

Published May 18th, 2025

Final Report: Generational Experiences as Turkish Americans

Assembly of Turkish American Associations Youth Committee

Project Led By:

Mehmet Tascioglu, ATAA Youth Committee Chair

Bora Ozalp, ATAA Youth Committee Vice Chair

Ilayda Yeni, ATAA Youth Committee Secretary

Nilufer Esen Bilgin, ATAA Past President

ATAA Youth Committee Members



INTRODUCTION

The Turkish American community is at a pivotal generational crossroads. While first-generation immigrants have spent decades building their lives and addressing pressing challenges, younger generations - Millennials and Gen Z - are now navigating a distinct set of cultural and societal issues. We hypothesize that meaningful cultural differences exist between these generational groups, and we aim to explore and better understand these dynamics through our research.

PURPOSE

The purpose of our research is to understand how Turkish Americans born in different generations (Gen X, Millennial, Gen Z, Boomer, and Silent Generation) differ in their perspectives of understanding and adapting to American life and culture.

METHODOLOGY

Our team conducted a survey through Google Forms, inviting participants to answer questions regarding their Turkish American identity. We established 3 criteria that made it eligible for individuals to participate in this survey:

- 1) You must identify with both American (US) and Turkish ethnicities
- 2) You must have been born no later than 2012
- 3) You must reside or have resided in the US for at least 10 years

For the purposes of our research, we also identified generations with the following names and birth years:

Silent Generation (1928-1945)

Boomer (1946-1964)

Generation X (1965-1980)

Millennial (1981-1996)

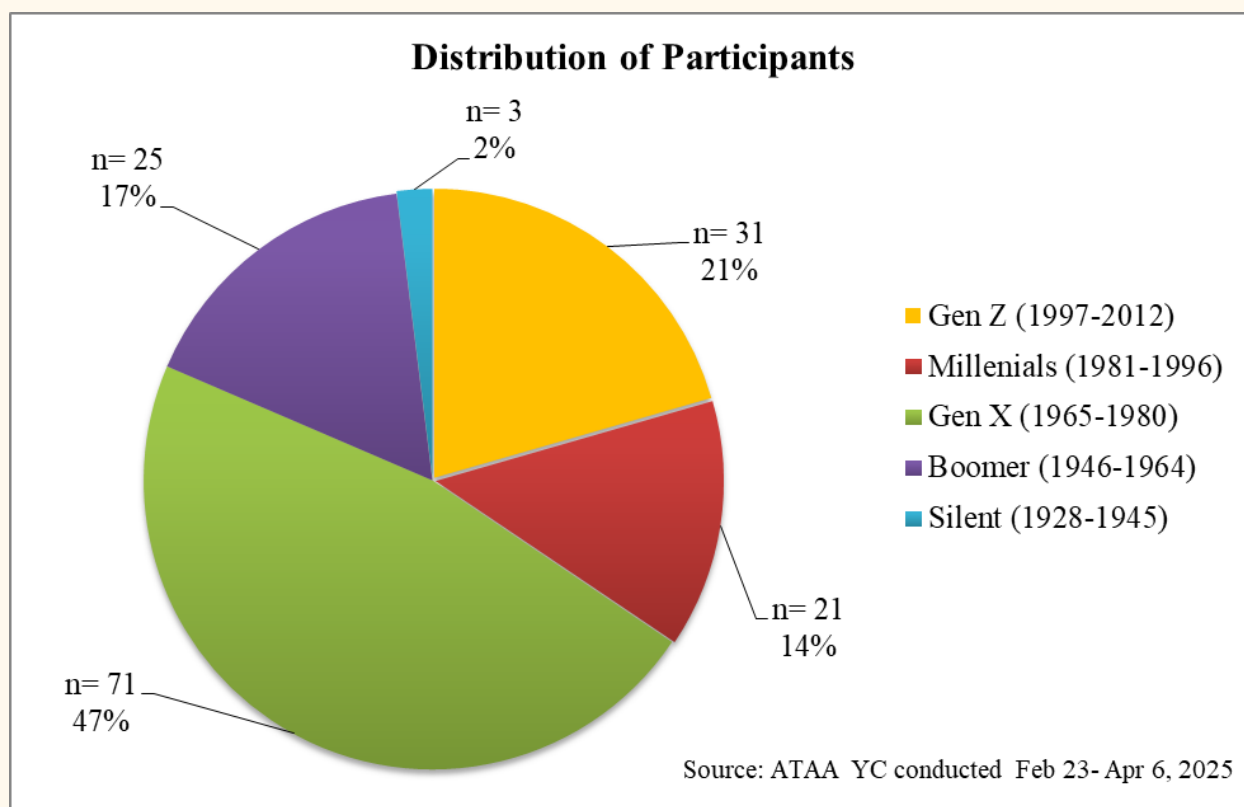
Generation Z (1997-2012)

Our survey had 150 responses. The Silent Generation's responses were combined and analyzed with the Boomers since there are very few Silent Generation Turkish Americans in the US, and the youngest are 80 years old.

