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Social Unrest in the UK and Turkey: Rethinking Police Violence against Dissident Communities

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Abstract

The present study explores police violence during the riots in London and Gezi Park protests in Istanbul. This study puts forth that the rise of social injustice in the UK and the erosion of plural democracy in Turkey clarify the paradox of state intervention because the two states prioritized rapid repression of uprising without consolidating public trust and social justice in the society. This comparative study reveals that the liberal and non-religious elements of the capitalist ruling system in the UK contain similar fractions of state repression when compared to the authoritarian and religious elements of the capitalist ruling system in Turkey. The authors conclude that police violence endures the social control of dissident communities while it maintains the sustainability of different capitalist ruling systems in the periods of social unrest.

Keywords

capitalism – police violence – riot – social protest – rule of law – social justice – UK – Turkey

1 Introduction

Riots and social protests unveil collective dissent in different political geographies. This unsurprising outcome provides a social context to compare and clarify the relationship between the form of dissent and the response of governments to the dissident communities. Recent riots and social protests in London and Istanbul provoke a number of challenging questions concerning the rule of law and social control in different political geographies. The dissident communities perceive that social or political systems are failed or not functioning well. However, the persistence in preserving the status quo or reluctance to implement radical changes in the ruling system enforces different states to maintain social control through using law enforcement and sometimes applying excessive force.

The repression of riots and social protests has been studied extensively both by the social movement and policing scholars (Barkan 1984; Opp and Wolfgang 1990; della Porta 1995; Koopmans 1997; Earl 2003; della Porta and Reiter 1998; Early, Sarah and McCarthy 2003; Merey 2004; Boudreau 2004; Carey 2006; Fernandez 2008; Rafail 2010). However, it has been suggested that the role of capitalism is often ignored in social movement studies (Hetland and Goodwin 2013; Fuchs 2014; della Porta 2015). The comparison of riots and social protests has not been fully uncovered when we take in account both its violent/peaceful character and police violence as independent variables to explore different ruling regimes of capitalist order. The liberal regime in the UK and the authoritarian regime in Turkey put these two countries into the broader cluster of capitalist order in which capitalist system influences main economic structure similarly in both countries whereas the two countries have quite different political characters in terms of the recognition of liberties. The two countries suppress dissident communities without developing non-violent interventions to tackle and eliminate the principal reason of uprising among the same dissident communities. In fact, the development of such non-violent interventions poses certain risks to the main pillars of capitalist order because of the concentration of wealth at the top, the lack of radical incrementalism, and the influence of neoliberalism as a principal ruling logic (Piketty 2014; Schram 2015). To this end, this present study compares the London riots in 2011 with the Gezi Park protests in Istanbul in 2013 in order to explore the social unrest in these two countries, through engaging with fundamental concepts determining the character of social unrest such as “police violence”, “social control”, “rule of law” and “voice and accountability”.

Taking “police violence” and “capitalist order” as independent variables, while the score of “the rule of law” and “voice and accountability” as dependent variables in a liberal regime of the UK and authoritarian regime of Turkey, we aim to explore how police violence fosters the surge of social unrest and stimulates mass mobilization through social protests and riots in London and Istanbul. We argue that police violence plays a leading role in the surge of social unrest and mobilization when the dissident groups perceive police behavior or state policies unjust, undemocratic and discriminative. This is not a surprising fact. However, our study suggests that police violence can become so prevalent that it has certain commonalities, irrespective of the scores of “rule of law” and “voice and accountability” of each country. We assert that police misconduct was the concern of protestors so those social protests rapidly transformed into violent riots in London, despite the UK having high scores of “rule of law” and “voice and accountability”. As a result, the authoritarian and liberal regimes of capitalism function similarly when it comes to the suppression of dissident communities. On the other hand, we also note that the method of policing the social protests is an important indication to distinguish the liberal and authoritarian governing models of capitalist order. In this context, we claim that the use of police violence to suppress the peaceful protests appears as a focal method of an authoritarian capitalist order as evidenced by the Gezi Park protests whereas excessive police force and police misconduct are less common in a liberal regime compared to the authoritarian regime. Our second argument centralizes the role of capitalism, claiming that the liberal and non-religious elements of capitalist ruling system in the UK reveal similar fractions of state repression when compared with the authoritarian and religious elements of capitalist ruling system in Turkey. This deduction takes us to the next argumentation: Police violence functions as a strong instrument to suppress the uprising while maintaining social control in contentious societies and sustaining different capitalist ruling systems.

We divide the remaining part of the paper into five sections. First, we introduce our theoretical framework with a critical review of the literature, which concerns the relationship between the rule of law, social protests and police violence in a capitalist order. Second, we present the methods that we used in this study. Third, we briefly narrate the two social protests and riots in London and Istanbul separately. Fourth, we compare the London riots and Gezi Park protests. Before the conclusion, we discuss the results of the rule of law and voice and accountability scores in these two countries and reconsider it within the places of social protest and riots in a liberal and authoritarian regime of

capitalist order. We conclude with our final remarks, limitations of the present study and opportunities for future research.

2 Rule of Law and Social Control in a Capitalist Order

The rule of law concept has been a central issue in the socio-legal discussions related to public order throughout history starting from the discourses of Aristotle to the systematic development of this concept in the nineteenth century by the British lawyer A. V. Dicey, who argued that “the rule of law is associated with rights-based liberalism and judicial review of governmental actions” (Fallon 1997: 1). That said, the “support for the rule of law is not exclusive to the West. It has been endorsed by government heads from a range of societies, cultures, and economic and political systems” (Tamanaha 2000: 2). However, the crucial question comes to the fore when we ask that what form of law should rule the polity and society? This question gains more importance in the contemporary world, where democracy and the control of means of production play a vital role in the regulation of social, political, and cultural life. The Secretary-General of the United Nations (UNSC 2004: 4) defined the rule of law as “a principle of governance in which all persons, institutions and entities, public and private, including the State itself, are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated, and which are consistent with international human rights norms and standards”. The rule of law is a fundamental basis for all liberal constitutions (Peacock 2009). This evolution in the definition of rule of law makes it not solely a systematic review of legal procedures, but a landmark enroute to consolidate social justice and a culture of lawfulness. O'Donnell (2004: 32) echoed this point similarly, arguing that “the role of law is among the essential pillars of upon which any high-quality democracy rests”. Nevertheless, a lawful society can be based on an unjust system in terms of the distribution of social, economic and political power. The rule of law, therefore, cannot function solely as criterion to guarantee social justice and democratic pluralism under every condition of different governing models.

