

Viewpoints of Turkish People on the Armenian Issue: A Q Methodology Study

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Keywords

Armenian issue, Q methodology, intractable conflicts, social identity

Abstract

This study aims to examine the viewpoints of people living in Türkiye toward the “Armenian issue” by using Q methodology. Field research was carried out with 40 adult participants with diverse religious and political views in Türkiye. The participants were asked to sort 41 different cards related to the Armenian issue from the most agreed (+4) to the most disagreed side (-4). The data were analyzed with the PQMethod 2.35 program. The results highlighted three factors (or viewpoints) representing different aspects of the Armenian issue: 1) Armenian issue as a result of war conditions and mutual sufferings, 2) Armenian issue as a genocide and Turkish State as the only political responsible party, 3) The Armenian issue as the influence of global powers such as the US and Russia. The results also indicated the participants’ agreement and disagreement points. The participants had a consensus on views involving reciprocal steps to solve the issue such as conducting scientific studies and various activities of research institutions and NGOs from both countries and restarting diplomatic relations. However, they diverged in views including politicized suggestions for the solutions of the Armenian issue such as a request for recognition of the genocide, and a request for an official apology. Finally, all participants agreed with the Q statements that “the main victims of the issue are the Armenians living in Anatolia” and that “many Turks are prejudiced against Armenians.”

Anahtar kelimeler

Ermeni meselesi, Q yöntemi, zorlu çatışmalar, sosyal kimlik

Türkiye’deki Bireylerin Ermeni Meselesine İlişkin Görüşleri: Bir Q Yöntemi Çalışması

Bu çalışmanın amacı Türkiye’de yaşayan insanların Ermeni meselesine yönelik bakış açılarını Q yöntemini kullanarak incelemektir. Alan araştırması Türkiye’de farklı dini ve siyasi görüşlere sahip 40 yetişkin katılımcı ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Katılımcılardan Ermeni meselesi ile ilgili 41 fikir kartını “tamamen destekliyorum” (+4) ile “hiç desteklemiyorum” (-4) arasında sıralamaları istenmiştir. Veriler PQMethod 2.35 programı ile analiz edilmiştir. Sonuçlar, Ermeni meselesinin farklı yönlerini temsil eden üç bakış açısının olduğunu göstermektedir: 1) Savaş koşullarının ve karşılıklı acıların bir sonucu olarak Ermeni meselesi, 2) Bir soykırım olarak Ermeni meselesi ve tek (siyasi) sorumlu taraf olarak Türkiye Devleti ve 3) ABD ve Rusya gibi küresel güçlerin etkisinde olarak Ermeni meselesi. Ayrıca sonuçlar katılımcıların bu meselede hemfikir oldukları ve olmadıkları bakış açılarını da göstermiştir. Katılımcılar bu sorunun çözümü için her iki ülkeden araştırma kurumları ve STK’ların bilimsel çalışmalar ve çeşitli faaliyetler yürütmesi ve diplomatik ilişkilerin yeniden başlatılması gibi karşılıklı adımları vurgulayan görüşlerde fikir birliğindedir. Ancak soykırımın tanınması talebi ve resmi özür talebi gibi Ermeni meselesinin çözümüne yönelik siyasi önerileri içeren görüşlerde ayrılmışlardır. Son olarak tüm katılımcılar “sorunun asıl mağdurlarının Anadolu’da yaşamakta olan Ermeniler olduğu” ve “pek çok Türk’ün Ermenilere karşı ön yargılı olduğu” yönündeki Q ifadelerine katılım göstermiştir.

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The ongoing unresolved historical issues between Armenia and Türkiye date back to the final period of the Ottoman State. Historians and political scientists in Türkiye primarily address these issues. There are also a few studies (Bilali, 2013; Vollhardt et al., 2014) in social psychology that focus on perceptions of the Armenian issue. However, it is important to understand how Armenians and Turks view these problems as a step toward a long-lasting solution.

This study aims to examine the viewpoints of adults living in Türkiye toward the “Armenian issue” using Q methodology. Q methodology is a suitable method for examining both individual similarities and differences, as well as socially shared perspectives on the phenomenon (Brown, 1980; Watts & Stenner, 2005). As an exploratory methodology, it offers a holistic assessment of the phenomenon (Watts & Stenner, 2012). It also allows us to identify common ground by exploring consensual points among different groups (Ulug, 2016). In the subsequent sections, Intractable Conflicts (Bar-Tal, 2007) and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) are summarized to provide the theoretical background for the study.

Intractable Conflicts

In many regions across the world, intractable conflicts emerge due to a variety of factors and share several defining characteristics. These conflicts are typically perceived as existential, zero-sum, and irresolvable. They often involve physical violence, demand significant material and psychological resources, persist for extended periods (often spanning at least a generation), and occupy a central place in the lives of those affected (Bar-Tal, 2007; Kriesberg, 1998). Members of societies engaged in intractable conflicts experience a range of negative outcomes, including heightened stress, hatred, insecurity, and pain. Additionally, such conflicts compel individuals to actively participate in and identify with the struggle (Bar-Tal et al., 2012). To navigate these challenging circumstances, individuals and groups develop a socio-psychological infrastructure comprising shared societal beliefs, which helps them adapt and cope with the prolonged conflict.

