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## INTRODUCTION

# Conventional versus non-conventional political participation in Turkey: dimensions, means, and consequences

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This special issue focuses on the emergence of different forms of civic and political activism in Turkey. In doing so, we have taken into account different components of active citizenship and looked more specifically into the development of civic and political forms of activism that bridge the realms of conventional and non-conventional participation. As witnessed in many different contexts, conventional forms of political participation such as electoral politics are being replaced with non-conventional forms of participation that take place outside, and sometimes in opposition to, the more traditional channels of representation.<sup>1</sup> The issue of active citizenship has become more and more salient in recent years, with a growing literature discussing the processes that bring about new modalities, which conceive the notion of citizenship as something detached from certain rights, obligations and entitlements embedded in the traditional definition of national citizenship.<sup>2</sup> The active role citizens can play in political and civic life deserves particular attention with regard to the analysis of participatory behaviors that signify new modalities through which citizens relate to civic and political domains.<sup>3</sup> We believe that the argument that more and more people are becoming disengaged from politics<sup>4</sup> proves to be misleading. A key point that drives our argumentation is that instead the crisis of representative democracy has favored the emergence of alternative modalities to engage and participate in civic and political life. Civic and political participation take manifold dimensions, and can be expressed through the activation of participatory behaviors<sup>5</sup> of various kinds, including volunteering, taking part in NGO activities, boycotts, and protests and demonstrations.

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## Demands of active citizenship

In the typology that we developed,<sup>6</sup> we argue that active citizenship can be untangled on the basis of two distinct dimensions (top-down and bottom-up) that provide the basis for diverging definitions: *active citizenship as a practice* and *active citizenship as a demand*. In regard to the former, we argue that public institutions through public policy have strategically promoted the activation of participatory behaviors in order to stimulate engagement among citizens, and ultimately to improve bases of input legitimacy. Under this category, we can include conventional political behaviors such as voting as well as non-conventional forms of participation such as joining a political movement or civil society organization with the scope of interacting with policy-makers through lobbying activities or advocacy work. Various examples in Europe provide evidence of the fact that public institutions foremost promote this form of participation in order to shape participatory behaviors, while at the same time, this is key for improving the efficiency of governance systems.<sup>7</sup> In regard to the latter, we argue that the lack of deliberative and participatory public policies is more likely to result with the emergence of bottom-up forms of civic and political mobilization where civil society groups contest the current status quo by posing distinct claims to policy-makers. Understanding the demands of active citizenship becomes particularly important whenever competing claims are made in civil society through the use of both traditional and alternative channels of mobilization.<sup>8</sup> Active citizenship as a demand is expressed outside formal channels of political participation such as electoral politics, and takes expression by means of various forms of deliberation.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, it takes place when public policy is insufficient or non-existent, and individuals tend to mobilize in collective action to solve a particular problem acting apart from – or in some cases replacing – public intervention. From this perspective, citizens tend to gain ownership of social and political settings by trying to subvert the existing order. Examples include getting involved in protests against an authoritarian government; self-mobilizing for the purpose of guaranteeing the well-being of the community to replace the functions of policy-makers when there is a lack of intervention; or occupying and using abandoned public spaces for the organization of cultural and/or social activities to provide help for immigrants or disadvantaged people in a particular community.

## Demands of active citizenship in the Turkish context

The Turkish case is particularly an important context, which could provide the reader with an understanding of the complexity inherent in the transformation of the conventional form of citizenship into active citizenship.<sup>10</sup> Many scholars have argued that in Turkey the notion of citizenship has evolved through a strong attachment to the state and its institutions,<sup>11</sup> which has resulted in the

development of both passive and militant citizens.<sup>12</sup> In regard to passive citizens, we refer to those who are mostly adherent to the *status quo*. At the same time, the citizens can be militant as they undertake political action in accordance with an organic vision of society, making them to defer their rights until the moment they serve their duties to the state.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, the Turkish context is characterized by a number of limitations in the promotion of practices of active citizenship. Just to draw on a significant example, the promotion of civil society policies by the European Union (EU) was expected to strengthen democratization and to bolster independent associations in Turkey. However, the result is a bit more complicated than was envisaged. On the one hand, the EU civil society policy has had an important effect on stimulating the development of civil society actors. On the other hand, it has not created a truly independent and autonomous civil society.<sup>14</sup>

