Religiosity and Political Participation of University Students in Turkey

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze the religiosity and political participation of the university students in Turkey. For this aim, a survey conducted on 872 students in order to understand the impact of religiosity on political participation. In this research, political participation is measured as conventional and un-conventional participation forms. The scale is prepared as 13 questions; 7 of them for measuring conventional and 6 of them for measuring un-conventional participation. It is determined in the literature that religiosity is related to conventional political participation and also has a negative effect on un-conventional participation. In fact, the studies included in the literature show that participation of the religious individuals is low generally and if they choose to perform any political participation, it is realized in the form of conventional participation. On the other hand university students are associated more than any groups with un-conventional participation. According to the result of the research it has been found that religiosity has a negative correlation with both conventional and un-conventional form of political participation.

Keywords: *Religiosity, political participation, university students, Turkey*

1. Introduction

The main objective of this research is to determine the effects of being religious or non-religious on political participation and how being religious differs generally and the role of religiosity on conventional and un-conventional forms of political participation of university students in Turkey specifically. In the literature, it is known that religiosity decreases political participation and the participation of the religious people is rather conventional. Based on this view, it is expected that religiosity would decrease political participation in this study.

Religion and religiosity are the concepts which are not easily defined up to the present. Not only defining the religion or religiosity but also measuring religiosity is also very problematic. Hökelekli points out that since there is no single form of religiosity, individuals believing in the same religion, even included in the same religious group, are different and for this reason, it is possible to mention a religiosity specific to every individual. Thus, this makes defining religiosity even much harder (Hökelekli, 2010: 81). In addition, Allport indicates that there are as many kinds of religion experiences as the number of people who tend to be religious in the world (Allport, 2004: 46). Similarly Spilka et al. says that "there is obviously great overlap among the various proposals, but all agree on one thing: Even though there may be only one word of religion, there may be hundred possible ways of being religious" (Spilka et al., 1985: 7). In this respect, Fromm states another situation that is related to this issue. He argues that, it is extremely difficult to understand whether someone is religious or not. According to him, although some people claim that they are religious, they may not be religious internally, and people who say that they are not religious may act highly religiously (Fromm, 1997: 239). It is understand from this argument that the problem lies not only at defining religiosity, but also at measuring religiosity, as well. As a result, every study makes a definition in accordance with its own research subject and in parallel with the discipline it is included. A researcher who is interested in the issue of religion and who desires to conduct a comprehensive research on the issue would unavoidably encounter the problem of measuring religiosity and many more problems included in it someday (Vernon, 1962a: 159). According to Vernon while try to measure religiosity there are two approaches. In the first approach such criteria such as church membership, church attendance, or acceptance of specific beliefs are often used to measure religiosity. In the second one, researcher asks to respondents some questions such as "how interested they are in religion or how important they feel religion to be in their lives" in order to measure religiosity (Vernon, 1962b: 243-244). Briefly it could be argued that for this research religiosity means to believe in a religion and to live the life in accordance with the requirements of that religion. Accordingly to this, religiosity is measured by asking to the respondents as how they feel themselves to be religious.

Another concept of the study, political participation has started to gain importance from the second half of the 20th century with people's beginning to take part in the political life, and has become a subject matter on which political scientists study intensively. In that era, democratic thinking gained importance and the idea of constructing political power on large masses instead of an intangible minority isolated from people is observed. In this respect, political participation is a concept that emerged as a result of the modernization process and as a component of modern societies. Just as the definitions of religion and religiosity, this concept also has been defined and interpreted differently by different researchers.

Aristotle defines the human being as a "political animal". Based on this quotation, it is possible to assume that human beings will take part in a political idea in some way or other. It is possible to express political participation as the attitudes and behaviors of the citizens towards the political system. Within this system, individuals perform some actions in order to affect directly or indirectly the decision-making of the political administrators. These actions may range from voting to participate in a candidate's campaign, to collect signatures, or participating in boycotts or meetings. In addition, individuals may follow political agenda via mass media or perform a political attitude and action by discussing political issues within their family or friends. So, it is also possible to say that not every individual performs the same level of participation. While some follow up the political agenda just as spectators, some others may prefer to take part in politics actively.

Political participation is defined differently by many researches. Some consider just voting as adequate for political participation, some others, nevertheless, state that campaign activity, protest behavior and volunteering should also be considered for political participation. First of all, Van Deth states as summarizing the situation that political participation is a wide-ranging concept and "has become a study of everything" (Van Deth, 2001: 2). Different forms of political participation were first started to be discussed by political scientists in 1960s-1970s (Milbrath, 1965; Verba and Nie, 1972; Barnes and Kaase, 1979). While Milbrath expressed that political participation was unidimensional, Barnes et al. (1979) mentioned two dimensions, namely conventional and un-conventional. Political participation was considered as unidimensional in 1950s and 1960s, but later it was studied as a multidimensional concept.