The content of law does, however, matter more than how the law system functions in a social and political regime. As a result, the rule of law cannot be the only standard to establish an equal, peaceful, democratic, and just society. The capitalist order in the UK offers a liberal regime where the citizens of the country are free in terms of civil liberties, which signify freedom from (i) torture; (ii) freedom from forced disappearance; (iii) freedom of conscience; (iv) freedom of press; (v) freedom of religion; (vi) freedom

of expression; and (vii) freedom of assembly. On the other hand, social injustice and poverty are evident in certain regions throughout the UK, while certain groups (such as Gypsies, Roma, homeless people, and people with learning disabilities, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers) remain socially disadvantaged (Equality and Human Rights Commission report published 2016). In addition, the same report also puts forth that social and economic perniciously affect Black and ethnic minority communities. A liberal country governed by a capitalist order extends the socially disadvantaged communities and marginalize them by the legal system through either or both imprisonment and social exclusion. It is, thus, not surprising that “one in six of all households in the UK are excluded from social norms due to poverty, and are poor in at least two out of three ways of assessing poverty ... in the UK more people are imprisoned, when measured both absolutely and relatively, than in any other country in Europe” (Dorling 2011: 6). The liberal regime in terms of guaranteeing the political and civil rights of citizens may ironically limit their social rights in a capitalist order when these rights pose certain risks to the ruling regime. This dilemma, in fact, is one of the main pillars of neoliberal capitalist system and functions similarly one way or another in diverse geographies where a number of countries in the West are conventionally categorized as “advanced democracies” based on human development indices and political regimes, while the socially disadvantaged communities in these countries find themselves being trapped through marginalization and criminalization.

Civil rights given to the citizens make a capitalist country liberal, whereas the limitation of those rights render another country authoritarian. As such, Turkey’s rule under the governance of Justice and Development Party (AK Party) has increased curbing the civil rights that eventually produced an electoral authoritarianism having a strong Islamic character (Ozbudun 2014; Tugal 2016). The ruling AK Party regime diminished the secular sensibilities of the country and created a new form of capitalism largely due to its own Muslim business network (Bugra and Savaskan 2014). This division between the religious and secular class polarised Turkish society through neoliberal policies of the new capitalist order where the power shift from secular to Islamist class has been a determining force (Balkan and Oncu, 2015). The capitalist property relations have been consolidated in the last decades in new Turkey (Duzgun 2012). However, this consolidation cannot be directly associated with the marriage of liberal democracy and capitalism. Inversely, the country has drifted towards authoritarian Islam in the last few years, undermining pluralist democracy by legitimizing majoritarian democracy as the ruling code of a new capitalist regime supported by a popular vote. Yet any such democracy in a

capitalist order, whether liberal or authoritarian, also depends on the management of critical moments in which public panic prevails and the escalation of violence dominates the public sphere. In this context, police violence appears as the key social control method in riots and social protests. Exploring police violence, thus, offers an opportunity to deconstruct the persistence of different political regimes in a capitalist order.

The difference between the rule of law and the rule by law demystifies the importance of justice more clearly in a social and political conflict because the rule by law indicates using law as an instrument to govern without binding the state (Peerenboom 2004). The rule of law has a strong relationship with the principle and ethical concept of law; however, the rule by law is more concerned with the organization and implementation of law. Hence, “what distinguishes them is not the nature of the law, whether it operates as a tool or as a framework, but the power system to which they respond” (Maravall and Przeworski 2003: 3). The rule of law plays a critical role in the times of social conflict, political tension and cultural polarization. Meyer (2004) argued that violence and disorder have the capacity to change the outcome of protest as it gives certain reasons to the authorities to legitimize the repression of social protests, which eventually decline in time. In a capitalist order, whether liberal or authoritarian, the rule by law aims to defend the rights of the state power to consolidate the ruling regime. This is argued to be the reason that suppressive policing methods against the uprising communities serve to accumulate the power of governments. Police violence, therefore, echoed in London and Gezi Park similarly to consolidate the ruling regime without addressing the principal reason of uprising even after the complete suppression of riots and social protests.

Interactional level in the police-crowd and police-community nexus is determinative whether the protest of dissident community evolves and becomes violent or it remains peaceful (Newburn 2016). The police systematically use its force to control the dissident groups who have formidable discontents about the social and political system. Hence, the violent character of the protest is dominant in such uprisings, which eventually target the protestors when they react against police suppression. The London riots and Gezi Park protests, which are scrutinized in this paper, were not the outcome of a series of violent attacks to gather and defy the police and state power systematically. Instead, we argue that if the lethal shot by the police had not happened, the social protests and riots in London would likely never have been occurred in such a critical and dramatic way. What is more, violence was not the expected outcome in the start of the peaceful protests in Istanbul’s Gezi Park. Yet, similar to the case of London, the legacy of state violence, the anger and perceptions of dissident communities – who believed that they have been exposed to systematic

discrimination by the law enforcement and political agencies for so long – transformed the reaction against police into ‘the straw that broke the camel’s back scenarios’.

