

Attitudes Towards Press in Today's Turkey: How Death Thoughts and Political Tendencies Effect Support for Free Press and Free Speech

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Abstract

Having inspired by "The Mortality Muzzle: The effect of death thoughts on attitudes toward national security and a watchdog press" article by Cuillier et al. (2010), the current study aims to examine the effect of mortality salience and political tendencies on attitudes of university students in Turkey towards free press and free speech. Original study's aim was to understand how Terror Management Theory's predictions effect people's attitudes towards a watchdog press. This study, aims to conduct a similar research in Turkey, understand how the stated factors work in Turkish culture, and see how results differ. Study was conducted in with a total of 110 university students (%61 female, %37 male, %2 unstated) taking various undergraduate and MA courses from communication faculty of a foundation university in İstanbul Turkey. Besides Terror Management Theory, results are discussed according to Turkey's specific conditions at the time data was collected, and participants' political tendencies. In addition, possible reasons for the differences in results are specified.

Keywords: *Terror Management Theory, press freedom, watchdog press, mortality salience.*

Günümüz Türkiye'sinde Basına Karşı Tutumlar: Ölümlle İlgili Düşünceler ve Siyasi Eğilimler, Basın ve İfade Özgürlüğüne Desteği Nasıl Etkiliyor?

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Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Cuillier ve diğerleri (2010) tarafından kaleme alınan "The Mortality Muzzle: The effect of death thoughts on attitudes toward national security and a watchdog press" isimli araştırma Türkiye'de tekrarlayarak, ölümlülüğün belirginliğinin ve bireylerin siyasi eğilimlerinin, Türkiye'deki üniversite öğrencilerinin basın özgürlüğüne ve ifade özgürlüğüne karşı tutumlarını nasıl etkilediğini incelemektir. Orijinal çalışmanın kuramsal dayanağını Dehşet Yönetimi Teorisi oluşturmuştur ve çalışma, söz konusu teorinin öngörülerinin, kamuoyunun bekçi köpeği rolünü üstlenen basına karşı olan tutumları nasıl etkilediğini anlamaya çalışmıştır. Bu çalışma ise, Türkiye'de benzer bir araştırma yapmak, aynı faktörlerin Türkiye kültüründe nasıl işlediğini anlamak ve sonuçların nasıl farklılaştığını görmek amacıyla yapılmıştır. Araştırma, İstanbul'da bir vakıf üniversitesinin iletişim fakültesinde, çeşitli dersleri almakta olan 110 üniversite öğrencisi (%61 kadın, %37 erkek, %2 belirtilmemiş) ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Sonuçlar, Dehşet Yönetimi Kuramının yanı sıra, Türkiye'nin bu çalışmanın verileri toplandığı dönemde var olan özel koşulları ve katılımcıların siyasi eğilimleri ile birlikte tartışılmış ve farklılaşan sonuçların olası sebepleri araştırılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Dehşet Yönetimi Teorisi, basın özgürlüğü, basının bekçi köpeği rolü, ölümlülüğün belirginliği*

Introduction

Based on the studies of Ernest Becker, Terror Management Theory remarks the specific status of humans among other animals. That is, humans are aware of the fact that all creatures are eventually going to die, death is inevitable, and in the end, all of their efforts are in vein. According to the theory, a good number of human behaviors can be explained as a struggle to avoid anxiety and not to panic against this awareness (Goldenberg, et al., 2001, p.427-428).

According to Becker (1976, p.63-64), humankind is constantly trying to find a way to transcend death, but rather spiritually than physically. Culture, by providing ideologies for people to identify themselves with, becomes a mean to reach immortality. Inspired by Otto Rank's writings, Becker states that, individuals tend to think that their ideologies or beliefs are the absolute truth. Therefore, if someone challenges or objects those beliefs, this reminds the individual that he or she is mortal and going to die. That is the cause of the rage people feel towards their opponents.

What is more, according to Becker (1975, p.15) the terror caused by the awareness of death is universal. In addition, humans are not only aware of death, but they are also aware of the fact that it can happen anytime, and anywhere; unexpectedly, and untimely. This knowledge furthermore increases the anxiety (Pyszczynski et al., 2003, p.15-16).

