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# Youth responses to state-manufactured diaspora mobilization: Turkey's diaspora governance and the politics of selective engagement

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**ABSTRACT**

Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) has implemented transnational policies to strengthen ties among diaspora youth in Europe with Turkey. However, these policies have been highly selective and geared towards regime-loyal groups in the diaspora. This article focuses on the group-level dynamics of AKP's transnational youth outreach and examines the responses of dissident youth in the diaspora to these policies. We argue that there is significant variation in how AKP's youth outreach strategies are received by diaspora youth and that the AKP's state-sponsored intervention in diasporic spaces not only transforms loyalist diaspora organizations, but also affects the identification and mobilization dynamics of dissident groups.

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## Introduction

Diasporas undergo a continual evolution across generations. Initiated by a pioneering wave of emigrants from one region to another, subsequent generations witness a transformation influenced by varied dynamics. The initial diasporans, belonging to the first generation, hold a unique experience, having lived in two distinct contexts. This dual exposure contributes significantly to the development of a diasporic identity, moulded by collective endeavours and memories associated with the establishment of a new life in a different environment. In contrast, subsequent generations develop different lived experiences. They are already born into a diasporic identity which can, at times, connect them to their ancestor's homeland through transnational ties (Baser, 2015; Wackenhut & Orjuela, 2023), or result in detachment. Given that each generation experiences the *country of origin* (CoO) and *country of residence* (CoR) differently, diasporic repertoires of action, then, are in constant transformation. As such, 'diaspora youth' constitute a distinct subset within the diasporic community which requires further study. On the one hand they represent the future of the community which makes their attachment to the CoO vital for the continuation of the diaspora itself. On the other hand, their integration into the CoR society is crucial to their own future. Only recently, have researchers started to study the dynamics that shape young people in the diaspora by focusing on the multifaceted belonging and identity

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formation processes that develop transnationally (Böcü & Baser, 2024; Hirt, 2021; Mahieu, 2019; Wackenhut & Orjuela, 2023).

This article discusses how Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) has implemented selective policies targeting diaspora youth in Europe. It explores the motivations and the reasons for such differential treatment and the ways in which the youth groups who do not support the AKP's rule perceive and respond to these policies. Building on previous studies on Turkey's diaspora youth outreach (Aksel, 2014; Arkilic, 2022; Böcü & Baser, 2024; Yabanci, 2021a) and on the reception of Turkey's diaspora governance strategies by the diaspora communities (Wackenhut, 2022), the article asks: *how do dissident diaspora youth mobilize, perceive and respond to Turkey's diaspora engagement policies?* Research has shown that political actors both in the CoO and CoR seek engagement with young people to advance their own agendas. This article specifically focuses on the CoO's engagement with diaspora youth as this is becoming an important area in diaspora studies to comprehend the diaspora outreach of the CoO and their reception by diasporas and the CoR. As diaspora youth is increasingly targeted by state-led diaspora governance policies as a separate group within a broader diaspora community (Abramson, 2019; Böcü & Baser, 2024; Mahieu, 2019; Wackenhut & Orjuela, 2023), there is a growing need to understand the reception of these policies by youth communities transnationally (see also the introduction of this special issue).

While many other CoOs across the globe engage in youth outreach, Turkey constitutes a theoretically and empirically relevant case study to investigate how diaspora youth react to homeland calling practices. First, Turkey has ramped up its diaspora engagement over the last decade, expanding and rebuilding institutions dedicated to diaspora and kin communities and investing extensively – both material and ideational resources – to increase its diasporas' soft power potential both in the Global North and South along strategic interests. Second, diaspora youth has received specific attention by the Turkish authorities since the launch of its diaspora engagement strategy. This has laid bare emergent policies and practices towards diaspora youth making processes and outcomes particularly observable for scholars. Lastly, policies and practices to engage diaspora youth have overlapped with growing authoritarianism under the rule of the AKP which has impacted state-diaspora relations over the last decade. While Turkey's efforts to engage diaspora youth reflect attempts to extend domestic strategies to craft a youth that is dedicated to the party's ideals and visions (Yabanci, 2021a), the deliberate targeting of specific youth demographics has given rise to fresh power imbalances among youth factions in the diaspora, characterized by diverse ideological, religious, and ethnic ties.

In this article, we deviated from conceptualizing diasporas as homogeneous entities and instead recognized and analysed their internal diversity. Diversity in the diaspora does not solely pertain to distinctions between various ethnic or religious groups; it can also manifest through differences within a given group. Moreover, within these communities, not all individuals identify as part of the diaspora; often, external actors like the CoO and CoR political entities impose this definition upon them. We align with the insights presented by de Jong and Mugge (2023) wherein they demonstrated the pivotal role of ethnically or racially minoritized citizens in forming their own political self-identifications and interests. This perspective is vital in understanding evaluations of political representation in the diaspora. Their work demonstrates that commonly employed state categories for research and policymaking lack analytical strength, largely due to their failure to acknowledge the agency of community members in shaping their individual political self-identifications. We applied this perspective into our methodological approach by paying specific attention to the self-identifications research participants reported during data collection and further avoided

categorizing diasporas as one monolithic group by considering diverse opinions, positions and affiliations of our interlocutors.