Barnes et al. (1979) divides political participation into two, namely conventional and unconventional. Conventional political participation is composed of actions in accordance with the rules and norms established by the political regime. Voting, participating in election campaigns, making donation to the election campaign of a candidate, being interested in politics, discussing political issues, wearing a badge of a political party, becoming a member of a political party or having conversation with political people are examples of such activities. On the other hand, unconventional political participation is composed of actions that are not in compliance with the rules and norms established by the political regime. Publishing leaflets, arranging demonstrations or meetings, forwarding collective petition, boycotting, and blocking building entrances/exits are examples of unconventional participation. Conventional political participation represents political actions accepted by the dominant culture while unconventional political participation involves the actions that are not considered acceptable by the dominant public culture, even if those actions are legal (Conway, 2000: 4).

There is no agreement on how political participation should be measured, either. There is no accurate answer to the questions such as how political participation is measured, with how many items it should be measured or how many dimensions it includes, etc. For this reason, every researcher decides on how to measure political participation and which questions to be asked by himself/herself.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Religiosity

When briefly looking at the studies on religiosity, it is seen that researchers review first of all what religiosity is and how it is measured, as well as the factors influencing the religiosity of the individual. Studies on religiosity have been reviewed theologically, psychologically, sociologically, anthropologically and politically by many social sciences. Religiosity has been discussed in many areas, ranging from the influence of religion and religiosity on the mental health to depression, from political participation to political attitudes and behaviors, even to criminal actions.

A part of the studies on religiosity is related with the factors which lead to occurrence of the religious behavior (Cornwall, 1989: 579-587). There are many influences that affect the people's religiousness in literature. In socialization parents, peer groups and religious institutions are the factors that influence the religiousness. Additionally, age, marital status, socio-economic status, gender is also some factors to determine people's religiousness. Parents have most important impact on child or adolescent religion. On the other hand, peers, education, school environment, the mass

media, and reading have an affect but lesser than the parents (Hood et al., 2009: 125). In several studies family socialization were the most frequent answers that had an effect on student's religious beliefs and mother was more important than the father when we compare the two parents (Argyle and Beit-Hallahmi, 1975; Allport, 2004). Some studies on gender also show that women are more religious than men (Allport et. al. 1948; Batson et.al 1993; Miller and Hoffman 1995; Allport, 2004; Günay, 2006; Hökelekli, 2010).

Most of the religiosity studies in Turkey were applied to the university students (Mutlu, 1989; Mutlu, 1996; Uysal, 1996; Onay 1999; Şahin 1999; Onay; 2004; Çapcıoğlu 2009). There are very few studies that investigate the socio-political attitudes and religiosity (Çapcıoğlu, 2009; Hülür and Kalender, 2003; Çarkoğlu and Toprak, 2006). Gender, age, occupation, socio-economic status, education, marital status, the place of accommodation, social class, urban and rural distinction, type of the group, its size, level of knowledge, economic status, political and social incidents, and being deprived of certain rights or benefits, alienation, exclusion and oppression are the factors affecting the individual's religiosity (Günay 2006; Hökelekli 2010). According to these studies, people living in the rural areas are more religious than the ones living in cities, married people are more religious than singles, women are more religious than men and the middle class are more religious than others. On the other hand, some other studies yielded exactly opposite results. In the studies of Köktaş (1993), Hülür and Kalender (2003), Onay (2004), and Mehmedoğlu (2004) men are found more religious than women. When analyzed at the relationship between social status and religiosity (Hökelekli, 2010; Köktaş, 1993; Onay, (2004), it can be also seen that the religiosity level of the people with higher socio-economic levels is lower than the people with middle and low socio-economic levels.

3. Political Participation

When studies conducted on political participation are reviewed, it is observed that the issue is investigated from a wide perspective. Political participation has been associated almost every subject matter. While some studies measure participation in different countries, the large majority of studies focus on the variables that determine political participation. Some studies investigate participation among young people whereas some others make comparative analyses in this area. As one of the most important variables of this study, religion also emerges as a variable that is investigated in relation with political participation.

