



Problems of nepotism and favouritism in the police organization in Turkey

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Keywords *Police, Turkey*

Abstract *Policing in a democratic, free society is one of the essential arguments in the literature. However, the data collected from the police chiefs (N = 306) show that nepotism and favouritism, enforced mostly by politicians, are the main problems in police organization in Turkey. That means that legality is ignored by the governing political parties at the expense of democratization of policing. Consequently, law enforcement and maintaining social order within the principles of democracy are problematic in Turkey, which may provide such a climate as to favour organized criminal groups, that are against democratization of the country.*

Introduction

At present, one of the main arguments in sociology is related to policing in a democratic society. A free society is possible with law enforcement and social order (Cox, 1996; Reiner, 1992). On the other hand, in general, there are social structural obstacles which challenge democratization of societies. Namely, they are street crimes, or conventional crimes and organized criminal groups. Street crimes, or conventional crimes mostly generate female victimization, fear of crimes and violence. That means breakdown of democracy, since fear, threat, and violence become part of everyday life. At this point, we should keep in mind that criminal democracy, or totalitarian liberalism, also, cannot present a free society. On the other hand, criminal organized groups oppose integration of the legal system with the rules of market economy. That means, also, a breakdown of democracy, since illegal economy, or immorality becomes part of the reality of everyday life. Unless the legal system is integrated into the principles of market economy, sources of making wealth are the consequences of immorality and breaking laws. Consequently, street crimes and organized criminal groups must be minimized in order to maintain democratization of society. That is possible; at least democratic institutionalization of policing is maintained. In other words, politicians' anti-democratic interventions into policing must be eliminated. On the other hand, the issue of the proper extent and nature of police intervention into the lives of citizens is also a constant source of controversy (Roberg and Kuykendall, 1993). The aim is to maintain a balanced relationship between citizens' constitutional rights and policing, in the name of crime prevention, law enforcement and maintaining social order (Walker, 1983). This is possible; at least the control of police is established by democratic principles. In other words, politicians' antidemocratic

interventions into police work must be eliminated. That means, democratic institutionalization of policing is needed.

In order to clarify policing in a democratic society, there is a need to comprehend policing problems. Unfortunately, in many countries, there are too few studies on police problems, while criticism of the police is generated by the media and some interests groups, namely, politicians, Mafia, media, labor and employer organizations. Consequently, much speculation is communicated to the public on policing problems, at the expense of sociological studies which, relatively speaking, introduce objective knowledge in order to argue the relationship between democracy and policing.

Since the data refer to the police organization in Turkey, it may be useful to enlighten the readers about the police organization. Thus, a general description follows of the Turkish police organization.

Organizational structure of the Turkish police

A. History

Relatively speaking, there is a long police history in Turkey. In a professional sense, the police were established in 1845 (Aydin, 1991, 1997). Before that, policing in the Ottoman Empire was carried out by military commanders. For the Ottoman, the Janissaries were the largest military force, but this was abolished during the 1830s and the new army had no policing responsibilities and obligations. Therefore, there was a gap in maintaining public order and a new civil police force was required to fill it. Consequently, in April 1845, the first police regulations and professional ethics were introduced. They were borrowed in full from French police regulations, i.e. it was a basic translation of French police regulations (Gulmez, 1983). In the light of those regulations, the police in Ottoman remained within the framework of the military force but were subject to slowly becoming a non-military force. As a consequence, the police were removed from the jurisdiction of the military and placed under the directorate of Police Marshalship (Zaptiye Musiriyeti), in 1848 (Okcabal, 1939). That is the first professional police organization in Turkish police history. During the second half of the nineteenth century, rural Turkey was policed by gendarmerie and retained an army association, while urban Turkey, like Istanbul, was policed by Police Marshalship. After the First World War, the Ottoman Empire collapsed and Turkey inherited the Ottoman. Therefore, the Ottoman police organization continued also. Just after the foundation of the new republic in 1923, the name of the national police organization became the General Directorate of Security, which still exists, and the gendarmerie was reorganised again to be attached to the Ministry of Interior for their policing functions. The gendarmerie are also responsible to the Ministry of Defence for their military functions. In 1932, the police were divided into two branches as uniformed and plain-clothes detectives. After 1960, again we see two major changes in police organization in Turkey (Aydin, 1991, 1997). Riot Police units or departments (*toplum polisi*) were introduced within the central and provincial police departments, in 1965. These changes were in response to

public disturbances and political violence in the early 1960s. Later on, these police units or departments, called Riot Police, were replaced by the Rapid Action Policing units (*çevik kuvvet*) in 1982. Also, in the 1980s, we see the introduction of Special Operation Teams (*Ozel Hareket Timleri*) and Anti-Terror police departments into the police force in Turkey.

