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A forgotten chapter of migrant democracy: TISBO's pioneering political participation project for older Turkish migrants in the Netherlands (1994)

Abstract

This article examines the pioneering political participation initiatives undertaken by the Turkish Islamic Elderly Union (Turks-Islamitische Ouderen Bond, TISBO) in the Netherlands in 1994. At a time when older migrants were frequently discussed in relation to welfare provision, social dependency and care needs, TISBO promoted a forward-looking approach that recognised older Turkish migrants as active participants in democratic and civic life. Employing a qualitative historical case-study design, the research draws on original organisational correspondence, meeting programmes, prepared political speeches, provincial government documents and contemporary administrative records. Particular attention is devoted to political information programmes organised in cooperation with provincial authorities in North Holland and South Holland in January 1994. The archival evidence documents TISBO's efforts to bring older Turkish migrants into direct contact with elected representatives and political parties, explain the Dutch political and electoral system, provide Turkish-language information and encourage participation in public affairs. The involvement of representatives from different political parties demonstrates the pluralistic orientation of these initiatives, while cooperation with provincial institutions illustrates the organisation's capacity to establish connections between migrant communities and formal democratic structures. The study distinguishes documented organisational activities from intended outcomes and avoids assuming measurable changes in electoral participation without supporting evidence. It argues that TISBO's initiatives represented an early migrant-led approach to civic inclusion that extended beyond conventional welfare-oriented perspectives on older migrants. The findings contribute to the historical understanding of migrant ageing, political participation and civil society representation in the Netherlands.

Keywords: TISBO, older Turkish migrants, political participation, civic inclusion, electoral education, migrant organisations, Netherlands

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Abbreviations: TISBO, Turkish Islamic Elderly Union; NISBO, Netherlands Islamic Elderly Union; WRR, Netherlands scientific council for government policy; VVD, people's party for freedom and democracy; PvdA, labour party; CDA, christian democratic appeal; D66, democrats 66

Introduction

The ageing of first-generation labour migrants represents an important dimension of European migration history, reflecting the gradual transformation of temporary labour migration into permanent settlement. Migrants who initially arrived in Western European countries under recruitment arrangements commonly understood as temporary subsequently established enduring family, social and institutional relationships in their countries of residence. As these populations approached retirement age, questions concerning housing, welfare provision, healthcare and social participation became increasingly significant. However, the historical experience of older migrants cannot be adequately understood through their welfare needs alone. Their opportunities to exercise political rights, participate in democratic processes and engage with public institutions also constitute essential dimensions of social inclusion and civic belonging.[1–5]

In the Netherlands, the transition from temporary labour migration towards permanent settlement was accompanied by a gradual reconsideration of immigrant participation and minority representation. The Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy[6,7] contributed to this changing policy perspective by recognising the increasingly permanent character of immigrant settlement. An important development followed in 1985, when legislation extended municipal voting rights to non-Dutch residents meeting specified conditions, enabling their participation in local elections from 1986 onwards. Nevertheless, the formal availability of electoral rights did not automatically guarantee effective political participation. Language barriers, limited familiarity with democratic institutions and insufficient access to political information could continue to restrict opportunities for meaningful engagement, particularly among older first-generation migrants.[6–9]

Within this changing environment, migrant-led organisations increasingly sought to address the social, institutional and representational needs of their communities. The Turkish Islamic Elderly Union (Turks-Islamitische Ouderen Bond, TISBO), founded on 5 July 1993 by Drs. Süleyman T. K. Damra, provides a significant example of this development. Emerging during the pioneering Haarlem housing initiative for older Turkish migrants, TISBO sought to improve their living conditions, strengthen independent representation and establish cooperation with public institutions. Its early activities combined housing advocacy, community mobilisation, educational cooperation and broader efforts to promote social participation. Historical organisational records, including Handleiding TISBO-Afdelingen, TISBO Werkplan 1995 and TISBO Projecten 1995, document the development of these institutional priorities.[10–13]

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The organisation's approach was particularly noteworthy because it extended beyond conventional welfare-oriented perspectives on migrant ageing. Rather than viewing older Turkish migrants exclusively as recipients of social assistance or specialised care, TISBO recognised their potential role as active participants in the public and democratic life of the Netherlands. This orientation was reflected in a series of political information and participation initiatives undertaken in early 1994. Original archival documents dated January 1994 reveal cooperation with provincial authorities, political representatives and community organisations in preparing meetings intended to improve older Turkish migrants' understanding of the Dutch political system, electoral procedures and opportunities for democratic engagement.[14,15]

Two particularly significant programmes were scheduled for 22 January 1994 in Haarlem, North Holland, and 24 January 1994 at the provincial government building in The Hague, South Holland. The surviving programmes, institutional correspondence and prepared speeches demonstrate TISBO's efforts to bring older Turkish migrants into direct contact with provincial officials and representatives of different political parties. The South Holland programme included planned contributions from representatives of the VVD, PvdA, CDA, GroenLinks and D66, alongside presentations concerning the Dutch political system and the role of political participation in representing older Turkish migrants' interests. Correspondence also documents arrangements for translating political information into Turkish, illustrating the importance attached to overcoming linguistic barriers to civic engagement.[15,16]