Our analysis is based on in-depth fieldwork in Europe (Germany, France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Sweden and the United Kingdom) where we have conducted interviews, ethnographic and participant observation between 2008 and 2022. As such, our qualitative research has documented the AKP's engagement with the diaspora over the past ten years. This extended timeframe has allowed for on-the-ground insights into how policies related to youth mobilization in the diaspora have been received over time. Across a range of research projects which unpacked mobilization of diaspora groups from Turkey, we have conducted more than 100 semi-structured interviews with first, second, and third generation diaspora members, including diaspora organization leaders and members to shed light on the enduring effects of CoO diaspora engagement on various diaspora communities. Interviewing older generations helped us to map the field and understand the political dynamics that unfolded over the years and set the scene for our conversations with youth in the diaspora. We have also conducted ethnographic and participant observation in Turkey's diasporas during external voting practices, youth diaspora conferences, demonstrations, conferences and other cultural/academic/sport events. This data was complemented with additional openly available textual data such as reports, government documents, news items, and social media posts as well as other data such as visuals, and videos which helped us to unpack youth mobilization in Turkey's diasporas across Europe. To empirically evaluate Turkey's pursuit of strategic influence over diaspora youth, we also analysed policies aimed at diaspora youth following the establishment of Turkey's Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (*Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı*, hereafter YTB) in 2010. These efforts shed light on both the local activities and the mobilization processes within the diaspora. Furthermore, we have also explored relevant websites and social media accounts of diaspora organizations, including those that are not aligned with AKP regime and oppose its rule.

## Non-democratic states, diaspora governance and youth engagement

In recent years, scholars have heavily explored diaspora engagement policies by migrant sending states. Since many countries have dedicated specific state institutions to enhance ties with their diasporas to foster relationships with their citizens abroad and harness their economic, cultural and political potential in the CoR, scholars have focused primarily on the agency of CoO states when analysing relationships between diasporas and their CoO. While some have focused on issues such as expatriate voting rights and other democratic participatory processes (Dickinson, 2022; Escobar et al., 2015; Wackenhut & Orjuela, 2023), others focused on institutional and governance practices by the CoO (Gamlen, 2014). Scholars have also shown that CoO have various motivations when governing their diasporas and that these practices can take positive and negative connotations depending on diverging interests (Turner, 2013). While certain policies such as the extension of voting rights and the enhancement of consular services benefit all members of a given diaspora community, other policies create discrepancy in terms of treatment of diasporas with diverging loyalties towards the regime in the CoO. States, therefore, can both empower diaspora groups by providing non-material and material support or disempower them by securitizing, monitoring and controlling their activities (Glasius, 2018).

How diaspora engagement policies fare on the ground and how different groups within the diaspora respond to policies, however, has received limited scholarly attention. In recent studies, scholars have stressed that diasporas are not homogenous entities and that there exists great internal

heterogeneity in terms of intra-diasporic identification and loyalties based on ideological, ethnic, religious, class, generational and other categories (Féron, 2017; Orjuela, 2016). Alonso and Mylonas (2019), for instance, advocate states disaggregate diaspora engagement policies by considering heterogeneity and group-specific attributes among different groups when exploring the reception of diaspora engagement policies and practices by diasporas. However, a serious consideration of heterogeneity and how it interacts with state-led efforts to engage the diaspora requires an analytic consideration of how different identity categories shape political processes within the diaspora.

Diaspora governance practices, by nature, involve state-led transnational mobilization. Defined as 'transnationalism from above' (Smith & Guarnizo, 1998), states as primary actors decide on the scope of the socially-constructed 'nation' or the 'diaspora' by setting identity-shaping agendas and boundaries for diaspora groups that are considered 'desired citizens' by state actors (Böcü & Baser, 2024; Yabanci, 2021b; Yanasmayan & Kaşlı, 2019). State-led diaspora mobilization is different from 'transnationalisation from below' (Smith & Guarnizo, 1998), where grassroot organizations play the main role as agenda-setters. When the authorities in the CoO exercise their power to govern diasporas, they might turn transnational cultural ties into efforts toward encouraging diaspora members to become part of these initiatives by offering material and non-material incentives ranging from empowerment to financial resources. These actions can create immediate power asymmetries between grassroots organizations in the diaspora and newly funded state-led organizations created by the CoO. Not all CoOs pursue the establishment of organized political diaspora groups; some might solely focus on economic or cultural benefits.

Nevertheless, in situations where countries of origin are compelled to advocate for their interests during conflicts, partisan interests can become prominent in the diaspora. In the context of Israel, Hil Aked (2023, p. 16) shows that Jewish diaspora's certain activities in the CoR can be considered as diaspora groups acting like 'social movements from above'. In a similar vein as Laurence Cox and Alf Nilsen (2014), she explains the difference between social movements from above and below and demonstrates how Israel organizes lobbying activities through diaspora groups in the UK and other states to enhance or defend dominant power structures. In this context, the relations established between the CoO and diaspora projects function as so-called 'manufactured civil society' (Aked, 2023, p. 16). As states try to recruit civil society groups to help achieve their political objectives, they create state-manufactured civil society organizations that are detached from independent, grassroots organizations (Aked, 2023; Hodgson, 2004). These policies are not confined to CoO's borders and we observe a similar trend in the transnational space: As diasporas operate as quasi civil society organizations transnationally (Cochrane, 2007), it can be argued that various CoO policymakers manufacture diaspora activism by creating diaspora organizations to achieve various political objectives. In other words, this *state-manufactured diaspora activism or mobilization* is facilitated by diaspora governance policies that are enacted by the ruling elite to distort power relations in the diaspora and achieve political goals.

Historically, dissident diaspora groups from Turkey which take on a critical position against non-democratic regimes have often been disadvantaged or disempowered by state-led policies which result in tensions between groups in the diaspora community, the CoO and the CoR (Böcü, 2022). As political actors in the CoO develop policies and practices vis-à-vis their diasporas, diaspora mobilization becomes a contested issue as different groups develop competing agendas. These tensions then penetrate diaspora discourses at large, but also affect sub-group levels including the diaspora youth. Youth have always played a crucial role in states' nation-building efforts, therefore it is no surprise that their agency becomes contested when the CoO try to extend their political practices and transmit national identity extraterritorially

(Mahieu, 2015, p. 399). Recent studies show the significance of youth entrepreneurship in the diaspora by highlighting how youth are targeted as a distinct group in mobilization efforts by CoO (Böcü & Baser, 2024; Dickinson, 2022; Wackenhut & Orjuela, 2023; introduction to this special issue).

