



Volume: 12 Issue: 1 Year: 2015

Factors affecting trust in police in Turkey

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Abstract

Law enforcement administrators generally evaluate their performance using statistics related to crime control. These statistics are important indicators for measuring performance, but it is also crucial to measure of public opinions toward the police. This study examines the determinants of public trust in the police. Using data from the European Social Survey (ESS) Round 4, for the analysis, a total sample of 2,416 persons is selected from respondents from Turkey. The study provides a snapshot of citizens' perceptions toward law enforcement. Overall, the results of this study regarding the demographic variables, including age, gender, marital status, and education, were consistent with previous research and proved to be significantly related to trust in the police. Surprisingly, perceived victimization failed to show a significant relationship. However, important predictors included perceived fear of crime and trust in the political system, which had significant impacts on public trust in the police. Especially, fear of crime was a significant predictor of satisfaction with police. Effective crime control and lowering crime rates are considered the core functions of law enforcement by citizens. Therefore, perceived effectiveness in fighting crime can lower individual fear of crime and thus increase satisfaction with law enforcement.

Keywords: Trust in the police; Law enforcement, Public satisfaction, Fear of crime

Introduction

Law enforcement administrators tend to focus on crime level statistics when evaluating the performance of their crime control policies. These statistics are important indicators for measuring performance however, it is also necessary to measure public opinions toward the police. In this manner, trust in police has been a popular research topic over the last few decades. In particular, citizens' perceptions toward the police have been shown to be an important measure of police performance. According to Cao and Zhao (2005, p. 404) "public opinion toward the police can be regarded as a barometer of progress a government has made toward serving popular interests and needs". In this respect, positive public perceptions toward police provide more comfortable, easier and effective police work (Skogan, 2006). It is important to note that confidence in the police is

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generally high during periods of democratic transition in a society (Cao & Dai, 2006). This is because individuals can monitor and criticize police actions in different ways in a democratic society. Thus, this kind of public feedback and evaluation are valuable indicators that explain the efficiency, effectiveness and public confidence in policing. In addition, it has been found that public attitudes toward the police are an important indicator of institutional trust in the country (Andreescu & Keeling, 2012). According to Cao and Dai (2006 p. 72), this is because “the police are the most visible institution of social control in all contemporary societies” . Accordingly, in a democratic society, the law enforcement unit is one of the most important and critical parts of governance. In democratic societies, individuals are more likely to feel that “the government would not misuse its power and would not willingly harm one” (Luhiste, 2006 p. 478).

Individuals trust the police only if they are satisfied that the police work has been fair and respectful. In this manner, understanding the public perceptions regarding satisfaction and confidence toward police work is an important issue. Although the study of public perceptions toward the police has taken many forms in recent literature (i.e. trust in police, distrust in police, confidence in police) (Andreescu & Keeling, 2012; Cao et al., 1998; 2011; Keane & Bell, 2013; Kaariainen, 2007; Luhiste, 2006) as well as explored the issue in different countries (i.e. European, USA and etc.), less academic attention has been paid to public attitude toward the police in Turkey (Karakus, McGarrell, & Basibuyuk, 2010; Cao & Burton, 2006). Considering the importance of this research, this is a crucial gap that needs to be filled. The essentiality of this research lies in the fact that understanding the nature of trust in police leads to improved functionality of law enforcement units. Hence, it might become a good starting point to check current and future attitudes and policies in the context of policing.

Using ESS 4 data collected from a national survey of Turkish citizens, the current study attempts to explain the relationship between public attitudes toward the police and perceptions of legal and political institutions, perceived fear of crime, victimization, and socio demographic characteristics.

Brief Historical Overview

The Republic of Turkey was established in 1923. With foundation of the Republic, many efforts and reforms have been exerted through the years. In this period, the effort related to secularism was the most important characteristic in the modernization of the Republic. In spite of the large Muslim population (98%) as well as the different social and ethnic groups, Turkey has made considerable progress in adopting secularism into its democracy (Burak, 2012). This

democratic, secular system as well as wide-ranging political reforms brought Turkey closer to modern, Western social and political life.

According to the 2013 general population census, the country's population is 76.6 million (TUIK, 2014). The law enforcement unit in Turkey is made up of the Turkish National Police (TNP) and Gendarmerie which serve under the Ministry of Interior. While Gendarmerie is responsible for the rural areas, TNP serves in urban and city centers (Karakus et. al., 2011). The number of TNP full-time employees is about 200,000, which serve under the General Directorate in Ankara (EGM, 2014).

