

**PERCEPTION OF ORGANIZATIONAL DEMOCRACY OF PUBLIC
SERVANTS IN TURKEY**

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the perceptions of organizational democracy among civil servants working in public institutions in Turkey. Organizational democracy, encompassing dimensions such as participation, transparency, justice, equality, and accountability, is critical for promoting inclusive governance and institutional legitimacy—particularly in transitional or semi-democratic administrative systems. Despite the existence of legal and structural reforms, especially during the European Union accession process, the extent to which public employees internalize and experience democratic organizational practices remains under-researched.

The study employs a quantitative research design, using the Organizational Democracy Scale. Data were collected from a sample of 403 public employees across various institutions through a structured survey. Descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, ANOVA, and Pearson correlation analyses were applied to examine the effects of demographic variables—such as education level, income, age, and tenure—on participants' perceptions of organizational democracy.

The results reveal that participants, on average, expressed a neutral stance regarding the democratic nature of their institutions. While the dimensions of transparency and equality received relatively more favorable ratings, justice and accountability were perceived more critically. Notably, inverse correlations were observed between education, income, tenure, and organizational democracy perceptions, suggesting that employees with higher cognitive and professional capital tend to be more critical of symbolic or underdeveloped democratic structures.

The findings contribute to the broader literature by highlighting the gap between formal democratic reforms and their internalization at the organizational level. The study concludes with recommendations for enhancing participatory mechanisms, merit-based practices, and ethical leadership to reinforce democratic culture within public bureaucracies.

Keywords: Organizational Democracy, Democratic Governance, Turkey

INTRODUCTION

In an era marked by intensified demands for transparency, accountability, and participatory governance, the concept of organizational democracy has gained renewed relevance—particularly within the context of public administration. As modern bureaucracies seek to reconcile efficiency with legitimacy, the internal democratization of institutions becomes not only a normative aspiration but also a functional imperative (Moynihan & Pandey, 2007). Organizational democracy refers to the degree to which employees participate in decision-making processes, experience fairness in managerial practices, and feel empowered to hold their institutions accountable. In this sense, it encompasses core dimensions such as participation, transparency, justice, equality, and accountability (Geçkil & Tikici, 2015).

In Turkey, where public institutions have traditionally operated within hierarchical, centralized frameworks rooted in both Ottoman administrative heritage and Kemalist state-building, efforts to democratize governance at the organizational level remain contested and

partial. Although formal reforms—especially during the European Union accession process—have aimed to enhance bureaucratic responsiveness and citizen engagement, less attention has been paid to how these reforms resonate within the perceptions and everyday experiences of public servants themselves.

This study seeks to address that gap by systematically investigating how civil servants in Turkey perceive organizational democracy in their respective institutions. Employing a quantitative research design and the Organizational Democracy Scale, the study explores the relationship between employees' democratic perceptions and key demographic variables such as education, income, tenure, and age. By uncovering patterns of perception across social and professional strata, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of democratic governance not just as a structural feature, but as a lived organizational reality.

Ultimately, the study aims to inform both academic debates on democratization and practical efforts to foster more participatory, fair, and responsive public institutions—particularly in contexts where formal institutional modernization has not always translated into cultural or procedural transformation.

1.LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1.Organizational Democracy: A Conceptual Framework

The concept of democracy has evolved far beyond its classical Athenian roots, now encompassing a wide array of political, social, and organizational arrangements. In its modern interpretation, democracy transcends the electoral process and formal representation, extending into domains such as workplaces, communities, and transnational governance structures (Valenzuela, 1989). Dahl (1991) highlights that the movement toward polyarchal democracy has opened new avenues for participatory ideals in non-state entities. This development has influenced how democracy is understood in the context of modern organizations, inspiring frameworks for shared governance, collective voice, and employee autonomy.

Organizational democracy builds upon this broadened democratic ethos, embedding participatory values within corporate and institutional operations (Battilana, Fuerstein & Lee, 2018). It is increasingly aligned with principles of deliberative democracy, which stress inclusivity, reasoned dialogue, and consensus-building—values applicable beyond the political sphere (Frega, 2021).

Organizational democracy refers to the practice of applying democratic principles such as participation, transparency, accountability, and equity within organizations. As conceptualized by Diefenbach (2020), it encompasses not just occasional consultation with employees but systematic inclusion in decision-making processes across strategic, tactical, and operational levels. This involves giving employees the right and capacity to influence decisions that affect their work, and even broader policy directions of the organization.

The central components of organizational democracy often include:

Participatory decision-making (employee involvement in setting goals and strategies),
Information sharing and transparency, and

Institutionalized mechanisms for voice and representation, including works councils, direct elections, and feedback platforms.

According to Kaufman (2001), democratic workplaces can foster not only employee satisfaction but also improve innovation, conflict resolution, and long-term performance. However, its success depends heavily on the organizational culture, leadership philosophy, and regulatory context.