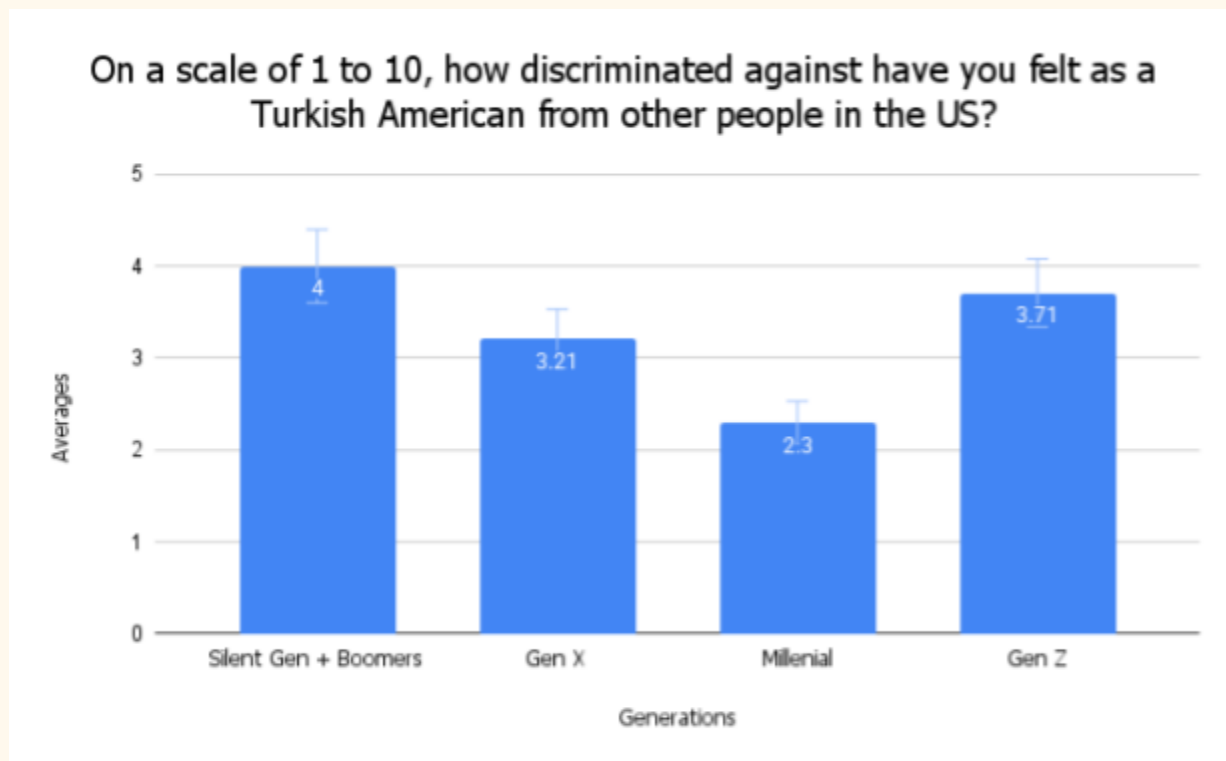
RESULTS

Demographics

Of our 150 survey respondents, the demographic data split by generation was prepared:



Discrimination Index



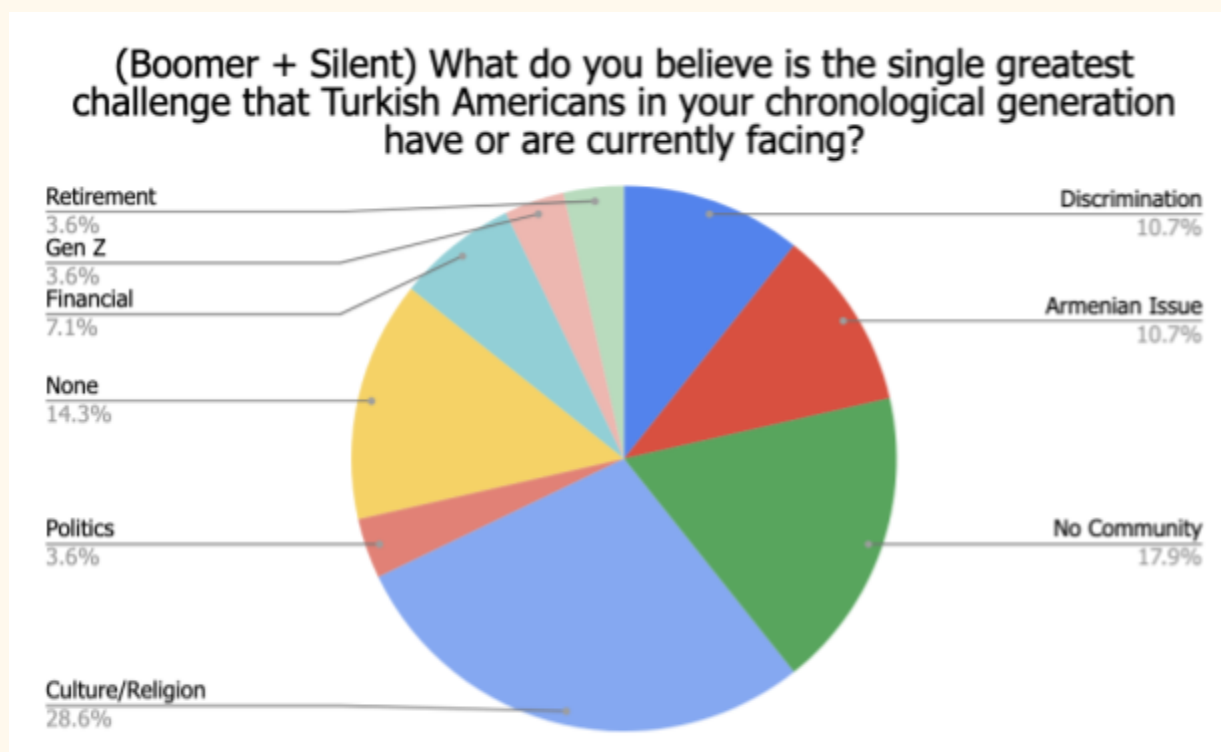
Source: ATAA YC conducted Feb 23 - Apr 6, 2025

When asked how much discrimination they have felt in the U.S. as Turkish Americans on a scale from 1 (no discrimination) to 10 (frequent discrimination), respondents reported the following average scores: 4.0 for the Silent Generation and Boomers, 3.21 for Gen X, 2.3 for Millennials, and 3.71 for Gen Z.

Notably, the average discrimination scores for the Silent Generation and Boomers, Gen X, and Gen Z are all significantly higher than that of Millennials, as indicated by the non-overlapping error bars. This suggests that Millennials perceive less discrimination than both older and younger generational cohorts. However, no group reported an average discrimination score exceeding 4.5 on the 1–10 scale, even when accounting for the margin of error.

Greatest Challenge

We asked participants to identify what they believed is the **single greatest challenge facing Turkish Americans in their generation**. Responses were categorized by common themes and analyzed by generation. Notably, the most frequently cited challenges vary across age groups, offering insight into evolving concerns within the Turkish American community.

