Turkey's Map of Emotions and Its Political Reflections

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Abstract

Political psychology is an interdisciplinary scientific field that that combines politics and psychology to explore the effect of emotions in politics. It examines the backgrounds of political decisions at the individual and community levels. This study analyzes the political decisions of voters in Turkey, focusing on positive and negative reactions, such as trust and fear. Using conclusions drawn from the Addiction Map of Turkey Study (TURBAHAR), which involved interviews with approximately twenty-five thousand participants during five months in 2018, this study analyzed the results of local elections held in thirty metropolitan districts and fifty-one provinces in Turkey on March 31, 2019. Eighty-six percent of the electorate participated in the elections. The data are organized into three groups or zones that identified vote pool areas: the People's Alliance (Zone 1), consisting of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP); the Nation Alliance (Zone 2), consisting of the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the IYI Party; and the People's Democratic Party (HDP) (Zone 3). This study tries to interpret the decision mechanisms and the positive and negative emotions of the voters in these three zones. The aim of the study is to analyze the recent psychopolitical reactions of Turkish voters in terms of anger, identity, inequality, uncertainty, polarization, discrimination, and tolerance of the society.

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The literature on the role of emotions in politics is characterized by a series of distinctions between individual/collective emotions, emotions/reason, and involuntary/strategic emotions, often portrayed as mutually exclusive dichotomies.

—Kennet Lynggaard, "Methodological Challenges in the Study of Emotions in Politics and How to Deal with Them"

Although understanding the role of emotion in our social and political agenda is a developing field of research in political science,[1] in the past two decades, several studies in political psychology have been conducted to understand the effects of emotions on political behaviors, options, choices, and information processing.[2] In the past, the overlap between political science and psychology was minimal, but the two fields gradually converged, and that intersection sparked the attention of the researchers in this study.[3] The political psychology is defined as an "interdisciplinary scientific field of inquiry concerned with the study of political processes from a psychological perspective." The definition continues: "At the most general level, political psychology is concerned with political thought and behavior of individuals within politically organized communities. Research in political psychology examines political behavior at the individual (e.g., decision making) and at the collective level (e.g., collective action), it concerns processes occurring in the general public (e.g., public opinion) and among political elites (e.g., psychology of leadership), and it relates to formal (e.g., voting) and informal (e.g., community involvement) processes of political participation."[4]

Studies of political processes suggest that voters do not decide whether a candidate is competent or incompetent, effective or ineffective by evaluating only the candidate's promises, the current economy, and their own financial circumstances. Contrary to what was believed in the past, studies in political psychology and other fields have revealed that positive and negative emotions play an essential role in people's decision making. The sources of these emotions may be cultural, hereditary, or neurobiological.

Understanding the psychopolitical and emotional background of the results of Turkey's recent local elections is the focus of this study. The election represents a big shift from the architecture of the past twenty years, which was built by the single ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). On March 31, 2019, Turkey's local elections took place in 30 metropolitan districts, 51 provinces, 922 counties, 32,105 neighborhoods, and 18,306 villages. The governing AKP and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) contested the elections in many provinces under the joint "People's Alliance." The Republican People's Party (CHP) and the IYI Party entered some of the races under the "National Alliance" banner. "The Pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) did not openly announce support for either alliance but did not field candidates in some areas to improve the chances of opposition candidates."[5]

In keeping with the standard participation rate since the 1950s, the turnout for the election was 86 percent. The AKP-MHP coalition received 51.7 percent of the votes nationwide; the CHP-IYI coalition received 38.0 percent. For the first time in decades, the AKP lead by President Recep Erdogan has lost control of the big cities, including Istanbul and the capital city of Ankara. But the nationwide results showed the victory of People's Alliance in cities with high Kurdish populations, such as Sirnak, Agri, Bitlis, and Mus. The People's Alliance surprisingly received 43.8 percent of the vote in South East Anatolia region, whereas the HDP received 31.6 percent of the vote.

An analysis of these election results and the new architecture of Turkey's politics must take the psychopolitical dimension into account. What emotions led people to decide as they did? Can

we define regional tendencies and forms of political behavior in terms of emotional reactions? This study examines the differences among several psychometric characteristics, such as levels of positive and negative emotions, alexithymia, psychiatric symptoms, attachment styles, and personal well-being among the three groups, defined as the participants who are living in the People's Alliance vote pool areas (Zone 1), the participants who are living in the National Alliance vote pool areas (Zone 2), and the participants who are living in the HDP vote pool areas (Zone 3).