Thus, if individuals identify themselves with a given ideology or cultural worldview, this means they are identifying themselves with something that exceeds the boundaries of the human life. In other words, if people dedicate their lives to a belief or an ideology, then even after their personal death, their ideas would still be alive; and this knowledge gives people the relief that their life was not in vein, it had a meaning, and they were a part of something immortal. Thus, according to Terror Management Theory, if a given structure such as a worldview or self-esteem helps to protect an individual from the terror or the anxiety caused by the awareness of death, people's need for these structures will increase when they are reminded of their mortality (Goldenberg et al., 2001, p.428).

Greenberg et al (1990, p.308-309) stated that worldviews in a given culture "provide the universe with order, meaning, value, and the possibility

of either literal or symbolic immortality". On the other hand, belief systems needs to be validated. If individuals come across a different kind of worldview, anxiety-buffering function of their own belief is threatened. Thus, the hypothesis of the study is, people will respond more positively to others who share their cultural worldview, and more negatively to the others who do not, when reminded of death (mortality salient).

Testing this hypothesis, researchers chose a sample group of Christian university students. Experimental group was first asked to answer questions about their own death, control group on the other hand was asked to answer questions on a neutral subject. Afterwards, both groups were asked to evaluate two "Who Am I?" questionnaires; one appeared to be filled by a Jew, and the other by a Christian. As expected, results showed that, when mortality salient (reminded of death), Christians responded to Jews more negatively, and to Christians more positively (Greenberg et al., 1990, p.310-313).

Another study (Rosenblatt et al., 1989, p.682) focused on norm violation. When a given individual does not share the cultural values of the others, there is a possibility that moral principles of the society are not the absolute truth. Thus, instead of questioning their own morals, and lose their guard against death anxiety, people chose to believe that deviants are evil, and norm violators should be punished. Participants of the study were municipal court judges, and they were asked to set bond for an alleged prostitute. Experimental group, who were reminded of death, set higher bonds than the control group.

Schimmel et al. (1999, p.905-908) studied the effect of mortality salience on stereotypical thinking. The participants were American university students, and similar to other studies, experimental group was reminded of death, and control group was not. Afterwards, both groups were given a questionnaire on characteristic traits, and asked to evaluate how much percentages Germans have each trait. As expected, mortality salient group engaged more into stereotypical thinking.

Another study conducted by Goldenberg et al. (2001, p.427-432) suggests that, according to terror management theory, humans prefer to distinguish themselves from other animals, as animal characteristics remind them their mortality. To test their hypothesis, authors of the study re-

minded experimental group of their deaths and left the control group neutral. Afterwards, both groups read an essay on either similarities or distinctions between humans and other animals. Results showed that, mortality salient group preferred the essay suggesting that humans are unique more than the essay suggesting that humans are similar to other animals. Other studies found that self-esteem functions as a buffer from anxiety caused by awareness of death (Greenberg et al., 1992a); when mortality salient, individuals' commitment to their partners decreases if they first discuss their differences in worldviews (Strachman and Schimel, 2006); and mortality salience increases obsessive-compulsive behavior (Strachan et al., 2007).

On the other hand, Greenberg et al. (1992b), found evidence that mortality salience does not always cause negative reactions. If a person has a liberal worldview, that is, if he or she is more tolerant to dissimilar others and more open-minded, when mortality salient his or her attitude does not become more negative toward a dissimilar other (liberals even become more tolerant when they are reminded of death), as opposed to a conservative person. Another study conducted in the same research showed that, individuals who were subjected a manipulation to prime tolerance, does not show negative reactions to people who are different from them, when mortality salient. Similarly, Pyszczynski et al. (2006) found that, when mortality salient, USA citizens who are conservative are more supportive of extreme military attacks on the Middle East, whereas liberals are not.

