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Blending Survey Data and Theory to Comprehend Refusal Reasons in Social Surveys

Sosyal Araştırmalarda Reddetme Nedenlerini Anlamak İçin Araştırma Verisi ve Teoriyi Birleştirmek

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Abstract

This study focuses on the reasons behind the refusal behavior of survey respondents in the era of steadily declining response trends in social surveys. In this sense, the primary goal of the study is to examine refusal reasons by contact attempts and interview outcomes in the light of nonresponse theories. The data source of the study is the 10th round of the European Social Survey (ESS10), a large-scale and cross-national survey carried out in European countries. In the survey, it is possible to observe the reasons behind refusals using the contact forms, which are mainly used to collect paradata. The study findings are discussed along with the nonresponse theories assisting in our understanding of the reasons underlying refusals. A particular attention was given to the leverage-salience theory which posits a direct relationship between survey participation and respondent benefits. The study concludes by presenting methodological strategies to reduce the increasing rates of nonresponse, concentrating on refusals. Finally, it is expected to develop practical implications for social survey settings in Türkiye.

Keywords: Nonresponse trends, survey refusals, leverage-salience theory, European Social Survey

Öz

Bu çalışma, sosyal araştırmalarda sürekli olarak azalan cevaplama oranlarının görüldüğü dönemde cevaplayıcıların araştırmaya katılmayı reddetme davranışı altındaki nedenlere odaklanmaktadır. Çalışmanın temel amacı, cevaplayıcıların reddetme davranışı nedenlerini cevapsızlık teorileri ışığında görüşme ziyaretlerine ve görüşme sonuç kodlarına göre incelemektir. Çalışmanın veri kaynağını farklı Avrupa ülkelerinde büyük ölçekte gerçekleştirilen bir araştırma olan European Social Survey'in 10. serisi (ESS10) oluşturmaktadır. Bu araştırmada, ziyaret formları aracılığıyla toplanan paradata aracığıyla cevaplayıcıların red nedenlerini değerlendirmek mümkün olabilmektedir. Çalışmanın bulguları, reddetme davranışı altındaki nedenleri anlamamıza yardımcı olan cevapsızlık teorileri ile tartışılmaktadır. Ayrıca, özellikle red nedenleri ve araştırma katılımı arasında doğrudan bir ilişki kuran leverage-salience teorisine değinilmektedir. Çalışmanın sonunda sosyal araştırmalarda cevaplayıcıların reddetme nedenlerine odaklanılarak, artan cevapsızlık oranlarını düşürecek çeşitli metodolojik önerilerde bulunulmuştur. Son olarak, bu çalışmanın Türkiye'deki sosyal araştırmalar için uygulanabilecek pratik uygulamaların geliştirilmesi süreçlerine katkıda bulunması beklenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Cevapsızlık eğilimi, sosyal araştırmalarda reddetme, leverage-salience teorisi, European Social Survey

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Introduction

Cross-national comparisons conducted by survey researchers pointed out that nonresponse trends are increasing even though the rate of response decline varies across countries (De Leeuw & De Heer, 2002; Luiten et al., 2020; Kohut et al., 2012). The situation which is usually noted in developed countries appears to be valid for national surveys in developing countries as well (Luiten et al., 2020; Saraç & Adalı, 2019).

It is common practice to use indicators such as contact rates with the sample units, response rates, and refusal rates when assessing the overall quality of surveys, whilst several approaches may be taken in the calculation process (AAPOR, 2016; Stoop, 2005; Rutstein & Rojas, 2006). Therefore, survey organizations typically target a response rate threshold at the beginning of the survey.

Nonresponse may lead to biased survey estimates in addition to a reduction in target sample sizes. Survey estimates may deviate significantly from the population values when interviews are conducted with a subset of the population that shares similar experiences. In other words, biased statistics may occur due to the nonresponding for certain units in the sample. This problem results from the strong relationship between nonresponse rate and nonresponse bias (Groves & Peytcheva, 2008). Still, higher response rates could lead to high error due to the substantial variations between respondents and nonrespondents in terms of survey interests (Koç & Saraç, 2023). Groves and Peytcheva's (2008) meta-analysis study explicitly showed a significant nonresponse bias, even in the case where the relationship between nonresponse rate and absolute bias is rather weak. Overall, the problem of nonresponse in social surveys requires greater attention, taking all these motivations into account.

This work concentrates on refusal behavior with particular emphasis on reasons for refusals according to contact attempts and final interview outcomes. Refusal can be considered as a foremost component of nonresponse. The remaining components are noncontacts and other non-interviews, usually related to the accessibility and availability of sample units including at-home patterns, number of calls, and timing of calls (Lynn & Clarke, 2002; Groves et al., 2009). For this reason, researchers typically speculate about refusal conversion strategies such as multiple contacts, conducting follow-up surveys, reducing interview length, providing alternative response modes, and cash incentives (Groves et al., 1999; Stoop, 2012). In addition, reminders have also been found to be an effective way to lower nonresponse, particularly in self-administered surveys (Edwards et al., 2002).

