

The Debate over Recent Recorded Crime in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

Publication of official recorded crime figures is a new practice in Turkey. The recording of crime figures in a professional and unbiased fashion has led to the publication of a range of tables in the context of crime and criminal justice. Since the first figures were published, in 2004, it has been possible to track increases in crime and this has placed the criminal justice system firmly on the political agenda. The debate over the recorded crime statistics has raged, with the government, the opposition, media and the general public all becoming involved. In the case of society at large it would appear that the fear of becoming a victim of crime has increased. Throughout this debate, law and order has become a political issue. At the same time in Turkey the concept of social support mechanisms is also being widely debated. What role do crime statistics play in the individual's right to a sense of personal security? To what degree can the figures be considered accurate? This work attempts to pull together the changes in recorded crimes which affect the public for the years 2004, 2005 and 2006. Specifically murder, theft, all forms of immoral behavior, assault and fraud which, taken together, constitute a significant portion of the recorded crime figures. It will be seen that for some crimes there would appear to have been a dramatic increase. Exactly what is increasing in the measurement of recorded crime in Turkey?

Keywords: Crime, Turkey, crime statistics, criminal justice system, victimization, police

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Introduction

In recent years in Turkey, and especially since 2004, one of the topics most widely discussed, on almost a daily basis, has been the dramatic rise in official crime figures. To what extent the official records reflect reality is a subject for debate in all countries. In Turkey the difference between the actual crimes being committed and those recorded in the statistics would seem to be especially contentious. Hence we should first consider how the official figures are collected.

In Turkey the official recorded crime statistics can be studied under four main headings. These are: police' statistics, public prosecutors' statistics, court statistics and prison statistics. The police' statistics can be further broken down into those of the actual police and the gendarmerie, with the former operating in towns and cities, whilst the latter cover villages and rural areas. The records of crime from these forces are the responsibility of the Ministry of Internal Affairs; the figures emanating from public prosecutors, courts and prisons all come under the Ministry of Justice.

A victim of crime has the right to report the crime to the police if in a town or city; or to the gendarmerie, or direct to the nearest public prosecutor's office, if the crime takes place in a rural area. Here we encounter the first problem with the recorded crime statistics. All crimes reported directly to the police or gendarmerie is automatically recorded. Crimes reported to the public prosecution offices are only recorded if it is decided to proceed with an investigation. If the public prosecutor feels there is no case then it is not recorded. It would seem, therefore, that in one sense the public prosecutors' figures are more accurate because they cover all crimes in which an investigation takes place: both those reported direct to the prosecutors' offices and those passed on for investigation from the police forces and gendarmerie.

To have reliable official recorded statistics for sentences, there must be coordination of information between the different authorities involved. The National Lawsuit Network Project has been established for this reason. It will collate data on crimes in the courts' system and give access to this data to all interested parties. The Project is currently in its pilot phase with future development already planned.

Currently the most detailed records of crime are kept by police forces. In Turkey such forces are involved in the initial investigation of all crimes and they can be split into three distinct groups. These are: public; private and

those persons in positions of authority who may sometimes take on the role of policeman. In general the public force is the police, the gendarmerie and customs officers; the private forces comprise private security companies, local councils' security personnel and village watchmen; the final group of people who may occasionally take on the role of policeman would include captains of ships and elected village headmen.

However, in Turkey the bulk of the work surrounding the investigation of a crime is undertaken by the police and gendarmerie. As stated above the former have jurisdiction in urban areas, the latter in the countryside. The Turkish National Police Organization is a huge group with a headquarters building in the capital and 81 regional centers in each of the country's 81 provinces. All urban police work is overseen by the National Police Organization (Fert 2007: 14) and some 75% of the population would seem to feel that this organization functions at an acceptable level. The work is carried out by over 200,000 employees.

