

# Opinions of Social Studies Teachers in Turkey on the Polarization between States

## OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 11

Special Issue: 1

Month: December

Year: 2022

E-ISSN: 2582-1334

Received: 12.09.2022

Accepted: 25.11.2022

Published: 20.12.2022

### Citation:

Oran, M. (2022). Opinions of social studies teachers in Turkey on the polarization between states. *Shanlax International Journal of Education*, 11(S1), 53-61.

### DOI:


<https://doi.org/10.34293/education.v11iS1-Dec.5893>



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### Abstract

*This study aims to reveal the views of social studies teachers about polarization between states. In this study, in which the phenomenology design, one of the qualitative research designs, was used, a semi-structured interview form was applied to 20 social studies teachers. While preparing the interview form, the opinions of 3 academicians who are experts in the field of social studies were taken. The reason for taking expert opinion is to increase the content validity of the research. While determining the study group of the research, convenient and easily accessible sampling method, which is one of the purposive sampling methods, was used. Descriptive analysis was applied to the data obtained within the scope of the research. The reliability of the research was calculated as 94% according to the reliability formula of Miles and Huberman (1994) [Percent of Agreement = Consensus / (Agreement + Disagreement) x 100]. In the research, the answers given by the social studies teachers to the research questions were collected in 16 codes. At the end of the research, social studies teachers generally described the polarization between states as negative. In addition, social studies teachers emphasized that polarization between states has harmful effects on education, economy, environment and society.*

**Keywords:** Polarization between States, Social Studies, Qualitative Research, Teacher

### Introduction

Every society has its own traditions, customs, lifestyles and ways of living. All these customs and traditions are proof that societies are different from each other. While these differences sometimes cause good events such as intercultural interaction, sometimes they can cause bad events by causing intercultural conflicts. This causes polarization between societies.

The concept of polarization as a dictionary; conflict of views, principles and tendencies, and the simultaneous existence of oppositions (Fiorina & Abrams, 2008). Polarization is a phenomenon that occurs as a result of linguistic, religious, sectarian, ethnic, ideological and cultural tensions between opposing groups in the social structure (Çağlar & Mermi, 2014). Vona Kurt (2015), on the other hand, defines polarization as moving away from the ground of reconciliation.

As can be understood from the expressions above, polarization is expressed as a phenomenon that causes divisions in societies. There are many factors that cause these differences. Reasons such as education levels of societies, social and economic conditions, ethnic and religious identity differences, and income inequality cause polarization (Mc Carty, Poole, & Rosenthal, 2006). Bayraktutan and Solmaz (2018), on the other hand, stated that the migration of qualified workforce from underdeveloped countries to developed countries may cause polarization. In short, ideological differences, sectarian differences, ethnic differences, injustice, inequality, insecurity, etc. factors can be said as the reasons that cause polarization.

When we look at the studies on polarization, the negative effects of polarization are generally emphasized. Polarization is a phenomenon that threatens the integrity and solidarity of the society in cultural, ethnic, religious and lifestyles arising from discrimination and exclusion (Özgür, 2006). Regarding the negative effects of polarization, Ünal (2013) states that societies and people narrow their thinking potential and restrict individuals from seeing social realities. Cirkin (2012), on the other hand, sees polarization as a phenomenon that arises from income inequality and creates tension in societies.

### Literature Review

When we take a look at the studies on polarization, we usually focus on politics, economy, psychology, sociology, etc. areas are considered. Studies addressing the polarization between states in the field of education have not been encountered so far. This study is important in terms of revealing the views of social studies teachers on interstate polarization in the field of education. In addition, this study is important in terms of trying to eliminate this deficiency in the field of education.

Since there is no study on polarization or polarization between states in the field of education, some of the studies on polarization in general are discussed in the literature section.

Ok (2011) "Are we getting more and more alienated? In her master's thesis titled "Different dimensions of social polarization on the basis of ethnic origins in İzmir", she examined ethnic groupings in society and the attitudes of individuals towards people from different ethnic origins.

In his master's thesis named "The effect of globalization on social polarization: An application on European Union countries" by Çirkin (2012), social polarization is discussed in the axis of globalization. In addition, in order to determine the relationship between polarization and globalization process in the study, a cross-section analysis was made based on the European Union countries for 2008.

Bayraktutan and Solmaz (2018) in their article titled "Polarization and economic integration: The example of the European Union" aimed to identify and evaluate the income differentiation trend among the European Union members and make suggestions.

Korkmaz (2021) aimed to examine the problematic between the international system and polar structures in his article named "A general evaluation on the international system and polar structures". In his article, Korkmaz discussed the relationship between war and polarization by presenting different approaches and views.

