ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ / RESEARCH ARTICLE

An Experimental Study on the Variation of the Attitudes towards the Syrian Refugees in Turkey

Türkiye'deki Suriyeli Mültecilere Yönelik Tutumların Değişkenliği Üzerine Deneysel Bir Çalışma

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Abstract

Is it possible to change the negative public attitudes towards refugees? Which factors reinforce such attitudinal changes? Since the refugee population is growing in many countries, finding answers to these questions has become even more important. By focusing on the Turkish context, this study has two specific objectives. First, we aim to find out how – and to what extent – the individual level of prejudice towards the Syrian refugees differs when the refugees are depicted in either empathy or threat-evoking conditions. Second, we try to show the interaction between personal dispositions (authoritarianism) and situational factors (threat-evoking condition) and their explanatory power on the individuals' prejudice towards the Syrian refugees. Towards this end, we conducted a survey-experiment with 120 university students in May 2016. The empirical results show that while empathy-evoking treatment leads to a decrease in prejudice, the threat-evoking one augments the biased attitudes towards the Syrian refugees. When the dispositional factors are included in the model, we observe that authoritarianism's interaction with threat-evoking treatment significantly effects the prejudice levels.
Keywords: Syrian Eefugees, Migration, Empathy, Threat, Authoritarianism

Öz

Toplumun mültecilere yönelik sahip olduğu tutumları değiştirmek mümkün müdür? Bu değişimi etkileyen temel faktörler nelerdir? Pek çok ülkede mültecilerin nüfusu arttığı için bu sorulara cevap bulmak bugün daha da önem kazanmıştır. Türkiye odaklı bu çalışmanın iki temel amacı bulunmaktadır. Birincisi, bireylerin Suriyeli mültecilere yönelik önyargılarının, empati ya da tehdit uyandıran durumların sunulduğu farklı deney koşullarında değişip değişmediğini ortaya çıkarmaktır. İkincisi ise, bireysel farklılık (otoriter kişilik) ve durumsal faktörler (tehdit uyandıran durum) arasındaki etkileşimin bireylerin mültecilere yönelik önyargıları üzerindeki etkisini göstermektir. Bu bağlamda Mayıs 2016'da 120 üniversite öğrencisi ile deney anketi gerçekleştirdik. Elde ettiğimiz bulgular empati uyandıran manipülasyonun öğrencilerin Suriyeli mültecilere karşı olan önyargı düzeylerini azalttığını, tehdit algısını uyandıran metinleri okuyan öğrencilerin ise Suriyeli mültecilere karşı daha

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yüksek önyargı ile yaklaştıklarını göstermektedir. Kişilik özelliklerinin önyargı düzeyleri üzerindeki etkisine baktığımız zaman ise tehdit algısını tetikleyen metinler düşük otoriterlik düzeyine sahip olan öğrencilerin önyargılarını artırırken, yüksek otoriterlik kişiliğine sahip olan öğrenciler üzerinde anlamlı bir etki yaratmamıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Suriyeli Mülteciler, Göç, Empati, Tehdit, Otoriter Kişilik

1. Introduction

The increasing level of international migration puts the relationship between the members of the host society and immigrants under scholarly scrutiny. While studying such inter-group processes, "prejudice" appears as one of the most important phenomena that shape intergroup relations. The latest example, which urges us to study outgroup prejudice, is the momentous refugee influx from Syria that has started in 2011 with the Syrian civil war. The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNCHR, 2020) acknowledges that more than 5.5 million people in total escaped from the conflict in Syria to various countries. Although the incident has influenced a significant number of countries in one way or another, the neighboring countries – like Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq – host the majority of refugees, and therefore, they have faced severe political, social, and economic problems.

An enormous increase in Turkey's refugee population occurred between 2011 and 2017 (see in Directorate General for Migration Management –DGMM, 2020). We conducted a survey experiment in 2016 regarding the host society's attitudes towards the Syrian refugees. At the time, the number of Syrian refugee population was almost 3 million (DGMM, 2020).[1] Turkey still hosts the highest number with 3.587.578 registered Syrian refugees, and obviously, they appear as a substantial outgroup in the Turkish society (DGMM, 2020; see in also UNCHR, 2020). When we look at the existing studies, we see that while some Turkish citizens have negative attitudes towards the Syrian refugees (e.g., IPSOS, 2016; International Crisis Group, 2018), others define refugees as "guests," "victims," or "people who fled from war" to Syrians (e.g., Erdoğan, 2014). In other words, while trying to explain Turkish citizens' perceptions of the Syrian refugees, we encounter a considerable ambiguity. For instance, the German Marshall Fund of the United States (2015) indicates that 84 percent of the participants are anxious because of the Syrian refugees who have fled to Turkey. Whereas Erdoğan (2014) states that although a kind of negativity towards the refugees is prevalent in society, the extent of general social acceptance is uncommonly high. Existing studies show that in the media, Syrian refugees are either depicted as a mass who triggers several problem or as the people who we need to empathize with (Göktuna-Yaylacı & Karakuş, 2015; Erdoğan, 2014; Doğanay & Çoban-Keneş 2016; Dimitrova, Ozdora-Aksak, & Connolly-Ahern, 2018; Efe 2015).

The available conflictual frames might lead the Turkish society to have unstable perceptions and relatively changeable attitudes towards the Syrian refugees, which may shift from one context to another depending on the narrative. Although the relationship between these groups is a pivotal element in the whole process, there seems to be no research in Turkey, which directly questions

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[1]   In 2016 the exact number of the Syrian refugees in Turkey was 2.834.441 (see in DGMM, 2020).

how different depictions of the refugees generate and influence public attitudes towards the Syrian refugees. Yet, understanding to what extent Turkish citizens' negative biases towards the Syrian refugees are inflexible is crucial to build social cohesion in the society and contemplate future public policies. Therefore, the current study intends to address this gap from the domain of political psychology and examine the psychological underpinnings of the public attitudes towards the Syrian refugees in the Turkish context. More specifically, our objective is to show whether people's levels of prejudice remain stable or change after they are exposed to empathy and threat-evoking treatments.