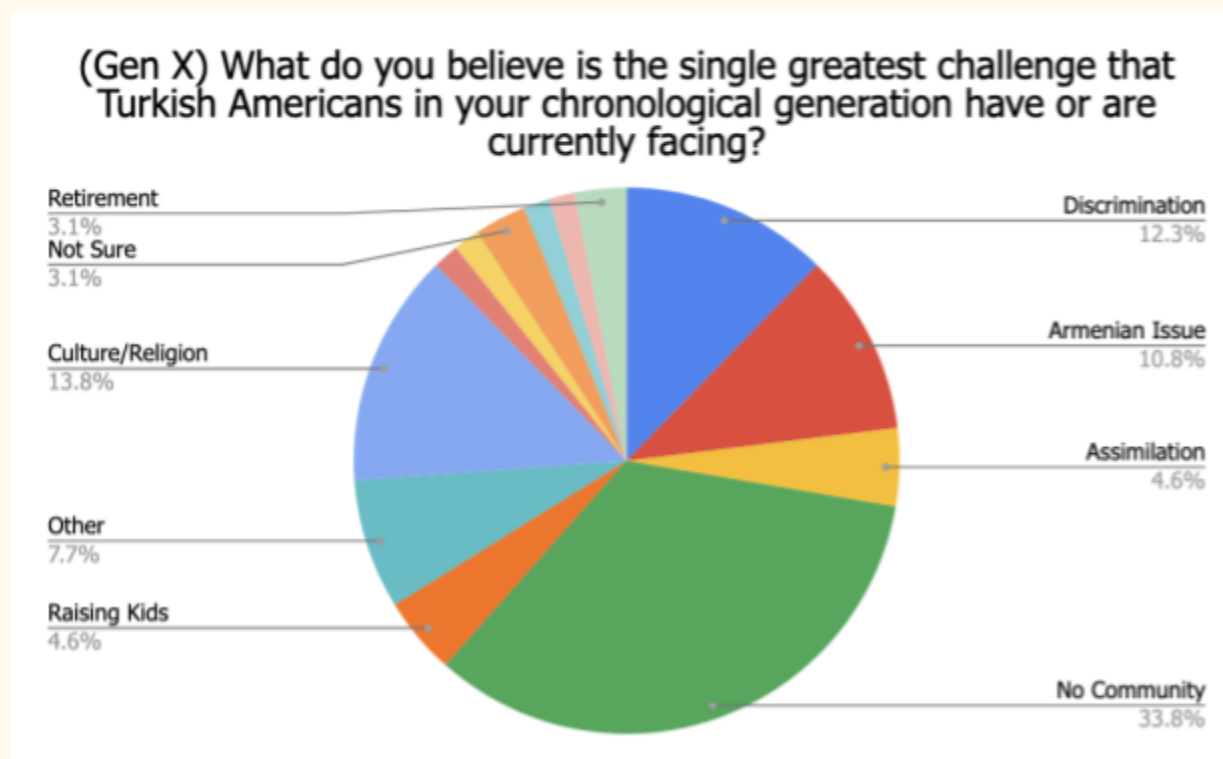


Source: ATAA YC conducted Feb 23 - Apr 6, 2025

For members of the Silent Generation and Baby Boomers, the most frequently reported challenge was **culture/religion (28.6%)**. This category included difficulties adjusting to American cultural norms, navigating religious differences, and coping with the cultural dislocation that often comes with immigration.

The second most cited challenge was **lack of community (17.9%)**, reflecting a sense of isolation or difficulty in finding others who share similar values and cultural backgrounds in the US.

The third most mentioned issue was the **Armenian issue (10.7%)**, encompassing responses that referenced tension or challenges related to the Armenian diaspora and historical narratives within the US context.

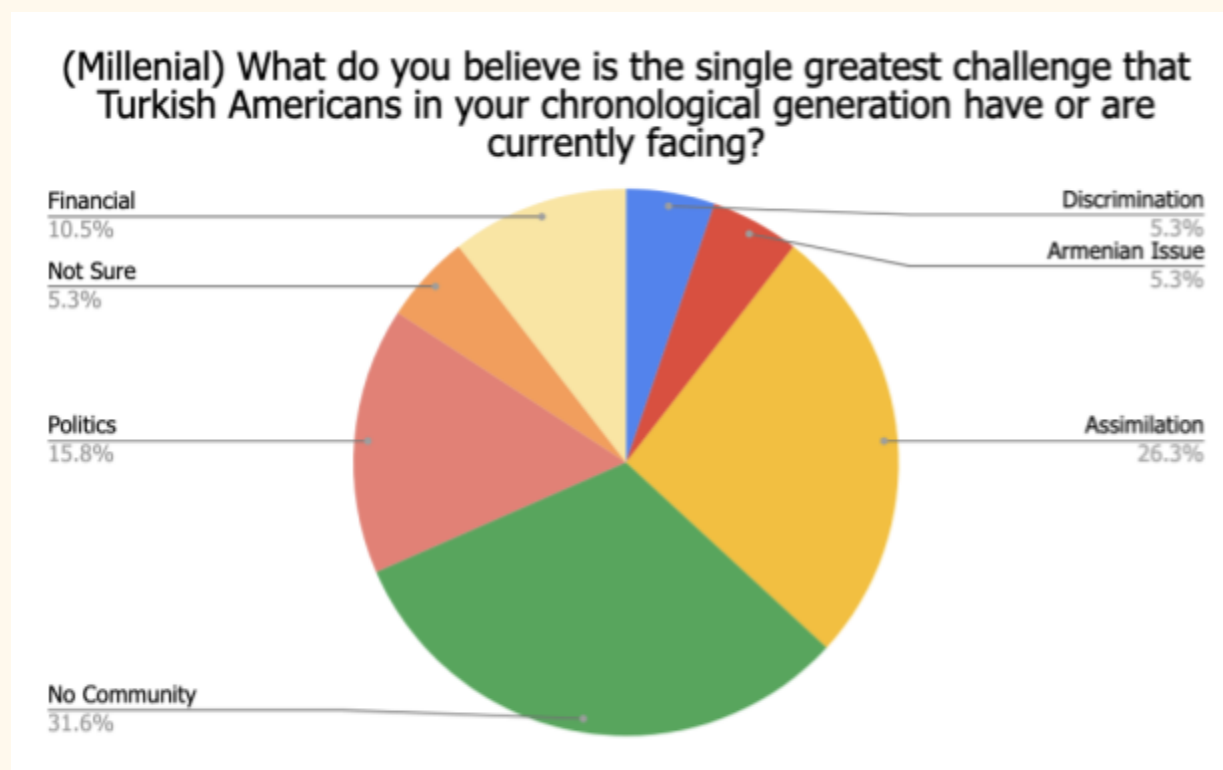


Source: ATAA YC conducted Feb 23 - Apr 6, 2025

For Generation X, the perceived greatest challenge shifted notably. **No community** emerged as the dominant concern, selected by 33.8% of respondents. Unlike older generations, Gen X respondents were less focused on adjusting to American culture and more concerned with the lack of a cohesive Turkish American community.

The second most cited issue was **culture/religion (13.8%)**, reflecting ongoing concerns about maintaining cultural identity and navigating religious differences. The third was **discrimination (12.3%)**, highlighting experiences of prejudice or unequal treatment.

It is important to note that Armenian issue (10.8%) and discrimination (12.3%) were treated as separate categories. While the former refers to tensions and historical concerns related to the Armenian diaspora, the latter focuses more broadly on perceived societal bias and unjust treatment.

