Determinants of the Attribution of Poverty in Turkey: An Empirical Analysis

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Abstract
This study explored poverty attribution in terms of socio-economic factors, based on a survey of 1,110 participants living Turkey’s three largest cities, namely Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir. We include the following socio-economic variables: income, subjective class status, subjective destiny perception, education level, political position, gender, marital status, and age. Participants with higher education levels mostly explain poverty using structural reasons whereas participants with lower education levels tend to explain it with fatalistic reasons. Left-wing participants tend to explain poverty in terms of structural factors for reasons whereas right-wing participants tend to give individualistic reasons. Finally, men tend to offer more individualistic attributions of poverty than women do. Individualistic and structuralist approaches agree on several specific policies for reducing poverty whereas the fatalistic approach suggests different policies.

Keywords Perception of poverty · Poverty attributions · Ordered probit · Probit · Turkey

1 Introduction

This paper aims to contribute to research into the perceived causes of poverty in Turkey by analyzing the perceived attributions for poverty among the urban population with different income levels, political views, and socio-economic factors, namely gender, marital status, education level, age, and self-reported class. Our main motivation and focus in this paper is to investigate whether people with different political views see the causes of poverty differently.

Some scholars have noted Turkey’s recent political polarization due to the divisive discourse of elites while partisan considerations strongly influenced voters’ opinions.

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regarding many salient social and political issues (Aytaç et al., 2017; Ertan et al., 2022). We believe that the attribution of poverty according to political views is important since different people because this leads to support for different poverty elimination policies. For example, people with structuralist or individualistic explanations of propose different policies for poverty elimination than people with fatalistic views.

Turkey, we believe, is a particularly appropriate country to study the effect of political view on poverty attribution since, as mentioned above, it has witnessed political polarization in many salient issues, including the elimination of poverty. For example, the governing political party, Justice and Development Party, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi in Turkish, AKP, has distributed free coal to families, especially around election times, to supposedly eliminate or reduce poverty. This paper, to the best of our knowledge, is one of the first papers to investigate the effects of political view on poverty attribution in Turkey.

Poverty has become one of the most significant problems in the contemporary world. Besides constantly rising economic inequalities, both between and within nation states, socio-cultural changes and lifestyles have also affected poverty. That is, poverty has gained new dimensions that cannot be measured with economic indicators alone, given that also it is a social as well as economic problem that creates a variety of social problems (social exclusion, social inequalities, injustices, etc.) while harming the inner life of individuals (depression, distress, low self-esteem, etc.).

Perceptions of poverty and poverty attributions are deeply affected by social and cultural factors, which are themselves also increasingly shaped by global processes in contemporary theoretical debates. In short, people’s perceptions of poverty and their poverty attributions have become an urgent issue that needs investigation to understand the scale of the problem of poverty more accurately. According to TUIK (Turkish Statistical Institute) data, defining poverty as 50% of median household income, 16.3% of Turkey’s population was living in poverty in 2012, or 22.7% if poverty is defined as 60% of median household income.

These socio-cultural changes are undoubtedly occurring most intensely in metropolitan areas. As Sassen (2000) notes, cities are the most “strategic sites” for research because they allow us to assess “major new trends” in today’s societies. Accordingly, our empirical research focuses on Turkey’s three most populous cities, İstanbul, Ankara, and İzmir.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. The next section briefly summarizes the relevant literature. Section three explains the data and statistical analysis. The last section discusses the findings and concludes.

2 Theoretical Approaches to Poverty Attributions and Brief Literature Review

The first systematic study regarding poverty attribution was carried out by Feagin (1972) in the US. Feagin (as cited in Lepianka et al., 2009) listed 11 statements of poverty, categorized into three types: (1) individualistic explanations attributing poverty to individual characteristics (laziness, lack of moral values, etc.); (2) structuralist explanations attributing poverty to socio-economic structure (low wages, lack of employment opportunities, prejudice, discrimination, income inequality, etc.); (3) fatalistic explanations that attribute poverty to factors beyond the control of individuals (such as bad luck, misfortune, and destiny, etc.).
The individualistic approach explains poverty in terms of behavioural and cultural factors, particularly the supposedly inappropriate behaviors and lifestyles of the poor and alleged lower intelligence (Niemala 2008). The first theory to propagate this idea of the causes of poverty was Social Darwinism. Its supporters claimed that the poor are poor because of laziness, failure to find jobs, lack of ambition, tendency to waste money, and unstable family lives (Islam, 2005).

In contrast, the structuralist approach explains poverty in terms of external factors, particularly that the poor occupy undesirable strata in the structural hierarchy. Poverty thus results from factors like poor education and low income, so the poor are victims of the social structure (Niemela, 2008). The structuralist approach criticizes the individualistic approach for disregarding the importance of economic, social, and political systems. The main structural processes are economic growth and economic inequality. While economic growth determines the size of the pie, economic inequality affects the size of the slices. In a world with scarce resources, different social strata have different poverty levels. Poverty is seen as an outcome of the capitalist labour market (Callens & Croux, 2009).

The structuralist approach takes a macro-level view by considering the labor market and demographic conditions as the main factors that increase the risk of poverty. Thus, the higher the number of people working in insecure employment conditions, the more likely that poverty becomes prevalent. Within this context, the structure refers to a combination of demographic factors and labor market conditions that determine individuals' probability of becoming poor (Brady, 2006).

