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ARTICLE



Discussion networks in Turkey: a social capital approach to informal social relations

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ABSTRACT

The present study inquires into the informal social network underpinnings of generalized trust in Turkey. For this purpose, it utilizes survey data on Turkish discussion networks. The findings show that informal social relations in Turkey are mostly composed of non-kinship relations, which serve as an important bridge across diverse social groups. The socio-economic cleavages of age and education, however, are found to be important filters through which both kinship and non-kinship relations influence generalized trust. Overall, the analysis affirms the relationship between individuals' socialization experiences and generalized trust. However, the influence of diverse social relations is not uniform and is much more complicated than is hypothesized in the social capital literature.

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Introduction

No one in town is animated by a desire to do good for all of the population. Even if sometimes there is someone apparently animated by this desire, in reality he is interested in his own welfare and he does his own business. Even the saints, for all their humility, looked after themselves. And men, after all, are only made of flesh and spirit (Banfield 1958, 20).

These words are from Banfield's (1958) landmark study in political science, titled *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*. The remarks belonged to a young teacher, who was asked about public-spirited members in his/her village, Montegrano. For Banfield, the widespread ethos of Montegrano was not public-spiritedness, but one he named *amoral familism*. Amoral familism refers to a widespread syndrome of disaffected citizenry, whereby everyone is concerned with the immediate interest of his/her nuclear family, assuming all others would behave similarly (Banfield 1958).

Banfield's study has re-gained importance with the advent of social capital research in the 1990s. Social capital refers to citizens' potential to cooperate for common ends at the group and national level. The volume of research on social capital is increasing due to its conceptual framework that links citizens' micro-level social relations to macro-level political behaviour. High levels of social capital are associated with effective democratic institutional performance (Putnam et al. 1993; Knack 2002) as well as economic growth and well-being (Fukuyama 1995; Whiteley 2000; Woolcock and

Narayan 2000). Moreover, research on social capital provides insights into the mechanisms through which the diverse networks of citizen engagement influence cooperative norms. The majority of these studies focus on the influence of civil society participation on generalized trust (Hooghe and Stolle 2003; Howard and Gilbert 2008). Recently, informal social relations have been examined more closely as the extant research has found inter-communal relations to be significant sources of tolerance, trust, and reciprocity (Mutz 2002; Putnam 2007; Uslaner 2011; Gundelach 2014).

Though social capital in general has been discussed within the framework of democratic institutionalization, its focus on societies' civic, public-spirited potential is also relevant for the examination of the recent populist backlash to democratic regimes. A process of democratic backsliding is evident across both well-institutionalized and under-institutionalized democracies (Lindberg 2018; Freedom House 2019). The roots of this process lie in citizens' dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of democratic regimes to meet contemporary challenges (Galston 2018). Although the sources of dissatisfaction differ across democracies with different levels of institutionalization, it results in a general syndrome of decoupling between the majoritarian and the liberal features of democratic regimes (Kriesi 2014; Mounk 2018; Rupnik 2018). Populist leaders tend to accentuate electoral victory and popular sovereignty at the expense of constitutional checks and balances and civil liberties. Hence, at stake are the rights and liberties of citizens, as well as the pluralist structure of democratic societies. The restoration of the liberal features of democratic regimes, then, is a challenge not only for political leaders who are wary of the populist agenda, but also the citizens of these regimes. Whether, or, to what extent, they will live up to this challenge, in turn, relates closely to citizens' civic and public-spirited potential to come together for common ends.

The present study focuses on the relationship between citizens' every day, informal relations and generalized trust in Turkey, which may illuminate the potential of the population to act together for common ends; hence their potential of public-spiritedness. Turkey, along with several other countries, is at the forefront of the recent worldwide decoupling of the majoritarian and liberal features of democratic regimes (Aytaç and Öniş 2014; Müller 2016; McCoy et al. 2018). Though Turkey has never qualified as a well-institutionalized liberal democracy, scholars were optimistic about the country's democratic prospects during the first decade of the twenty-first century (Tocci 2005). This optimism relied on a series of liberal constitutional reforms enacted by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), the elected government in Turkey since 2002. These reforms curbed the tutelary powers of both the military and the bureaucracy and thus provided a more democratic playing field for democratic actors such as the elected government, the parliament, and political parties. They also strengthened civil liberties such as freedom of expression and association, which increased the scope of citizen level political and civic participation (Özbudun 2007).

Although the constitutional reforms of the 2000s provided a window of opportunity for liberal democratic institutionalization, the second half of the twentieth century witnessed a reversal of these reforms, again, by the AKP. On the basis of a series of illiberal practices such as increasing government control over the media, civil society, and state bureaucracy, scholars now discuss the extent to which competitive authoritarianism rather than democracy is more explanatory of Turkey's political regime (Esen and Gümüşçü 2016; Somer 2016). The quick reversal of the noteworthy democratic reforms

in less than a decade gives credence to the political culture school of democratization studies, which argues the inadequacy of constitutional/institutional reforms for democratic institutionalization absent mass citizenry support (Linz and Stepan 1997; Inglehart and Welzel 2005). In this vein, the present study's focus on generalized trust as an indicator of civic, public-spirited potential in Turkey is both timely and significant.

The study's novelty is twofold. The first lies in its focus on the influence of citizens' every day, informal relations on generalized trust. While there is already a well-established literature on civil society in Turkey, the number of studies on informal relations are fewer. The present study makes an effort to examine these relations and their implications to explain generalized trust in Turkey. The second novelty is in its method, which utilizes a social networks approach to operationalize informal social relations. More specifically, the study analyses citizens' core discussion networks and uses the networks module of a 2009 nationwide survey representative of Turkey's urban population for this purpose. To the author's knowledge, the present study makes the first effort to analyse the relationship between citizens' informal social relations and generalized trust through a formal, multi-variate analysis, utilizing a social networks approach.