While closely related, organizational democracy differs from similar concepts in important ways:

Participative Management: Often managerial in origin, participative management focuses on involving employees in decision-making to improve productivity and morale (Kaufman, 2001). However, it is typically initiated and bounded by managerial discretion, lacking the structural empowerment found in organizational democracy.

Employee Representation: Employee representation systems—such as trade unions or worker councils—are institutional mechanisms designed to protect labor interests. While essential to democratic functioning, they may not always translate into a broader culture of internal democracy unless paired with participatory practices at various organizational levels (Poole, Lansbury & Wailes, 2001).

Industrial Democracy: This concept emphasizes shared governance in the workplace, often involving co-determination (e.g., Germany's *Mitbestimmung*). It is a macro-level application of democratic principles, incorporating legal and structural reforms that enable employee influence over strategic decisions (Wailes et al., 2001). However, organizational democracy is a broader construct that includes both formal mechanisms and cultural practices promoting egalitarianism within institutions.

1.2.Theoretical Approaches to Organizational Democracy

Liberal theory, with its focus on individual autonomy, free choice, and minimal coercion, serves as a foundational perspective for participatory structures in organizations. In this view, organizational democracy is conceptualized as a voluntary and rational mechanism through which individuals can exercise voice and agency within institutions (Held, 2006). Rooted in classical liberal political thought, liberal organizational democracy seeks to extend civic rights—such as freedom of expression and participation—into the workplace context (Pateman, 1970).

Within this framework, participation is often instrumentalized: it is encouraged because it increases efficiency, motivation, and commitment (March & Olsen, 1989). However, critics argue that liberal interpretations can lead to tokenistic forms of inclusion that mask deeper asymmetries in power and decision-making (Johnson & Heiss, 2023). Despite this, liberal theory has provided a vital normative basis for the defense of employee participation as both a right and a performance-enhancing practice.

Marxist theories approach organizational democracy from a critical, structural standpoint. Rather than focusing on voluntary participation, these perspectives emphasize the inherent class conflict between labor and capital. Organizations, especially capitalist

enterprises, are seen not as neutral arenas but as sites of exploitation and ideological reproduction (Vidal, Adler, & Delbridge, 2015).

According to Marxist scholars, organizational democracy must go beyond surface-level reforms and tackle the ownership and control structures that underlie capitalist production. Workplace democracy, in this context, is a potential tool for class emancipation—transforming hierarchical control into collective ownership (Wright, 2010).

Modern neo-Marxist approaches have incorporated institutional and cultural analyses, acknowledging that domination is reproduced not only through ownership but also through norms and ideologies (Maher & Aquanno, 2018). These perspectives highlight the limitations of liberal participatory reforms and advocate for systemic restructuring as a prerequisite for genuine democratization.

Systems theory, particularly in its open systems form, conceptualizes organizations as complex, adaptive systems interacting continuously with their environments (Katz & Kahn, 1978). From this perspective, democracy is not a static institutional arrangement but a dynamic process that helps organizations remain responsive, resilient, and aligned with their stakeholders.

Open systems thinking emphasizes feedback, communication, and decentralization—principles that align well with democratic participation (Bogason, 2004). Organizational democracy, under this lens, is understood as a method of increasing system complexity in order to manage uncertainty and foster innovation.

However, some critics argue that systems theory can be too functionally oriented, treating democracy primarily as a tool for systemic survival rather than as a normative goal (McCarthy, 1985). Nevertheless, the open systems approach offers valuable insights into how democratic practices can enhance organizational adaptability and learning.

New institutional theory shifts the focus from internal dynamics to the broader institutional environments that shape organizational behavior. It posits that organizations adopt democratic structures and practices not only for efficiency but also to gain legitimacy and conform to prevailing norms and expectations (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2008).

Within this framework, organizational democracy can be seen as an "institutional myth"—a symbol of modern rationality and fairness rather than a practice always embedded in daily operations (Meyer, 2007).

Neo-institutionalist scholars have distinguished between *formal* structures (e.g., participatory committees) and *informal* practices (e.g., culture, trust), arguing that alignment between the two is essential for genuine democratic outcomes (Greenwood et al., 2011). The theory also highlights isomorphic pressures—coercive, mimetic, and normative—that lead organizations across sectors to adopt similar democratic forms, even if their implementation varies.

Organizational democracy refers to the set of practices and values within an institution that facilitate employee participation in decision-making processes, ensure transparency and fairness in internal operations, and promote accountability across hierarchical levels (Geçkil &

Tikici, 2015). Rooted in broader democratic theory, the concept reflects the transposition of civic ideals—such as deliberation, inclusion, and equality—into the internal functioning of organizations. It encompasses multiple dimensions, including participation, transparency, justice, equality, and accountability, which together constitute the normative framework for democratic organizational culture.

In Western democracies, the development of organizational democracy has been shaped by participatory management theories, industrial democracy movements, and humanistic organizational behavior models (Kim, 2002). In these contexts, democratic structures are not only embedded in formal procedures but also reinforced through institutional trust, employee empowerment, and shared governance. For instance, Treib et al. (2006) argue that public organizations in established democracies integrate deliberative mechanisms as a means of legitimizing administrative authority, while ensuring policy responsiveness and employee commitment.