Regarding education, previous attempts to define the role of low education level have been ambiguous, with some categorizing it as an individual cause of poverty whereas others categorize it as a structural factor. For example, Majumdar and Chatterjee (2020) found that non-social work students considered low education level as an individualist explanation in their study of perceptions of poverty, its causes, and future commitment to work with the poor. Similarly, Nandori (2021) argues that it is unclear whether certain factors are structural individual, or fatalistic, including “low level of income”, “hopelessness”, “low level of education”, “unemployment”, “debt” or isolation”. Finally, Calnitsky (2018) suggests that individualistic and structural explanations of poverty can interact: “Individualistic explanations of poverty become more complex when we invoke individual attributes that themselves have social causes” (p.3).

The fatalistic approach, which explains poverty in terms of individual misfortune, illness, and physical handicaps, was first put forward by Feather (1974) as cited in Van Oorschot and Halman (2000). The fatalistic approach thus adds destiny to explanations of poverty, in the sense that poverty may derive from unavoidable and uncontrollable factors.

2.1 Literature on Poverty Attributions in USA

Feagin (1975), Gilens (1999), Kluegel and Smith (1981), and Smith and Stone (1989) have demonstrated that the individualistic approach is prevalent in the USA. Common beliefs regarding possible reasons for poverty focus on individual characteristics, such as lack of work ethic, personal deficiencies, and incompetence. Earlier studies (Feagin, 1975; Kluegel & Smith, 1986) also demonstrated that individuals with higher socio-economic status (mostly white, older, and higher income groups) tend to support the individualistic approach whereas individuals with lower socio-economic status are more likely to support the structural approach, although without discarding individualistic explanations. The support for individualistic explanations even from people with
lower socio-economic status was seen as indicating the effect of the dominant ideology on Americans (Huber & Form, 1973).

Other studies have investigated how popular attributions of poverty at the local level influence such attributions at the national level in the USA. For example, Hopkins (2009) found that individualistic attributions were less likely in regions where the poor were mostly white while individualistic explanations were more likely in regions where most people vote republican.

The persistence of structuralist explanations, despite the dominance of individualistic explanations, probably depends on the socio-political climate. Kluegel and Smith (1986), for instance, showed that such explanations become much more common during times of social and economic difficulties. Similarly, Piven and Cloward’s (1971) demonstrated the prevalence of structural explanations of poverty during the Great Depression (Hunt, 1996). However, “individualist and structural attributions for poverty are not ideological alternatives” for one another (Hunt & Bullock, 2016). Finally, Cozzarelli et al. (2001) reported that people generally have negative attitudes towards the poor, who they blame the poor for their own suffering.

2.2 Literature on Poverty Attributions in Europe

Van Oorschot & Halman (2000) used survey data from the 1990 European Values Study (EVS) to investigate two dimensions of poverty attributions: controllable versus uncontrollable factors and individual versus social factors. They combined the two dimensions to create four types of explanations: the individual is to blame (laziness); it is the individual’s fate (bad luck); society is to blame (injustice); and it is society’s fate (an inevitable part of progress). They found that “contrary to prior evidence from the Anglo-Saxon countries only, social blame (injustice) is the most frequently mentioned reason why there are poor people and individual fate (bad luck) least frequently mentioned reason and there is no relation between popular perceptions of poverty and type of welfare state regime.”

Lepianka et al. (2010) conducted an ordered logistic regression analysis on data from the 1999/2000 EVS to investigate differences in poverty attribution among 28 European countries. They found that the types of attribution depended on five factors (awareness of the existence of poverty, personal experience of disadvantaged people, personal values, socio-demographic background, and structural and cultural country-level characteristics). More specifically, differences in poverty attributions are directly related to having a Catholic tradition, living in a country with a high level of poverty, personal subjective experience of disadvantaged people, and personal values.

Norciaa et al. (2010) analyzed poverty attributions using their data from a previous study in 2008 on 2,000 participants in Italy. They found significant correlations between poverty attributions and economic situation (real or perceived), gender, education level, political orientation, and media use. Women were more likely to make structuralist attributions while education level and frequency of media use were also positively correlated with structuralist explanations. In contrast, religious people were more likely to prefer fatalistic explanations. Finally, those who reported that their own economic situation was good predominantly supported the individualistic approach whereas those with poor economic conditions preferred a fatalistic perspective.
2.3 Literature on Poverty Attributions in Other Countries

Habibov et al. (2017), examined support for structural poverty attributions in 24 post-communist countries covering 2006 to 2010. At the individual level, adherence to the rules of the market economy and work ethics significantly reduces structural poverty attributions. In contrast, support for the equality norms and personal experience with poverty significantly increases structural poverty attributions. At the country level, GDP growth notably reduces structural attributions, although GDP per capita and poverty rates have no significant influence.

Vázquez et al. (2017) analyzed poverty attributions in a sample of 1,092 undergraduates from Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chile, and Spain. The results indicate that such attributions in developing countries are primarily influenced by the level of development in the interviewees’ country of origin, their political ideology, and their own economic situation.

Nishimwe-Niyimbanira (2014) applied Feagin’s framework in South Africa to show a preference for individualistic explanations of poverty.

Kreidl (2000) investigated attributions of both poverty and wealth in the USA, West Germany, Netherlands, Hungary, Czech Republic, and Russia from 1991 to 1996. There was no effect of education on preference for structural explanations while structural and individualistic explanations were not mutually exclusive. More specifically, structural explanations of poverty were more likely from women (in Germany, Netherlands, and Russia), low-income households (Hungary and Russia in 1991), people with lower subjective social status (Hungary and Czech Republic in 1991 and 1996; Russia in 1996), those with higher deprivation (the Netherlands, the USA, Russia in 1996 and Czech Republic in 1991), and the long-term unemployed (Netherlands and Czech Republic in 1996).

2.4 Literature on Poverty Attributions in Turkey

Few studies have investigated poverty attributions in Turkey. Applying Feagin’s framework, Morçöl (1997) found that people in Turkey are more likely than those in the USA to support structural explanations and less likely to believe in individualistic explanations.