The violent social control of state forces imposes precarity¹ through police force and violates the fundamental human rights of contentious communities. This tarnished image of state forces and justice constitute the traumatic past of the marginalized communities in a capitalist order. The commonalities and diversifications noted above render the two case studies landmark comparative examples, so as to unveil the relationship between the rule of law and police violence during social protests and riots in a liberal and authoritarian order of capitalism.

3 Methods

Our reasoning for selection of the particular two cases is related largely to our principal research question. Our aim is to test the role of “rule of law” and “voice and accountability” scores in the use of police violence in two capitalist social order that have different degree of civil liberties and political systems. As such, we selected two countries – the UK and Turkey – that recently suppressed riots and social protests violently. The UK has a high score of “rule of law” and “voice and accountability” whereas Turkey has lower index scores in both of the clusters.

We used three principal methods in this research. The first one is a narrative inquiry, which helped to contextualize the moment of police violence, the reaction of protestors and the surge of riots and social protests. The narration, therefore, was based on four factors shaped the riots and social protests: (i) facts related to the protests and riots such as the primary motive of mass mobilization; (ii) duration of protests and riots; (iii) total number of arrests; (iv) total number of dead and injured people. After a separated narrative on the two cases, we compared the London riots and Gezi Park protests based on eight criteria: (i) the type of ruling regime; (ii) the source of main dissent; (iii) main social control methods; (iv) the situational aftermath of riots and social protests; (v) the level of harm to the private and public goods; (vi) organizational capacity; (vii) the response of the government in addition

1 Precarity was first used by a Catholic monk, Léonce Crenier, to signify the essential element of poverty (Day 1952). The meaning of precarity has been expanded to identify the exploitation of neo-capitalist systems through insecure jobs, social exclusion, low pay and welfare cuts (see Hardt and Negri 2004; Mabrouki 2004).

to law enforcement; and (viii) the role of different capitalist regimes in the surge of conflict.

The third method we used is the reapplication and presentation of data concerning the score of “rule of law” and “voice and accountability” in the UK and Turkey. One of the main purposes of this study is to explore the relationship between the rule of law and police violence in riots and social protests. For this reason, our primary data were derived from the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) Project, as it is the only data source that has been measuring different government indicators every year since 2002. “The WGI project reports composite indicators of six dimensions of governance, covering over 200 countries and territories since 1996, and is updated annually. The six aggregate governance indicators are based on hundreds of individual underlying variables from dozens of different data sources. The source data underlying the WGI come from a large number of individual sources, and reflect the views on governance of thousands of survey respondents and public, private, and NGO sector experts worldwide” (Kaufmann, Kraay and Mastruzzi 2010: 20). We used the data from five yearly intervals (i.e. 2004, 2009 and 2014) for both Turkey and the UK. In addition to this data, we examined the latest data collection concerning the rule of law index in 2015, which was conducted by World Justice Project. Such data is based on more than 100,000 household and expert surveys measuring “how the rule of law is experienced in practical, everyday situations by the general public worldwide” (WJP Rule of Law Index 2015). The rule of law index aims to capture “perceptions of the extent to which agents have confidence in and abide by the rules of society, and in particular the quality of contract enforcement, property rights, the police, and the courts, as well as the likelihood of crime and violence.” (Kaufmann, Kraay and Mastruzzi 2010: 4) The score for the rule of law is 0.46 for Turkey and 0.78 for the UK (World Justice Project 2015). Comparing to the other countries in the world, Turkey ranks in the bottom quartile whereas the UK ranks in the top quartile in both indices. In this respect, the latest data of World Justice Project also showed a very similar result with the data that we derived from the Worldwide Governance Indicators and displayed in Table 1.

The social protests and riots create venues and collective actions that reveal the voice of dissident groups (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001). Hence, the second data cluster, voice and accountability, has a special importance in comparing the relationship between the score of “rule of law” and “voice and accountability”. The index of “voice and accountability” is composed of seven representative and twelve non-representative sources. The index aims to measure “the perceptions of the extent to which a country’s citizens are able to participate in selecting their government, as well as freedom of expression,

TABLE 1 *“Voice and Accountability” and “Rule of Law” indicators for Turkey and United Kingdom according to Worldwide Governance Indicators*

Indicator	Country	Year	Number of sources ^a	Government score (-2.5 to +2.5) ^b	Percentile rank (0 to 100) ^c	Standard error ^d
Voice and accountability	Turkey	2004	11	-0.03	47.60	0.16
		2009	15	-0.09	45.50	0.12
		2014	12	-0.32	37.93	0.13
	United Kingdom	2004	8	1.61	95.19	0.19
		2009	11	1.31	91.94	0.15
		2014	10	1.30	92.12	0.15
Rule of Law	Turkey	2004	13	0.13	57.89	0.16
		2009	16	0.10	57.82	0.14
		2014	14	0.04	59.62	0.15
	United Kingdom	2004	8	1.62	93.30	0.17
		2009	10	1.73	94.31	0.16
		2014	10	1.89	94.23	0.17

- a Number of sources shows the number of individual sources on which the aggregate indicator is based. (Please see the appendix for the name of each source.)
- b The government score is an estimate of governance measured on a scale from -2.5 to 2.5. Higher values correspond to better governance.
- c Percentile rank indicates rank of country among all countries in the world. 0 corresponds to lowest rank and 100 corresponds to highest rank.
- d Standard error captures the precision of the estimate of governance for each country. Lower values indicate more precision.

freedom of association, and a free media” (Kaufmann, Kraay and Mastruzzi 2010: 4). Even though the UK’s “rule of law” and “voice and accountability” indicators show a better government performance than Turkey. There are still certain problems that the country needs to overcome to make its score better. Nevertheless, the UK has a better performance in both indicators than USA, Italy, Spain, and France, other countries’ scores in “rule of law” and “voice and accountability” better than the UK, such as Denmark, Sweden, Netherlands, Finland, Australia, and Canada. These ratings indicate that the UK has a more liberal and democratic regime than Turkey (and, indeed, for that matter than the USA, Spain and France. However, the rating of the UK still indicates that

there are areas, which need improvement and its rating is worse than in other parts of the world, such as Australia, Canada, and Scandinavia.

