

# Political Orientation and Fertility in Turkey: Evidence from World Values Survey, 1989-2014

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The impact of political orientation of individuals on their fertility level is an issue that disregarded highly in the demographic literature. Therefore, this study aims to investigate whether political attitude is associated with number of children on the basis of individuals that completed their reproductive period. The data are from all the waves of the World Value Survey conducted in Turkey from 1989-1993 to 2010-2014 periods. The study utilizes the two main questions from the data sets. The first one is “How many children do you have?”, the dependent variable of the study varying between 0 to 8. The second one is the “Self-positioning in political scale” ranging from left to right in ten different scale points. This variable was categorized under three different groups as left/liberal, intermediate and right/conservative. A number of covariates are also controlled during the multivariate phase of the study. In the multivariate phase of the study, the study exploits the poisson regression technique in order to show the net impact of the political orientation on fertility under the control of all possible covariates. Overall, political orientation for right/conservative than for left/liberal and intermediate political attitudes are associated with higher average number of offspring. The association persists even after controlling all possible covariates. Furthermore, the time series data shows that this pattern emerged in Turkey during the 2000s with the effect of the political polarization around the discussion on “all couples should have at least 3-children” policy suggested by the government with the right/conservative political orientation.

Key words: Political orientation, fertility, World Values Survey, Turkey

## Introduction

The linkages between political attitude and fertility level can be defined as an untouched issue in demographic literature. There exist wide ranges of studies on the impact of politics or policies on fertility at the overall level, but not on the individual level. To our knowledge, there is only one study on the issue in psychology literature that examines the relation between political orientation and reproduction (Fieder and Huber, 2018). Much of the studies in demographic literature focuses on the impact of religiosity on fertility level (McQuillan, 2004; Hayford and

Morgan, 2008; Peri-Rotem, 2016; Dilmaghani, 2019; Herzer, 2019). This study, in this context, aims to fill the gap in the demographic literature and focuses on the impact of political orientation on fertility level at the individual level.

### Data and Methodology

The data of the study is from the five waves of the World Values Survey conducted in Turkey in the period of 1989-1993, 1994-1998, 1999-2004, 2005–2009 and 2010–2014. The study utilizes the two main questions asked in all five waves from the data sets. The first question is “How many children do you have?”, the dependent variable of the study varying between 0 to 8. The second one is the “Self-positioning in political scale”, the independent variable of the study ranging from left to right in ten different scale points. In both descriptive and multivariate phases of the study, a number of covariates such as survey years, gender, age, education, working status, income, religiosity of the respondents. All the data sets are pooled into one data set before the multivariate analyses. By this way, we have a chance to control the time effect on both fertility and self-positioning political scale.

In the multivariate phase of the study, the study exploits the poisson regression technique in order to show the net impact of the political orientation on fertility under the control of all possible covariates. Poisson regression models are conducted in four estimation stages (only survey years, survey years and independent variable, individual characteristics, economic profile and religiosity and life satisfaction) in an additive way as seen in Table 1. The independent variable of the study (political orientation score (POS)) was categorized under three different groups as left/liberal, intermediate and right/conservative in the multivariate phase of the study.

Table 1. Estimation stages of multivariate analyses

<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>	<b>Model 4</b>
Time effect	Time effect	Time effect	Time effect
	POS	POS	POS
		Sex	Sex
		Age	Age
		Years of schooling	Years of schooling
		Working status	Working status
		Income level	Income level
			Religiosity score
			Life satisfaction score

## **Descriptive Findings**

Turkey experiences a fertility transition, its recent total fertility rate is just about the replacement level of fertility. In line with this transition as Table 1 pointed out percentage of people having less than three children is on the way of increasing in Turkey. On the contrary, the percentage of people having 5 and more children has decreased considerably from 12.2 percent in 1989-1993 period to 4.3 percent in 2010-2014 period. In this period, mean number of children per woman has decreased by 85 percent from 3.39 to 1.84 (Table 2).