The socio-psychological infrastructure of intractable conflicts comprises three interrelated elements: collective memory, ethos of conflict, and collective emotional orientation. Collective memory consists of shared beliefs that provide a coherent narrative of the conflict’s history, often adapted to meet group needs, resulting in selective, distorted, or simplified accounts (Bar-Tal, 2007; Cairns & Roe, 2003). Ethos of conflict offers a framework for understanding the conflict’s present and future through themes like security, patriotism, and peace, evolving with new circumstances (Bar-Tal, 2000, 2013). These two elements complement each other in sustaining the conflict. Collective emotional orientation fosters group cohesion by amplifying shared emotions such as hatred, pride, or fear toward the outgroup, reinforcing ingroup loyalty and providing a cultural frame of reference (Bar-Tal, 2007). Combined, these elements function to: (a) strengthen group resilience under conflict, (b) delineate ingroup-outgroup boundaries and justify violence, and (c) promote solidarity, mobilization and social identity shaping (Bar-Tal, 2007; for a detailed conceptual framework).

Social Identity Theory

Social identity emerges when individuals categorize themselves as members of a group based on cognitive and motivational needs, such as a sense of belonging, self-esteem, and the desire for order. This process leads them to identify with their group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Group members seek to establish a positive in-group identity by comparing their group’s characteristics with those of other groups (Tajfel, 1982). When the group is perceived to possess favorable qualities, a positive social identity is formed, enhancing the members’ sense of self-worth and value as part of the group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

The relationship between social identity and intractable conflict is both complex and reciprocal. Social identity underpins intractable conflict processes by providing an epistemic basis for the emotions, thoughts, beliefs and convictions that emerge at the collective level (Oren et al., 2004). Themes such as security, patriotism and peace that constitute the ethos of conflict are the basic building blocks of societal beliefs that give meaning to social identity. These shared societal beliefs provide a common framework for the way in which individuals perceive the world, while at the same time satisfying feelings of belonging and obligation and creating a strong bond between group members (Oren & Bar-Tal, 2006).

Ethos is a flexible and transformative dimension of social identity (Oren & Bar-Tal, 2006). According to the authors, in the process of intractable conflict, ethos of conflict is constantly transformed according to the changing needs of individuals and groups, reshaping the content of social identity in the process. This transformation provides an important perspective for understanding the dynamics of social identity in the context of conflict while drawing attention to the flexible and contextual nature of social identity. In intractable conflicts, on the other hand, group identity tends to function as a coping mechanism to overcome challenges such as stress, uncertainty and fear. While a strengthened social identity promotes solidarity among group members, it also fuels the perpetuation of conflict (Bar-Tal, 2007).

The enduring conflictual relationship between Turks and Armenians, although currently persisting at a non-violent level, can be conceptualized as a distinct form of intractable conflict when analyzed within the framework of the intractable conflicts. As the intractable conflicts provide a general theoretical framework that can be applied to other conflict situations, various aspects of the conflict between Turks and Armenians can be analyzed in accordance with the principles of this approach. However, although each social conflict has its contextual dynamics, the common socio-psychological principles underlying conflicts have a universal character (Bar-Tal, 2007; 2013). In this context, historical resentments, mistrust, anxieties and deep-seated grievances between two societies combine with specific local dynamics to form a different pattern of intractable conflict. This situation offers an important perspective for understanding how past un-lived or unexpressed experiences feed the ongoing tensions and insecurities in the relationship.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 40 participants (17 female, 23 male) with diverse religious and political views. The religious view ranged from 1 to 7 ($M = 3.50$; $SD = 2.18$; 1: *not at all*; 7: *very much*). The political view ranged from 1 to 7 ($M = 3.48$; $SD = 1.81$; 1: *left*; 7: *right*). The data was collected in Izmir, Manisa and Istanbul in Türkiye in 2016. The age of the participants ranged from 23 to 62 ($M = 37.10$; $SD = 10.96$).

Procedure and materials

The set of statements used in the research was collected from various sources: Academic articles, books, reports, newspaper articles, and panel discussions on the “Armenian issue.” Then, seven experts evaluated all the statements (76 statements) to various criteria such as comprehensiveness, clarity, redundancy, reiteration, missing content, overlapping, and representability (Ulug, 2016; Watts & Stenner, 2005). Next, the statements were reduced to 41 items (see Table 1 for all final statements). This number of items is in the suggested range in the literature (between 40 and 80; Stainton Rogers, 1995). A pilot study was conducted with two participants to check whether the statements are clear and easily understandable.

