THEMATIC ARTICLES: PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS REFUGEES

Turkish Perceptions of Risk vis-à-vis Syrian Refugees: An Exploratory Study of Cultural Cognition in Izmir, Turkey

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Abstract. This exploratory research seeks to investigate the risk perception of Turkish citizen's vis-à-vis Syrian refugees, utilising cultural cognition as a theoretical sounding board. Delimited to the city of Izmir, the aims of this research were to ascertain what perceived risks Syrian refugees pose onto Turkish society, how these perceptions relate to worldview adherences amongst Turkish citizens, and what psychological processes may explain the development of such perceptions. Employing a mixed-methods approach, triangulation of both news article and focus group content analyses identified five commonly perceived risks relating to Syrian refugee entry into Turkey: employment, inflow, social, political and security. This information informed the design of a survey instrument, of which was used to compare worldview adherences to perceptions of said risks and demographic characteristics. For two of the five risks, results showed that egalitarians perceived the refugees as a higher risk than those with hierarchist identities. It was also found that individuals with higher levels of education and employment were more likely to perceive Syrian refugees as a risk to Turkish society. As a starting point to explore the development of such perceptions of risk, the processes of identity-protective cognition, reactive devaluation, self-censorship, and optimism bias were used to tentatively explicate the data.

Keywords: *risk perception, refugees, identity, cultural cognition, psychology, Turkey*

Introduction

Since the spring of 2011, Syria has been undergoing a brutal civil war. As of March 2018, the inter-agency Syria Regional Refugee Response (2018) estimates that over 3.5 million Syrians have sought refuge in Turkey. As has been identified by Pırıl Ercoban (2016), Director of the Izmir-based Association for Solidarity with Refugees

(Mülteci-Der), this has caused a growth in xenophobic sentiments. This is not unusual, as similar trends have been identified in many refugee-hosting countries, notably in South Africa (Crush and Ramachandran 2010; McKnight 2008; De Jager 2011), Lebanon (El-Malak 2002; Hanafi 2014; Ibrahim 2008) and Kenya (Kibreab 2014; Reinl 2013; Pavanello *et al.* 2010). As Kibreab (2007, 31) identifies, refugees are often "(…) invariably blamed for being the cause of economic crisis, shortage of housing, transportation, water, electricity, employment, (…) theft, crime, prostitution and other forms of anti-social behaviour". Thus, there is a significant need to understand host country perceptions of risk towards forced migrants.

The following research has the objective to examine Syrian refugee inflow and associated risk perceptions held by Turkish citizens in the Aegean city of Izmir. It does so through the theoretical lens of cultural cognition, understood as an approach that combines both cultural theory and the psychometric paradigm. Cultural theory, largely credited to the work of anthropologist Mary Douglas (1970; 1978), asserts that there are "(…) two dimensions of sociality (….), ideal typical social positions (…) able to account for cultural diversity in the most parsimonious way possible" (Mamadouh 1999, 396). These two dimensions, leading to a defined *worldview*, are known as 'grid' and 'group'. Grid is understood as the "(…) social distinctions and delegations of authority that they use to limit how people behave to one another" (Douglas and Wildavsky 1982, 138). Therefore, "the higher the grid dimension, the less life is open to individual negotiation" (Wouters and Maesschalck 2014, 225). Group represents "(…) the outside boundary that people have erected between themselves and the outside world" (Douglas and Wildavsky 1982, 138). Therefore, "the higher the group dimension, the more individual choice is subjected to group determination" (Wouters and Maesschalck 2014, 225). Cultural theory undertakes what is known as 'grid-group analysis', placing individuals as either hierarchists (high grid, high group), egalitarians (low grid, high group), individualists (low grid, low group) or communitarians (high grid, low group). Claiming that "(…) risk perception can be predicted by cultural adherence and social learning" (Oltedal and Rundmo 2007, 254), cultural theory has been a fruitful theoretical lens in understanding perceptions of risk (*see* Cerroni and Simonella 2014; Hood 1995; Wouters and Maesschalck 2014). The psychometric paradigm, conversely, has the primary interest of determining various psychological processes at play in the development of risk perception. Predominantly attributed to the work of Slovic (1987), the psychometric paradigm uses "(…) psychological scaling and multivariate analysis

techniques to produce quantitative representations or 'cognitive maps' of risk attitudes and perceptions" (Slovic 1987, 281). Through its use, the psychometric paradigm has "(…) identified factors that influence the perception of different hazards" (Siegrist *et al.* 2005, 211), such as affect, overconfidence, dread and desire for certainty (*see* Slovic and Peters 2006; Slovic *et al*. 1980; Chauvin *et al.* 2008). Cultural cognition seeks to collate both cultural theory and the psychometric paradigm by adopting grid-group analysis all the while taking into account the various individual and group psychological processes that may be involved in the development of cultural worldview ascriptions. For instance, cognitive-dissonance avoidance, affect, naïve realism and reactive devaluation (Kahan *et al.* 2007) have been used in conjunction to explain cultural worldview adherences and how group and individual characteristics harmoniously sustain perceptions of risk.