The study has two caveats. The first caveat is that the survey used in this study dates back to 2009 which may limit its validity to draw conclusions about contemporary Turkey. Notwithstanding the viability of this scepticism, studies on political culture show that countries' cultural features are quite durable, and cultures change slowly (Inglehart and Welzel 2005). Indeed, both Uslaner's (2002) and Bjornskov's (2007) longitudinal studies demonstrated that generalized trust is an enduring, time-invariant property of national cultures. This assertion is also applicable to citizens' social networks. Marsden (1990) wrote about the expectation of a low rate of change in citizens' social ties, especially for networks of close relationships. These studies give credence to the validity of using the 2009 survey to discuss issues of informal relations, generalized trust, and public-spiritedness in contemporary Turkey. The second caveat is the fact that the survey is representative of an urban population only. The conclusions of the study should be read keeping this fact in mind.

A social networks approach to social capital, informal social relations and generalized trust

Social capital

Making Democracy Work, by Putnam et al. focused on citizens' civic, public-spirited potential across regions of Italy and introduced the concept of social capital to political science (Putnam et al. 1993). However, social capital was already a well-established concept in sociology prior to its popularity in political science (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1988; Lin 2001; Putnam et al. 1993). The sociological definitions of the concept underscored its social network underpinnings. Bourdieu, for instance, defined social capital as '... the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition- or, in other words, to membership in a group' (Bourdieu 1986, 248; Schuller et al. 2000). According to both Coleman (1988) and Lin (2001), social capital is about cooperative norms which are generated within social networks and which facilitated certain actions of actors. Focusing on the relationship between social networks

and norms, Lin (2007) suggested conceptualising and measuring social capital ‘relative to its roots’, which lay in social networks and social relations.

Though Putnam and his collaborators utilized sociological approaches when formulating the concept of social capital in *Making Democracy Work*, they also attributed new meanings to the concept. They defined social capital as those ‘features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action’ (Putnam et al. 1993, 167). This definition presented a comprehensive approach to social capital because it regarded social capital as a property of given societies rather than smaller social groups. In this vein, it delineated both citizens’ formal relations in civil society organizations (CSOs) and their informal, social relations, as well as cooperative norms such as trust, reciprocity, and tolerance as multiple indicators of social capital.

Analyses that count on multiple indicators of social capital provided detailed information on country-level public-spirited potential (Putnam 2000; Pichler and Wallace 2007). However, this information often comes at the expense of conceptual clarity. Indeed, many critics regarded multiple indicators of social capital, which conflated the causes (group-level or networks-level social relations) and consequences (cooperative norms) of social capital as its soft underbelly (Tarrow 1996; Portes 1998; Baron et al. 2000). While these critics called for a conceptual clarity, the sociological accounts of social capital provide a causal framework that presented citizens’ social relations as determinants of cooperative norms. In political science, there are a number of studies questioning the influence of citizens’ formal, CSO level relations and/or informal, social relations on the generation of cooperative norms (Dekker and Uslaner 2001; Uslaner 2002; Hooghe and Stolle 2003; Prakash and Selle 2005). Moreover, the number of studies utilizing social network properties to analyse the implications of these relations have recently increased (Gibson 2001; Nir 2005; Stolle et al. 2008; Koopmans and Veit 2014). The present study also makes an effort in this direction and adopts a social networks approach to analyse the influence of informal social relations on generalized trust in Turkey.

Informal social relations and generalized trust

The creation of cooperative norms which relate to civic community and public-spiritedness is central to research on social capital (Putnam 2000; Dekker and Uslaner 2001; Alesina and La Ferrara 2002). Generalized trust is prominent among these norms and refers to a general optimism and faith in the good will of people at large. Hence, generalized trust is focused rather on trust in people we do not know. Such trust is exhibited to strangers because we regard them as fellow citizens that, while strangers, are found familiar. We regard them not only as harmless, but also as worthy of respect for association and co-operation as well as deliberation and competition. In short, generalized trust is an operational code which relates individual citizens to one another as fellow citizens and to the larger society as political and economic agents. According to Uslaner, generalized trust shows the scope of one’s community and measures how widely people view their moral community (Uslaner 2002).

The literature points to attitudinal and institutional determinants of generalized trust, along with social capital determinants. Uslaner, for instance, argued that optimism and one’s sense of control over his/her life positively influences generalized trust (Uslaner 1999). Likewise, Inglehart (1997) included generalized trust among the post-modern, self-

expressive values of high life-satisfaction, happiness, and optimism. Alternatively, studies focusing on institutional determinants of generalized trust underlined economic and social equality as enablers for a trusting environment (Uslaner 2002; Delhey and Newton 2005). In this vein, these studies underscored that a well-institutionalized, fair justice system and the power-sharing quality of political institutions serve as significant factors promoting generalized trust (Cohen 1999; Freitag and Bühlmann 2009).

Notwithstanding the importance of these alternative determinants of generalized trust, studies on social capital prioritize the influence of citizens' diverse socialization experiences on generalized trust. These studies rely on a rather simple and straightforward assumption: an individual who views other people as members to his/her moral community despite possible political, social, or religious differences of opinion is one who is familiar with diversity. An individual who, during the course of their life has had the opportunity to socialize with diverse others, would then become familiar with diversity. This familiarity, in turn, is expected to breed a positive attitude towards other people. The alternative is those whose social circles are restricted mostly to kinship relations such as those with family members or relatives. As underlined by Uslaner, these types of individuals view the world in terms of 'we' and 'they' and their strong scepticism about different others bar them from extending trust to fellow citizens (Uslaner 2002).