We suggest that Turkey's state-led diaspora governance tiered towards conservative and nationalistic youth based on the ideological underpinnings of the AKP regime has generated varying outcomes on the group-level. The regime's outreach has been highly ideologically charged, embracing, empowering and/or co-opting certain segments of the diaspora, while neglecting, excluding and/or repressing other segments of the diaspora (Aksel, 2014; Öktem, 2014; Yanasmayan & Kaşlı, 2019). Therefore, state-led diaspora youth governance has changed power dynamics in the diaspora through the selective provision of benefits to select groups (Böcü & Baser, 2024). This has created asymmetries between state-sponsored and grassroots diaspora organizations and/or exacerbated already existing discrepancies, at times leading to competition for resources and deepening of existing tensions among diaspora youth. In other words, state-led interventions in diasporas' transnational practices have further complicated youth politics within the diaspora by creating differential treatment of youth depending on the degree of their alignment with the regime.

## Revisiting Turkey's diaspora youth policies under the AKP regime

### *Differential treatment in diaspora youth engagement*

Turkey's diaspora engagement policies have expanded significantly after the AKP's coming to power. Thanks to the establishment of the YTB, Turkey has centralized diaspora outreach over the last decade (Aksel, 2014). While the YTB has reorganized Turkey's political, social, and economic relations with its diaspora across CoR contexts, the engagement of youth segments in the diaspora constitutes a new and relatively underexplored form of group-specific engagement (Arkilic, 2022; Böcü & Baser, 2024). Historically, Turkey's engagement with diaspora youth has been limited to side programmes such as cultural events, commemoration events, and the celebration of national holiday dedicated to the youth by Atatürk (*19 May, Youth and Sports Day*) hosted by embassies and consulates abroad to promote identification with the CoO throughout the 1990s and early 2000s (Aksel, 2014; Şenay, 2013). Already then, the state perceived diaspora youth as citizens that needed to be 'socialised into a national community' in efforts to achieve identification with the Kemalist republic and prevent ideological infiltration by Islamist groups in the diaspora (Şenay, 2013, pp. 128–129). However, a significant transformation has occurred under the AKP rule where diaspora engagement policies became a significant layer of the incumbent party's vision at home and abroad.

This state-manufactured diaspora mobilization encompassed not only top-down approaches but also efforts to instigate changes at the grassroots level. In the 2000s, a reorganization of state-diaspora relations, and the foundation of the YTB in 2010 resulted in the development of institutionalized youth policies under the prerogative of the AKP, reflecting the ideological underpinnings of the competitive authoritarian regime in the diaspora. In pursuit of the AKP's goals to create a new nationalistic and pious diaspora, the YTB has steadily implemented a variety of diaspora youth engagement programmes. In coordination with other state institutions, its activities range from cultural programmes such as youth camps and language courses which not only seek to strengthen cultural ties and enhance identification with the homeland, but also to create and co-opt future generations of diasporans that will promote the regimes' interests at home and abroad (Böcü & Baser,

2024; Öktem, 2014; Yabanci, 2021b). Diaspora engagement by the AKP, however, has been highly selective and tiered towards nationalistic and religious segments within Turkey's diasporas, while simultaneously neglecting, excluding and repressing segments of the diaspora that are in opposition to the regime such as Kurdish, Alevi or Kemalist youth (Öktem, 2014).

These policies can be considered as a transnational manifestation of domestic political developments in Turkey. As Tuğal (2009) demonstrates, Islamist movements in Turkey traditionally base their mobilization strategy on transforming everyday practices. As a party with Islamic roots, the AKP also applied this strategy by merging high-level politics with everyday social practices, which not only transformed top-down initiatives but also processes on the ground. The AKP has reshaped Turkish politics through various means, generally using Islam and Turkish nationalism to guide its vision for the country (Kaya, 2015). The AKP also instrumentalized Islam and Turkish nationalism to unite the diaspora behind the president and mobilize them for various political goals (Böcü & Panwar, 2022). Combined with the ongoing democratic backsliding led by the AKP after the Gezi Park protests in 2013, Turkey's relations with the diaspora further changed resulting in a differential treatment of intra-diasporic groups based on their alignment with the regime. While existing structures to engage parts of the diaspora adhering to the AKP's rule were preserved and extended, new divisive and repressive structures to shift power dynamics in the diaspora were also set in place.

To illustrate how this differential treatment unfolds, a review of the YTB's website, programmes and official language towards the diaspora reveals the nuances of its selective engagement with diaspora youth. While there is no direct messaging which discourages Kurdish, Alevi, or Kemalist youth from engaging with the YTB, the content of programmes for diaspora youth reflects the exclusion of these groups by emphasizing certain identity categories such as Turkishness and Islam that signal a narrow understanding of what constitutes an ideal diaspora youth for the regime. For instance, the emphasis and promotion of Turkishness and Turkish language activities that dominate YTB's youth programmes clearly reflects a lack of consideration of Kurdish identity, which mirrors the negative treatment of the Kurdish minority in the CoO. Furthermore, while the YTB prioritizes programmes that are tailored for pious youth such as visits to mosques and other Islamic historical sites. Alevism rarely receives similar consideration in the YTB's youth engagement. Lastly, Kemalist youth who tend to identify with the nation based on a secular worldview and their devotion to Turkey's major opposition party CHP and Atatürk, are also not mentioned in YTB programmes. Instead, the clear division between girls and boys during youth camp activities of the YTB, and the prioritization of mosque visits during heritage tours clearly disregard those with secular worldviews. Şenay (2022, p. 346) describes the crafting of good citizens in YTB's transnational activities as practices performed by a pedagogical state:

> (…) under the current diaspora engagement policy, one can trace an increasing focus on pedagogic programs of consciousness-raising and capacity-building tailored for selected groups across each state-designated external constituency. The strategies pursued in this field of action can be described, more broadly, as a project of fashioning 'good' citizens, insofar as the pedagogical state calls upon and encourages diaspora groups to take greater responsibility for the interests of their communities (and of Turkey).