However, the application of organizational democracy in semi-democratic or transitioning political-administrative systems often reflects a fragmented or layered reality. In Turkey, organizational democracy has been largely shaped by hierarchical bureaucratic traditions inherited from both the Ottoman patrimonial structure and the centralized nation-state model of the early Republic. Democratic initiatives—especially during the European Union candidacy period—have emphasized formal alignment with participatory governance principles, yet often without a corresponding transformation in organizational culture or employee empowerment practices.

This divergence underscores what Sajjad et al. (2023) describe as a symbolic or procedural democratization, where democratic norms are formally adopted but weakly internalized. Consequently, Turkish public institutions frequently exhibit characteristics of "delegative" or "hybrid" democracy (O'Donnell, 1994), where the rhetoric of participation may coexist with limited accountability and elite-driven decision-making.

By situating Turkey's organizational democracy practices within a comparative framework, this study seeks to assess both the extent and the nature of democratic perceptions among public employees—acknowledging global benchmarks while also accounting for local historical and institutional specificities.

1.3.Outcomes of Organizational Democracy Applications

Organizational democracy significantly contributes to employee satisfaction and intrinsic motivation by fostering autonomy, trust, and meaningful participation. When employees are involved in decision-making and feel their voices are heard, they exhibit stronger psychological ownership and internal motivation (Geckil, 2022; Safari, Salehzadeh & Ghaziasgar, 2018).

Empirical studies demonstrate a positive correlation between perceived organizational democracy and job satisfaction, particularly when combined with empowerment practices and fair leadership (Belias & Koustelios, 2014). Democratic practices reduce perceived workplace injustice and alienation, thereby enhancing employees' affective commitment and long-term engagement (Ahmed et al., 2019).

A democratic organizational environment cultivates innovation through open communication, decentralized decision-making, and psychological safety. Employees in democratic settings are more likely to contribute novel ideas and challenge status quo norms, creating conditions conducive to continuous improvement (Imran et al., 2025).

Research has shown that inclusive leadership and participatory governance lead to better organizational performance, especially in dynamic or knowledge-intensive environments (Qiao, Li & Hong, 2024). The freedom to experiment and collaborate without fear of reprisal is a critical driver of creativity and adaptability in democratic organizations.

Beyond momentary morale, organizational democracy strengthens long-term commitment to the organization. When employees perceive fairness, transparency, and accountability in workplace governance, they reciprocate with greater organizational loyalty (Haskasap et al., 2022; Ahmed et al., 2019).

Organizational commitment increases when employees view themselves as stakeholders rather than subordinates. This shift is particularly evident in democratic organizations with participatory boards, employee ownership, or representative councils (Weber et al., 2023). Studies have shown that such organizations experience lower turnover intentions and higher organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs).

Organizational democracy can also mitigate workplace conflict and reduce resistance to change. By enabling dialogue and involving employees in shaping change processes, democratic structures diffuse tension and enhance mutual understanding (Geckil, 2022; Kirkman & Shapiro, 2001).

Democratic environments provide institutionalized outlets for dissent, allowing grievances to be addressed constructively before escalating into broader organizational dysfunction (Wagner & Gooding, 1987). In contrast to autocratic systems where conflict is suppressed or ignored, democratic workplaces foster a culture of deliberation, empathy, and negotiated resolution.

1.4.Global and Local Perspectives on Organizational Democracy

Scandinavian countries—particularly Sweden, Norway, and Denmark—are widely regarded as frontrunners in the institutionalization of organizational democracy. These nations implement co-determination laws, robust collective bargaining systems, and workplace representation structures that empower employees to participate meaningfully in governance and decision-making (Enehaug, Falkum & Hvid, 2018).

The Nordic model integrates social dialogue into corporate governance by combining individual participation (e.g., team autonomy) and collective representation (e.g., works councils and union representation on boards) (Winther, 2024). Employees are legally entitled to participate in decisions through board-level representation, a practice that not only supports workplace democracy but also aligns with broader societal values of egalitarianism and consensus.

Studies show that such institutionalized forms of participation result in higher levels of job satisfaction, lower inequality, and more stable labor relations (Berg, Børve & Røkenes,

2023). Moreover, democracy at work in these countries extends to small- and medium-sized enterprises, supported by cultural norms favoring transparency and collaboration.

Turkey presents a more complex and evolving picture. Although democratic participation is constitutionally encouraged in workplaces, practical implementation remains limited due to hierarchical management traditions, weak enforcement mechanisms, and fragmented union structures (Gönençer, 2010; Dereli et al., 2022).

Nonetheless, there are notable attempts—especially among firms linked with the European Union market—to adopt participative structures such as employee suggestion systems, joint committees, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) projects involving employee voice (Özcüre et al., 2009). EU harmonization processes have also influenced legal reforms related to employee representation, particularly in multinational corporations operating in Turkey.