These employees fall into four distinct groups: judicial, administrative, intelligence and traffic police with the 'judicial' police ensuring crimes are thoroughly investigated and passed to the courts as appropriate (Police Code of 2559, article 2). There are specialized units for certain types of crime. For example crimes involving public order are handled by the Public Order Department which has branches each run by a local Director of Public Order; terrorism is likewise overseen by a Department of Terrorist Crime with branches headed up by Branch Directors (Police Code of 2559, article 9-1); smuggling, drugs, financial and organized crime are the remit of the Department of Smuggling and Organized Crime also with its Branch Directors; incidents in the community are referred to the Department of Security and its Branch Directors; the initial work on all reported crime is carried out by staff at the nearest Police Headquarters or the local police station (Safak 2002: 72). Alongside these units are other support agencies. For example, Police Helicopters help with air support; crimes at sea will involve the work of the Sea Police and/or Police Divers; crimes committed by juveniles or in which juveniles victims are will look to the Specialist Juvenile Police for expertise.

Whenever necessary, whether in the operational investigation of crime or the highlighting of criminal activity, the intelligence forces can be called upon (Fert 2007: 13-5). The Traffic Police are charged with handling all breaches of traffic law and ensuring services for road users (Highway Traffic Law No.2918 - 6/b). Finally the administrative employees of the police

forces provide support to all areas within the forces. (Security Organization Law No.3201 Article 1-3-5-8).

In general the internal organization of the gendarmerie is the same as the police with two notable exceptions. Firstly, gendarmerie personnel, as well as answering to their own line managers, are also considered to be part of the country's military and thus ultimately responsible to the Army Chief of Staff. Secondly, as has been mentioned previously, the gendarmerie only operates outside of towns and cities (Police Code of 2559, article 25) which means they actually have responsibility for approximately one third of the population. According to the latest available figures from the Turkish National Statistics Institute, there are some 23,797,653 people living outside of towns and cities. This figure represents 35.1% of the overall population (Turkish National Statistics Institute 2001).

An Overview of Criminal Investigations in Turkey

The official recorded crime figures are compiled from information given by the Head Office of the National Police and the office of Chief of the Gendarmerie. They pass on information to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Turkish National Statistics Institute, which has been collected from all their various operational units and collated into the form of annual statistics. The information is gathered under very general headings with no individual case detail.

The National Police system for criminal investigation separates crimes into four general categories which are reflected in the headings under which figures for recorded crime are collected: public order, smuggling, security and terrorism. The latter is further sub-divided into political, religious or ideological. Smuggling is broken down into weapons and drugs with a further heading for both smuggling and organized crime to cover crimes in which three or more people are involved. Security crimes cover community and trade union incidents, and the 'public order' heading includes everything not previously covered by smuggling, security and terrorism. In general the 'public order' category can be further broken down into crimes against the person and crimes against property.

It should be noted here that there are soon to be changes to this system following the passing of Turkish Criminal Code and entered into force in 1.6.2005. This law, (TCK), allows for the use of the following four categories of crimes: international crimes, crimes against the person, crimes against the community, and crimes against the state and population. It also introduces

more detailed sub-groupings within the four aforementioned categories and it is planned to begin collecting police crime figures in line with Turkish Criminal Law from 2007.

Comparison of Recorded Crime in Five Countries

To make our explanation much more clear, the crime statistics of some countries are evaluated at Table-1.

Country	Population	Approx No. of Police	Apprpx. no. Reported Crimes			
			2002	2003	2004	2005
Turkey	70,000,000	200,000	458,000	499,000	530,000	680,000
France	59,900,000	180,000	4,110,000	3,970,000	3,820,000	3,770,000
Germany	82,500,000	250,000	6,500,000	6,570,000	6,630,000	6,390,000
Belgium	10,500,000	35,600	1,040,000	1,020,000	1,010,000	989,000
UK	57,000,000	330,000	6,500,000	6,548,000	6,200,000	5,560,000

Table 1: Comparison of Reported Crimes, Population and Police Numbers in Five Countries

The above table gives figures for the years 2002 - 2005 for Turkey, France, Germany, Belgium and the United Kingdom including population, approximate size of police force and approximate number of reported crimes. It is clear that the number of crimes reported in Turkey rose before 2005. The 680,000 reported in 2005 had increased to 1,050,000 in 2006 thus giving around 54% increase in two years. Between 2004 and 2005 there was a 28% increase. As can be seen from the above figures the greatest increase has taken place since the first publication of recorded crime figures, but the trend would seem to have been present in earlier years.