Groves et al. (2009) outlined the survey design features that impact survey participation comprising contactability, initial decision, and final decision. According to this framework, the factors determining contactability of sample units include the number and timing of calls, the duration of fieldwork, interviewer workload, and interviewer observations. Secondly, initial decisions of respondents are shaped by pre-notification, sponsorship, interviewer behavior, incentives, burden, respondent rules, and household-interviewer matching. Finally, mode switch, interviewer switch, two-phase sampling, persuasive letters, and post-survey adjustments affect individuals' final decisions to participate in surveys. Similarly, Groves and Couper (1998) explained survey cooperation from different perspectives including the social environment, design features, sample unit pre-disposition, and interaction between householder and respondent. They also revealed differences in response propensity by type of residence (e.g., central city, sub-urban, other urban, and rural).

Revealing factors influencing survey participation could explain why some respondents are more likely to decline to answer surveys than others. *Leverage-salience theory* asserts that willingness to participate in a survey is determined by several factors such as survey topic, sponsorship, use of incentives, and pre-notification letters, thereby increasing the benefits of respondents (Groves et al., 2000). The importance that respondents attribute to each factor would determine their decision regarding survey participation. Most of these factors appear to be related to survey design decisions under the control of researchers. For instance, a new study conducted by Haan et al. (2024) revealed that the inclusion of personal information on forms is a disincentive factor for survey participation.

The main objective of the study is to comprehend the refusal reasons, by examining the motivations behind refusals in the countries involved in the 10th round of the European Social Survey (ESS10). This will be examined with respect to how the reasons for refusals vary according to contact attempts and final interview outcomes. Additionally, the proportion of refusals over final interview outcomes will be examined by the countries to make a ground for further examinations. The basic

rationale for selecting the ESS data is the ability to handle such methodological evaluations due to the paradata collection employed in the fieldwork. Based on the interviewer observations recorded in the contact forms, the information about the reasons for refusals is provided. The another aim of the study is to discuss reasons for refusals in the broad sense of nonresponse theories in the field, with a particular emphasis on the *leverage-salience theory*. Finally, the study attempts to give practical recommendations for national survey settings in Türkiye based on study findings.

"A good theory could enable improvements in survey design and survey process to increase response rates." (Dillman, 2020)

1. Theoretical Framework

There exist numerous survey theories as to why certain units prefer not to participate in surveys. The initial theories, systematically presented by Dillman (2020) in his book chapter, include arguments about survey participation from the respondent's perspective. *The benefit-cost theory* (Singer, 2011), *social exchange theory* (Dillmann et al., 2014), and *leverage-salience theory* (Groves et al., 2000) provide strong provisions to understand respondents' decisions regarding survey participation.

1.1. The Leverage-Salience Theory

The leverage-salience theory asserts that varying predispositions of individuals and survey design features influence survey participation at different levels. In this sense, leverage and salience of attributes as well as their importance levels and directions are key determinants when respondents decide to accept or refuse to interview (Groves et al., 2000). The survey topic, questionnaire length, incentive use, and survey sponsorship are among the design features affecting the decision for survey participation, according to the theory.

Starting from earlier studies, being "too busy" and "not interested" are the main reasons for refusals. In this regard, Couper (1997) detected that refusals due to not being interested in the American National Election Studies were the result of individuals having lower levels of political knowledge. This appears to be directly related to the respondent's interest and knowledge of the survey topic. Similarly, Groves et al. (2004) found higher cooperation rates among individuals (e.g., new parents, teachers, politicians, and elderly people) who are interested in the survey topic in a phone-based experimental study.

The use of incentives in surveys, especially pre-paid ones rather than promised ones, has been noted to be an influential factor in achieving increased response rates (Singer et al., 1999; Parsons et al., 2014; Groves et al., 2000). Watson and Wooden also (2009) mentioned the positive effect of incentives on increased response tendencies for panel surveys although their design and administration vary across surveys. The researchers also showed the significant impact of sending pre-notification letters on response propensity in various studies (Traugott & Goldstein, 1993; Groves & Peytcheva, 2008). Additionally, factors intended to reduce respondent burden such as shorter interviews and reduced complexity of tasks would result in increased response rates (Edwards et al., 2002).