Yet we still need to decipher how different forms of dissent determined the violent and peaceful character of London riots and Gezi Park protests, and how police violence played a determining role in the expansion of social unrest in the liberal regime of the UK and the authoritarian regime of Turkey. These explanations also offer a relevant context to compare the “rule of law” and “voice and accountability” indicators.

4 Police Violence and Mobilization in London Riots

The riots in London started on August 6, 2011, two days after the police had shot and killed Mark Duggan, a 29-year old black man who was a resident of Tottenham in North London (Riots in Tottenham 2011). The circumstances around the shooting were contested with the Metropolitan Police, claiming that Duggan had acquired a handgun, which he was planning to use in a criminal act. Nevertheless, friends and families of Duggan were not convinced by these accounts (Mark Duggan 2015). In addition, the changing narrative and inconsistency in the Metropolitan Police’s account over the death of Duggan defied the reliability of the police’s accounts (The leading article 2011). These contested tactics and maneuvers of the state forces frustrated local public that was already concerned about the death of Mark Duggan. The Independent Police Complaints Commission (a nondepartmental public body that investigates police conduct in the UK) subsequently investigated the case of Duggan’s killing (IPCC, Metropolitan Police Service 2012), and a public inquest returned a verdict that it was a lawful killing (Dodd, 2014). Yet such an outcome was not sufficient to convince protesters who had contrary views about the legitimacy of this killing. Therefore, two days after the killing of Mark Duggan, the dissidents did not remain silent and asserted concern regarding the prevalence of police misconduct. The unrest grew exponentially with the motto uttering that ‘there can be no peace without justice’ (Tottenham Riot 2011). Mark Wadsworth, a local journalist familiar with the area, visited Tottenham shortly before the protests transformed into precarious and violent riots in this highly contentious area of north London. What Wadsworth witnessed indicated an ongoing process of socioeconomic decline and cultural marginalization of the neighborhood and community. He reported from the field:

Stafford Scott, a campaigner on racial equality, said: “People say that things are not the same here (in Tottenham) since 1985, that conditions are much better. But they are just as bad in terms of the stopping and

searching of Black youth by the police, Black students thrown out of school and high unemployment.” There are more than 50 people for each unfilled job, 10 per cent more people claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance this year than last. Unemployment hits the youth hardest. A youth worker, Symeon Brown, said Haringey Council, the UK local authority, had cut youth services by 75 per cent.

TOTTENHAM RIOT 2011

The death of Mark Duggan crystallized the dissent of local community that has been marginalized socio-economically and culturally for so long. The social decline in the boroughs of London, in this case Tottenham, manifested itself through the violent reaction of some groups within the local community. The fatal shooting by the police created emotional solidarity among the violent participants of the riots. The socioeconomic vulnerability shaped the perceptions of black youth concerning the discriminatory approach of the state forces towards them.

The family of Mark Duggan called for calm, but they also claimed that Duggan had not fired at police before he was being shot (Holehouse 2011). The riots in London swiftly spread to other cities from Leicester and Nottingham to Bristol and Manchester (England Riots 2011). The riots in England lasted for five days before the police regained control through using excessive force and the riots diminished on August 11, 2011. However, the outcome of social unrest was enormous and perturbing. Five people were killed. Dozens of civilians and around two-hundred police officers were injured (England’s week of riots 2011). Looting, assault, arson, and property damage were widespread (Moore 2011). The reason for the lootings after the London riots was lack of a determined objective by the looters (Treadwell et al. 2012). However, apart from opportunist looters, the instigator of these riots was clear; excessive police force amongst a community characterized by social inequality which was to be repeated dramatically in the major cities of the country during the riots.

5 Police Violence and Mobilization in Gezi Park Protests, Istanbul

Different from the social unrest in London, the Gezi Park protests were organized by peaceful groups until the decline of protests. The main reason was to raise their voice and discontent over repressive and discriminatory political issues. The Gezi Park protests started on May 28, 2013 in Istanbul when the police burned the tents of dozens of peaceful environmental activists who opposed the government plans to replace the Gezi Park, one of the few green areas in the center of Istanbul, with an Ottoman-era military barracks including a mosque and

shopping mall (Turkey Clashes 2013). The religious and commercial symbol were at the center of this plan that showed the happy marriage of Islamic politics with capitalism. The level of police force against the peaceful protestors mobilized thousands of people around the Gezi Park in the subsequent days. The increasing political authority of the Turkish government disguised itself through a ruthless attempt to design public projects without considering the overall benefits to the public. The local administrative court in Istanbul cancelled the project in mid-June 2013 by concluding that such benefits were not evident.² The increasingly authoritarian policies of the ruling AK Party government were the dominant leitmotifs in the mobilization of Gezi Park protests. Furthermore, the political authority of the pro-Islamic government seriously engaged in defying policies to weaken the secular polity of the country by curbing political and civil rights and making these rights questionable in the public sphere. For instance, shortly before the Gezi Park protests, the government challenged the right of abortion and handed a suspended 10-month prison for world-renowned Turkish pianist Fazil Say for interpreting his claims as an “insult against the religious belief held by a faction of society” (Gurcan and Peker 2014). The Turkish government also banned the sale of alcohol in shops between 22:00 and 06:00 and opposed the proposal to extend the rights of LGBT community in the country (Gurcan and Peker 2014). The Turkish media reported that the protests were “drawing more than students and intellectuals. Families with children, women in headscarves, men in suits, hipsters in sneakers, pharmacists, tea-house proprietors – all are taking to the streets to register their displeasure” (Gezer and Popp 2013). The protestors in Gezi Park, as a result, achieved to unify around one common reason, which was uprising for their democratic rights even though the protestors were heterogeneous, coming from different social and cultural backgrounds.