Pettigrew (2011) emphasizes that the causes and determinants of prejudice should be analyzed by considering its multi-faceted nature. That is to say, the roots of prejudice might derive from a combination of structural – level, situational – level, and individual-level factors. Hence, identifying situational elements, individual characteristics, and their interactions is crucial to explain intergroup processes. In that sense, since different framings and portrayals of an outgroup generate different situations, people's evaluations, and in turn, their attitudes would change in line with what they are exposed to. In respect to this reasoning, how an outgroup and related issues are framed and narrated seem quite substantial in the formation of public perceptions and attitudes towards outgroup members. By conducting a survey experiment on university students, in this research, we aim to find out how – and to what extent – respondents' levels of prejudice towards Syrian refugees differ when the refugees are depicted in either empathy – or threat-evoking experimental conditions. If Turkish citizens' attitudes towards the Syrian refugees are not rigid but open to change, it means that shifting people's existing attitudes from negative to positive – or vice versa – would be possible. In this case, we would argue that framing the issue in a positive and empathetic manner – for instance, through the media channels, speeches of politicians and public figures, and so forth – can help build social cohesion in such multi-group societies.

In addition to portraying the refugees in different ways, individual-level characteristics can be the roots of prejudicial attitudes. Among such individual-level determinants, in the domain of prejudice research, the construct of authoritarianism is remarked as a crucial explanatory variable (e.g., Heaven & Quintin, 2003; Ekehammar et al., 2004; Levin et al., 2013; Pettigrew, 2011). We intend to illuminate the interplay between authoritarianism and perceived threat and their particular impact on prejudice.

The current study is composed of six sections. The first section elaborates on the conceptualization of prejudice and covers its situation-dependent and individual-level determinants. The second section provides the theoretical framework that presents the theoretical insights and hypotheses of the study. The third part introduces the methodology and design. In the subsequent part, we report the empirical findings of the research; and finally, we discuss the results in the light of existing literature.

2. Prejudice: Situational and Individual-Level Explanations

Outgroup prejudice has been studied for several decades as one of the most perplexing phenomena in intergroup relations. As a pioneer scholar in this research domain, Allport (1955, p. 9) underlines the faulty and inflexible generalizations that generate antipathy toward a group or an individual member of that group. According to Allport (1995), since human mind has a limited capacity to process information, generalizing various inputs through the cognitive function of overcategorization is inevitable. People can have erroneous beliefs, and if an emotional resistance accompanies to keep them without any attempt to rectify these beliefs, prejudice will emerge (Allport, 1955; Katz, 1991). The construct can be defined as "…any attitude, emotion or behavior towards members of a group, which directly or indirectly implies some negativity or antipathy towards that group" (Brown, 2010:7).

Although different theoretical perspectives can be found in the literature, the person-situation schism is considerably visible (Choma & Hodson, 2008; Akrami et al., 2009; Hodson, 2009). This dichotomy refers to whether the individual differences best clarify prejudice (e.g., Altemeyer, 1996, 2004, 2006; Akrami & Ekehammar, 2006; McFarland, 2010) or situational and contextual elements (e.g., Guimond et al. 2003; Wagner et al. 2003; Pettigrew, 2018). In this research, we intend to focus on both of these sides as well as their nexus. Our theoretical framework is twofold. First, we tap into the particular impacts of situational factors, including the empathy – and threat-evoking depictions of Syrian refugees in Turkey. Second, we espouse an interactionist approach to show the interplay between individual-level characteristics and situational-level explanations of prejudice.

Previous research yields that prejudice towards immigrants or any minority group is associated with the extent of perceiving them as a threat (Stephan & Stephan, 1996; Duckitt, 2006). As a prominent approach, the group conflict theory offers that the competition on limited resources, conflicting goals, and interests trigger the intergroup hostility, and prejudice (see in Blumer, 1958; Quillian, 1995). Following this line of reasoning, Stephan and Stephan (1996) propose the Integrated Threat Theory (ITT) and argue that the majority's threat perceptions stem from economic and cultural concerns and beget prejudice. ITT deals with the issue based on two constituents: realistic and symbolic threats (Stephan & Renfro, 2002). Realistic threats refer to any perceived danger against the sources of power (political or economic), the material existence or physical well-being, and any resources existing in the in-group or its members (Stephan & Stephan, 1996; Stephan, Ybarra, & Bachman, 1999). In other words, these threats are not perceived according to their reality; instead, the emphasized point is the perceptions. On the other hand, the symbolic threats include the concerns related to the perceived differences in worldviews, daily practices, cultural norms, beliefs, moral values, and so forth. According to the ITT, if the majority recognize an outgroup as threatening, prejudice towards an outgroup would be quite probable in their relations.

Even though ITT suggests that threat causes prejudice (Stephan & Stephan, 2000), most of the studies that empirically tested the theory rely on correlational evidence (Bahns, 2017). Earlier studies empirically showed that there is a positive correlation between threat perceptions and

prejudice (e.g., Stephan & Renfro, 2002; Stephan & Stephan, 2000). Only a few numbers of studies have tried to explain the causal mechanism between these two aspects, and they could not agree which one causes the other. In their experimental research, Duckitt, and Sibley (2010b), for instance, demonstrate that threat was an essential factor that increases the level of prejudice against immigrants. Bahns (2017), on the other hand, finds reverse causality between the two concepts. This might be related to the groups in question, the case in itself, and the context. Such factors can alter the direction of causality between perceived threat and prejudice. In that sense, ITT would be more favorable to build theoretical reasoning for the case of Syrian refugees in Turkey. Before the Syrian refugee influx, in the survey conducted by the Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM or – SGDD – Sığınmacılar ve Göçmenlerle Dayanışma Derneği-), 71.5% of respondents have stated that they perceive refugees and asylum seekers in neither positive nor negative vein (2011, p. 27). Another research report indicates that as the Syrian refugees' duration of stay and their population increases, public perception has become more negative (Orhan, 2014, p. 19). It can be said that before Syrian refugee influx, people in Turkey did not have a greater level of biased and unwelcoming attitudes towards refugees. Yet, afterward due to the competition on economic spheres, differences in the socio-cultural norms and practices, prejudice has appeared and gradually escalated among the Turkish citizens. In this study, we will test this unidirectional theoretical formulation by first evoking threat perceptions and assessing its impact on the prejudice towards Syrian refugees.