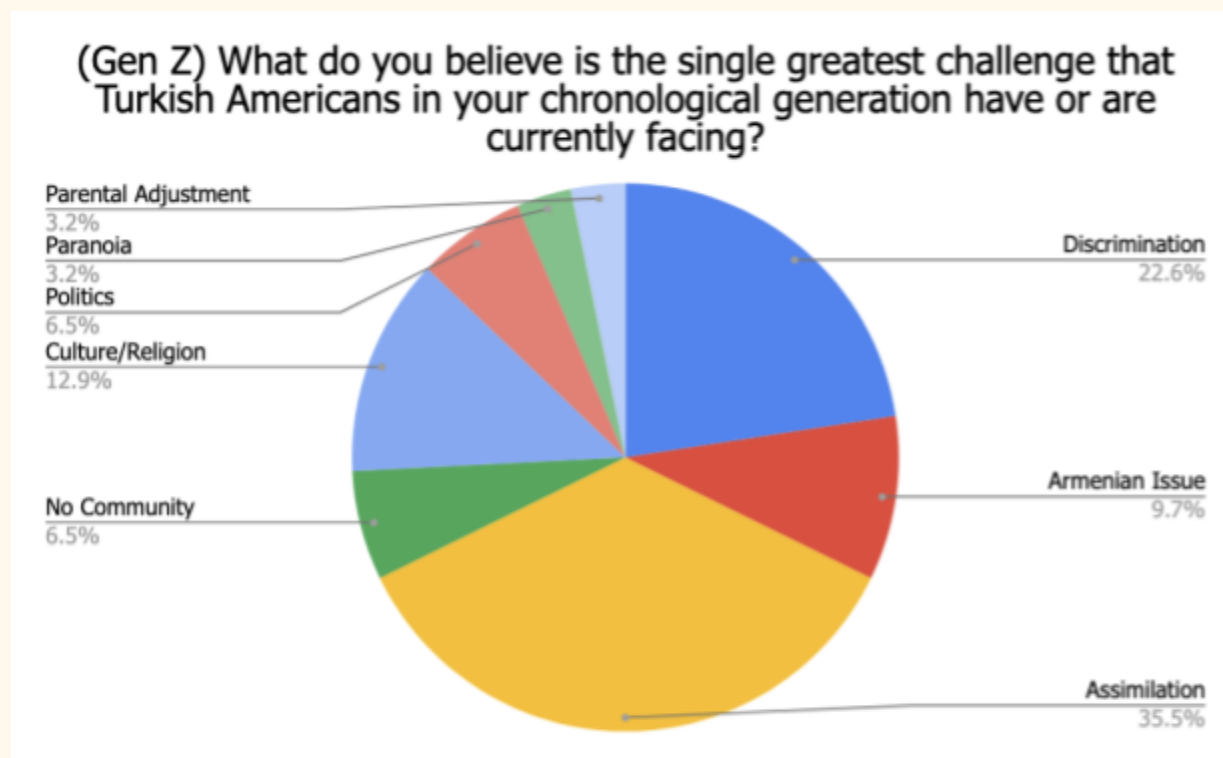


Source: ATAA YC conducted Feb 23 - Apr 6, 2025

Among Millennials, the most frequently reported challenge mirrored that of Generation X: **no community** was the top concern, cited by 31.6% of respondents. This suggests a continued struggle among younger Turkish Americans to find shared spaces or networks that reflect their identity and values.

The second most common challenge, unique to this generation, was **assimilation** (26.3%). Unlike older cohorts, Millennials expressed greater concern about the pressures of conforming to dominant American cultural norms - often at the cost of preserving their own heritage. Here, assimilation refers to the process by which individuals adopt the behaviors, values, and customs of the mainstream culture, potentially leading to a loss of cultural identity.

The third most cited challenge was **politics** (15.8%), which may reflect concerns related to both U.S. domestic politics and Turkish political developments. Although individual political affiliations or issues were not collected, this trend points to growing political awareness and concern among Millennial respondents.

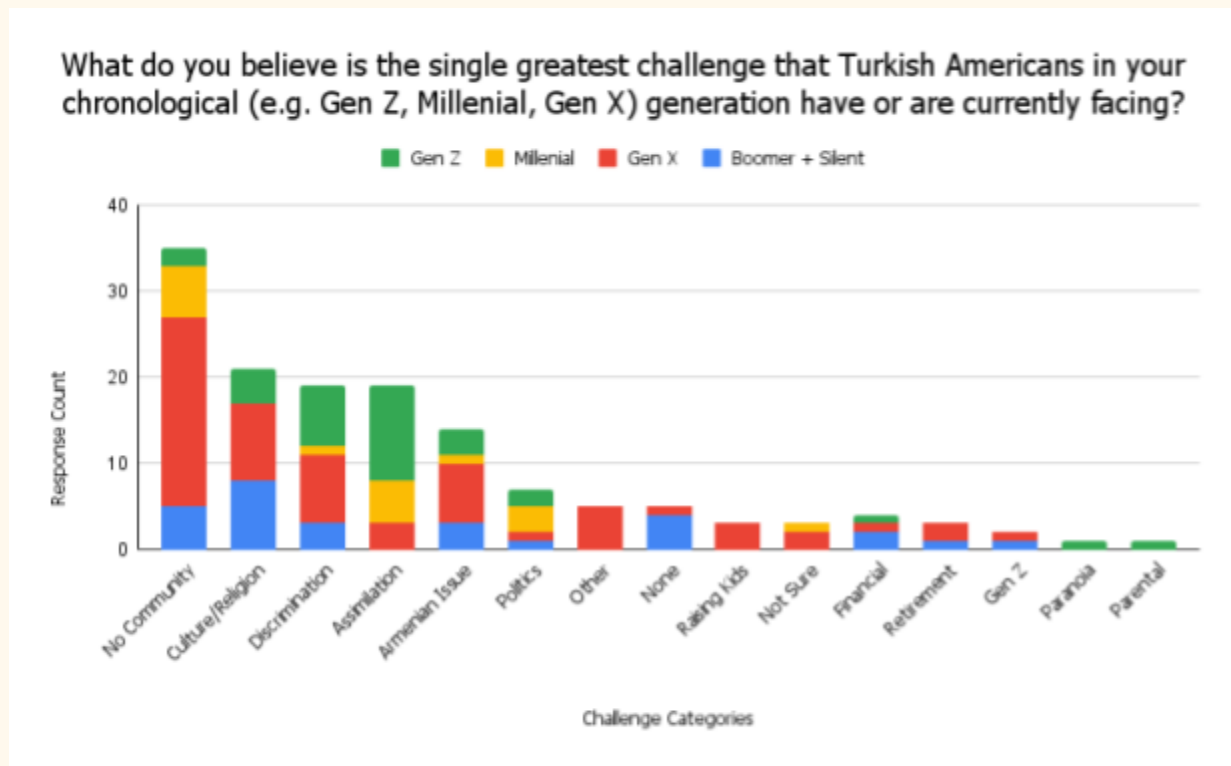


Source: ATAA YC conducted Feb 23 - Apr 6, 2025

Generation Z, the youngest cohort in our survey, identified **assimilation** as their most pressing challenge, with 35.5% of respondents selecting it. This highlights a growing concern among Gen Z Turkish Americans about balancing integration into mainstream U.S. culture with preserving their ethnic and cultural identity.