According to most of the studies age is one of the most important determinant of political participation as age increases political participation increases, as well (Kalaycıoğlu, 1983; Dalton, 2002; Tatar, 2003, Quintelier, 2007, Gallup, 2007) Education is the other important factor that affects political participation in some studies. They indicate that more educated people ara more participated than the less educated (Kalaycıoğlu, 1983; Walter and Rosenberg, 2007; Quitelier, 2007; Gallup 2007). There has been found a positive relationship between gender and political participation in favor of men in the both national and international literature. Men tended to be found more politicaly active than women (Almod and Verba, 1963; Milbrath, 1965; Ozankaya, 1966; Baykal 1970; Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Kalaycıoğlu, 1983; Erdoğan, 2001; Conway, 2000; TÜSİAD, 2001; Tatar, 2003; Gallup, 2007). In difference of conventional and un-conventional participation Esgin (1999) found female students performed conventional participation most while the men performed un-conventional participation. According to Parlak's research (1999) whereas unconventional participation is associated with relatively higher education un-conventional participation is associated with relatively lower education. In Turkey studies have found that the political participation level of students is very low (Parlak, 1999; Erdoğan). In addition, many studies have found a positive relationship between income and political participation (Almond and Verba 1963; Baykal, 1970; Verba and Nie, 1972; Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980, Kalaycıoğlu, 1983; Verba, et.al., 1995; Conway, 2000).

The relationship between religiosity and political participation has been investigated in the literature mostly on the basis of religious institutions. This has been made by reviewing mostly the relationship between membership and participation. It is determined in the literature that religiosity is related to conventional political participation and has a negative effect on unconventional participation. Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu (2009) found that religiosity had a diminishing effect on protest and pressure potentials. Also Erdoğan stated as a result of the regression analyses he conducted in his studies that religiosity was a determinant of conventional participation. Secret et al. (1990) investigated the relationship between religiosity and political participation in their study and as a result, it was determined that religiosity suppressed protest activities. In the studies conducted so far on political participation, religiosity has emerged as related to the conventional political participation. In fact, the studies included in the literature show that participation of the religious individuals is low and that if they choose to perform any political participation, it is realized in the form of conventional participation.

4. Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. 872 students from faculty of Arts and Sciences, Divinity and, Economic and Administrative Sciences from three universities were constituted the participants of this research in order to establish relationships between the religiosity and political participation. Data were collected by means of the group-administered questionnaire method.

In this research, respondents were asked about directly how much or to what degree they see themselves as religious in ten point likert scale ranging from 1 (low) to 10 (high). While 1 indicates no religiosity, 10 indicate 100% of being religious. For measuring political participation, a scale was conducted by researcher. The scale is consisted of 13 questions while 7 of them measuring conventional and 6 of them for un-conventional participation. Conventional participation was measured with the questions; working in a campaign of a party or candidate, collect signature or signed a petition for supporting a candidate, wear a sticker or badge of a political party, persuade someone how to vote, youth branches of a political party, and political parties except youth branches. Due to the fact that voting is mandatory in Turkey, voting is not included in this form of political participation calculation. Un-conventional participation is measured by the question; writing a letter of application, signing a petition, joining a boycott, attending a political demonstration/meeting, participating in a protest march, organizing a demonstration, meeting, and protest march.

The reliability of the whole scale was checked by means of the cronbach alpha reliability test and the alpha result of the scale was found .824. The cronbach alpha value of conventional sub-scale was determined as .752 while the un-conventional sub-scale was determined as .769. The KMO value of the scale is 0.869 and this indicates a good validity level. According to the results of the Bartlett test, it is significant with the level of 0.01.

For analyzing the relation of religiosity and political participation hypotheses below are constructed.

H1: There is a positive relationship between religiosity and conventional political participation.

H2: There is a negative relationship between religiosity and un-conventional political participation.

5. Findings

Table 1 indicates the result of respondent's religiosity. As a result, religiosity mean of participant is found as 6.56 in10 point likert scale. The students in this research are found highly religious in comparison with the other studies about Turkey.

Table 1: Distribution of Results according to Religiosity Level

Religiosity	N	Min.	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
	870	1	10	6.56	2.769

In this study, political participation is measured by means of the 13 questions. It is seen that the respondents performed 'voting' most, as a form of political participation (75.8%). It is followed by 'signing a petition' 49%, 'writing a letter of application' 44.7%. The lowest rate is belongs to 'member of political parties except youth branches' with the rate of 2.2%. It would not be wrong to argue that the rate of cast a vote participation in young people is quite high. It is clearly seen from the table that university students performed un-conventional participation much more than conventional participation except voting. This situation is corresponding with the literature. These results are found higher than the other studies which are conducted in Turkey on political participation. Not yet choice is included in the study in order to see the political tendency of the participants who has not participated yet, due to underage or because of not having a chance.