Göregenli and Solak (2009) developed the Attributions for Poverty Scale (APS) in Turkey. They observed that those who position themselves on the right politically make more individualistic and fewer structural references than those who position themselves on the left. In addition, right wingers also made more fatalistic familial references than left-wingers.

Yakışık, Dölarslan, and Zülfikar (2017) found that poor people in Turkey tend to prefer fatalistic factors to explain poverty.

Daslı and Yurtseven (2020) investigated how students’ attitudes regarding the causes of poverty affect their attitudes towards aid policies for the poor. They found that women are more likely to explain poverty using structural reasons than men, who tend to prefer fatalistic attributions more than women. Attributions regarding poverty also differ by income group, with respondents on lower incomes preferring fatalistic attributions more than those on higher incomes, who tend towards individualistic attributions.
2.5 Literature on Poverty Attributions and Support for Social Welfare Politics

Research has also highlighted the importance of social welfare policies in determining poverty attributions. Voicu and Strapcova (2005), for instance, argue that people’s poverty attributions are directly linked to their country’s socio-economic system. In particular, people are more likely to support structural explanations in countries with established welfare systems. Similarly, Bullock et al. (2003) report that individuals who prefer structural explanations of tend to support social welfare politics more than those who prefer individualistic explanations. A recent Eurobarometer (2010) public opinion survey in 2010 found that “[i]njustice in society continues – by far – to be the most common explanation for poverty. Close to half (48% in 2010) of Europeans see it as the reason why people live in poverty.”

These findings support the idea that people living in countries with welfare systems are highly likely to support structural explanations, given that most EU countries still adhere to basic social welfare ideals. Both Kluegel and Smith (1986) and Feagin (1975) have shown that people with structuralist beliefs about poverty tend to favor increased welfare spending whereas those with individualistic beliefs tend to favor reduced support.

As Kluegel and Smith (1981) note, “beliefs about social inequality are potentially consequential for a range of behaviors and attitudes”. Accordingly, the multidimensional structure of poverty and social exclusion affects the scope, interpretation, and meaning of poverty depending on each social, economic, cultural, and political context (Pirani, 2013).

This brief literature review reveals a gap in the literature regarding how the political views of people in Turkey affect their poverty attributions as most previous studies have examined how socio-economic factors affect poverty attributions in different countries and/or under different welfare policy regimes. Thus, it is worthwhile to investigate how different people with different political views explain the existence of poverty. Like many previous studies, we draw on Feagin’s three-way categorization of poverty attributions. However, we differ in terms of examining how people with different political views attribute poverty.

Accordingly, we test the following five hypotheses using regression analysis:

H1: Right-wing people and those who define themselves as neither right wing nor left wing do not support the structuralist view.

H2: People who define themselves as high class do not support the structuralist view.

H3: Right-wing people and people who define themselves as neither right wing nor left wing support the individualistic view.

H4: People who define themselves as high class support the individualistic view.

H5: People with different poverty attributions support different welfare policies.

We expect not to reject all the hypotheses above since most right-wing people and people who define themselves as high class do not believe that poverty results from income inequality, labor market conditions, or external factors; rather, they rely on individual explanations, such as laziness, lack of work ethic, unstable family life, and wasting money. We also expect the last hypothesis will be confirmed since people with structuralist views are likely to support different welfare policies to those with individualistic or fatalistic views.

The following section describes the data and presents the statistical analyses.
3 Data and Statistical Analyses

The data were collected between July and September 2011. First, we requested statistical information from TUIK (Turkish Statistical Institute) regarding the development levels of streets and districts to identify different income groups in Turkey’s three largest cities. Based on this information, three groups of streets and districts were identified for each city in terms of three development levels: high, medium, and low.

The number of the questionnaires required for each city was then determined by calculating the proportion of each city’s population as a percentage of the total population of the three cities. The questionnaires were distributed equally to the three income levels (high, middle, and low) in each city. The required minimum sample size was calculated as 1,067 with a margin of error of 3% and a 95% confidence interval. Ultimately, 1,110 questionnaires were distributed.

Based on the information from TUIK, questionnaires were targeted specifically at high-income households in high-developed areas, middle-income households in medium-developed areas, and low-income households in low-developed areas, with the restriction that no more than questionnaires could be distributed in each building.

Apart from the TUIK data, information about potential participants was also gathered from each district’s local official (in Turkish, muhtar) and by observing each building’s appearance. Finally, informal interviews were conducted with some participants.

The questionnaires were distributed equally to high-developed, medium-developed, and low-developed districts in each city. In total, 678, 249, and 183 questionnaires were distributed in Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir, respectively, making an overall total of 1,110, as shown in Table 1.

3.1 Descriptive Statistics

Regarding the independent variables, the following socio-economic and subjective factors were included, based on the literature: education, gender, political belief, age, marital status, perception of class, perception of destiny, and subjective poverty. Table 2 summarizes descriptive statistics for the sample:

Regarding perceptions of poverty, 52.4% of low-income respondents consider themselves as poor whereas 6.8% of middle-income people and 0.3% of low-income respondents consider themselves as poor. No low-income respondents consider themselves as rich whereas 32.7% of high-income respondents do. While 37.8% of low-income respondents consider themselves as neither poor nor rich, 90.8% of middle-income respondents consider themselves as neither poor nor rich and 65.7% of high-income respondents consider themselves as neither poor nor rich. Fewer than half of high-income respondents consider themselves as rich.

