the individual but can change depending on the increase or decrease in the effects of environmental factors.

Political socialization is a process that can be handled at both the macro and micro levels. At the macro level, political socialization provides a framework that examines how political systems and social structure convey appropriate political norms and practices to individuals. At the micro level, how individuals are involved in political development processes, how they interact with political contexts and how they construct their personal political identities are investigated (Sapiro, 2004: 3). A comprehensive understanding of the political socialization process is critical in terms of making sense of the political participation patterns of individuals and the continuity and change of political culture.

The first research in the field of political socialization emerged in the United States in the 1950s as a result of a wide interest in understanding and explaining the nature of political behaviour. The first comprehensive study that focused on the concept and contributed to its global recognition was published by Herbert H. Hyman under the title *Political Socialization: A Study in the Psychology of Political Behaviour* (1959). Since the 1960s, academic interest in the field of political socialization has increased, with intensive research conducted, especially in the United States. Themes such as political learning processes during early childhood and the role of the family institution in shaping political attitudes (Easton & Dennis 1965; Davies 1965; Dowse & Hughes 1971), the influence of the education system and peer groups (Ziblatt 1965; Langton 1967; Prewitt et al. 1970), and the role of mass media in this process (Chaffee et al. 1970; Conway et al. 1981) have been prominent topics in research during this period. In Continental Europe, interest in the field has increased, albeit with some delay, since the 1990s (Niemi & Hepburn 1995: 7).

In Türkiye, the first studies in the field of political socialization were conducted by academics at the Faculty of Political Science at Ankara University (see Tokgöz 1978; Alkan 1979; Alkan & Ergil 1980). However, with the exceptions of limited examples such as Yücekök (1987), Kaplan (1999), and Türkkahraman (2000), it appears that there was little academic interest in the field of political socialization throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Since the 2000s, there has been a partial increase in academic studies related to the field at universities. In this context, studies focusing on university students, particularly those examining the influence of mass media and social media on the political socialization process (Metin 2014; Türkmenoğlu 2017), have attracted attention. Studies by Akin (2009) and Ergün (2019) have focused on the factors influencing the political socialization processes of university youth. These studies have provided concrete data showing that university education has a certain degree of impact on the political attitudes, behaviours, and tendencies of youth. However, considering that university education is undergoing a transformation process within the rapidly changing and





evolving atmosphere of many fields today, it is important to conduct current field studies on youth political socialization and compare them with those of previous studies.

2. Methodology

This study aims to analyze the factors influencing the political socialization processes of university students. In this context, the population of the research is determined to be the students of Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University. The university is located in the Central Anatolia Region of Türkiye and is considered a rural university according to traditional classifications. Although the institution predominantly hosts students from the Central Anatolia Region, it also accommodates students from various regions of Türkiye. The sample of the study is limited to students enrolled in different faculties at Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University. As of the 2021-2022 academic year, the university has 13,773 registered students at the faculty level (NOHU, 2022). The required sample size for the study, calculated with a 5% margin of error, was determined to be at least 370 (Yazıcıoğlu & Erdoğan 2004). Therefore, the study aimed to reach at least 40 students (20 female and 20 male) from each faculty using a quota sampling method, with a total of 480 students. Before starting the study, approval was obtained from the Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University Ethics Committee (Decision No: 2022/07-09). The data were collected through face-to-face surveys administered to participants between June 1 and June 30, 2022. A total of 566 students from 12 different faculties at the university participated in the survey.

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The measurement tool used in the study consists of a questionnaire containing demographic questions and a 15-item “Political Socialization Scale” developed on the basis of the relevant literature. The statements in the scale were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Apart from the scale, the participants were asked questions about demographic variables, the level of interest in politics, the political party membership of the parents and the thoughts of voting in the next elections. In terms of the demographic characteristics of the participants, care was taken to show a balanced distribution of gender and class level variables. The collected data were analyzed via the SPSS 24 statistical program. Chi-square tests, t tests, ANOVAs and factor analyses were performed on the data, and the findings were interpreted by the researcher. To facilitate understanding of the analysis results, the scale averages of the subdimensions that emerged in the factor analyses were converted to a percentage system (for example, Mean: $2.5/5 = 50/100$).