B. Present police organization structure

Policing in Turkey has traditionally been centralized and carried out by three separate national forces. Namely, the civil police, the gendarmerie, and the coastal security. All over, centralization has been a traditional characteristic of the political and administrative system in Turkish history. Turkey's centralized and coercive style of policing derives from the centralized policing tradition of France. In Turkey, the Ministry of the Interior essentially has the authority to control and fund the police. However, in practice, operational control is not usually exercised by the Ministry of the Interior, but is delegated to the heads of three forces mentioned above. Namely, the Director-General of the Police, the Commander-General of the Gendarmerie and the Commander of the Coastal Security Guard. These, in turn, delegate some of their authority to the directors and commanders of provincial organizations.

Another body involved in the management structure of policing in Turkey is the High Security Commission. This is an advisory body, which has the role of co-ordinating the three police forces and other institutions involved in policing. It makes the highest decisions in terms of internal security, peace and order in the country. The High Security Commission holds its meetings at various times during the year and is called into emergency sessions when necessary. The chairman is the Ministry of the Interior. The permanent representative members are from the general staff, and the heads of police, the gendarmerie and the coastal security forces. The commanders of some Special Forces such as the customs and forest guard are usually represented in this Commission. The chairman, the Ministry of the Interior, may also call a number of police inspectors, governors, and representatives from any other relevant organizations for each meeting. All the functions performed by these three forces are the same but normally the police are responsible for policing within the municipal boundaries of cities and towns. The gendarmerie work in rural areas, villages and small towns, and the coastal security guard is responsible for not only, as their name would imply, the coastal areas but also territorial waters. The three forces have separate arrangements for finance, central headquarters in Ankara, provincial units, training schools, and communication systems. The highest officials of the organizations are attached to the Ministry of Interior with regard to their policing functions. The local units are under the highest civil authority with respect to their functions and under the Public Prosecutor with respect to their judicial functions.

The Turkish National Police corresponds to the administrative subdivisions. There are three kinds of department within the central organization or headquarters: the principal, assistant and advisory departments. The principal

departments are those which are responsible for the main policing tasks such as crime prevention and public order, for example, the departments of security, anti-terrorism, traffic. Assistant departments are those such as personnel affairs, health and training, which act as support and help the principal departments to carry out a more effective policing service. Finally, advisory departments, such as the Police Inspection Board and Legal Advice, work directly under the command of the Director-General in respect of their specialities to advise or inform the Director-General or other interested departments.

Under the large central organization, there are police units in each city, which also have sub-divisions in districts or small towns. The smallest unit is the local police station, attached to the district police commanders. On the other hand, the Turkish National Gendarmerie organization is a part of the military with responsibility for policing tasks in rural areas. The gendarmerie takes care of law enforcement, conducts criminal investigations, controls traffic within their areas of responsibility. The Ministry of Defence directs the gendarmerie with regard to their military tasks, whereas police tasks of gendarmerie are carried out under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior. Gendarmerie personnel have a military status. The Turkish National Gendarmerie organization has its headquarters in Ankara, the capital city, headed by a General, at the highest level. There are also departments for security, anti-terrorism, administrative or assistant departments such as personnel affairs, training and financial divisions. There are regional divisions, responsible to the Commander-General, commanded by a Colonel. The gendarmes based in the city or in the town units do not police the areas in the municipal boundaries, which are policed by police officers. In summary, we see that the Turkish police organization has been highly centralized. However, some argue that the system should be changed from a centralized to a decentralized model. On the other hand, to the author's knowledge, there is no empirical study which shows the problems of the centralized administrative structure of policing in Turkey, while there are speculative arguments.

C. Police accountability

Accountability is a complex issue. Mostly, we see a good deal of controversy and rhetoric in discussions. In general, the position of chief constables is the centre of the discussions for accountability. This is essentially because of the assumption that there are apparent relationships between the police chiefs and politics. We see that Turkish democratic arrangements have failed to provide political neutrality, or independence of the police. I suggest that the crisis in policing is one of the most striking manifestations of the broader problems of democracy in Turkey. Unlike Western politicians, most Turkish politicians have introduced such definitions of democracy which ignore the rank order of individual responsibilities and obligations for first, citizenship, then nationality and finally identity in order to make society workable, as we see in Northern America, European countries and Japan. Also, most Turkish politicians have

ignored the use of democracy in reducing the average citizen's everyday life problems in a Western sense. Mostly, they introduced a conflicting model of free market economy vs. socialism to the citizens, while ignoring the essential characteristics of the free enterprise social economic and political model in order to enjoy a corrupt and exploitative social system for their personal, material gains. As a result of such politics, citizens in Turkey have formed "rightish" or "leftish" oriented groups of people, who see each other as the "enemy". Therefore, Turkey has experienced regular depressions which resulted in military interventions in 1960, 1971, and 1981. For example, in 1981, about ten citizens died through shooting per day, due to internal, usually violent conflicts between "rightish" and "leftish" oriented people. Such political divisions among the people have occurred in every aspect of life, including the police, in Turkey. That means that, as a bureaucrat, essentially speaking, you may reach a top position if supported by effective politicians. As in many countries, high ranking officers are appointed by politicians.