However, challenges persist in terms of managerial resistance, low trust levels, and limited institutional capacity. Research suggests that democratization efforts are often symbolic rather than systemic and are more prevalent in foreign subsidiaries than in domestic enterprises (Cam, 2018).

Multinational corporations (MNCs) offer a hybrid context for studying organizational democracy. These firms frequently encounter divergent national expectations, especially when operating in both high-democracy (e.g., Germany, Sweden) and low-democracy (e.g., Turkey, China) environments (Wilkinson, 2010).

Many MNCs headquartered in Europe institutionalize codetermination rights in their home countries while modifying or reducing such participative mechanisms in host countries due to local legal or cultural barriers (Warner & Peccei, 1977). Research indicates that Scandinavian MNCs are more consistent in promoting participatory practices globally, whereas Anglo-American MNCs often prioritize managerial autonomy and shareholder value (Hofstede, 1980; Crane, Matten & Moon, 2004).

Furthermore, there is an emerging trend where some global companies voluntarily adopt transnational democratic practices—such as global works councils, digital participation tools, and internal referenda—driven by pressures from international labor standards and ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) frameworks.

1.5.Barriers and Critiques of Organizational Democracy

One of the most enduring barriers to organizational democracy stems from entrenched hierarchical structures and deep-rooted cultural norms that resist participatory change. In many organizations, especially those shaped by traditional bureaucratic models, power is centralized and change is often perceived as a threat to authority or efficiency (King & Land, 2018). Structural resistance is reinforced by rigid job classifications, centralized decision-making systems, and narrow role definitions that hinder shared governance.

Culturally, high power distance, prevalent in both corporate and national cultures, undermines attempts to democratize internal processes (Hofstede, 1980). Employees may internalize passivity, while managers may view participation as inefficiency or a loss of control.

Even in progressive organizations, cultural inertia can act as a “silent veto” against transformative democratic practices (Ganesh, Zoller & Cheney, 2005).

A major criticism of organizational democracy initiatives is the prevalence of symbolic participation—practices that offer the appearance of inclusion without actual redistribution of power. These include suggestion boxes, pseudo-consultations, or participation rituals that rarely influence strategic decisions (Polletta, 2005; King & Land, 2018).

Such “window dressing” practices may even backfire by generating cynicism among employees and reinforcing power asymmetries. The performative nature of participation, as noted by Fleming and Banerjee (2016), highlights how organizations co-opt democratic language to legitimize managerial control while suppressing genuine dissent. These token efforts often prioritize legitimacy in the eyes of stakeholders rather than meaningful internal democratization (Dutta, 2012).

Organizational democracy is also critically constrained by the dominant ideology of neoliberalism, which emphasizes individualism, competition, and market logic over collective governance. Neoliberalism reframes democracy itself as a consumer choice, reducing participatory ideals to “voice through exit” mechanisms such as turnover or market feedback (Saad-Filho, 2015).

This ideology fosters workplace environments that are atomized, transactional, and hyper-flexibilized, leaving little space for sustained collective dialogue or employee empowerment (Giroux, 2001). Moreover, the rise of gig economies, platform labor, and precarious work has intensified barriers to organizing, voice, and institutional continuity—further marginalizing democratic norms (Connolly, 2013).

Neoliberal managerialism not only undercuts organizational democracy structurally but also shapes discursive practices, framing critical engagement as inefficiency or subversion (Ganesh et al., 2005). This explains the paradoxical situation where democratic values are rhetorically endorsed in CSR and ESG discourses but systematically excluded from governance frameworks.

2.METHODOLOGY

Organizational democracy, a concept rooted in the tradition of industrial democracy, has predominantly been explored within the context of the private sector and civil society organizations. In contrast, scholarly investigations focusing on organizational democracy within the public sector remain limited. This gap in the literature is particularly notable given that public institutions operate within strict legal frameworks to deliver public services, often resulting in restricted opportunities for employee participation in decision-making processes.

Despite these structural limitations, examining the degree to which public sector employees participate in decision-making processes and benefit from principles such as participation, transparency, critique, justice, and equality is significant. Such investigations can provide meaningful insights into democratic governance in public service delivery.

A noteworthy contribution in this domain is the study by Işık (2017), titled *Perceptions of Organizational Democracy in Public Institutions: The Case of İŞKUR Isparta Provincial*

Directorate. This study sought to measure the perception of organizational democracy among public employees in Turkey.

The population of the study comprises all public sector employees in Turkey. As of the end of 2024, there are 5,241,753 public employees in the country (Source: [Presidency of Strategy and Budget](#), retrieved on 25/03/2025). Based on a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, the required sample size was calculated to be 384. The study ultimately collected data from 403 participants, indicating that the sample size is statistically representative of the population.

The research employed a quantitative research design, utilizing the simple random sampling method to reach participants. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire comprising two sections. The first section gathered demographic information about the participants, including gender, age, marital status, education level, income, and years of service.