In the first days of June 2013, a solidarity group was established to represent the protestors, which is called Taksim Solidarity, and they issued fundamental demands for conciliation and termination of the protests (Taksim Solidarity Press Release 2013):

- the preservation of Gezi Park;
- an end to police violence, the right to freedom of assembly and the prosecution of those responsible for the violence against demonstrators;
- an end to the sale of “public spaces, beaches, waters, forests, streams, parks and urban symbols to private companies, large holdings and investors”;
- the right of people to express their “needs and complaints without experiencing fear, arrest or torture.”

² The Turkish Council of State reapproved the project again in July 2015.

- for the media “whose professional duty is to protect the public good and relay correct information ... to act in an ethical and professional way.”
- ruling authorities to realise that the reaction of the citizens is also about the third airport in Istanbul, the third bridge over The Bosphorus, the construction on Atatürk Forest Farm, and the hydro-electric power plants (HEPP).

The government immediately rejected the proposal and embraced a more authoritarian path to suppress the protests in the following days by using police force. Amnesty International reported that “the use of force by police is being driven not by the need to respond to violence – of which there has been very little on the part of protesters – but by a desire to prevent and discourage protest of any kind” (Amnesty International 2013a). By 14 June 150,000 tear gas cartridges and 3000 tons of water had been used (Eylemlerin Bilancosu 2013). The protests spread to other major cities of the country during the volatile summer. The protests, however, demonstrated extensively a peaceful character. Violence only emerged after the fierce police suppression and it was limited with the interactions between the police and the protestors. Looting or plundering was not recorded. Yet the protests showed a decline in the last week of August 2013. The increasing number of victims, casualties and extensive fear in the public because of the police brutality and imprisonment led to the decline of protests (Tugal 2013; Gurcan and Peker 2015). More than three thousand people found themselves imprisoned, while eleven protestors were killed and at least 8,163 were injured (Amnesty International 2013b).

6 The Rise of Social and Political Dissent: Marginalization in London Riots and Gezi Park Protests

Comparing the London riots and Gezi Park protests, we detected eight criteria that reveal both similar and diverse dimensions of the two cases (see Table 2). The ruling regime of the two countries also shape the level of response against the riots and social protests. Even though the main ruling economic ideology of the both countries is related to capitalism, when examining the political economic structure, the UK is traditionally more attached to the promotion of liberal values of democratic rights. In comparison, Turkey has witnessed deteriorating human rights record and increasing authoritarianism coupled with an erosion of plural democracy particularly in the last decade. The political economic structure of the UK allocates the country in the league of liberal democracy whereas Turkey takes its position in the league of authoritarian

democracy where certain liberties and free elections are available under a regime curbing many rights, restricting the opposition, and eroding plural democracy. Turkey, of course, is not alone in this league, as Russia, Malaysia, China, Azerbaijan, Iran, and Venezuela show many similarities in terms of the limits on political freedom. Yet, what is striking is that, despite these noted differences between the UK and Turkey, police violence plays a similar role both in liberal and authoritarian democracies.

TABLE 2 *Comparison of London riots and Gezi Park protests based on eight criteria*

	London riots	Gezi park protests
Type of ruling regime of the country	Liberal democracy	Authoritarian democracy
Source of main dissent	Social dissent	Political dissent
Main social control methods	Police force, which is occasionally violent, faulty and excessive	Police force, which is mostly violent, faulty, and excessive
The number of victimized and arrested people in the aftermath of the riots and social protests	Low number of arrests and casualty	High number of arrests and casualty
Harm against the private and public goods	Mostly violent/extensive harm to the private and public goods	Mostly peaceful/limited harm to the private and public goods
Organizational capacity of riots/social protests	Dispersed and disorganized riots with unclear demands and inconsistent targets	United and well-organized social protests with clear demands and consistent targets
The response of the government in addition to law enforcement	Some policies deployed, but no serious methods to tackle the source of social dissent	No policies deployed by the government. Inversely, a more authoritarian path was followed
The role of different capitalist regimes in the surge of conflict	Marginalization of communities in the social sphere by libertarian and non-religious elements of capitalism	Marginalization of communities in the political sphere by authoritarian and Islamic elements of capitalism

The source of a dominant motive in the two cases was more perplexing and related to social and political dissent of the protestors in London riots and Gezi Park protests respectively. These two different forms of dissent – whether social or political dissent – were already evident before the violence of police imposed itself as a central agency of conflict in the two cases. Social dissent has often prevailed throughout history among the economically declining, socially isolated and culturally discriminated communities. These vulnerabilities played a role in the spread of protests and riots, with the protests and riots in London and other cities of the country drawing in protestors from all ethnic groups. On the other hand, different from the London case, the political dissent shaped the dominant motive, leading to mass mobilization in the Gezi Park protests.

The peaceful protestors were confronted by extensive police violence, and many of them were arrested. Police violence was also apparent in London; however, it was not as extensive as the Gezi Park protests. In addition, different from the violent and criminalized character of the London riots, looting and property damage were not evident during the Gezi Park protests. More to the point, the extensive police violence and higher number of arrests suggest that an authoritarian order is more reactionary against peacefully organized social protests, which aim at defying the power of their ruling regime. When considering the London riots, the embedded discrimination and socio-economic vulnerability were apparent in the everyday lives of the disadvantageous groups that further fostered their marginalization through police violence. Thus, the death of black man in London opened a Pandora's Box, uncovering deep social inequalities in the country.