As Terror Management Theory suggests that cultural worldview helps individuals battle with anxiety caused by death awareness, testing the theory in different cultures, and see its universality is crucial. That is why, the studies conducted by Kökdemir and Yeniçeri (2010) is very important as they tested the theory in a predominantly Muslim country, Turkey. The first study (p.166-169) measured the effect of mortality salience on university identity. Participants were university students, studying either at a private or at a state university. They were given two types of essays; one was favoring private universities, and the other was favoring state universities. Afterwards the participants were asked to evaluate the essays they were asked to read. When mortality salient, private university students

evaluated the essay favoring private universities more positively. Similarly, state university students, when reminded of death, also evaluated the essay favoring state universities more positively. Researchers conducted another study (Kökdemir and Yeniçeri, 2010, p.170-171), which focused on religious and national identities. Participants were told that Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs were going to fund 11 countries to strengthen the relationships, and then they were asked to give each country a percentage of funding. When mortality salient, participants gave Turkmenistan higher percentage, and Greece and England lower percentage. This case is especially remarkable for Turkmenistan as both Turkey and Turkmenistan share the same ethnic origin.

Terror Management Theory and Attitudes Towards Press

Cuillier et al. (2010) studied how mortality salience affects people's attitudes towards a watchdog press. Researchers suggest that (p.185-186) during times of war and terrorist attacks, support for a watchdog press or press freedom decreases, and this can be explained by Terror Management Theory. Researchers first measured how much participants value national security by using Schwartz's social value survey. Then they reminded the control group of their death and left the experimental group neutral. Afterwards, participants answered questions on press freedom, freedom of expression, and watchdog press. Results showed that, those who value national security more, showed less support for watchdog press. What's more, their support was even lower when mortality salient. On the other hand, mortality salient condition had no statistically significant effect for those who value national security less. Overall participants also had lower support for watchdog press when mortality salient (p.190-194).

Mortality Salience and Turkey's Circumstances

Circumstances in a country may affect its inhabitants' way of thinking and so their behaviors. For discussing terror management theory within current research, it is crucial to consider Turkey's situation at that time and special incidents must be taken into account.

In line with studies following 11 September 2001 attacks in the United States, research that was done by Shalev et al. (2006) showed as well, that during a wave of terror, people exposed to the incidents directly or indirectly are affected psychologically and shown symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and widespread anxiety. Bleich et al. (2006) pointed out that intense and continuous terror results in erosion of resiliency.

Before presenting the findings, it is necessary to explain the atmosphere in Turkey prior to conduct of this research as respondents of the study might be under the influence of their circumstances. Many different incidents recently happened in Turkey might influence responders' answers but mainly it is possible to collect the reasons under four titles: Coup Attempt, terrorist attacks, Syria war and refugees, escalating deadly crimes could be taken into account. It is necessary to evaluate these incidents and possible influence of them on Turkish people.

Coup Attempt

In July 2016, Turkey witnessed a shocking coup attempt organized by a section of the army serving Fethullah Gülen, the leader of Hizmet Movement, living in Pennsylvania, United States. On 15th of July 2016 by night, explosions and shootings took place in Istanbul and Ankara. With the call of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, civilians went out to the streets to protest coup plotters. Turkish Parliament building was attacked and many of the protesters were crushed by military tanks or shot by soldiers. The coup attempt failed, yet, 250 people died, and 2193 people were injured (A.A, 2016).

After the coup attempt, for months, both mainstream and alternative media organizations repeatedly showed the footage of those violent moments where people were being murdered. After the coup attempt, on 20 July 2018, Turkey declared a state of emergency. Nationwide state of emergency that lasted 2 years was ended by the government on 18th of July 2018. It is important to note that this research has been done under the state of emergency and there is a high possibility that respondents were influenced from the atmosphere created by this situation. According to Human Rights Joint Platform (İnsan Hakları Ortak Platformu) State of Emergency: Updated Situation Report, 228.137 people were detained, and

134.144 people were dismissed from their positions under the state of emergency. 31 times state of emergency decrees (KHK) were issued in two years and every time a new decree issued, new implementations were announced, and people were affected. State of emergency decrees included precautions that would be taken against persons and institutions and rearrangement of regulations. As a result of these decrees, investigation and prosecution procedures changed. Detention durations prolonged. 17.089 social media users were accused legally for supporting and praising terrorist organization. 174 media organizations were closed, namely 50 newspapers, 33 TV channels 20 magazines 7 news agencies, 39 radio stations and 30 publication/distribution companies (İnsan Hakları Ortak Platformu, 2018).