With regard to the social and political improvements, Turkey is trying to become a more democratic society. Accordingly, the law enforcement units and their practices are seeking to become more democratic in nature. In this regard, there has been a considerable transition in its policing philosophy. Replacing traditional methods, proactive and preventive policing systems have appeared among the police units. Based on these changes, this study seeks to understand the nature of public confidence in the police.

Determinants of Public Opinions toward the Police

Over the past three decades, researchers and policymakers have examined public opinions about the police in an attempt to understand its determinants. Accordingly, using different methods and determinants, a large body of research has examined the issues of confidence, trust, and satisfaction with the police (Andreescu & Keeling, 2011; Cao & Dai, 2006; Cao et al., 1998; 2011; Dowler & Sparks, 2008; Ellison et. al., 2003; Flexon et al., 2009; Keane & Bell, 2013; Kaariainen, 2007; Luhiste, 2006; Weitzer & Tuch, 2014).

Most studies examined the variations in certain socio-demographic characteristics to explain confidence in the police. The current study focuses on socio-demographic variables, including age, gender, education, and marital status, to explain trust in the police. In research examining the influence of age, some studies have found a positive effect on public trust in the police, where older individuals had higher levels of trust (Dai & Johnson, 2009; Garcia & Cao, 2005; Ivkovic, 2008). Gender is another variable that impacts confidence toward the police. While some studies found no significant association between gender and confidence with the police (Cao et al., 1998; Frank et. al., 2005) other studies found that females held more positive attitudes and satisfaction with the police than males (Dowler and Sparks, 2008; Kaariainen, 2007; Ivkovic, 2008). In addition, findings for the relationship between marital status and attitudes toward the police were mixed. Though, most studies have shown that there is a positive relationship between being married and public opinions toward the police (Cao & Zhao, 2005, Karakus, et. al, 2010).

In terms of social class, education is another predictor of attitude toward the police that has been examined (Andreescu & Keeling 2012; Dowlers & Sparks 2008; Cao et. al., 2012). While the results of education have also been mixed, (Ho & McKean, 2004), some studies found a positive relationship between education and attitudes toward the police. In these cases, more educated citizens were more likely to hold positive attitudes than less educated citizens (Frank et al., 2005). In contrast, another study found a negative association between education and public attitudes toward services, where higher educated individuals had more negative attitudes (Kakizaki, 2012).

Compared to the evaluation of demographic determinants, less attention has been given to contextual determinants, including the influence of victimization and fear of crime related to citizens' opinions toward the police. Although victimization might be an influential factor, however, because many crime victims do not file police reports, a strong association between the two variables has not been found. This is an important consideration because "crime victims who do not make a police report, and who are not influenced by such direct contact with police, might attribute some degree of responsibility for their victimization to the police and consequently have less positive opinions of police" (Dowler & Sparks, 2008 p.399). For this reason, findings have been generally mixed regarding the association between victimization and attitudes toward the police. On the other hand, fear of crime, or perception of the possibility of being victimized, had a significant negative impact on public attitudes toward the police (Ho & McKean, 2004). In general, studies found that the people who had high perceived fear of crime were more likely to have negative attitudes toward the police (Dowler & Sparks, 2008; Hawdon & Ryan, 2003). Accordingly, effectiveness of police, crime control, and a high sense of neighborhood safety increases overall confidence and satisfaction with police (Weitzer & Tuch, 2005).

In addition to the socio-demographic and contextual determinants, another important predictor that impacts the public's attitude toward the police is political factors. According to Kakizaki (2012, p. 67), "the level of public's confidence in government institutions is a barometer of citizen's support for the legitimacy of political systems governing their countries". There is a broad consensus that certain degrees of trust or distrust toward the political system affect the performance of institutions. In this regard, as an important institution in public administration, citizens' beliefs and expectations of the political system and also oversights in this system will directly or indirectly impact the effectiveness of policing. Therefore, we can safely assume that there is a link between trust in the political system and trust in police (Kaariainen, 2007). According to this assumption, general trust in the political system explains the public trust toward law enforcement in a country.