It is clear from the above that in other countries the official recorded crime figures are much higher than in Turkey. Despite the United Kingdom having a much smaller population than Turkey its crime rate would seem to be more than six times higher than Turkey's. However, it would be wrong to say that either the United Kingdom is six times less safe than Turkey, or simply that Turkey is a safer place than the United Kingdom.

To look at the figures in another way we have calculated the number of police per hundred thousand of population and this shows Turkey in the lowest position of the countries considered above.

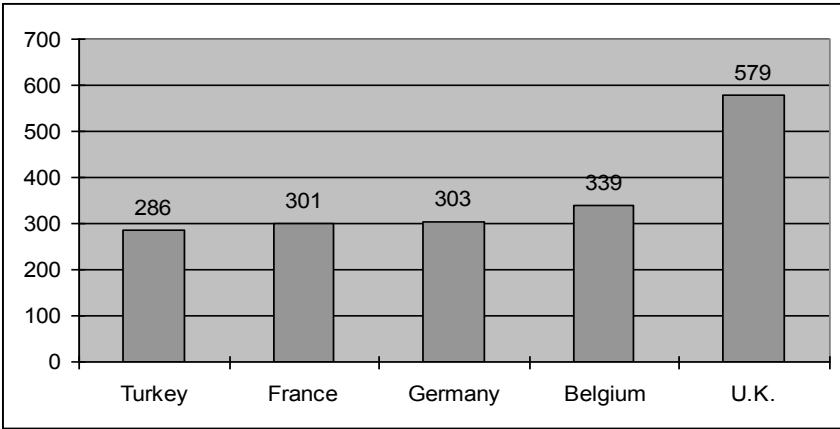


Figure 1: Number of Police per Hundred Thousand Population in Five Countries

Figure-1 shows the number of police per hundred thousand members of the population in the same five countries. Turkey has 286 police per hundred thousand population, France has 301, Germany 303, Belgium 339 and the United Kingdom 579. From these figures it can be seen that the countries with the lowest numbers of police maintain national police forces. Even when Turkey is placed alongside comparable countries it would seem that another 50,000 – 70,000 police are needed in Turkey to achieve a more equitable police: population ratio.

The comparatively low numbers of police in Turkey has now been recognized and recruitment campaigns to increase police numbers have been instigated. In 2005 a further 8,000 candidates for careers in the police forces were recruited; in 2006 another 11,500 and this year, up to the end of June 2007: 6,800 new candidates entered the police force.

The Reasons of the Rise in Recorded Crime

In different countries the definition of ‘a crime’ can change. What is classified as a crime in one country may be viewed as legitimate behavior in another. For example, in Turkey the act of committing suicide was not a crime before 2006! The crime was called ‘persuading and helping someone to commit suicide. In other countries this act was not considered a crime and accordingly was not included in the records. It can be seen that this situation not only led to an error in the totals of recorded crimes but also caused confusion when comparing crime figures with other countries. In an

attempt to clarify this issue, in this work we have chosen not to use the heading 'recorded crime statistics' but instead use 'numbers of recorded cases'.