The type of trust between police and public that characterised consensus policing has broken down, in particular at student demonstrations where there is confusion over offenders and non-offenders; disorder is then inevitable.

In Turkey, the police are answerable to only one person, the Ministry of the Interior. Therefore, in a fundamental sense, policing is a political activity. In all countries, police have a political function. Police leadership is composed of members of the Establishment, and as such there is a complex interaction between the state as a whole and the police. For example, in Turkey, a tragic traffic accident occurred at the end of December 1997, where a very well-known police chief, a member of the Mafia, and a member of Parliament were all in the same private car. This accident stirred unprecedented debate about the relationships between the Mafia, police and politicians. Consequently, the critical question is how are we to avoid the police becoming a partisan tool? (Bowden, 1978). One way this may be achieved to some extent is to maximize professionalization in a democratic country, while minimizing bureaucratization in the police organization.

Interpretations of the data

The data are collected from police chiefs to specify and clarify police problems from the viewpoints of their experiences, in Turkey. The questionnaires contain 47 about policing problems including demographic items. The questionnaires are presented to the police chiefs anonymously to portray a sense of privacy. The respondents have at least 15 years of work experience and, consequently, I assume that they are conscious of their occupational problems, and able to provide valid and reliable answers to the questions. The sample size was 306. The questionnaires were presented to 400 police chiefs but some of them did not answer some items in the questionnaire and, therefore, were eliminated from the statistical analysis. The data were collected following the non-probability purposive procedure. This data collection procedure was

chosen to target those subjects who show sympathy for the study and therefore would be willing to answer the questions which are confidential in nature; also, in order to target those who have at least 15 years' work experience.

Demographic information in the data shows that 22.5 per cent ($N = 68$), 14.8 per cent ($N = 47$), 62.7 per cent ($N = 191$) are chief inspectors, superintendents, and directors, respectively. We see that directors make up a large portion of the data, and that 43 per cent ($N = 132$), 24 per cent ($N = 75$), 21 per cent ($N = 65$), and 11 per cent ($N = 34$) have close to 15 years, between 16 and 25 years, between 26 and 30 years, and more than 31 years of work experience, respectively. In Turkey, the police organization has several divisions. Namely, police stations, departments such as custom, personnel affairs, computer, passport, migration, crime prevention, inspection, finance, airports, organised crime and smuggling. There are also traffic, rapid action and special forces, in the police organization, in Turkey. With reference to the departments in which the respondents have worked, the data indicate that 20.6 per cent have worked in police stations, 23.9 per cent in departments as listed above, 14.7 per cent in traffic, 16.1 per cent in rapid action, 3.7 per cent in anti-terror squads, 10.2 per cent in police colleges, and about 10.9 per cent in the others. Therefore, the data show that the respondents have a good working background with experience in virtually all departments. On the other hand, when the subjects were asked to specify what departments or divisions they wish to work in, the following findings were obtained: 35.1 per cent, 22.2 per cent, 16.5 per cent, 15.4 per cent, 8.9 per cent preferred to work in police stations, departments, rapid action, traffic and anti-terror teams, respectively. It is interesting to see that mostly they wish to have work experience in police stations.

Opinions on the appointment and promotion applications. When the respondents were asked to specify "whether legal regulations for the appointments are applied as declared in the name of justice", 232 (72 per cent) respondents indicated that those regulations are mostly ignored. On the other hand, when the subjects were asked to report "any illegal use of appointment regulations for your own personal appointments", 161 (53 per cent) subjects said "yes", while 143 (46 per cent) said "no". We see that some injustices were committed in appointments. About half of the respondents believed that their appointments were made in a fair way, while the other half denied any just application and specified the existence of subjectivie as opposed to objective applications. In summary, these findings suggest that appointments are mostly dominated by personal networks; namely, nepotism and favouritism. In other words, about three-quarters of respondents are discontented, while one quarter are content with the application of appointments.