Method

Data and Sample

The source of data used in this study was the European Social Survey (ESS) Round 4 which is an academic cross-national survey carried out from 2008-2009. The survey measures citizens' perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about their societies. For the analysis, a total sample of 2,416 persons is selected from respondents from Turkey, which is a representative sample of those ages 15 and over (no upper age limit). Sampling for the ESS was administered using a random probability method. The variables used in this study are presented below.

The dependent variable is *trust in the police*. This variable was derived from a single survey item:

Using this card, please tell me on a score of 0-10 how much you personally trust each of the institutions I read out. 0 means you do not trust an institution at all, and 10 means you have complete trust. Firstly... .. the police?

Independent variables consisted of seven variables: trust in the political system, fear of crime, victimization, age, gender, education, and marital status. *Trust in political system* was measured by three survey items; "trust in country's parliament", "trust in politicians", and "trust in political parties". Each of these variables was derived from a single survey item: *how much do you personally trust each of the institutions?* (country's parliament, politicians, and political parties, respectively) 0 means *not trust an institution at all*, and 10 means *complete trust*. The Cronbach's alpha showed a reliability of .758. *Fear of Crime* was measured by three survey items asking respondents, "*How safe do you feel walking alone in a local area after dark*" (*aesfdrk*), "*How often do you worry about your home being burgled*" (*brghmvr*), and "*How often do you worry about becoming a victim of a serious crime?*" (*crvctwr*) These questions were answered based on a four-point scale from 1 (very unsafe/very worried) to 4 (very safe/never worried). The two variables "brghmvr" and "crvctwr" were reversed-coded since originally a higher score did not indicate a higher fear of crime. After the recode, a score of 4 indicates that the respondent is always worried and a score of 1 indicates that he/she is never worried. Therefore, higher scores indicate higher fear of crime in a neighborhood. The Cronbach's alpha showed a reliability of .703.

Victimization is a dichotomous variable that was measured using a single survey item which asks respondents whether she/he or a household member has been a victim of a burglary or assault in the last 5 years. A value of 0 indicates no victimization and 1 represents victimization in the last 5 years.

The demographic variables are age, gender, education, and marital status. Respondents' ages ranged from 15 to 90. Age was operationalized using a four-point scale, where 1 indicates 15-30 years old, 2 (31-45 years old), 3 (45-60 years old), and 4 (61 and older years old). Education ranges from 1 to 10, and it is also categorized using a four point scale, where 0 indicates noneducated, 1

(1-8 years of education completed), 2 (9-12 years of education completed), 3 (13-16 years of education completed), 4 (16 years or more completed) Gender is a dichotomous variable coded as 0 (female) and 1 (male).

Data Analysis and Findings

The aim of this analysis is two-fold. It is first interested in the association between demographic characteristics and public trust in the police in Turkey. Second, using linear regression, it is interested in predicting public trust in the police based on other independent variables, including fear of crime, victimization, and trust in the political system.

Descriptive Statistics

The study includes four demographic variables: age, gender, education, and marital status. These variables represent the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. Tables below show the percentage distributions and frequencies of these variables.

Table 1: The Percentage Distributions and Frequencies of Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Female	1289	53.4	53.4	53.4
Male	1127	46.6	46.6	100.0
Total	2416	100.0	100.0	

Table 1 shows the percentage distributions and frequencies of the gender. According to the results, the sample is almost equally female (53.4%) and (46.6%) male. Considering the proportion of the male (51%) and female (49%) female population in 2008 in Turkey (TUIK, 2014), the ratio of the respondents represents the general population of the country.

Table 2 shows the percentage distributions and frequencies of the age. Of the 2416 respondents, 338 respondents (14%) were over 61 years old, 466 respondents (19.3%) were between 46 and 60 years old, 752 (31.1%) respondents were between 31-45 years old, and 860 (35.6%) respondents were between 15-30 years old. According to Table 2, the age group between 15-30 years old is the largest portion of the sample.

Table 2 :The Percentage Distributions and Frequencies of Age

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
15-30 years old	860	35.6	36	35.6
31-45 years old	752	31.1	31.1	66.7
46-60 years old	466	19.3	19.3	86.0
61 and older years old	338	14.0	14.0	100.0
Total	2416	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 shows the percentage distributions and frequencies of the education level of the respondents. Of the total sample, 36 respondents (1.5%) indicated the highest education level (master/doctorate degrees) of the sample. In addition, 8.5% of respondents graduated from universities, 19.6 % of the respondents graduated from high school, 57.7% of the respondents, which is the largest portion, graduated from primary school, and 12.6 % of the respondents were non-educated.