3. Findings

Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage distributions of the data collected within the scope of the research. The students participating in the research were ensured to have a balanced distribution in terms of gender, faculty and class variables. The analysis of the data reveals that the political party membership rates of the parents of university students in the





sample are quite low (mother: 4.7%; father: 8%). Similarly, it was observed that students have a low level of interest in politics; only 15.9% of participants reported being closely interested in politics. However, when the responses to the question “Do you intend to vote in the upcoming elections?”, 86% of the students expressed an intention to vote. This rate is consistent with the high voter turnout observed in general elections held in Türkiye over the past 30 years (Supreme Election Council, 2025).

Table 1: Distributions and Percentages of the Data

Gender	n	%
Female	301	53,2
Male	265	46,8
Total	566	100,0
Class Level	n	%
1st Year	117	20,7
2nd Year	145	25,6
3rd Year	187	33,0
4th Year	117	20,7
Total	566	100,0
Faculty	n	%
Education	40	7,1
Science and Literature	50	8,8
Economics and Administrative Sciences	49	8,7
Engineering	52	9,2
Architecture	24	4,2
Communication	49	8,7
Agricultural Sciences and Technologies	50	8,8
Islamic Studies	50	8,8
Medicine	48	8,5
Fine Arts	49	8,7
Sports Sciences	55	9,7
Health Sciences	50	8,8
Total	566	100,0
Father's Political Party Membership	n	%
Yes	45	8
No	519	92
Total	564	100
Mother's Political Party Membership	n	%
Yes	26	4,7
No	538	95,3
Total	564	100
Level of Interest in Politics	n	%
No Interest at All	195	34,5
I am Very Slightly Interested	137	24,2
I am Slightly Interested	144	25,4
I am Quite Interested	56	9,9
I am Very Interested	34	6
Total	566	100
Do You Intend to Vote in the Upcoming Elections?	n	%
Yes	487	86
No	77	14
Total	564	100





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Statistical analyses conducted on the factors determining university students' interest in politics show that certain demographic variables have a significant effect on the level of political interest. According to the results of the chi-square test, a statistically significant relationship was found between the gender variable and the level of interest in politics (chi-square: 33.649, sd: 4, p: 0.000). The findings indicate that male students (25.2%) are more interested in politics than are female students (8.6%). This result is consistent with the gender-based political interest differences widely discussed in the literature (Scott 2007; Sancar 2014; Erzen 2019). The higher level of political participation among male students can be explained by gender roles and the perception of the political field as a male-dominated domain. On the other hand, no statistically significant difference was found between the faculty- and class-level variables and students' level of interest in politics (Chi-square: 8.221, sd: 12, p: 0.768). This finding suggests that the university education process is not a determining factor in students' political interest and that political interest is more likely to be influenced by individual or societal factors.

Another analysis examining the political socialization process within the family revealed that students whose fathers are members of a political party have a significantly greater level of interest in politics (31.1%) than do those whose fathers are not party members (14.6%) (Chi-square: 22.832, sd: 8, p: 0.004). However, no significant relationship was found between mothers' political party membership and students' interest in politics (Chi-square: 17.131, sd: 12, p: 0.145). This suggests that the father plays a more influential role in the political socialization process within the family than the mother does. In traditional societal structures, where men take on more active roles in politics and fathers play a more decisive role in the development of the political consciousness of children, these factors can be identified as key contributors to this finding.

The results indicate that one of the most significant factors determining university students' interest in politics is gender and fathers' political background. Furthermore, the lack of a significant effect of academic variables (such as faculty and class level) on students' political interest leads to the conclusion that societal and familial factors play a more decisive role in the development of political interest. Specifically, the father's political influence within the family is a crucial factor in shaping the political attitudes and behaviours of young individuals.