The second most frequently reported challenge was **discrimination** (22.6%), suggesting heightened awareness and sensitivity to issues of prejudice and social exclusion. This was followed by **culture/religion** (12.9%), continuing the trend seen across older generations, albeit at a lower rate.

Unlike older generations, Gen Z placed less emphasis on community-building, with only 6.5% selecting no community, indicating a possible shift in how younger Turkish Americans experience identity and connection in the diaspora.



Source: ATAA YC conducted Feb 23 - Apr 6, 2025

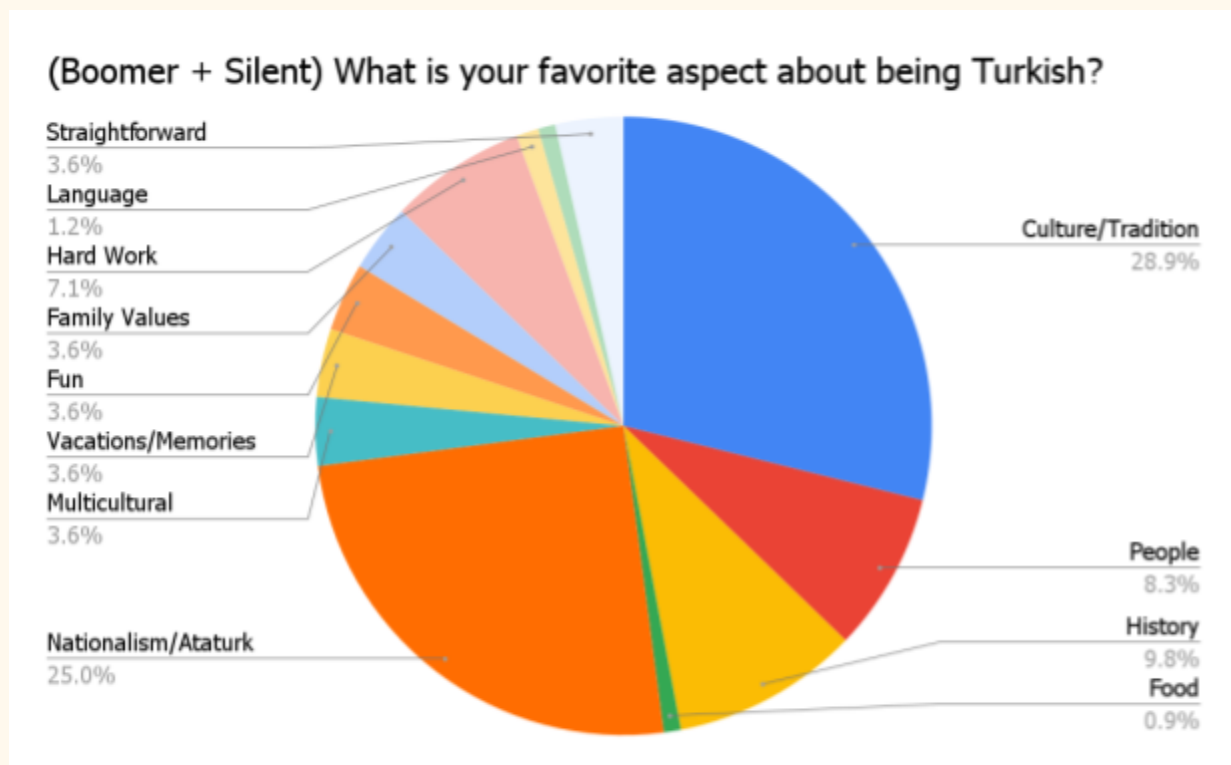
Analyzing the combined responses of all 150 participants, the most frequently reported challenge was **no community**, selected by 35 individuals. This reflects a widespread concern across generations about the lack of cohesive, supportive Turkish American networks in the U.S.

However, it's important to interpret these results with caution. The number of responses per generation was not evenly distributed - Generation X was significantly overrepresented, contributing 71 of the total responses. As a result, the absolute counts in this chart are skewed and may not accurately reflect generational trends on a proportional basis.

This graph offers a helpful snapshot of aggregate concerns but should not be used to draw conclusions about generational differences without adjusting for sample size.

Favorite Aspect

We also asked all participants what their **favorite aspect about being Turkish** was. Responses were analyzed and grouped according to similar characteristics. Among the generations, the top choices notably shifts, which is ripe for a deeper analysis.