1.1. The Benefit-Cost Theory

The benefit-cost theory could be considered as an extended form of the *leverage-salience theory*. The theory is based on the balance between benefits and costs perceived by each individual. People would be more willing to participate in surveys when their benefits are greater than the costs, according to this theory (Singer, 2011). In other words, the perception of benefits is always more essential than reducing costs including risks and harm. Thus, survey researchers should focus on how they can increase the respondents' benefits to encourage survey participation in accordance with this theory.

1.1. The Social Exchange Theory

The social exchange theory, asserted by Dillman et al. (2014), attempts to understand survey participation based on people's interactions with others. According to this theory, interactions between individuals, depending on how the trust is formed, constitute the benefits of respondents, societies, or communications. In other words, the trust established between people is a fundamental factor in persuading people to respond to surveys. This theory explains high noncontact rates for high-security or controlled-access buildings in urban areas (Gfroerer et al., 1997).

Methods

Data Source

The European Social Survey (ESS), a cross-national survey carried out across Europe every two years, is the data source of the study. A wide range of data is collected by the survey, including social behaviors and attitudes, social values, health, well- being, national and cultural identity, religion, family life, and marriage. The main goals are to follow the trend of public attitudes and values across Europe, develop social indicators on attitudes and beliefs, and strengthen the methodological assessment of cross-national survey estimates (ESS, 2024a).

The 10th round of the survey involved 31 different countries and was carried out between September 2020 and 2022. The CAPI (Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing) method was used in 22 countries when collecting data, while self-administered methods (e.g., web or paper) were used in 9 countries with the impact of the pandemic. In countries where in-person methods were the primary data collection mode, there was also an option to conduct video interviews for the follow-up. The individual interviews conducted with Europeans over 15 years of age lasted about an hour.

The survey countries used random probability sampling techniques in the sampling design and conducted proper weighting procedures. The ESS also targets a minimum response rate of 70% and a maximum non-contact rate of 3% in each of the participating countries. The main motivation was to get valid, reliable, and nationally representative estimates. This work mainly uses contact forms designed to record all relevant information about the fieldwork. Detailed contact information of the sample units such as date, day, time, administration mode, interview outcome, and result of each interview were collected through these forms. Additionally, contact attempts that resulted in refusals, stated reasons for the refusals (if any), and demographic information of the contact persons are also recorded on this form by interviewers (ESS, 2024b). Regarding the study, Table 1 presents all possible results and outcomes of contact attempts, and reasons for the refusals collected by the contact forms used in the ESS.

Statistical Analysis

Statistical analyses within this study include the percentage distributions of interview outcomes with an emphasis on refusals by survey countries, and refusal reasons stated by nonrespondents by the contact attempts and final interview outcomes in accordance with the study objectives. The analyses were carried out using RStudio (2023.12.1) and SPSS Statistics version 23.0 (IBM SPSS Corp., Armonk, NY, USA) statistical analysis programs.

Countries, where the final outcome code was not available in the contact form data set (named ESS10CF), were excluded from the analysis. In total, contact information from 19 countries[1] was used in the statistical analyses. The information from the first three contact attempts was included in the analyses given that the number of cases fell below 1,000 following the third attempt. Figure 1 illustrates the contact attempts, refusals, and other outcomes in the survey as well as the number of cases in each category. The contact attempts and nonrespondents due to refusals consist of the study units examined here in accordance with the study goals.

[1]Bulgaria (BG), Switzerland (CH), Czechia (CZ), Estonia (EE), Finland (FI), France (FR), Greece (GR), Croatia (HR), Hungary (HU), Iceland (IS), Italy (IT), Lithuania (LT), Montenegro (ME), North Macedonia (MK), Netherlands (NL), Norway (NO), Portugal (PT), Slovenia (SI), and Slovakia (SK).

Table 1.
Results and outcomes of contact attempts and reasons for refusals

Code	Result of the contact attempt	Outcome of contact attempt	Reasons for refusals
1	Completed interview	An appointment was made	It is bad timing (otherwise engaged, sick children, visitors, …)
2	Partial interview	Refusal of target respondent	I am not interested
3	Contact with unidentified person	Refusal by proxy (family, acquaintance)	I don't know enough about this topic, too difficult for me
4	Contact with target respondent but no interview	Someone refused, not sure if target respondent	This is a waste of time
5	Contact with somebody other than target respondent	Respondent is unavailable /not at home until __/___	This is a waste of money
6	No contact at all	Mentally/physically unable ill/sick (short term and therefore could revisit during the fieldwork period)	The survey interferes with my privacy /I give no personal information
7	Invalid address	Mentally/physically unable ill/sick (long term and would be unable to complete interview during the fieldwork period)	I never do surveys
8	Other information about sample unit	Respondent is deceased	I have already co-operated in surveys too often
9	-	Respondent moved abroad	I do not trust surveys
10	-	Respondent moved, unsure whether abroad	I have had bad experiences before with surveys
11	-	Respondent moved within country	I don't like the subject
12	-	Language barrier	My partner/family/household members do not give approval
13	-	Other	I do not admit strangers to my house, I am afraid to let them in
14	-	-	Other