Table 2: Factors Affecting the Political Attitudes and Behaviours of University Youth (Political Socialization Scale)

My political views have been affected by the following factors	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Government Policies	566	3,53	1,504
Political Events	566	3,34	1,463
Political Leaders	566	3,02	1,463
What I Watch in the Media	566	2,98	1,574





Political Parties	566	2,92	1,489
Political Posts on Social Media	566	2,74	2,250
Publications I Read	565	2,53	1,395
My University Education	566	2,34	1,389
Father	566	2,15	1,301
My Friends	565	1,85	1,082
Mother	566	1,83	1,123
My Professors at University	566	1,67	1,071
Siblings	566	1,66	1,068
Past Teachers	566	1,63	1,029
Relatives	566	1,63	1,017

When the average values of the responses to the political socialization scale, which includes potential factors influencing the political attitudes and behaviours of university students (see Table 2), are examined, the highest average values are associated with the statements “Government Policies” (3.53), “Political Events” (3.34), and “Political Leaders” (3.02). The next highest averages are for the statements “What I Watch in the Media” (2.98) and “Political Parties” (2.92). Notably, most other statements have averages below 2.5. In this context, these statements are factors that influence students’ political attitudes and behaviours to a lesser extent. When the averages for the statements “mother,” “father,” “siblings,” and “relatives” are considered, the university youth perceive the “family influence” on their political views to be quite low.

Table 3: Factor Analysis of the Political Socialization Scale

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
1st Factor: Political Events and Media			
Political Leaders	,900		
Political Events	,881		
Political Parties	,873		
Government Policies	,819		
Political Posts on Social Media	,510		
What I Watch in the Media	,389		
2nd Factor: Education System/School			
My University Professors		,743	
My Past Teachers		,742	
My University Education		,676	
Publications I Read		,595	
My Friends		,562	
3rd Factor: Family			
Father			,833
Mother			,827
Siblings			,710
Relatives			,591





Total Variance:	24.36	17.45	16.81
KMO Sampling Adequacy		0,826	
Cronbach's alpha		0,813	
Bartlett's Test Of Sphericity	X ² : 3643,8	Sd: 105	P: ,000

A factor analysis was conducted on the scale developed to identify the factors affecting the political socialization process of students studying at the faculty level at Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University. As a result of the analysis, the scale items were grouped into three subdimensions (factors) (see Table 3). The reliability of the scale items is very high (Cronbach's alpha: 0.813). The scale explains 58.64% of the total variance, and the KMO value resulting from the factor analysis is 0.826. The Cronbach's alpha value of the scale indicates high reliability and consistency. Additionally, the KMO value indicates an appropriate sample size for the factor analysis and suggests that the dataset is sufficient for factor analysis.

As a result of the analysis, the items "Political Leaders, Political Events, Political Parties, Government Policies, Political Posts on Social Media, Media Content" were grouped under the first factor, which was named "Political Events and Media" because of the content of the items. On the basis of the average values of the items in this factor (see Table 2), these are the elements that most strongly influence the political socialization process of university youth. The items in this factor indicate that external sources of information, such as political leaders, political events, political parties, government policies, social media posts, and media content, shape students' political perspectives. This finding also shows that media and political events play critical roles in the political socialization processes of young people.

The items grouped under the second factor were "My Professors at the University, My Past Teachers, My University Education, Publications Outside the Course I Studied, My Friends", and this factor was defined as "Education System/School". The expressions of this factor show that the political socialization process of students is shaped by education, especially by interactions within the school. School-based resources such as university education, professors, and past teachers directly or indirectly influence students' political opinions. This situation also highlights the important role that educational institutions play in the political development of students.

The items "Father, Mother, Siblings, Relatives" are grouped under the third factor, which has been labeled "Family." This factor examines the impact of interactions with family members (father, mother, siblings, and relatives) on the political socialization process. The family, as one of the individual's first social environments, is a fundamental setting where political values and attitudes are shaped. Political discussions within the family, values acquired from family members, and the political behaviours observed within the family play





a determining role in the development of young people's political attitudes (Almond & Verba 1963: 325; Türkkahraman 2000: 31; Lauglo 2011: 64-66).