Organizing educational trips back to the CoO, the Turkish state create creates a discourse of role-modeling and good citizens which it advertises to extraterritorial audiences. The YTB is hereby used to disseminate AKP's discourse abroad as press releases and social media accounts propagate a narrative about 'enemies of the country', 'prospects and visions' as well as the 'mightiness' of the

president. As discussed elsewhere, YTB's targeted youth activities reflect the ruling party's vision and agenda where even cultural activities are politicized (Böcü & Baser, 2024). For instance, diaspora youth academies are presented as platforms where 'role models' for youth are created.[1] These 'role models' operate in line with AKP's vision to create a regime-loyal youth, and therefore exclude those who are in opposition. Such aspirations are also illustrated during a YTB Communication Academy organized in 2019 in Strasbourg where diaspora youth were instructed on the role that international and foreign media play in supporting groups that are listed as terrorist organizations by the Turkish state such as the PKK and FETÖ.[2] Yanasmayan and Kaşlı (2019) have also analysed YTB's magazine Arti90 and found that 'YTB, was instrumentally used for the government's positive yet selective engagement attempts with external citizens when the need arises to form a public opinion abroad in line with Turkey's (read AKP's) official discourse' (Yanasmayan & Kaşlı, 2019, p. 28).

### *Reception of diaspora youth engagement*

Previous studies analysed state-sponsored policies tailored for youth at the policy level (Böcü & Baser, 2024) and how they are received by subsequent generation diaspora members who have conservative and nationalist tendencies (Iyi, 2021). Building on this, our observations show that many young people in the diaspora are appreciative of AKP's approach towards the diaspora youth. Language courses and cultural events in particular boost a sense of belonging to Turkey among those in the diaspora. Testimonies by young diasporans after summer schools or academies published on websites such as YouTube reveal a certain level of pride to participate in those events and growing demand for Turkey's active involvement abroad.[3] Some segments close to AKP are becoming more and more visible and active as they feel the CoO's support for their mobilization efforts. Turkey also gives the impression of a strong state which cares for its citizens as YTB authorities document human rights violations against Turkish citizens all around the world and organize seminars to tackle these issues.[4] Consequently, some feel embraced by their CoO, creating a feeling of empowerment among certain segments of the diaspora (Arkilic, 2022; Kaya, 2022; Yabanci, 2021b; Baser and Féron, 2022). The duty of Turkey's "brand ambassadors", which is mentioned in many politicians' speeches in the diaspora and in Turkey, is also fully embraced by some diaspora members. They are willing to lobby for Ankara's interests or promote Turkey's image in the countries that they live in (Böcü & Baser, 2024). Yet, despite substantive efforts and the unprecedented investment of resources the ability of the AKP to engage youth has varied widely**.** To begin with, critical voices from nationalistic and conservative youth groups – who should be responsive to the AKP's outreach – express covert criticism against the YTB's policies and practices. For instance, a university student who has taken part the YTB's diaspora youth academy indicates that 'the overall program appealed to him personally', but criticizes some activities in the following way:

> We were discussing the topic of human rights and how Turkey can become a human rights leader on the global stage. The instructor pushed the issue of Islamophobia as the main conversation topic. I then raised my hand and brought up domestic human rights abuses in Turkey … you know, around the Kurdish issue. I was immediately shut down and we moved to the next topic. I did not appreciate the approach of the instructor; my classmates also did not intervene. I felt unseen. I was re-invited, but this experience discouraged me from participating again.[5]

Moreover, there are also critical voices affiliated with nationalistic networks of the Grey Wolves in Germany who express frustration over the AKP's growing conservative and Islamic tendencies. In particular, those who live a secular lifestyle in their CoR, do not feel represented by the activities

promoted by the YTB. One student from Germany who played with the idea of attending a youth summer camp organized by the YTB, for instance, justifies his decision to not attend on the grounds that 'alcohol was banned for the entirety of the camp'.[6] A study conducted by Iyi (2021) with new generation diasporans born in Germany also found that, although many young people are appreciative of Turkey's growing interest towards the diaspora, political escalations between the CoO and CoR are increasingly perceived as a problem which might harm them in the CoR in the long run. This indicates that diaspora youth also have their own agency; while the AKP's agenda affects the autonomy of state-sponsored diaspora organizations, young people also try to shape YTB policies by participating and expressing their own demands. Aside from critical voices emerging within conservative and nationalistic youth circles, opposition groups' responses to these policies remains under-researched. On the one hand, there are large portions of diaspora youth who do not feel represented in the YTB's activities due to their ideological, religious or ethnic stance which stands in contrast with what the AKP promotes at home and abroad. On the other hand, there is also a segment within diaspora youth which takes a nonchalant approach towards the AKP's policies and keeps distance from such events. Accordingly, in the following section, we explore how the co-optation and empowerment of regime loyal youth groups has been perceived by Turkey's excluded diaspora youth and shed light on group-level dynamics resulting from this power imbalance.