The goal of this mixed-methods research was to determine which risks are typically attributed to forced migrants, and how cultural cognition plays into the development of Turkish risk perceptions of Syrian refugees in Izmir, Turkey. The aims were as follows: (1) to examine the Syrian refugee inflow and associated risk perceptions held by Turkish citizens, (2) to ascertain whether there is causality between cultural worldviews and risk perception and (3) to explore possible group and individual psychological processes that could contribute or sustain risk perception in respects to Syrian inflow. Relevant to each aim, three research questions were established:

1. What perceived risks do Syrian refugees pose onto Turkish society?
2. How do cultural worldviews affect the perception that Syrians pose a risk to Turkey?
3. What psychological processes (group and individual) can explain the perception of risk that Syrian refugees pose a threat to Turkish society?

As cultural cognition has never been used in the context of forced migration, this research was fundamentally exploratory. Thus, no hypotheses were established prior to the research, as is typical with exploratory research. Research ethics approval was granted by the University of Leicester *Ethics Sub-Committee for Media and Communication* and *School of Management* on 16.09.2015.

Methods

Research design

Due to the limited number of empirical studies on host country risk perception of forced migrants within the Middle Eastern context, a mixed-methods

approach was deemed most suitable as it provides "(…) multiple ways of seeing and hearing, multiple ways of making sense of the social world (…)" (Greene 2008, 20), supported by an understanding that "(…) the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches, in combination, provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone" (Cresswell and Plano Clark 2007, 5).

In order to determine dominant public interest risk themes relating to Syrian refugees, two instruments were developed. The first involved a content analysis of news articles of two newspapers, *Today's Zaman* and *Hürriyet Daily News*, selected based on results by Efe and Yeşiltaş (2012) of which determined both had vastly different representation of events. The content analysis included articles from June 1st to October 1st 2015, a period selected based on the media outpour resulting from the 2015 European migration crisis, along with its convenience in relation to other parts of the research schedule. In total, 167 articles were selected by means of rigid exclusion criteria's and coded according to risk themes. A focus group was then organized in 2016 to verify the findings of the news article content analysis, enrich its content, authentic the data within the relevant study area, and determine any perceptual gaps of refugee inflow risks that were not identified. Using quadrat sampling in Izmir's most densely populated and economically diverse district (Konak), five individuals took part in the focus group discussion. The discussion was recorded, then transcribed, and coded using the same coding frame used during the newspaper content analysis. Results of both newspaper and focus group content analyses were compared using chi-square analysis, determining five risk themes – employment, inflow, legal deviance (security), political, and relations between Turks and Syrians (social) – of which were drafted into survey questions. The survey instrument, including the Likert-style risk perception questions, also included demographic questions, and incorporated a survey instrument developed by Kahan *et al*. (2007) of which has been used to determine grid-group adherences. Given that census data in Turkey is not collected systematically, data sets are not comprehensive and census records for individuals are not available (at least publicly) for consultation. Thus, the hope of reaching a survey sample representative of Izmir's population had to be abandoned early in the research. This was one of the most relevant factors leading to this research remaining exploratory rather than explanatory or action-based. As a result, snowball sampling was used for the survey component of this research. This type of sampling is usually used when there are "(…) less than optimal research conditions where other methodologies are not

applicable" (Cohen and Arieli 2011, 424), and is understood as a "(…) nonprobability sampling in which subjects initially selected recruit other subjects, who in turn recruit other subjects, and so on" (Powers and Knapp 2011, 172). In total, 130 surveys were returned and completed in good form, which is sufficient for studies which are exploratory in nature (Shevels 2015).

Data analysis

Data collected by the survey instrument was analysed using SPSS. Multiple analyses were undertaken, including analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine interactions between worldview profiles and risk items, and both linear and ordinal regression to increase the reliability of results. Forward stepwise regression, using models which incrementally added independent variables, was used in both cases of regression analysis.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for independent variables

	Category	Frequency	Percent
EMPLOYMENT LEVEL	Unskilled	32	24.6
	Semi-skilled	47	36.2
	Skilled manual	32	24.6
	Skilled non-manual	8	6.2
	Intermediate	4	3.1
	Professional	7	5.4
EDUCATION LEVEL	Elementary	10	7.7
	High school	40	30.8
	Bachelor's	59	45.4
	Master's	16	12.3
	Doctorate	5	3.8
GENDER	Female	72	55.4
	Male	58	44.6
ETHNICITY	Minority	23	17.7
	Turkish	107	82.3
WORLDVIEW1	Egalitarian	57	43.8
	Hierarch	73	56.2
WORLDVIEW2	Communitarian	57	43.8
	Individualist	73	56.2

For independent variables, the majority of participants worked in semi-skilled employment (36%); 45.4% had a Bachelor's level of education; 55.4% were

women; 82.3% self-identified as 'Turkish'; 56.2% scored as hierarchists; and 56.2% scored as individualists. Socio-demographic and worldview characteristics of the survey sample are reported in Table 1.

Descriptive statistics relating to answers vis-à-vis risk item questions (dependent variables) are reported in Table 2. As reported, the bulk of respondents believed all risks to be either "high" or "very high", compared to "low" or "very low" response rates. This is particularly evident for both employment and social risk. Security and political risk exhibited the most variability in answers. Across all risk categories, participants believed inflow risk to be the highest ("very high" = 32.3%) and political risk to be the lowest ("very low" = 7.7%).