Table 1
Z-Scores of the Statements for Each Factor

No	Statements	F1	F2	F3
Domain 1 - Problem definitions and causes of the problem				
7	The problem arose from the war conditions of the 1915 period.	1.36*	-.44	-.57
9	From the beginning until today, this problem has persisted because of the provocations of the global powers such as the US and Russia.	.65	-1.10*	1.23
14	There is no Armenian problem, there are Armenians who make trouble.	.16*	-1.42*	-.70*
18	The problem today stems from the Armenian Diaspora.	.24	-1.07*	-.09
22	The Armenian issue has entered our agenda as a result of the bloody actions of ASALA in the 1970s.	.12	-.67	-.36
26	<i>The problem stemmed from the mistreatment of Armenians by the Kurdish tribes in the Ottoman State.</i>	-.70	-.96	-.37
28	<i>The problem stemmed from the politics and practices of the Young Turks.</i>	.06	.57	.22
29	The problem stemmed from the Armenian gangs that lived in the Ottoman era.	.36	-1.18*	-.25
30	The problem is in fact a result of the painful events that happened during the deportation/relocation of Armenian people.	.13	-1.41*	-.17
35	It is difficult to define those events as a “problem”; we should accept it as a “genocide.”	-1.70	.78*	-1.40
Domain 2 - Moral judgments				
2	<i>Both peoples suffered very much in the war conditions of the 1915 period.</i>	1.78	.35*	1.69
4	<i>Many Turks are prejudiced against Armenians.</i>	.89	1.27	.89
8	Turks and Armenians are similar people in the same geography; traitors are the ones who perpetuate the problem.	.60*	-1.02*	1.45*
13	The rightfulness of Turks’ claims in this problem needs to be told to the whole world more effectively.	.63	-1.31*	-.02
17	The activities of the Armenian Diaspora include hatred and enmity.	.34	-.66*	.20
24	The Armenians in Türkiye are used as a pawn by the Armenian Diaspora.	-.14	-1.05*	.18
25	The main victims of 1915 events are the Turks.	-.46	-1.81*	-.18
27	<i>The main victims of the issue are the Armenians living in Anatolia.</i>	.28	.80	.28
31	The media is biased and deaf to this issue.	-.48*	.90	.41
36	Türkiye’s official policy is hostile to Armenians.	-1.30	1.15*	-1.20
38	Over the tragic events of 1915, the Armenians have suffered more than the Turks’.	-1.50	.31*	-1.09
39	We should feel responsible and guilty due to atrocities committed against Armenians.	-1.65	.27*	-1.00
(table continues)				

Domain 3 - Solutions for the problem and barriers to the problem solution				
1	To solve the problem, the bilateral solution commissions should be established from both sides.	1.55	1.45	2.14
3	<i>To solve the problem, the research institutions and the civil society organizations of both countries should conduct scientific studies and various activities.</i>	1.62	1.39	1.84
5	The solution to this problem must be left to the historians.	.31*	-.76*	1.12
6	To solve the problem, the Armenians must end the genocide allegations.	1.51*	-1.18*	.05*
10	To solve the problem, the Armenians should not demand the compensation/financial reparations.	.95*	-.91	-1.29
11	<i>To solve the problem, the diplomatic relations between Armenia and Türkiye should be re-started.</i>	.84	1.08	1.38
12	To solve the problem, the Armenian historical and architectural heritage in Türkiye should be protected and restored.	.24	.84	.85
15	<i>To solve the problem, the views of both sides should be objectively mentioned in history lessons.</i>	.91	.68	.40
16	This problem cannot be solved because of the interests of the global powers such as the US and Russia in this region.	.17	-.32	1.60*
19	The attitudes and activities of the Diaspora on the 1915 events are a barrier to the solution of the problem.	.58	-.56*	.53
20	To solve the problem, Armenia should withdraw from Nagorno-Karabakh area.	-.08	-.52	-.87
21	Türkiye needs to change the nation-state ideology to solve this problem.	-.69	1.34*	-.26
23	To solve the problem, the Türkiye-Armenia border must be opened.	-.20	.91*	-.56
32	To solve the problem, Türkiye must officially apologize.	-1.74	1.24*	-1.10
33	To solve the problem, the original names of Armenian streets must be restored in Türkiye.	-.41	.34*	-.65
34	The distorting historical facts of Türkiye is an obstacle for the solution of the problem.	-1.30	1.25*	-1.16
37	To solve the problem, the property rights of the Armenians in Türkiye must be restored.	-.88*	-.01	-.11
40	To solve the problem, Türkiye must recognize the Armenian Genocide.	-2.26*	1.33*	-1.26*
41	To solve the problem, the US, EU or Russia must be the mediator.	-.76*	.10*	-1.81*

Note. F1 to F3: Loadings on Factors 1 to 3. Z-scores in bold are significantly ($p < .05$) different from each of the other three z-scores, indicating “distinguishing statements” (asterisk (*)) indicates significance at $p < .01$. Statements in italic indicate “consensus statements.”

In accordance with the purposes of the research, by transforming the frame analysis proposed by Entman (1993)³ as four categories, the set of statements was prepared into three categories including the following domains: a) definitions and causes of the Armenian issue, b) moral judgments concerning the Armenian issue, and c) suggestions to the solutions and barriers to solutions of the Armenian issue.

Given the sensitivity and potentially politicized nature of the topic under research, both a consent form and verbal explanations were provided to minimize the tendency for participants to give socially desirable answers and the possibility of feeling pressured. These explanations were only intended for participants who requested additional information about the research or were curious about the procedure regarding the results.

³ Entman's (1993) frame analysis approach consists of four domains as a) problem definition, b) causal interpretation, c) moral evaluation and d) treatment recommendation. In addition to these four main domains, “barrier to problem solution” as a fifth domain was also added based on Karasu et al. (2017) and Ulug (2016).

The explanations made it clear that participation was entirely voluntary, and that complete anonymity would be ensured in the data collection and reporting processes. Participants were assured that their responses would only be analyzed at an aggregate level and that no individual responses would be identified or attributed to them. In addition, the instructions specifically emphasized that there were no right or expected answers to minimize any potential sense of pressure on participants. The interviews were conducted in quiet environments where only the participant and the researcher were present, and where the participant's comfort and privacy could be maximized. Whenever possible, the interviews were conducted in the participant's preferred locations, for example, in his/her own home or office.