Table 3: The Percentage Distributions and Frequencies of Education

	Frequen cy	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Non educated	305	12.6	12.6	12.6
1-8 years	1395	57.7	57.7	70.4
9-12 years	474	19.6	19.6	90.0
12-16 years	206	8.5	8.5	98.5
More than 16 years	36	1.5	1.5	100.0
Total	2416	100.0	100.0	

Table 4 shows the percentage distributions and frequencies of marital status. According to the results, respondents are predominantly married (67.9 %) with 32.1% unmarried.

Table 4 : The Percentage Distributions and Frequencies of Marital Status

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Unmarried	774	32.0	32.1	32.1
Married	1635	67.7	67.9	100.0
Total	2416	100.0	100.0	

Multiple Linear Regression Results

Multiple linear regression was used to examine whether trust in police in Turkey can be predicted based on our independent variables: trust in political system in Turkey, perceived fear of crime, perceived victimization, gender, marital status, age and education level of respondents. Multiple linear regression enables us to determine the overall fit of the model and the relative contribution of each of the predictor variables to the total explained variance in the dependent variable. The results of the multiple linear regression shows how much of the variation in trust in police in Turkey can be explained by the independent variables as a whole as well as the relative importance of each independent variable. All assumptions of multiple linear regression are met for this study.

The F ratio in the statistical significance (ANOVA) table (Table 5) tests whether the overall regression model is a good fit for the data.

Table 5: Statistical Significance of the Model (ANOVA)

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	6749.558	7	964.223	114.548	.000 ^a
	Residual	18973.363	2254	8.418		
	Total	25722.921	2261			

a. Predictors: (Constant), eduyrscategory, victimization, trustinpolsytm, gender, maritalstatus, fearofcrime, agecategory

b. Dependent Variable: trustinpolice

Table 5 indicates that our selected independent variables are statistically significantly in predicting the variance in our dependent variable with a corresponding F value of 114.548 at $p < .005$. This indicates that our overall regression model fits the data collected.

The model summary table (Table 6) indicates the proportion of the variance in the dependent variable, trust in police in Turkey, that can be explained by the set of independent variables, namely, perceived fear of crime, perceived victimization, trust in the political system, gender, marital status, age and education level.

Table 6: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.512a	.262	.260	2.90132

a. Predictors: (Constant), eduyrscategory, victimization, trustinpolsytm, gender, maritalstatus, fearofcrime, agecategory

The R Square value (Coefficient of Determination) of .262 indicates that 26.2 % of the variability of our dependent variable are explained by the independent variables as a whole. This value is considered a good value of prediction.

The final table (Table 7) provides the correlation coefficients of our model, which allows us to understand the significance and relative importance of each independent variable. Unstandardized coefficients of the independent variable indicate how much the dependent variable varies based on an independent variable, when all other independent variables are held constant.

The “Sig” column of the Table 7 indicates that except for victimization and age, all other independent variables’ coefficients are statistically significant in explaining the variation in our dependent variable. The most important predictor is trust in the political system, which has an unstandardized coefficient value of .640. This positive and significant correlation indicates that people with higher levels of trust in the political system tend to also have higher levels of trust in police. One important finding is that males tend to have lower trust in police than their female counterparts. Furthermore, as the level of education of participants increases, their level of trust in police tends to decrease (-.224; $p < .005$).

Table 7: Statistical Significance and Relative Importance of Independent Variables

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Coefficients		
(Constant)	4.655	.304		15.317	.000
trustinpolsytm	.640	.024	.480	26.252	.000
fearofcrime	-.234	.070	-.063	-3.357	.001
victimization	-.187	.219	-.016	-.852	.394
Male	-.396	.126	-.059	-3.155	.002
Married	.378	.136	.052	2.775	.006
agecategory	.116	.064	.036	1.809	.071
eduyrscategory	-.224	.065	-.069	-3.426	.001

a. Dependent Variable: trustinpolice

Discussion

According to previous studies, a number of predictors are expected to significantly impact public trust in the police. Several categorized variables, including socio-demographic factors, contextual indicators, and individual perceptions were used to explain public trust in the police.

