



Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi

The Journal of International Social Research

Cilt: 9 Sayı: 43 Volume: 9 Issue: 43

Nisan 2016 April 2016

www.sosyalarastirmalar.com Issn: 1307-9581

ANALYTICAL INDUCTION ON SECURITY PERCEPTIONS OF THE TURKISH AND AMERICAN CITIZENS WITH REGARD TO AIRPORT SECURITY PRACTICES

Ahmet KAYA*

Abstract

Airport and aviation security has become more sophisticated due to the globalization process, and advance in new technologies as well as innovations in the area of transportation and telecommunication. Thus, the present study aiming to provide insights towards airport security practices, attempts to analyze behavioral patterns of airline passengers regarding airport security practices and processes. The purpose of this study is to illustrate the impact of airport practices on perceptions of airline passengers. In order to collect the data, the researcher has conducted field observations at the JFK Airport and made interviews in 2010 with diverse ethnic groups including the Turkish and USA nationals amounting to 14 interviewees in total.

In terms of units of analysis with regard to the present study, three aspects will be discussed within the context of qualitative methodology. First, *habitat* refers to the airport, which is a unique place where people from all around the world and different cultures can be present and interact each other. Second, *groups* include the Turkish and American citizens, which form a social group and a distinctive social entity. In order to eliminate biases and prejudgments between individual cultures, American and the Turkish citizens have been the main focus groups. By doing so, this study will contribute to the literature by showing how these two distinctive cultures view aspects of world affairs in a common way and share similar concerns. Third, *practices* are about the acts and activities at the airport, which can also be considered as a social setting.

Keywords: Semi-structured interviews, purposive sampling, memos, selective coding, airport security, globalization.

Preamble

Airports play a key role in transporting of people and goods nationally, regionally, and internationally. In addition, airports present a unique set of challenges (Transportation Research Board, 2003, p.1-2). These challenges have differed over time. For example, in the 1980s, perceptions of airport practices were merely focusing on parking facilities, accessing to the airport and traffic signs (Gendel, 1987: 2-4). Today, this trend has shifted into new concerns, new conditions, and including new standards.

Therefore, airport security has undergone a significant change over the last decade. Protecting airports towards threats have become a controversial issue over time. Hundreds of millions of passengers have passed through airline security. Airport security has been greatly strengthened with increased administrative structures and legal measures (Seidenstat, 2009: 10).

Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, there have been calls for increased regulation of airport practices (Transportation Research Board, 2007: 14). To give an example, airline security throughout the United States has increased dramatically. But, in spite of increased measures in the areas of border and airport security, there have still been multiple attempted terrorist attacks aboard both domestic and international flights (Holbrook, 2010: 12).

In response to terrorist attacks, the United States government has enacted a new legislation, the Aviation and Transportation Security Act (ATSA). ATSA aims to increase airline passenger safety and establish the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). Since April 30, 2002, TSA officers have begun to conduct passenger-screening activities at all commercial airports throughout the United States (Blalock and et al., 2007: 731-733). Although these new security regulations have been enacted in order to ensure passenger safety and restore confidence in the United States aviation system, their overall effect on airline passengers is still unclear.

1. Research Design (Methods)

The present author of the research has got in the process and gathered the data by doing a number of interviews and observations. At the beginning, the given *provisional hypothesis* was that "due to their cultural, social and/or educational backgrounds, airline passengers differ in their perceptions on airports and airport practices. However, airline passengers, to some extent, have similar feelings about airport practices despite such cultural, social and/or educational backgrounds". After getting in the research site

* Ph.D., Independent Scholar of International Relations, Email: kayahmet@gmail.com.

and gathering more data, the provisional hypothesis has come true.

In order to specify the hypothesis, firstly the researcher has chosen two different groups amounting to 14 people in total respectively as the American and Turkish citizens and interviewed with them. These initial interviews have provided valuable insights and notable angles thus developing and intensifying the research topic.

Initially, the research question was not so clear at the beginning of interviews and it was requiring to be elaborated. To do so, the researcher initiated field observations and conducted more interviews. Then, the research question has begun to be more sophisticated. Furthermore, in order to ensure the objectivity and reliability of the research, the author has made field observations in different period of times, including rush hours and regular hours of the airport where he could find and observe densely or rarely populated airline passengers. Additionally, the researcher has conducted fourteen interviews and tried to select the interviewees from diverse social status, including, teacher, student, limousine driver, retired person, and agency representatives and various age groups ranging from 26-60. In order to ensure the privacy, names of interviewees have been coded in accordance with the rules of Institutional Review Board thus aiming to protect the rights of human subjects used in studies.

All respondents or informants who were interviewed have had international airline travel experiences roughly since the 2002. From these interviews, the author has come across various perceptions regarding airport security practices. In order to confirm the responses from the interviews, the researcher has visited the airport setting, John F. Kennedy Airport (JFK) in 2010 and there he observed activities and behaviors of passengers. By the way, the reason for choosing JFK, especially Terminal-1 is that it is the only airport where the researcher could find Turkish and American airline passengers in certain times and certain places. The clarity of their arrivals and departures has provided researcher some opportunities in terms of observing them in a decent way. The researcher observed the airport practices and passengers approximately 9 feet away from passenger queues in Terminal-1.

a. Limitations

The author had some difficulty while accessing to the setting, JFK, since the airport is situated in another state and far away from the dwelling of the researcher. In addition to this, the routes connecting the airport and parking facilities require toll charges. Furthermore, the most important limitation was about high delicacy of airport security practices thus making the observation difficult. Passengers and officers at the airport may also be very suspicious to interviews, research topics and interview questions which all impact on building trust thus limiting the scope of the study.

b. Strategies for Getting in the Site and Gathering the Data

At first, the interview strategy implemented by the researcher is building trust before the interviews by establishing friendships, asking their convenient time (clarifying whether they are morning or evening persons), visiting their working areas or homes, and doing things together such as outdoor activities. The researcher has also explained his intention for conducting research with a notification letter. The author has tried to be clear while addressing the interview questions and kept eye contacts with the interviewees during interviews.

