

**In Search of a Turkish Middle Class:
Economic Occupations, Political Orientations, Social Life-Styles, Moral Values**

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SUMMARY OF THE BASIC FINDINGS

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Short Resume:

Hakan Yilmaz is Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science and International Relations, Bogazici University, Istanbul, and the executive coordinator of Bogazici University's Master of Arts Program in European Studies. He completed his undergraduate education at the Economics Department of Bogazici University (1987). He received his MA (1991) and Ph.D. (1996) degrees at the Political Science Department of Columbia University in New York City. He has taught courses and published works in the areas of contemporary Turkish politics, European-Turkish cultural perceptions, and external-internal linkages in the processes of democratization. Dr. Yilmaz has conducted research projects on Euroskepticism in Turkey (2004) and conservatism in Turkey (2006). He is currently conducting research in two areas; the first about the political and cultural attitudes of the Turkish middle classes and the second one into the cultural determinants of French and German opposition to Turkey's accession to the European Union. He has been recently awarded by the European Commission a Jean Monnet course in the area of "issues of culture and identity in European integration". Examples of his recent publications are : *Placing Turkey on the Map of Europe* (Istanbul: Boğaziçi University Press, 2005); "Islam, Sovereignty, and Democracy: A Turkish View" (*Middle East Journal*, Vol. 61, No. 3, Summer 2007, pp. 477-493); "Euroskeptizismus in der Türkei - Parteien, Eliten und öffentliche Meinung, 1995-2006" (in *Die Türkei und Europa*, ed. Gabriele Clemens, Hamburg: LIT-Verlag, Studien zur Neueren Europäischen Geschichte Bd. 1, pp. 215-243, 2007); "Turkish Conservatism and the Idea of Europe" (in *Between Europe and the Mediterranean: The Challenges and the Fears*, ed. Paul Sant Cassia and Thierry Fabre, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007, pp. 137-161), "Turkish Identity on the Road to the EU: Basic Elements of French and German Oppositional Discourses" (*Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, Volume 9, Issue 3, 2007, pp.293-305); and "Euroskepticism in Turkey: Parties, Elites and Public Opinion, 1995-2006" (forthcoming in *South European Society and Politics*, spring 2008).

Goals and Motivations of the Project

The goal of this research was to explore the boundaries of a “middle class” in Turkey. The motivation behind this search for a Turkish middle class was that many since the time of Aristotle, various classical political theorists have claimed that in a given society “those who stand in the middle” are the backbone of a stable social order and a durable political regime. Aristotle argued, in his *Politics*, that the state should operate through the people in the middle class, not the poor, or the rich: "It is clear then ... that the best partnership in a state is the one which operates through the middle people, and also that those states in which the middle element is large, and stronger if possible than the other two together, or at any rate stronger than either of them alone, have every chance of having a well-run constitution." (See <http://library.thinkquest.org/18775/aristotle/socar.htm>). In 1792, James Madison, fourth president of the United States (1809-1817) and one of its founding fathers, defined government's role in promoting an American middle class, "By the silent operation of the laws, which, without violating the rights of property, reduce extreme wealth towards a state of mediocrity, and raise extreme indigence toward a state of comfort." (See <http://www.thomhartmann.com/tencommandments.shtml> and Microsoft ® Encarta ® Reference Library 2005. © 1993-2004). In the 1950s and 1960s, many theorists coming from the modernization and political development schools have argued that the transition to, and the consolidation of, democratic regimes in Western Europe and North America since the early 19th century had a high correlation with the emergence of economically well-endowed and socially influential middle classes in those countries. Seymour Martin Lipset, for instance, provides one of the first quantitative analyses of democratization that linked the development of middle classes to the development of democracy. Lipset's basic argument was that industrial development/modernization led to increased wealth, education, communication, and equality. These, in turn, led to moderate lower and upper classes and large middle class, all of which led to a more stable democracy (See Seymour Martin Lipset, 1959, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy," *American Political Science Review* LII (March), 69-105.). A more recent contribution highlighting the linkages between economic development, the emergence of the middle classes and the consolidation of democracy is “Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy”, by Daron Acemoglu of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and James A. Robinson of Harvard University (Cambridge University Press, 2006). In this book Acemoglu and Robinson underline the role of the middle class in a three-class model in promoting the transition from “partial” to “full” democracy, particularly by acting as a buffer between the repressive tendencies of the authoritarian elites and the submissive tendencies of the lower classes.