Current research questioned Turkish people's attitudes towards a watchdog press and whether their support for watchdog press and press freedom decreases when they are reminded of their death. However, people were in a way inured to the situation. Under these circumstances, it might be possible that whether liberal or conservative, people felt indifferent about freedom of the press.

Terrorism

Terrorism is one of the major problems of Turkey and there are twelve different terrorist organization structures (Yelaldı, 2014). Turkey has geo-strategic importance because of its location, serving as a bridge between Europe and Asia. Neighboring both Middle East and Europe, Turkey has beneficial geographical location. On the other hand, this important geo-strategic position also leads to problems of terrorism activities. Turkey has borders to war areas of 21th century, Iraq and Syria, and terrorist organizations such as PKK (The Kurdish Workers Party) and ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and Levant) are very active in the region. Turkish Armed Forces have been in conflict with PKK and ISIL terrorist organizations. News about martyrs is on the first pages of the newspapers and first issue of TV news almost every day. Not only soldiers and security forces, but also civilians get harmed very often. According to Global Terrorism Index, Turkey was among 10 countries most impacted by terrorism in 2016. Taking the 9th place Turkey is referred and added that Turkey was on the top ten

countries for the first time, due to the increased activity of PKK and ISIL (Institute for Economic & Peace, 2017, p.16-21). According to Global Peace Index 2018 produced by the Institute for Economics and Peace, Turkey is the 149th peaceful country among 163 countries global list and the 36th and the last country among European countries (Institute for Economic & Peace, 2018).

Starting from year 2016 up to the period that the survey of the current study implemented, various shocking terrorist attacks took place in Turkey. On January 12, 2016, In Sultanahmet, central historic district of Istanbul, a suicide bomber blew himself up and killed 10 tourists. On February 17 2016, 28 soldiers killed and more than 60 were injured during the bombing of a military convoy of buses in Ankara. Again, in Ankara on 13th of March 2016, a car exploded in a public square and more than 30 people were killed. On 19th March 2016, 4 people have died in a suicide bomber attack in Istanbul. On 7 th of June 2016, a car bomb in Istanbul tourist district killed 11 people and many others were injured. On 28 June 2016, suicide attackers killed 45 people and injured dozens at Atatürk International Airport in Istanbul. On December 10th, 2016, Outside of Beşiktaş Football Stadium were bombed, 38 people were killed, and 136 others were injured. Finally, on 19th of December 2016, a gunman assassinated Russian Ambassador to Turkey during an art exhibit in Ankara (Montague, Kenneth & Timothy, 2016). At the beginning of 2017 a gunman of ISIL shot and killed 39 civilians and injured 71 people celebrating New Year in Reina nightclub. On the 5th of January 2017 a car bomb was prevented from exploding in Izmir Courthouse, 2 people were killed, and 5 people injured (140 Journos, 2017).

Syrian War and Refugees

Syrian Civil war has started in 2011 and Turkey has been pursuing an open-door policy for the refugees. By the time 2 August 2018, there are 3.542.250 registered Syrian refugees in Turkey according to Turkish government and United Nations Refugee Agency (The Refugees Operational Portal, 2018). Being a border neighbour with war area in Syria, Turkish people have been witnessing brutal incidents. News such as refugees

drowning in sinking boats or daily numbers of death people in Syrian civil war has become routine.

On 20 January 2018, Turkey, together with Free Syrian Army, has made a cross-border intervention to Syria in Afrin. The operation namely "Olive Branch" was targeting YPG, the armed branch of PYD, the Syrian affiliate of the PKK. Between 20 January 2018-8 April 2018, 52 Turkish soldiers were dead, 232 Turkish soldiers were injured (Stratejik Ortak, 2018). The operation was the first news on the agenda of the media in Turkey. Supporting or criticizing the operation, all the media organizations were continuously reporting about the operation and inevitably, about the martyrs. Considering this, it is possible to say that the survey of the current research was done during war atmosphere.