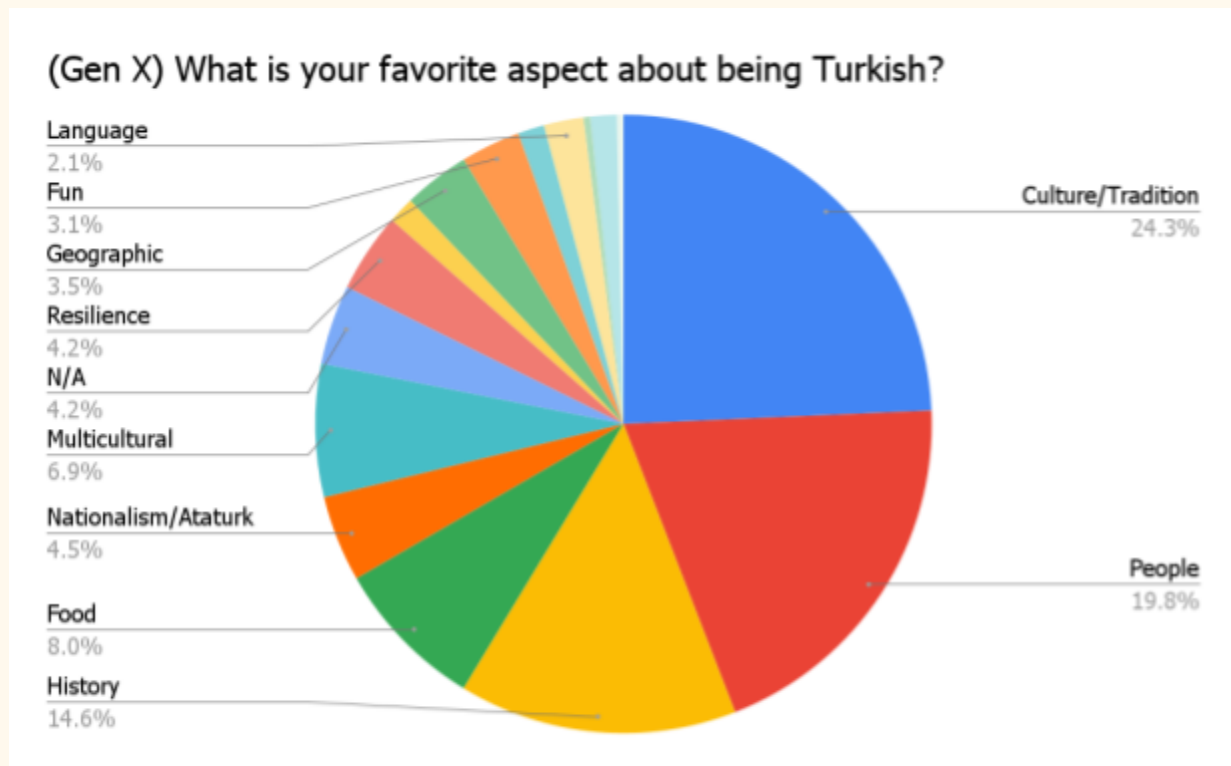


Source: ATAA YC conducted Feb 23 - Apr 6, 2025

For the Silent Generation and Boomers, the most frequently cited favorite aspect was **culture/tradition** (28.9%). This broad category encompasses shared customs, social norms, values, and the intergenerational transmission of behaviors and beliefs that define Turkish identity.

Coming in a close second was **nationalism/Atatürk** (25.0%), highlighting the continued reverence for the founder of modern Türkiye and pride in national identity. The third most cited response was **history** (9.8%), reflecting an appreciation for Türkiye's long and rich past.

It is also worth noting that the **straightforward** category (3.6%) included responses describing how easy or natural it felt to embrace or express a Turkish identity.

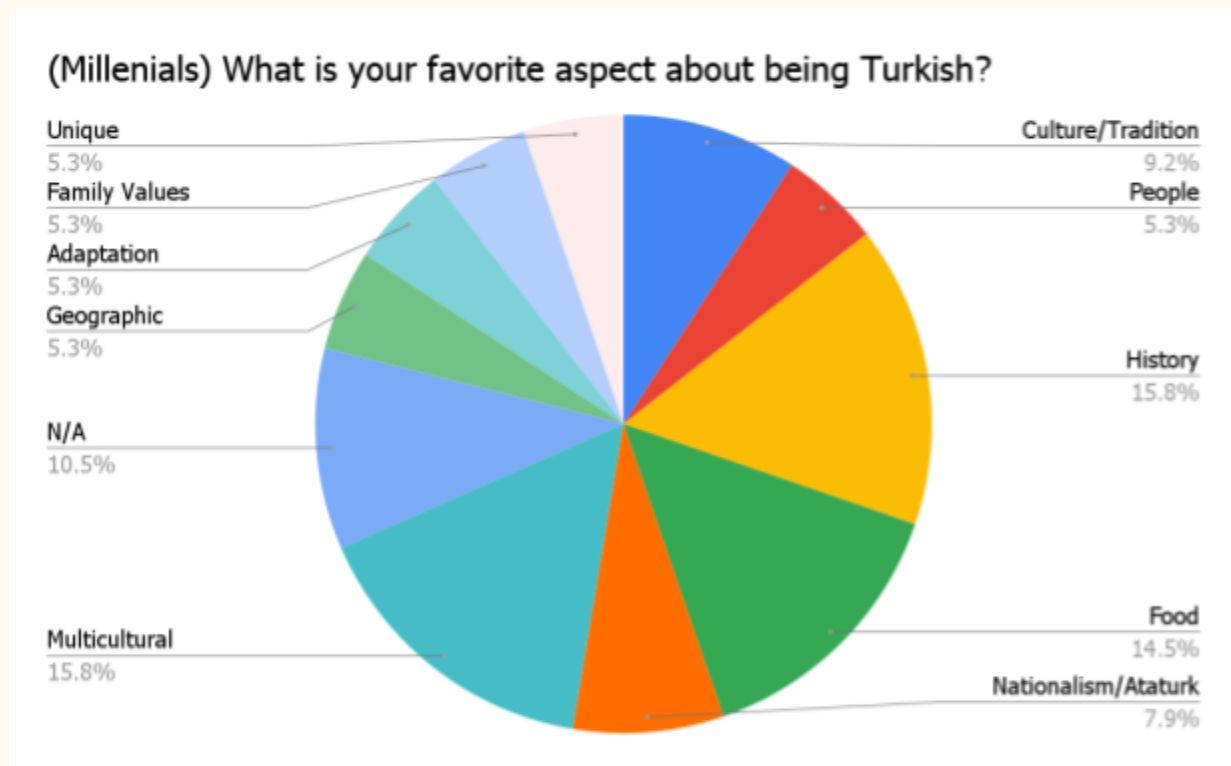


Source: ATAA YC conducted Feb 23 - Apr 6, 2025

Among Generation X participants, the most frequently cited favorite aspect of being Turkish was **culture/tradition** (24.3%). This reflects a strong appreciation for the customs, practices, and values passed down through generations.

The second most common response was **people** (19.8%), referencing the warmth, personality, and character of the Turkish people themselves. This choice highlights a relational and human-centered source of cultural pride.