On the other hand, although the perceived threat is presented as a successful explanatory variable for prejudice, the pivotal question of how intergroup relations can be improved remains unanswered after scrutinizing perceived threat and prejudice association. In that lens, empathy appears as one of the central constructs for better intergroup relations (see in, e.g., Dovidio et al., 2010; Dovido et al., 2004; Miklikowska, 2017; Shih et al., 2009). Empathy can be broadly defined as the ability to share and sense another's emotions and experiences by putting oneself in another's position. In a general sense, scholars agree that there are two fundamental aspects of empathy: cognitive and emotional. While cognitive empathy denotes taking one's perspective and role, the latter refers to sympathize with a person in need and plight, emotionally. In this research, we narrate Syrian refugees in need, and the difficulties in their life in Turkey; and subsequently, motivate participants to imagine what it would be like to be in the refugees' situation. Therefore, instead of capturing an affective or cognitive aspect of empathy, we pursue to evoke both sides in the treatment text. Furthermore, in respect to person-situation schism, empathy can be an individual level disposition, which is relatively stable as a life-long trait, (e.g., Davis, 1983; Eisenberg, 1991, Eisenberg et al., 1991) and something changeable depending on particular situations (e.g., Batson, 1991; Staats et al., 2006). In the current research, we experimentally elicit empathy by framing the case; and therefore, the empathy treatment grounds on the situational aspect.

In addition to such situational factors, "authoritarianism" can be presented as an underlying dispositional constituent of biased attitudes. Altemeyer (1996, p. 6) defines authoritarianism (Right-Wing Authoritarianism – RWA) as "the covariation of three attitudinal clusters in a person" which are authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, and conventionalism. He

describes "authoritarian submission" as an individual's higher submission to the established and legitimate authorities. "Authoritarian aggression," on the other hand, portrays a kind of aggression towards unconventional people (social deviants), minority groups, and those sanctioned by the authorities in society. However, by conventionalism, Altemeyer means "a strong acceptance of and commitment to the traditional social norms in one's society" (1996, p. 11). Having these three attitudinal components on a considerable degree can lead people to form biased attitudes towards the members of an outgroup.

Moreover, the worldview behind authoritarianism is that the idea of the social world is dangerous and threatening. Therefore, the underlying social view of high authoritarianism makes the values or motivational goals that concern to establish and maintain social or collective order, security, and stability (Duckitt, 2001; Duckitt & Sibley, 2010a). In line with this formulation, previous findings reveal that authoritarianism has a significant role in threat perceptions (Crowson, 2009; Chors & Ibler, 2009) and outgroup prejudice (Altemeyer, 1996; 2004; Van Hiel & Mervielde, 2005). To be able to consider the potential impact of personal dispositions, in the present research, we include authoritarianism as one of the essential factors that influence prejudice. The following section specifies our theoretical framework and the hypotheses of this study.

3. The Theoretical Expectations

Most of the existing studies have shown a positive correlation between perceived threat and prejudice (e.g., Jedinger & Eisentraut, 2020; Quillian, 1995; Stephan et al., 1999; Stephan et al., 2002) as well as the negative influence of empathy on prejudicial attitudes (e.g., Bäckström & Björklund, 2007; Finlay & Stephan, 2000; also see in Dovidio et al., 2010; Stephan & Finlay, 1999). However, these associations still deserve further examination to provide causal explanations in different contexts. Although displaying the extent of flexibility – or rigidity – of people's attitudes towards the refugees is an important matter, to best of our knowledge, there is almost no research that reveals the causal impact of perceived threat and empathy on shaping Turkish citizens' attitudes towards the Syrian refugees. In this section, we briefly review how perceived threat and empathy function in the emergence of prejudice and provide the theoretical framework of our experimental research. In this study, we try to understand the causal impact of empathy and perceived threat on the university students' prejudice towards the Syrian refugees. To address the concept of empathy, we formulate an empathy-evoking narrative about Syrian refugees, including its cognitive and affective constituents. As a result of this manipulation, we expect to make the respondents understand the refugees' perspectives and adopt a more empathetic position. Given that the existing studies delineate a negative relationship between empathy and prejudice (Bäckström & Björklund, 2007; Finlay & Stephan, 2000; McFarland, 2010; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008) our first hypothesis suggests:

Hypothesis 1: The empathy-evoking manipulation leads Turkish university students to reduce their prejudice towards the Syrian refugees.

In similar logic, we also present the issue as a threatening situation by emphasizing the social, economic, and other problems that the Syrian refugees pose for the Turkish society; thus, we create a threat evoking stimulus. The formulated treatment includes both symbolic and realistic threat perceptions about Syrian refugees in Turkey. The expectation is to find out participants in the threat-evoking condition would be more likely to have a higher level of prejudice than others.

Hypothesis 2: Threat-evoking conditions would increase Turkish university students' prejudice towards Syrian refugees.