Materials and Methods

This study is a part of the Addiction Map of Turkey Study (TURBAHAR) that was carried out throughout Turkey in 2018.[6] The study used a stratified cluster sampling approach based on the NUTS (nomenclature of territorial units for statistics) classification. NUTS is a hierarchical system for dividing up the economic territory of the European Union.[7] The people residing in twenty-six NUTS regions of Turkey were included in the study. At least 200 and at most 2,000 people were involved in each area. Inclusion criteria for participants included being over eighteen years of age and not having a mental illness that would prevent the individual from completing questionnaires. Larger samples were selected from the regions with higher densities of the population. A total of 24,990 people were interviewed for the study; but 24,494 people met the criteria and filled the scales.

Between July 2018 and October 2018, the participants were selected from government offices and nongovernmental institutions such as charities. Potential participants were asked to give their consent for participating in the study. Once the consent form was signed, each participant received a questionnaire that was to be filled out and authenticated by a self-report under the supervision of an interviewer. Directions for completing the questionnaire were given verbally and in writing. The interviews in the study were carried out by clinical psychologists (n = 125). Filling in the questionnaires took an average of forty-five minutes. The Üsküdar University Ethics Committee of Non-Invasive Researches approved the study. The questionnaire includes the following parts:

Sociodemographic Information Form: This form prepared by the researchers includes questions about participants' age, gender, education, marital status, number of children, and presence of psychiatric disorders.

Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI): This instrument consists of fifty-three items in nine subscales (somatization, obsessive-compulsive disorder, interpersonal sensitivity, depression, anxiety disorders, hostility, phobic anxiety, paranoid ideations, and psychoticism) and was adapted to Turkish by Şahin and Durak.[8] The participants were asked to reply using a five-point scale ranging from "not at all" to "extremely." The alpha coefficients of the factor subscale ranged between 0.70 (for depression) and 0.88 (for somatization).

Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20): This scale was developed to investigate alexithymia, defined as not recognizing one's own emotions and excitement. It is a five-point Likert-type self-reporting scale consisting of twenty items with three subscales: difficulty identifying feelings (TAS-1), difficulty expressing feelings (TAS-2), and externally oriented thinking (TAS-3). Higher scores indicate higher levels of alexithymia. The scale was developed by Bagby, Taylor, and Parker.[9] The Turkish version was developed by Güleç et al.[10]

Personal Well-Being Index-Adult (PWBI-A): This index was developed in 2006 by the International Wellbeing Group to provide a subjective measure of well-being. It consists of an eleven-point (0–10) Likert-type scale that aims to measure the satisfaction levels of eight areas of a person's life: quality of life, individual health, success in life, interpersonal relations, personal security, social belonging, looking to the future with confidence, and spirituality.[11] All eight of the items in the PWBI-A, which was adapted to Turkish by Meral, are positive; the scale can be graded with a maximum score of 80.[12]

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS): The PANAS is a twenty-item self-report measure of positive and negative affect at a given time using a five-point Likert scale. Participants respond to twenty adjectives describing affect. Gençöz tested its validity and reliability for Turkish. The Turkish version of PANAS has demonstrated good internal consistency (0.83–0.86) and moderate concurrent validity (0.40–0.54).[13]

Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R): The validity and reliability of this scale, developed by Fraley and Shaver, was carried out by Selçuk and colleagues in 2005.[14] The scale consists of thirty-six items in a seven-item Likert: eighteen in anxiety and eighteen in avoidance subscales. The score from each subscale varies between 18 and 126, and the higher scores are related to avoidant attachment or anxious attachment styles.

Local Elections Data: As described earlier, Turkey's local elections took place March 31, 2019, in eighty-one Turkish cities and provinces. Thirty metropolitan and 1,351 district municipal mayors, alongside 1,251 provincial and 20,500 municipal councilors were elected, in addition to office holders for numerous nonpartisan local positions, such as neighborhood wardens (mukhtars) and members of elderly people's councils.