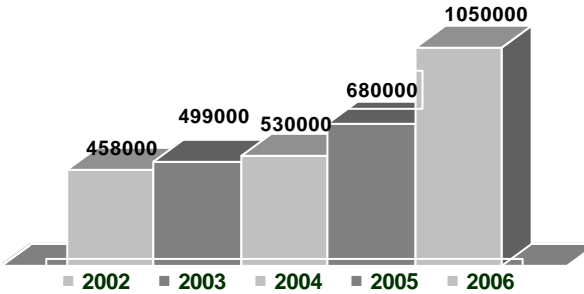
As can be seen from Table 2, in the past three years there has been a dramatic increase in officially recorded cases which has led to much political debate over the same period. In common with many other countries, Turkey now has the 'law and order' debate firmly entrenched in the political agenda. The AK party government, which came to power on 3rd November 2002, has been criticized for its inadequacy in this context. There is clearly a case, as in all other countries, for debating the accuracy of the crime statistics. Crimes may be committed which are never recorded in the official figures because:

1. There may be unawareness of any crime having been committed.
2. Victim may not report the crime to the police for a variety of reasons.
3. Police may not record the crime.

In Turkey, since 2005, there have been important changes in the way in which the official recorded crime statistics are compiled. Prior to 2005 the police presented all incidents in which they were involved broken down into two categories by outcome: 'number dealt with by fines' and 'number dealt with by custodial sentence'. This proved to be far too simplistic a methodology as it actively prevented any analysis of the actual crimes involved. It has been shown that factors such as the environment (Anrews & Bonta 1998: 39), people's sociological and psychological circumstances (Hirschi 1996: 249-256) and other influences must be taken into account in the context of crime statistics (Agnew 1994: 555-580; Stahhut & Bowes 2004: 71). Accordingly from 2005 onwards all crimes were recorded within an agreed system of classification which allows for the crime to be entered into a given category, the factors surrounding the crime to be available, and even profiles of those involved in the crime to be analyzed (Fert 2004: 49). Whilst it is still early days for this system it does mean that the police must now record all information pertaining to a reported crime and this information will be included in the official statistics (Order of the Ministry of the Interior). In the years immediately following 2000, Turkey's low recorded crime statistics proportional to population, when compared with figures from other European countries, led to a general feeling of suspicion of all statistics.

In Figure 2 the low figures at the beginning of the current decade are clearly illustrated. The issue of low crime figures has been known to cause anxiety and suspicion in some other countries, because when crimes are hidden it is

interpreted as a lack of activity and productivity in the pursuance of criminals.



**Figure 2: Annual Numbers of Cases Recorded by Police Forces in Turkey
2002 – 2006**

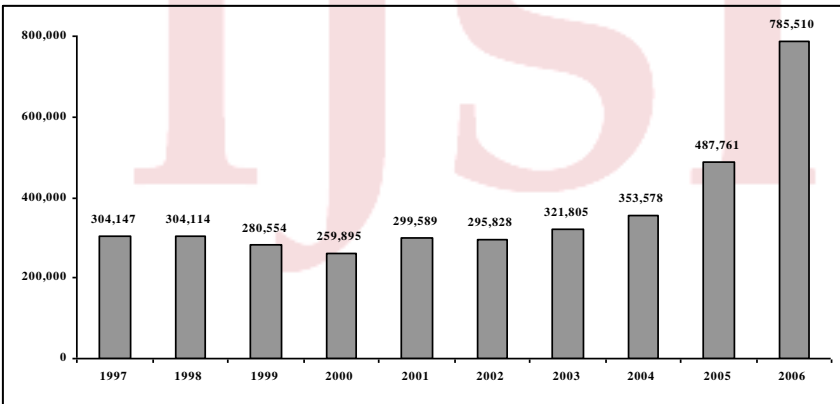


Figure 3: Annual Number of 'Public Order' Cases 1997 – 2006

Figure 3 shows the source of the rise in crime figures. New recording systems that include all crimes, however small, and the introduction of rational forms of measurement have resulted in a more realistic picture (Hagan 1994: 67-69). It is still the case that other countries have much higher rates of crime than ours.