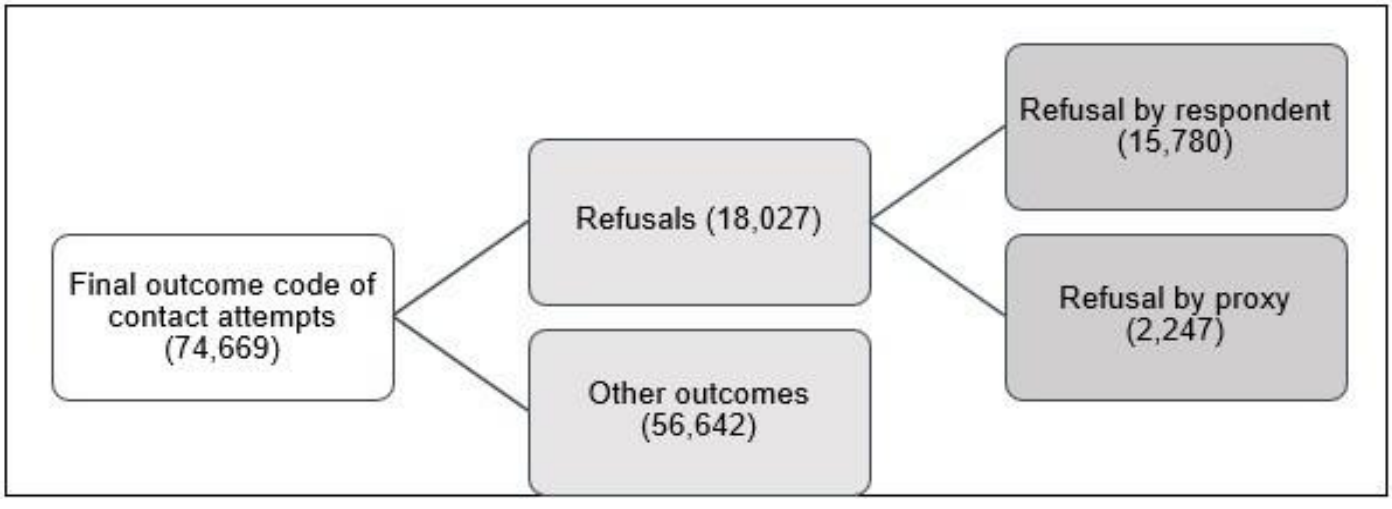

Figure 1.
Number of cases for contact attempts, refusals and other outcomes

Results

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of final interview outcomes for each ESS country. The countries where respondent's refusals are the most common are the Netherlands (40 percent), Hungary (38 percent), Norway (34 percent), and France (32 percent) according to results. Moreover, in North Macedonia and Greece the percentages of refusals by proxies are about 8-9 percent. The percentage of interview outcomes excluding refusals is higher than 53 percent for each ESS country. The three countries with the lowest percentage of refusals across all survey countries are the Czechia (6 percent) followed by Portugal (7 percent) and Lithuania (10 percent). Overall, 24 percent of the contact attempts result in refusals by the respondents or their proxy. The percentage distribution of interview outcomes by survey countries is presented in Table 2.