| Table 1 | Distribution of questionnaires by city and income level |
|---------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|
|         | Istanbul    | Ankara    | Izmir     |
| High-income areas | 226 | 83 | 61 | 370 |
| Middle-income areas | 226 | 83 | 61 | 370 |
| Low-income areas | 226 | 83 | 61 | 370 |
| Total     | 678         | 249       | 183       | 1,110    |
Table 2  Descriptive statistics by socio-economic groups

| Perception of poverty | Low income | Middle income | High income |
|-----------------------|------------|---------------|-------------|
|                       | \( N \) | % | \( N \) | % | \( N \) | % |
| Very poor             | 36 | 9.7 | 3 | 0.8 | – | – |
| Poor                  | 194 | 52.4 | 25 | 6.8 | 1 | 0.3 |
| Neither poor nor rich | 140 | 37.8 | 336 | 90.8 | 243 | 65.7 |
| Rich                  | 0 | 0 | 6 | 1.6 | 121 | 32.7 |
| Very rich             | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 1.4 |
| Total                 | 370 | 100.0 | 370 | 100.0 | 370 | 100.0 |

| Perception of class   | Low income | Middle income | High income |
|-----------------------|------------|---------------|-------------|
|                       | \( N \) | % | \( N \) | % | \( N \) | % |
| Lower class           | 127 | 34.3 | 24 | 6.5 | 1 | 0.3 |
| Lower middle class    | 155 | 41.9 | 53 | 14.3 | 14 | 3.8 |
| Middle class          | 85 | 23.0 | 273 | 73.8 | 212 | 57.3 |
| Upper middle class    | 3 | 0.8 | 18 | 4.9 | 129 | 34.9 |
| High class            | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0.5 | 14 | 3.8 |
| Total                 | 370 | 100.0 | 370 | 100.0 | 370 | 100.0 |

| Role of destiny       | Low income | Middle income | High income |
|-----------------------|------------|---------------|-------------|
|                       | \( N \) | % | \( N \) | % | \( N \) | % |
| Destiny determines everything in life | 57 | 15.4 | 43 | 11.6 | 25 | 6.8 |
| Destiny determines most things in life | 42 | 11.4 | 27 | 7.3 | 11 | 3.0 |
| Destiny determines some things in life | 64 | 17.3 | 58 | 15.7 | 78 | 21.1 |
| People create their own destiny | 125 | 33.9 | 133 | 35.9 | 130 | 35.2 |
| Missing               | 1 | 0.3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0.3 |
| Total                 | 370 | 100.0 | 370 | 100.0 | 370 | 100.0 |

| Gender                | Low income | Middle income | High income |
|-----------------------|------------|---------------|-------------|
|                       | \( N \) | % | \( N \) | % | \( N \) | % |
| Woman                 | 174 | 47.0 | 163 | 44.1 | 179 | 48.4 |
| Man                   | 196 | 53.0 | 207 | 55.9 | 191 | 51.6 |
| Total                 | 370 | 100.0 | 370 | 100.0 | 370 | 100.0 |

| Age                   | Low income | Middle income | High income |
|-----------------------|------------|---------------|-------------|
|                       | \( N \) | % | \( N \) | % | \( N \) | % |
| 18–25                 | 62 | 16.8 | 67 | 18.1 | 53 | 14.3 |
| 26–30                 | 57 | 15.4 | 73 | 19.7 | 77 | 20.8 |
| 31–35                 | 56 | 15.1 | 53 | 14.3 | 68 | 18.4 |
| 36–40                 | 61 | 16.5 | 50 | 13.5 | 63 | 17.0 |
| 41–45                 | 34 | 9.2 | 36 | 9.7 | 41 | 11.1 |
| 46–50                 | 36 | 9.7 | 35 | 9.5 | 18 | 4.9 |
| 51–55                 | 14 | 3.8 | 22 | 5.9 | 24 | 6.5 |
| 56–60                 | 22 | 5.9 | 14 | 3.8 | 18 | 4.9 |
| 61–65                 | 13 | 3.5 | 14 | 3.8 | 5 | 1.4 |
| 66 and above          | 15 | 4.1 | 6 | 1.6 | 3 | 0.8 |
| Total                 | 370 | 100.0 | 370 | 100.0 | 370 | 100.0 |

| Education status      | Low income | Middle income | High income |
|-----------------------|------------|---------------|-------------|
|                       | \( N \) | % | \( N \) | % | \( N \) | % |
| Illiterate            | 15 | 4.1 | – | – | – | 0 |
| Only literate         | 16 | 4.3 | 5 | 1.4 | – | 0 |
| Primary School        | 147 | 39.8 | 57 | 15.4 | 12 | 3.2 |
| Secondary School      | 67 | 18.2 | 36 | 9.7 | 10 | 2.7 |
| High School graduate  | 98 | 26.6 | 153 | 41.4 | 113 | 30.5 |
| College Graduate      | 25 | 6.8 | 114 | 30.8 | 201 | 54.3 |
| Postgraduate          | 1 | 0.3 | 5 | 1.4 | 34 | 9.2 |
| Missing               | 1 | 0.3 | 0 | 0 | 370 | 100.0 |
| Total                 | 370 | 100.0 | 370 | 100.0 | 370 | 100.0 |
Thus, perceptions of poverty vary with income status. Specifically, as income status changes from low to middle, more respondents consider themselves as neither poor nor rich. However, as income status changes from middle to high, fewer respondents consider themselves as neither poor nor rich.

Regarding class perceptions, 23% of low-income respondents, 73.8% of middle-income respondents, and 57.3% of high-income respondents consider themselves as middle class. Very few respondents consider themselves as high class: only 3.8% of even high-income respondents consider themselves as high class.

Regarding destiny in life, 15.4% of low-income respondents, 11.6% of middle-income respondents, and 6.8% of high-income respondents believe that destiny determines everything in life. In other words, high-income respondents are less likely than low-income and middle-income respondents to believe that destiny determines everything in life. In contrast, 22% of low-income respondents, 29.5% of middle-income respondents, and 33.9% of high-income respondents believe that respondents create their own destiny. In other words, high-income respondents are more likely than low-income and middle-income respondents to believe that people determine their own destiny.