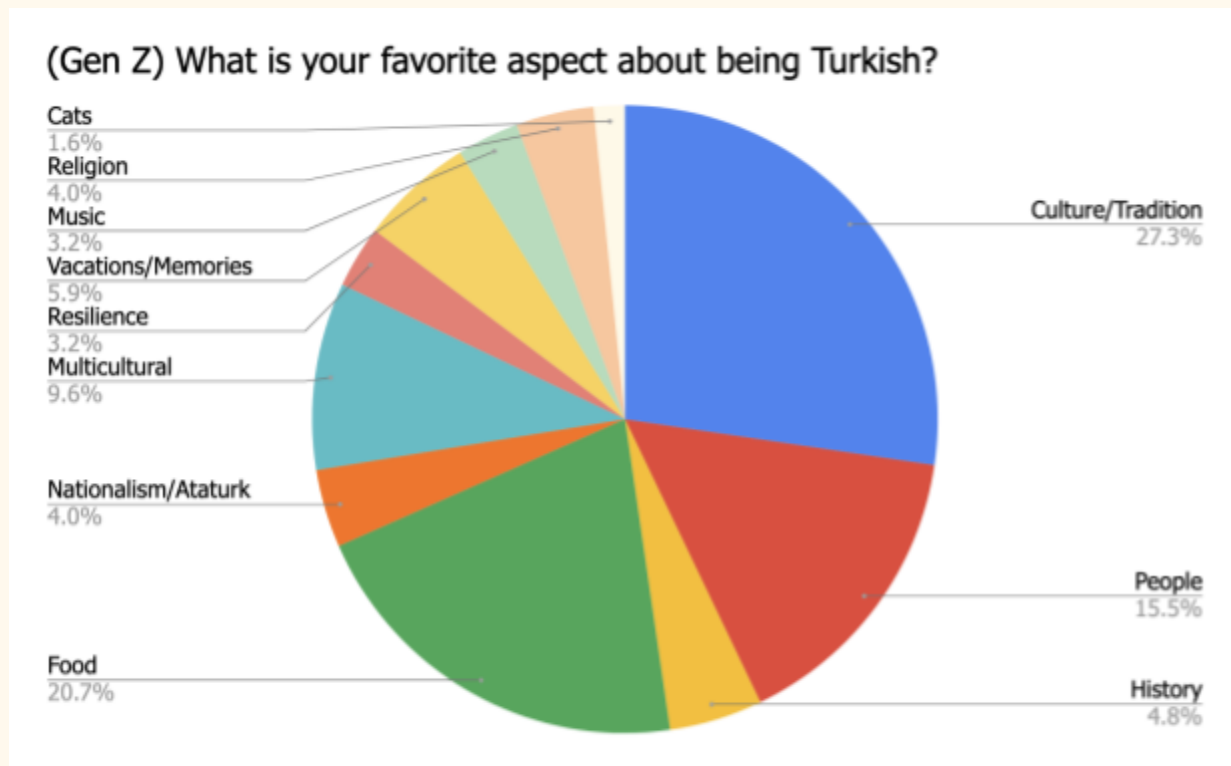
In third place was **history** (14.6%), indicating that many Gen X respondents value the rich and complex historical legacy of Türkiye as a key part of their identity.



Source: ATAA YC conducted Feb 23 - Apr 6, 2025

Among Millennials, the top responses for favorite aspect of being Turkish were **multicultural** and **history**, each selected by 15.8% of respondents. Multicultural reflects pride in embracing both Turkish and non-Turkish identities, such as American, in a way that feels seamless and integrated. History indicates a continued appreciation for Türkiye's rich and diverse past.

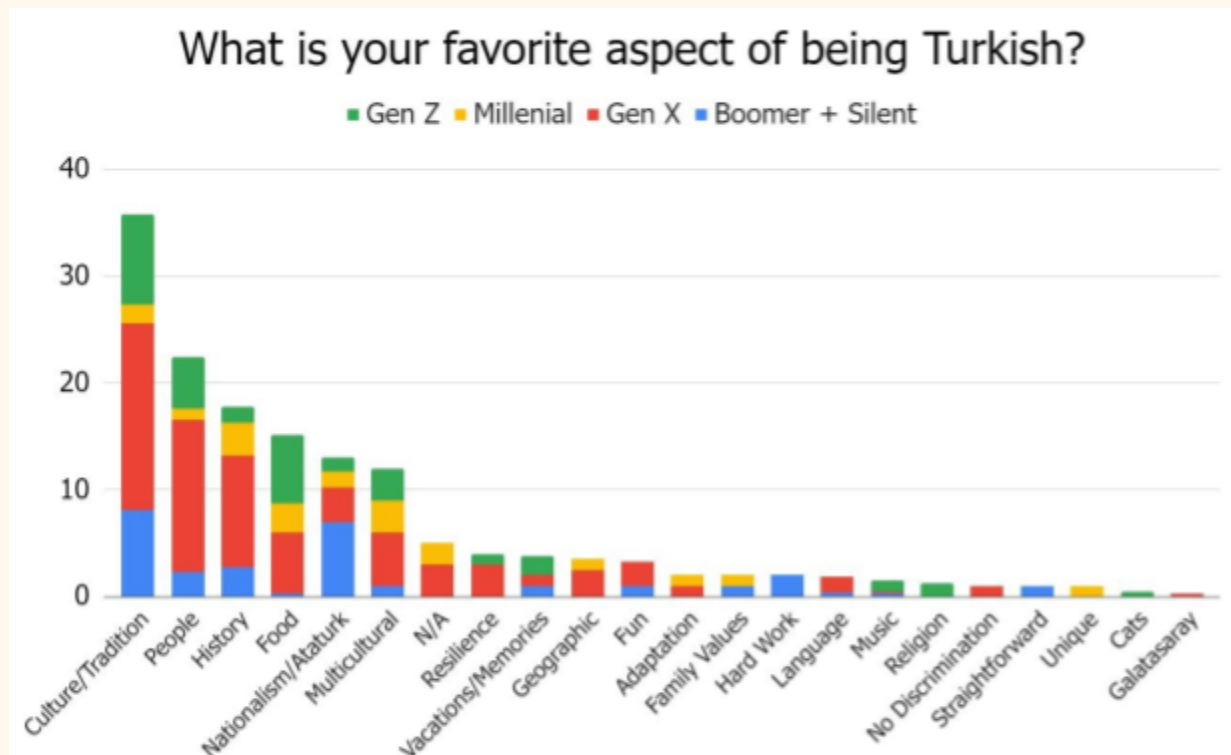
The third most selected response was **food** (14.5%), showing that culinary heritage remains a strong point of cultural connection for this generation.



Source: ATAA YC conducted Feb 23 - Apr 6, 2025

Gen Z shares notable similarities with their parental generation, Gen X. The most commonly selected favorite aspect of being Turkish was **culture/tradition** (27.3%), reflecting a strong connection to shared customs, values, and heritage.

Food was the second most cited response (20.7%), highlighting the continued importance of culinary identity among younger Turkish Americans. In third place was **people** (15.5%), referencing admiration for the character, warmth, or values of fellow Turks.



Source: ATAA YC conducted Feb 23 - Apr 6, 2025

When analyzing all generations collectively, **culture/tradition** stands out as the most frequently cited favorite aspect of being Turkish. This reflects a broad, shared appreciation for heritage, customs, and collective identity across age groups.

The second most common response was **people**, referencing the values, character, and warmth associated with the Turkish community. **History** came in third, highlighting the importance placed on Türkiye's rich and complex past across generational lines.

While other categories such as food, nationalism/Atatürk, and multicultural were also prominent, their popularity varied more significantly by generation.

Who do you Identify Closer to: Turkish or American?

We asked participants a straightforward question: “Who do you identify closer to?” Respondents chose between two options - Turkish or American.