In light of the data obtained from the study, the relationships between the factors influencing university students' political socialization process and certain demographic variables were examined through variance (ANOVA) and t test analyses. First, the relationships among gender, faculty variables, and three factors -political events and media, education system/school, and family- were analyzed. The results indicate that there is no significant difference between gender and faculty variables and these three factors (gender: $t: ,931$, $p: ,352$; faculty: $F: 1,380$, $p: ,178$). This suggests that political socialization occurs similarly, independent of these two variables, and that the influences students receive from media and political events, the education system, and family are independent of gender and faculty differences. When the relationship with the class-level variable was examined, no significant difference was found in the "political events and media" factor at the class level ($F: ,421$, $p: ,738$). This finding indicates that external factors such as political events and media do not influence students' political socialization processes at the class level.

A significant difference was observed between the "Education System/School" factor and the class level variable ($F: 3.786$, $p: ,010$). This result shows that the education process changes the political attitudes and behaviours of students over time and that the influence of university education increases in the years following students' education. The difference is particularly noticeable between first year (mean: 47.65) and fourth year (mean: 51.78) students. This suggests that the university years are a critical turning point in shaping students' political perspectives and that the educational process has a stronger political impact in later years.

Similarly, when the relationship between the family factor and class level was examined, a similar situation was observed ($F: 2.797$, $p: ,040$). A significant difference was found between first year (mean: 51.65) and fourth year (mean: 48.41) students. This shows that as the university education process progresses, the influence of the family on political socialization gradually decreases over time. In other words, in the later years of university education, students begin to think more independently and are influenced more by external factors than their families in their political socialization. In fact, this situation can be seen as a reverse confirmation of our previous analysis. In other words, as the political impact of university education increases on youth, the influence of the family decreases in a similar proportion.

Finally, the relationship between the "political events and media" factor and the intention to vote in the upcoming elections was examined. The results of the t test ($t: 5.475$, $p: ,000$) reveal that political events and media factors strongly influence students' voting behaviour. The average score for students who stated that they would vote (mean: 50.93) was higher than that for those who stated that they would not vote (mean: 44.38). This shows that





the strengthening of political knowledge and attitudes through political events and the media has a significant effect on students' voting decisions. In addition, it reveals that familial influences decrease over time and that students' political attitudes are shaped more independently. These findings also reveal that some variables have certain effects on political socialization processes, but some factors do not create significant differences in terms of gender, faculty and class level.

Conclusion and Evaluation

This research aimed to determine the main factors affecting the political socialization processes of university youth, and in this context, a field study was carried out on students at Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University. The findings revealed that three main factors -political events and media, the education system/school and family- are effective in shaping students' political attitudes and behaviours.

According to the results of the research, "political events and media" stand out as the factor with the strongest effect on the formation of students' political attitudes. Current political developments, media content and the discourses of political leaders directly affect students' political orientations and determine their level of participation in political processes. Social media has emerged as an important tool that shapes individuals' perceptions of the political agenda.

The "education system and school" factor plays a decisive role in shaping the political attitudes of young people. With the progress of the university education process, the political effects of students from education have increased. In the later stages of the education process, the influence of the academic environment becomes more evident in the political attitudes and behaviours of students. In particular, upper-year students have more knowledge about political issues, and the academic environment gives them different perspectives.

However, the effect of the "family" factor on students' political attitudes decreases, especially in the later years of university education. The fact that individuals are exposed to different opinions and develop critical thinking skills during the university education process causes the political influences from the family to relatively weaken. However, the father's political background had a significant effect on the political interest of young people. The political influence of mothers on young people seems to be more secondary than that of fathers.

In this study, it was also determined that the students' interest levels in politics were generally low. Although most of the participants stated that they were not very interested in politics, their voting tendency was high. This shows that the students' level of awareness about





participation in the political process is high, but they keep their distance from direct forms of political participation, such as political activism or party membership.

In conclusion, the findings show that the influence of media and political events is decisive in the political socialization processes of university students, that the influence of the education system increases over time, and that the effect of the family factor weakens over time. These findings are based on similar studies conducted at different universities (See Akın, 2009; Ergün, 2019). During their university education, students start to think more independently of the knowledge and experience they gain from different sources, and nonfamily factors become more decisive in shaping their political orientation. Therefore, the role of universities in the process of raising political awareness should be examined more closely, and political education opportunities should be increased.

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