YEAR		Public Order	Smuggling	Security	Terrorism	Totals
2005	No.	487,761	20,384	19,181	1,294	526,335
	%	93	3.6	2.8	0.6	100
2006	No.	785,510	30,685	16,947	1,243	836,670
	%	93.9	3.6	2	0.5	100

Table 2: Breakdown of Police Cases 2005 & 2006

Table 2 gives a breakdown of all crimes in the country and shows that in 2005 the police were responsible for: “48,761 public order cases, 20,384 smuggling, 19,181 security and 1,294 terrorism-related incidents giving 526,335 in total”. In the following year, 2006, they dealt with: “785,510 public order cases, 30,685 smuggling, 16,947 security and 1,243 terrorism giving a total of 836,670.”

From Table 2, it can be seen that the increase from the 2005 total of 526,335 to the 2006 total of 836,670 is almost entirely accounted for by the rise in ‘general’ crime. Some 487,761 incidents of which in 2005 comprised 93% of the total; in 2006 785,510 cases became 93.9% of that year’s total.

Table 2 also shows that incidents of security and terrorism which were 1,294 and 19,181 respectively in 2005, actually fell to 1,243 and 16,947 in 2006. The incidence of smuggling remained proportionately the same over the two years in question.

Types of official recorded crimes

In Turkey the official recorded crimes are broken down under two main headings, into ‘crimes against the person’ and ‘crimes against property’. Here we present a further breakdown of the main ‘crimes against the person’.

Crimes against the person

Below you see annual figures for a range of ‘crimes against the person’ for the years 2004 – 2006 with analysis of major changes being considered after the table.

		2004	2005	2006
Unlawful killing	Premeditated murder	1,828	2,094	2,066
	Accidental killing	854	808	826
	Attempted murder	390	489	563
Acts of assault	Deliberate wounding/beating	62,420	77,623	111,565
	Accidental wounding	4,219	5,168	11,446
Crimes against individual freedom, the family and decency	Kidnap of girl/woman	4,471	5,220	7,130
	Kidnap of child	293	429	546
	Hostage taking	33	33	48
	Threatening behavior	5,587	10,809	28,088
	Maltreatment within the family	7,079	9,901	17,064
	Insulting & swearing	2,339	4,600	11,509
	Obscene behavior	1,757	1,802	3,144
	Rape	1,152	1,206	1,300
	Attempted rape	709	805	1,026
	Encouraging/arranging prostitution	2,032	1,594	1,932
	Illegal gambling	3,485	1,825	2,329
	Crimes against decrees of the state	Insulting/attacking a member of the police force	6,169	7,037
Insulting/attacking any other public servant		1,354	1,616	1,841
Bribery		168	144	173
Embezzlement		19	33	40
Corruption		23	20	20
Embezzlement		14	6	1
Others	Human trafficking	200	130	104
	Violation of the Fire Arms and Knives Act of 6136	8,068	10,667	19,137
	Firing a gun in a public place	5,259	5,470	6,533
	Suicide	1,674	1,619	1,647
	Attempted suicide	9,280	12,094	18,527
Others not listed above		27,070	34,436	63,131
Totals		158,241	197,996	321,676

Table 4: 2004-2006 Numbers of Crimes Against the Person

Examination of Table 4 shows that deliberate wounding/beating, insulting and swearing, violation of the Law Number 6136 and behaving badly within the family all show a steady increase in occurrence over the past few years. The reason for this rise lies in the fact that these crimes were not previously included in the official statistics. For example arguments between people or fights and 'light' wounding only began to be recorded for statistical purposes in 2005, which accounts for the almost 100% increase in certain crimes in two years. Consider the crime of 'child kidnap' which has been shown to actually often refer to one partner of a separating couple taking the children with him/her without the agreement of the other parent. Again this act was not properly included in the statistics until the collection methodology was changed and comprehensive inclusion has led to the increase in its occurrence.