The second section incorporated the Organizational Democracy Scale developed by Geçkil and Tikici (2015, pp. 77–78). This scale consists of 28 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The items are grouped to measure various dimensions of organizational democracy:

- Items 1–8: Participation and Criticism
- Items 9–14: Transparency
- Items 15–19: Justice
- Items 20–25: Equality
- Items 26–28: Accountability

Data analysis was conducted using the SPSS 29 statistical software package. All statistical analyses were carried out within a 95% confidence interval and a 5% margin of error.

Table 1. Demographic Findings of Participants

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percent %
Gender	Female	137	34,0
	Male	266	66,0
Marital Status	Married	305	75,7
	Single	98	24,3
Age Range	18-25	24	6,0
	26-33	68	16,9
	34-41	93	23,1
	42-49	100	24,8
	50+	118	29,3
Working Time	0-5	48	11,9
	6-10	96	23,8
	11-15	57	14,1
	16-20	64	15,9
	21+	138	34,2
Education Level	High School and Pre	30	7,4
	Associate Degree	80	19,9
	Undergraduate	169	41,9

	Postgraduate	124	30,8
Income Level	0-45000-TL	70	17,4
	45001-55000-TL	66	16,4
	55001-65000-TL	165	40,9
	65001-75000-TL	62	15,4
	75001+TL	40	9,9

According to the data, 34% of the respondents were female, while 66% were male. In terms of marital status, 75.7% of participants were married, and 24.3% were single.

With respect to age distribution:

- 6% were between 18–25 years,
- 16.9% were between 26–33 years,
- 23.1% were between 34–41 years,
- 24.8% were between 42–49 years, and
- 29.3% were aged 50 years and above.

Regarding years of service, the participants reported:

- 11.9% with 0–5 years,
- 23.8% with 6–10 years,
- 14.1% with 11–15 years,
- 15.9% with 16–20 years, and
- 34.2% with more than 21 years of work experience.

Educational attainment levels were as follows:

- 7.4% had a high school diploma or below,
- 19.9% held an associate degree,
- 41.9% had a bachelor's degree, and
- 30.8% held a postgraduate degree (master's or doctorate).

In terms of monthly income levels (in Turkish Lira):

- 17.4% earned 0–45,000 TL,
- 16.4% earned 45,001–55,000 TL,
- 40.9% earned 55,001–65,000 TL,
- 15.4% earned 65,001–75,000 TL, and

- 9.9% earned above 75,001 TL.

Table 2. Findings Related to the Organizational Democracy Scale

Dimension Name	Scale Item	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Std. Deviation	Factor Loading	Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha)
Participation & Criticism	Managers encourage me to participate in organizational decisions.	2,65	1,189	,639	,913
	Majority opinions are considered in institutional decision-making.	2,80	1,229	,766	
	All those affected by decisions have a say during the decision-making process.	2,71	1,337	,722	
	Managers respect majority decisions even if they disagree.	2,45	1,180	,776	
	I can comfortably criticize policies or decisions I find inappropriate.	3,12	1,249	,592	
	Management encourages employees to voice criticism.	2,39	1,161	,761	
	Management considers employee criticism.	2,60	1,168	,831	
	Criticizing managerial practices is considered normal.	2,53	1,208	,777	
Transparency	Everyone is given the opportunity to express their opinions during meetings.	3,11	1,167	,770	,912
	Transparency guides institutional operations.	2,57	1,204	,815	
	Managers organize briefing sessions during critical developments.	3,16	1,179	,717	
	There is open and two-way communication in my institution.	2,86	1,106	,846	

	Performance evaluations adhere to transparency principles.	2,61	1,201	,834	
	Employees are supported in their professional development through training.	3,15	1,193	,738	
Justice	There is a fair reward system in my institution.	2,34	1,151	,776	,850
	Compensation is based on contributions and work.	2,34	1,196	,715	
	Merit is considered in task distribution.	2,25	1,254	,774	
	Evaluation criteria are standardized.	2,78	1,172	,621	
	Subordinates influence evaluations of supervisors.	2,41	1,237	,619	
Equality	Gender discrimination does not exist in my institution.	3,36	1,228	,587	,753
	Political views influence recruitment decisions.	3,19	1,240	,633	
	Proposal quality is valued over the proposer's identity.	2,91	1,181	,776	
	Discrimination exists among employees.	3,32	1,240	,534	
	No distinctions based on language, religion, or race are made.	3,59	1,203	,593	
	I believe my institution is a democratic organization.	2,61	1,146	,740	
Accountability	Policies and procedures can always be questioned by employees.	2,62	1,092	,746	,863
	Employees at all levels can be held accountable.	2,68	1,200	,697	
	A culture of accountability is established.	2,52	1,125	,786	
The Organizational Democracy Scale had an overall mean score of					2,77
a high internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of					,952
The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy					,952
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Approx. Chi-Square					8361,141
df					378
Sig. (p)					,001

According to the results presented in Table 2, the factor loadings of the items on the Organizational Democracy Scale ranged between 0.534 and 0.846, indicating a strong level of item-factor association. The factor analysis revealed that the scale retains its original five-dimensional structure, consistent with the construct developed by Geçkil and Tikici (2015).