First, participants were asked to complete an informed consent form. They started sorting the 41 items into three piles as: (a) items they agree, (b) items they disagree, and (c) items they feel neutral about. After that, they were asked to sort them into a fixed quasi-normal distribution ranging from +4 (most agree) to -4 (most disagree). The number of statements to be placed on each number was predetermined (see Figure 1). After sorting all cards into the fixed quasi-normal distribution, participants were asked to comment on the statements they mostly agree with (+4) and mostly disagreed with (-4). In the end, socio-demographic questions such as age, gender, occupation, religious view and political view were asked.

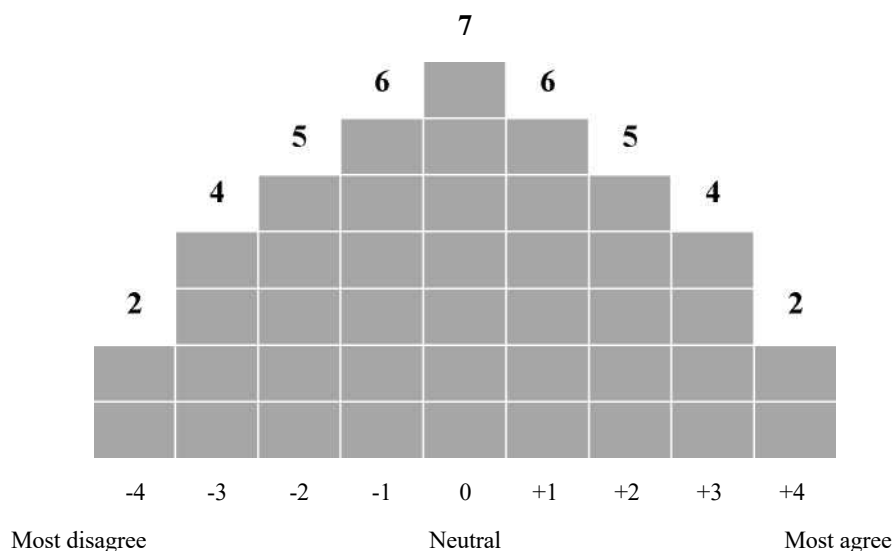


Figure 1. The Fixed Quasi-Normal Distribution.

The Numbers in Bold Indicate the Number of Statements to be Placed on Each Number.

Analysis

The data were analyzed with the PQMethod 2.35 program (Schmolck, 2014). Accordingly, the factors were extracted using the principal component analysis (PCA) and rotated by the varimax technique. The factors were evaluated based on the four criteria: simplicity, clarity, distinctness, and stability (Webler et al., 2009). It also was considered that each factor includes a minimum of two participants (Brown, 1980). The socio-demographic characteristics of the participants and their comments were considered when interpreting the factors (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

Results

The three-factor solution explained 59% of the variance.⁴ Of 40 participants, 25 were loaded on one of the three factors.⁵ The remaining 15 participants had multiple loadings,⁶ which means that their views represent a combination of the perspectives described below (see Table 2 for factor loadings and participants' characteristics). In addition, the correlation between Factor 1 and Factor 2 was low (-.24)⁷. In the following, the most agreed and most disagreed statements as well as distinguishing statements for each factor were described (see Table 1 for z-scores).

Factor 1. "Armenian issue as a result of war conditions and mutual sufferings"

In Factor 1, the tragic events of 1915 are evaluated as a consequence of the conditions of war and the problem is characterized as the common sufferings of both groups. It had 10 defining sorts, with factor loadings from .54 to .79. The age range of the participants (6 females, 4 males) was between 26 and 62 years ($M = 41.70$; $SD = 13.97$). The religious view ranged from 1 to 7 ($M = 4.30$; $SD = 1.70$; 1: *not at all*; 7: *very much*). The political view ranged from 1 to 7 ($M = 4.30$; $SD = 1.25$; 1: *left*; 7: *right*).

In Factor 1, the Armenian issue is seen as a consequence of the war conditions of the 1915 period (statement no. 7) and not seen as a genocide (no. 35). According to Factor 1, the view that both peoples suffered very much in the war conditions of the 1915 period is strongly agreed (no. 2). However, the views that the Armenians have suffered more than Turks over the tragic events of 1915 and Turks should feel responsible and guilty due to atrocities committed against Armenians are rejected (nos. 38 and 39). In Factor 1, the views that Türkiye must recognize the Armenian Genocide and officially apologize to solve the problem are rejected (nos. 40 and 32). However, solution strategies such as supporting activities based on mutual cooperation such as conducting scientific studies, establishing bilateral solution commissions, teaching both views in history lessons and restarting diplomatic relations are also agreed to solve the problem (nos. 3, 1, 15 and 11). The views criticizing and blaming Türkiye are also rejected (nos. 6, 34 and 36).

Factor 2. "Armenian issue as a genocide and Turkish State as the only political responsible"

Factor 2 represents the viewpoint that the tragic events of 1915 are evaluated as a genocide and Türkiye is seen as the only responsible party for it. It had 9 defining sorts, with factor loadings from .68 to .87. The age range of the participants (3 female, 6 male) was between 24 and 47 years ($M = 34.56$; $SD = 8.38$). The religious view ranged from 1 to 7 ($M = 1.22$; $SD = .44$; 1: *not at all*; 7: *very much*). The political view ranged from 1 to 7 ($M = 1.89$; $SD = .78$; 1: *left*; 7: *right*).