Previous research remark that authoritarianism can consistently predict prejudice (Altemeyer, 1996; 2004; Van Hiel & Mervielde, 2005). Besides, concerning the relationship between threat and authoritarianism, scholars suggest a positive link (Crowson, 2009; Chors & Ibler, 2009). In other words, authoritarianism is depicted as a substantial predictor of both threat perceptions and prejudice. In that sense, one can expect that authoritarianism would positively interact with perceived threat and increase outgroup bias. However, Hetherington and Suhay (2011), reveal that the interaction between threat and authoritarianism is in a negative vein, especially during the threatening times. They underline that the impact of threat can be largest on the less authoritarian individuals whereas the smallest on, the more authoritarians. Similar to Hetherington and Suhay's (2011) theoretical framework, we suggest that since the issue of Syrian refugees poses a threatening situation according to the host community in Turkey, low authoritarians would be more sensitive to feel significant threat after exposed the threat-evoking manipulation. On the other hand, given that the high authoritarians already have high levels of threat perception, the impact of threat manipulation would not be as effective as on such people compared to low authoritarians. Thus, our last hypothesis asserts:

Hypothesis 3: Although authoritarianism would have a positive effect on prejudice, the perceived threat condition would negatively interact with authoritarianism.

4. Research Method and Design

To test the key hypotheses of this study, we have conducted a survey experiment with Turkish university students. The survey experiment –in which all the employed questionnaires, scales, and the manipulation texts were in Turkish – was conducted in the first week of May 2016. There were 120 students (75 females, 45 males) who participated in the research voluntarily. The age range in the sample was from 18 to 26 (*Mean* = 21,72; *Standard deviation* = 1, 62). They were all undergraduate students from two different private universities (Yeditepe University and Koç University) in Istanbul and several departments such as Law, Engineering, Medicine, Psychology, and Pharmacy. Participants were chosen by convenient sampling, and they were randomly assigned to the experimental conditions.

Since one might see the use of convenient student sampling in experimental research as problematic, explaining the present sampling rationale in detail would be important to understand whether convenient sampling in experimental research prevents us from making substantial and valid causal

claims. Scholars argue that the type of sample would neither theoretically nor methodologically impair the validity of the results (Erişen, Erişen, & Özkeçeci-Taner, 2013, p. 16; see in also Erişen, 2013; Finlay & Stephan, 2000; Lahav & Courtemanche, 2012). Druckman and Kam assert that "student subjects do not intrinsically pose a problem for a study's external validity" (2011, p. 41). They thoroughly examine whether there are significant differences between students and the general population concerning several themes, including partisanship, ideology, the contribution of immigrants to society, social trust, the importance of religion, homosexuality as a way of life, and so forth. Consequently, they find that "[s]tudents and the nonstudent general population are, on average, indistinguishable" in almost all cases.[2] In light of earlier studies, we expect that convenience student sampling would neither imperil the validity of the results nor the causal inferences making grounded on them.

Regarding the experiment's procedure, first, participants filled out the demographic form in which we ask some information about age, gender, major, seniority at university, level of religiosity. Right after the demographic form, respondents completed the adopted – and also most recent – version of the Right-Wing Authoritarianism scale (Altemeyer, 2006). As it is in the original calculation, there were 20 calculated items. The response system was kept as original. Hence, a 9-point Likert scale (-4 = very strongly disagree to +4 very strongly agree). In the scale, the minimum score was 20, and the maximum was 180. The reliability or the RWA measure was found on a satisfactory level (20 items; α = 0.89).

After the authoritarianism scale, participants were asked to read a text that was either empathy-evoking or threat-evoking unless they were in the neutral condition. To put the manipulations in detail, we generated two different texts to evoke either empathy or threat perception towards Syrian refugees, with the same word count as 226 (see Appendix B for the exact wording of the manipulation texts). In the empathy-evoking text, the objective was to show the refugees' plight, including the conditions of warfare in Syria that urged them to leave and the existing living conditions in Turkey. While narrating the case, we prompted participants to think the refugees' plight in a humanitarian frame by reminding them civil war is an inevitable conflict, which did not break out because of the refugees or their actions. Lastly, we asked the readers to put themselves into the refugees' shoes. By doing so, we intended to evoke empathy-related emotions and manipulate the readers to take the refugees' perspectives.

On the other hand, the threat-evoking text was formulated to include both the symbolic and realistic threat concerns prevalent in Turkish society about the Syrian refugees. The text started with the realistic aspect of threat, which is more related to the increasing population of the refugees, financial burden on the country, and competitions in the economic sphere. Therefore, we underlined the Syrian community's density in Turkey with the official numbers provided by the Deputy Prime Minister, Yalçın Akdoğan, in that period. The narration continued with the cumulative economic

2   Student and nonstudent participants did not differ from each other in terms of partisanship, ideology, religiosity, belief in limited government, views about homosexuality, contributions of immigrants to society, social trust, interest in politics, and overall media use. The two groups distinguished themselves only in terms of religious attendance, level of political information, and specific types of media use (see in Druckman & Kam, 2011, pp. 51-52).

costs and expenditures spent on the refugees, increasing rental prices, and job competition among the host community and the refugees. Subsequently, we pointed out the symbolic threats by tapping on the socio-cultural issues and potential future problems that might occur in society.

In each text, one particular quotation was taken to make the text as more reliable in the eyes of readers. More specifically, in the empathy-evoking text, we inserted a part of the actual interview – which is published on an online news portal – with a Syrian family in need.[3] On the other side, there was a quotation selected from an online newspaper article, which emphasizes that due to the harsh situation in which Syrian refugees live, we might come up with several problems.[4]

Following the empathy – and threat-evoking treatments, participants completed the 7-item prejudice measure, which aimed to tap on mostly blatant and prevalent issues in the Turkish community (see Appendix C for the exact wording of the prejudice items).[5] The responses were reported on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Accordingly, the possible lowest score for the prejudice index was 7, and the highest one was 35. Higher scores reflected a higher level of prejudice against Syrians in Turkey. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was on a satisfactory level, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$. In each experimental condition, there were 40 respondents. As shown in Table 1, the participants' year in the university, gender frequencies, and means of age in the experimental conditions were found similar. In the following section, we present the empirical findings of our experimental research and discuss the results in line with the existing literature.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Variables	Empathetic				Threat				Neutral			
	N	%	M	SD	N	%	M	SD	N	%	M	SD
Religiosity	40		1.56	1.15	40		1.98	1.35	40		1.70	1.29
Female	23	57.5			29	72.5			23	57.5		
Male	17	42.5			11	27.5			17	42.5		
Age	40		22.43	1.58	40		21.60	1.63	40		21.15	1.42
Years at the university			2.75	1.14			2.75	1.27			2.43	
First year students	6	15			6	15			11	27.5		
Second year students	7	17.5			10	25			4	10		
Third year students	8	20			4	10			7	17.5		
Fourth year students	11	27.5			12	30			8	20		
Missing	8	20			8	20			10	25		