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for dependent variables

	Category	Frequency	Percent
Q32: EMPLOYMENT RISK	Very high risk	34	26.2
	High risk	67	51.5
	Moderate risk	12	9.2
	Low risk	12	9.2
	Very low risk	5	3.8
Q33: INFLOW RISK	Very high risk	42	32.3
	High risk	45	34.6
	Moderate risk	3	2.3
	Low risk	35	26.9
	Very low risk	5	3.8
Q34: SECURITY RISK	Very high risk	26	20
	High risk	58	44.6
	Moderate risk	14	10.8
	Low risk	23	17.7
	Very low risk	9	6.9
Q35: POLITICAL RISK	Very high risk	22	16.9
	High risk	44	33.8
	Moderate risk	17	13.1
	Low risk	37	28.5
	Very low risk	10	7.7
Q36: SOCIAL RISK	Very high risk	30	23.1
	High risk	71	54.6
	Moderate risk	13	10
	Low risk	9	6.9
	Very low risk	7	5.4

Analysis of variance (ANOVA)

Given the nature of this research and what it sought to explore, single-factor ANOVA tests were undertaken between risk question dependent variables and cultural worldview independent variables. Three of the five risk theme questions – specifically employment ($p = 0.020$), inflow ($p = 0.0002$) and social ($p = 0.004$) – showed significant variance. On each of these three questions, a Bonferonni-corrected t-test was conducted on all six worldview combinations in order to assess answer variance between worldview interactions. Data showed significance for certain worldview interactions (*see* Table 3). The employment risk question responses exhibited significance between hierarchist-individualists and egalitarian-communitarians. The inflow risk question showed the richest results in terms of response variance, three worldview interactions in total. The most variance was between hierarchist-communitarians and egalitarian-communitarians ($p = 0.0000$). The social risk question responses showed two significant cases of variance, the first between hierarchist-communitarians and egalitarian-individualists, and the second between hierarchist-communitarians and egalitarian-communitarians.

Table 3: Bonferonni corrected post-ANOVA t-test between worldview profiles and question answers

	Worldview interactions	p(T<=t) two-tail
Q32: Employment	Hier_Indi x Hier_Comm	0.1751
	Hier_Indi x Egal_Indi	**0.0049**
	Hier_Indi x Egal_Comm	0.8637
	Hier_Comm x Egal_Indi	0.0942
	Hier_Comm x Egal_Comm	0.4488
	Egal_Indi x Egal_Comm	0.0614
Q33: Inflow	Hier_Indi x Hier_Comm	0.1978
	Hier_Indi x Egal_Indi	0.0885
	Hier_Indi x Egal_Comm	**0.0040**
	Hier_Comm x Egal_Indi	**0.0022**
	Hier_Comm x Egal_Comm	**0.0000**
	Egal_Indi x Egal_Comm	0.1116
Q36: Social	Hier_Indi x Hier_Comm	0.5631
	Hier_Indi x Egal_Indi	0.0234
	Hier_Indi x Egal_Comm	0.0342
	Hier_Comm x Egal_Indi	**0.0029**
	Hier_Comm x Egal_Comm	**0.0062**
	Egal_Indi x Egal_Comm	0.7580

Note: Bold indicates significance according to Bonferonni corrected critical value of 0.008.

Regression analysis

As the debate rages on about how to treat Likert-style dependent variables (see Norman 2010), the decision to implement both linear and ordinal regression was taken in the early stages of the research design. Both regression tests were implemented using forward stepwise regression, whereby models – distinct sets of independent variables – are incrementally added into the regression. Model 1 introduced gender, age, employment and education variables. Model 2 introduced ethnicity. Model 3 introduced worldview affiliation variables. Results from both linear and ordinal regression tests were interpreted simultaneously. As the goal of this research was to evaluate the impact of worldview adherences to perceptions of risk, and in an attempt to stay within a reasonable word count, only the two of five risk items which returned statistically significant results (i.e. social and inflow) are presented below. Employment risk also demonstrated significant results, but with other non-worldview independent variables. Thus, along with security and political risks, statistical data for employment has been omitted but is nevertheless included in the 'Discussion' section of this paper.

Table 4: Linear forward stepwise regression, where DV is Q36 (social risk), responses based on a 5-point agreement-disagreement (reverse coded) Likert scale, answering the question "The relationship between Syrian refugees and Turks is quite good"

Model	1	2	3
MALE	0.204 (0.179)	0.182 (0.182)	0.075 (0.179)
AGE	-0.025 (0.014)	-0.024 (0.014)	-0.024 (0.014)
EMPLOYMENT LEVEL	-0.098 (0.085)	-0.095 (0.085)	-0.112 (0.082)
EDUCATION LEVEL	**-0.248** (0.123)	-0.244 (0.123)	-0.162 (0.122)
TURKISH		-0.186 (0.236)	-0.239 (0.229)
HIER vs EGAL			**0.606** (0.184)
INDI vs COMM			-0.001 (0.176)
R2	0.079	0.083	0.159
F	**2.668**	2.252	**3.297**

Note: IV's were added incrementally into three models. Standard errors are in parentheses. Bolded coefficients are significant at $p \leq .05$. N = 130.