In line with this assumption, social networks rich in weak ties that bridge different social groups constitute what is known as *bridging social capital*. Bridging social capital is positively associated with generalized trust. Alternatively, social networks rich in strong ties make up *bonding social capital*. Despite the instrumentality of strong ties in strengthening in-group solidarity, their utility for the formation of cooperative norms such as generalized trust is suspect; as strong in-group identity may constrict relations with out-groups at best, it may breed out-group hostility at worst. Hence, strong ties may bar the formation of cross-cutting networks and, therefore, of generalized trust (Putnam 2000).

The social capital literature's differentiation among individuals' strong, weak, and bridging ties is owed to Granovetter's seminal study *The Strength of Weak Ties* (Granovetter 1973; Putnam 2000). Granovetter pointed to certain structures such as the workplace and the organizational membership in which bridging ties are likely to be established. As also underlined by Stolle, individuals' CSO experience influence generalized trust to the extent it provides a bridging context of social interactions: 'the more identity-categories overlap in the positive cooperation experience, the easier the transfer of trust to society at large (Stolle 2002, 405)'. A similar argument can also be made for the social relations of more informal settings: informal social relations positively influence generalized trust to the extent that they take place within a bridging context (Stolle 2002).

A social networks approach serves well to determine whether social relations take place in a bonding or a bridging context. In social network analysis, individual's network ties are widely referred as the egocentric network. In general, name generators are used to collect egocentric data, which ask the respondent the names of their various social exchange contacts. An individual's social exchanges are multiple, such as talking about family problems, weekend socialization, borrowing money, and finding a job (Marsden 1990; Danching 1998). Despite the detailed information name generators are able to elicit, the use of multiple name generators without an upper limit to the network size is not possible in multi-item surveys due to time restrictions. In a 1984 study, Burt suggested a condensed version of the name generators for multi-item surveys (Burt 1984). Accordingly, the respondent is only asked about the contacts

with whom important matters are discussed. In addition to the names, questions about the strength and attribute/attitude properties of the given tie provide valuable information about the structure of these networks. These questions are referred to as name interpreters. The 'discuss important matters' name generator/interpreter is useful to designate individuals' core discussion networks (Marsden 1987).

One of the important advantages of using the name generator/interpreter approach in multi-item surveys is the generation of a series of common network variables which are comparable across time and space. These variables are network size, network density and network diversity (Burt 1984; Marsden 1990). Different studies have inquired about the influence of these variables on a series of attitudes as well as norms (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1987; Knoke 1990; Baker et al. 2006).

In her analysis on the US, Mutz (2002) demonstrated that exposure to dissonant views within a political discussion network played a significant role both in one's awareness of rationales for oppositional views and political tolerance. Her analysis also showed that the likelihood of political tolerance increased for the respondents, who were exposed to dissonant views from their strong, close ties. Along similar lines, Price et al. (2002) inquired into the influence of political disagreement on civility in the US. Their analysis revealed that only disagreement with acquaintances in political conversation significantly influenced individuals' awareness of their own opinions. They did not find a similar influence of disagreement with family/friends. Last but not least, in his analysis on Russia, Gibson (2001) determined an abundance of weak ties within the discussion networks rather than strong ties. On the basis of the high trust Russians displayed towards their acquaintances, Gibson argued for the potential of informal social relations in Russia to create generalized trust, in the context of both weak civil society and low generalized trust.

The present study aims to introduce Turkey as another case study to these existing studies. It aims to address the following, interrelated questions:

- (a) How diverse are core discussion networks in Turkey? Do they reveal a bonding or a bridging structure?
- (b) How do diverse network properties relate to generalized trust in Turkey?
- (c) What does the core discussion networks and their relation to generalized trust tell us about the potential of Turkish citizens to act together for common ends; hence their potential of public-spiritedness?

Social capital in Turkey: a contextual discussion

One of the most frequent criticisms directed towards studies on social capital is their over-emphasis on citizens' side of politics, which, more often, does not take the role of political institutions into consideration (Tarrow 1996; Cohen 1999). It would not be wrong to suggest just the opposite of this criticism for the Turkish case. The majority of studies on citizen level interactions in Turkey focused on the political context, which shaped either the citizenship regime (Ünsal 1998; Keyman and İçduygu 2003) or the state-civil society relations (Kalaycıoğlu 2002; Kaliber and Tocci 2010; Somer 2016). Studies focusing on the civic potential of either the citizen level or the CSO level interactions, however, remained less common.

Generalized trust levels in Turkey are low. Only approximately 10% of Turkish citizens say they trust most people (Esmer 2012). This percentage shows that the

majority of citizens in Turkey are sceptical about the intentions of the fellow citizens and would prefer not to join forces together for common ends, even when the opportunity arises. Generalized trust levels in Turkey contrast sharply with levels in Norway, Sweden, and Finland, where more than 50% of the citizens agreed that they trusted most people. Trust percentages in Italy, Russia, South Korea, and Romania, for example, changed between 20 to 30% (Inglehart et al. 2014).

Similar to generalized trust levels, the percentage of citizens' participation in CSOs is also low. Only approximately 10 to 15% of Turkish citizens are members in any type of CSOs (TÜSEV 2011). This percentage, for example, is more than 70% in Sweden, the US, and South Korea; around 50% in Japan, Cyprus, and Argentina; and between 20 and 35% in Russia, Romania, and Spain (Inglehart et al. 2014).

Although the participation rate in CSOs is low in Turkey, a small number of studies which have delved into the details of citizens' CSOs experiences have shown the transformative influence of CSOs on a series of civic attitudes. Çakmaklı (2015) for instance showed that the CSOs experience increased participants' self-confidence, made them more aware and knowledgeable, amplified their tolerance as well as provided them a feeling of self-contentment. Along similar lines, Cenkler-Özek (2017) analysed CSOs' co-operation networks and argued for varying levels of civic and political potential of the women' CSOs and the business CSOs, respectively. These studies are significant in underscoring the dynamic relations and interactions of the CSO sector, even in a context of low CSO participation.