In Factor 2, the Armenian issue is seen as a genocide (no. 35) and the views ignoring the problem and externalizing responsibility (nos. 14, 30, 9, 18) are rejected. It is agreed with the views that many Turks are prejudiced against Armenians and Türkiye's official policy is hostile to Armenians (nos. 4 and 36). In addition, the view that we should feel responsible and guilty due to atrocities committed against Armenians is supported (no. 39). In Factor 2, the view seeing the Turks as the main victims of the 1915 events is rejected (no. 25). According to Factor 2, both the views supporting activities based on mutual cooperation such as establishing the bilateral solution commissions and conducting scientific studies are supported and it also is agreed with

⁴ The first factor's explained variance was 22%, the second's 20%, and the third's 17%. However, it should be noted that different from regular factor analysis, these values are less meaningful in Q methodology (Cuppen et al. 2010; Ulug & Cohrs, 2016).

⁵ Values with a factor load greater than .39 were considered statistically significant. The formula for the significant factor loads is as follows: Standard Error = $(1/\sqrt{\text{statement number}}) \times 2.58$ (McKeown & Thomas, 1988).

⁶ It is considered that there is a difference at least .20 among the factor loads in the multiple loadings (Ulug & Cohrs, 2016).

⁷ The value of the correlation between Factor 1 and Factor 3 was .70; the value of the correlation between Factor 2 and Factor 3 was .03.

the views that Türkiye needs to change the nation-state ideology and Türkiye must recognize the Armenian Genocide to solve the problem (nos. 1, 3, 21 and 40).

Table 2
Factor Loadings and Participant Characteristics

ID	F1	F2	F3	Gender	Occupation	Age	Rel. view.	Pol. view
1	.73X	-.06	.52	Female	Teacher	27	4	4
2	.79X	-.29	.27	Male	Firefighter	27	5	6
3	.34	.20	.56X	Female	Teacher	27	6	5
4	.37	-.05	.70X	Male	Teacher	27	2	2
5	.26	.68X	.11	Male	Mechanic	47	1	3
6	.52	.30	.44	Male	Psychologist	28	5	2
7	.07	.31	.43	Female	Homemaker	29	4	6
8	.48	.64	.04	Male	Teacher	27	5	2
9	-.13	.68X	.04	Male	Teacher	39	1	1
10	.64	.04	.50	Female	Midwife	41	7	5
11	.17	.78X	.03	Male	Psychologist	25	1	2
12	-.46	.75X	.19	Female	Civil Servant	41	2	3
13	-.14	.77X	-.09	Male	Civil Servant	40	1	1
14	.75X	.12	.24	Female	Civil Servant	49	2	4
15	-.36	.81X	-.19	Male	Civil Servant	39	1	1
16	.41	.21	.66X	Female	Civil Servant	46	1	1
17	.02	-.35	.54	Male	Municipal Employee	31	6	7
18	.34	.05	.81X	Male	NGO Staff	36	4	6
19	.54X	-.34	.17	Male	Artisan	39	6	5
20	.45	-.52	.23	Female	Employee	39	7	4
21	.37	.49	-.21	Male	Engineer	28	1	1
22	.44	-.14	.52	Female	Homemaker	45	7	4
23	.16	.81X	.16	Male	NGO Staff	30	2	2
24	-.19	.84X	.03	Female	NGO Staff	26	1	2
25	-.28	.87X	-.03	Female	NGO Staff	24	1	2
26	.06	.23	.70X	Male	NGO Staff	34	4	5
27	.52	-.30	.46	Male	Teacher	30	6	6
28	.65X	-.26	.43	Male	Engineer	29	1	5
29	.61X	-.14	.23	Female	Lecturer	50	6	4
30	.59	.07	.45	Female	Make-up Artist	36	1	3
31	.41	-.34	.54	Male	Entrepreneur	40	2	2
32	.62X	.21	.08	Female	Retired	62	4	3
33	.40	-.18	.60X	Female	Accountant	45	4	4
34	.34	.10	.51	Male	Teacher	27	4	3
35	.68X	-.24	.43	Female	Engineer	26	5	4
36	.37	-.20	.55	Male	Retired	56	1	1
37	.57	-.38	.40	Male	Retired	61	7	7
38	.69X	-.01	.41	Male	Retired	60	6	6
39	.63X	.03	.39	Female	Midwife	48	4	2
40	.49	.39	.30	Male	Unemployed	23	2	3

Note. F1 to F4: Loadings on Factors 1 to 4; Loadings in bold indicate that the respective sort was used as a defining sort; Religious view: 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*; Political view: 1 = *left*, 7 = *right*.

Factor 3. “The Armenian issue as the influence of global powers such as the US and Russia”

Factor 3 represents the viewpoint that the tragic events of 1915 are evaluated as the influence of global powers such as the US and Russia. It had 6 (3 female, 3 male) defining sorts, with factor loadings from .56 to .81. The age range of the participants was between 27 and 46 years ($M = 35.83$; $SD = 8.33$). The religious view

ranged from 1 to 7 ($M = 3.50$; $SD = 1.76$; 1: *not at all*; 7: *very much*). The political view ranged from 1 to 7 ($M = 3.83$; $SD = 1.94$; 1: *left*; 7: *right*).