The first multiple linear regression results are shown in Table 4, where question 36 ("The relationship between Syrian refugees and Turks is quite good") is the dependent variable. In response to the social risk posed by Syrian refugees, the hierarchist-individualist value expressed significance in both linear (see Table 4) and

ordinal models (see Table 5). In model 3 of the linear regression (r-squared 0.159; significant F-value of 3.297), a positive coefficient indicated that egalitarians had a tendency to consider social risk as higher than hierarchists. The well-fitted ordinal regression (-2 Log likelihood 0.006; 0.125 Pearson chi-square; r-squared 0.229) showed a similar trend, where the significant egalitarian coefficient of -1.374 marked a higher risk perception than the hierarchist baseline variable.

Table 5: Ordinal forward stepwise regression, where DV is Q36 (social risk), responses based on a 5-point agreement-disagreement (reverse coded) Likert scale, answering the question "The relationship between Syrian refugees and Turks is quite good"

	Model	1		2	3
	AGE	-0.049	-0.028	-0.049 (0.028)	-0.049 (0.029)
EMPLOYEMENT	UNSKILLED	**2.396**	-1.223	**2.427** (1.225)	2.416 (1.263)
	SEMI-SKILLED	1.925	-1.128	1.922 (1.126)	2.117 (1.167)
	SKILLED MANUAL	1.56	-1.116	1.589 (1.119)	1.574 (1.154)
	SKILLED NON-MANUAL	1.873	-1.328	1.873 (1.326)	1.963 (1.373)
	INTERMEDIATE	2.042	-1.367	2.087 (1.375)	1.843 (1.425)
	PROFESSIONAL	0a		0a	0a
EDUCATION	ELEMENTARY	1.982	-1.36	1.982 (1.358)	1.212 (1.398)
	HIGH SCHOOL	1.455	-1.068	1.443 (1.07)	1.069 (1.087)
	BACHELOR'S	0.121	-0.997	0.107 (0.999)	-0.041 (1.014)
	MASTER'S	0.313	-1.038	0.305 (1.039)	0.154 (1.055)
	DOCTORAT	0a		0a	0a
GENDER	FEMALE	-0.111	-0.375	-0.091 (0.383)	0.002 (0.389)
	MALE	0a		0a	0a
ETHNICITY	MINORITY			0.155 (0.47)	0.235 (0.473)
	TURKISH			0a	0a
WORLDVIEW	EGALITARIAN				**-1.374** (0.407)
	HIERARCHIST				0a
	COMMUNITARIAN				-0.085 (0.364)
	INDIVIDUALIST				0a
	-2 Log likelihood (sig.)	0.078		0.108	0.006
	Pearson	0.15		0.213	0.125
	R2 (Nagelkerke)	0.142		0.143	0.229
	Test of parellel lines (sig.)	0.925		0.998	1

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. Bolded coefficients are significant at $p \leq .05$. N = 130. Logit link function. Data points *0a* are baseline variable classes.

Regarding regression significance, education took more importance in responses concerning inflow risk (question 33). Across all three linear regression models (*see* Table 6), education showed negative significance, meaning that those with lower education were more likely to perceive the risk of allowing large numbers of refugees into Turkey as lower than the remaining respondents. The education coefficient did, however, decline (-0.406 to -0.293) when worldview variables were added within model 3. The hierarchist-egalitarian scale worldviews expressed significance (0.838), with a positive coefficient indicating a tendency for hierarchists

to perceive inflow as a lower risk than egalitarians. Ordinal regression (*see* Table 7) confirmed the difference between hierarchist and egalitarian perception of risk, with a significant egalitarian worldview coefficient of -1.492 below the hierarchist baseline class (thus, perceiving risk as higher). Keeping with the ordinal regression, the significance of education determined through linear regression was pared down, showing in all three models that a maximum educational attainment at the high school level was the most influential educational category.

Table 6: Linear forward stepwise regression, where DV is Q33 (inflow risk), responses based on a 5-point agreement-disagreement (reverse coded) Likert scale, answering the question "The number of Syrian refugees that were accepted into Turkey was appropriate".

Model	1	2	3
MALE	0.25 (0.221)	0.188 (0.222)	0.044 (0.216)
AGE	-0.022 (0.017)	-0.021 (0.017)	-0.021 (0.016)
EMPLOYMENT LEVEL	-0.175 (0.105)	-0.169 (0.104)	-0.192 (0.099)
EDUCATION LEVEL	**-0.417** (0.152)	**-0.406** (0.151)	**-0.293** (0.147)
TURKISH		**-0.529** (0.288)	**-0.605** (0.276)
HIER vs EGAL			**0.838** (0.222)
INDI vs COMM			0.034 (0.212)
R2	0.093	0.117	0.210
F	3.194	**3.28**	**4.629**

Note: IV's were added incrementally into three models. Standard errors are in parentheses. Bolded coefficients are significant at $p ≤ .05$. N = 130.

Discussion

In total, the survey research instrument explored the perception of five risks. From the analysis of survey data, at least two of the five risk items (inflow and social risks) provided some answers to the aforementioned research questions stated in the introduction. The data obtained within the context of the three remaining risk items (employment, security and political risks) were much more inconclusive in regards to how worldviews play in the perception of risk. This next section expands on the results obtained through this research, bridging obtained results with research questions, and exploring possible reasons for these findings.