However, a number of transformative aspects have challenged this top-down promotion of active citizenship highlighting new dimensions that are worthwhile to explore. This is particularly true with respect to bottom-up dimensions of civic and political participation that radically put the link between the state and citizens under scrutiny.<sup>15</sup> More scholars have been looking, in fact, at the emergence of alternative ways through which citizens participate, frame claims and define their ownership of the public space. Research by Engin Isin on the acts of citizenship is enlightening in this sense.<sup>16</sup> Acts of citizenship imply the redefinition of the spaces of participation and new modalities to shape what is political. This process of redefinition is inherent to the emergence of new struggles to express and gain a legitimate voice in public sphere. In another example, Berna Turam conducted important ethnographic research in Teşvikiye, a notoriously secular-oriented neighborhood of Istanbul. She highlights different acts of citizenship, which are performed by both secular-oriented locals of the neighborhood with more bourgeois lifestyles as well as those of newly arrived, more Islamic-oriented high-spenders. Turam argues that both the government and opposition have failed to regulate and protect the rights and liberties of citizens, which are threatened by the political contestation between the two groups. However, in the absence of the regulatory mechanisms by state actors, both devout Muslims and secularists learn in action how to see, talk, and act beyond the Islamist–secularist duality. These new acts of citizenship are performed and negotiated in the public space in a way that leads to the increasing irrelevance of the Islamist–secularist axis, reshuffling and realigning a wide range of groups across the political spectrum in defense of a deeper liberal democracy.<sup>17</sup>

### **Locating *occupygezi***

On this basis, in this special issue we frame the emergence of occupy movements as a meaningful example of active citizenship as a demand, where

mobilizing agents have operated against the political elites as well as the current ideological frameworks such as neo-liberalism in order to vindicate the ownership of the public space<sup>18</sup> and to advocate for better bases of democracy.<sup>19</sup> In these cases, calls for democracy and social justice have been expressed through means such as street protests, arts, satire, humor, parody, creativity, and different acts of solidarity.

Focusing on the specific effects of the 2013 Gezi Park protests – which originated in Istanbul but spread throughout the country – we reflect on how this experience might re-orient current on civic and political participation in Turkey. To this effect, we specifically focus on the main dynamics of non-conventional forms of civic and political activism. In doing so, we are also trying to make conclusions with regard to understanding the impact of non-conventional forms of political participation on voting behavior. The attempt to gain ownership of the public space in the case of Gezi represents a clear example of a bottom-up expression of active citizenship where different claims were developed and communicated in order to break the strong link with the authoritarian state. This resulted in direct demands to gain ownership of public policy processes and to pave the way to develop forms of deliberative democracy in the country. In a volatile context as in Turkish, it is rather difficult to identify clearly the legacy of *occupygezi* and its long-term effects. The internal domestic conditions of the country as well as its role in the international arena have dramatically changed since 2013, and are constantly evolving mainly due to the domestic societal and political cleavages as well as to the regional problems in the Middle East. Yet, the papers in the special issue reflect upon the significance of *occupygezi* nowadays, demonstrating not only its importance in questioning the link between the patrimonial state and its citizens, but also for stimulating participatory behaviors.

### Outline of the special issue

This special issue provides a timely reflection on current debates that are of great relevance in order to understand key issues such the historical determinants of civic and political participation in Turkey, traditional and alternative means of political and civic mobilization, and political behavior. The contributors of the special issue take into account both the determinants and the legacy of *occupygezi*. The papers draw on different methodological traditions and disciplines, touching upon insights from political sociology, public policy analysis, political science, social anthropology, and political psychology. In addition, by combining analysis conducted by junior and senior scholars, it provides fresh empirical research and key case studies supported by strong theoretical frameworks. It combines articles that mix both quantitative and qualitative methods of enquiry in order to provide a deeper understanding of the complexity of political participation in Turkey.