Escalating Deadly Crimes

Deadly crimes are escalating in Turkey and with the increase of related news on the media; people might be remembering their deadliness often. According to the Umut Foundation's Armed Violence Report, armed violence in Turkey escalated by 28 percent in 2017 compared with previous year and 61 percent since 2015. In year 2017, 2187 people were murdered, 3529 people were injured in gun involved incidents. Istanbul, where the survey of the current research was implemented, saw most crimes committed with individual arms, with 351 incidents (Umut Vakfı, 2018).

2017 Report prepared by Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız (We Will Stop Femicide) Platform showed that femicide increased %25 in year 2017 in Turkey and reached to 409 (Daily Sabah, 2018). Taking into consideration the fact that news and every other media content about deadly crimes are very tempting for the audience, it is profitable for the media to use them exaggeratedly and recurrently. As Cultivation Theory of Gerbner points out, violence on TV is very influential over people and violence shown on TV is ten times more than real life. For Gerbner, as media shows violence continuously, it creates an exaggerative violence perception among the audience and cultivates exaggerated amount of feelings of insecurity and restlessness. People watching TV would have negative ideas about the world they live in. Gerbner describes this situation as "Mean world syndrome" (Gerbner et al., 1986, p.28).

In Turkey coup attempt, terrorist attacks, Syrian civil war, refugees, and escalating deadly crimes are on the agenda of the media very intensely in the last 3 years. Thus, people are continuously watching, hearing or reading about a mean world and it is a high possibility that ideas about death are not very much excluded from their minds. It is necessary to evaluate the findings in the light of this information.

Present Study

Besides the specific conditions described above that are surrounding Turkey's citizens, there is also an extremely polarized political climate in today's Turkey; with president Erdoğan's supporters on one side, and opponents on the other. This polarization is consistent with Terror Management Theory's indications and makes it even more necessary to test the theory and its relation to press in country's current situation.

Taking the inspiration from the "The Mortality Muzzle: The Effect of Death Thoughts on Attitudes Toward National Security and a Watchdog Press" article of Cuillier et al. (2010), the current study aimed to examine the effect of mortality salience and political tendencies on attitudes of Turkish university students towards free press and free speech. Thus, it was tried to be understood how death thoughts and extremely polarized political climate of Turkey reflect themselves upon public's attitudes towards press. Therefore, following four hypotheses were tested:

- H1: Control group will show higher support to free press and free speech than experimental group (mortality salient condition).
- H2: Those who value national security higher will show bigger difference of support to free press and free speech between control group and experimental group; whereas those who value national security lower, will show little or no difference.
- H3: Those who define themselves as liberals will show more support for free speech and free press when mortality salient.
- H4: Participants who define themselves as liberals will be more supportive of free press and free speech than participants who define themselves as conservatives.

Method

Materials

Materials from the original study (Cuillier et al., 2010) were subjected to a double translation to become sure of the quality of translation to Turkish. Materials consisted of a Schwartz's 56 items social value survey, mortality salience manipulation, filler task and questions on free speech and free press. Schwartz's 56 items social value survey's purpose was to measure how much participants value national security. Participants asked to rate the listed values according to how important each one to them in a scale of 0 to 10. 0 being "not important" and 10 being "of supreme importance". National Security item was listed as follows: "National security – protection of my nation from enemies"

Afterwards, there was either mortality salience (MS) manipulation or control condition. Experimental group (MS condition) had to answer these questions: "Please briefly describe the emotions that the thought of your own death arouse in you", and "jot down, as specifically as you can, what you think will happen to you physically when you die and once you are physically dead". These questions, as also Cuillier et al. (2010, pp. 192) cites from Burke et. al. (2010, pp. 23), are the most common questions to remind people of death in terror management experiments. Control group on the other hand, had to answer the same questions, but this time "death" was replaced by "dental pain", as in the original study; since dental pain is still a disturbing experience but not reminding of death (Cuillier et al., 2010, p.192).