In Factor 3, from the beginning until today, this problem has persisted because of the provocations of the global powers such as the US and Russia (no. 9). It is also not defined as a genocide (no. 35). According to Factor 3, the views that both peoples suffered very much in the war conditions of the 1915 period and Turks and Armenians are similar people in the same geography; traitors are the ones who perpetuate the problem are strongly agreed (nos. 2 and 8). However, the views criticizing Türkiye are also rejected (nos. 36 and 34).

In Factor 3, the views that the US, EU or Russia must be the mediator, the Armenians should not demand the compensation/financial reparations, Türkiye must recognize the Armenian Genocide and officially apologize are rejected (nos. 41, 10, 40 and 32). However, the views supporting activities based on mutual cooperation such as establishing bilateral solution commissions, conducting scientific studies and restarting the diplomatic relations are supported to solve the problem (nos. 1, 3 and 11). It is also agreed that the Armenians must end the genocide allegations to solve the problem (no. 6), and in line with that, the views criticizing Türkiye are also rejected (nos. 34 and 36). According to Factor 3, the views that this problem cannot be solved because of the interests of the global powers such as the US and Russia in this region and the solution to this problem must be left to the historians are agreed (nos. 16 and 5).

Discussion

Three different viewpoints (or factors) in relation to the Armenian issue are highlighted in the study. Factor 1 represents the viewpoint that the tragic events of 1915 are evaluated as a consequence of the conditions of war and the problem is characterized as the common sufferings. Factor 2 is the viewpoint that the tragic events of 1915 are evaluated as a genocide and Türkiye is seen as the only responsible party for it. Factor 3 is the viewpoint that the tragic events of 1915 are evaluated as the influence of global powers such as the US and Russia and it is emphasized on common sufferings as in Factor 1.

Even though the participants in Factor 1 and Factor 3 have a consensus on the view that this issue should not be defined as a genocide, they diverge on the causes of the problem. For example, in Factor 1, the problem stems from “the war conditions of the 1915” and “the Armenian gangs that lived in the Ottoman era,” whereas in Factor 3, from the beginning until today, this problem has persisted because of “the provocations of the global powers such as the US and Russia.” Factor 2 differs drastically from Factor 1 and Factor 3. In Factor 2, these causal explanations are completely rejected, and Türkiye is seen as the only responsible party for this issue.

Factor 1 and partly Factor 3 seem to be largely consistent with Türkiye’s official policy against the Armenian issue. The participants in both viewpoints reduce the responsibility of the Turks or Türkiye, and they put the blame on external factors such as the war conditions of the 1915 period or global powers. The finding is consistent with the previous studies (Bilali, 2013; Bilali et al., 2012). According to Bilali’s (2013) study, Turkish participants, in line with Türkiye’s official policy on the Armenian issue, minimized the internal group responsibility for the 1915 events and attributed the responsibility for what happened to Armenians and external factors (e.g., third parties and the harsh conditions of the First World War). In another study, Turkish participants evaluated the violent events of 1915 as a response to Armenian provocations, and while acknowledging that Armenians suffered in the process, they stressed that Turks were also victims during the Balkan Wars. Moreover, these participants also produce narratives that Armenians harmed Turks (Bilali et al., 2012). These findings align with the perspectives of participants categorized under Factor 1 and partly Factor

3, demonstrating consistency in their viewpoints.

The perspective emphasizing external factors aligns with the official thesis that the sociopolitical and military context of World War I played a pivotal role in shaping the events that led to the forced relocations and widespread suffering of Armenians (Çiçek, 2005; Halaçoğlu, 2005). Specifically, the Ottoman State under significant threat to its territorial integrity and internal stability, implemented extraordinary measures such as the Temporary Law of Deportation, widely known as the Tehcir Law. These measures were presented as essential for ensuring national security amidst the existential crisis faced by the state. While this framing situates the Armenian issue within the broader historical narrative of wartime exigencies and state survival, it often underrepresents the profound human cost and ethical implications of these policies (Özdoğan ve Kılıçdağı, 2012). This perspective, therefore, calls for a critical analysis that not only considers the historical contingencies but also addresses the ways in which such narratives are employed to shape collective understandings of responsibility and memory.

According to Factor 3, although the tragic events of 1915 are not defined as a genocide, it is supported the view that the Armenians should demand the compensation/financial reparations to solve the problem. This approach contradicts Türkiye's official policy against the Armenian issue. However, this can be regarded as an alternative approach that facilitates and promotes dialogue between the two communities. Financial compensation is a concrete and realistic form of reparation. This can bring about positive outcomes between the two communities (Hakim et al., 2021).

All participants in the three viewpoints have a consensus on statements involving reciprocal steps such as conducting scientific studies and various activities of research institutions and NGOs of both countries, restarting the diplomatic relations and teaching the views of both countries in history lessons to solve the problem. This demand for reciprocity is consistent with the results of a study conducted with young people from Türkiye and Armenia (Karasu et al., 2020). In this study, participants in Türkiye and Armenia emphasized that they expect both peoples and civil society organizations in both countries to engage in peaceful steps. Participants in Armenia, in particular, stated that it is necessary to develop positive attitudes by abandoning negative attitudes and establishing communication and cooperation between the parties. Participants in Türkiye, on the other hand, pointed out that joint activities should be carried out in areas such as science, art, culture, economy and education and that public awareness should be raised on this issue. Although young people from both countries have different and polarized attitudes toward the Armenian issue, they see dialogue and peace as the solution.