Turkish society today appears being divided along a series of gaps, disparities and inequalities that tend to polarize people into rival “identity camps”, preparing a fertile ground for ongoing and impending “culture wars”, whose most salient issues include the following: East vs. West (regional disparities); Poor vs. Rich; Kurdish vs. Turkish; Islamist vs. Secularist; Sunni vs. Alevi; Nationalist vs. Cosmopolitan; Isolationist vs. Integrationist (with respect to the EU); Authoritarian vs. Democrat; and Social Conservative vs. Social Liberal. In this context, a question that naturally comes to mind is whether there exists a center in Turkish society, a middle class, endowed with a capacity, capability and willingness for conciliation, mitigation, mediation, arbitration and negotiation between the extreme sides of the culture wars. If such a center exists, then the hopes for building a long-lasting democracy in Turkey would admittedly be higher. A parallel question is whether this middle class, provided that it exists, has any representative institutions or individuals in the political arena. The goal of this research project is, thus, to set out a number of basic economic, social, political and cultural criteria on the basis of which a Turkish middle class could be defined, delineated, and distinguished from the lower and upper classes in terms of regional distribution, economic occupations, political orientations, social life-styles and moral values.

Research Methods

The research combined qualitative and quantitative methods and it was completed in 13 months, between 1 December 2006 and 31 December 2007. As part of the qualitative research, the first two months (December 2006 and January 2007) were spent by a survey of the theoretical literature and previous empirical researches on the class structure and the development of the middle classes in Turkey. In the following two months (February-March, 2007), face-to-face and one-on-one in-depth interviews were carried out with 56 persons in 8 different cities. Based on the outcomes of the literature review and the analysis of the in-depth interviews, the following two months (April-May) were devoted to developing a questionnaire involving approximately 90 questions (45 standard and 45 original questions), to be then applied in the nation-wide field survey. The time reserved for the realization of the field survey had been initially set as June 2007. However, a series of unexpected political crises in Turkey forced us to bypass June, July and August, and postpone the application of the field survey to September. The crisis had started in April 2007, and lasted all the way through August 2007. The main issue that was involved in the crisis was a civil-military clash over the election of a new president. In July, the country had early general elections, and in August the new parliament finally elected a new president. Under these circumstances, we had to wait until the crisis was peacefully resolved and the general public mood came to a standstill so that we could carry out a healthy opinion poll. This meant that the field survey had to be shifted to the month of September. The first analyses of the survey were done in the first weeks of October, and the results were shared with the public, by way of a press conference, on 24 October 2007. In the coming months, the analyses were further refined and the findings were presented in various interviews with the newspapers and TV stations and at various academic and public conferences. The research work accomplished thus far can be summarized and tabulated as follows:

- A series of face-to-face, one-on-one in-depth interviews, with 56 people, in 8 different cities, have been made, transcribed and coded.
- Books and articles examining the role of the middle classes in sustaining democratic regimes around the world, as well as those describing previous empirical research on the structure and values of the Turkish middle classes, have been examined; relevant quotations have been collected in computerized data files and classified by subject.
- News and commentaries on the issue of the class structure and the middle classes in Turkey, published in the mainstream newspapers in the last three years have been scanned; relevant quotations have been collected in computerized data files and classified by subject.
- Based on the data emerging from the analysis of the in-depth interviews, as well as from the examination of the books and newspapers, the questionnaire of a public opinion poll has been prepared.
- A public opinion poll was conducted (in September 2007) in a nation-wide random sample of 1800 respondents. Preliminary bivariate and multivariate analyses of the data was carried out and tables for a power-point presentation were produced. Based on the survey findings, short modular papers were written, analyzing the different parts of the research, and customized for specific audiences (national, foreign, academic, political, business, civil) with different needs and expectations.
- The data that was gathered from the interviews were subjected to a qualitative analysis. Further statistical analyses, particularly cluster and factor analyses, were applied to the field survey data to come up with meaningful generalizations regarding the most pertinent issues of the Turkish middle classes. The findings from these more refined data analyses were then tabulated and presented to the different audiences in the academia, media and civil society.