The timing of these initiatives was especially relevant because Dutch municipal elections were scheduled for 2 March 1994. By organising political information activities in the weeks preceding these elections, TISBO sought to connect formal electoral rights with opportunities for informed participation. At the same time, the inclusion of politicians from different parties indicates an approach oriented towards political pluralism rather than the promotion of a single party. The surviving documents establish the organisation's objectives, institutional partnerships and preparations, although they do not by themselves demonstrate measurable changes in voting behaviour or electoral turnout.[8]

The broader institutional significance of these activities becomes clearer when considered alongside the subsequent development of organised Muslim elderly representation in the Netherlands. On 5 July 1995, Drs. Damra founded the Netherlands Islamic Elderly Union (Nederlandse Islamitische Bond voor Ouderen, NISBO), extending representation to older Muslims from different national and ethnic backgrounds. Damra's discussion[2] of NISBO's role in preparing older migrants for the future, together with later organisational documents concerning elderly advisory services and institutional priorities, illustrates the continuing importance of representation, access to services and participation within this organisational trajectory.[17,18] These later developments provide historical context for TISBO's earlier initiatives without establishing that the political participation programmes of 1994 directly caused subsequent institutional outcomes.

Despite growing scholarly attention to immigrant political participation, the specific historical role of organisations representing older migrants remains insufficiently explored. Existing research has examined migration, political incorporation, ageing and welfare provision, yet the intersection of elderly representation, electoral education and migrant-led civic initiatives warrants closer historical investigation. The TISBO experience offers an opportunity to examine how an organisation established primarily to represent older migrants developed a broader understanding of social inclusion encompassing democratic participation and institutional engagement.

Against this background, the present study addresses the following research question:

How did TISBO's political participation initiatives in 1994 seek to strengthen the democratic engagement and civic inclusion of older Turkish migrants in the Netherlands, and in what respects did these initiatives represent a forward-looking approach to migrant elderly representation?

Employing a qualitative historical case-study approach, the research draws on original TISBO correspondence, organisational records, meeting programmes, prepared political speeches, provincial government documents and related archival materials. Through chronological reconstruction and thematic documentary analysis, it examines the organisation's objectives, institutional partnerships, political pluralism, language accessibility and efforts to encourage participation. The study distinguishes documented activities from intended outcomes and places TISBO's initiatives within the wider historical development of migrant representation and democratic inclusion in the Netherlands.

Literature review and historical background

From temporary labour migration to permanent settlement and ageing

The history of Turkish labour migration to the Netherlands forms an essential background to understanding the political participation initiatives developed by TISBO in 1994. From the 1960s onwards, Turkish workers arrived under labour recruitment arrangements that were generally understood as temporary. However, family reunification, established community networks and changing personal circumstances gradually transformed temporary migration into permanent settlement. This development challenged earlier assumptions that migrant workers would eventually return to their countries of origin.[3,6,7]

By the early 1990s, increasing numbers of first-generation Turkish migrants were approaching retirement age in the Netherlands. Their circumstances raised questions concerning housing, social welfare, healthcare, family relationships and access to public institutions. Research on migrant ageing has subsequently demonstrated that older migrants' experiences are shaped by interconnected social, economic and institutional conditions rather than by age or migration background alone.[2,4,19]

The historical development of TISBO illustrates how these demographic changes generated new forms of migrant-led organisation. Founded on 5 July 1993 by Drs. Süleyman T. K. Damra, TISBO emerged in a period when the residential and welfare needs of older Turkish migrants were receiving growing attention. Its involvement in the Haarlem housing initiative reflected an effort to translate the expressed preferences of older migrants into practical institutional arrangements. Contemporary housing-preference investigations and subsequent organisational documents reveal a broader concern with independent living, social participation and the representation of older migrants' interests.[10,11,20,21]

Political rights and migrant participation in the Netherlands

Political participation among immigrant populations became an increasingly important issue in Dutch public policy during the late

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twentieth century. Rath[22] examined the political participation of ethnic minorities in the Netherlands, drawing attention to the relationship between legal status, socioeconomic conditions and opportunities for political engagement. Entzinger[8] subsequently analysed the political incorporation of immigrants within the changing Dutch policy environment, including the extension of municipal electoral rights to eligible foreign residents. The legal developments of the 1980s were particularly important. Following constitutional and electoral reforms, non-Dutch residents who satisfied the applicable residence and other eligibility requirements were permitted to vote and stand as candidates in municipal elections from 1986 onwards. This represented an important expansion of local political participation. However, municipal electoral rights remained distinct from voting rights in provincial and national elections, for which Dutch nationality was required.[8,16]

The distinction is essential for interpreting TISBO's initiatives in 1994. Although its political information programmes involved cooperation with provincial authorities in North Holland and South Holland, such cooperation did not imply that all participants were entitled to vote in provincial elections. Rather, provincial institutions provided opportunities for explaining governmental responsibilities, discussing political representation and facilitating contact between older migrants and political representatives. Formal electoral rights should also be distinguished from the practical conditions necessary for their exercise. Knowledge of electoral procedures, familiarity with political institutions, access to understandable information and opportunities to interact with political representatives can influence how individuals experience democratic participation. This distinction was particularly relevant to first-generation migrants who had spent much of their working lives in the Netherlands but might have had limited opportunities to become familiar with the country's political and administrative arrangements.