Regarding education level, as expected, the high-income group includes more college graduates than the other groups since education level is positively correlated with income, although we do not investigate the direction of causation. More specifically, 66.4% of low-income respondents (4.1% illiterate + 4.3% only literate + 39.8% primary school + 18.2% secondary school) have at most a secondary-school education level.

Regarding age, respondents aged at least 66 years comprised 4.1% of the low-income group but only 1.6 and 0.8% of the middle-income and high-income groups, respectively. This shows that the low-income group has the most old-aged respondents.

To examine poverty attributions, two questions were used to assess the respondents’ preference for each approach (individualistic, structural, and fatalistic). The participants could answer as many questions as they wanted. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics.

As Table 3 shows, the preferred approach to making poverty attributions varies across income groups. For example, 20.3% of low-income respondents agree that “the poor are poor because they are unlucky” compared to 14.1% of middle-income and 17.8% of high-income respondents. Conversely, 23.5% of low-income respondents agree that “the poor are poor because of their fate” compared to 11.4% of middle-income and 8.9% of high-income respondents. Thus, fewer high-income respondents than middle and low-income respondents support the fatalistic approach. Both the individualistic and approaches were supported by fewer low-income than middle- and high-income respondents.

Most participants prefer structural explanations, with 60% agreeing that poverty derives from income inequality and 46% attributing poverty to a lack of basic services. In contrast, fewer participants preferred individualistic explanations, although a significant proportion

| Table 2 (continued) | Low income | Middle income | High income |
|---------------------|------------|---------------|-------------|
|                     | N   | %   | N   | %   | N   | %   |
| Marital status      |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Married             | 249 | 67.3 | 231 | 62.4 | 224 | 60.5 |
| Single              | 121 | 32.7 | 139 | 37.6 | 146 | 39.5 |
| Total               | 370 | 100.0 | 370 | 100.0 | 370 | 100.0 |
Table 3 Poverty attributions by socio-economic group

|                              | Low income | Middle income | High income | All sample |
|------------------------------|------------|---------------|-------------|------------|
|                              | N  | %  | N  | %  | N  | %  | N  | %  |
| The poor are poor because they are unlucky. (fatalistic approach) | Yes | 75 | 20.3 | 52 | 14.1 | 66 | 17.8 | 193 | 17 |
|                              | No | 295 | 79.7 | 318 | 85.9 | 304 | 82.2 | 917 | 83 |
|                              | Total | 370 | 100.0 | 370 | 100.0 | 370 | 100.0 | 1110 | 100 |
| The poor are poor because of their fate. (fatalistic approach) | Yes | 87 | 23.5 | 42 | 11.4 | 33 | 8.9 | 162 | 15 |
|                              | No | 283 | 76.5 | 328 | 88.6 | 337 | 91.1 | 948 | 85 |
|                              | Total | 370 | 100.0 | 370 | 100.0 | 370 | 100.0 | 1110 | 100 |
| The poor are poor because they are lazy. (individualistic approach) | Yes | 124 | 33.5 | 131 | 35.4 | 133 | 35.9 | 388 | 35 |
|                              | No | 246 | 66.5 | 239 | 64.6 | 237 | 64.1 | 722 | 65 |
|                              | Total | 370 | 100.0 | 370 | 100.0 | 370 | 100.0 | 1110 | 100 |
| The poor are poor because of their lack of skill, intelligence, and talent. (individualistic approach) | Yes | 44 | 11.9 | 47 | 12.7 | 63 | 17.0 | 154 | 14 |
|                              | No | 326 | 88.1 | 323 | 87.3 | 307 | 83.0 | 956 | 86 |
|                              | Total | 370 | 100.0 | 370 | 100.0 | 370 | 100.0 | 1110 | 100 |
| The poor are poor because of the inequality of income distribution. (structural approach) | Yes | 189 | 51.1 | 239 | 64.6 | 233 | 63.0 | 661 | 60 |
|                              | No | 181 | 48.9 | 131 | 35.4 | 137 | 37.0 | 449 | 40 |
|                              | Total | 370 | 100.0 | 370 | 100.0 | 370 | 100.0 | 1110 | 100 |
| The poor are poor because they are unable to benefit from basic services (education, health, etc.). (structural approach) | Yes | 150 | 40.5 | 194 | 52.4 | 162 | 43.8 | 506 | 46 |
|                              | No | 220 | 59.5 | 176 | 47.6 | 208 | 56.2 | 604 | 54 |
|                              | Total | 370 | 100.0 | 370 | 100.0 | 370 | 100.0 | 1110 | 100 |
| I have no idea what causes poverty | Yes | 30 | 7.5 | 19 | 4.3 | 17 | 4.5 | 66 | 06 |
|                              | No | 340 | 93.5 | 351 | 95.7 | 353 | 95.6 | 1044 | 94 |
|                              | Total | 370 | 100.0 | 370 | 100.0 | 370 | 100.0 | 1110 | 100 |
(35%) agree that laziness can explain poverty while 14% agree that poverty results from “lack of skill, intelligence, and talent”.

The fourth and fifth most frequently selected explanations were fatalistic: “being unlucky” (17%) and “fate” (15%). Overall, the distribution of responses reflects the dominance of structural attributions of poverty among the participants, followed by individualistic and fatalistic attributions.

In order to investigate the effect of political outlook on poverty attributions, we classify political views into three broad categories: right-wing, left-wing, and neither left nor right. The participants’ political position was measured using the following question: “How do you define yourself in terms of political stance?” Respondents could select from nine response categories that are commonly used in Turkish politics, particularly by commentators during election campaigns: conservative, modern conservative, conservative democrat, liberal, social democrat, socialist, nationalist, others, or “none of above”.