Table 7: Ordinal forward stepwise regression, where DV is Q33 (inflow risk), responses based on a 5-point agreement-disagreement (reverse coded) Likert scale, answering the question "The number of Syrian refugees that were accepted into Turkey was appropriate".

	Model	1	2	3
	AGE	-0.022 (0.027)	-0.017 (0.027)	-0.016 (0.028)
EMPLOYMENT	UNSKILLED	2.15 (1.189)	2.279 (1.185)	2.21 (1.213)
	SEMI-SKILLED	1.968 (1.108)	1.942 (1.097)	2.189 (1.126)
	SKILLED MANUAL	1.243 (1.093)	1.399 (1.09)	1.361 (1.11)
	SKILLED NON-MANUAL	1.945 (1.298)	1.934 (1.29)	1.871 (1.333)
	INTERMEDIATE	1.255 (1.33)	1.474 (1.335)	1.139 (1.361)
	PROFESSIONAL	0a	0a	0a
EDUCATION	ELEMENTARY	2.665 (1.368)	2.651 (1.367)	1.959 (1.428)
	HIGH SCHOOL	**2.493** (1.089)	**2.462** (1.091)	**2.285** (1.148)
	BACHELOR'S	1.34 (1.024)	1.261 (1.025)	1.248 (1.085)
	MASTER'S	1.133 (1.059)	1.079 (1.06)	1.021 (1.119)
	DOCTORAT	0a	0a	0a
GENDER	FEMALE	-0.152 (0.36)	-0.04 (0.368)	0.083 (0.379)
	MALE	0a	0a	0a
ETHNICITY	MINORITY		0.807 (0.458)	0.84 (0.468)
	TURKISH		0a	0a
WORLDVIEW	EGALITARIAN			**-1.492** (0.384)
	HIERARCHIST			0a
	COMMUNITARIAN			-0.105 (0.355)
	INDIVIDUALIST			0a
	-2 Log likelihood (sig.)	0.101	0.059	0.001
	Pearson	0.743	0.675	0.633
	R2 (Nagelkerke)	0.134	0.157	0.265
	Test of parellel lines (sig.)	0.464	0.852	1

Note: IV's were added incrementally into three models. Standard errors are in parentheses. Bolded coefficients are significant at $p \leq .05$. N = 130. Logit link function. Data points *0a* are baseline variable classes.

Inflow and social risk

As the intention of this research was to evaluate risk perception through the use of cultural cognition, significant variance ($p \leq .05$) between cultural worldviews was of particular interest. Data analysis revealed that such variance, specifically in regards to the hierarchist-egalitarian worldview scale, was most apparent in responses relating to inflow and social risk. In both cases, the egalitarian worldview perceived the risk as higher than those holding hierarchist worldviews.

Understanding the identities of hierarchists and egalitarians in Turkey is imperative to develop a thoughtful frame of potential explanatory factors fuelling their division on the refugee issue. A relevant way to do so is to look at one of the most polarising event in Turkey's recent history, the 2013 Gezi Park protests. Although the historical green space in Istanbul was indeed the focal point of civil unrest, the Gezi Movement was far from geographically centralised, where protests

spanned across dozens of cities, rallying an estimated 3.5 million individuals (De Ballaigue 2013). The importance of this period in regards to this research lies within the prevalent use of egalitarian narratives used by the crowds of protesters. Egalitarianism was a pivotal part of the emergence of the protest movement, where it was the "(…) result of the cumulative authoritarian governmental actions that people revolted against the regime in pursuit of egalitarian ideals (…)" (Ayındlı 2015: 4). Alonso (2015) illustrates the magnitude of the Gezi Movement:

> "What had initially started as a small sit-in to protect the last piece of green space in central Istanbul went on to develop as a nationwide uprising of sorts. Turkey had rarely seen this level of inter-group camaraderie in contemporary history. It seemed that, at last, something was happening that would start to seriously question the policies that had destroyed (and continue to do so) large chunks of the social fabric, environment, the tangible and intangible heritages of Istanbul, alongside the possibilities of more egalitarian and truly heterogeneous urban spaces." (Alonso 2015: 231)

Aside from the participants' strong focus on egalitarianism, another "(…) overarching theme was that of *culture*, especially the presumed fragmentation of secular political culture at the behest of a pro-Islamic authoritarian nationalist conservative party" [emphasis in original text] (Abbas and Yiğit 2015, 73). Similarly, Moudouros (2014) claims that "(…) the mass mobilization of the protests was attacking the central vein of the ideological and economic aspirations of political Islam regarding the transformation of urban space" (Moudouros 2014, 191) and that the movements' strong opposition to the ruling AK Parti (AKP) developed "(…) another major pole which came to dispute all the previous ones: it disputes the ideological autocracy of the Islamic world, it requires the overthrow of the Islamic paternalism and at the same time it distances itself from and denounces the older version of the Kemalist authoritarianism" (Moudouros 2014, 193). The movement also presented a stance vis-à-vis Turkey's economic future, as was expressed in Gürcan and Peker's (2015) book *Challenging Neoliberalism at Turkey's Gezi Park*: "we hope that our enterprise will contribute to the understanding of the prospects and limitations of the emerging popular-egalitarian alternatives to neoliberalism" (Gürcan and Peker's 2015, 6).