TISBO's January 1994 activities emerged within this context. The municipal elections scheduled for 2 March 1994 provided a concrete electoral setting for information programmes intended to explain political participation to older Turkish migrants. The surviving archival documents demonstrate that TISBO sought to connect legal opportunities for participation with accessible information and direct institutional engagement.[14,16]

Migrant organisations, civic inclusion and collective representation

Migrant organisations can perform functions extending beyond the provision of cultural, religious or social services. They may represent community interests, communicate with public authorities, facilitate access to institutions and create opportunities for participation in collective decision-making. From this perspective, civic inclusion concerns not only formal membership in a political community but also the practical ability to obtain information, communicate preferences and participate in public life. The development of TISBO provides a historical example of these interconnected functions. The organisation emerged from a context of community mobilisation and institutional cooperation surrounding the Haarlem housing initiative. Its early activities involved identifying the needs of older Turkish migrants, establishing relationships with housing and welfare organisations and encouraging collective representation. Subsequent organisational documents demonstrate that its objectives extended beyond a single residential project.[20]

The political information programmes of January 1994 introduced a further dimension. By inviting representatives of different political parties and cooperating with provincial authorities, TISBO sought to facilitate direct communication between older Turkish migrants and established democratic institutions. The programmes combined explanations of governmental responsibilities with discussions of political rights and party perspectives.[15,16,23]

An important feature was the attention given to linguistic accessibility. Correspondence dated 6 January 1994 requested advance copies of political speeches so that their contents could be translated into Turkish. A subsequent communication from D66 representative Monique Terwiel referred to the provision of Turkish-language electoral material. These arrangements demonstrate that TISBO regarded access to understandable political information as an important practical condition for participation.[24–26]

The inclusion of representatives from several political parties also suggests an approach oriented towards political pluralism. Rather than restricting information to a single political perspective, the programmes were designed to expose participants to different political viewpoints. The available records therefore support an interpretation of TISBO's activities as initiatives in civic and electoral education, although the extent of participants' subsequent political engagement cannot be established from these documents alone.

The institutional vision of TISBO and its subsequent development

TISBO's early institutional development reflected a broad understanding of the circumstances of older Turkish migrants. Its organisational activities addressed housing, welfare, community representation, education and opportunities for social participation. The Handleiding TISBO-Afdelingen, TISBO Werkplan 1995 and TISBO Projecten 1995 provide evidence of the organisation's developing structures and priorities.[10–12]

This institutional approach was associated with the leadership of Drs. Süleyman T. K. Damra, who founded TISBO in July 1993 and subsequently established the Netherlands Islamic Elderly Union (Nederlandse Islamitische Bond voor Ouderen, NISBO) on 5 July 1995. The establishment of NISBO extended organised representation beyond older Turkish migrants to older Muslims from different national and ethnic backgrounds. Damra's discussion[2] of NISBO's role in preparing older Turkish migrants for the future provides a relevant contemporary perspective on the importance attributed to institutional representation. Later NISBO documents concerning elderly advisory services, public policy and organisational planning illustrate the continuing development of this broader institutional agenda.[18,27,28]

Yılmaz's study[13] of the Haarlem housing initiative further situates TISBO's origins within the development of migrant-led social initiatives and institutional cooperation in the Netherlands. His separate historical account of Islamic institutional development[29] provides contextual material concerning the wider emergence of independent Muslim organisations.

Analytical perspective and research gap

The preceding literature and historical evidence suggest that the political participation of older migrants should be examined through several interconnected dimensions: formal political rights, accessibility of electoral information, institutional engagement, collective representation and opportunities for civic participation. Existing scholarship on immigrant political incorporation provides an important foundation for understanding the legal and institutional environment of the Netherlands in the 1980s and 1990s.[8,22] Research

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on migrant ageing, meanwhile, offers perspectives on the changing social circumstances of first-generation migrants and the importance of appropriate institutional responses.[4,19,30] However, the specific historical intersection between older migrant representation and organised political information initiatives has received comparatively limited attention.