İnan and Grasso focus on temporal and structural mechanisms of political activism in Turkey with a particular emphasis on the centrality of generational and social class bases that help us understand social change. Kayaoğlu presents a dataset from a large-scale survey focusing on different determinants of political behavior in Turkey shedding light on the actual implications of the *occupygezi* movement. Papazian refers to the theories of intersectionality to present the results of his ethnographic work conducted in Istanbul, where he investigates the activism of leftist Armenian youths. Gümüş informs the reader about the results of her field work conducted with young participants of the Gezi protests, trying to understand the processes of social change that produced new modalities of political participation. Görkem, drawing upon a large-scale 2015 survey, looks at a particularly prominent and growing aspect of active citizenship, namely digital activism. Kaya examines the *occupygezi* movement under the light of different models of Europeanization, focusing on the legacy of the movement for various civil society actors such as business associations, media, and trade unions. Bee and Chrona report the results of a field work conducted in 2015/2016 with activists of youth organizations in order to provide an account of the impact of the *occupygezi* on their practices, activities, and values. Derman concentrates on the case study of the ‘standing man,’ providing an example of one of the many alternative and innovative modalities of mobilization and, in particular, reporting a valuable example of how performative acts can represent a significant expression of participation that combine arts and politics.

These articles provide evidence of different dimensions, means, and consequences inherent to conventional and non-conventional political participation in Turkey by raising critical points in regard to the emergence of demands of active citizenship that are meant to contest the current status quo, while at the same time vindicating the independence and autonomy of the civil society from interferences and manipulations coming from the political level. One could question whether the *occupygezi* movement still has a legacy in Turkey, but the articles in this special issue argue that the movement has made a great impact on the civil society to reassemble the social across ethnic, religious, class, cultural, and gendered identities.

Several individuals have been very supportive during the period in which we edited this special issue, which is the outcome of a very-well attended workshop organized by the European Institute of Istanbul Bilgi University on 21 January 2016. The workshop and the publication of this special issue are supported by a grant received from the European Commission’s 7th Framework Programme, Intra-European Fellowships (IEF) FP7-PEOPLE-2013-IEF, Grant Agreement No: 625977, entitled ‘The Europeanisation of the organised civil society in Turkey: The case of the youth organisations in the prospect of European integration’ (EUROCS). We are grateful to the participants of the workshop, who later contributed to this issue with their

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## Notes

1. Marinetto, “Who Wants to Be an Active Citizen?”
2. Bee and Villano, “Active Citizenship”; Boje, “Commentary”; Faulks, *Citizenship*; Heater, *What Is Citizenship?*; Hoskins and Mascherini, “Measuring Active Citizenship”; and Lister, *Citizenship*.
3. Barrett and Brunton Smith, “Political and Civic Engagement.”
4. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*.
5. Barrett and Smith, “Political and Civic Engagement”; and Ekman and Amnå, “Political Participation.”
6. Bee and Kaya, “Between Practices and Demands.”
7. Bouza Garcia, *Participatory Democracy*; and Smismans, *Civil Society*.
8. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*.
9. Delli Carpini, Cook, and Jacobs, “Public Deliberations.”
10. Çakmaklı, “Active Citizenship in Turkey”; and Çakmaklı, “Rights and Obligations.”
11. Keyman and İçduygu, “Globalisation,” 231.
12. İçduygu, Yılmaz, and Nalan, “What Is the Matter with Citizenship?”; and İçduyğu, “Interacting Actors.”
13. Keyman and İçduygu, “Globalisation,” 231.
14. Ergun, “Civil Society”; Kubicek, “Political Conditionality”; Kuzmanovic, *Refractions*; Yılmaz, “EU Conditionality”; and Zihnioglu, *European Union*.
15. Bozkurt, Çok, and Şener, “Government Perspectives”; Chrona and Capelos, “The Political Psychology”; and Gül and Cünük, “Istanbul’s Taksim Square.”
16. Isin, “Theorising”; and Isin, “Citizenship in Flux.”
17. Turam, “Primacy of Space in Politics.”
18. Murray, “The Sphere”; Turam, “Primacy of Space in Politics”; and Vatikiotis and Yörük, “Gezi Movement.”
19. Abbas and Yiğit, “Scenes from Gezi Park”; David and Totamis, *Everywhere Taksim*; and Karasulu, “If a Leaf Falls.”

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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