The number of arrested people, casualties and economic damage also diversify as these numbers are lower in the London riots than the Gezi Park protests. While police violence played a major role in both cases. In the London riots, the police were occasionally violent and at fault whereas the Gezi Park protests were prevalently characterized by excessive police violence. This contradiction shapes the reaction of the law enforcement against the dissident and uprising communities at different degrees in a liberal and an authoritarian democracy.

The cost of the London riots after the damage to the public and private good were estimated around £100 million (Edmonds and Strickland 2015). The level of violence and harm to the private and public good by the rioters and protestors was more grievous in the London riots than the Gezi Park protests. The main reason in the surge of violence in the London riots is also related to the diversity of population group who participated in the riots in London and other English cities. Some of the rioters were angry, violent and aimed to increase gains by materializing this social chaos through looting. Some protestors,

whose concerns were social deprivation, segregation, unjust policies of the government, and police violence, could not make their voice heard as much as the outcome of violence deployed by the looters. Therefore, the participants of the London riots became part of a heterogeneous group whose demands eroded in silence after the termination of the riot because of the dispersed and disorganized character of the social group in addition to violent rioters whose aims were gaining material benefits from the riots. The same character of disunity partially led the rioters to target random places and institutions from time to time. Hence, the victimized and socially deprived group among the rioters lacked the sources to clarify their demands and raise their voice effectively. On the other hand, a contradictory approach was embraced by many participants of the Gezi Park protests. Shortly after the violent and excessive police force in the first days of suppression in early June 2013, the protestors received an important moral support from the prominent social organizations in Turkey and this followed the solidarity of popular singers and artists with the Gezi Park protestors. While the protests were spreading to the other Turkish cities in the country, the peaceful and non-violent resistance was the principal method of the participants. It is not surprising that the participants united with the establishment of Taksim Solidarity to raise their voice under a unified force with clear demands. The manifesto published by the Taksim Solidarity, that was noted in the previous section, is a palpable example of it. As a result, Gezi Park protests portrayed a contradictory organizational structure, which had clear goals, demonstrated a peaceful and organized character, which was open to dialogue and possessing clear aims.

The response of law enforcement to a riot or social protest determines the destiny of rioters and protestors. Yet, the same response also permits certain hints in detecting the role of law enforcement and the capacity of developing government policies to address the concerns of rioters and protestors. From this perspective, neither the English nor the Turkish government could centralize the concerns of the rioters and protestors while devising responses both during and aftermath of the riots and social protests. This missed opportunity led both governments to prioritize rapid and violent suppression of the riots and protests. In July 2013, the British government published *Government Response to the Riots, Communities and Victims Panel's final report* and rejected the argument that "poverty, race and the challenging economy" cannot be the excuses for the "appalling behavior" for the riots in August 2011 (Government Response to the Riots 2013: 15). The same report presents the implemented policies by the government since the riots and these policies are mainly limited to the reforms in policing and justice system. The rejection of growing social injustice and the police violence against the dissident communities by

the British government reflect the conservative state position that is unable to grasp the principal social problem in the surge of conflict. Similarly, the Turkish government rejected the manifesto of the Taksim Square and did not abolish the project to construct both a mosque and a shopping mall. What is more, an unyielding campaign was initiated by the pro-government media outlets to delegitimize the protestors (Koca-Helvaci 2016). The London riots and Gezi Park protests unravel the misleading priority of law makers from both country whose decisions prompted the decline of social peace and equality in the society.

The comparison of London riots and Gezi Park protests clarify that the rise of social dissent and political dissent depends upon eight factors: (i) the type of ruling regime; (ii) the source of main dissent; (iii) main social control methods; (iv) the number of arrested people and victims of the aftermath of riots and social protests; (v) the level of harm to the private and public goods; (vi) organizational capacity of riots/social protests; (vii) the response of the government in addition to law enforcement; and (viii) the role of different capitalist regimes in the surge of conflict. The first seven factors explicate our first main argument asserting that the two states prioritized rapid repression of uprising by excessive police force, which was violent and excessive to different degrees, over the consolidation of trust, peace, and equality in the society. The same method of police repression also elucidates the paradox of state repression, which eliminates the riot and social protest for a certain period of time through law enforcement without dealing with the principal factors creating the social and political dissent. So far, we have presented those first seven factors when comparing the London riots and Gezi Park protests. The eighth factor will now be next discussed.

7 Police Violence in either Liberal or Authoritarian Capitalist Orders

The fundamental commonality of the two social protests and riots discussed in the paper lies in the role of police violence in two capitalist orders that either fostered mass mobilization (as happened in London) or transformed a relatively small group of protestors into massive dissident groups as happened in the Gezi Park protests). However, police violence is not the only reason of mass mobilization, yet it is a stimulating force that concretizes deep social and political problems in these two countries.

Repression, as Tilly (1978: 100) argued, signifies “any action by another group which raises the contender’s cost of collective action”. Emotions are strong auxiliary forces in this solidarity that provide motivation and determine the goal

for social protests. Yet repression against collective action is not limited to certain marginalized groups in different political regimes. "If faced with popular dissent, democracies were just as likely to respond with negative sanctions as other regime types, whereas negative sanctions were particularly unsuccessful to solicit dissident cooperation in democracies" (Carey 2006: 1). Various forms of dissent and its methods of social control during the social protests and riots test the strength of democracies, voice and accountability. Gilham and Marx (2000: 234) analyzed the Seattle social protests, claiming that complex violent social settings produce certain ironies in which protestors and the police are the facilitators of this irony, and concluded that "authoritarian societies are defined by order without liberty. But democratic societies can only exist with both liberty and order." Yet the consolidation of liberty and order guarantees neither social justice nor a sustainable peace in a capitalist order. The London riots depicts how the liberal regime in the UK created social unrest and suppressed it with the use of police force to reconsolidate the social order. The reconsolidation of social order does not guarantee the resolution of social conflict, but the eradication of social dissent and physical violence in the public space. The increasing gap between the rich and the poor, the rife of poverty, modern slavery, and discrimination in the work space continue to be the major social problems in the UK for particular groups.