Provinces in which the opinion poll was implemented

Province	Number of Polls	Share in Total (%)
1 Adana	157	8,7
2 Ankara	145	8,0
3 Antalya	56	3,1
4 Bursa	95	5,3
5 Diyarbakır	112	6,2
6 Edirne	66	3,7
7 Erzurum	53	2,9
8 Gaziantep	58	3,2
9 İstanbul	375	20,7
10 İzmir	112	6,2
11 Kayseri	97	5,4
12 Kocaeli	64	3,5
13 Konya	59	3,3
14 Malatya	82	4,6
15 Manisa	113	6,3
16 Samsun	64	3,5
17 Trabzon	63	3,5
18 Zonguldak	36	2,0
TOTAL	1809	100,0

Provinces in which in-depth interviews were conducted

Province	Number of In-Depth Interviews
1 Ankara	8
2 Bursa	5
3 Diyarbakır	5
4 Gaziantep	5
5 İstanbul	12
6 İzmir	6
7 Konya	5
8 Samsun	5
TOTAL	56

Summary of the Basic Findings

The Turkish middle class was expected to have two major characteristics, that would set it apart from the lower and upper classes. Firstly, in terms of its share in the distribution of income and allocation of status privileges, the middle class was expected to occupy a middle of the ground position between the extremes. Secondly, the middle class was expected to possess “civic values”, those values that constitute the cultural prerequisites of a democratic regime. Civic values, mean, first and foremost, that the middle class is a social group that is most likely to use rational debate to settle conflicts, as opposed to violence and demagoguery based on deeply-held emotions and unquestioned beliefs. Civic values also imply that the middle class is actively engaged in learning about the nation’s political problems and in taking up peaceful collective action as a way to express its opinions. Put in a nutshell, we were expecting to find a group of people characterized by “centrist” and “civilized” attitudes, that would be the pillar of democratic consolidation in Turkey.

The respondents to the opinion poll were clustered into lower, middle and upper classes, based on objective as well subjective characteristics. These included people’s self-perceptions regarding their social position and welfare; the way they viewed the changes in their social position and welfare from the past to the present, and from the present towards the future; they way they compared their situation today with their parents’ situation in the past and with their kids’ expected situation in the future; they way they reconciled their religious beliefs and practices on the one hand and modern ways and values on the other; the extent to which they accepted and were ready to accept reforms in their religious beliefs and practices; their political values and party preferences; their attitudes towards and expectations from the European Union and European values; and, finally, differences between life-styles (measuring, basically, how much a person lived a relatively closed and local versus open and social life, and how much he/she had access to people and information outside his immediate environment; in that regard, we have taken into account habits of vacationing; entertainment; art consumption; access to digital technology and the internet; knowledge of foreign languages).

As a result of our clustering, we have found out that at the top of the Turkish society lies 22% of the people, comprising Turkey’s upper class. The bottom end of the class structure, on the other hand, is composed of the lower class, which makes up some 33% of the people. Finally, in between the upper and the lower classes is positioned the middle class, corresponding to 45% of the population. The following table summarizes the basic differences between these three classes:

Table 1: Three Basic Social Classes in Turkey Today

	<i>Lower Class</i>	<i>Middle Class</i>	<i>Upper Class</i>
Percentage share in the population	33%	45%	22%
Religious Attitudes	Traditional Muslim	Modern Muslim	Modern Muslim
Political Attitudes	Parochial, Old Right	New Right (Majority preferring the center-right AKP -- Justice and Development Party – in an election)	Old Left (Close to half preferring to vote for the Kemalist CHP – Republican People’s Party – in an election)
Income Level	Low	Medium	High
Future Expectations regarding social status and welfare	Moderately Optimistic	Highly Optimistic	Highly Pessimistic
Attitudes towards Turkey’s membership in the European Union	Weak EU Supporter	Strong EU Supporter	Strong EU Opponent