This study aimed to reveal the views of social studies teachers about polarization between states. In this context, the following questions were asked to the social studies teachers included in the study:

- What do you think are the causes of polarization between states?
- Could you evaluate the polarization between states from an educational point of view?
- Can you evaluate the polarization between states from a social perspective?
- Can you evaluate the polarization between states from an economic point of view?
- Can you evaluate the polarization between states from an environmental point of view?
- Could you explain why polarization between states is necessary or not?

### Method

Phenomenology design was used in the research. The phenomenology design is one of the qualitative research designs and is generally used in scientific studies on events, phenomena and subjects that are known but not in-depth knowledge (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). Groenewald (2014) described phenomenology as people's evaluation and interpretation of events and phenomena from their own perspectives. With this method used, the views of social studies teachers about polarization between states were examined. Thus, the issue of polarization between states has been discussed and interpreted in detail from an educational point of view.

### Working Group

20 social studies teachers working in secondary education institutions in Turkey constitute the study group of the research. Looking at the hometowns of the teachers: Uşak (6), Manisa (4), Adana (2), Afyonkarahisar (1), Antalya (1), Bitlis (1), Edirne (1), Kastamonu (1), Sivas (1), Rize There are social studies teachers from 11 different cities, including

(1) and Van (1). Ten (50%) of the teachers included in the study are male and 10 (50%) are female. Considering the ages of the participants, it is seen that they are in the 24-39 age range. The professional experience years of the participants vary between 1 and 18 years. In addition, the social studies teachers who participated in the research were abbreviated and coded as “P”.

While determining the study group of the research, convenient or easily accessible sampling method was preferred among the purposeful sampling methods. In this sampling method, the easiest sample is selected to save effort, money and time (Baltacı, 2018). In addition, in the purposeful sampling method, information-rich situations are preferred in order to conduct in-depth research (Büyüköztürk, Kılıç Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2008).

### Data Collection and Data Analysis

In the collection of data, first of all, a literature review was carried out on the subject. Literature review is the name given to the information gathering process carried out in order to complete the missing information by making use of various sources related to the subject (Timmins & McCabe, 2005). After the literature review was carried out, a semi-structured interview form was prepared by the researchers to be applied to the participants. While the researchers were preparing the semi-structured interview form, they sought the opinions of 3 academicians who had expertise in social studies education. The purpose of the researchers to apply for expert opinion is that they want to increase the content validity of the study.

Within the scope of the research, the data obtained with the semi-structured interview form were first transferred to the Microsoft Office Word file in the computer environment. These data, which were transferred to Microsoft Office Word file, were then subjected to descriptive analysis. The data obtained in descriptive analysis is interpreted according to predetermined themes. In this type of analysis, the opinions of the participants participating in the research on the questions asked are given without changing them directly (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). The reliability of the research was calculated as 94% according to the reliability formula of Miles

and Huberman (1994) [Percent of Agreement = Consensus / (Agreement + Disagreement) x 100]. In addition, the answers given by the participants to the questions in the interview form were collected in 42 codes at the first stage. Later, these codes were associated with each other and this number was reduced to 16. Some of these codes are as follows: Global problem, security problem, basic need problem, directs education, disrupts education, disrupts the social order, destroys the environment, etc.

### Findings and Comments

In this part of the research, there are answers to the questions directed to the social studies teachers included in the study and comments on the evaluation of these answers.

### Findings Concerning the Causes of Polarization Between States

**Table 1 Codes Regarding the Causes of Polarization Between States**

Codes	Participants
Conflict of Interest	1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20
Desire to Be the Dominant Power	2, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12
Political and Political Situations	1, 4, 8, 9, 10
Ethnic, Religious and Cultural Differences	3, 6, 14
Geopolitical Location	3, 8, 9

The first question of the research: “What do you think are the causes of polarization between states?” to the question, when the answers of the participants participating in the research were examined, 5 different codes emerged. These codes are; conflict of interest (13), desire to dominate (7), political and political situations (5), ethnic-religious-cultural differences (3) and geopolitical position (3). Some examples of direct quotations regarding the “conflict of interest” response of the participants are as follows:

P.16: “I think the most important reason for polarization between states is the efforts of countries to gain benefits. Today everything is based on

money. The more money you have, the stronger you are. For this reason, I think the most important reason for polarization is the conflict of interest of the states.”. P.19 said: “The main reason for the polarization between the states is their progress in line with their own interests. Certain conflicts occur when the activities they do on their way to progress for their own interests conflict with the interests of other countries. This situation can sometimes progress to actual war.” his expressed an opinion.