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was found to be 0.952, a value considered to be excellent, suggesting that the dataset is suitable for factor analysis. In addition, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity yielded a statistically significant chi-square value ($\chi^2 = 8361.141$, $df = 378$, $p < 0.001$), further confirming the appropriateness of conducting a factor analysis.

In terms of reliability, the scale demonstrated high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.952, indicating a very high level of reliability.

Taken together, these findings confirm that the Organizational Democracy Scale has strong construct validity and high reliability, making it a robust instrument for measuring perceptions of organizational democracy among public sector employees.

To determine whether the data were normally distributed and to select the appropriate statistical tests (parametric vs. non-parametric), the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test was performed. The test produced a p-value of 0.025 for the organizational democracy variable, which is less than the conventional threshold of 0.05. However, skewness and kurtosis values were found to be 0.004 and -0.544, respectively. Since both values fall within the acceptable range of -1.5 to $+1.5$, the distribution can be considered approximately normal.

Based on these results, the data met the assumptions for parametric statistical analyses, which were consequently employed in subsequent stages of the research.

Table 3. Mean Findings Related to Organizational Democracy Scale and Sub-Dimensions

Scale and Subscales	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Std. Deviation	N	Perception Level
Participation & Criticism	2,65	,95850	403	Neither Agree nor Disagree
Transparency	2,91	,97970	403	Neither Agree nor Disagree
Justice	2,42	,95100	403	Disagree
Equality	3,16	,58506	403	Neither Agree nor Disagree
Accountability	2,60	1,00960	403	Disagree
Organizational Democracy	2,77	,78878	403	Neither Agree nor Disagree

In Table 3, participants' perceptions regarding the Participation–Criticism dimension of the Organizational Democracy Scale were at the level of “Neutral”. This indicates that respondents were uncertain about whether employees in their institutions are genuinely involved in decision-making processes or are able to express criticism of existing policies.

Similarly, in the Transparency dimension, participants' responses also clustered around the “Neutral” level. This suggests a general ambiguity among respondents concerning the transparency practices of their institutions, indicating that they are unsure whether institutional operations are conducted in an open and accountable manner.

For the Justice dimension, participants' perceptions were predominantly at the level of “Disagree”. This result implies that respondents believe their institutions lack fairness in areas such as remuneration, reward distribution, and merit-based promotion.

Lastly, regarding the Equality dimension, perceptions again aligned with the “Neutral” category. This suggests that participants are uncertain as to whether their institutions uphold principles of equality related to language, religion, race, or gender.

In the Accountability dimension, participants' perceptions were at the level of “Disagree”. This indicates that respondents believe the policies and procedures implemented in their institutions are not always open to scrutiny or questioning by employees.

Overall, participants' perceptions on the Organizational Democracy Scale were at the “Neutral” level. This suggests that respondents are uncertain about whether the institutions they work for can be characterized as democratic organizations.

Table 4. Difference Analysis Based on Gender Variable (Independent Samples T-Test)

Variable	Gender	N	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Std. Deviation	t Value	p Value
Organizational Democracy	Female	137	2,95	,86557	3,354	,005*
	Male	266	2,57	,73045		

*P<0,05

As presented in Table 4, the analysis of variance based on the gender variable revealed a statistically significant difference in perceptions of organizational democracy between male and female participants ($p = 0.005 < 0.05$). Specifically, the mean score for female participants was $\bar{X} = 2.95$, corresponding to the “Neutral” level, whereas the mean score for male participants was $\bar{X} = 2.57$, corresponding to the “Disagree” level.

These findings indicate that female participants were generally undecided about whether their institutions could be considered democratic, while male participants tended to believe that their institutions did not operate in a democratic manner.

Table 5. Independent Samples T-Test Based on Marital Status Variable

Variable	Marital Status	N	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Std. Deviation	t Value	p Value
Organizational Democracy	Married	305	2,70	0,77535	-1,603	,870
	Single	98	2,65	0,73712		

$P > 0,05$

As shown in Table 5, the independent samples t-test based on the marital status variable revealed no statistically significant difference between the organizational democracy perceptions of married and single participants ($p = 0.870 > 0.05$). Accordingly, both groups demonstrated a “Neutral” level of perception, indicating uncertainty about whether their institutions can be considered democratic organizations.

Table 6. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Based on Educational Level Variable

Variable	Education Level	N	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	F Value	p Value
Organizational Democracy	High School	30	3,46	10,188	,001*
	Associate Degree	80	2,85		
	Undergraduate	169	2,65		
	Postgraduate	124	2,70		

* $P < 0,05$

As shown in Table 6, the ANOVA test conducted based on the educational level variable revealed a statistically significant difference in participants' perceptions of organizational democracy ($p = 0.001 < 0.05$). Specifically, participants with a high school education or lower reported a mean score of $\bar{X} = 3.46$, corresponding to the “Agree” level, while the perceptions of participants in all other educational groups fell within the “Neutral” range.