For the empirical analysis, a respondent was defined as right-wing if they selected conservative, modern conservative, conservative democrat, liberal, or nationalist and left-wing if they selected social democrats and socialists. Missing responses were coded as “other” and categorized as “neither left nor right” along with “none of above” responses.

As noted above, respondents who selected “liberal” were included in the political right category. The term “liberal” has multiple meanings in Turkey, although it generally refers to the political right because it is associated with less government intervention and support for the market economy. In contrast, it refers to the political left, especially in the USA, mainly regarding culture.

Of the 1,057 respondents, 54 identified as liberal (*** %), alongside 305 left-wing (28.8%), 523 right-wing (49.48%), and 229 (21.66%) respondents who were neither left nor right. This distribution is consistent with the vote shares of right- and left-wing parties in many of Turkey’s national parliamentary elections, which indicates that the sample is representative of the whole population in terms of political outlook.

The following section presents the regression analyses of the determinants of different poverty attributions.

### 3.2 Regression Findings

We conducted two sets of regressions, as presented in Tables 4 and 5. The dependent variable in the first set was a binary yes/no choice, coded as 1 for yes and 0 for no responses to questions about poverty attribution. For each approach to explaining poverty (structuralist, individualistic, and fatalistic), there were two statements, as presented in Table 3 in the previous section. If the respondent answered yes to either one or both questions in each pair, the dependent variable took the value of 1 for that group whereas if the respondent answered no to both questions, the variable took the value of 0. For these types of dependent variable, binary choice regression analysis is appropriate. We therefore used a probit method to estimate the coefficients of independent variables.

For the second set of regressions, the dependent variable was an ordered choice variable. Respondents answered the questions using a Likert-type scale from 1 to 5, with 1 labelled as “not important at all” and 5 as “very important”. The dependent variables in the second set of regressions also included policy variables about reducing poverty. The respondents stated their preference for each policy by assigning any number from 1 to 5. Since the dependent variable is an ordered response, ordered probit regression analysis was used to estimate the coefficients of the independent variables.
As Table 4 shows, people who define themselves neither left nor right or right-wing political do not believe that poverty results from income inequality or lack of basic services. That is, they do not support the structuralist view. Therefore, Hypothesis One was confirmed.

Regarding the socio-economic variables, the coefficients for gender, age, and marital status were not significant, indicating that support for the structuralist view is not affected by these variables. Literate people and elementary, middle, and high school graduates were more likely than respondents with university and graduate degrees to reject structuralist explanations of poverty. Annual per capita income had a positive and significant coefficient. That is, respondents with higher incomes (not perceived income) were more likely to agree with structuralist explanations, specifically income inequalities and inadequate access to basic services. Conversely, respondents with high perceived income defined

Table 4 Socio-economic and demographic determinants of poverty attribution approach

| Independent variables | Structuralists | Individualists | Fatalists |
|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------|
|                       | Coef           | Std. Err       | Coef     | Std. Err       | Coef           | Std. Err       |
| Female                | -0.03          | 0.09           | -0.37*** | 0.08           | -0.08          | 0.09           |
| Age                   | -0.00001       | 0.00           | 0.00     | 0.00           | -0.0009***     | 0.0002         |
| Married               | 0.14           | 0.10           | 0.07     | 0.09           | 0.17*          | 0.10           |
| Neither left nor right| -0.44***       | 0.14           | 0.37***  | 0.12           |                |                |
| Political right       | -0.32***       | 0.12           | 0.42***  | 0.10           | -0.08          | 0.09           |
| Annual per capita income | 0.000007**   | 0.00           | -0.00001*** | 0.00     | -0.000007*     | 0.00           |
| Native–born           | 0.02           | 0.10           | -0.08    | 0.09           | -0.02          | 0.09           |
| Illiterate            | 0.13           | 0.42           | -1.16*** | 0.50           |                |                |
| Literate              | -1.12***       | 0.32           | 0.47     | 0.34           |                |                |
| Elementary            | -0.50***       | 0.16           | -0.02    | 0.14           | 0.04           | 0.11           |
| Middle school         | -0.68***       | 0.18           | 0.03     | 0.16           |                |                |
| High school           | -0.42***       | 0.13           | 0.09     | 0.10           |                |                |
| Lower class           |                |                |          |                | 0.40***        | 0.14           |
| Lower middle class    | 0.07           | 0.15           | 0.23     | 0.15           |                |                |
| Middle class          | 0.07           | 0.17           | 0.12     | 0.17           |                |                |
| Upper middle class    | -0.23          | 0.23           | 0.42*    | 0.22           |                |                |
| High class            | -1.25***       | 0.39           | 0.99***  | 0.37           |                |                |
| Role of destiny       | -0.22**        | 0.09           | -0.25*** | 0.09           | 0.38***        | 0.09           |
| Self-reported very poor | -0.05         | 0.14           | 0.46***  | 0.13           |                |                |
| Self–Reported rich    | -0.17          | 0.23           | 0.58***  | 0.20           |                |                |
| Constant              | 1.39***        | 0.22           | -0.70*** | 0.19           | -0.46***       | 0.13           |
| Observations          | 1057           | 1057           | 1057     |                |                |                |
| Wald Chi2             | 75.40          | 97.95          | 77.74    |                |                |                |
| Prob > Chi2           | 0.000          | 0.000          | 0.0000   |                |                |                |
| Pseudo R2             | 0.08           | 0.07           | 0.06     |                |                |                |

***p < 0.01; **p < 0.05; *p < 0.10
themselves a high class and rejected structuralist explanations. Thus, Hypothesis Two was also confirmed. Respondents who said that destiny was very important in their life also did not agree with the structuralist view.