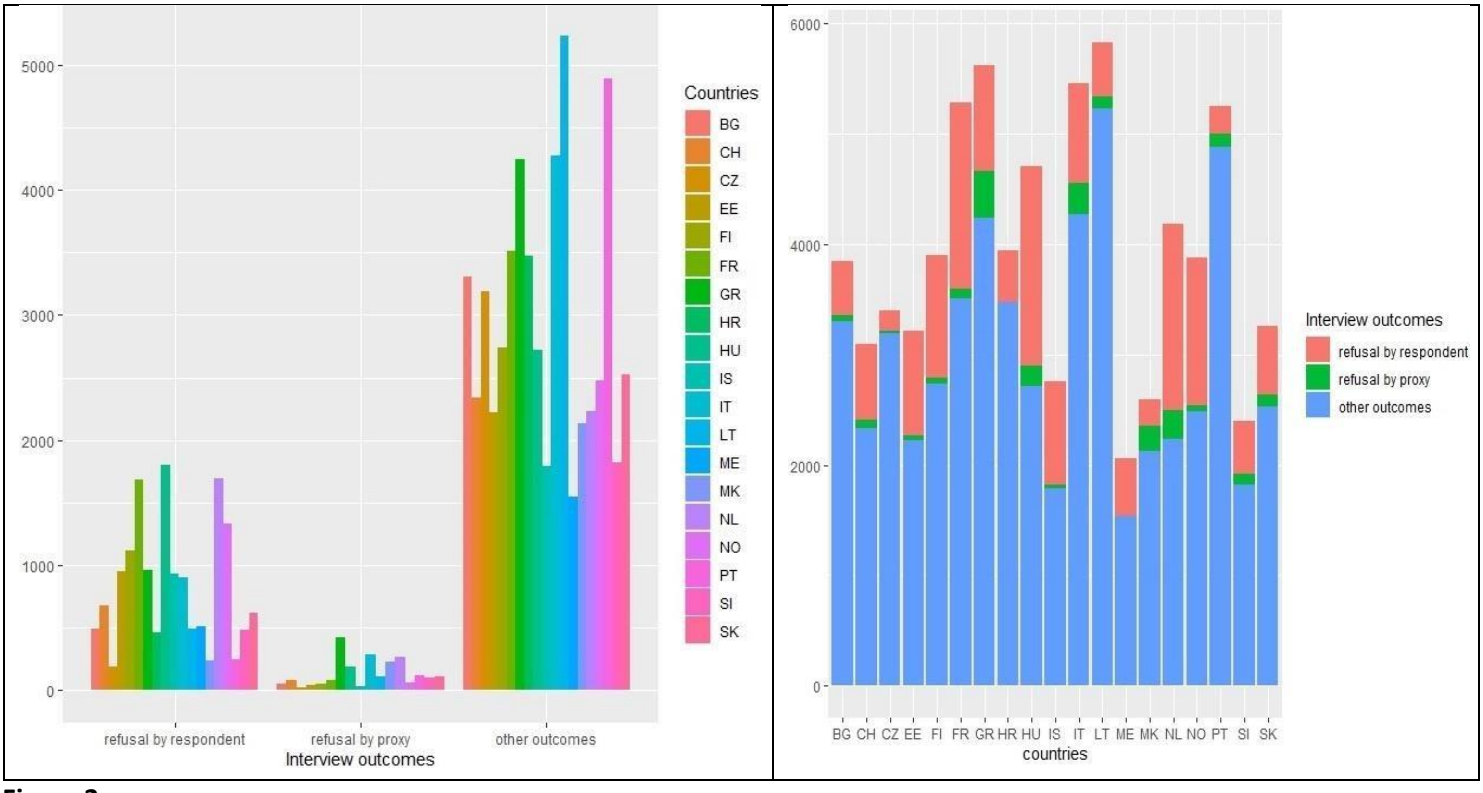

Figure 2.

The distribution of interview outcomes by survey countries

Table 2.
The percentage distribution of interview outcomes by survey countries

Countries	Refusals		Other outcomes	Number of contact attempts
	By respondent	By proxy		
Bulgaria	12.7	1.4	85.9	3,845
Switzerland	22.0	2.5	75.5	3,093
Czechia	5.5	0.8	93.7	3,401
Estonia	29.6	1.3	69.1	3,218
Finland	28.6	1.3	70.2	3,900
France	31.9	1.6	66.5	5,279
Greece	17.1	7.5	75.5	5,619
Croatia	11.8	0.0	88.2	3,940
Hungary	38.3	4.0	57.7	4,705
Iceland	33.9	1.2	64.9	2,758
Italy	16.5	5.2	78.3	5,458
Lithuania	8.4	1.8	89.8	5,830
Montenegro	25.0	0.0	75.0	2,056
North Macedonia	9.2	8.7	82.1	2,595
Netherlands	40.4	6.4	53.3	4,187
Norway	34.4	1.7	64.0	3,878
Portugal	4.8	2.2	93.0	5,254
Slovenia	19.9	4.3	75.8	2,398
Slovakia	19.0	3.4	77.7	3,255
Total	21.1	3.0	75.9	74,669

Table 3 presents the percentage distribution of reasons for initial refusals by final interview outcome, which includes refusals by respondent, refusals by proxy, and other outcomes in the ESS countries. Regardless of the outcome of the interview, descriptive results indicated that the most common reason for refusals is a lack of interest in the survey. This rationale accounts for 59 percent of the refusals by respondents and 49 percent of refusals by proxies or other outcomes. Second, about 12 percent of the initial refusals were due to bad timing for the interview (e.g., sick children and houseguests). The percentage of respondents who reported bad timing for interviews was 15 percent for refusals by proxies, and 13 percent for other outcomes.