The TISBO case allows this intersection to be examined through original archival documentation. Three analytical dimensions guide the present study: first, the organisation's efforts to improve older Turkish migrants' understanding of political rights and institutions; second, its cooperation with provincial authorities and representatives of different political parties; and third, its practical arrangements for accessible information and community outreach. The term pioneering is used here to describe the documented development of an organised, migrant-led approach combining elderly advocacy with political information and institutional participation. The assessment of these initiatives as forward-looking rests on their historical timing, organisational objectives and documented practices rather than on an assumption that they were the first initiatives of their kind or that they demonstrably increased electoral turnout.

Methodology

Research design and historical scope

This study employs a qualitative historical case-study design to examine the political participation and civic inclusion initiatives undertaken by the Turkish Islamic Elderly Union (TISBO) in the Netherlands in 1994. The research combines chronological reconstruction, thematic documentary analysis and cross-document comparison to investigate how a migrant-led elderly organisation sought to facilitate political information, institutional engagement and democratic participation.[31,32]

The principal historical focus is January 1994, particularly the political information programmes scheduled for 22 January in Haarlem, North Holland, and 24 January in The Hague, South Holland. Preparatory correspondence, organisational planning and related community outreach activities are examined to reconstruct the development of these initiatives. Earlier institutional developments and subsequent TISBO and NISBO publications provide contextual evidence without extending the principal period of investigation.

Primary archival sources and documentary selection

The study draws primarily on original historical documents associated with TISBO's political information activities. These include institutional correspondence, meeting invitations, organisational agendas, programme schedules, prepared political speeches, provincial government communications, electoral information materials and administrative records. Particularly significant sources include correspondence dated 6 January 1994 concerning the participation of political representatives, TISBO's organisational planning documents dated 9 January 1994, and the programmes prepared for the North Holland and South Holland meetings. Additional documents include prepared addresses by provincial officials, political representatives' contributions and correspondence concerning Turkish-language electoral information.[14,15,24,25]

The documentary materials are supplemented by TISBO's organisational publications, including Handleiding TISBO-Afdelingen, TISBO Werkplan 1995 and TISBO Projecten 1995. Relevant NISBO publications and Damra's institutional reflections[2] provide further historical context concerning the development of migrant elderly representation. Yılmaz's research[13] on the Haarlem housing initiative contributes contextual information about TISBO's origins and broader institutional environment. Documents were selected according to four criteria: direct relevance to the initiatives under investigation, identifiable institutional provenance, chronological traceability and evidentiary significance. Original correspondence and contemporary administrative records receive particular attention because they document organisational intentions, institutional communication and programme arrangements close to the time of the events.

Chronological reconstruction and thematic documentary analysis

The analysis proceeds through three complementary stages.

a) First, chronological reconstruction establishes the sequence of organisational preparations, invitations, institutional correspondence and political information programmes. Particular attention is given to the relationship between TISBO's January activities and the municipal elections scheduled for 2 March 1994.

b) Second, thematic documentary analysis identifies four interconnected dimensions: political and electoral information, cooperation with provincial authorities, political pluralism and linguistic accessibility. These categories provide a framework for examining how TISBO sought to connect older Turkish migrants with democratic institutions and political representatives.

c) Third, cross-document comparison assesses the consistency of information recorded in organisational documents, prepared speeches, programme schedules and administrative correspondence. Differences between preliminary and revised programmes are examined to distinguish changing arrangements from confirmed activities.

This procedure also distinguishes planned participation, documented institutional engagement and independently verifiable outcomes. Invitations and programme schedules establish intended activities, while prepared speeches document the positions and information formulated for presentation. Such materials are not automatically treated as evidence that every invited representative attended or that every prepared address was delivered in full.

Historical interpretation and evidentiary limitations

The historical significance of TISBO's initiatives is assessed in relation to their documented objectives, institutional arrangements and contemporary political context. The study does not assume that political information programmes necessarily increased electoral turnout, changed voting preferences or produced lasting political participation. Similarly, the description of these initiatives as pioneering and forward-looking refers to their documented combination of migrant elderly representation, multilingual political information and cooperation with democratic institutions. It does not constitute an unverified claim that TISBO organised the first such activities in the Netherlands or Europe.

TISBO's political participation initiatives in 1994

Institutional planning and the January 1994 board agenda

The political participation initiatives undertaken by the Turkish Islamic Elderly Union (TISBO) in early 1994 emerged from a

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deliberate organisational effort to encourage older Turkish migrants to engage with Dutch democratic institutions. An agenda prepared for a TISBO North Holland board meeting on 9 January 1994 provides particularly significant evidence of this planning process. The document identifies a series of political participation meetings scheduled between 22 January and 20 February 1994, indicating that the organisation intended to reach older Turkish migrants through both provincial-level information programmes and smaller community gatherings.[14]

The first major meeting was scheduled for 22 January 1994 at Dienstencentrum Schalkererf in Haarlem. The invitation plan envisaged participation from several locations, including Haarlem, Alkmaar, Beverwijk, IJmuiden, Amsterdam and Zaandam. The second meeting was planned for 24 January at the provincial government building of South Holland in The Hague, with prospective participants drawn from The Hague, Rotterdam, Schiedam, Vlaardingen and surrounding communities. The projected invitations for these two meetings each totalled approximately 210 people.[14]