Regarding the individualistic approach, our regression results show that it is not preferred by women, respondents with high actual annual income (not perceived income), illiterate respondents, and respondents who consider destiny to be very important. That is, they do not think that the poor are poor because they are lazy or lack skill, intelligence, and talent. In contrast, the individualistic approach is preferred by respondents who define themselves as neither left nor right, or identify as right wing, respondents who define themselves as upper-middle or high class, and describe themselves as rich. That is, they tend to think that poor are poor because they are lazy, or lack skill, intelligence, and talent. These findings confirm Hypotheses Three and Four.

Regarding the fatalistic approach, the regression results indicate support for this approach from lower-class respondents, respondents who self-report as poor, respondents who consider that destiny is very important in their life, and married respondents. That is, they think that poor are poor because they are unlucky, and that poverty is their fate. In contrast, older respondents, and high-income respondents (not perceived income) disagree with the fatalistic approach.

It is important to consider endogeneity in our regression analysis as there could be reverse causality from the dependent variable (poverty attribution) to political views. However, we believe that this reverse causality is weak since almost 60% of respondents agree

| Table 5 Public policy preferences by poverty attribution approaches |
|------------------------|---------|---------|---------|--------|
| Estimation method      | Ordered probit regression |
| Independent variables  | Structuralist | Fatalistic | Individualistic | Obs |
| Public policies to reduce the poverty (dependent variables) | Coef. (Std.Err.) | Coef. (Std.Err.) | Coef. (Std.Err.) |  |
| Guaranteed minimum income | 0.33*** (0.08) | 0.02 (0.08) | 0.03 (0.07) | 1110 |
| Association and foundation aid | −0.15* (0.08) | 0.20*** (0.07) | −0.16** (0.07) | 1110 |
| Policies for better income distribution | 0.48*** (0.08) | 0.01 (0.08) | 0.20** (0.07) | 1110 |
| Coal aid | −0.23*** (0.08) | 0.17** (0.07) | −0.11 (0.07) | 1110 |
| Vocational courses | 0.18** (0.08) | 0.00 (0.08) | 0.23*** (0.07) | 1110 |
| Free education and health services | 0.37*** (0.08) | −0.01 (0.08) | 0.08 (0.07) | 1110 |
| Community aid | −0.14* (0.08) | 0.15** (0.08) | −0.06 (0.07) | 1110 |
| New job creation | 0.36*** (0.09) | 0.07 (0.08) | 0.40*** (0.08) | 1110 |

***p < 0.01; **p < 0.05; *p < 0.10
with structuralist poverty attributions although only about 28% of respondents defined themselves as left wing. In other words, while most left-wing people believe that poverty has structuralist causes, not all the people who think like this are left wing.

We further investigated endogeneity by designing an online experimental survey conducted with a more educationally homogeneous group of undergraduate and master’s economics students. Out of 800 students approached, 81 responded to the survey, of whom 72 (88.88%) think that poverty is caused by income inequality. Of these 72 students, 39 students defined themselves as centrist or right wing while 33 students defined themselves as left wing. Given that 36 students out of the full sample of 81 defined themselves as left wing, almost all left-wing students (33 out of 36) think that poverty is caused by income inequality, although not all students who think that poverty is caused by structuralist factors are left wing. These results thus indicate weak endogeneity in our regression results.

Table 5 presents the results of the second set of regressions.

As Table 5 shows, people with structuralist views think that policies guaranteeing minimum income should be implemented along with better income distribution, vocational courses, free education and health services, and new job creation. Conversely, these respondents do not believe that poverty can be reduced by association and foundation aid, coal aid, and only community aid.

In contrast, respondents with a fatalistic view agree that poverty can be reduced by increasing association and foundation aid, coal aid and community aid can reduce the poverty. As usually low-income respondents, believe instead that poverty can be reduced with the help of the people around them (community aid, association and foundation aid) and coal aid from the government, especially before national or local elections.

Respondents with an individualistic view think that policies for new job creation, vocational courses, and policies for better income distribution can help poverty reduction whereas association and foundation aid cannot.

Table 5 indicates that Hypothesis Five is confirmed since respondents with individualistic or structuralist views support some of the same policies, such as new job creation, vocational courses, and better income distribution. Comparing the fatalistic and structuralist views highlights clear policy preference differences. More specifically, only the former agrees that association and foundation aid, coal aid, and community aid can reduce poverty.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

The descriptive statistics show that most respondents in Turkey (60%) think that the poor are poor because of income inequality. As explained in the introduction, the structuralist view places more weight on government intervention for poverty reduction and assumes a strong welfare state.

This structuralist view may derive from the remnants of Turkey’s earlier welfare system. Despite free market and liberal economic policies since the 1980s and changes in the share of private health and education spending during the AKP’s time in government, Turkey’s welfare system has retained its protective familial base, as mentioned by Akkan (2018). Indeed, there is a rich literature on Turkey’s general welfare system (Buğra & Keyder 2006), healthcare system (Yılmaz, 2013), and pension system (Aysan, 2013), which shows that the system is stronger in some areas than others. For Göçmen (2014), a historical analysis of the development of Turkey’s welfare regime demonstrates that the spread of religiously motivated associations (RMAs) over the last two decades cannot be attributed
to retrenchments within the welfare state. In fact, social assistance by central and local state institutions has expanded during this period.

Therefore, although Turkey’s welfare system has been weakened since the 1980s, the Turkish public may have retained their previous expectations of the state. Changes in the public attitudes may not always keep up with the changing policy landscape since some components in the previous welfare system still matter very much for many Turkish citizens.