Official data on the election results were obtained from the Supreme Election Board of Turkey. The vote rates of 30 metropolitan districts, 51 provinces were recalculated for 26 NUTS-2 regions for the People's Alliance, the National Alliance, and the HDP. Regional voting density distribution charts were created for each group. Thirteen NUTS-2 regions (n = 10,799) that had a voting density above a rate of 50 percent for People's Alliance are labeled "People's Alliance vote pool areas" (Zone 1). Five NUTS-2 regions (n = 6995) that had a voting density above a rate of 50 percent for National Alliance are labeled "National Alliance vote pool areas" (Zone 2). Four NUTS-2 regions (n = 1,400) that had a voting density above a rate of 50 percent for HDP are labeled "HDP vote pool areas" (Zone 3).

The data of the study were analyzed using the IBM statistical software SPSS-21. Sociodemographic characteristics and data from five different scales were included in the analysis. One-way analysis of variation (ANOVA) with Tukey post-hoc tests was used to determine significant differences among the three zones.

Results

In this study, 49.9 percent (n = 9,578) of the participants were female and 50.1 percent (n = 9,616) were male. The age range of the participants was 18–81, and the mean age was 32.4±11.24 for females and 31.26±13.7 for males; 45.1 percent of the participants are married, and 39.9 percent have children. Although each zone had a different number of subjects, the mean age, ratio of females to males, and mean years of education did not differ statistically significantly.

Subjective well-being, anxiety, depression, negative self-evaluation, somatization, alexithymia, positive affect levels, and attachment styles were found to differ between three zones statistically significantly. Hostility scores and negative affect scores, however, did not have a statistically significant difference among the three zones. The graphics related to psychometric scores appear in Figures 1–12.

Mean scores of personal well-being were found to be statistically significantly higher in Zone 1 compared to those in Zone 2 and in Zone 3. Also, mean scores of personal well-being in Zone 2 was found to be statistically significantly higher than those in Zone 3 (Figure 1).
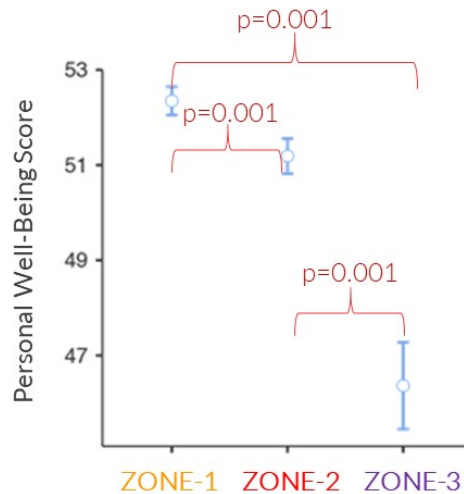

Figure 1. Mean personal well-being scores by Zone

Mean scores of anxiety were found to be statistically significantly higher in Zone 3 compared to those in Zone 1 and Zone 2. But the mean scores of anxiety in Zone 1 and Zone 2 were not found to be statistically significantly different (Figure 2).
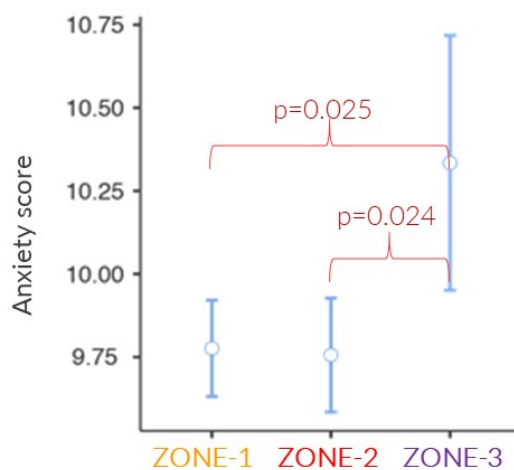

Figure 2. Mean anxiety scores by Zone

Mean scores of depression were found to be statistically significantly higher in Zone 3 compared to those in Zone 2. But the mean scores of depression in Zone 1 and Zone 2 were not

found to be statistically significantly different. Also, the mean scores of depression in Zone 1 and Zone 3 were not found to be statistically significantly different (Figure 3).
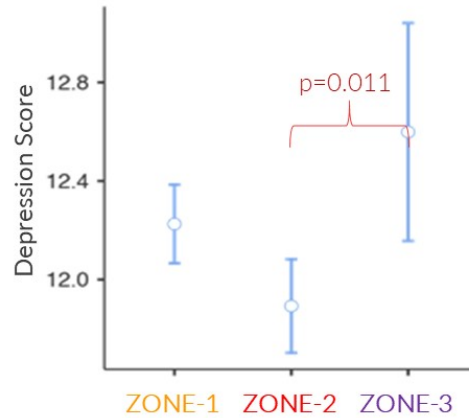