## *Patterns of dissident youth mobilization*

Various youth groups within the diaspora have historically been excluded from Turkey's diaspora outreach. Embedded in dynamics of state-diaspora outreach in the 1980s and 1990s which prioritized secular and nationalistic groups in an attempt to project 'long-distance Kemalism' into the diaspora (Şenay, 2012, p. 1615), certain groups – regardless of their generational positionality – have traditionally been excluded by the state (Böcü, 2022). Among other young segments within the diaspora, Kurdish, leftist and Alevi youth have organized independently of the state and mobilized in opposition to political developments in the CoO. Kurdish and Alevi youth have been among the most organized and politically active segments within Turkey's diasporas, demonstrating varying degrees of opposition towards the CoO (Baser, 2015). This generational continuation of diasporic activism occurs also due to inherited traumas that first-generation diasporas transmit to subsequent generations through collective narratives and practices. Kurds and Alevis have been repressed in Turkey as a result of their religious, ethnic or ideological claims and their diasporas have frequently responded to the violation of minority rights in Turkey by mass mobilization, demonstrations and petitions. With increasing transnational repression by the Turkish state under the AKP, new generations have also shown great interest in their parents' struggles and started to raise their voices as a collective. Specifically, the Kurdish diaspora youth's mobilization against the Turkish state in the 1980s and 1990s manifested in street-level protests and occasional violence stand out as a particularly active episode of mobilization against the state (Baser, 2015). Alevi youth, on the other hand, began organizing in the late 1990s within the newly formed institutional structures of the Alevi Unity Federation, and have taken part in various street-level protests within the larger Alevi movement as well as engaging in cultural practices to learn, teach and promote Alevism in the diaspora (Sökefeld, 2006, p. 277).

The AKP's accession to power triggered democratic decline and growing authoritarianism in Turkey during the early 2000s and diaspora politics increasingly became an arena for the regimes' power consolidation. Diaspora youth, as we have argued elsewhere, has been a major area of focus for the regime, which is why it implemented policies to secure the support of future generations

(Böcü & Baser, 2024). Various developments in the CoO therefore triggered unprecedented organizational and mobilizational responses from dissident youth groups against the regime. We identified those critical moments in order to analyse where and when the diaspora activism accelerated and became more visible. A few critical moments can be identified as particularly important in shaping intra-diasporic youth responses to the AKP's growing authoritarianism. First, the Gezi protests 2013 which triggered large-scale solidarity protests launched by second, third, and even fourth generation members of the diaspora across the globe resulted in the transnationalisation of Gezi spirit into the diaspora and shaped a growing awareness to defend democracy among youth at home and abroad. Specifically, initial anti-regime mobilization during the Gezi protests was an identity shaping process for young diasporans who report that this was their first political engagement from afar. A second critical moment for young diasporans was the transnationalisation of political party propaganda strategies as a result of the extension of voting rights for citizens abroad in 2014, which opened up avenues of political participation for second, third, and even fourth generation diasporans who hold Turkish citizenship. In particular, during the 2017 constitutional referendum, a pivotal moment for regime change in Turkey, young members of the diaspora became actively involved in politics by engaging in electoral mobilization against the AKP regime. Apart from these events that triggered large-scale mobilization regardless of various existing cleavages between Kurdish,[7] leftist, Alevi and Secular youth against the regime, issue-specific sporadic and episodic mobilizations and organizations by the youth occurred as well. For instance, young Kurds across Europe demonstrated against Turkey's response to the 2014 ISIS attack against Kobane (Toivanen, 2021).

Young diasporans usually organized as sub-groups within larger diaspora organizations. Without the support of the CoO, these groups had to independently recruit members, collect donations and seek support from institutions and actors in the CoR. This stands in stark contrast to state-sponsored diaspora building activities by the regime which created diaspora organizations to advance its political agenda. Therefore, the gap in terms of capacity and leverage between state-sponsored and non-state-sponsored diaspora organizations has widened over the last decade. State-led interventions have not only affected opposition groups but also organizations which do not directly confront the regime. For instance, a second-generation Turkish participant who was the leader of a diaspora youth organization in Sweden explained that due to the funding the state-sponsored diaspora organizations receive from Turkey, they could organize events that would appeal to wider communities and the local diaspora organizations started losing members as a result of these discrepancies.[8] Another interviewee also explained that the leaders of state-sponsored organizations often act as 'non-official state officials' and that they are offered a career path as representatives of Turkey in the diaspora.[9] This involvement brought the end of numerous diaspora organizations even though they were not directly opposing the AKP regime. For the oppositional groups, other dynamics were at play, including actively countering the regimes' narratives abroad, curbing their activities, or monitoring their mobilization patterns. The asymmetrical relationship between state-sponsored and other diaspora organizations in the long run also includes competing for the next generations' loyalties. Although not all young people opt for diaspora activism, diaspora entrepreneurs at all levels try to woo young people and increase their chances of visibility and survival.

## *Dissident youth engagement from afar*

While the aforementioned large-scale moments in opposition to the regime reflect the nature of episodic youth mobilization against the AKP, there are additional intra-diasporic dynamics that

have shaped opposition youth responses to the AKP's differential engagement. Group-level differences based on existing identity cleavages between opposition groups shape their ability to oppose the regime. As such, there is great variation in the way they respond to the AKP's growing presence in the diaspora. In the following section, we turn to the three biggest youth groups across European diasporas; namely Kurdish, Alevi and Kemalist youth and map their mobilizational responses to the AKP's differential and selective youth outreach. While each group within the diaspora engages in anti-regime activities, the mobilization patterns and repertoires they use varies and, in most cases, do not overlap.[10]

The Kurdish diaspora in Europe stands out in terms of frequency of youth mobilization against the AKP regime. While the Kurdish diaspora has historically mobilized against the Turkish state, younger and second generations of the Kurdish movement started to mobilize more actively and frequently throughout the 2010s after the siege of Kobane in 2014 and following other developments in Turkey (Toivanen, 2021, p. 165). Their activities have ranged from street-level mobilization such as partaking in demonstrations, 'homeland' electoral mobilization to events-based activities such as organizing seminars to raise awareness and financial resources to support the Kurdistan movement, travel back to Kurdish regions and digital activism (Baser, 2015; Toivanen, 2021). Kurdish youth have also opposed the AKP regime through institutionalized channels by taking part in electoral mobilization to support transnational political party structures of the People's Democratic Party *(Halkların Demokratik Partisi, hereafter HDP)*. According to a young Kurdish activist who has been involved in campaign activities of the HDP during the 2015 parliamentary elections and the 2017 constitutional referendum, 'Kurdish youth played an influential role in electoral mobilization against the AKP' – however, repeated defeat has resulted in a growing 'retreat from electoral politics' necessitating a return to informal politics.[11] As such, Kurdish youth increasingly partake in street-level politics such as demonstrations and protests to mobilize against the regime.