It is also worth considering how policies over the last two decades have affected Turkish people’s current expectations. We believe that although there are many RMAs, people still expect the government to supply basic health care and free education. The public does not expect RMAs to solve problems in the pension system or social security system.

The regression analysis also supports Feagin (1972) and Hunt (1996), that people with higher education degrees are more likely to attribute poverty to structural factors. For Feagin (1972), the relationship between level of education and attribution of poverty is as follows: people with an intermediate education level prefer individualistic explanations for poverty whereas people with higher educational levels prefer structuralist explanations. For Hunt (1996), more education among whites reduces individualistic poverty attributions. In short, our findings agree with the literature: better educated people think that poverty is caused by income inequality and inability to access basic public services.

Regarding gender, women do not seem to support individualistic explanations, which contradicts the findings of Morçöl (1997), who reported that Turkish women support a more individualistic approach than men. Despite increasing over the years, women’s participation in Turkey’s labor force, at 32.5% in 2016 according to TUIK, is still below the rate in developed countries. Furthermore, women still face gender bias in employment, which may explain why they do not prefer individualistic explanations of poverty. Other studies (Hunt (1996), Halman and van Oorschot (1999), Niemelä (2008), have also indicated that women are more likely than men to support structuralist perspectives on poverty, although Cozzarelli et al. (2001) found no effect of gender on poverty attributions.

Annual per capita income has a positively significant coefficient for the structuralist approach, albeit very small and a negatively significant coefficient for the individualistic and fatalistic approaches. That means that people with higher incomes (not perceived income) prefer a structuralist view. This contradicts Hunt (1996), who reported that a lower household income increases the likelihood of structuralist beliefs. In contrast, people with high perceived income define themselves high-class and reject the structuralist view.

Age and the marital status only significantly affect the fatalistic approach. That is, married people are more likely to support the fatalistic view than singles while has a significant negative coefficient for the fatalistic view, meaning that older people do not support this approach, ceteris paribus.

Regarding the subjective variables, perception of class status affected the fatalistic view, with more support from respondents who self-reported as lower class. In contrast, self-reported upper-middle-class and high-class respondents support the individualistic view rather than the structuralist view.

Regarding subjective poverty, respondents who self-reported as very poor are more likely to support the fatalistic view while respondents self-reporting as high class do not support the structuralist view. These findings are new in Turkey. According to Nasser (2007), social class is not an entirely clear predictor of poverty attributions in Lebanon, where young people are more structuralist if they are upper rather than lower class.

Political belief is also a significant predictor of the preferred type of poverty attributions. According to the regression analysis, right-wing and neither-left-nor-right respondents
prefer the individualistic approach over the structuralist approach. There is much evidence showing that left-wing people tend to agree with structuralist poverty attributions (e.g., Bullock, 1999; Cozzarelli et al., 2001; Furnham, 1982; Van Oorschot & Halman 2000; Kreidl, 2000). Therefore, our findings in terms of political views are in line with the literature and provide more evidence that right-wing people do not support the structural explanations of poverty.

The last subjective variable is destiny. People who consider that destiny is very important in their life prefer fatalistic explanations over structuralist and individualistic attributions. From his analysis of beliefs about the causes of wealth and poverty, Hunt (2004) concluded that respondents favor individualistic over structuralist explanations of wealth but structuralist over individualistic explanations of poverty. Fatalistic beliefs were the least popular, although racial minorities and poorer people are most likely to attribute events to God’s will.

As with poverty attributions, policy proposals vary too. People with a structuralist view want public policies like better income distribution, vocational courses, free education, health services, and new job creation. However, they believe that increased association and foundation aid, coal aid and only community aid cannot reduce poverty. People with an individualistic view think that association and foundation aid cannot decrease poverty either whereas new job creation, vocational course, and policies for better income distribution can. People with fatalistic views think that increased association and foundation aid, coal aid, and community aid can reduce poverty.

It is worth highlighting the diametrically opposed positions of the structuralist and fatalistic view. The latter claims that reducing poverty can be achieved by coal aid, association and foundation aid, and community aid whereas the former sees such aid as prolonging poverty rather than reducing it. In addition, the fatalistic view does not believe that poverty can be reduced by a guaranteed minimum income, free education and health services, policies for better income distribution, vocational courses, or new job creation.

It is worth noting that only the structuralist view supports a guaranteed minimum income to reduce poverty. This is important since many scholars have discussed this policy’s potential to reduce poverty and increase macroeconomic efficiency (Magnani & Piccoli, 2020). A guaranteed minimum income is also seen as a way to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. In the literature, there is a consensus that people with individualistic views are less supportive of improving social security and social protection policies than people with structuralist views (Alston & Dean, 1972; Zucker & Weiner, 1993; Van Oorschot & Halman 2000; Appelbaum 2001).

In addition, the individualistic and structuralist views are close in their policy recommendations. The most important difference between them is that the structuralist view strongly supports free education and health services whereas the individualistic approach rejects these.

People with a fatalistic view clearly reject giving more responsibility to state because the most important issue for them is surviving day to day, so they do not think about the state’s role in reducing poverty. Costa and Dias (2015, 3) highlight the implications of this: “a society that takes a fatalistic view will be resigned to poverty and feel it has no social responsibility for the phenomenon. This resignation hinders society’s mobilization and active participation in resolving the problem”. However, we should note that the analysis was based on data from Turkey’s three largest cities, which may have different dynamics in poverty attributions to other areas. Therefore, the results cannot yet be generalized.

Finally, if the fatalistic approach dominates in a society, this may reduce the importance of structural policies to reduce poverty. Therefore, public policies need to be implemented
by the government or other public and civil society institutions to establish the understanding that poverty is neither destiny nor a God-given situation.

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