Figure 3. Mean depression scores by Zone

Mean scores of somatization were found to be statistically significantly higher in Zone 3 compared to those in Zone 1 and Zone 2. But the mean scores of somatization in Zone 1 and Zone 2 were not found to be statistically significantly different (Figure 4).
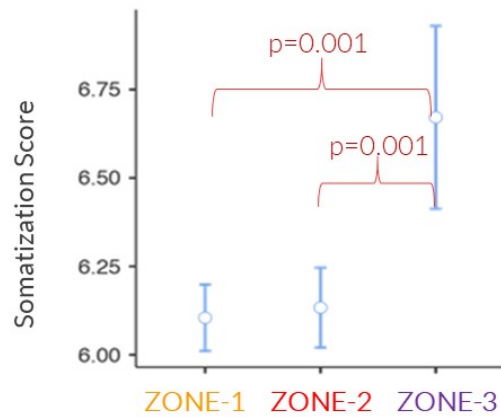

Figure 4. Mean somatization scores by Zone

Mean scores of hostility were not found to be statistically significantly different among the three zones (Figure 5).
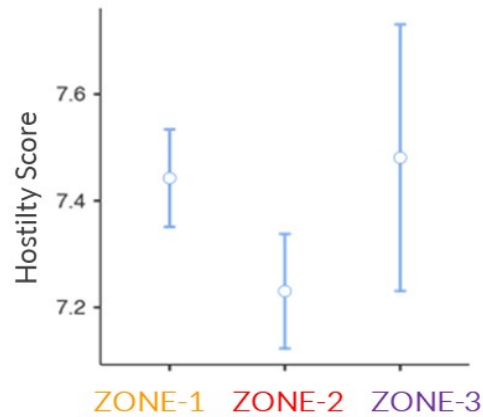
Figure 5. Mean hostility scores by Zone

Mean scores of negative self-evaluation were found to be statistically significantly higher in Zone 3 compared to those in Zone 1 and Zone 2. But the mean scores of negative self-evaluation in Zone 1 and Zone 2 were not found to be statistically significantly different (Figure 6).
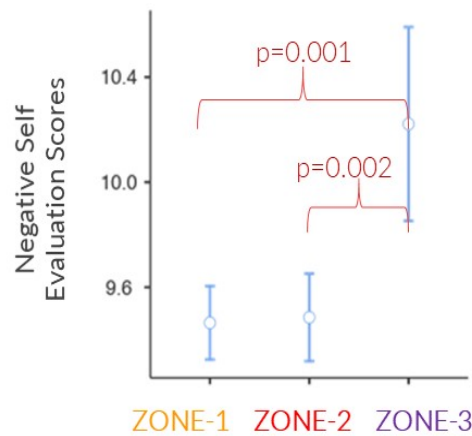

Figure 6. Mean negative self-evaluation scores by Zone

Mean scores of difficulty in identifying feeling were found to be statistically significantly higher in Zone 3 compared to those in Zone 1 and Zone 2. But the mean scores of difficulty in identifying feelings in Zone 1 and Zone 2 were not found to be statistically significantly different (Figure 7).
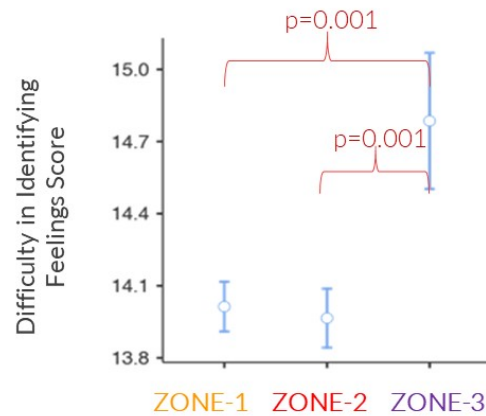
Figure 7. Mean difficulty in identifying feelings scores by Zone