Although a brief outline of the Gezi affair, it is clear that environmental, social, cultural, political and economic spheres factored into this nationwide crisis. Arguably, it is indeed one mean by which the identities of egalitarians and hierarchists in Turkey can be carved out. Furthermore, a look at the demographic

makeup of Gezi protesters provides interesting parallels with this research' findings. A study undertaken by Konda Research and Consulting (2014) showed that of sampled Gezi park protesters, 34.5 % had a high school education, 42.8% had completed college (equivalent to a Bachelor's degree) and 12.9% had a Master's degree (Konda Research and Consulting 2014, 11). This is consistent with the egalitarian educational profile determined in this research, where instances in which egalitarians perceived risk significantly higher than hierarchists (inflow and social risk) were paired to higher levels of education. Cluster analysis also revealed the correlation between egalitarians and higher levels of education, where one of five egalitarian-individualist clusters was combined with Master's level education, another with the Doctorate level, two with the Bachelor's level and another with high school level education. In contrast, both hierarchist-individualist clusters had elementary education as cluster members.

Although this research has no intention to seek answers in the wrong places, the objective of a discussion is indeed to explore and propose reasoning for research findings according to the best explanatory sources. The Gezi crisis is fresh in Turkey's history and its magnitude should not be undermined. The events explicitly demarcated a line between two very distinct camps, those who support AKP's vision of "New Turkey" (Yavuz 2006) as a strong state built on the pillars of neoliberalism and Islam (Moudouros 2014), and those dissidents who disagreed with this outlook. It is not unlikely that this strong polarisation transpires to the refugee inflow question. In fact, this trend was identified in a study by the Hacettepe University Migration and Politics Research Centre, where it was determined that Turks supporting AKP were more likely to have positive feelings towards refugees (Erdoğan 2014).

It has been well documented that the decision to allow such a great number of refugees into Turkey was AKP's making (Bozkurt 2012). Thus, if a parallel is drawn between anti-AKP Gezi protesters and the egalitarian profile of this research, it is possible that egalitarians consider the risk greater than hierarchists because they do not have as strong an allegiance or trust in the current apparatus governing Turkey. If this is true, identity protective cognition may be at work. Kahan *et al.* (2007) outline the circumstance in which identity protective cognition may take place:

> "Individual well-being, this account recognizes, is intricately bound up with group membership, which supplies individuals not only with material benefits but a range of critical nonmaterial ones, including opportunities to acquire status and self-esteem. Challenges to commonly held group *beliefs* can undermine a person's well-

being either by threatening to drive a wedge between that person and other group members, by interfering with important practices within the group, or by impugning the social competence (and thus the esteem-conferring capacity) of a group generally." [emphasis in original text] (Kahan *et al.* 2007, 470)

In Cohen *et al.*'s (2000) work on the play of biases and self-affirmation within the perception of abortion, results showed a "tendency to rate the attitude-confirming advocate more favorably than the attitude-disconfirming one" (Cohen *et al.* 2000, 1160), supporting a theory that "(…) people resist evidence that challenges the validity of strongly held beliefs (…)" (Cohen *et al.* 2000, 1161). Knowing that the AKP-led government proposed Turkey's open-door policy for Syrian refugees, and assuming that egalitarians are potentially comprised of individuals with alternate party affiliations (or none at all), their higher perception of risk may be a form of motivated cognition by which AKP initiatives are perceived as inherently anti-social, destructive and unadvisable. To further illustrate this point, what is suggested here is that if egalitarians saw the relationship between Turks and Syrian refugees as good or low risk (social risk), or the number of allowed refugees to enter Turkey to be acceptable (inflow risk), then their affinity to governmental wariness would be threatened to a certain extent. This has strong ties to the process of reactive devaluation, "(…) the tendency of individuals who belong to a group to dismiss the persuasiveness of evidence proffered by their adversaries in settings of intergroup conflict" (Kahan and Braman 2006, 166), where even if there was evidence of social cohesion between Syrian refugees and Turks, egalitarians would potentially reject these facts. Alternatively, as McCright and Dunlap (2011) explain that "the parallel dynamics of identity-protective cognition and system-justifying attitudes also suggest that heightened emotional and psychic investment in defending in-group claims may translate into misperceived understanding about problems (…)" (McCright and Dunlap 2011, 1165), it is possible that hierarchists perceive social and inflow risks as lower than egalitarians in order to justify the arguably rigid and hierarchical AKP system, and would therefore validate news reports showing successful relations between Syrian refugees and Turks.