Changes in Kurdish youth mobilization have further been shaped by the lived experiences in the diaspora. For instance, the ongoing criminalization of the Kurdish movement by various countries, including Germany and France, has affected the mobilization of the Kurdish diaspora in two major hubs where Kurds have played a crucial role in anti-regime mobilization (Baser, 2015; Toivanen, 2021). Given this criminalization, Kurdish youth appear to have mainly mobilized locally within associations such as student unions, youth groups and other informal groups. This has resulted in the emergence of claims-making mechanisms in the CoR in search of alternative avenues for the recognition of language rights or their ethnic group which have been less frequented ways of mobilization by Kurdish youth (p. 688). The relative absence of the use of institutional channels in the CoR may be explained by the dominant perception among Kurdish diasporas that policymakers in the CoR are an 'ally of Turkey' (Baser, 2017). This is also confirmed by Kurdish youth in Germany and France, who increasingly feel pressures from authorities in the CoR. A Kurdish activist from Germany, for instance, describes an exchange with German security authorities after he held a speech at a protest event organized by the Kurdish movement as an intimidating experience:

> One day following a speech I held in Kurdish, an agent of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz) knocked on my door and interrogated me about my activities within the Kurdish movement. They asked about how I got involved in youth engagement activities, and what kind of slogans were chanted at the protest. Of course, I knew that the German state has a sophisticated intelligence apparatus, but I did not expect them to knock on my door.[12]

Given this growing suspicion towards the CoR, young Kurds have turned to supranational engagement in efforts to influence European policymaking (Eccarius-Kelly, 2017). According to Toivanen (2021, p. 171), highly-educated young Kurdish leaders increasingly play a crucial role in advancing the claims of the movement through different channels, including through the Kurdish European Society in Brussels. Eccarius-Kelly (2017, p. 44) refers to this process as the formation of a 'Euro-Kurdish intelligentsia' which has influenced European policymaking by way of generating attention for the Kurdish cause within European academic and policy networks. The impact that European-born or European educated second and third generation Kurds are making across Europe to promote Kurdish interests and oppose the AKP regime is also evident in the context of CoR where individual-level engagement of young Kurdish MPs is increasingly used.

Young Kurds in the diaspora frequently referred to Turkey's neo-Ottoman agenda when it comes to its diaspora engagement policy.[13] For others, such policies revealed that Turkey cares more about its kin communities in the Balkans or in the Caucasus than Kurdish communities within Turkey. One of them underlined that if Turkey accepted Kurds as a main component of Turkey's society, they would have included Kurds who live in neighbouring countries as kin communities as well. Therefore, Turkey's definition of a diaspora could be perceived as what Turkish authorities view as an ideal citizen in their own country.[14] In France, interviewees mentioned the murder of three Kurdish women in Paris during the peace process between Turkey and the PKK, and suggested that diaspora engagement policies of the Turkish state only apply to Kurds for the purpose of monitoring and surveillance.[15] Young Kurds who are active within the Kurdish movement also mentioned that they are not interested in YTB's activities for a number of reasons. Firstly, they see the organization as a pawn of an authoritarian state which oppresses their kin communities in the CoO. Consequently, joining events curated by the regime on topics such as Islamophobia did not correspond with their values. Secondly, for many, being in a democratic CoR posed an opportunity to revert Turkey's assimilation policies toward the Kurdish community. Thus, the establishment of platforms to revive the Kurdish language and rekindle Kurdish culture shaped Kurdish youth uninterested in Turkey-sponsored events and disenchanted with the YTB's exclusive discourse.[16]

Alevi youth opposition has unfolded slightly differently to that of Kurdish youth. The initial organizational activities of the Alevi diaspora started as a response to the atrocities committed against Turkey's Alevis throughout the 1990s. After the establishment of the Alevi Federation in Germany (*Almanya Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonu*, AABF) as the first migrant organization advocating Alevi identity and beliefs, Alevi youth started to organize immediately in 1994 as a youth wing of the AABF.[17] According to pioneers within the Alevi youth movement in Germany, Alevi youth first acted under the leadership and guidance of their parents who had experienced discrimination and repression in Turkey. However, over time, Alevi youth became 'increasingly autonomous' in their political organizational and behavioural structures.[18] Currently, the largest organizational structure of Alevi youth is constituted by the Federation of Alevi Youth in Germany (*Bund der Alevitischen Jugendlichen in Deutschland e.V.,* hereafter BDAJ*)*, which is organized in 130 local organizations.[19] Other large youth organizations of the Alevi youth were established in in the 2010s such as the British Alevi Youth Federation (*Britanya Alevi Gençlik Federasyonu*) among others.[20] In the early 2000s, Alevi youth typically mobilized within the framework of the larger federation to commemorate the Sivas massacre and organized a few youth-tailored activities to engage younger segments of its members. Alevi youth activities have also focused on opposing growing authoritarianism of the AKP regime. Most prominently, Alevi youth were involved in street-level mobilization during the large Gezi solidarity protests, and to some degree, in electoral mobilization against the constitutional referendum in 2017 to promote a 'NO' vote within the diaspora.[21]