Source: ATAA YC conducted Feb 23 - Apr 6, 2025

Across all generations, the majority of respondents identified more closely with being Turkish. Gen X had the highest rate of Turkish identification (87.3%), followed by Millennials (85.0%) and Boomers + Silent (75.0%). However, Gen Z stood out, with 40.6% of respondents identifying more closely with being American—the highest of any generation and the only group with over 30% identifying this way.

It's important to note a potential bias: participants were more likely to be involved in Turkish communities or culturally Turkish networks, which is likely how they received the survey. As such, we believe the actual proportion of respondents identifying as American is likely underreported. We hypothesize that identification with being American is significantly higher in the broader population than reflected in this sample.

Discussion

Our team has interpreted the survey results, and provide our analysis below.

Silent Gen and Boomers

When analyzing responses across the survey, the Silent Generation and Boomers emerge as the trailblazers - many were not only first-generation Turkish Americans, but among the earliest Turkish migrants to the United States. Their responses reflect the profound cultural adjustment they faced, likely without the support of existing Turkish communities or family networks. This absence of social infrastructure may have intensified their culture shock upon arrival.

This generation also lived through a period marked by geopolitical tensions, including the rise of violent Armenian militant organizations in the 1970s and 1980s. As a result, they were the only generation to list the Armenian issue among their top three challenges—reflecting lived historical context. Yet despite these challenges, Silent Gen and Boomers were not statistically more likely to report discrimination than Gen Z, indicating a notable degree of resilience in the face of adversity.

In terms of what they value most about being Turkish, Silent Gen and Boomers strongly emphasized culture and tradition, as well as nationalism. They were the only generation to include nationalism/Atatürk in their top three favorite aspects. Their responses suggest a deep pride in their Turkish identity, alongside a reflective appreciation for the decades they've spent living in the U.S.

Generation X

While Boomers primarily struggled with cultural adjustment, Generation X was more focused on the lack of community in the U.S. compared to what they had in Türkiye. Many Gen X respondents expressed difficulty raising children without nearby family support and cited feelings of isolation. The Armenian issue, which ranked as a top concern for Boomers, was less prominent for Gen X - likely because much of this generation immigrated after the height of the associated violence.

In terms of what they appreciate most about being Turkish, Gen X strongly valued culture/tradition, people, and history. This emphasis is reflected in the activities of Turkish American organizations, many of which host events centered on cultural holidays and historical education. Large gatherings remain important, often including lectures, celebrations, or religious observances - even among secular members of the community. Traditions such as Iftar dinners and Bayram continue to hold cultural significance.

Gen X also reported the strongest identification with their Turkish identity over their American identity - more so than any other generation. This may be due to their position as a bridge generation: younger than Boomers and Silent Gen, yet not distant enough for most to have American-born grandchildren. Their identity remains strongly tied to their immigrant experience.

Millennials

Millennials present themselves as a generational bridge between Gen X and Gen Z, sharing key concerns with both while also displaying unique priorities. Like Gen X, they expressed a strong concern about the lack of community in the U.S. However, they also resonated with Gen Z's focus on assimilation, reflecting a dual challenge of maintaining cultural identity while integrating into American society.

Distinctly, Millennials stood out by naming politics and financial pressures as top challenges more frequently than other generations. This may reflect their heightened exposure to recent global and domestic economic volatility, including inflation in both Türkiye and the U.S., as well as growing political polarization. We hypothesize that these factors may affect Millennials more acutely than older generations, who are generally more established and financially secure.

Millennials also showed a strong awareness of their multicultural identity - multiculturalism was one of the most frequently cited favorite aspects of being Turkish. They demonstrated the most diverse range of responses to this question, suggesting a generation that embraces many facets of Turkishness. Despite this diversity, the group still showed strong cultural attachment, with 85% identifying more closely with being Turkish than American.

Generation Z

Generation Z stands apart from the older generations due to a key characteristic: the majority are second or third-generation Turkish Americans, meaning they were born and raised in the U.S. This generational shift is evident in many of their responses. Their top reported challenge was assimilation, reflecting concerns about the erosion of cultural identity as they become more integrated into American life. Notably, 40.6% of Gen Z respondents identified more with being American than Turkish - a stark contrast to previous generations.

Gen Z shares many values with their parents' generation, Gen X, especially a strong appreciation for culture/tradition and people. This continuity likely reflects successful cultural transmission from Gen X and the impact of Turkish community organizations that emphasize gatherings and shared experiences.

However, unlike older generations, Gen Z expressed little interest in history and no strong attachment to the Turkish language. Only 4.8% of respondents listed history among their favorite aspects of being Turkish, and not a single Gen Z respondent named language as a cultural priority. This suggests a shifting set of values and a need for community organizations to adapt accordingly.

We recommend that Turkish American associations emphasize activities that highlight culture/tradition, food, and social connection, such as holiday celebrations, youth groups, and high school chapters. These align well with Gen Z's interests and provide accessible ways to strengthen community bonds.

In contrast, we suggest scaling back casual language immersion and history-heavy programming for Gen Z. Many know the basics behind Turkish history but are not interested in the details. Similarly, the use of Turkish in casual community events can be exclusionary for youth who do not speak the language.

Instead, we propose a model where Turkish is offered as a cultural enrichment opportunity through a strongly-funded set of Turkish language schools; however, English should be spoken and heavily-encouraged at both casual and formal events for inclusivity purposes. If future generations are not made to feel welcomed or able to participate, the community risks losing engagement from individuals who are likely to hold significant economic and cultural influence in the decades to come.

Conclusion

Turkish Americans represent a unique and resilient community. To outsiders, we may be seen as another “White” or “European” group - an identity that can shield us from some forms of discrimination. Yet this perceived proximity to whiteness comes with a hidden cost: a heightened risk of cultural assimilation. Unlike visibly distinct ethnic minorities, Turkish Americans risk fading into the mainstream, as has happened to once-prominent Italian, German, French, and Spanish diasporas in the United States.

To preserve our identity, Turkish Americans must adopt a hybrid strategy. In this model, cultural values are preserved and celebrated, even as members become fully integrated into American life. The strength of the community lies in its generational continuity, where culture is not confined to first-generation immigrants but is embraced by their children, grandchildren, and beyond.

Without this intentional strategy, we risk repeating a familiar cycle: our children grow up, assimilate, and the cultural legacy weakens - only to be partially recovered by the next wave of immigrants. It is time to build a community where every generation belongs and contributes, ensuring that Turkish American identity thrives into the future.

Acknowledgments

The ATAA Youth Committee Leadership team acknowledges the contributions of Ms. Dalin Seker and Ms. Dila Arat, members of the ATAA YC Event Subcommittee who prepared all of the graphs displayed in the paper. We also thank the ATAA Board of Directors for supporting our work.