Crimes	2004 %				2005 %				2006 %			
	Perpetrator arrested	Perpetrator away	Perpetrator not known	Total	Perpetrator arrested	Perpetrator away	Perpetrator not known	Total	Perpetrator arrested	Perpetrator away	Perpetrator not known	Total
Unlawful killing	77	8	15	2	72	10	18	2	75	10	15	1
Assault	85	8	7	42	80	10	10	42	79	8	13	39
Crimes against sexual immunity (former name: crimes against the family & decency)	90	9	1	19	85	12	3	19	82	12	6	23
Crimes against the state	97	2	1	5	97	2	1	4	97	2	1	3
Other	95	2	3	32	92	3	5	33	91	3	6	34
Total	90	6	4	100	85	8	7	100	84	7	9	100

Table 5: 2004 - 2006 Percentage Rates and Outcomes for Crimes Against the Person are Presented within the Main Classifications as Proportions of the total.

As can be seen, within these five categories the most commonly occurring crime, representing around 40% of the total, is assault in its various forms. Unlawful killing occurs least accounting for 2% of overall crime totals in 2004 and 2005, and falling to 1% in 2006. In the context of percentage rates for types of crime it can be seen that there was little change in the years 2004 – 2006. In the case of assault, even though the compilation methodology had changed in 2006, the proportion allotted to this crime has fallen by 3%.

Crimes against property

For the second group, ‘crimes against property’ recorded crime numbers for the main offences are presented below.

		2004	2005	2006
Theft	From a home	33,937	53,932	85,964
	From a workplace	29,919	43,733	55,967
	From a public sector office	2,744	3,579	4,307
	From a bank	117	158	202
	From a car	25,190	39,705	68,855
	Car theft	24,659	32,051	31,522
	Mugging	5,101	7,168	12,154
	Pick pocketing	11,689	18,556	27,612
	Animal Theft	695	886	1,200
	Other	22,447	35,060	64,166
Robbery/ Fraud	From a person	4,259	6,248	7,770
	From a house	254	160	192
	From a workplace	264	290	428
	From a bank	6	6	8
	Kidnapping	65	86	95
	Forcing someone to sign a cheque or other legal document	154	188	316
Arson	Deliberate	1,174	1,524	2,210
	Accidental	2,701	3,253	6,038
Other Offences	Swindling	5,141	7,528	1,2651
	Legal fraud	3,604	5,162	8,529
	Receiving/selling stolen goods	372	510	1,055
	Criminal damage	7,046	14,156	38,267
	Cyber Crime	317	214	299
	Forcible entry of a building	1,836	2,093	3,156
	Violation of government directive	4,439	2,804	3,487
Crimes not listed above		7,207	10,715	27,384
TOTALS		195,337	289,765	463,834

Table 6: 2004-2006 Annual Figures for Crimes Against Property

Table 6 shows the dramatic increase in crimes against property year on year. Consider theft from houses which was recorded 33,937 times in 2004; rose to 53,932 in 2005; and by 2006 had reached 85,964. However this increase, as has been previously explained, is in part due to the fact that prior to 2005 all instances of the crime were not necessarily recorded. For example, theft to the value of 10YTL or less was not included in the figures under the old methodology, but it is now counted.

Types of Crime	2004 %				2005 %				2006 %			
	Perpetrator arrested	Perpetrator away	Perpetrator not known	TOTAL	Perpetrator arrested	Perpetrator or away	Perpetrator not known	TOTAL	Perpetrator arrested	Perpetrator away	Predators not known	TOTAL
Theft	21	2	57	80	13	2	66	81	10	2	64	76
Robbery/ Fraud	1.7	0.3	1	3	1	0.2	0.8	2	0.9	0.3	0.8	2
Arson	1.5	0.1	0.4	2	1.3	0.1	0.6	2	1.3	0.1	0.6	2
Other	10.5	1.5	3	15	8	1.7	5.3	15	9	1	10	20

Table 7: 2004 – 2006 Percentage Rates and Outcomes for Crimes Against Property

The figures set out in Table 6 show an annual increase in crimes against property. On the other hand Table 7, which presents the figures in terms of percentage rates, shows a fall in certain forms of crime.