The same agenda identified further political participation meetings for 30 January, 5 February and 20 February 1994, associated respectively with the Selimiye Mosque, Fatih Mosque and Ehlibeyt association in Haarlem. These arrangements illustrate an outreach strategy connecting formal governmental settings with familiar religious and community institutions.[14]

The planned geographical distribution was significant. Rather than limiting its activities to a single neighbourhood or established organisational membership, TISBO sought to reach older Turkish migrants across several municipalities. The inclusion of mosques and community associations suggests an attempt to make political information accessible through existing social networks. The board agenda documents the intended programme and invitation targets, but it does not independently establish that every scheduled meeting took place or that the projected attendance figures were achieved. Nevertheless, it provides clear evidence that TISBO had developed a coordinated programme of political participation activities before the municipal elections of March 1994.

The north holland political information programme, 22 January 1994

Preparations for the North Holland political information programme included direct correspondence with invited political representatives and arrangements for translating their contributions into Turkish, as documented in TISBO's correspondence dated 6 January 1994.[23,25]

A letter signed by Berna Yılmaz and addressed to T. Capel requested an advance copy of the intended speech, specifically explaining that the material would be translated for the Turkish-speaking audience. The correspondence provides evidence of early attention to linguistic accessibility and indicates that TISBO sought to prepare participants for meaningful engagement with political information rather than relying exclusively on Dutch-language presentations.[25]

A particularly important source is the five-page prepared address of J. E. M. Berman, a member of the provincial executive of North Holland, dated 22 January 1994. Entitled Voorlichtingsdag TISBO – Politieke Participatie Turkse Ouderen, the document explicitly identifies the occasion as a provincial information day concerning the political participation of older Turkish migrants.[23]

The address describes the meeting as an opportunity for provincial representatives from different democratic political parties to explain the provincial administration and discuss political participation. Berman's prepared remarks introduce the functions of North Holland's provincial government, its relationship with municipalities and its responsibilities in areas including spatial planning, environmental protection, infrastructure and public administration.[23]

The significance of this material extends beyond the administrative information it contains. By addressing older Turkish migrants directly as an audience interested in governmental affairs, the prepared speech reflects an institutional approach in which their participation in civic and political discussions was considered relevant and legitimate. Although the prepared address offers strong evidence of the programme's institutional content and intended audience, its surviving form does not independently verify every aspect of the meeting's actual proceedings. The historical finding is therefore framed primarily in terms of documented institutional cooperation and political information rather than unverified claims about participant responses or subsequent electoral behaviour.

The South Holland political information programme, 24 January 1994

The South Holland political information programme, prepared for 24 January 1994 at the provincial government building in The Hague, represents one of the most extensively documented components of TISBO's initiative. The surviving programme, entitled Programma Voorlichtingsdag Zuid-Holland 24 januari 1994 – Politieke participatie Turkse ouderen, records a structured sequence of presentations involving TISBO representatives, provincial officials and politicians associated with five political parties.[15]

The programme was scheduled to begin with registration, followed by an introduction from Seher Güngör, chair of TISBO South Holland. J. Pool, a member of the South Holland provincial executive, was listed to deliver the opening address. Drs. S. T. K. Damra, national chair of TISBO, was assigned a presentation concerning the role of politics in representing the interests of older Turkish migrants.[15]

Additional planned contributions included Hamdi Mert, chair of the Islamic Foundation Netherlands, and Veli Yücesan, secretary of the Netherlands Islamic Federation, who was to explain the Dutch political system. The programme then provided for presentations by representatives of five political parties: Erica Terpstra (VVD), Th. Apostolou (PvdA), D. Ramlal (CDA), Herman Meijer (GroenLinks) and Monique Terwiel (D66).[15]

This combination of institutional presentations and political contributions is a distinctive feature of the initiative. Participants were to receive information not only about governmental structures and electoral processes but also about different political perspectives. The programme therefore connected basic political education with opportunities for direct engagement with political representatives.[15,16]

A contemporary TISBO press release further clarified the organisation's intentions. It described political participation as relevant to older Turkish migrants' opportunities to participate in Dutch society and presented the information day as a means of improving their knowledge of political institutions and democratic processes. The event also required organisational and financial planning. An accompanying budget listed expenditures for interpreting, personnel, video recording, accommodation, equipment and related costs, with a total subsidy request of 6,000 Dutch guilders. The inclusion of interpretation and audiovisual materials demonstrates the attention given to communication and the accessibility of information. However, the surviving budget establishes a funding request rather than confirmed expenditure or payment.[15]

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Together, the programme, press release and financial documentation demonstrate that TISBO designed the South Holland initiative as a structured political information event involving multiple institutions and forms of communication.[15]

Cooperation with provincial authorities and political representatives

An important characteristic of TISBO's 1994 political participation initiatives was its cooperation with provincial authorities and representatives of different political parties. The information programmes created opportunities for older Turkish migrants to become acquainted with Dutch governmental institutions and a range of political perspectives. The surviving presentations from five major Dutch political parties of the period—the VVD, PvdA, CDA, GroenLinks and D66— provide valuable historical evidence of the issues communicated to TISBO and its intended audience.