Next material was a filler task PANAS-X survey, consisting of 60 item and measuring mood. It was found that mortality salience shows its effect when there is a delay (Pyszczynski et al., 1999). Therefore, Terror Management Theory research usually uses approximately 5 minutes of filler tasks.

Afterwards, the participants answered questions on free speech and free press. A couple of free speech questions was not directly about press, but was still included in the study; not only because free speech is the corner stone of press freedom, but also in current state of extremely polarized Turkey, tolerance against expression of different ideas becomes much more important for attitudes towards free press. Thus, free speech and free press questions titled "Government and Press Questions" (borrowed

from the materials of study conducted by Cuillier et al., 2010) were listed as follows:

- "Newspapers should be allowed to criticize public officials."
- "Newspapers should be allowed to publish freely without government approval of a story."
- "People should be prohibited from expressing unpopular opinions." (Reverse coded)
- "The press should have access to the annual salaries of public employees. 5. It is OK to make some government records secret to minimize threats from terrorism." (Reverse coded)
- "Musicians should be allowed to sing songs with lyrics that others might find offensive."
- "Newspapers should be allowed to freely criticize the Turkish military for its strategy and performance."
- "The spending decisions of high-level public officials should be made available to the press."
- "Property tax records, including the value of a person's home and how much was paid in property taxes, should be available to the press."
- "The press has too much freedom to publish whatever it wants." (Reverse coded).

Participants answered these questions using 7- point Likert scale with 1 point being "strongly disagree" and 7- point being "strongly agree". Finally, participants answered questions on demographics and about their political and religious views. Political and religious view questions were again 7- point Likert scale with 1 point being "very liberal" and 7- points being very conservative.

Participants and Procedure

Study was conducted in Fall 2017, with a total of 144 university students taking various undergraduate and MA courses from communication faculty of a foundation university in Istanbul Turkey. Participants in groups ranging from 16 to 47 filled the survey during their regular class time as one single package. Instructor told them it was part of a research project

on a theory of social psychology but did not give any specific details. Students were informed that participation was voluntary, answers would be anonymous. The average time required to complete the questionnaires was 40 minutes. 9 of the participants rejected to fill the survey, 19 of them did not fill the key parts, and 6 of them were eliminated due to careless responding. That left a total number of 110 participants (%61 female, %37 male, %2 unstated) for analysis. 91 of them were undergraduate students and 16 of them were graduate students. 3 of them were not stated.

Results

Support for Press Freedom

The first objective was to examine whether participants' support press freedom or not. The Cronbach's alpha was 0.716, which is satisfactory. The score of whole participants, regardless of MS condition was 4.56 (SD=1,08); which shows that participants somewhat supported press freedom, though not very strongly. In order to investigate whether or not men and women differ in terms of support for press freedom, an independent samples t-test was conducted. When different sexes compared, men have higher scores (M=4,90, SD1.17) than women (M=4,35, SD=1.06) and the difference was statistically significant ($p<0.05$). Possible reasons for this situation will be discussed below. Participants showed the lowest support for the question: "It is OK to make some government records secret to minimize threats from terrorism." (M=2,62 SD=1,94). This question was reverse coded; thus, participants highly supported the idea of keeping some records secret if there was a threat of terrorism. The highest support was to the question: "Newspapers should be allowed to criticize public officials." (M=5,53, SD=1,74); showing a support for watchdog press.

Testing of H1, on the other hand, did not show a statistically significant result ($p>0.05$). In order to examine whether participants who were reminded of their death show lower support for free press and free speech compared to control group, an independent samples t-test was conducted. The hypothesis was not supported; participants who were reminded of

their death did not show lower support to free press and free speech, compared to control group. Possible reasons for this result in current Turkey will be discussed later.

Attitudes Toward National Security

The second objective was to examine the participants' attitudes toward national security and difference between experimental group and control group about supporting free press and free speech. The mean of national security was 9,27 out of 10 (SD=1,61), which is extremely high. This means almost every participant valued national security high; thus, H2 was not tested.