The collective identification of Alevi youth under the umbrella identity of Alevism is further elevated by self-organized activities of the youth who arrange youth camps on a regular basis where Alevi youth participate in educational and cultural workshops and learn more about Alevism. Alevi identity is further nurtured by the commemoration of traumatic events pertaining to Alevi history in Turkey such as panels on the Sivas or Dersim massacres and by the organization of identity-shaping activities such as musical festivals where traditional *Saz* music is performed to foster cultural ties with Alevism. Apart from mobilization against the AKP and efforts to maintain cultural ties, Alevi youth increasingly utilize institutionalized channels in the CoR to mobilize for their rights. In contrast to Kurdish youth, who are often marginalized or criminalized by policymakers in the CoR and therefore cannot or do not regularly engage institutional channels, Alevi diaspora youth organizations frequently utilize institutional channels to participate in political processes, advance their claims, and boost their relative power. This is exemplified by the engagement of the BDAJ and their involvement through Germany's major youth organization the German Youth Ring (*Deutscher Bundesjugendring*). Here, Alevi youth promote Alevism, communicate Alevi youth claims to political parties in the CoR, and engage in democratic activism for the protection of minorities and human rights. According to an activist from the BDAJ the promotion of Alevi youth claims 'cannot be dissected from the repression of Alevis in Turkey' which is why Alevi youth also highlights, criticizes, and debates the 'structures of the regime abroad'.[22]

This often culminates in conflict and competition between Alevi youth and regime-loyal youth groups which negotiate political issues within institutional channels in the CoR, confronting Alevi youth with the regimes' long arm on a regular basis. In Germany, for instance, the BDAJ has openly criticized ties between the AKP and youth organizations active within the German Youth Ring, however, facing in turn accusations of engaging in anti-Muslim racism from certain stakeholders in the CoR.[23] A young Alevi activist describes the ability of youth groups affiliated with the AKP to engage in unfounded accusations as the 'consequence of a lack of understanding of homeland and diaspora repression dynamics' and 'the connections that exist between certain groups and the AKP in Germany'.[24] To boost their influence Alevi youth are therefore increasingly pursuing involvement in the politics of the CoR, moving through ranks of policymaking and shaping Swiss, German, UK politics through placing pivotal figures into political office who at times further their interests through lawmaking. A young policymaker from the UK with Alevi roots describes this as 'the only path forward in the fight to promote Alevism here given that avenues are closed off at home'.[25]

A new active player in diaspora youth activism against the AKP regime are secular and Kemalist youth in Turkey's diasporas. While these segments of the diaspora have historically been historically embraced by the state, they have faced neglect and repression under AKP rule. In the past, secular and Kemalist youth enjoyed symbolic embracement by the state and were empowered by cultural and nation-building events celebrating national holidays of the Kemalist state such as the National Sovereignty and Children's Day (*Ulusal Egemenlik ve Çocuk Bayramı*) or the Commemoration of Atatürk. Youth, and Sports Day (*19 Mayıs Atatürk'ü Anma, Gençlik ve Spor Bayramı*) curated by embassies and consulates abroad throughout the 1990s and early 2000s (Aksel, 2014; Şenay, 2013). Under the AKP regime, however, these cultural celebrations and youth events promoting trans-Kemalism were significantly curbed and ultimately replaced with new symbolic events grounded in the ideologies of the AKP regime. In response to these changing dynamics which alienated Kemalist youth, a revival of their activism has occurred in the 2010s within the transnational party-led networks of the major opposition party in Turkey, namely the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, hereafter CHP). Since 2013, the CHP has established

various transnational party outlets across different countries with youth wings that organize secular youth abroad. While there is great variation in terms of youth membership and engagement within the various CHP outlets, secular youth often mobilizes in times of electoral competition against the AKP. According to a youth speaker of the CHP in Germany, activities include 'the preparation and distribution of campaign material, house visits, conversations with electorate and oversight at polling stations in the consulate during elections'.[26]

In the absence of electoral mobilization, so-called 'CHP party schools' (*CHP Parti Okulları*) serve as transnational tools of building party identification are used as a party-led avenue of diaspora youth outreach to build ties with the CHP. Here, the CHP's home branch sends delegations abroad to educate and organize party members actors across Europe, inform them about the party agenda and the upcoming elections. With these engagements, among other regular commemoration events such as The Commemoration of Atatürk (*Atatürk'ü anma günü ve Atatürk haftası*) and the Republic Day of Turkey (*29 Ekim Cumhuriyet Bayramı*), youth are further integrated into party-led structures of the CHP and engage in sporadic mobilization against the incumbent AKP. In contrast to other groups, CHP youth appear less engaged in the politics of the CoR and had little to no influence on a supranational level. There are, however, growing intentions to engage in policymaking procedures in the CoR. As one CHP youth activist from Switzerland who is involved in local politics of the Social Democratic Party of Switzerland (*Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz, SP*) describes:

> We are trying to motivate young people to join in within the ranks of the Social Democrats here, there is great overlap between party values [with the SP] and it is crucial that we make our claims heard here [in Switzerland] to increase our visibility and platform. That is what I am trying to do, I hope I will succeed.[27]