VVD (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy). The prepared presentation by M. C. H. Heineken for the North Holland meeting emphasised the importance of maintaining independence, personal responsibility and active participation in later life. The document addressed elderly housing, the accessibility of public facilities, flexible retirement arrangements and the relationship between public provision and individual initiative. It presented older people as individuals who should remain engaged in social life and retain opportunities to make decisions concerning their own circumstances. These themes connected the VVD's elderly policy perspectives with TISBO's broader concern for the independence and participation of older migrants.[33]

PvdA (Labour Party). The surviving document on the PvdA's approach to immigrants in the forthcoming government period emphasised equal treatment, solidarity and the prevention of discrimination. It supported the participation of legally resident migrants in Dutch society while stressing the importance of accessible education, Dutch-language learning and opportunities for employment. The document also recognised the need for certain provisions to respond to specific circumstances associated with ethnic background. Its perspective connected civic participation with social rights, institutional accessibility and the wider conditions of integration.[34]

CDA (Christian Democratic Appeal). The prepared speaking notes attributed to D. Ramlal explicitly addressed the political participation of older people from minority communities, particularly Turkish migrants. The document welcomed TISBO's initiative and emphasised that the permanent settlement of ethnic minorities made their participation in Dutch public life increasingly important. It discussed the role of political parties in encouraging minority participation, the activities of the CDA's Intercultural Council and the importance of understanding democratic procedures. Political participation was presented not merely as voting or eligibility for election, but also as contributing to discussions, expressing opinions and participating in decisions affecting society.[35]

GroenLinks (GreenLeft). Herman Meijer's prepared presentation for the South Holland programme addressed environmental protection, economic fairness and multicultural coexistence. It emphasised equal rights, opposition to racism and discrimination, improved opportunities for immigrants in employment and education, and broader political representation. The document also advocated extending political rights for foreign residents beyond the municipal level. Its discussion of elderly welfare included support for improving the financial circumstances of older people receiving only a basic state pension. These positions reflected a conception of civic inclusion connecting political participation with social and economic equality.[36]

D66 (Democrats 66). The surviving D66 materials addressed democratic participation, public administration and elderly welfare. Monique Terwiel's correspondence to TISBO included material concerning the party's political programme and a Turkish-language electoral leaflet, illustrating attention to accessible political communication. A separate prepared address by Marjo van Maastricht-Thijssen, a D66 representative in the Provincial States of North Holland, discussed the social consequences of an ageing population, the integration of migrants and the importance of enabling older people to remain independent for as long as possible. Her presentation also referred to earlier encounters with older Turkish migrants during discussions of the Haarlem housing initiative. These materials connected political engagement with elderly care, independent living and the recognition of migrants' changing circumstances in the Netherlands.[37,38]

Taken together, these documents reveal both differences and overlapping concerns among the political representatives involved in TISBO's initiatives. The presentations approached political participation through different perspectives, including personal independence, social solidarity, community responsibility, equal rights, democratic engagement and public service provision. Their inclusion within TISBO's programmes provided an opportunity for older Turkish migrants to encounter multiple political viewpoints rather than information from a single party. The significance of this pluralistic approach lies in TISBO's role as an intermediary between migrant communities and established political institutions. By inviting representatives from across the political spectrum and arranging accessible information, the organisation sought to strengthen older migrants' understanding of democratic life and their opportunities for informed participation. The documents record the political positions and prepared contributions of the invited representatives; they do not establish that TISBO endorsed these positions or that all contributions were delivered in full.

Multilingual political education and electoral information

Language accessibility constituted a practical component of TISBO's political participation strategy. The surviving correspondence indicates that the organisation recognised the importance of making information understandable to older Turkish migrants who might have had limited familiarity with Dutch political terminology. In letters dated 6 January 1994, TISBO requested advance copies of invited speakers' presentations so that they could be translated into Turkish. This procedure suggests that interpretation was incorporated into the planning process rather than treated as an incidental requirement.[24,25]

A further example appears in correspondence from D66 representative Monique Terwiel to Drs. Damra. In addition to providing material for her contribution to the South Holland information day, Terwiel enclosed a Turkish-language electoral leaflet. The accompanying documentation included information on political participation and the party's positions concerning elderly welfare and public policy.[26]

The significance of these arrangements lies in their potential to reduce informational barriers. Formal voting rights have limited practical value when eligible individuals cannot readily understand electoral procedures, institutional responsibilities or political choices. By requesting translated materials and organising direct presentations, TISBO sought to address this gap. The approach was particularly

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relevant to older first-generation migrants whose experiences of Dutch institutions could differ from those of younger, Dutch-educated generations. Translating political information into Turkish therefore represented more than a linguistic accommodation; it formed part of an effort to improve access to democratic processes. Nevertheless, the available documents establish the intention to provide translated information and confirm the transmission of some Turkish-language materials. They do not establish the extent to which every presentation was translated, how participants understood the information or whether the materials influenced later voting decisions.