These findings suggest that individuals with lower levels of formal education are more likely to perceive their institutions as democratic, whereas participants with higher educational attainment remain uncertain about the democratic nature of their organizations.

Table 7. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Based on Age Variable

Variable	Age	N	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	F Value	p Value
Organizational Democracy	18-25	24	3,27	9,819	,001*
	26-33	68	3,13		
	34-41	93	2,78		
	42-49	100	2,54		

	50+	118	2,63		
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*P<0,05

As shown in Table 7, the ANOVA test conducted based on the age variable revealed a statistically significant difference in participants' perceptions of organizational democracy ($p = 0.001 < 0.05$). Specifically, participants in the 42–49 age group reported a mean score of $\bar{X} = 2.54$, corresponding to the “Disagree” level, whereas the perceptions of participants in all other age groups were at the “Neutral” level.

These results indicate that individuals aged 42 to 49 tend to perceive their institutions as not being democratic, while participants from other age brackets remain uncertain about the democratic nature of their organizations..

Tablo 8. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Based on Income Level Variable

Variable	Income Level (Turkish Lira)	N	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	F Value	p Value
Organizational Democracy	0-45000	70	2,99	3,441	,009*
	45001-55000	66	2,70		
	55001-65000	165	2,73		
	65001-75000	62	2,88		
	75001+	40	2,47		

*P<0,05

As shown in Table 8, the ANOVA test conducted based on the income level variable revealed a statistically significant difference in participants' perceptions of organizational democracy ($p = 0.009 < 0.05$). Specifically, participants in the income group earning 75,001+ TL reported a mean score of $\bar{X} = 2.47$, corresponding to the “Disagree” level, while the perceptions of participants in all other income brackets remained at the “Neutral” level.

These findings suggest that individuals in the highest income group are more inclined to perceive their institutions as not being democratic, whereas participants in the lower income groups exhibit uncertainty regarding the democratic nature of their organizations.

Table 9. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Based on Years of Work Experience

Variable	Years of Work Experience	N	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	F Value	p Value
Organizational Democracy	0-5	48	3,15	7,651	,001*
	6-10	96	2,96		
	11-15	57	2,54		
	16-20	64	2,52		

	21+	138	2,71		
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*P<0,05

As shown in Table 9, the ANOVA test conducted based on the variable of years of work experience revealed a statistically significant difference in participants' perceptions of organizational democracy ($p = 0.001 < 0.05$). Specifically, participants with 11–15 years and 16–20 years of work experience reported mean scores of $\bar{X} = 2.52$ and $\bar{X} = 2.54$, respectively—both corresponding to the “Disagree” level. In contrast, the perceptions of participants in all other experience groups were at the “Neutral” level.

These findings suggest that individuals with mid-level tenure (11–20 years) are more likely to believe that their institutions are not democratic, whereas those with shorter or longer work experience remain uncertain about the democratic nature of their organizations.

Table 10. Findings on the Relationship Between Independent Variables and Organizational Democracy (Correlation Analysis)

Independent Variables		Organizational Democracy
Education Level	Pearson Correlation	-,198**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001
	N	403
Age	Pearson Correlation	-,264**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001
	N	403
Income Level	Pearson Correlation	-,118*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,018
	N	403
Year of work experience	Pearson Correlation	-,190**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001
	N	403
Participation-Criticism	Pearson Correlation	,928**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001
	N	403
Transparency	Pearson Correlation	,938**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001
	N	403
Justice	Pearson Correlation	,893**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001
	N	403
Equality	Pearson Correlation	,770**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001
	N	403
Accountability	Pearson Correlation	,828**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001
	N	403

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As shown in Table 10, a correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between participants' demographic variables (educational level, age, income level, and years of work experience) and their perceptions of organizational democracy, including its sub-dimensions.

According to the findings:

A statistically significant but very weak negative correlation was found between educational level and perceptions of organizational democracy ($r = -.198$, $p = .001 < .01$). This suggests that as educational attainment increases, perceptions of organizational democracy tend to decrease.

A weak negative correlation was found between age and organizational democracy perception ($r = -.264$, $p = .001 < .01$), indicating that older participants are less likely to perceive their institutions as democratic.

Income level was also negatively associated with organizational democracy perceptions, though at a very weak level ($r = -.118$, $p = .018 < .05$), suggesting that higher income groups reported lower levels of democratic perception.

A very weak negative correlation was identified between years of work experience and perceptions of organizational democracy ($r = -.190$, $p = .001 < .01$), indicating that longer-serving employees are slightly more critical of their organizations' democratic nature.

Regarding the sub-dimensions of the Organizational Democracy Scale:

There was a very strong positive correlation between Participation and Criticism and organizational democracy ($r = .928$, $p = .001 < .01$). Higher levels of perceived participatory and critical capacity were associated with stronger democratic perceptions.

