

Project Title:

ARMED FORCES AND SOCIETY IN TURKEY: AN EMPIRICAL APPROACH

Project Team:

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Abstract:

Since the 1990s, many opinion surveys have demonstrated that the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) are the most trusted institution among the Turkish public. In the academic literature as well it is a commonly shared view that Turkish society trusts and values its military. Despite this widely shared argument, there is still limited empirical knowledge of the factors and dynamics behind the relations between the military and society in Turkey. Indeed, the scope and prevalence of public confidence in the military have not yet been fully analyzed. It is necessary to conduct a public opinion survey that focuses only on military-society relations in Turkey. Following this opinion poll, a study that employs quantitative research methods and techniques must be done in order to objectively analyze the results of the survey. Similarly, in-depth interviews that will analyze the perceptions of the elite toward the military must be conducted. Such research will have two important contributions to the existing literature. First, it will demonstrate the limits, scope, and reasons for public confidence and support for the military. Second, it will empirically test the arguments of the literature that attempts to explain the legitimacy and popularity of the military in the country.

The proposed project has two pillars. First, it intends to conduct an opinion poll from a nationwide, representative sample of around 3000 randomly selected people and analyze the results of this survey by employing quantitative methods. Second, the project aims to conduct interviews with around 75 political and economic leaders and examine the perceptions of the elites toward the military by employing qualitative methods. The dependent variable of this analysis is the perceptions and attitudes of both the upper and lower strata of society toward the TAF. More specifically, this research project aims at finding answers to the following questions: How much does Turkish society trust the military? What are the perceptions of society on military interventions in politics? What does the public and elite expect from the TAF? What are the perceptions of the public and elite toward conscription? What is the dominant view in Turkish society on the question of transition to a professional military? What do people think about the recent developments in civil-military relations in Turkey? Several factors, which might shape the answers to such questions, will be investigated. These factors include income and education level, religion, religiosity, secularism, religious sect, ethnicity, ideology, political party support, ethnicity, military service, martyrdom, urban/rural division, region etc.

This study will empirically verify or falsify the arguments that have been frequently articulated in the public and academic literature. Empirical or quantitative techniques and methods are not yet employed in the literature on civil-military relations in Turkey. As a result, this project has original value and it will have an important contribution to the academic literature. Moreover, this study will have significant widespread effects. Since Turkey is located in an important geopolitical region, a study that focuses on the various aspects of relations between the TAF and society will produce results that would enhance our understanding of political stability, and consequently, national security. The project is expected to also produce important insights on democratic consolidation in Turkey. A public opinion survey that focuses on the relations between the military and society, in combination with elite interviews, will help develop inferences on the possibilities of creating more democratic civil-military relations in Turkey on the road to European Union membership.