Studies conducted on informal social relations in Turkey are even rarer. A longitudinal study on individual giving and philanthropy conducted by the Third Sector Foundation of Turkey (TÜSEV) provides an insightful commentary on Turkish citizens' public spiritedness. Two surveys from 2003 and 2015 underlined that Turkish citizens understand philanthropy mainly in terms of helping the poor and those in need. Moreover, the majority preferred direct giving to making donations through a CSO. The surveys also designated citizens' familiar circles of family, neighbours, or the fellow townspeople as the most preferred target groups for philanthropic giving (TÜSEV 2015).

From a rather different angle, Kılınç and Bezci (2011) also underlined the primacy of fellow townspeople' solidarity networks for the residents of squatter houses in Turkish metropolitan areas. These networks were found crucial to cope with social and moral problems created by fast urbanization and migration. Last but not least, the nationwide study by Uğuz et al. (2011) on Turkey showed citizens' frequent participation in informal socializing activities such as eating out, going to the cinema, and visiting each other's homes. This study also pointed to citizens' preference of non-kinship relations of either the same-sex friends (24.5%) or both-sex friends (33.9%) for these activities rather than kinship relations of family (22.8%) and relatives (12.6%).

Uğuz et al. (2011) also elaborated upon the extent to which informal social relations in Turkey take place in a bridging context. Accordingly, the study asked the respondents whether income, education, religious, and/or political differences among people who lived in the same social environment posed a problem for social relations. Nearly half of the respondents regarded these types of differences as a problem (46.3%). Moreover, respondents indicated differences related to education as the sources of problems in social relations more frequently than ethnic or religious differences. In this vein, the study showed the primacy of socio-economic cleavages, which are likely to structure informal social relations in Turkey.

The literature review so far underlined citizens' low levels of CSO participation and relatively higher levels of informal socializing in Turkey. Yet studies inquiring informal social relations in Turkey are too few. Hence, it is difficult to argue for the presence of a systematic research agenda on this subject. By focusing on core discussion networks and their implications for generalized trust, the following sections aim to provide a formal, multivariate analysis on informal social relations in Turkey.

Research design

Three nation-wide surveys, which were conducted during the 2008–2009 period, included detailed name generator/interpreter questions in order to elicit properties of discussion networks in Turkey (Çarkoğlu and Cenker 2011). Data for the present analysis comes from one of these surveys, which was representative of Turkey's urban population with a sample of 1002 people. The World Bank funded the survey, and it was focused in particular on informal economic activities in Turkey (The World Bank 2010). The fieldwork lasted from November 2008 to February 2009 and data was collected by face-to-face interviewing method. The present study utilized the social networks module in this survey for its analysis.

Respondents were first asked the initials of the name of the individuals with whom they discuss important matters. Up to three names were collected in this manner and the collected information elicited the tie-based relationships. It was supplemented further with a series of questions about the nature of the relationship between the respondent and the discussants as well as the discussants' demographic features, which were related to network diversity (Marsden 1990; Burt 1984).

In general, name generator/interpreter elicits close and intimate relationships and are thus more likely to account for strong rather than weak ties (Marsden 1987). In line with a series of studies in political science, the survey used role relationships as an indicator of tie strength (Mutz 2002; Price et al. 2002). Accordingly, respondents' ties to family members and relatives were considered to be strong ties. Alternatively, ties to friends and acquaintances were considered weak ties.

In addition to the role relationships, a series of questions were introduced to further understand the extent of diversity in respondent's discussion networks. These questions enquired into the extent of the differences between the respondent and their discussant in terms of age groups, education levels, and world views. This information was used to analyse the diversity of the kinship as well as the non-kinship relations (Marsden 1990).

In short, the present study utilized detailed survey questions on both the structure and content of core discussion networks in Turkey. In addition to core discussion networks, the survey also included a question on the number of close friends from the neighbourhood, the workplace/school, and other places. Hence, it also had an additional informal network size measure.

Dependent variable

Generalized trust served as the dependent variable in the study. The survey posed the following question to decipher generalized trust:

Table 1. Generalized trust variable.

Generalized trust	Frequency	Percentage
Most people can be trusted = 1	69	6.9
One should be careful = 0	933	93.1
Total	1002	100.0

In every society, some people trust each other, while some do not. Now I will ask you questions about trust and co-operation. Generally speaking, do you think most people can be trusted? Or, should one be careful in dealing with people?

Respondents who indicated that most people can be trusted were coded as 1. Alternatively, those who said that one should be careful in dealing with people were coded as 0. The frequency table of generalized trust is shown in [Table 1](#).

The present study verified once again the low generalized trust levels in Turkey. Only approximately seven out of a hundred respondents indicated trust in their fellow citizens. This finding corroborates the existing data on generalized trust in Turkey.

Independent variables

All independent variables are explained in detail below. Summary statistics are provided in [Appendix 1](#).

Tie-based variables

- (1) *Size of kinship ties*: This variable counted the indicated family or relatives ties in a respondent's discussion network and was given as a value between 0 and 3. A respondent who indicated three discussants and who also indicated family or relatives as his/her core discussants was recorded at the maximum value of 3.
- (2) *Size of non-kinship ties*: This variable counted the indicated friends or acquaintances ties in a respondent's discussion network and was given as a value between 0 and 3. For example, a respondent who indicated three discussants and who also indicated friends or acquaintances as his/her core discussants was recorded at the maximum value of 3.
- (3) *Density of kinship ties*: As noted, the role relationships were used in the survey to indicate tie strength. The indicated roles were family, relatives, friends, or acquaintances. Stronger ties took on higher values. Hence, family discussants were recorded at a value of 4 and acquaintance discussants at 1. This ranking of respondent's role relationships was used to generate both the *density of kinship ties* and the *density of non-kinship ties* variables.