Looking at the remaining reasons for refusals, 6-7 percent of nonrespondents and 8 percent of interviews resulted in other outcomes stating that surveys are a waste of time. Concerns about trust and privacy/sharing of personal information appear to be more problematic for interviews resulting in other outcomes rather than refusals (4-5 percent). Accordingly, among other outcomes than refusals, the percentage of refusals based on not letting strangers into the house or being afraid to let someone in was found to be around 4 percent. The outcome of the interview does not significantly change the proportion of respondents who stated they never do surveys (4 percent). The percentage of reasons for refusals such as the respondent's partner, family, or household member not providing approval is higher for refusals made by proxies (4 percent) compared to refusals made by respondents, and other outcomes (1 percent). Few respondents have mentioned reasons such as cooperating in surveys too often, having bad experiences before with surveys, or not being interested in the survey topic (Table 3).

Table 3.
The percentage distribution of reasons for initial refusals by final interview outcomes, all countries

Refusal reasons	Refusal by respondent	Number	Refusal by proxy	Number	Other outcomes	Number
It is bad timing (otherwise engaged, sick children, visitors, …)	11.5	1,784	14.5	323	13.1	1,184
I am not interested	59.3	9,224	48.9	1,017	48.9	4,417
I don't know enough about this topic, too difficult for me	1.4	212	1.1	33	1.1	100
This is a waste of time	6.6	1,034	6.4	142	7.5	677
This is a waste of money	0.4	62	0.5	11	0.5	41
The survey interferes with my privacy/I give no personal information	2.3	361	3.9	87	5.4	483
I never do surveys	3.9	600	4.1	90	4.4	397
I have already cooperated in surveys too often	0.4	61	0.3	6	0.4	38
I do not trust surveys	1.3	207	2.3	52	3.5	312
I have had bad experiences before with surveys	0.3	46	0.4	9	0.5	43
I don't like the subject	0.7	107	0.8	17	0.8	70
My partner/family/household members do not give approval	0.7	114	4.1	90	1.0	94
I do not admit strangers to my house, I am afraid to let them in	1.5	231	3.4	76	3.5	320
I need to isolate-not allowed to have people in my home	0.5	75	0.9	20	0.8	68
Don't feel comfortable allowing people in my home for health reasons	1.4	222	2.3	51	3.4	310
Other	7.8	1,218	8.9	198	5.2	472
Total	100.0	15,558	100.0	2,222	100.0	9,026

Table 4 presents the percentage distribution of refusal reasons according to order of contact attempts. The majority of respondents who refused survey participation at the initial contact stated that they are not interested in surveys (58 percent). Second, several factors including sick children and guests at home (12 percent) made the interview unsuitable timed. For the second attempts, one out of each four respondents who declined to interview stated that it was a waste of time (25 percent), and 14 percent of those reported that they never do surveys. Even at the second attempt, 12 percent of nonrespondents reported they had no interest in participating in surveys. The majority of respondents who rejected interview during the third attempt stated that they never do surveys (17 percent), and they do not trust surveys (14 percent).

Descriptive results of the study suggested that nonrespondents give different explanations for their refusals according to the contact attempts. While reluctance to participate in surveys and the belief that surveys are a waste of time are resistant reasons for refusals, the prevalence of trust problem is increasing with the contact attempts. The prevalence of respondents who stated that they do not trust surveys in the third attempts (17 percent) is quite higher than that of the initial visits (2 percent). The reason that may be linked to trust concerns is the reluctance to allow strangers into the house, and afraid to let them in. The percentage of individuals who did not respond survey due to this concern during the initial attempt was 2 percent, which reached to 5 percent in second attempts and 10 percent in third visits. Similarly, it seems that concerns regarding privacy matters are increasing following the initial attempts. In the second and third attempts, approximately 8-9

percent of nonrespondents stated concerns about their privacy being compromised or preference on not providing any personal information. Conversely, this figure is estimated to be around 3 percent during the first attempts (Table 4).

Another reason for refusal which is increasing with each attempt is the lack of interest in the survey topic (1 percent at the first visit, 9 percent at the third attempt). Moreover, the percentage of nonrespondents who reported that surveys are a waste of money increased to about 7 percent in the third visits. Factors such as hesitancy to have guests at home due to health concerns and the need to isolate appear to be associated with the global pandemic, which aligns with the survey period in 2020 (Table 4).