* N = number, % = percentage, M = mean, SD = standard deviation

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3   For the full version of the interview: Kural, B. (2014, July 13). Kadıköy'deki Suriyeliler anlatıyor. *Bağımsız İletişim Ağı (Bianet)*. Retrieved from http://bianet.org/bianet/insan-haklari/156952-kadikoy-deki-suriyeliler-anlat%C4%B1yor

4   For the full version of the article: Orhan, O. (2015, January 13). Suriyeli sığınmacıların Türkiye'ye etkileri. *Al Jazeera Türk*. Retrieved from http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/gorus/suriyeli-siginmacilarin-turkiyeye-etkileri

5   Scholars suggest different theoretical approaches and measurements about prejudice. One is developed by Pettigrew and Meertens (1995), who suggest two forms of prejudice: subtle and blatant. To capture the present context, in the present article, we mostly focus on the blatant side, which refers to hot, close, and direct indicators. We also benefitted from previous research reports (e.g., Erdoğan, 2014) while formulating the prejudice items.

5. Results

5.1. The Differences in the Prejudice Levels among the Experimental Conditions

When we look at Figure 1, we see that the prejudice scores significantly vary across the experimental conditions. The mean level of prejudice for the group exposed to empathetic stimulus is 18.87 (*SD=6.21*); the mean level of prejudice for the group exposed to a threat – evoking condition is 24.73 (*SD=6.75*), and the mean level of prejudice for the neutral condition that was not exposed to any external manipulation is 22.13 (*SD=6.25*). Thus, this simple mean comparison shows that the respondents exposed to threat-evoking stimuli have a higher level of prejudice, and the group exposed to the empathy-provoking condition has a lower level of prejudice compared to the neutral condition. Given that the students were randomly assigned to each group, and the demographic characteristics show considerable similarities across groups, we can say that demographic factors would not explain the variation of prejudice across the groups.

Figure 1. The means of prejudice scores in the experimental conditions.
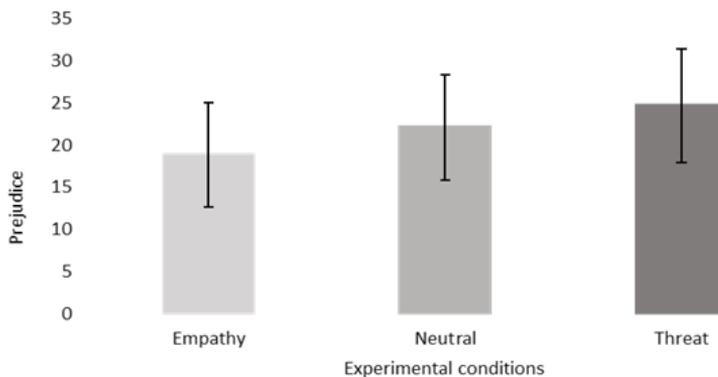
To understand whether the levels of prejudice significantly differ across the experimental conditions, we conducted an analysis of variance test (ANOVA). The findings displayed a statistically significant differentiation on the prejudice levels among the experimental conditions, $F(2, 114) = 8.25$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.13$. For further examination, we conducted several regression analyses.

5.2. The Influences of Empathy – and Threat-Evoking Stimuli on the Prejudice Levels

The first two hypotheses focused on how the treatments – being exposed to either empathy or threat-evoking texts – affect respondents' prejudicial attitudes towards the Syrian refugees. We expected that while empathy-evoking treatment would lead to a decrease in the prejudice levels, receiving threat-evoking treatment would raise prejudice. To test these theoretical expectations, in Model-1 we regressed the level of prejudice on empathy and threat-evoking treatments. The

results show that exposing the experimental group to empathy-evoking portrayals of Syrian refugees decreased the levels of prejudice, whereas receiving threat-evoking treatment increased the prejudice scores. For the empathy-evoking treatment, the results were robust after the covariates of gender, religiosity, and authoritarianism were included in the model (see in Table 2). On the other hand, we could not see a significant effect of the threat-evoking treatment in Model 1 with covariates.

Table 2. Regression analyses of average treatment effects (base category is neutral condition)

| DV: Level of prejudice	Model (1) without covariates	Model (1) with covariates	Model (2) without covariates	Model (2) with covariates
	Coefficient (*Coef.*)	*Coef.*	*Coef.*	*Coef.*
Empathy	-3.260**	-3.433**	-3.243**	-3.268**
	(1.462)	(1.505)	(1.482)	(1.486)
Threat	2.593*	2.489	9.205**	9.124**
	(1.453)	(1.524)	(3.548)	(3.566)
Authoritarianism		0.013	0.023	0.041
		(0.030)	(0.028)	(0.033)
Authoritarianism Interaction with threat			-0.102**	-0.099**
			(0.048)	(0.048)
Religiosity		-0.784		-0.704
		(0.599)		(0.594)
Female		-0.188		-0.190
		(1.317)		(1.299)
Constant	22.132***	22.920***	20.783***	20.946***
	(1.040)	(2.111)	(2.028)	(2.302)
Observations	117	114	114	114
R^2	0.13	0.14	0.16	0.17

Standard errors in parentheses

*** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$

5.3. The Interplay between Authoritarianism and Perceived Threat

In the following analysis, the third hypothesis is tested. The expectation was to find out not only a significant positive link between authoritarianism and prejudice levels but also a negative interaction between authoritarianism and perceived threat condition. Therefore, we generated a second model to examine the influence of authoritarianism and its interaction with threat-evoking treatment on the level of prejudice. Here, the model included authoritarianism, threat – and empathy-evoking conditions as the main independent variables and the threat*authoritarianism interaction. As Table 2 indicates under the sections of Model 2, authoritarianism, per se, was not found as a significant predictor of prejudice. On the other hand, the findings displayed a significant effect of authoritarianism on prejudice levels between the threat-evoking condition and baseline.