Mean scores of difficulty in describing feelings were found to be statistically significantly lower in Zone 3 compared to those in Zone 1 and Zone 2. But the mean scores of difficulty in describing feelings in Zone 1 and Zone 2 were not found to be statistically significantly different (Figure 8).
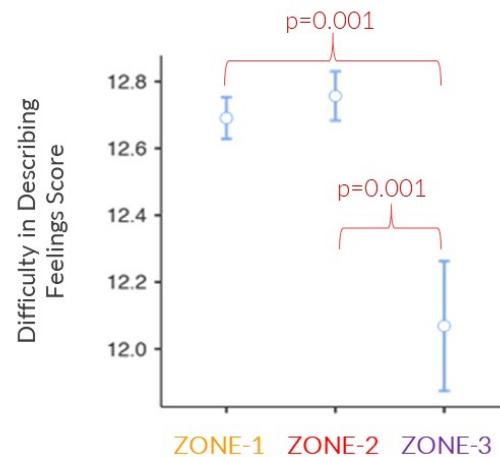

Figure 8. Mean difficulty in describing feelings scores by Zone

Mean scores of positive affect were found to be statistically significantly lower in Zone 3 compared to those in Zone 1 and Zone 2. But the mean scores of positive affect in Zone 1 and Zone 2 were not found to be statistically significantly different (Figure 9).
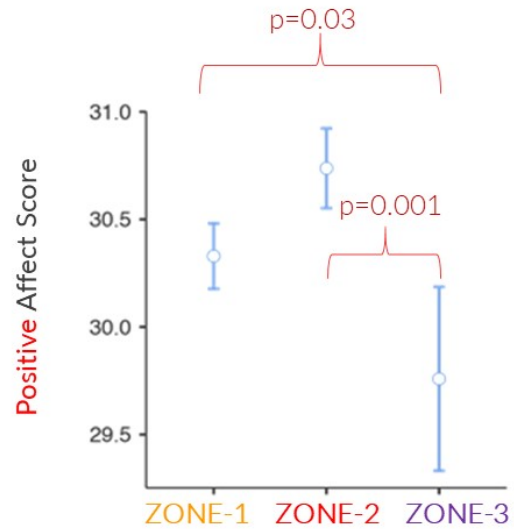
Figure 9. Mean positive affect scores by Zone

Mean scores of negative affect were not found to be statistically significantly different between Zone 1, Zone 2, and Zone 3 (Figure 10).
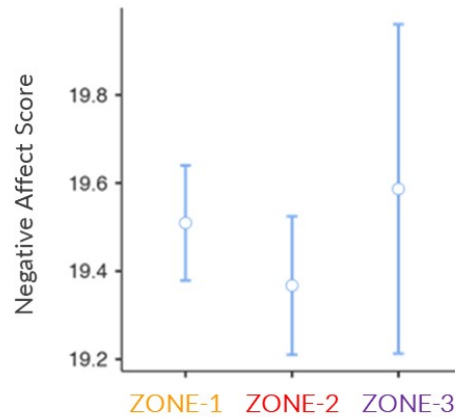
Figure 10. Mean negative affect scores by Zone

Mean scores of avoidant attachment were found to be statistically significantly higher in Zone 3 compared to those in Zone 1 and Zone 2. Also, mean scores of avoidant attachment in Zone 1 were found to be statistically significantly higher than those in Zone 2 (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Mean avoidant attachment scores by Zone

Mean scores of anxious attachment were found to be statistically significantly higher in Zone 3 compared to those in Zone 1 and Zone 2. But mean scores of avoidant attachment in Zone 1 and Zone 2 were not found to be statistically significantly different (Figure 12).
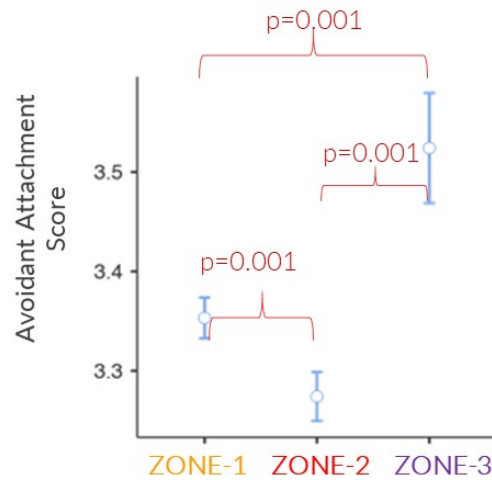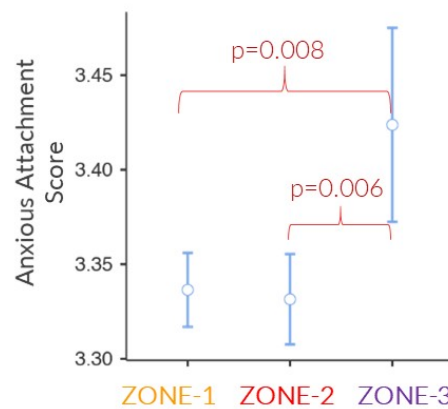