## New dynamics in response to differential treatment in youth engagement

Studies on the diaspora have long neglected youth mobilization in the diaspora. Yet, recent accounts clearly demonstrate a trend in which CoO policymakers tailor specific policies to strengthen young people's ties with homeland and harness their potential as transnational actors. In this article, we focused on Turkey's youth engagement policies and practices by underlining the development of a selective approach towards their diasporas showing that CoO do not embrace the diaspora community as a whole. This is also reflected in youth engagement policies where the CoO projects the creation of ideal citizens into its vision of a diaspora. Our analysis indicates that there is growing variation in the way opposition youth navigate the neglect, exclusion and repression of the AKP regime. But there are also common themes of utilizing avenues in the CoR when their relative power is curbed by the differential treatment of the AKP or policymakers in the CoR. Turkey's opposition youth – regardless of existing identity cleavages between them – demonstrate unity against growing authoritarianism at home. In particular, three dynamics can be understood as new repertoires of resistance to authoritarianism from abroad: first, all opposition youth actors appear involved in anti-regime activism, but not necessarily within traditional and old diasporic structures established by their parents. Instead, they utilize new local, national and supranational networks by fostering ties with native actors and institutions in the CoR to reduce power imbalances with the regime. While the type of networks chosen varies, the use of CoR actors and structures to achieve relative empowerment emerges as a common strategy. They are able to do so because their generation has acquired language and educational skills that their parents, bound by the conditions of their emigration to Europe, did not have. As socially, economically and

politically integrated individuals who often hold citizenship of their CoR, many youth diaspora activists see living in the CoR as a chance to increase their ability to change politics in the CoO. As we highlighted above, although young Kurdish diasporans feel mistrust in many CoR contexts, they still choose to engage through European-level channels to increase their voice in the diaspora.

New forms and means of mobilization by diaspora youth is another dynamic to consider, but insufficiently discussed in current research. While street-level protests and demonstrations are still common forms of anti-regime activism, opposition youth are increasingly turning to new individual-level channels to resist the government. Dissident youth groups in the diaspora, particularly Alevi, Kurdish, and secular youth, are becoming more assertive in their individual activism against the AKP regime. They participate in local, national, or European-level channels to increase their impact. At the same time, digital channels such as social media platforms like Instagram, X and TikTok are now frequently used by young people in the diaspora and offer new opportunities to reach youth and engage in anti-regime activities. But their use also exposes the opposition activities to security authorities in the CoO and CoR, who keep track of their engagement. In particular, the increased criminalization of anti-regime criticism voiced online has resulted in concerns among youth who choose to travel back to Turkey. For instance, among our interviewees, a youth activist from the CHP has faced multiple incidents of harassment at the Turkish border due to her online criticism of the AKP and the President.[28] Kurdish youth who engage in radical politics and often do not return to Turkey, on the other hand, are not concerned about Turkey's digital surveillance, but instead are more aware of the attempts by CoR authorities to monitor their digital resistance against the AKP.

In this intricate interplay of power and influence, the unequal treatment of distinct factions within Turkey's diaspora, determined by their political allegiance (or lack thereof) to the regime, has generated uneven power dynamics and escalated tensions within these communities. While state-driven endeavours to construct diaspora networks, coupled with manufactured diaspora activism in CoR, yield diverse outcomes, bolstering certain groups while curbing others, the resulting combination of enthusiasm and unease reverberates across disparate diasporic segments. As the AKP regime grapples to retain its authority, the realm of youth politics evolves into a transnational domain, with competing factions on both sides wooing for the allegiance of the younger generation. The persistent recruitment campaigns led by politicized diaspora entities and the globalization of political pursuits by CoO stakeholders underscores the ambiguity surrounding the enduring consequences of state intervention in diasporic affairs.

## Notes

1. https://www.ytb.gov.tr/yurtdisi-vatandaslar/diaspora-genclik-akademisi.
2. https://www.ytb.gov.tr/en/news/ytb-communication-academy-2019-took-place.
3. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-_v4eTSHyw.
4. https://www.ytb.gov.tr/en/attacks-against-turkish-citizens-abroad.
5. Second author's interview with YTB initiative participant in Frankfurt, 2019.
6. Second author's interview with Ülkücü youth in Berlin, 2020.
7. It is noteworthy to highlight that within the diaspora, there are also Kurdish individuals who support the AKP regime. When discussing Kurdish factions in opposition, we are referring to those diaspora members who associate themselves with the Kurdish movement or other movements advocating for Kurdish rights repressed by the Turkish state.
8. First author's interview, Stockholm, 2014.
9. First author's interview, Malmo, 2014.

10. Note that many young people take an oppositional stance against the AKP, however, do not prefer to participate in diasporic activities of any group.
11. Second author's interview with Kurdish youth activist in Berlin, 2019.
12. Second author's interview with Kurdish youth activist in Berlin, 2019.
13. First author's interview with members of a Kurdish youth association in Stockholm, 2013.
14. First author's interview with members of a Kurdish youth association in Stockholm, 2013.
15. First author's interview at Ahmet Kaya Cultural Centre, Paris, 2013.
16. First author's interview in Berlin with young Kurds who attend KOMKAR, 2011 and 2013.
17. https://www.bdaj.de/index.php/ueber-uns/kurzportrait.
18. Second author's interview with a leading member of the BDAJ in Cologne, 2019.
19. Second author's interview with a leading member of the BDAJ in Cologne, 2019.
20. https://www.alevinet.org/SAP.aspx?pid=BAGF_en-GB.
21. https://www.instagram.com/p/BSXAzzygV1p/.
22. Second author's interview with a leading member of the BDAJ in Cologne, 2019.
23. https://jugendhilfeportal.de/artikel/bund-der-alevitischen-jugendlichen-distanziert-sich-von-politischen-islamverbaenden.
24. Second author's interview with a leading Alevi youth activist in Berlin, 2022.
25. Second author's interview with a local policymaker and Alevi youth activist in London, 2022.
26. Second author's interview with youth leader within a local outlet of the CHP in Berlin, 2019.
27. Second author's interview with youth activist within a local outlet of the CHP in Zurich, 2022.
28. Second author's interview with youth leader within a local outlet of the CHP in Berlin, 2019.

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