Elsewhere in countries, where capitalism has played little or no role, police repression has been frequently to suppress the social or political dissent. For example, in Lenin's ruling regime, "Soviet citizens at all levels of society were subject to intense secret police surveillance and were constantly subject to possible arrest for real or imagined infractions" (Skocpol 1979: 230). The Tiananmen Square protests of 1989 in China brought the brutal state repression against the protestors who strove for the elimination of corruption in the Communist Party and the recognition of fundamental freedoms (Lim 2014). From this point of view, what makes police violence in a capitalist society distinctive than a non-capitalist society is blurry at the first instance. Both capitalist and non-capitalist state forces use law enforcement to preserve the status quo against the dissident communities. In fact, such commonalities are more than the distinctions between a capitalist and non-capitalist society regarding the control of power and the consolidation of its authority in contentious times. However, the comparison in this present study reveals another overlooked issue regarding the similarities and differences between a liberal and authoritarian ruling system of capitalism. Hence, comparing the riots and social protests in the UK and Turkey, we have found that capitalism conceals the main social problem while hindering the design of relevant policies to overcome the social dissent in a liberal ruling regime as it occurred in

the London riots. On the other hand, capitalism in an authoritarian regime leads to more critical outcomes because not only does police violence apply suppression, but also those capitalist policies designed by the government are implemented against the furious objection of politically dissident groups, who show their reaction against these projects through peaceful protests. The liberal policies neglecting the social justice eventually made the police force the guardians of the regime to defend it against the contentious communities. Different from the Gezi Park protests, the reactionary communities were not ideologically polarized, and religion was not a motivating factor in the surge of London riots. Therefore, the liberal and non-religious elements of the capitalist ruling system in the UK reveal similar fractions of state repression when we compare it with the authoritarian and religious elements of capitalist ruling system in Turkey. Yet the main difference appears in the degree of police violence and police misconduct. The liberal regime still does not have a good record on accountability of policing methods in terms of excessive force. Nevertheless, torture or systematic violence against the dissident communities are not as common as in authoritarian regimes (Iadicola and Shupe 2003: 267). Yet in both cases police violence is an effective instrument, which endures the social control of dissident communities on one hand while maintaining the sustainability of different capitalist ruling systems on the other. The decline of the riots and social protests in London and Istanbul after the rapid police repression is an indication that clarifies the effectiveness of law enforcement in the preservation of status quo.

Returning to our comparison in the use of police violence by the two capitalist countries with different ruling systems, we identify that police violence is still the main pillar of social control independent of political regime of a country. However, the level of police violence and police misconduct demonstrate differences in a liberal and authoritarian capitalist ruling system. The London riots show that police violence and police misconduct were less grievous than the Gezi Park protests, even though the protestors in the Gezi Park were mostly peaceful. Capitalism creates new opportunities for the government in a liberal regime by concealing the principal problem. A focus solely upon criminal actions of rioters during riots and public violence ironically allows the government in the UK to overlook the probable causational roots of its main social problems, which are based in the dysfunctional system of growing social inequality and social injustice. The main problem began with the social dissent among the rioters and that same social dissent transformed the riots into a perilous threat against the public order. The recommended response to tackle such public discord requires the designing of social programs that outreach those living in poverty and deprived regions that have been

adversely influenced by the ravages of capitalism. The UK report, noted in the previous section, was prepared by the government after the decline of riots, and it blamed the rioters who deployed violence. However, such a response overlooks those non-violent protesting groups who raised their concerns regarding social injustice, but their concerns did not find adequate place in the same report. Designing public policies that address the needs of the uprising dissident communities signify a fundamental change in the core principles of a capitalist economy. Such a radical shift is not on the agenda of the UK government. This contradiction explains the role of a liberal capitalist ruling system in the concealment of the main social problem and the suppression of dissident communities through law enforcement.

With regard to Turkey, the increasing political authority, the surging role of Islam in social and cultural life, and the initiatives of AK Party government have combined to create an obedient and pious generation in Turkey. This threatening combination has played a major role in mass mobilization of the mostly secular, modern, and young generation who believed that their life style was under risk of elimination. The destruction of Gezi Park without considering the environmental concerns of protestors regarding the construction of a mosque, a residential area, and a shopping mall explains the mutual relationship between Islamic capitalism and authoritarian ruling regime. While in the UK case study, capitalism concealed the main social problem; in the Turkish case, capitalism played a more explicit role with shaping the economic landscape through the Islamic social networks and public contracts. The violent suppression of the protests prompted a discernible rise of an authoritarian capitalist landscape, colored by both conservative and Islamic groups. The strong religious basis of such an authoritarian capitalist order enticed those who are part of the social network within conservative Islamic trade unions to take the major share from the public contracts, so they benefited from the privatization policies and government-private sector cooperation. It is not coincidental that the entire project to construct a mosque in one of the most popular squares of the city merged with the construction of a shopping mall and a residential area. The destruction of a park unveils a long-term plan, which aims to create a conservative and Islamic society, while transforming the control of economy through shifting the power from a secular to a more religious group that is affiliated with the ruling party.

If a riot or social protest has violent outcomes, the capitalist oriented principles of state forces, whether liberal or authoritarian, impose interventionist repression through police force without addressing the main dissent of the uprising communities. As a result, there is no difference between the liberal and

authoritarian ruling systems of capitalism in their approach to tackle the main social and political problem that incited uprisings. The apathy of both governments to address the social and political dissent categorizes the two countries in the same cluster. Yet one of the most important difference is the level of reaction of police force, which was *occasionally* excessive and flawed in the London riots; however, it was *mostly* excessive and flawed in the Gezi Park protests. In addition, the role of capitalism is still important but more elusive in a liberal ruling regime, whereas the Turkish case study reveals that capitalism plays an active role in an authoritarian regime by increasing the wealth of the political networks and directly shaping the contemporary economic programs with the suppression of political dissent.