Figure 12. Mean anxious attachment scores by Zone

Discussion

This study examines the differences in several psychometric characteristics among the subjects living on the vote pool areas of the three major political formations that were observed in Turkey's local elections in March 2019. Subjective well-being scores were found to be highest in Zone 1 and lowest in Zone 3. Difficulty in describing feelings and positive affect scores were found to be higher in Zone 1 and Zone 2 than in Zone 3. Depression, anxiety, negative self-evaluation, difficulty in identifying feelings, avoidant attachment, and anxious attachment scores were found to be higher in Zone 3 than in Zone 1 and Zone 2. The three zones did not differ in hostility and negative affect scores.

Zone 3 differs from the other regions in many psychological variables. Personal well-being and positive affect is at the lowest level compared to other regions. Among the many characteristics that affect personal well-being, depression and anxiety, especially, have negative relationships with personal well-being.[15] In keeping with this relationship, an increase in anxiety

and depression scores is observed in individuals living in Zone 3. This finding is compatible with the literature. Anxiety and depression are also significantly affected by an individual's attachment styles. In Zone 3, again in keeping with the differences in other variables and in the literature, insecure attachment styles were found to be higher than in other regions. High insecure attachment scores and low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety scores are associated with the differentiation in voting behavior of that region. Despite all these differences, in one of the surprising results of our study, hostility and negative emotions in Zone 3 are similar to those in other regions. In particular, anxiety, depression, and insecure attachment features have been shown in the literature to be associated with hostility.[16] Also, one of the sources of hostility is low emotional awareness.[17] Alexithymia, which indicates low emotional awareness,[18] and "difficulty expressing emotions" scores, one of its subscales, are higher in individuals living in Zone 3. Though depression, anxiety, insecure attachment, difficulty expressing emotions, and low personal well-being are high, hostility is similar. But among these three groups that were so unlike in some ways, differences in degree of hostility were not seen, suggesting that some external factors apart from the individual's psychological backgrounds were triggering the hostility.

The conceptualization of emotions in current political psychology takes a neural approach known as the affective intelligence approach.[19] Affective intelligence theory argues that emotions are guiding the individual directly and making it easy to respond to certain conditions with the desired behavior. In that instance, politics ensures that an individual will tend to trust former habits when making decisions. When the survival system gets involved, the level of trust drops, and the individual begins to question previous practices or beliefs. When a person faces uncertainty, the system related to survival kicks in. At this stage, individuals try to get more information about themselves and their environment and focus their attention on their situation and on obtaining new information. Consequently, according to the theory of affective intelligence, when politics and political candidates cause anxiety, an individual's urge to get more information in order to suppress the uncertainty increases.

Conversely, when members of the electorate feel positive or enthusiastic, they sustain their trust in accustomed political behaviors and their political involvement. This two-dimensional affective intelligence approach has been adapted to several areas, ranging from political campaigns to interest in learning[20] and from a perceived threat to the focus of attention on politicians.[21] Studies in neuroscience show a behavioral consequence of emotions to approach and withdrawal.[22] It is also asserted that fluctuations in power that affect an individual's positive and negative emotions have an impact on decisions to approach or withdraw.