Figure 2 illustrates that as authoritarianism increases, the threat-evoking condition and the baseline difference decrease. To put it more specifically, we observed that up to the authoritarianism score of 60, there was a statistically significant difference between a threat-evoking condition and the baseline in terms of prejudice level. Whereas for authoritarianism scores higher than 60, there was no significant difference in prejudice levels between being exposed to the threat-evoking stimulus, or not. Besides, as authoritarianism scores increase between the interval of 20 and around 60, the level of prejudice decreased in the threat-evoking condition. That is to say, participants with a low level of authoritarianism (up to about 60) had higher prejudice scores, whereas individuals with higher authoritarianism levels had a lower level of prejudice towards Syrian refugees in Turkey. When the covariates were entered into the same model, these findings remained. We also applied the bootstrap method with 1000 replications to the conducted regression models and found that the results were robust after bootstrapping (see in Appendix, Table A1).

Figure 2. The Marginal Effect of Authoritarianism on Prejudice in the Threat-evoking Condition
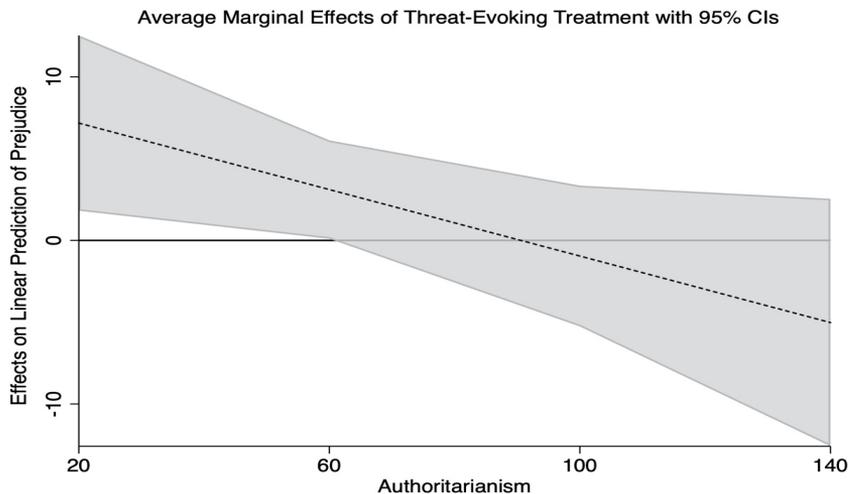
6. Discussion

As a consequence of the devastating conflict that has forced Syrian people to flee to several countries, the intergroup prejudice between Syrian refugees and the host societies appears as an important research topic. In that lens, the present study's primary intention was to uncover whether the prejudice in Turkey against Syrian refugees is vulnerable to empathy – and threat-evoking treatments. In addition to the situational effects of empathy and perceived threat, authoritarianism is used as an individual-level determinant of prejudice. Given an interactionist approach, the current design endeavors to provide a fertile ground to explore the possible explanations of the prejudice phenomenon.

In line with the previous studies, which show the negative relationship between empathy and prejudice (Bäckström & Björklund, 2007; Finlay & Stephan, 2000; McFarland, 2010; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008), the results of our experimental design support the first hypothesis. The empathy-evoking manipulation makes individuals less prejudiced towards the Syrian refugees. In different contexts, earlier studies present consistent evidence displaying that experimentally evoked empathy can reduce prejudice (Batson, Chang, Orr, & Rowland, 2002; Batson et al., 1997; Finlay & Stephan, 2000). However, in the Turkish context, particularly related to the Syrian refugees, there is almost no research concentrating on the causal role of empathy in the reduction of outgroup prejudice. What exists, on the other hand, is a correlational study, which reveals that stronger humanitarian concerns are related to lower negative behavioral intentions towards the Syrian refugees in Turkey (Yitmen & Verkuyten, 2018). Since the empathy treatment, here, was formulated by highlighting the humanitarian concerns, we received supportive evidence to Yitmen and Verkuyten (2018)'s finding. Although they focus on the behavioral intentions regarding the Syrian refugees and our research interest centers around the prejudicial attitudes, the current experimental design might be helpful to understand the causal mechanism behind the connection between humanitarian concerns and outgroup positivity, in general. Future studies are still needed to thoroughly analyze the causal path among empathy and humanitarian interests, negative attitudes, and behavioral intentions regarding the matter.

Moreover, in this study, we could find enough evidence to support our second hypothesis. As suggested by earlier studies (Stephan & Renfro, 2002; Stephan & Stephan, 2000; Duckitt and Sibley, 2010b), we anticipated that respondents, who read the threat-evoking text would display a higher level of prejudice compared to the others, and the results from the experiment confirmed this expectation. Previous studies asserted a positive association between threat perception and prejudice (e.g., Stephan & Renfro, 2002; Stephan & Stephan, 2000). However, the causal mechanism between these two concepts is relatively ambiguous to designate which one causes the other. Duckitt and Sibley (2010b) demonstrate in their experimental study that threat was an essential factor contributing to arouse a higher level of prejudice against immigrants. Bahns' (2017) findings suggest a reverse causal relationship between them; meaning, it is possible for both of them to affect each other. In our study, the causal mechanism was formulated as unidirectional so that the threat-evoking condition makes individuals more prejudiced. The results produced evidence for this unidirectional mechanism between threat and prejudice. Our reasoning behind that theoretical framework is related to the case-specific features. Before the Syrian refugees became visible in Turkey, prejudicial attitudes towards immigrants, refugees, or asylum seekers were not prevalent (ASAM, 2011). As the competition on the same resources increased and the differences in the socio-cultural values and practices between the refugees and host community became salient, threat perceptions appeared and spread.