Local community outreach and planned follow-up activities

TISBO's political participation programme was not limited to its two principal provincial meetings. The 9 January 1994 board agenda also identified smaller community-based activities intended to extend information and discussion into settings familiar to older Turkish migrants. Meetings were scheduled for 30 January at the Selimiye Mosque, 5 February at the Fatih Mosque and 20 February at the Ehlibeyt association in Haarlem. The planned participation of approximately 50 people at each location demonstrates an intention to reach different segments of the community.[14]

At the same time, the surviving board agenda provides evidence of planned activities rather than definitive proof of their completion. Confirming the implementation and attendance of these local meetings would require additional documents, such as minutes, reports, participant records or contemporary correspondence.

Recorded participation, community responses and programme outcomes

The documentary collection provides evidence of extensive organisational preparation and institutional cooperation, but the available information on actual participation and subsequent outcomes is more limited. A surviving handwritten note concerning the January political participation activities refers to approximately 80–90 participants and around 20 women. It also identifies matters requiring follow-up, including participants' reactions and the purpose of the meeting. The note appears to concern the 24 January gathering, although its incomplete documentary context requires caution in assigning these figures to a particular event.[39]

The distinction between projected attendance and recorded participation is important. The January board agenda specified invitation targets for the principal meetings, whereas the handwritten note appears to refer to an estimated attendance figure. These numbers represent different types of information and cannot be combined or interpreted as an overall measure of programme participation. The available materials also do not provide systematic evidence of changes in voter turnout, electoral registration, voting preferences or subsequent political involvement among participants. Such outcomes would require independent electoral data, participant follow-up records or other forms of contemporary documentation. Nevertheless, the initiatives generated identifiable organisational and institutional outcomes. These included the preparation of political information programmes, communication with provincial officials, and the involvement of representatives from multiple political parties, requests for Turkish-language translations and the production or distribution of electoral information materials. The distinctive contribution of the 1994 initiatives therefore lies in their organisational approach: combining elderly representation, political education, multilingual communication, community outreach and institutional cooperation within a coordinated programme. This approach provides a substantial foundation for evaluating TISBO's activities as forward-looking initiatives in the history of migrant civic inclusion in the Netherlands.

Discussion

Beyond welfare: older migrants as democratic participants

The findings of this study reveal an important dimension of TISBO's institutional approach to migrant ageing. While housing, social welfare and elderly care constituted significant concerns for first-generation Turkish migrants in the Netherlands, TISBO's political participation initiatives in 1994 extended this agenda into the sphere of democratic engagement. The organisation approached older migrants not merely as recipients of welfare services but also as individuals capable of understanding political institutions, exercising electoral rights and participating in public decision-making. This orientation was particularly significant within the historical circumstances of the early 1990s. The transition from temporary labour migration to permanent settlement had created new questions concerning the long-term position of ageing migrant populations. TISBO's activities suggested that responding to these circumstances required more than appropriate housing and welfare arrangements. It also required opportunities for older migrants to understand the political structures governing their country of residence and to communicate their interests within those structures.

The organisation's broader institutional development reinforces this interpretation. Its early housing activities, subsequent organisational planning and wider advocacy initiatives demonstrate an approach in which social participation and independent representation were interconnected.[11,12] Damra's later reflections[2] on organised elderly representation and subsequent NISBO publications provide additional context for understanding the development of this institutional perspective.

Institutional access, political pluralism and civic empowerment

One of the most distinctive characteristics of TISBO's initiatives was the combination of cooperation with public authorities and engagement with representatives from different political parties. The participation of provincial institutions in North Holland and South Holland provided opportunities to introduce older migrants to governmental responsibilities, administrative structures and democratic processes. The South Holland programme was especially notable for its planned inclusion of representatives from VVD, PvdA, CDA, GroenLinks and D66. This arrangement exposed participants to differing political perspectives and created opportunities for political information beyond a single partisan framework.[15,33,36]

The organisational significance of this approach lies in the distinction between political mobilisation on behalf of a particular party and the provision of information intended to support independent political participation. The available documentation indicates that TISBO sought to facilitate contact with multiple political representatives and improve participants' understanding of the political system. It does not establish institutional endorsement of a particular party or candidate.

A further important element was linguistic accessibility. The requests for advance copies of speeches, arrangements for Turkish translation and provision of Turkish-language electoral information demonstrate practical attention to barriers that could restrict political participation. These activities connected the formal availability of political rights with the conditions necessary for understanding and

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exercising them. This combination of political pluralism, multilingual communication and institutional access may be understood as an early form of migrant-led civic empowerment. Rather than assuming that electoral rights alone ensured meaningful inclusion, TISBO sought to create opportunities for older migrants to obtain information, encounter political representatives and become more familiar with democratic institutions. Nevertheless, the documented intention to promote civic empowerment should be distinguished from evidence of empowerment actually achieved. The archival collection provides substantial information about organisational arrangements and institutional cooperation, but it does not permit a systematic assessment of participants' subsequent political knowledge, electoral behaviour or long-term civic engagement.