Some examples of direct quotations regarding the participants’ “desire to be the dominant power” answer are as follows: P.11: “States want all power to be theirs. For this reason, states act in this direction and this causes polarization.”. P.12: “I think the reasons for polarization; I can say the desire to dominate the world and the idea of having a say.” his expressed an opinion.

An example of a direct quotation regarding the “political and political situations” answer given by the participants is as follows: K.4: “I think the most important reasons for the polarization between states today are the political policies of the states.” his expressed an opinion.

An example of a direct quotation regarding the “ethnic-religious-cultural differences” answer given by the participants is as follows: K.14: “Religious, cultural and ethnic differences may cause polarization between states. I can say that especially cultural differences are the factors that make polarization more evident.” used the answer.

An example of a direct quotation regarding the “geopolitical position” answer given by the participants is as follows: K.8: “There are many reasons for polarization between states. However, I can say that the most important reason is the geopolitical position of the states. Because states with a strong geopolitical position are the ones that initiate polarization.” her expressed an opinion.

When the answers of the participants were examined, it was stated that reasons such as conflict of interest, desire to be a dominant power, political and political situations, ethnic-religious-cultural differences and geopolitical position could cause polarization between states.

**Findings on the Educational Evaluation of Polarization Between States**

**Table 2 Codes Regarding the Educational Evaluation of Polarization Between States**

Codes	Participants
It Directs Education	1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 18
Education is Disrupted	2, 4, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20

The second question of the research: “Can you evaluate the polarization between states from an educational point of view?” to the question the answers of the participants participating in the research were collected in 2 codes. These codes are; it directs education (11) and education is disrupted (9). Here are some examples of direct citations for the “it directs education” code:

P.5: “The reason why English is a world language spoken all over the world today is that England was involved in the education of the countries it exploited at the time. Today, big states use education to raise people who fit their minds. The education strategies of big states affect the education strategies of small countries. States located at the same pole use the same type of education system. They are hesitant to reflect their own national culture in their education. In other words, polarizations give direction to education”. P.6: “Polarizations between states are the subject of education, researches and articles are written on it. Polarizations affect education”. P.10 said: “States can be affected by each other’s education systems and the beautiful system can set an example for the other country. Therefore, education takes shape through polarizations.” her expressed an opinion.

Some examples of direct citations for the “Education is disrupts” code are as follows: P.2: “With polarization, education of states may be disrupted. Because states focus on polarization, that is, on economic interests, education may not be given the necessary importance.”. P.13: “Polarization affects societies negatively in terms of education as well as in many other aspects. Wars, economic conflicts, etc. caused by polarization. situations cause education to be adversely affected. Education may be disrupted due to polarization.”. P.20 said: “When we consider the polarization between states

educationally; Developed countries prevent their social, economic and political progress by putting pressure on underdeveloped countries. This situation hinders the development of education levels by turning countries with low education levels into colonial countries by other countries.” his expressed an opinion.

Social studies teachers participating in the research stated that polarization leads and disrupts education regarding the educational evaluation of polarization between states. The participants of the study emphasized that in some cases positive and in some cases negative situations may occur in the direction of polarization in education.

**Findings Regarding the Evaluation of Polarization Between States from the Perspective of Society**

**Table 3 Codes Regarding the Evaluation of Polarization Between States from the Perspective of Society**

Codes	Participants
Disrupts the Order of Society	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 15, 18, 19, 20
It Contributes to the Development of Society	10, 11, 14, 16, 17

The third question of the research: “Can you evaluate the polarization between states from a social perspective?” The answers of the participants participating in the research were collected in 2 codes. These codes are; it disrupts the social order (15) and it contributes to the development of society (5). Some examples of direct citations for the code “Disrupts the order of society” are as follows:

P.3: “As a result of polarization between states, it is seen that issues such as discrimination, racism and sectarian conflicts arise between societies. These, in turn, disrupt the social order.”. P.7: “It causes the separation of societies and prevents world peace. This, in turn, causes wars and harms societies themselves.”. P.8 said: “It causes chaos and disorder in the society. It reflects differences as the biggest enemy. This paves the way for the destruction of society.” her expressed an opinion.

Some examples of direct quotations regarding the answer “It contributes to the development of society” are as follows: P.10: “The social impact

can be positive. To develop society, to be ahead of other countries qualitatively, educationally, social and scientific progress can develop society.”. P.17 on the other hand: “Thanks to polarization, people of developed countries can think objectively about the situation, defend and achieve their rights more easily, since their education and welfare levels are high.” gave the answer.