Regarding the satisfaction and confidence in the police, previous research suggests that there is a positive relationship between being female, being married, age and confidence with law enforcement. As expected, in the current study, females, those who are married and older respondents expressed positive attitudes and satisfaction with the police. Therefore, the results are consistent with previous findings (Dai & Johnson, 2009; Dowler & Sparks, 2008; Garcia & Cao, 2005; Kaarriainen, 2007; Ivkovic, 2008), in that females were more confident than males, and singles or divorced citizens were less confident than married citizens. Furthermore, older individuals held more favorable attitudes than younger individuals. Older respondents' satisfaction with police is an important finding. According to some previous research, younger individuals tended to have negative attitudes toward the police and perceived the police as an enforcer of authority (Dowler & Sparks, 2008; Reisig & Parks, 2000). In the current study, results were consistent, showing that older individuals were more satisfied than younger individuals with law enforcement. It is possible that the older individuals in Turkey experienced different social and

political circumstances, including undemocratic treatments in the past. Therefore, compared to the undemocratic treatments, democratic policing in recent years might shape their opinions positively toward the police in Turkey.

On the other hand, while many previous studies found a positive relationship between education and satisfaction with law enforcement, in the current study, the results showed an inverse relationship between education and trust in law enforcement units. Hence, more educated citizens were less likely to hold positive attitudes than less educated citizens. This interesting finding appears to be consistent with some previous studies (Karakus et. al, 2010; Cao & Zhao, 2005; Jang et. al., 2010). Presumably, citizens with higher education levels are more likely to pay importance to freedom than others. Hence, this significant negative effect of education on public trust toward the police might reflect the perception of police as an entity which restricts freedom on behalf of the government.

According to previous research, victimization has a significant impact on citizens' attitudes toward law enforcement. Surprisingly, perceived victimization failed to reach the level of significance in the current study. This unexpected finding might be explained by the limited number of respondents who were victimized. Thus, there might be an inadequate sample size or number of victims for measuring the association between victimization and trust in police.

Another important finding was that fear of crime was a significant predictor of satisfaction with police. As expected, there was a significant negative relationship between fear of crime and trust in the police. Therefore, as perceived fear of crime decreases, trust in the police increases among citizens. Thus, the results on this relationship support previous findings. Effective crime control and lowering crime rates are considered the core functions of law enforcement by citizens. Therefore, perceived effectiveness in fighting crime can lower individual fear of crime and thus increase satisfaction with law enforcement.

The last and strongest predictor of trust in police was "trust in the political system". The respondents who had more confidence in the political system (political parties, parliament, etc.) were more likely to show higher trust in law enforcement. The degree of trust in law enforcement can justifiably be considered as a reflection of the satisfaction with government. In this regard, level of trust in the political system of a society is a considerable measure of the quality of government that represents public trust toward the institutions in public services. Otherwise, a negative perception related to the political system creates an atmosphere of distrust among citizens (Kaarianen, 2007). In the current study, trust in the political system had a significant, positive relationship with trust in law enforcement. Therefore, the two variables seem to be interlinked,

where trust in the political system can help to explain trust in law enforcement. Hence, if citizens trust in the political system, this may link to trust in other aspects of government in general.

Conclusions and recommendations

The main purpose of this research was examining public trust toward the police in Turkey. Understanding trust towards this institution is a representative indicator measuring its performance. The findings of the current research show that trust in law enforcement may be perceived as the reflection of general public satisfaction in services. As its strongest indicator, trust in the political system predicted trust in the police. Therefore, political attitudes gained precedence in explaining trust in the police. This finding should be of particular interest to public administrators. Policy makers should pay more attention to citizens' demands and opinions in Turkey, which may inform perceptions of the democratic policing techniques in the society.

The current study provided only a snapshot of citizens' perceptions toward law enforcement. However, it aimed to stimulate policy makers' attention to the importance of public opinions in this context. Society expects an effective participation of public administration in democratic society. In terms of policy recommendations, the importance of citizen participation should be evaluated by decision makers.

The present study however had some limitations. First, the study only included a limited set of independent predictors. Therefore, the current research was not able to control for the impacts of other important individual or contextual variables. Future research should include more individual and contextual-level variables in order to provide a richer explanation of citizens' trust in the police. Another limitation of the current study regarding its methodology is that many respondents possibly had no personal and direct contact with police. Therefore, the dependent variable explains general opinion toward the police instead of the respondents real experiences. If samples in future studies are able to select from experienced respondents, it would provide more comprehensive results to the Turkish context.

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