Influence of Mortality Salience on Liberal Participants' Attitudes Toward Free Press

Third objective of the study was to examine whether liberal participants would show more support for free speech and free press when mortality salient. If we only look participants who define themselves as liberals, mortality salient group's mean score was somewhat higher (M=5,10, SD=1,19) than control group (M=4,80, SD=1,03). However, this result was not statistically significant ($p>0.05$). There also was not statistically significant result among conservative participants.

Comparison of Liberals and Conservatives

The fourth objective of the study was to examine the difference of support to free press and free speech between liberals and conservatives. One way ANOVA showed that, participants who define themselves as liberals show more support (M=4,97, SD=1,31) than participants who are moderate (M=4,20, SD= 0,80) and conservative (M= 3,86, SD= 0,72); and the difference was statistically significant ($p<0,05$). However, there was no statistically significant difference between moderate and conservative participants ($P>0.05$). Similar results were found for religious views. Not religious participants' mean score was 5,26 (SD=1,04); it was higher than both moderate (M=4,50, SD=1,25) and religious (M=4,16, SD=0,80) participants'.

The difference was again statistically significant ($p < 0,05$). There was no significant difference between moderate and religious participants. Results indicate that, politically conservative group shows the lowest support for press freedom, whereas not religious group shows the highest support.

Discussion

Based on Terror Management Theory, the aim of this study was to contribute to the understanding of people's attitudes towards free press when they are reminded of their death. The process of conducting the study was a finding on its own, as some participants behaved reactively against research questions; 9 of them rejecting to fill the survey. Based on the instructor's observations, answering a survey with a headline "Government and Press Questions", and facing questions on government and press relations was somehow created tension not only for those who rejected to fill the survey, but also for some of the participants who went on with the questions. This situation should be considered together with state of emergency at the time, extremely polarized political climate of the country, and constant reminders of mortality; which made people feel anxiety and fear. As polarization made them hold on to their political views more, government supporters might have become more reactive to questions on a watchdog press.

On the other hand, the results of this study demonstrate that mortality salience condition have not created a statistically significant difference between experimental group and control group about their attitudes toward free press. So hypothesis disproved. This situation might be discussed regarding various reasons. First of all, the circumstances of Turkey during the conduct of this research, which was already described above, could be a possible reason. Survey of the research was done in extraordinary conditions, under the atmosphere created by the State of Emergency, which was announced after the coup attempt. It is fair to tell that anxiety; fear and discomfort levels of residents of Turkey were continuously high with regularly announced state of emergency decrees. Together with this, ongoing terrorist attacks and Turkish Military's struggle with terrorist

groups, influence of civil war in Syria and escalating deadly crimes in Turkey have possibilities to remind people their mortality. Thus, it would be not wrong to comment that under this circumstances lack of difference between experimental group and control group is understandable. In other words, it is possible to assume that; participants were already (and constantly) in a mortality salient condition. Previous literature on socio-tropic threat might be explanatory here. Sociotropic threat is described by Davis and Silver (2004, p.34) as "a generalized anxiety and a sense of threat to society, the country as a whole or the region where one lives" and as shown in their research, people's support for civil liberties are decreasing when they sense socio-tropic and personal threat. Thus, independent from mortality salience variable, extraordinary conditions in Turkey might have a threatening influence on people.

Another possible reason for this indifference could be about the educational backgrounds of the respondents. All 110 participants were communication faculty students and as usual, great amount of the courses they take include discussions on the importance of the free press. This means, there might be a matter of social desirability bias which is described as the situation where participants give answers in a socially desired way, rather than the actual fact (Paulhus, 1991, p.17). So they might have felt obliged to give supportive answers to questions most related to press freedom. This might also explain why the first question "Newspapers should be allowed to criticize public officials." has the highest support.