Similarly, Transparency showed a very strong positive correlation ($r = .938$, $p = .001 < .01$), suggesting that greater perceived transparency is closely linked to stronger democratic evaluations.

A strong positive correlation was found between Justice and overall organizational democracy ($r = .893$, $p = .001 < .01$), as well as between Equality ($r = .770$, $p = .001 < .01$) and Accountability ($r = .828$, $p = .001 < .01$) with organizational democracy perceptions.

These results collectively indicate that participants' positive perceptions in these sub-dimensions strongly enhance their overall evaluation of organizational democracy.

Conclusion

This study examined Turkish public servants' perceptions of organizational democracy by analyzing key dimensions such as participation, transparency, justice, equality, and accountability. Based on a quantitative analysis of responses from 403 civil servants and using the Organizational Democracy Scale developed by Geçkil and Tikici (2015), the research explored how demographic variables—education level, income, age, and tenure—intersect with perceived democratic practices in public institutions.

Findings indicate that, on average, respondents hold a “neutral” stance regarding the democratic nature of their organizations. This outcome is consistent with national studies that highlight a gap between formal democratic structures and actual administrative behavior in Turkish public agencies (Ayдын & Polatcan, 2016; Tetik & Acar, 2020). While participants

reported relatively positive perceptions of transparency and equality, their ratings of justice and accountability were notably lower, suggesting that institutional reforms have not sufficiently addressed issues of fairness and responsibility.

A critical finding is the inverse relationship between education, income, and tenure and the perception of organizational democracy. Similar to the results by Akyıldız (2024), this trend supports the notion of critical disengagement, where more experienced and better-educated employees become increasingly aware of symbolic or performative dimensions of organizational participation. This pattern stands in contrast to findings from Western European contexts (e.g., Christensen & Lægreid, 2006), where tenure often correlates positively with institutional trust—suggesting a divergence rooted in bureaucratic culture and democratic consolidation.

The strong positive correlations between the overall perception of organizational democracy and its sub-dimensions—especially participation ($r = .928$), transparency ($r = .938$), and justice ($r = .893$)—underscore the interdependence of these components. These findings reinforce global research emphasizing that participative governance, procedural fairness, and access to institutional information are vital to cultivating democratic workplace environments (Kim, 2002; Sajjad et al., 2023).

For policymakers and practitioners, the findings reveal a pressing need to bridge the gap between structural reforms and actual employee experiences. Recommendations include:

- Institutionalizing participatory governance through inclusive decision-making platforms, employee consultation mechanisms, and feedback loops (Kim, 2002).
- Reforming recruitment and promotion systems to prioritize merit over political affiliation (Van de Walle, 2001).
- Enhancing transparency and communication in internal processes to build institutional trust (Christensen & Lægreid, 2006).
- Embedding ethical leadership and participatory training into civil service curricula to encourage cultural transformation.
- Introducing measurable indicators to evaluate democratic climate at departmental levels (Moynihan & Pandey, 2007).

Such reforms would not only improve organizational legitimacy and employee satisfaction but also contribute to long-term democratic resilience within the public sector.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the understanding of democratization in bureaucratic settings by illustrating a layered and selective perception of democracy (O'Donnell, 1994; Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005). It suggests that individual-level factors—particularly education, professional capital, and institutional exposure—play a pivotal role in shaping how democratic practices are interpreted, accepted, or contested.

The results also support a contextualized application of theories such as neo-institutionalism and delegative democracy, where institutional structures may exist, but their normative content is either weakened or reinterpreted by hierarchical or clientelist dynamics.

This research is not without limitations. First, its cross-sectional design restricts causal interpretations. Longitudinal designs are necessary to assess how policy reforms influence perceptions over time. Second, reliance on self-reported data may have introduced social desirability bias. Triangulation with qualitative data (e.g., interviews, document analysis) would enrich interpretation.

Third, the study's sample is limited in geographical and institutional diversity. Broader national sampling across different ministries and regional units would enhance external validity. Finally, contextual variables such as organizational type (e.g., central vs. local), managerial status, or political affiliation were not controlled for, which may affect results.

Future studies should consider comparative approaches across sectors (e.g., education, health, judiciary), explore the impact of organizational leadership styles on democracy perception, and integrate psychological constructs such as trust, psychological safety, and perceived voice to capture deeper relational dimensions of organizational democracy.

In sum, while Turkish public servants demonstrate a base-level awareness of democratic ideals within their institutions, this awareness appears fragile and unevenly distributed. Closing the perceptual and structural gap between democracy in form and democracy in function requires both institutional commitment and continued scholarly attention to the evolving dynamics of public governance.

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Authors' Contributions

Murşit Işık conceptualized and designed the study, conducted data collection and statistical analyses, and was the primary author of the manuscript. Hakan Candan contributed to the study design and provided critical revisions during the manuscript preparation. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.