Density of kinship ties variable referred to the average of the tie strengths of the indicated kinship ties in a respondent's discussion network and was recorded between 0 and 4.

- (4) *Density of non-kinship ties*: *Density of non-kinship ties variable* referred to the average of the tie strengths of the indicated non-kinship ties in a respondent's discussion network. This variable was given values between 0 and 2.

- (5) *Age diversity of kinship ties*: As indicated before, the survey asked a series of questions about discussants in order to elicit the extent of the respondent's exposure to diversity through his/her informal relations. The discussant's age-group was one of these diversity measures and was used to generate both *age diversity of kinship ties variable* and *age diversity of non-kinship ties variable*. Age groups were provided as follows: 18–24; 25–34; 35–44; 45–54; 55–64; and 65 and above and was given a value of 1 to 6, respectively. Hence, a discussant whose age was between 18 and 24 received a value of 1 and a discussant whose age was 65 and above received a value of 6.

The present study utilized the well-known variance formula in statistics to generate all measures related to age diversity and education diversity. Hence, *age diversity of kinship ties variable* reflected the variance of age groups among the kinship discussants and the respondent. The values of this variable changed between 0 and 6.25.

- (6) *Age diversity of non-kinship ties*: This variable reflected the variance of age groups among the non-kinship discussants and the respondent. It was calculated by using the same procedure explained for the previous variable. The values of this variable changed between the values of 0 and 4.
- (7) *Education diversity of kinship ties*: This variable, along with below *education diversity of non-kinship ties variable*, was generated by using the survey question on the discussant's education levels. The education levels the respondent indicated for his/her discussants were as follows: not literate, literate, primary school, secondary school, high school, and university and higher. Hence, a discussant who was not literate was recorded at a value of 1 and a discussant with a university or graduate degree received a value of 6. The *Education diversity of kinship ties* variable reflected the variance of education levels among the kinship discussants and the respondent and was provided as a continuous variable between 0 and 5.56.
- (8) *Education diversity of non-kinship ties*: This variable reflected the variance of education levels among the non-kinship discussants and the respondent. It was given as a continuous variable between 0 and 4.25.
- (9) *World view diversity of kinship ties*: This variable, along with the below *world view diversity of non-kinship ties variable*, was generated using the survey question on the respondent's indication of their discussant's worldview closeness. The answer categories for this question were as follows: very close, close, not very close, and not close at all. Hence, this question already deciphered the distance between the world views of the respondent and their respective discussant. *World view diversity of kinship ties variable*, then, measured the average of the squared worldview difference of the respondent in comparison with their kinship discussants and was given between 0 and 16.
- (10) *World view diversity of non-kinship ties*: This variable measured the average of the squared worldview difference of the respondent in comparison with their non-kinship discussants and was recorded as a variable between 0 and 16.
- (11) *Number of close friends*: This variable measured the respondent's total, approximate number of close friends from the workplace/school, neighbourhood, or other locations. Its value was given between 0 and 210.

Bridging structures

- (12) *Employment status*: This variable was a dummy variable, which took a value of 1 if the respondent had either a full-time job or a part-time job or was self-employed.
- (13) *University*: This dummy variable took a value of 1 if the respondent had a university or graduate degree.

Attitudinal variables

- (14) *Subjective happiness*: In the survey, the subjective happiness variable was measured along a 1 to 10 point scale, where 1 stood for 'not happy at all and 10 for 'very happy'.

Demographic variables

- (15) *Sex*: This was a dummy variable and took a value of 1 if the respondent was a male.
- (16) *Age*: This was a continuous variable ranging between 18 and 87.
- (17) *Household size*: This was given as a continuous variable between 1 and 14.
- (18) *Settlement size*: Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir are the three largest cities in Turkey and were also included in the sample. Hence, by generating three separate dummy variables for these cities, the analysis controlled for the influence on generalized trust of living in larger and more populated cities.

Descriptive analyses

Before the presentation of the multivariate analysis, a descriptive analysis of core discussion networks in Turkey is necessary in order to account for both the structure and the content of these networks.

As was noted before, the respondents were asked to indicate up to three discussants with whom they discussed important matters. In the survey, 1002 respondents indicated a total of 1822 discussants. [Figure 1](#) displays the distribution of respondents over different network sizes. The largest group of respondents indicated three discussants and those indicating no discussants was the lowest.

A related, follow-up figure shows the distribution of different role relationships with the discussants. According to [Figure 2](#), friends were indicated as the most frequent core discussants (51.7%), followed by family members (31.7%).

As can be seen in [Table 2](#), only in one-person discussant networks were the names of family members (41.5%) provided at similar rates as those of friends (43.3%). In both two and three-person discussants networks, the percentages of ties to friends well surpassed those to family members. This tells us that core discussion networks in Turkey are not necessarily confined to family circles. On the contrary, it seems that friends rather than family members are preferred when discussing important matters.

The analysis so far underscores the importance of friendship ties in Turkish discussion networks. Nearly 60% of discussion networks were composed of more than one discussant. In addition, friendship ties were more frequent in discussant networks of two and three discussants. These findings point to the relatively higher weight of non-kinship relations in

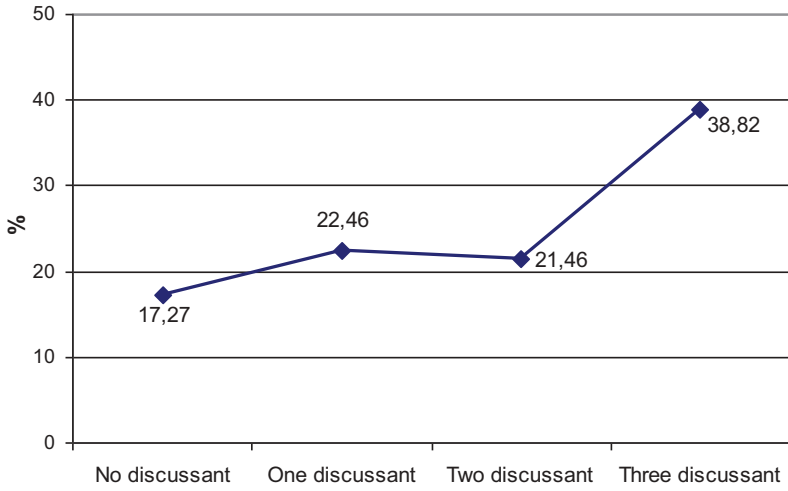


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents by network sizes.