In his research, Erişen (2013) argues that when negative emotions – particularly anger and fear – are experimentally evoked, the level of perceived threat significantly increases related to the Syria crisis in the Turkish context. This finding might illuminate the underlying affective mechanism of what we found about the significant role of perceived threat in the increase of

prejudicial attitudes towards Syrian refugees. To put it more precisely, when people are exposed to the threat-evoking portrayal of Syrian refugees, such exposure can arouse negative emotions (e.g., anger, fear, anxiety). In turn, their interaction might present a more solid mechanism as the roots of prejudice. Further research is needed to elucidate how the perceived threat is accompanied by emotions in the Turkish context while influencing the prejudicial attitudes towards the refugees.

Concerning the significant impacts of empathy and threat, the negative discourse in the media seems quite influential to canalize public opinion to a more negative side. When we consider the duality in the media in terms of depicting Syrian refugees in either a positive or negative manner, we see that the content of the news can play an essential role in changing public attitudes. Therefore, the information channels should be careful in framing or narrating any information about such critical matters. This inference is also supported by Getmansky, Sınmazdemir, and Zeitzoff (2018), who find that receiving messages about the possible effects of refugees on the host society increases local people's negative attitudes. Among their manipulation messages, three messages hold negative contents (including economic costs, ethnic balance, and militant ties), while one message carries a positive gist that emphasizes innocent women and children. Although the expectation is to detect a positive impact of the message surprisingly, the treatment backfired and made local people more likely to express negative attitudes towards the refugees. Contrary to that, we found strong evidence that experimentally induced empathy can decrease negative attitudes towards the Syrian refugees.

Getmansky et al. (2018) argue that there might be several explanations behind their finding. For example, people may perceive women and children as an unproductive population or may associate young Syrian females to the instances of polygamy and child marriages (Getmansky et al., 2018, pp. 8-10). However, the manipulation text in our study expresses the issue by situating it on a humanitarian frame. These different results remind us how the portrayal of such delicate matters play a crucial role in perception and attitude formation. Although both of these treatments are based on positive themes, their influences diverge entirely.

Another striking finding taps the significance of the interplay between personal dispositions and situational factors as the roots of prejudice. Concerning the person-situation schism in the domain of prejudice, our findings yield that by focusing on the interactions, much more substantial evidence can be provided instead of scrutinizing only on the separate effects of the individuals' dispositions or the situational factors. Although we have anticipated that authoritarianism would significantly affect the prejudice levels, the current results do not validate this hypothesis. On the other hand, a significant negative interaction effect was observed between the threat-evoking stimulus and authoritarianism on people's level of prejudice. That is to say, threat-evoking text displayed a significant impact for respondents who had lower scores than the mean level of authoritarianism; and in turn, although these people were the less authoritarians, they had a greater level of prejudice, after they read the text, compared to the ones in the neutral condition.

Why did threat-evoking treatment significantly influence low authoritarians but not high scorers? It is most probably related to less authoritarian people's sensitivity to the threat-evoking treatment. In their cross-sectional survey research, Hetherington and Suhay (2011) report that in threatening times (e.g., after a terrorist attack), most people are susceptible to authoritarian thinking. In a similar vein, our findings indicate that as opposed to high authoritarians, low scorers are much more prone to display biased and unwelcoming attitudes towards the refugees after they are exposed to the threat-evoking treatment. This finding shows that prejudicial attitudes can easily become popular under threat-evoking conditions. Consequently, the present results emphasize the importance of looking at the interplay between the situational and dispositional factors that are crucial to understanding outgroup prejudice.

7. Conclusion

Outgroup prejudice is one of the major societal problems in the countries where a large number of immigrant and refugee populations reside. As one of these places, Turkey hosts the largest number of the Syrian refugee population in the world. In this study, we approach the issue from the field of political psychology. By focusing on the individuals' personality traits, our main objective is to explain how empathy and threat-evoking portrayals of the Syrian refugees influence the outgroup prejudice. The results show that while empathy evoking conditions decrease biased attitudes, threat-evoking intervention increases prejudice. Moreover, our findings show that although authoritarianism does not appear as a significant predictor of prejudice, its interaction with the threat-evoking condition significantly affects prejudice.

This study has certain limitations. First, although we used random assignment to the experimental groups, the sampling procedure relied on convenient sampling, and the generalizability of the findings might be questionable. Second, this study focuses only on university students. As a future study, replicating the same analysis for different parts of the society would make an important contribution to the literature. This would help us to reveal both contextual variations and potential demographic moderators. By doing so, more detailed models would be developed to elucidate the puzzle of intergroup prejudice with respect to the contextual and structural determinants.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Regression analyses of average treatment effects with bootstrap method (base category is neutral condition).

DV: Level of prejudice	Bootstrap Model (1)	Bootstrap Model (1) with Covariates	Bootstrap Model (2)	Bootstrap Model (2) with Covariates
	Coefficient (*Coef.*)	*Coef.*	*Coef.*	*Coef.*
Empathy	− 3.260**	-3.460**	-3.243**	-3.268**
	(1.434)	(1.390)	(1.434)	(1.465)
Threat	2.593*	2.492	9.205**	9.125**
	(1.454)	(1.581)	(3.710)	(3.551)
Authoritarianism		0.011	0.023	0.042
		(0.032)	(0.034)	(0.039)
Authoritarianism Interaction with threat			-0.102*	-0.099*
			(0.054)	(0.052)
Religiosity		-0.757		-0.704
		(0.607)		(0.560)
Female		-0.187		-0.190
		(1.398)		(1.330)
Constant	22.132***	22.920***	20.783***	20.947***
	(1.023)	(2.114)	(2.167)	(2.322)
Observations	117	114	114	114
R^2	0.13	0.14	0.16	0.17