Turning to the results of our data in Table 1, there is a gap in terms of “voice and accountability” and “rule of law” scores between the two countries. Turkish government performs poorly in the “voice and accountability” and the “rule of law” scores, whereas the UK has good government scores in both of these clusters. The diminishing performance of the Turkish government in the “rule of law” score in the 2009 and 2014 index is also worth noting that decreased from 0.13 to 0.10 in 2009 and continued deteriorating in the 2014 index with a score of 0.04. The Gezi Park case portrays a different social and political landscape in which the authoritarian Turkish government leveraged public panic strategically and suppressed the peaceful and non-violent protestors. Nevertheless, the two cases clarify that the method of police reaction is an important instrument in a capitalist order that leads both to the surge of social unrest and the control of it by physical force. In doing so, the undermined power of the dissident groups is demotivated to protest again at least for a certain period of time. Police violence may elucidate social vulnerabilities and undemocratic governance in these two countries that have different scores relating to “voice and accountability” and the “rule of law”. The London riots are the poignant examples of this elucidation and make the country’s high scores unremarkable in the prevention of riots and their governance. The high scores of “voice and accountability” and “rule of law” manifest only a general picture of the political, social and legal landscape in a country. We argue that these high scores are insufficient to address the principal motives that marginalize and discriminate certain groups and minorities in a liberal capitalist order. More alarmingly, these scores raise a vital methodological concern as it neglects and undermines the social and political marginalization of disadvantaged groups.

The protestors may pose certain risks against authoritarian governments. These risks against the authoritarian capitalist order prompt the implementation of repressive law enforcement policies in such countries. The Gezi Park

protests are typical examples revealing the repressive facets of governing cadre in an authoritarian capitalist order. The comparison of London and Gezi Park cases manifests that both liberal and authoritarian capitalist orders create dissident communities uprising for different reasons, but being suppressed similarly through police force.

The commonalities between the London and Gezi Park cases are remarkable when police violence increased social unrest in both instances. The comparison of the two cases questions the high score of “rule of law” and “voice and accountability” of the UK. This deduction takes us to our next claim that the places and the times of social protest and riot need to be re-explored and compared so as to distinguish the role of different social and political orders in a micro-space and time period. The content of this claim highlights that the moments of social crisis and the areas of collective uprising offer the opportunity of revealing unequal distribution of power and mis-governance of justice in a capitalist order, regardless as to, whether it is liberal or authoritarian. Moreover, police violence in the London case indicates that the state reaction against dissident groups festers where violence is endemic for a certain group of people whose life conditions are characterized by social inequality and social exclusion. By the same token, the high scores of “rule of law” and “voice and accountability” lose their importance concerning the credibility of a liberal capitalist order which marginalizes and excludes socioeconomically disadvantaged groups.

8 Concluding Remarks

This comparative study of police violence in riots and social protests has sought to clarify how police violence gives impetus to social unrest and becomes an effective social control method in a liberal and authoritarian capitalist order. Yet the most critical outcome is that reaction of law enforcement unveils social inequality and undemocratic governance both in the UK and Turkey. Perceptions of police misconduct, particularly among the members of socially disadvantaged and culturally marginalized communities, make the mechanism that functionalizes the rule of law appear ineffective and discriminatory for these groups as it is delineated in the case of UK through the London riots. Conversely, the authoritarian governments, having a low score of “rule of law”, followed a more reactionary path by extending the use of violence even against those peaceful protestors. Such a repressive social control method does not only elucidate the fragility of governing models in a capitalist order, but

also elucidates that the governing cadre of a capitalist order, whether liberal or authoritarian, embracing similar social control methods through using law enforcement and police repression. In this context, police violence in the present study emerges as an important indicator to test the reaction of two different capitalist orders and the role of rule of law where social protests and riots occur. The present study, therefore, highlights that neither the “rule of law” score nor the “voice and accountability” score are sufficient to detect social and democratic justice in the places of social protests and riots where the marginalized, disadvantaged and dejected communities live in and react against the ruling power because of the perceived injustice.

We aimed to shed new light on the relationship between the rule of law and social protests in which police violence played a concerted role in a liberal and authoritarian capitalist order. Yet the present study has certain limitations such as the lack of ethnographic research after the riots and social protests ceased. The results of our study, nevertheless, bring two new questions regarding (i) how the consolidation of liberal and authoritarian capitalist order evolves without tackling the root of social and political dissent after the decline of riots and protests; and (ii) how the perceptions of protestors, concerning their future, transform after the decline of riots and social protests. While we could not devise a complete response to these significant questions here, the present study’s finding may open up new ways as to how to reconsider police violence through comparative lenses critically in different regime types of capitalist order. We may also develop new perspectives to conceive the anthropological dynamics of rule of law related to social and democratic justice, if a group of researchers conduct comparative ethnographic research in diverse geographies as participant observers. The protests of Global Justice Movement may provide good opportunities for such a research in which there is a high probability of police repression. The present study underlines that measuring the rule of law for the dissident communities in the places of riots and social protests are more fundamental, rather than presenting a general picture concerning the score of rule of law in a country. The rule of law must be to the service of all citizens in order to retain such important notions of democratic policing and ‘policing by consent’. More importantly, the rule of law must be an auxiliary force to eliminate the source of social, political and cultural inequality that creates great dissent and vulnerabilities among the marginalized, deprived and discriminated communities. Inversely, the two cases show that law enforcement remains under the governance of capitalist order avoiding any serious risks against social and democratic injustice. Thus, law enforcement empowers both liberal and authoritarian forms of capitalist order similarly.

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