Social studies teachers participating in the research expressed both negative and positive aspects of polarization between states. Most of the participants stated that polarization is harmful for the society. Some of the participants stated that the level of development of the countries has increased thanks to polarization.

**Findings Regarding the Evaluation of Polarization Between States from the Perspective of Economic**

**Table 4 Codes Regarding the Economic Evaluation of Polarization Between States**

Codes	Participants
Negative Effects on the Economy of States	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 19, 20
Strengthens the Economies of States	7, 10, 17, 18

The fourth question of the research: “Can you evaluate the polarization between states from an economic point of view?” to the question the answers of the participants participating in the research were collected in 2 codes. These codes are; negatively affects the economies of states (16) and strengthens the economies of states (4). Some examples of direct quotations regarding the code “It adversely affects the economies of states” are as follows:

P.1: “As a result of polarization between states, wars usually occur. As a result, the parties involved in the war suffer. The elimination of these damages is covered by the countries’ own economies. When this happens, the economy of the country suffers. For this reason, I can say that polarization between states harms the economies of countries economically.”. P.3: “As a result of polarization between states, military expenditures and strategic weaknesses in foreign trade may occur. This can have a negative impact on the country’s economy.”.



P.9 said: “Because of the polarization between the states, the economies of many states are collapsing. Education, health, arts, etc. the money that needs to be transferred to the areas is allocated to wars because of polarization. This causes societies to fall into economic difficulties.” gave the answer.

Some examples of direct quotations regarding the code “strengthen the economies of states” are as follows: P.17: “I think that the most important reason for interstate polarization is the economy, nations want to dominate the world by strengthening their economy, and this causes interstate polarization. Every state is making efforts to improve its economy and technology in this regard.”. P.18 said: “Economic power is very important in polarization. Developing in terms of industry, trade, transportation and progress in every field is possible with new opportunities. The countries that are ahead in the economic field become power centers by making progress in other fields as well.” his expressed an opinion.

Opinions of participants who participated in the research on the economic evaluation of polarization between states were collected in two different codes. 16 of the 20 participants who participated in the research stated that polarization between states harms the economies of states. 4 participants who participated in the research emphasized that polarization between states would strengthen the economies of states.

**Findings Regarding the Evaluation of Polarization Between States from the Perspective of Environmental**

**Table 5 Codes Regarding the Evaluation of Polarization Between States from the Perspective of Environmental**

Codes	Participants
Destroys The Environment	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19
Creates Environmental Sensitivity	5, 20

The fifth question of the research: “Can you evaluate the polarization between states from an environmental perspective?” to the question the answers of the participants participating in the

research were collected in 2 codes. These codes are; it destroys the environment (18) and creates environmental sensitivity (2). Some examples of direct citations for the “destroys the environment” code are as follows:

P.2: “Polarizations are a situation that leads many countries to negativity for the benefit of a few countries. This negative situation usually results in sanctions such as war and embargo. In a country where there is war and embargo, it is inevitable that the environment in which people live their lives will be destroyed. For this reason, I think that polarization between states affects the environment negatively.”.

P.7: “From the point of view of the natural environment, since countries are in competition with each other, natural resource consumption rises to high levels and nature is destroyed.”. P.17 on the other hand: “Environmental destructions occur due to wars brought about by polarization between states and nuclear weapons tested. In the simplest terms, forests that occur in 20-30 years disappear in 20-30 minutes.” her expressed an opinion.

An example of a direct quote regarding the code “creates environmental sensitivity” is as follows: P.5: “Polarization between states is not always harmful to the environment. Sometimes such polarizations bring environmental-conscious states of mind together. It causes an increase in environmental sensitivity in other countries. Since the states that want to be on the same side want to agree on every issue, they can also agree on environmental awareness and take important steps in this regard. Like the Kyoto Protocol, for example.” gave the answer.

When the opinions of the participants on the environmental evaluation of interstate polarization were examined, 18 of 20 teachers stated that polarization between states would adversely affect the environment. Participants mentioned that polarization between states will cause wars and therefore environmental destruction will occur. Two participants who participated in the research stated that polarization between states can create sensitivity to the environment in the countries that are in polarization.