All participants in this study agree with the views that many Turks are prejudiced against Armenians; conversely, they reject the view that the problem stemmed from the mistreatment of Armenians by the Kurdish tribes in the Ottoman. Moreover, they agree with the views that the main victims of the issue are the Armenians living in Anatolia and the problem stemmed from the politics and practices of the Young Turk opposition movement.⁸ The consensual points are an important component for the conflict resolution and reconciliation process (Bar-Tal, 2000; Bar-Tal & Bennink, 2004; Hameiri & Halperin 2015). However, they dissociate on views including politicized suggestions such as a request for recognition of genocide, and a request for an official apology for the solutions to the problem.

Intractable conflicts are processes that have multiple effects both at the individual and group level. From a social-psychological perspective, these effects may lead to negative behaviors including discrimination and violence toward out-group by increasing in-group identification (Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005; Reicher et

⁸ The Young Turk opposition movement emerged against the regime of Sultan Abdul-Hamid (Abdulhamit) II (1876-1909) (Hanioglu, 1995).

al., 2008). Therefore, understanding the perspectives of people living in Türkiye on the Armenian issue may help the prevention of possible negative behaviors toward Armenians.

For participants representing Factor 2, the idea that the Armenian issue must be recognized as “genocide” is one of the most important issues. This finding is consistent with the results of research conducted in Armenia. For example, in a survey conducted by CRRC (Caucasus Research Resource Centre-Armenia) (2015), the most common answer given by participants in Armenia to the question “What interests you the most about Türkiye-Armenia relations?” was the recognition of the Armenian genocide (85%). In the same survey, the most common response to the question “What kind of compensation/repair do you expect from Türkiye?” was official recognition of the Armenian genocide (42%). Similarly, a study conducted by ACNIS (Armenian Centre for National and International Studies) (2005) found that the greatest responsibility for the Armenian issue was attributed entirely to the Turkish state (61.1%).

The participants in the second group held the Turkish state fully responsible for what has been done to the Armenians and expressed that they feel collectively guilty and responsible for this situation. This finding is considered an important stage in the functioning of reparation and compensation processes in collective guilt literature (Branscombe et al., 2002; Wohl et al., 2006). In contrast, participants in the first and third groups were opposed to the idea of collective responsibility or guilt for what was done to the Armenians. This group tends to have right-wing political views and blames the Armenians for the problem. This finding is consistent with other findings in the literature, which have shown that in situations of intergroup conflict, individuals with right-wing political orientations tend to blame the out-group and trivialize their own group’s actions while mitigating collective guilt (Wohl & Branscombe, 2004; Sharvit et al., 2015).

The study reveals that some participants (15 individuals) have significant characteristics of more than one viewpoint and cannot be defined by only one viewpoint. This shows that the three viewpoints identified in the study are not completely mutually exclusive (Uluğ, 2016). In addition to the distinguishing and consensus points, it is also noteworthy that there are some commonalities between these viewpoints, which have different characteristics from each other. This finding can be considered as a meaningful starting point in the process of peaceful transformation of conflict-ridden relations.

Even though the viewpoints that emerge in our study appear to be based on objective historical realities, they are shaped by the collective memory that has been produced and shared by Turks and Armenians on this issue throughout history. While this memory allows for the continuous reconstruction of historical realities, it is also constructed in different contexts according to the socio-political needs of each period. For example, the Armenian issue was put back on the Turkish agenda in the 1970s with the attacks on Turkish diplomats by the terrorist organization ASALA (Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia). In this context, the Turkish regime established after the military coup of 12 September 1980 treated the issue as a security issue by separating it from its historical context (Dağlıoğlu, 2020). As a result of this approach, the Armenian issue was evaluated solely from a security perspective. Similarly, since the 1990s, the Armenian issue has been discussed in the context of issues such as human rights and minority rights in Türkiye’s European Union accession process (Bilgin, 2005; Görgülü, 2008). This development, in addition to political contacts, contributed to the efforts of non-governmental organizations to normalize the issue and made it partially possible to address the social dimensions of the issue. In this way, in different historical periods, the Armenian issue has been addressed not only as a “problem of the past” but also as part of the current socio-political dynamics. In this context, the Armenian issue should be approached through a comprehensive analysis of the representations and perceptions that have been reshaped according to the conditions of the time, by evaluating its historical, political and social dimensions together.

The Q statements in this study were divided into three domains: a) definitions and causes of the Armenian issue, b) moral judgments on the Armenian issue, and c) suggestions for the solution of the Armenian issue and barriers to the solution. The first domain includes narratives about the past of intractable conflict relations and these narratives reflect the elements of collective memory emphasized in the literature on intractable conflicts. The frame provides important clues as to how perceptions and narratives of the past shape current conflict dynamics. The second domain includes designs on the past, current status and possible future developments of the issue. It also provides an understanding of how collective emotions (e.g., anger, guilt, or empathy) toward the outgroup are shaped. By addressing the historical and moral dimensions of the issue, the frame shows how the conflict is made sense of in broader social and moral contexts. The third frame includes suggestions for resolving the problem and views on the barriers to the resolution process. Since this frame contains narratives and future expectations for the resolution of the conflict between the two groups, it can be evaluated within ethos of conflict in the literature on intractable conflicts.