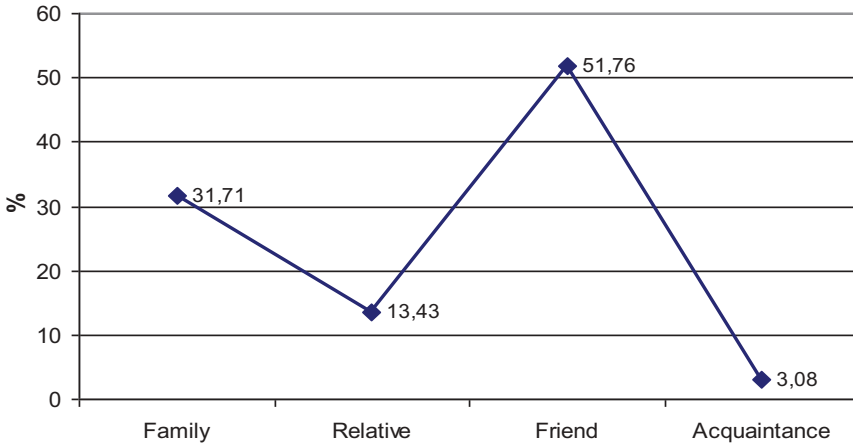


Figure 2. Distribution of respondents by relationship with the discussants.

Table 2. Percentage distribution of relationship between the respondent and the discussant over different network sizes (%).

	One Discussant	Two Discussants	Three Discussants
Family	41.5	34.7	28.7
Relative	12.5	11.0	14.5
Friend	43.3	52.0	53.3
Acquaintance	2.7	2.3	3.4
Total %	100	100	100
Total number	224	429	1163

Turkish discussion networks. It is however appropriate to mention one caveat here. The analysis shows a relatively lower frequency of acquaintanceship ties in discussion networks. This finding, in turn, cautions against over-assuming the bridging potential of the

designated non-kinship relations in Turkish discussion networks. The analysis of diversity measures provides further insights into this potential.

The present study counted on age, education, and world view diversity as its diversity measures. Table 3 shows the extent of age differences between the respondent and discussants, according to role relationships. Respondents were more likely to name discussants in identical age groups (49.8%) rather than older (21.4%) or younger (28.8%) discussants (Table 3). Additionally, within identical age groups, the percentage of friends and acquaintances (68.2%) well surpassed the percentage of family and relatives (31.8%). Conversely, when there were age differences between the respondents and discussants, the percentages of family and relatives were higher than the percentages of friends and acquaintances.

A similar analysis was conducted for education levels. Table 4 presents such analysis and reflects the educational differences between respondents and discussants according to role relationships. More than half of respondents (55%) named discussants that had identical education levels. Once again, friendship and acquaintanceship relations were more frequent within this group (62.7%) than family and relatives relations (37.3%). However, for discussants that had a higher or lower obtained education level than the respondents, the percentages of family and relatives were higher than that of friends and acquaintances.

The analyses of both age and education differences between the respondents and the discussants show substantial variability. Despite this variability, however, both Tables 3

Table 3. The extent of age differences between the respondent and discussants according to relationship (%).

Respondents' age group	Discussant > Respondent		Discussant = Respondent		Discussant < Respondent	
	Friends & Acqu.	Family & Rel.	Friends & Acqu.	Family & Rel.	Friends & Acqu.	Family & Rel.
18–24	6.8	10.9	12.1	2.6	---	---
25–34	15.3	24.9	21.8	8.8	3.9	3.9
35–44	8.3	14.3	16.9	8.6	7.3	11.2
45–54	5.7	6.8	9.8	6.8	11.8	17.3
55–64	4.7	2.3	5.9	3.3	12.7	13.9
65 and above	---	---	1.8	1.7	6.9	11.2
Total % within groups	40.8	59.2	68.2	31.8	42.6	57.4
Total % across groups	21.4		49.8		28.8	

Table 4. The extent of educational differences between the respondent and discussants according to relationship (%).

Respondents' education level	Discussant > Respondent		Discussant = Respondent		Discussant < Respondent	
	Friends & Acqu.	Family & Rel.	Friends & Acqu.	Family & Rel.	Friends & Acqu.	Family & Rel.
Not literate	4.1	6.9	0.8	0.6	---	---
Literate	2.2	4.1	0.2	0.4	0.9	0.9
Primary school	22.9	26.8	23.4	24	3.9	7.1
Secondary school	10	11	3.5	2	8.6	12.8
High school	8.2	3.7	18.2	7.9	16.6	20.8
University or above	---	---	16.6	2.4	12.8	15.7
Total % within groups	47.4	52.6	62.7	37.3	42.7	57.3
Total % across groups	26		55		19	

Table 5. Worldview differences according to role relationship (%).

	Acquaintance	Friend	Relative	Family
Not close at all	5.4	3.8	5.1	4.6
Not very close	16.1	11.8	8.5	13.6
Close	42.9	49.9	52.1	44.9
Very close	35.7	34.5	34.3	36.9
Total %	100	100	100	100
Total number	56	925	236	566

and 4 underline the primacy of family and relatives ties, which exposed respondents to discussants from different age groups or education levels.