Table 2: Distribution of Results according to Political Participation Scale

Political participation	Yes	No	Not Yet
	%	%	%
1. Voting in an election	75.8	13.6	10.6
2. Working in a campaign of a party or candidate	6.8	84.7	8.5
3. Collect signature/signed a petition for a candidate	3.4	89.0	7.6
4. Wear a sticker or badge of a political party.	6.9	86.7	6.4
5. Persuade someone how to vote	21.2	72.8	0.6

6. Youth branches of a political party	4.9	88.2	6.9
7. Political parties except youth branches	2.2	94.0	3.8
8. Writing a letter of application to the authorities	44.7	33.6	21.7
9. Signing a petition	49.0	38.6	12.4
10. Joining a boycott	27.3	61.9	10.8
11. Attending a political demonstration/meeting	27.4	64.6	0.8
12. Participating in a protest march	30.3	58.3	11.5
13. Organizing a demonstration, meeting, protest march	5.0	85.2	9.7

Table 3 shows the result of political participation of university students in terms of their religiosity. Student's religiosity mean scores are found high mostly in the choice of 'not participate' when comparing only participate and not-participate choices; except voting, youth branches of a political party and organizing demonstrations and meeting. This finding show that religiosity decreases the students' political participation both conventional and un-conventional way.

The relationship among conventional, unconventional, total political participation and religiosity is investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Here, the respondents who stated 'not yet' are considered as not participated because of the fact that no participation has occurred yet. It is seen from the Table 4 that there is a negative correlation between religiosity and conventional political participation r= -0.060, n= 872, p<.0, with high levels of religiosity associated with low levels of conventional political participation. Similarly there is a negative correlation between religiosity and un-conventional political participation, r=-0.223, n= 872, p<.01 with high religiosity associated with low levels of un-conventional political participation. These results show that H1 hypothesis is rejected and H2 is accepted. Because after the correlation analysis it is seen that religiosity decreases all forms of political participation. Previously it is mentioned that religiosity is associated with conventional political participation in the literature. In addition, it is known that both political participation and religiosity increases with age. As a result of this it could be argued that due to our sample (university students), there is no relation found between religiosity and conventional political participation.

Table 3: Distribution of Religiosity according to Political Participation Scale

	ROS	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error
Voting	Not-participate	119	6.19	2.735	0.251
	Participate	657	6.48	2.806	0.109
	Not yet	92	6.55	2.548	0.266
Working in a Campaign of a Party/candidate	Not-participate	507	7.07	2.368	0.105
	Participate	262	5.35	3.180	0.196
	Not yet	99	6.17	2.580	0.259
Collect signature signed a petition for a candidate	Not-participate	736	6.52	2.713	0.100
	Participate	59	6.34	2.922	0.380
	Not yet	73	5.89	3.152	0.369
Wear a sticker or badge of a political party.	Not-participate	773	6.53	2.683	0.097
	Participate	30	6.30	3.515	0.642
	Not yet	65	5.55	3.245	0.403
Persuade someone how to vote	Not-participate	739	6.66	2.636	0.097
	Participate	44	5.80	3.282	0.495
	Not yet	85	5.01	3.145	0.341
Youth branches of a political party	Not-participate	766	6.37	2.738	0.099
	Participate	41	7.56	2.829	0.442
	Not yet	60	6.67	3.007	0.388
Political parties except youth branches	Not-participate	817	6.47	2.746	0.096
	Participate	17	5.35	3.334	0.809
	Not yet	33	6.45	3.042	0.530
Writing a letter of application	Not-participate	292	6.66	2.563	0.150
	Participate	388	6.15	2.940	0.149
	Not yet	188	6.74	2.667	0.195
Signing a petition	Not-participate	335	7.06	2.260	0.123
	Participate	426	5.80	3.008	0.146
	Not yet	107	7.15	2.638	0.255
Joining a	Not-participate	537	6.95	2.439	0.105

boycott	Participate	237	5.37	3.116	0.202
	Not yet	94	6.36	2.854	0.294
Attending a pol. demonstration /meeting	Not-participate	561	6.91	2.409	0.102
	Participate	237	5.42	3.244	0.211
	Not yet	70	6.27	2.807	0.336
Participating in a protest march	Not-participate	808	6.65	2.641	0.093
	Participate	19	3.89	3.398	0.779
	Not yet	41	3.78	3.013	0.470
Organizing a demonstration, meeting	Not-participate	753	6.46	2.745	0.100
	Participate	59	6.80	2.670	0.348
	Not yet	56	5.98	3.159	0.422

Table 4: Correlations of Religiosity and PP

Variables	1	2	3	4
1-Religiosity	1	-0.060	-0.223**	-0.198**
2-Conventional		1	0.510**	0.792**
3-Un-conventional			1	0.883**
4-Total Political participation				1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

6. Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to find out whether there was a relationship between religiosity and conventional and un-conventional form of political participation. As a result, the findings of the study indicate that religiosity is negatively associated with all forms of political participation. If an individual's religiosity increases, his/her political participation level in both conventional and un-conventional forms are decrease. Then it could be argued that religiosity can decrease the all forms of political participation for university students. As mentioned above it is known that both political participation and religiosity increases with age. Then it could be an expected result for university students.

7. Ackowledgement

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