When we create categories from self-positioning political scale by grouping scales 1 to 4 as left/liberal, 5-6 as intermediate and 7 to 10 as and right/conservative, majority of the people classify themselves in the intermediate group. In all survey period, the percentage of people defined themselves in the right/conservative wing is much higher than those defined themselves in the left/liberal wing. However, in the last survey conducted in 2012 in Turkey, the self-positioning political scale shifts to right completely and as a result the percentage of people in the left/liberal wing and especially in the intermediate decline significantly as seen in Figure 3. The changes in the mean political orientation scores also confirms how self-positioning political scale shifts from intermediate to right/conservative wing over time (Figure 4).

Regarding with how the level of fertility changes according to political orientation of the people, as Figure 5 reveals that the level of fertility increases as the self-positioning political scale shifts in both 1989-1993 and 2010-2014 periods in Turkey. The mean number of children for the people at the left wing was 1.9; while it was 3 for the people at the right in 1989-1993 period. The mean number of children for the people at both wings has decreased in the 2010-2014 period, especially for the people at the left wing from 1.9 children in 1989-1993 period to under 1 child in 2010-2014 period. In the same period, the decline in mean number of children appears to be limited for the people at the intermediate and right/conservative wing.

## **Multivariate Findings**

The Model 1 reveals that number of children per person decreases over time. In the first period, the fertility level was 2.5 times higher than the fertility level in the most recent period. When the POS enters into the equation of Poisson regression, the time effect persists its explanatory power in Model 2. Model 2 shows that people located themselves in the right/conservative wing have 2.4 times higher fertility level than those in the left/liberal wing. Even after the covariates regarding with sex, age, education, working status and income (Model 3) and then covariates on religiosity and life satisfaction (Model 4) are taken under control, the number of children for the

people self-positioning themselves as the right/conservative is 2.3 times higher than that of as the left/liberal. The people located themselves in the intermediate political attitude than for left/liberal is also associated with higher average number of offspring in all models.

Figure 1. Changes in the number of children per person by survey waves in Turkey

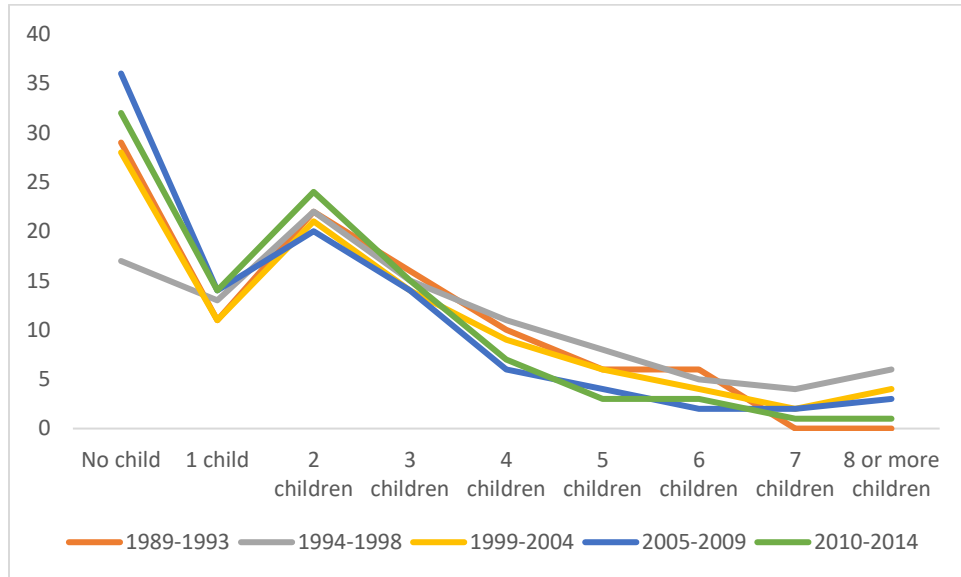


Figure 2. Changes in the mean number of children per woman by survey waves in Turkey