As religion and its place in national identity configured into the Gezi movement, it may have had influence on egalitarian and hierarchist perceptions of risk. Moudouros (2014) explains that:

"(…) the AKP managed to restore the doctrine of an 'original Turkey' as the central characteristic of the identity that seeks to impose itself in public. The basic components of this identity are the local characteristics unique to the nation and

Islamic religion, as interpreted by the current political power" (Moudouros 2014, 184)

Demographic data concerning Turkey's June 2015 election shows that 44% of AKP's electorate was composed religious conservatives (16% above the national average), 47% were traditional conservatives and 9% identified as "modern" (Konda Research and Consulting 2015, 75). In contrast, AKP's main contender, Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (CHP), had an electorate profile made up of 8% religious conservatives, 38% traditional conservatives and 54% identifying as "modern" (29% above the national average)(Konda Research and Consulting, 2015: 75). Both cultural theory and cultural cognition consider culture as the anchor dividing hierarchists and egalitarians. However, as these theoretical frameworks have been applied in Western societies, where cultural diversity is much more prevalent due to colonisation, globalisation and global migration flows, culture in Turkey is much more homogenous and its divisions are rather anchored in the debate of modernisation versus traditionalism. Historically speaking, Turks have mostly identified as non-Arabs (Salbi 2015; Uzer 2016), largely fuelled by their penchant for secularism and modernisation. However, although "(…) Turkish historiography has been dominated by secularization theory that takes as axiomatic the 'decline of religion' both among individuals and in society as a whole as a result of modernization" (Brockett 2011, 222), "(…) Turks today who do not consciously identify as Muslims have a very real fear that their own freedoms are now at risk with an Islamic political power" (Brockett 2011, 226). As Syrian refugees flow through the border, originating from the Arab world with higher national rates of religiosity, egalitarians' plausible affinity to modernisation and secularism is now threatened, potentially explaining a higher perception of refugee inflow and social risk.

The authentic truth explaining the division between hierarchists and egalitarians on the inflow and social risks relating to Syrian refugee inflow is unattainable within the scope of this research. However, as this section carved out potential variables contributing to hierarchist and egalitarian identities, future research opportunities have become visible.

Security and political risk

Responses regarding both security and political risk were largely inconclusive when analysed against independent variables. Significant variability was only

identified in responses relating to security risks, where ordinal regression identified that individuals working in lower employment levels considered the risk to be lower than those working in higher employment levels. Linear regression, however, did not recognise this variability as significant.

Descriptive statistics regarding risk level responses for both political and security risks evidently demonstrate a larger spectrum of responses when compared to the other risk factors. For instance, where risk level is primarily considered as "high" or "very high" for employment and social risks, responses for political and social risk seemingly hover between "high" and "low". Various factors, other than those demographic characteristics collected in this study, can potentially explain the larger spectrum of risk perceptions for political and security risks.

As briefly identified in the last section, AKP has greatly changed Turkey's political landscape since its success as the ruling party since 2002. One of the early events foreshadowing the current state of Turkey's political landscape were the 2008 Ergenekon court trials. Led by AKP, 275 individuals, including army generals, lawyers and journalists, were accused of being part of a coup-plotting terrorist organisation named "Ergenekon". After five years, "(…) the court acquitted only 21 out of some 275 defendants and handed down harsh sentences to the rest" (Taş 2014, 163). This was, however, a controversial case, as some journalists and academics claimed that the Ergenekon court trials were potentially an attempt by AKP to silence political opponents (Hürriyet 2008; Taş 2014; Esayan 2013). When the same State prosecutors working on the Ergenekon case went after then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (now President) for corruption charges in 2014, Erdoğan attempted to discredit the prosecutor' authenticity, "(…) acknowledging what many legal and forensics experts have long said: that, in a word, the [Ergenekon] trials were a sham" (Arango 2014). However, at this point, constitutional changes (Aydınlı 2011) were already put in place and the once politicised and traditionally parallel military forces (Haynes 2010) were now seemingly under AKP rule (The Economist 2013). This was an extensive change, as "(…) Turkey's political culture and the legitimacy of successive regimes have been strongly moulded by the heavily politicised armed forces" (Haynes 2010, 315). It is from this understanding that both political and security risks have been grouped together in this discussion.

Although well within the lines of ethical protocol, asking questions about the political and security risks brought about by Syrian refugees may be wrought with limitations in a socio-political climate such as Turkey. Beck (1998) explains that

manufactured uncertainty "(…) means that risk has become an inescapable part of our lives and everyone is facing unknown and barely calculable risks" (Beck 1998, 12). In Turkey, this unknown is exacerbated by a widely-recognised systematic control of information by the ruling party. In the *2016 Prison Census* by the Committee to Protect Journalists, Turkey ranked 1st globally for journalist imprisonment (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2016a). Alternatively, Reporters with Borders' *2017 World Press Freedom Index* ranked Turkey 155th highest out of 180 countries (Reporters Without Borders, 2017). In one event, where photograph-supported reports surfaced that Turkey's *Millî İstihbarat Teşkilatı* intelligence agency (MİT) was transferring weapons into Syria, the state resorted to pressing terrorism and treason charges against the two journalists who had reported on this evidence (Committee to Protect Journalists 2016b). Judges and lawyers have also faced the brunt of censorship, Human Rights Watch calling it "(…) government control of the judiciary" (Sinclair-Webb 2015). Academics have not escaped ideological control either, where following a recently drafted petition signed by 90 Turkish academics demanding a ceasefire in the predominantly Kurdish southeast region, government security forces detained 27 of them under a charge of spreading terrorist propaganda (Weaver 2016).