Why TISBO's initiatives were forward-looking for their time

The designation ahead of its time requires careful historical interpretation. It should not be understood as an assertion that TISBO was necessarily the first organisation in the Netherlands to address immigrant political participation. Political incorporation and local electoral rights had already entered Dutch public policy discussions during the preceding decade.[2,8,22,27]

a. First, the initiatives specifically addressed older first-generation Turkish migrants, a population whose circumstances were frequently examined through housing, care and social welfare concerns. TISBO's approach recognised political participation as another relevant dimension of their lives.

b. Second, the organisation translated this recognition into a structured programme involving provincial authorities, representatives from several political parties and community organisations. The January 1994 documents demonstrate that political information was not merely an abstract organisational objective but the subject of concrete planning, correspondence and institutional cooperation.

c. Third, the attention given to Turkish-language communication addressed a practical obstacle to participation. Requests for translated speeches and the provision of electoral materials reflected an understanding that meaningful political inclusion depended partly on the accessibility of information.

d. Fourth, the combination of provincial-level meetings and planned community gatherings connected formal democratic institutions with familiar local environments. This approach sought to make political information available both through governmental settings and through existing migrant community networks.

Historical significance, institutional continuity and evidentiary limits

TISBO's political participation initiatives form part of a wider institutional history of migrant elderly representation in the Netherlands. Its work in housing, education, community mobilisation and political information demonstrates the organisation's effort to address multiple dimensions of older migrants' social position. The subsequent establishment of NISBO in 1995 extended organised representation to older Muslims from different national and ethnic backgrounds. Later NISBO documents concerning elderly advisory services, public policy and organisational planning demonstrate the continued importance of institutional access and representation.[18,27,28] These developments provide a broader historical perspective on the organisational approach associated with TISBO and its founding leadership.[2,18,27,28]

However, institutional continuity should not be confused with direct causation. The available evidence does not establish that TISBO's January 1994 political information programmes independently produced the subsequent development of NISBO or specific changes in Dutch political institutions. Their historical significance rests primarily on the documented initiatives themselves and the approach to older migrant participation they represented. Several limitations must therefore be acknowledged. The archival collection contains detailed organisational correspondence, programmes and prepared speeches, but systematic participant evaluations and electoral follow-up data have not been established. Consequently, the study cannot determine whether the programmes increased voter turnout, altered electoral preferences or generated sustained political involvement. Similarly, the evidence does not justify a claim that these were the earliest initiatives of their kind in the Netherlands or Europe. Establishing such a distinction would require a broader comparative investigation of contemporary migrant organisations and political participation programmes.

Conclusion

The political participation initiatives undertaken by the Turkish Islamic Elderly Union (TISBO) in 1994 represent a significant and forward-looking dimension of migrant-led civic engagement in the Netherlands. At a time when older Turkish migrants were frequently approached through the perspectives of housing, welfare provision and care needs, TISBO promoted an institutional vision that also recognised their capacity to exercise political rights and participate in democratic life.

This study identifies three interconnected contributions. First, TISBO developed a coordinated programme of political information and community outreach in preparation for the 1994 Dutch municipal elections. Second, its cooperation with provincial authorities and representatives from different political parties created opportunities for direct institutional engagement and exposure to diverse political perspectives. Third, its arrangements for Turkish-language translation and electoral information demonstrated an awareness of the practical barriers that could limit meaningful political participation among older first-generation migrants. The historical significance of these initiatives extends beyond their immediate organisational objectives. By connecting elderly representation with political education, linguistic accessibility and institutional cooperation, TISBO advanced an approach that treated older migrants not merely as beneficiaries of public services but as potential participants in democratic decision-making. This perspective provides a substantive basis for understanding the initiatives as pioneering and ahead of their time within the organisation's historical context.

The available archival evidence establishes the programmes' preparation, institutional partnerships and intended forms of political engagement. However, it does not permit definitive conclusions concerning changes in electoral turnout, voting behaviour or sustained political participation. Nor does it establish that TISBO's activities were the first initiatives of their kind in the Netherlands. Their importance therefore lies primarily in the documented organisational approach and the broader understanding of migrant elderly representation that it expressed.

Viewed alongside TISBO's housing, educational and welfare activities and the subsequent institutional development of NISBO, the 1994 initiatives illustrate a multidimensional approach to the social inclusion of older migrants. The findings contribute to the historical literature on migrant ageing, civil society and democratic participation by recovering an early example of organised political

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information and civic engagement directed specifically towards older Turkish migrants.

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Conflicts of Interest

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