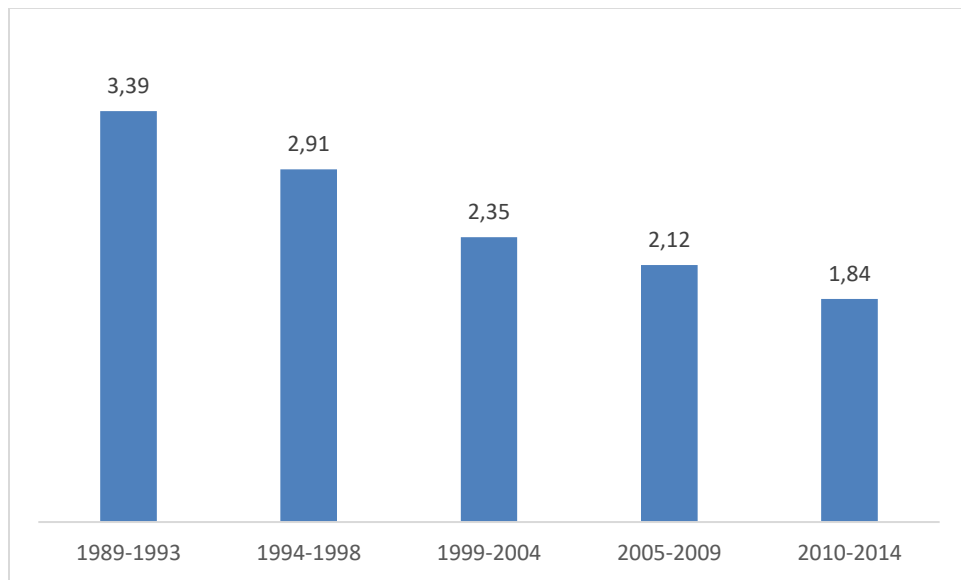


Figure 3. Changes in the political orientation scores by survey waves in Turkey

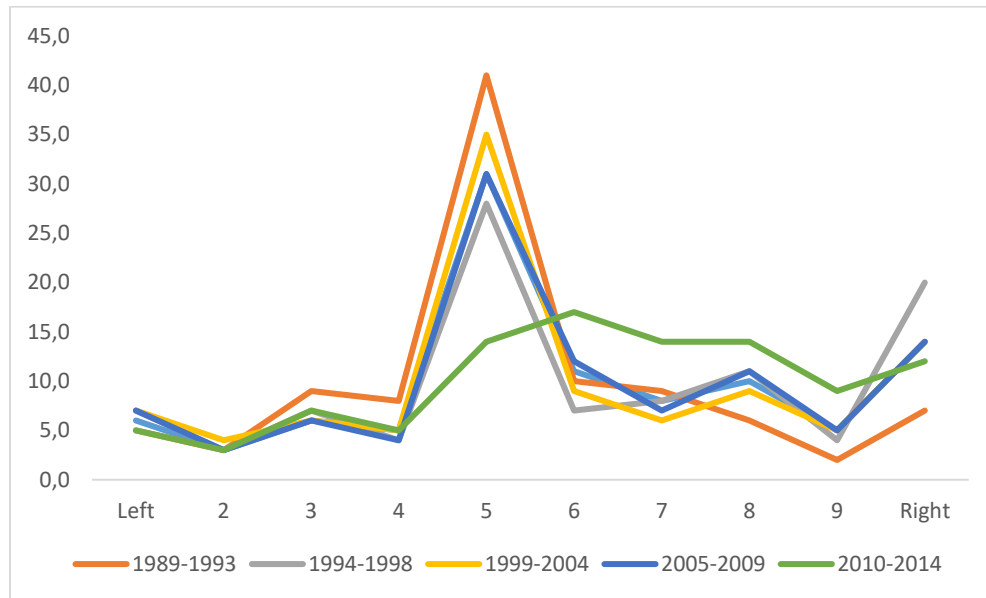


Figure 4. Changes in the mean political orientation scores by survey waves in Turkey