Table 4.
The percentage distribution of reasons for refusals by contact attempts, all countries

Refusal reasons	1st attempt	Number	2nd attempt	Number	3rd attempt	Number
It is bad timing (otherwise engaged, sick children, visitors, …)	11.9	2,107	0.6	35	1.0	23
I am not interested	57.6	10,241	11.8	745	0.3	8
I don't know enough about this topic, too difficult for me	1.4	245	4.6	289	1.4	34
This is a waste of time	6.6	1,176	24.7	1,554	9.0	217
This is a waste of money	0.4	73	2.4	154	6.6	158
The survey interferes with my privacy/I give no personal information	2.5	448	8.6	542	8.4	203
I never do surveys	3.9	690	13.3	834	16.5	399
I have already cooperated in surveys too often	0.4	67	1.4	87	1.5	35
I do not trust surveys	1.5	259	6.7	420	14.2	343
I have had bad experiences before with surveys	0.3	55	1.6	102	2.7	66
I don't like the subject	0.7	124	4.1	255	8.5	204
My partner/family/household members do not give approval	1.1	204	1.9	122	2.9	71
I do not admit strangers to my house, I am afraid to let them in	1.7	307	5.2	328	10.0	241
I need to isolate-not allowed to have people in my home	0.5	95	1.4	85	2.6	62
Don't feel comfortable allowing people in my home for health reasons	1.5	273	3.3	205	7.9	191
Other	8.0	1,416	8.5	533	6.5	156
Total	100.0	17,780	100.0	6,290	100.0	2,411

Conclusion and Discussion

The growing rates of nonresponse in surveys warrant consideration due to the potential impact of nonresponse bias on survey estimates (Groves & Peytcheva, 2008), reduced sample sizes, and the overall quality of social surveys. Since refusals account for a large portion of nonresponse in today's survey world, it is worth examining the dynamics behind them and developing practical strategies to deal with refusals within methodological assessments. The results of this study have led us

to the following key issues that need to be addressed in detail from both practical and theoretical perspectives. Figure 3 outlines the main arguments focused in the study.

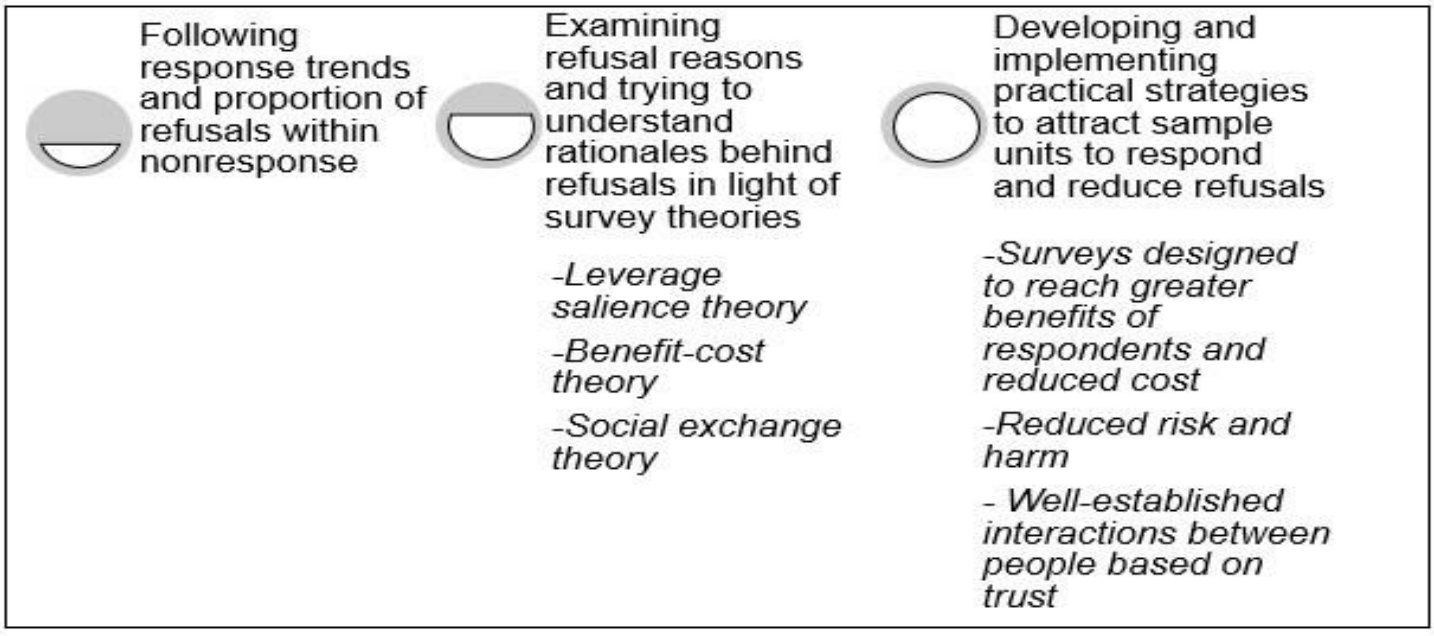

Figure 3.
An overview of the main arguments of the study

The proportion of refusals among final interview outcomes

The refusal rate is problematic for each survey country, ranging from 6 percent in Czechia to 47 percent in the Netherlands. It appears that determining target response rates by survey organizations is useful in observing the discrepancy between the obtained and target rates of survey response. In this sense, survey practitioners should discuss how to close this gap from the perspectives of respondents and survey design. Furthermore, comparing the proportion of refusals across the survey countries offers insight into each country's position among all countries. It would be useful to examine the strategies employed at data collection in countries where the refusal rates are at acceptable levels. This could mean adjusting existing implications or adopting new strategies in order to decrease refusal rates in practice.