Several experimental studies show that anger and fear in risk analysis have different consequences in conduct. The studies demonstrate that fear is related to the behavior of information seeking[23] and to an interest in learning.[24] Fear is also related to having some ambivalence about specific political subjects[25] and to an inclination to discuss certain topics.[26] MacKuen and his colleagues have suggested that citizens who feel anger are in search of less information.[27] Other studies have shown similar results. Valentino and his colleagues, for example, point out that people who are anxious spend less time reading about a certain topic, while Huddy, Feldman, and Weber demonstrate that people who are anxious consider subjects less deeply and reject new ideas of closeness to new ideas.[28] On one hand, anxiety always encourages behaviors that are undertaken to quell uncertainty.[29] On the other hand, uncertainty increases anxiety.[30] While in some instances uncertainty increases an individual's anxiety, in other instances where the experienced situation is perceived as threatening to the individual's private sphere, it prompts this individual to get angry. Huddy and his colleagues have

demonstrated that anxiety induces people to distance themselves from risks and to support a more reconciliatory policy.[31] It has been observed, however, that the evocation of threat inspires fury in people. Furthermore, it increases support for decisions about military intervention, penal policies, and restrictions on freedom. Anger emerges simultaneously with fear; one is more dominant than the other and experienced on a more conscious level.

Unlike fear and sadness, anger is a mobilizing emotion.[32] Studies show that anger increases motivation toward aggression, prompting individuals to undertake collective action, despite the risks involved.[33] A 1986 study in Turkey concluded that denial of polarization by progovernment factions and insistence by the opposition that polarization exists increases polarization and raises the hostility between the two groups.[34]

Enthusiasm, in contrast to fear, anger, and sadness, is a positive emotion that is linked to polarization and partisan identity. It is related to feeling good, and it harbors positive emotions such as hope, affection, excitement, and pride. Positive emotions, in general, reinforce certain habits in certain situations. When positive emotions are associated with political practices, the association reinforces those habits.[35]

A diversity of political views is essential for the political health of a democracy. But when political and social differences give rise to a single political authority that draws a distinction between them and us, the smoothly running system is rendered inoperable. Polarization prevents the free exchange of information, preventing a free discussion of different points of view. When the dominate political power in a country ignores the polarization in the country, then the divide between these two poles gets deeper.

Polarization, which is based on identity politics, tends to intensify intolerance toward groups that are seen as political and ethnic minorities, transform the partisan divisions into societal separations, raise feelings of hatred among the voters, and reinforce prejudice and negative thoughts toward the other. Social distances widen in a populist atmosphere and tolerance toward the other diminishes and, in time, ossifies.[36] Many studies show that when discourses of polarization cause intolerance among citizens, that intolerance transfers to other social identities.[37] In terms of such indicators as ethnicity, language, and religion, individuals can get a strong attachment to their own identities and embrace feelings of hatred when a society is divided into allies and enemies. These powerful divisions give rise to social and political intolerance.[38] In Turkey, identities, especially those that are based on ethnicity, local dialect, and religious affiliation that are derived from historical traumas, seem to be a major cause of political and social controversies.[39]

According to group conflict theory, a threat perceived by the counter group inspires prejudice and intolerance toward that group. To counteract this prejudice and intolerance, members of a political and civil society must accept the existence of polarization at a minimum level. If there is no common ground, it will not be possible to develop appropriate dialogues and methods to compete with the polarization.[40] If the denial of polarization continues, societal regulation will not be possible and that denial will become part of the society's culture. The transformation of polarization into violence and hostility is inevitable after a certain amount of time.[41] If a disintegrated society is to be reunited and regulated, the existence of polarization must be acknowledged and, as early as possible, the polarization should not be allowed to strengthen. Thus, the denial of the polarization from a particular group creates more alienation of the counter group. As the level of trust diminishes and the level of fear rises, the polarization between these two groups hardens. Periods of intense polarization are characterized by a specific type of pressure, a rising perception of threat, and indecisiveness in politics. At these moments,

the political leader could take the opportunity to reshape the political arena in terms of his field of interests and will.[42]

Tolerance is one of the most significant features of democratic societies during tough and confusing periods. It is defined as an acceptance of these differences by the citizens who hold different beliefs about social and political truths.[43] In contrast, in a polarized situation, people tend to protect their territory.[44] Tolerance requires that sides be open to discussing their own points of view and to hearing the ideas and arguments of the other sides without necessarily agreeing.[45]

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that electors of the three main political entities in Turkey are distinctive from one another. It is surprising to get similar outcomes on hostility and negative emotions from these three groups, demonstrating different psychometric features in several fields. Apart from each group's distinctive psychological features, other factors can be considered as a trigger to negative emotions and hostility. Polarization prevents the exchange of information, blocking the kind of communication that allows each side to present its arguments. If the political power in the country discriminates between its supporters and those who do not support it, yet it does not see the polarization in the country, the gap between the two poles deepens.

Notes

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