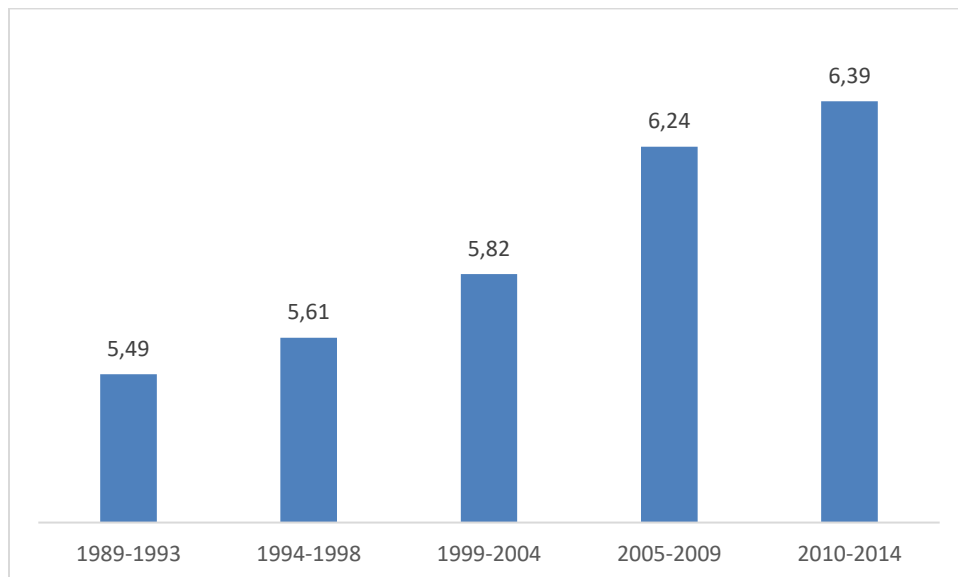


Figure 5. Mean number of children by political orientation score in Turkey

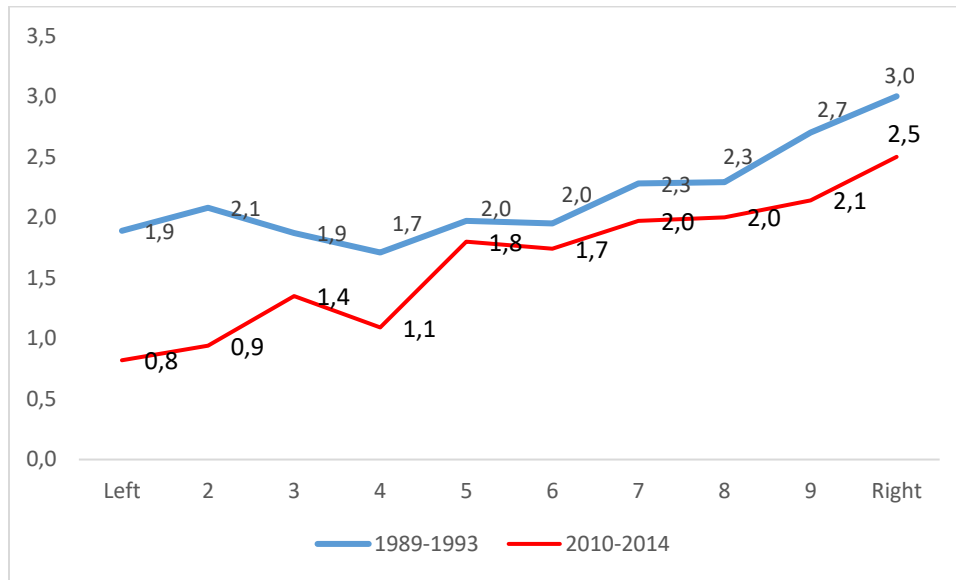


Table 2. Poisson regression results for the impact of POS on the number of children

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<b>Survey years</b>				
1989-1993	2.494*	2.510*	2.240*	2.159*
1994-1998	1.884*	1.837*	1.692*	1.347*
1999-2004	1.447*	1.418*	1.317*	1.256*
2005-2009	1.120**	1.109**	1.091**	1.101**
2010-2014	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
<b>POS</b>				
Left/liberal	-	1.000	1.000	1.000
Intermediate	-	1.105**	1.112**	1.117**
Right/conservative	-	2.424*	2.340*	2.330*
R Square	0.241	0.293	0.337	0,410

\*p<0.01; \*\*p<0.05

## Conclusion

Overall, political orientation for right/conservative than for left/liberal and intermediate political attitudes are associated with higher average number of offspring. The association persists even after controlling all possible covariates. Furthermore, the time series data shows that the pattern of self-positioning political scale shifting from intermediate to right/conservative wing over time that emerged in Turkey during the 2000s with the effect of the political polarization around the discussion on “*all couples should have at least 3-children*” policy suggested by the government with the right/conservative political orientation.

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