According to the research results, the participants of Factor 1 and partly Factor 3 rejected the views that they believe are contrary to Türkiye's official policies on the Armenian issue. This shows that these groups tend to maintain the existing conflictual relationship in the context of collective memory and ethos of conflict regarding the Armenian issue (Cairns & Roe, 2003; Oren, 2019). Conversely, the viewpoints of Factor 2 participants exhibit a critical attitude toward the positions of Factor 1 and Factor 3 participants. This group seems to adopt a perspective opposing the official narrative on the Armenian issue. However, rather than being perceived as a demand for normalization and reconciliation in public opinion, the proposals of this group are considered as a threat. This phenomenon appears to be closely linked to the hegemonic representations surrounding the Armenian issue, which have rendered it a near-taboo topic in Türkiye (Karasu & Uluğ, 2020). Perspectives that deviate from the official stance of the Turkish state are often delegitimized and marginalized, limiting the scope for alternative narratives and critical discourse.

The mean levels of religiosity and political orientation of the participants exhibit significant differences in each factor analyzed. In Factor 1, these values are above the average, in Factor 2 they are below the average, and in Factor 3 they are at the average level. This distribution shows how not only individual differences, but also social ideologies and historical contexts play a shaping role on perceptions of the issue. In particular, political conservatism as one of social ideologies, beyond being an individual tendency, is defined as an ideology that legitimizes intergroup inequalities and resists social change (Jost, 2020). Therefore, it can be said that this ideological framework creates both conceptual and practical obstacles to the resolution processes regarding the issue.

When evaluating the interplay among right-wing political orientation, social identity, and the Armenian issue in an integrated manner, we argue that participants, particularly those aligned with Factor 1, perceive this issue through an "ideological line of defense." This interpretation is rooted in a collective tendency to externalize responsibility for historical events, such as attributing the outcomes to external forces like war conditions or interventions by global powers (Akçam, 1995). However, this externalization is not only an individual cognitive process; rather, it reflects the influence of broader psychological mechanisms shaped by social identity. Social Identity Theory (Hogg, 2016; Tajfel, 1982) suggests that individuals derive a sense of self-worth from their group membership, and in contexts of perceived threat, this identification intensifies, leading to defensive attitudes and cognitive biases.

In this case, historical and national experiences including military defeats, sociopolitical upheavals, and the disintegration of the Ottoman State have collectively contributed to an ideological defense mechanism that reinforces a siege mentality. This mentality, deeply embedded within the national identity and

conservative political ideology, operates as a psychological safeguard against external challenges (Bar-Tal, 2012). By contextualizing these dynamics, we can better understand how shared historical narratives and collective memories influence not only group-level attitudes but also individual psychological processes, such as the attribution of responsibility.

We think that the nationalist understanding of state administration shaped during the decline of the Ottoman State is at the root of current official policies on the Armenian issue. This historical and ideological context shows that the Armenian issue should be considered not only as a historical event, but also as a phenomenon that is reproduced in contemporary social and political relations. The inability to evaluate the Armenian issue as a problem that can be discussed with its social dimensions is one of the main obstacles blocking the search for a solution. In this context, it is clear that solution proposals on the issue should be developed by considering historical, social and ideological layers.

The results reflect the polarizations that are often expressed in the media and daily discourse concerning the Armenian issue in Türkiye. However, the views shared by all participants for a solution to the problem may be viewed as promising in terms of the normalization of relations. More research is needed to find out what are the new proposals that more people will agree on for new solutions.

Limitations and Directions for Future Studies

The viewpoints revealed by the Q methodology in this study provide an exploratory framework in terms of perceptions and evaluations on the Armenian issue. However, it is not possible to claim that the three viewpoints obtained reflect the general perceptions of individuals in Türkiye on the Armenian issue in a detailed and holistic manner. Therefore, in future research, these viewpoints should be tested on larger and more representative samples using quantitative methods. In particular, the potential of the Q methodology to be combined with quantitative methods in various ways (e.g., scale development, profile correlation) provides researchers with significant methodological conveniences in this area (Danielson, 2009).

The study did not ask participants about their ethnic identity. This preference can be considered as one of the limitations of the study. However, the aim was to contribute to the peaceful transformation process of the complex and conflictual relations shaped in the context of the 1915 events. Considering the possible risks that ethnic identity emphasis may pose in this process, it was preferred to address the participants on the axis of a common country and geography.

Another limitation of the study is that the sample is limited both in terms of the cities where data was collected and the number of participants. Although we observed that the individuals participating in the study have average values in terms of their political orientations and religiosity levels, it should be noted that this sample does not fully reflect the widespread views of individuals across Türkiye. In future research, we recommend analyzing different demographic and sociopolitical contexts with larger and more diversified samples.

In this study, the viewpoints of individuals in Türkiye toward the conflictual relations between the two peoples and possible peace processes were analyzed. On the basis of the research findings, new models can be developed between some social psychological variables (e.g., collective victimization, trust in the outgroup, collective denial, attitudes toward reconciliation, intergroup contact and forgiveness) and alternative approaches to solving the conflict can be evaluated.

In this respect, we believe that the exploratory findings of this study can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the perceptions on the Armenian issue and have the potential to enrich the

literature in this field.

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