Another finding of the study regarding press freedom is that there is a gender gap within the participants. Women tend to support press freedom less. Previous research showed that women are more likely to feel anxiety to personal and social risks compared to men (Djerf-Pierre and Wängnerud, 2016). As at the time the study was conducted, the risk factors were high due to terrorist attacks, Syrian War, escalating deadly crimes, coup attempt, and state of emergency; we can assume that anxiety level was also increasing. That might have caused women to hold back, be more protective, and less supportive of free press. In addition, socialization of gender roles might be explanatory for this result. According to Güldü and Ersoy-Kart (2009, p. 100) different attitudes towards politics, and inequality between men and women's political participation might be caused by socialization of gender roles, as men and women learn what is appropriate

and inappropriate for them; and politics is mostly seen as a masculine area. Besides, women are expected to do daily routine household work and that untimeliness further detracts them from politics. That might be another reason for women supporting press freedom less, as they have learned not to involve in politics very much.

The study showed that participants highly supported the idea of keeping some records secret if there was a threat of terrorism. This has been already a very hot topic in current Turkey since well-known journalists Can Dündar and Erdem Gül from Turkish daily Cumhuriyet have been struggling with a lawsuit. Journalists Dündar and Gül were arrested and then detained in year 2015 as a result of a criminal complaint filed against them, accusing journalists for “disclosing documents concerning the security of the State” (Global Freedom of Expression). The trial was opened after journalists published a news story about Turkey’s National Intelligence Organization’s (MIT- Millî İstihbarat Teşkilâtı) delivering arms to rebels in Syria in January 2014 in Adana. The lawsuit is still continuing and in April 2018 the court issued arrest warrant and a red notice for exiled journalist Can Dündar (Hurriyet Daily News, April 2018). Erdem Gül was acquitted by the court in July 2018. The lawsuit has been in the agenda of the press and so Turkey since 2015. In extremely polarized Turkey the lawsuit of Dündar and Gül has been an issue of polarization as well. After the state linked the lawsuit to terrorist organization of Fethullah Gülen (despite journalists themselves strongly deny) supporting the journalists Dündar and Gül has become a question of betrayal to the state. Choices of participants could be evaluated better in the light of this background information. During state of emergency period, where anyone questioning government practices would be quickly branded as traitor or terrorist, supporting journalists’ freely publishing any record might be seen as extra marginal and dangerous.

Hypothesis 2 was predicting that participants who value national security higher would show bigger difference of support to free press and free speech between control group and experimental group. However, this hypothesis could not be tested as almost every participant valued national security high. The mean for all participants was 9,27 out of 10. This extreme result might have caused by terrorist attacks, Syrian war, and cross border military operations related to terrorist organizations. This

finding indicates that Turkish people feel highly threatened by enemies and have an urge to protect the country. This might be considered as a factor affecting their support to free press and free speech. It might also be another factor for participants' support for keeping government records secret against a threat of terrorism.

Hypothesis 3 suggested that, those who define themselves as liberals will show more support for free speech and free press when mortality salient. As discussed above, Terror Management Theory's findings indicates that liberals would be more tolerant to dissimilar others when mortality salient, because their values include being more open-minded and tolerant (Greenberg et al., 1992b). Results show that, liberals were actually more supportive of free press and free speech when reminded of death, but this was a slight difference and was not statistically significant. Although the findings were in line with the theory's indications, the hypothesis cannot be accepted.

The last hypothesis predicted that liberals would show more support to free press and free speech than conservatives. This hypothesis was accepted, as there was a statistically significant difference between participants who define themselves as liberals and those who define themselves as moderates and conservatives. This was a rather expected result, considering liberal worldview is commonly associated with tolerance, and by nature should be supportive of free press and free speech. Similar findings were found for religious orientations. Participants who define themselves as not religious were more supportive of free press and free speech than those who are moderate and very religious. This result exceeds the boundaries of this study's discussion and should be analyzed further as another study.

This study was conducted in a rather extraordinary condition, and results should be evaluated considering this specific climate of the country. This situation might be considered as the present study's limitation, and the authors' suggestion for future research is to conduct the same study in Turkey when the country's climate will be relatively normal. Comparing present study's results with this future research might provide more insight on death thoughts, political tendencies, and their relations to public's attitudes towards free press and free speech in Turkish culture.

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