As Coote (1998) asserts that planning for uncertainty involves "(…) a continuing dialogue between the public and the policy-makers", and that it is indeed "(…) a two-way process in which those who are responsible give account and are held to account by those who have vested that responsibility in them", it is apparent that by means of censorship, the current Turkish State does not want a dialogic relationship with its citizens, or at least those who do not endorse all of AKP's endeavors. This lack of dialogue can lead to a misunderstanding of risks, potentially explaining the large spread in political and security risk perceptions. Other studies on public perception of risk, particularly in the context of climate change, have drawn similar conclusions (*see* Corbett and Durfee 2004; Poortinga *et al.* 2011; Corner *et al.* 2012). Fear may also be at play in the make up of responses, where some respondents may have downplayed political risk (by means of self-censorship) in the event that somehow their identity would be revealed to Turkish authorities. Some may have answered according to their understanding that the current government' shear strenght will tame security risks, as has been the case with its recent military campaign in Kurdish areas in southeastern Turkey, along with widespread arrests following the 2016 coup attempt allegedly plotted by the Gülen movement (Lowen

2017). In view of the 2015 Ankara bombing attacks claiming the lives of nearly one hundred protesters, and where Cagay Duru of the Association of Turkish Psychologists stated that "such man-made attacks not only kill or injure people, but also cause severe harm on the psychology of individuals and society" (Girit 2015), others may have responded according to a view that security gaps do exist. Lastly, although not claiming that this is the last of possible explanation for the response divide on (particularly) security risk, is the notion of optimism bias. Where optimism bias is "(…) the tendency to rate our own risk as significantly lower than that of our peers (…)" (Cameron 2008, 573), some may have answered thinking that while a security risk may in fact exist, the slim chances that it affects them directly may have lead them to a lower perception of actual risk.

Employment risk

Descriptive statistics (*see* Table 2) indicated that, generally, the risk of Syrian refugee inflow was perceived as "high" (51.5%) or "very high" (26.2%). As was briefly outlined in the introduction, this is a common fear amongst host country citizens. By means of regression analysis, employment, education and ethnicity independent variables were shown to express significant variance in responses ($p ≤ .05$). Those having a higher level of education, working in a high employment category and identifying as Turkish seemingly perceived employment risk as higher than the remainder of respondents.

Media reports concerning both Syrian refugees and the theme of employment show two very different realities. On the one hand, the Syrian refugees' inability to secure work permits has forced many into informal or low-paying jobs, causing hostility amongst locals competing for the little work that is available (Ozdemir 2014; Today's Zaman 2014). In this scenario, the results from this research are surprising, as those in higher-level employment perceive refugees as a higher risk to Turkish employment than those working in unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled-manual jobs. The second refugee employment reality is portrayed as successful, where Syrian's were the most prominent group of foreigners starting new businesses in Turkey in 2014 (Hürriyet Daily News 2014) and that 2015 saw "(…) more than 1,000 companies (…) established in Turkey with at least one Syrian partner (…), compared with 30 in 2010" (Hürriyet Daily News 2015). This equates to about one out of forty new businesses in Turkey, indicates a report by the Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (Zalewski 2015). This second scenario, where Syrian refugees

are seemingly gaining an increasingly strong foothold in business on Turkish soil, may be one of a plurality of factors explaining why those in higher-level jobs (e.g. those working in business or finance) have a significantly higher employment risk perception than those working in lower-income employment sectors.

Coupled with results for risk perception and educational attainment, higher risk perception amongst those working in higher-level employment sectors may also have been the result of increased access to information. According to the 2015 Turkish Statistical Institute (2015) survey on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) usage, 94.1% of individuals with a university degree had logged onto the Internet within a three month period, in contrast to 31.2% of individuals with a primary level education (Turkish Statistical Institute 2015). Similarly, a report on Internet and social media usage in Turkey found that those with higher incomes (thus likely in higher employment levels) were significantly more likely to use the Internet for news information than those in lower income ranges (Konda Research and Consulting 2011). Although no studies specific to Turkey have been undertaken comparing the representation of Syrian refugees in print, television and online news platforms, studies such as Yang and Grabe' (2011) confirm that a knowledge gap exists between those individuals who gather news information from print and those who consult online sources. Bek (2004) asserts that tabloidization permeates throughout the whole of Turkey's television networks (and has also been extended to print media), resulting in televised and print news that is condensed and politically superficial: "the reporting adopted in this news is *not* the investigative type; it does not attempt to investigate why and how an event happened or what the social context or solutions are" [emphasis in original text] (Bek 2004, 381). Online news sources, on the other hand, are much more fluid and dynamic, as content is added at multiple times of the day, articles are connected via hyperlinks and users can participate through discussion boards and comment threads. This, undeniably, creates an environment with richer content and greater learning opportunities rather than television or print news sources that restrict or dumb down (in the case of tabloidization) information. As Akser and Baybars-Hawks (2012) outline that since AKP's political success in 2002 was followed by the mass conglomeration of television and print news, creating what they call a "(…) media autocracy (…)" (Akser and Baybars-Hawks 2012, 315), it is not unlikely that news coverage pertaining to refugee livelihoods and well-being has been wrought with distortions. If this is the case, it would potentially explain why both highly educated and those working in

high-level employment jobs (i.e. those individuals more likely to access online news sources) would have a wider understanding and pulse on the refugee issue, their livelihoods and their potential impact on Turkey's employment structure.

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