The variation in the reasons for refusals based on final interview outcomes and contact attempts

Study results put forward that respondents' lack of interest is the primary reason for survey refusals, accounting for 59 percent for refusals by respondents, and 58 percent for the initial visits. That is followed by the bad timing for the interview which is estimated to be 15 percent for refusals by proxies and 12 percent at first contact attempt.

Nonrespondents' lack of interest in surveys appears to be the most significant factor in both their leverage and salience, according to the *leverage-salience theory* (Groves et al., 2000). This component is so important that other refusal reasons such as being a waste of time, excessive cooperation with surveys, needing isolation, and obtaining permission from someone remain negligible when considering whether or not to participate in surveys. This result indicated that survey researchers should develop strategies to attract respondents to participate in surveys, such as offering pre-paid incentives or sending pre-notification letters (Watson & Wooden, 2009; Parsons et al., 2014). These strategies also support the arguments of the *benefit-cost theory* (Singer, 2011) because respondents' benefits would be greater than their costs, which affects respondents' willingness in a positive way.

As Couper (1997) hypothesized in his study, the lower levels of knowledge about survey topics may be one of the causes of being not interested in surveys. Thus, survey researchers should also provide a brief explanation of the survey topic and

interview instructions in order to ease the interview process from the respondent's perspective. As Edwards et al. (2002) confirmed, shorter interviews and less complex tasks can lead to a decrease in respondent burden and an increase in response rate as a result of that.

Following the initial attempt, more delicate responses, such as privacy and trust, become visible when evaluating the variation in estimated percentages for refusal reasons by contact attempts. The percentage of respondents who stated they wouldn't let strangers into their home or were afraid to let them in is higher in the third attempt (10 percent) than in the first attempt (2 percent). Similarly, stating that not trusting surveys was 2 percent in the first contact, but it rose to 14 percent in the third contact. These findings raise the possibility that survey refusals may be concealed due to concerns about trust, privacy, and sharing of personal information. These issues could be negotiated through the well-established interactions established between respondents and interviewers, enabling the persuasion of individuals to participate. The *social exchange theory* (Dillman et al., 2014) explains the significant contribution of building trust to achieving survey cooperation, especially for high-security buildings in urban areas.

2. The social survey settings in Türkiye

Türkiye is not an exception regarding the rising rates of nonresponse experienced by the countries worldwide. Several social surveys are conducted in Türkiye that focus on health, nutrition, domestic violence against women, time use, the elderly population, youth, children and so on. The strategies discussed in this section can also be applied to Türkiye in the light of study findings, and explanatory theories such as *leverage-salience theory*, *benefit-cost theory,* and *social exchange theory*. Survey methodologists should consider sending pre-notification letters to sample units and offering pre-paid incentives at the design phase. Many researchers have established the effectiveness of such implications for various survey settings in various countries. Undoubtedly, design decisions would be affected by the modes of data collection, time and financial constraints.

Moreover, respondents would like to know how the data they provided will be used in the near future. Therefore, it might be possible to persuade potential nonrespondents to participate in surveys by explaining the policy implications in different areas where the collected survey data is utilized. For instance, in a health survey, re-calls or re-visits can be organized by the survey organizations to clarify the objectives of the survey and explain the respondents' potential contribution to the policies that could be developed in the country's health system. The same message can be conveyed to all sample units through the media, using the power of visual tools (e.g. news, social media). As the study results suggested, explaining survey objectives and statements of ethical considerations (e.g., privacy) to persuade respondents during the initial contact is of greater significance than subsequent contacts. Still, follow-up visits should be considered with the increased chance of contact and response for the sample units. Re-visits should be scheduled at the convenience of the respondents. At this stage, sample units may be given small gifts or incentives (e.g. gift cards) to encourage survey participation while ensuring unbiased responses and following ethical rules. Additionally, building trust between the main actors of data collection could be enhanced through well-organized interviewer training that includes sessions on refusal conversion strategies. Training sessions should cover such methodological issues in addition to interviewing techniques and questionnaire rules. This paper also encourages the paradata collection in surveys to make methodological evaluations. Socio-demographic and socio-economic information on nonrespondents should be collected through questionnaires to allow for follow-up. Interviewer observations and respondent ratings should be collected on detailed contact history forms, if possible. Finally, it is important to note that such evaluations should be made taking the cultural settings of the countries into account.

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