Conclusion

The rise in recorded crime statistics is an issue which is hotly debated in all societies. At the same time it has been shown that, as countries become more westernised, the individual's fear of becoming a victim of crime also increases (Bahar 2006). The inadequacy of formal social support mechanisms (Meithe & Meier 2009: 74-86), the decline of informal social networks in modern towns and cities, the rise in recorded crime, together with the lack of social and economic support for actual victims of crime, would all seem to contribute to the rise in fear of becoming a victim (Bahar et al. 2007; Sokullu-Akinci 1999: 54-60).

Debates around the rise in recorded crime figures, particularly at the level of formal and informal social networks, all of which try to produce solutions to the problem, would seem to be a healthy development. Examination of

Table 1 and Figure 3 shows that the official statistics for Turkey in the years 1998 – 2002 would seem to invite criticism in an international context. Though it should be remembered that at that period, in Turkey itself, the collection methodology was being heavily debated.

It has to be said that, despite the introduction of new collection methodology in an attempt to improve the accuracy of the figures, it could be that certain contributors are still not providing accurate data due to an almost subconscious attachment to old methods. However, it would seem this is being counterbalanced by the new methodological and professional perspective which accepts constructive criticism of the recorded crime figures. All those working within the criminal justice system: professionals, experts, academics and the media; are learning more and more about the recorded crime figures as time goes by. During this process the police are learning how to collect data in a professional fashion and how to act upon the results of that data to the benefit of all. It should be borne in mind that until recently domestic violence, sexual assault and other forms of crime were not included in the statistics thus giving skewed results. It is also clear that survey data from victims should also be considered alongside the official recorded crime figures.

Close examination of the rise in Turkey's recorded crime figures shows that there has not been a significant rise in 'crimes against the person'. In this context, we see an increase only in 'crimes against property', where since 2005 offences have increased at the rate of 60-65% annually. In this context, as can be seen from Table 6, the source of the increase in crimes against property in 2004, 2005 and 2006 would seem to lie in changes in the collection methodology.

To what extent is it possible to reduce crimes against property by purely physical means such as increased security? It would seem that there are different answers to that question depending on one's point of view, and to effectively reduce crimes against property factors which play a part in the execution of these crimes must be examined. First of all it would seem vital to try and address the socio-economic issues affecting the perpetrators.

The rise in recorded crime figures should not be directly correlated with a rise in actual criminal cases being investigated. There are still cases where the police are not fully informed, or receive insufficient information to properly investigate, and this is an area for further consideration. Strengthening of relationships between the public and the police, broadening avenues for information gathering, establishing robust evidence

trials, and an active criminal justice system, are all areas in need of development if we are to have viable records. In this context the meaning of the rise in recorded crime, when compared with the rise in criminal cases, is a subject for debate.

It would seem that in Turkey the police have started to display a more professional approach to the recording of crime. The politicians' main contention with regard to the crime figures would seem to be that they do not show the number and types of crimes being investigated. If all crimes are included in the statistics it would seem logical that an increase is unavoidable (Sokullu-Akinci 2007: 73-84). Having examined the figures from many developed countries, starting with those of the European Union: the United Kingdom, Germany and France; and including those for USA and Japan; it would seem that the possibility of being a victim of crime varies between 8000 and 23000 per hundred thousand head of population. In 2006 in Turkey the equivalent figure was a mere 5000. In other words the fear of being a victim of crime in Turkey has been greatly exaggerated.

There is debate over which causes the greater anxiety in Turkey: the rise in recorded crime figures or the rise in fear of becoming a victim of crime. Certainly unrest in society is not simply linked to the official measures of recorded crime and the fear of becoming a victim does play a part in generating anxiety. Fear of becoming a victim has a negative influence. We have to work towards a society in which each individual feels they have a positive part to play.

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