Standard errors in parentheses

*** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$

Appendix B: Manipulation Texts

Empathetic Text

Suriye'de yaşanan iç savaş nedeniyle 2011 yılından bu yana milyonlarca Suriyeli, ülkelerini terk etmek zorunda kaldılar. Türkiye, insanlığa dair olumlu duruşunu koruyarak, Suriye'den gelen kardeşlerine kucak açtı. Bu kucaklama zaten, ahlaki ve vicdani bir gereklilikten başka bir şey değildi. Çünkü geldikleri yerde, yani Suriye'de okullar, hastaneler, masum siviller ve hatta bebekler her gün bombalara maruz kalıyor. Bu insanları görmezden gelmek toplumumuzun ve kültürümüzün kabul edebileceği bir yaklaşım değil.

Yaşadığımız çağ son derece acımasız bir anlayışa bürünmüş zihniyetlerle dolu. Oysaki bu acımasızlıklar neticesinde, Suriye'de yaşanan bu vahşi savaş, her toplumun başına gelebilir. Dolayısıyla bu hazin tabloyu insan odaklı çözmeye çalışmalıyız. Bugün onların başına gelenlerle, yarın bizim karşılaşmayacağımızı kimse garanti edemez.

Kendinizi bir an için sığınmacıların yerine koyarak empati yapın. Suriyeli sığınmacıların, bizlerin anlayışına ve desteğine ihtiyacı var. Muhabir Beyza Kural'ın evsiz sığınmacılarla yaptığı röportajdan bir kesitte de bu hazin tabloyu görebiliyoruz: "...Suriyeliyiz diye ev vermediler. Komşular şikâyet ediyormuş. 'Kaçak işçi çalıştırmıyoruz' diye iş de vermiyorlar. İnsanlar yemek, yatak yardımı getiriyor. Ev olsa kalırız, ekmeğimizi yeriz, tuvaleti, suyu olur. Burada camiye gidiyoruz. Çocukları soğuk suda temizliyoruz. Büyük oğlumuz Suriye'de. Onların evi de yıkılmıştı. Nasıldır şimdi, ne yapıyor bilmiyoruz."

Savaştan kaçarak bizim gibi ülkelere sığınan bu insanlar, koşulları ve olayları kendileri belirlemediler. Aksine evlerinden, yurtlarından vazgeçmek zorunda kaldılar. Kimileri işsiz, eğitimsiz, dilimize ve yaşam tarzımıza da yabancı. Toplum olarak sığınmacıları anlamaya çalışmak ve onlara destek olmak öncelikli bir insanlık görevidir.

Threat-evoking Text

Başbakan Yardımcısı Yalçın Akdoğan'ın geçtiğimiz ay yaptığı açıklamaya göre, Türkiye'de, 2 milyon 700 bini geçkin Suriyeli mülteci var ve İstanbul, mültecilerin en yoğun bulunduğu şehirlerden biri. Ülkeye büyük bir nüfus halinde gelen bu insanlar, şehirlilik kültürünün altını üstüne getirdiler. Toplumsal sorunlarla birlikte ekonomik alana da ciddi olumsuzluklar söz konusu.

En başta yardımlara ayrılan bütçeler nedeniyle ekonomik anlamda zor durumda kaldığımız yadsınamaz bir gerçek. 2015 yılının sonlarına doğru, resmi makamlardan gelen açıklamaya göre Suriyelilere 7 milyar dolar harcandı. Ülkemizde zaten pek çok sorun varken bu ciddi bir külfet oldu. Ayrıca, artan ev kiraları ve işsizlik de giderek kendini hissettiren ekonomik sorunlar arasında.

Türkiye'nin bu kadar büyük bir göç dalgasını kaldıracak alt yapısı aslında yok. Buna bir de denetlenemez göç dalgası eklenince bugün hemen her şehrin, tüm sokaklarında sığınmacıları

görüyoruz. Araştırmacı Oytun Orhan'ın belirttiği gibi geleceğe dair de büyük toplumsal sorunlar doğması ihtimali yüksek: "Suriyeli sığınmacıların zor koşullarda yaşamaları, her türlü suç ve şiddet ortamının doğup gelişmesi açısından uygun koşulları sunuyor. Eğitim almamış, düşük gelirli, dışlanmışlık hissi içinde kimlik bunalımı yaşayan sığınmacı gençler, ileriki dönemde suç kaynağı oluşturabilirler". Bu gerçekler günümüz için de büyük bir tehlike.

Yakın zamanda bu konuya nasıl çözüm getirileceği belirsiz. Çocuk işçilerin, arttığı, her köşe başında evsizlerin yaşadığı bir ülke haline geliyoruz. Dahası, bu sorunların ne zaman sona ereceğini bilmiyoruz. Hatta Avrupa Birliği ile yapılan son anlaşma ile mülteci sayısı şüphesiz daha da artacak.

Appendix C: The Original Version of the Prejudice Questionnaire

Bu kadar sığınmacıya bakılması Türkiye'nin ekonomisine zarar vermektedir.

Türkiye'de yardıma muhtaç yüksek sayıda vatandaş varken, vergilerimin Suriyeli sığınmacılara harcanmasına karşıyım.

Suriyeliler işlerimizi elimizden almaktadırlar.

Suriyeli sığınmacılar bulundukları yerlerde şiddet, hırsızlık, kaçakçılık ve fuhuş gibi suçlara bulaşarak toplumsal ahlak ve huzuru bozmaktadır.

Suriyeli sığınmacılar ile komşu olursam, şahsıma veya aileme zarar vereceklerini düşünüyorum.

Suriyelilerin Türkiye'de kalması gelecekte büyük sorunlara yol açabilir.

Suriyelilerin buradaki topluma uyum sağlayacağını düşünüyorum.[6]

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6   Reversed item