Last but not least, world view diversity focuses on the extent of world view differences between the respondent and their discussants. In Turkish discussion networks, nearly 85% of respondents indicated at least close world views with their discussants. Hence, the variability of world view diversity is found to be low. Table 5 further shows how world views between the respondents and the discussants differed for different role relationships.

For all types of relationships, close world views were found to be the most frequent. The highest world view differences were observed with acquaintance discussants (22.5%). However, Table 5 also demonstrated that relations with family and relatives did not necessarily mean more congruence in world views. As a matter of fact, approximately 18% of family discussants were described as holding world views which were either not very close or not close at all to the respondent's world views. Nevertheless, Table 5 underlines the overall closeness between the respondent and their discussants' world views. Turkish discussion networks revealed substantial variability in terms of both age and education diversity. Conversely, diversity in the worldview of the discussion networks was found to be rather low. More often than not the respondents shared close world views with their discussants, regardless of the role relationship between the respondents and the discussants. This finding, in turn, may point to a bonding rather than a bridging context of Turkish discussion networks.

The descriptive analysis presented a series of important network measures which were operationalized at the tie-based level in the following multivariate analysis. This analysis sheds light on the extent to which citizens' informal relations, elicited through their core discussion networks, influenced generalized trust in Turkey.

Multivariate analysis

Logistic regression is better suited to dependent variables with binary outcomes and generalized trust was investigated as a binary variable with rare event outcome. In other words, the number of respondents who said they would rather be careful in dealing with people (those coded as 0 on generalized trust) surpassed the number of trusting respondents. Tomz et al. (1999) suggested the employment of the rare events logistic regression for cases when one value of a binary variable dominates the other. In line with this suggestion, this method was used to test whether informal social networks influenced generalized trust in Turkey.

The multivariate analysis underscored the different influence exerted by kinship and non-kinship ties on generalized trust. The presence of non-kinship ties in discussion networks is a significant and positive determinant of generalized trust (Table 6). This finding is in line with the social capital literature's expectation of a positive relationship between citizen exposure to weak ties via their secondary relations and generalized trust.

Table 6. Multivariate analysis.

	Coefficients	Robust Std. Err.	P> z
<i>Tie based relations</i>			
<i>Size of kinship ties</i>	-0.11	0.22	0.60
<i>Size of non-kinship ties</i>	0.49	0.23	0.03
<i>Density of kinship ties</i>	0.13	0.15	0.41
<i>Density of non-kinship ties</i>	-0.41	0.32	0.20
<i>Number of close friends</i>	0.01	0.01	0.32
<i>Worldview diversity of kinship ties</i>	-0.01	0.06	0.93
<i>Worldview diversity of non- kinship ties</i>	-0.02	0.05	0.66
<i>Age diversity of kinship ties</i>	0.26	0.15	0.08
<i>Age diversity of non-kinship ties</i>	0.73	0.34	0.03
<i>Education diversity of kinship ties</i>	-0.09	0.26	0.73
<i>Education diversity of non- kinship ties</i>	-0.76	0.40	0.06
<i>Bridging structures</i>			
<i>Employed</i>	0.09	0.33	0.79
<i>Attended university</i>	1.13	0.36	0.00
<i>Individual level features</i>			
<i>Subjective happiness</i>	0.10	0.06	0.07
<i>Control variables</i>			
<i>Sex</i>	-0.27	0.33	0.41
<i>Age</i>	0.01	0.01	0.44
<i>Household size</i>	0.10	0.09	0.25
<i>Istanbul</i>	-1.11	0.31	0.00
<i>Ankara</i>	-1.58	0.44	0.00
<i>Izmir</i>	-1.24	0.47	0.01
<i>Constant</i>	-3.50	0.86	0.00
<i>Number of observations</i>		987	

The negative influence of the size of kinship ties is also a noteworthy finding although this relationship is not significant.

The age and education diversity variables showed interesting results and are worthy of detailed discussion. As shown in [Table 6](#), age diversity, exerted through an individual's kinship and non-kinship ties, positively influenced generalized trust. The analysis also underscores a higher magnitude of influence for age diversity exerted through non-kinship ties. Findings on age diversity may be related to Turkish culture, which places emphasis on seniority and hierarchical relations. These features are likely to ease tensions which may arise due to disagreements. Thus, deliberations within such networks would not only be informative about different opinions due to different life experiences, but possible conflict and ensuing cognitive dissonance would also be smoothed out with the familiar code of behaviour in the hierarchical relationship between the younger and the older individuals.

While societal morals about the code of behaviour across generations are likely to moderate the tension exerted on the respondent due to exposure to different ideas and opinions, different education levels seem to aggravate similar tensions. Education diversity of non-kinship ties had a significant, negative effect on generalized trust ([Table 6](#)). Though insignificant, education diversity of kinship ties also exerted a similar, negative influence. It seems that exposure to people from different education levels in Turkey does not ease possible differences in opinions towards a general understanding about the human condition at large. On the contrary, such diversity tends to underscore the differences between people. An explanation for the possible impermeability of opinions within educationally diverse networks may be the unbridgeable differences in people'

lifestyles due to educational differences, which are also reflected in the way people relate to each other at the societal level (Inglehart and Welzel 2005).

In contrast with education diversity, university education has a significant, positive effect on generalized trust. University education is expected to socialize people into environments different from the ones with which they are familiar. In other words, bridging ties would become more available with a higher level of education. These ties, in turn, are likely to make people more aware of the others, reason more about variable human conditions, and deliberate more with others. In this sense, the positive and significant influence of a university education is not unexpected. However, the results given in Table 6 also indicate that even university graduates are vulnerable to educational diversity of non-kinship ties. Those two findings together underscore that education serves as a significant fault line in Turkish society. While education may provide a viable structure to forge bridging relationships, in cases when education remains a scarce resource, the bridges within this structure may turn into strategic strongholds which buttress the existing power asymmetries.