Similarly, when the respondents were asked to indicate "whether legal regulations for the promotions are applied in an appropriate manner to the relevant laws", 157 (52 per cent) respondents indicated, simply, "no", while 47 per cent reported that the rules are properly applied. On the other hand, 129 (42 per cent) respondents indicated that they personally experienced illegal use of the regulations for their own promotions, while 177 subjects (58 per cent)

reported that they have not experienced any abuse. Overall, more than half of the respondents shared negative opinions about applications for the promotions. In summary, these findings indicate that promotions are also regulated by personal networks to a significant extent.

It is obvious that promotions are much more important, since they relate to the personal advancement of the officers in the profession. It is clear that any injustice in promotions will not only effect the individual officer in lowering morale and work efficiency, but also cause negative feelings towards the leaders in the police organization and organization itself in general. It is clear that officers, who believe that they are not treated fairly and justly according to objective rules, will resort to external help to get what they believe they deserve. This appears to be an invitation to politicians to interfere in the organization. One vital implication of unfair application of the rules for promotions is maintaining the serious inequalities created by advancing those who do not really deserve to be promoted and holding back the ones who deserve it on merit. This, no doubt, reduces the overall efficiency of the organization.

The data also show that the longer the respondents serve in the organization the more experience of promotion they gain. A Pearson correlation coefficient of -0.26 was obtained between the years served and general opinion for promotion. Briefly, this shows that the longer one serves in the police organization the more negative the opinions about the applications for promotion which are gained. Similarly, as expected, a Spearman Rho of -0.24 was calculated when studying the relationship between individual officers' rank in the organization and their opinion for the application of promotion. Specifically speaking, as we move in the direction of chief inspectors, superintendents, one-star director, two-star director, three-star director and four-star director, we see more and more negative opinions, among the subjects, for the promotion applications. On the other hand, the cross-tabulation of individual opinions for the promotions in general and individual opinions for personal promotion show that those subjects (who express that their promotions were not followed by just, fair, objective rules) are more likely to have negative opinions for the applications of promotion in police organization, in general (chi-square = 82.5, $df = 9$, $p = 0.001$, and Somer's $D = 0.59$). This finding suggests that if an honest, objective, fair and just system of promotion and appointment in police organization is maintained, then it will be possible for individual officers to have positive, constructive opinions for the organization. It is noteworthy that a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.44, and Spearman Rho 0.43 were obtained when we calculated the relationship between individual officers' opinions for the promotion and appointment. In summary, we see that the subjects experience some anxiety and fears for their appointments and promotions, evidenced by the finding that 71 per cent ($N = 218$) of the respondents answered "yes" to the item, "Do you believe that the present system of promotion and appointment will be against your personal gains?"

Also, when they were asked to identify the most important problem they experience, 243 (79 per cent) respondents reported that it was pressure from the politicians who are the main generators of nepotism and favouritism. On the other hand, similarly, the data also show that 278 (90.8 per cent) police chiefs reported that pressure groups exercise negative effects on police work. When the respondents were asked to specify “the three most important pressure groups which practise negative effects on police,” the data show that 211 subjects (69.0 per cent) mention politicians, first, followed by the media with 19.3 per cent, human rights organizations with 11.8 per cent, and the Mafia with 9.6 per cent. In summary, we see that politicians are perceived to be the most influential pressure group, which exercises negative influences for policing, followed by human rights organizations and the Mafia, in Turkey. It is clear that the only possible solution for minimizing these problems is professionalism against bureaucratization in the police organization. Indeed, the data show that, in order to have freedom from pressure groups, 243 (79 per cent) respondents agreed that promotions and appointments must be controlled by the police professional ethics. In other words, the police organization should be based upon professionalism.

Conclusions

The findings show that the essential problems in the police organization, in Turkey, stem from nepotism and favouritism. Appointments, promotions, and the honoring system are mostly regulated by personal networks, but not by legal rules, at the expense of democratic institutionalization policing. Those networks are mostly based on political affiliation. Following this, the data also show that the next essential policing problem in Turkey is mostly generated by the negative interventions of politicians. Therefore, we see that policing within democratic principles is problematic, while those factors work positively for organized criminal groups (Williams and Savona, 1996; Williams, 1997). A state emphasizing nepotism and favouritism against principles of legality disturbs morality, at the societal level, which is what organized criminal groups wish to see. Criminal groups and conventional crimes are against democratization of the country and democratization of policing (Williams, 1997). Therefore, in Turkey, law enforcement, which is one of the essential duties of police, becomes problematic, evidenced by the findings in this study. Therefore policing for law enforcement and maintaining social order, in a democratic sense, is possible to the extent that policing is independent of politicians’ material interests. In other words, nepotism and favouritism should be eliminated in order to establish democratic institutionalization of police in Turkey.

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