## Findings on Whether Inter-State Polarization Is Necessary

**Table 6 Codes on Whether Inter-State Polarization Is Necessary**

Codes	Participants
Gereksizdir	2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20
Gereklidir	5, 6, 9, 10, 17
Görecelidir	1

The last question of the research: “Can you explain why polarization between states is necessary or not?” to the question the answers of the participants participating in the research were collected in 3 codes. These codes are; unnecessary (14), necessary (5), and relative (1). Here are some examples of direct citations for the “It is unnecessary” code:

P.3: “I don’t think polarization between states is necessary. Because states can maintain their continuity not with war and polarization, but with peace and tolerance.”. P.4: “I think that polarization between states is unnecessary in a globalizing world. I am of the opinion that in today’s world where science and technology prevail, polarizations will harm states in many areas.”. P.13 said: “Looking at the history, these polarizations, which are in the interest of a few states, put many states in a difficult situation, both financially and in terms of health, education, and culture. For this reason, I am not a person who sees polarization between states as necessary.” her expressed an opinion.

Some examples of direct quotations regarding the “It is necessary” code are as follows: P.5: “Because we are in a tense period in which there is a possibility of war in today’s world, it is not possible to be alone politically. Of course, every country establishes relations with other states if its interests overlap, regardless of historical, cultural, economic, which it finds close to itself. Since not every country in the world can act in the same way in terms of political strategy, it is likely that there will be more than one bloc. It is the right of every state to establish good relations with the state that it considers the closest politically, socially, economically and culturally, and to get rid of political loneliness. Because the states that are left alone are aware that they are in a very dangerous situation in today’s conditions.”.

K.10 said: “Unless polarization between states comes to the brink of war, of course, it is positive. It allows countries to develop socially, economically, scientifically and in many ways and to increase their welfare level. So progress takes place in every field.” her expressed an opinion.

An example of a direct quote for the “It is relative” code is as follows: K.1: “It is relative. Because in some cases, the situations in which the states are in can push the states to polarization. The polarizations in World War I and World War II can be given as examples. In some cases, there are polarizations just for the sake of economic gain. In these cases, I can say that polarization is harmful. For this reason, whether polarization between states is necessary or not may differ according to time and situation.” gave the answer.

Social studies teachers participating in the research expressed 3 different answers regarding whether polarization between states is necessary. 14 of the 20 participants who participated in the research stated that they see polarization between states as unnecessary and harmful. The 5 participants who participated in the research emphasized that they considered polarization between states necessary. One participant in the research stated that whether polarization between states is necessary or not may change according to the current time.

## Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

Since there is no study similar to the study we discussed, there are no similar studies that we can compare with the results of this study. For this reason, in the discussion section, the similarities and differences of this research with the studies on polarization in general rather than the field of education are revealed.

Gaytancıoğlu (2009) examined whether Myrdal’s Polarization Theory is valid in Ireland, Greece and Spain in his master’s thesis named “The analysis of the polarization theory on the integrations”. At the end of the study, he argued that after the membership of Ireland, Greece and Spain to the European Union, they did not become poorer, on the contrary, they got richer economically. Therefore, he emphasized that Myrdal’s Polarization Theory is not a valid theory for Ireland, Greece and Spain, which are

members of the European Union. In our study, it was emphasized that most of the teachers participating in the research would cause an economic collapse due to the polarization between states. In this context, the results obtained by Gaytancıoğlu and the results of our study differ.

Bayraktutan and Solmaz (2018) aimed to identify and evaluate income differences among European Union member countries and to make policy recommendations in their article titled “Polarization and economic integration: The example of the European Union”. At the end of the research, it was found that the economic difference between the European Union countries caused polarization in 25 European Union members. The similar side of this study with our study is that there is a consensus that economic differences cause polarization.

Sayılan (2018) examined the relationship between the ideological orientations of these theories and worldviews in his master’s thesis titled “Worldviews and ideological orientations: An integration of polarity theory, dual process model, and moral foundations theory”. In the research, it has been revealed that people’s worldviews are effective in shaping their ideological orientations. The common aspect of this study and ours is that the worldviews of societies are among the causes of polarization.

Akdede and Keyifli (2020) analyzed the polarization of states in economic terms in their article titled “Political polarization, income inequality and government”. In the study, it was emphasized that polarization leads to inequality in income distribution. In this context, there is a similarity between the results of Akdede and Keyifli’s study and the results of our study.

If we refer to the results of the study we have carried out; First of all, participants who participated in the research stated that polarization between states may be caused by reasons such as conflict of interest, the desire to be a dominant power, political and political situations, ethnic-religious-cultural differences and geopolitical position. In addition, the participants who participated in the research stated that the polarization between states hinders education, causes the separation of societies, negatively affects the economies of countries, and destroys the living environment.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

- Seminars can be given to people by experts of the subject in order to raise awareness of the society under the title of benefits and harms of polarization between states.
- In order to raise awareness of future generations, the subject of polarization between states can be added to the social studies curriculum.
- The number of studies in the field of education related to polarization between states can be increased.

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