Different from age diversity and education diversity, world view diversity was not found to be a significant determinant of generalized trust. The findings on all three diversity measures underline the variable influence of diverse tie properties, even when they are partitioned on the basis of kinship and non-kinship ties. In other words, diverse kinship and/or non-kinship ties do not appear to exert a uniform influence on generalized trust. This is indeed a challenging finding for the social capital literature, which hypothesizes a more uniform effect of the diverse social relations on the generation of civic norms, including generalized trust. The present analysis shows that the influence of informal social relations on generalized trust varies according to the content of diversity; hence the diverse tie properties.

Analysis on the influence of city differences provides additional insight. Living in Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir in comparison to other smaller cities in Turkey negatively influenced generalized trust (Table 6). Although living in large cities exposes individuals to more diverse people, the risks and vulnerabilities associated with larger cities would also be higher. Hence, it seems that the socio-political context in which the diverse relationships take place is also a factor when commenting on trust relations. When people rate the potential risks associated with these relations higher than potential opportunities, they may well refrain from trust behaviour. Last but not least, the analysis designated subjective happiness as a positive and significant determinant of generalized trust. This finding is in line with the literature on generalized trust. Happier individuals tend to be more positive about themselves and are more optimistic about the human potential to better the existing standards. In this vein, they are more likely to regard other people as trustworthy fellow citizens.

Conclusion and discussion

Published in 1958, Banfield's *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* remains one of the most influential studies on political culture today. The influence of this study lies in its formulation of *amoral familism* as a basic, micro-societal level operational code, which has shaped the ways citizens interact with both fellow citizens and political actors and institutions. These interactions, in turn, have implications for the quality and accountability of

government and for the responsiveness of political actors. In this vein, the study's transcending influence across societies and over time is not surprising.

The main research motivation behind studies on social capital is not very different from this study: to understand the dynamics of citizen level social interactions with a fundamental assumption that they may have important political implications. The present study followed this line of research and it focused on the analysis of core discussion networks in Turkey.

This study has three significant contributions. Firstly, it provided a detailed, structural analysis on citizens' discussion networks in Turkey. These networks revealed an abundance of non-kinship ties not just those confined to family relations. The designated diversity of role relationships, in turn, pointed to the bridging potential of network ties. Diversity of age groups and/or education levels at the networks level further strengthened this potential. On the other hand, the analysis also underlined the low percentage of acquaintanceship ties in these networks. Moreover, members of discussion networks predominantly shared similar world views, thus embedding the bridging potential of discussion networks in a bonding context of similar world views. As a result, although these networks do not signal an ethos of *amoral familism* based on exclusive family ties, they reveal the low potential to cross-cut across alternative opinions and/or politically adversarial groups.

The second contribution is that the study showed the different influence exerted by alternative network diversity measures on generalized trust. Among these diversity measures, the significant and negative influence of education diversity of non-kinship ties was particularly noteworthy. In social research, education levels show differences in cognitive capacities and social status. They also indicate differences in life-styles and value-systems (Inglehart and Welzel 2005). In this framework, the finding of a negative relationship between education diversity of non-kinship ties and generalized trust pointed to rather significant status and lifestyle differences at the discussion networks level in Turkey. Even in cases when one becomes aware of these differences through familiar social circles of friends and acquaintances, they are more likely to breed scepticism rather than trust towards fellow citizens. This finding, in turn, corroborates the study by Uğuz et al. (2011) and underscores the primacy of socio-economic cleavages in Turkey, which are likely to generate disincentives for the formation of civic norms such as generalized trust.

The study's third novel contribution is the link it suggests between micro-level social relations and the potential of public-spiritedness in Turkey. The present analysis showed that citizens in Turkey socialize beyond their family circles, yet they also socialize with people who are similar to themselves in important ways. Though the increase in citizens' non-kinship ties generates a potential of public-spiritedness, perceived status and lifestyle differences, which underline societal power asymmetries, are likely to inhibit this potential.

When these findings are considered along with the low levels of civil society participation, the potential of citizen level interactions to create a public-spirited ethos in Turkey appears limited. This situation, in turn, leaves a quite enlarged playing field for the political elite to steer the political processes. In this vein, the present study concludes that weak public-spirited potential of citizen level interactions in Turkey has been one of the main reasons behind the oscillation between its status as an exemplary country of democratic, reformist spirit and one that has joined in the global trend towards populist,

democratic backsliding during the last decade. By focusing on discussion networks, the present study made only an initial effort to link micro-level social relations to Turkey's political dynamics. This assertion needs to be tested with further studies conducted with a focus on citizen level interactions.

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Appendix A1. Summary statistics of independent variables

	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Size of kinship ties	1002	0.82	1.04	0	3
Size of non-kinship ties	1002	0.99	1.14	0	3
Density of kinship ties	1002	1.48	1.82	0	4
Density of non-kinship ties	1002	0.8	0.93	0	2
Age diversity of kinship ties	997	0.37	0.78	0	6.25
Age diversity of non-kinship ties	997	0.11	0.31	0	4
Education diversity of kinship ties	993	0.26	0.58	0	5.56
Education diversity of non-kinship ties	993	0.16	0.41	0	4.25
Worldview diversity of kinship ties	1002	1.84	3.11	0	16
Worldview diversity of non-kinship ties	1002	2.07	3.08	0	16
Number of close friends	1002	9.3	16.6	0	210
Employed	1002	0.4	0.5	0	1
University	993	0.1	0.3	0	1
Subjective happiness	1000	6.1	2.5	1	10
Sex (man = 1)	1002	0.5	0.5	0	1
Age	997	42.2	14.9	18	87
Household size	1002	3.7	1.6	1	14
ISTANBUL	1002	0.4	0.5	0	1
ANKARA	1002	0.2	0.4	0	1
IZMIR	1002	0.1	0.3	0	1