The airport can be described as a difficult setting due to security concerns; the researcher personally has got over these difficulties by having a letter addressing the research topic and aim of the study. Additionally, before starting research activity, the author introduced himself to the officers, who are working at the airport, including police officers, customs, TSA and private security officers. This helped him not to be seemed as suspicious and made him known by the officers at the airport. Furthermore, while observing, the author prepared scratch and reminding notes (memos) in the sense that later he could remember the details with regard to the observations.

c. Data Analyzing Process

At the beginning, it seemed to be hard to reach common characteristics, which can be used in the findings section of the study. However, constant reading of the notes facilitated designing research and analysis (Corbin and Strauss, 2008: 160), (Ryan and Bernard, 2000: 783). In this qualitative research, analyzing process initially has begun with the gathered data from interviews including open coding of the data, which is a kind of "brainstorming approach towards the data" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 105). In other words, this analytic journey started from a ground level followed by defining the conceptual names of the major themes emerged from the data.

Data analyzing process was the most challenging part of the research. After reading all interview notes including approximately 25 pages of handwritten interviews and observation notes, the selected data has been coded. For example, while coding the data from interviews, it has been observed that the concentration was more on issues related to the security.

While analyzing the data obtained from interviews, first, the researcher has examined the data in a

preliminary order. Then, he organized the information acquired from interviews into different categories. To do so, he has developed several categories and used the coded data within these categories. He has also developed a chart showing the frequency of the words obtained from interview findings. Then, he has put these words into a table in the sense that the themes of security, search, and screening could be seen easily. Subsequently, he has examined the relationships or correlations among the frequency of words and categories.

Finally, in order to make an analytical induction, the researcher has presented similarities and differences of the responds regarding airport security practices. After analyzing the data through the cited process, the author has reached some findings acquired from interviews and observations, which are going to be addressed in the next section.

2. Findings of the Research

a. Interview Findings:

Having considered the findings obtained from observations and interviews, it can be argued that in the case of airport security practices they may seem different in character, lifestyle, and each group forms a distinct stereotype, under certain conditions and to some extent they may feel the same and act with a common sense or they may have similar reactions to some of airport practices. Therefore, this section will present cultural or behavioral differences or similarities of the Turkish and American citizens with regard to the airport practices.

i. Similarities

Specifically, in line with the research question and problem definition, both groups do not like security control areas and security control measures. Both groups mentioned similar concerns regarding security practices. For example, during interviews, the frequency of using security related terms in the responses of the Turkish and American citizens nearly equals to each other (See the Table 1).

Table 1: Frequency of "Security" Related Words Used by Both Groups

American Citizens	Turkish Citizens
Subject-A1: 6 times	Subject-T1: 4 times
Subject-A2: 4 times	Subject-T2: 6 times
Subject-A3: 4 times	Subject-T3: 4 times
Subject-A4: 3 times	Subject-T4: 7 times
Subject-A5: 7 times	Subject-T5: 6 times
Subject-A6: 2 times	Subject-T6: 3 times
Subject-A7: 3 times	Subject-T7: 2 times
TOTAL: 29 times	TOTAL: 32 times

Additionally, though it is claimed by each group that there are too much security measures, they internalize the reasons of security measures. However, both groups similarly perceive security officers as strict, plain, certain, sad, unemotional, not gentle, and loutish, but professional.

Airline passengers, whether they are from the United States or Turkey, concern about the frequency of security check-points. Passengers are expected to obey certain instructions given by security officers; in certain cases if some passengers were informed about certain security measures at the airport, they would take precautions beforehand and be prepared for unexpected practices. These measures should be publicized and become known for all airline passengers.

ii. Differences

Because of governmental practices, the emergence of internalizing the security acts can be seen in other cultures, as well. To give an example, while arguing restrictive governmental policies on immigration, the immigrants in Europe think that their voices should be enhanced in the policy debates and political processes. This idea is also reflected by the majority of public in UK and France (Nyiri, 2007: 2).

During interviews, Americans perceive the airport setting in a negative way. For example, they identify airport as a place of severe security practices, congested, complicated, unorganized, and hectic, which imply some negative connotations. Whereas, the Turkish citizens perceive the airport setting comparatively in a positive way in the sense that they consider airport as a place of gathering diverse cultures, ensuring transportation, and meeting point.

Mostly, the researcher had considerable eye contacts with American interviewees, which infer that Americans are very, open minded, straightforward, and fearless. They believe in what they said and they are very liberal in their statements though they might challenge the governmental policies regarding the security area.

However, less eye contact was acquired from the Turkish citizens during interviews as compared to Americans. Therefore, it can be claimed that the Turkish citizens are impatient, emotional, reserved, more introspective, not open or having some difficulties while explaining their concerns. Turkish interviewees are very vigilant what they said and wanted not to be misunderstood. It is understood that these differences are resulting from cultural, educational and social background of each group member.

b. Findings Obtained From Observation

All observation activities have taken place at the USA, New York John Fitzgerald Kennedy (JFK) Airport, specifically, Terminal-1, which has a modern architecture, grey metal blocks and big windows. There is a shiny billboard, which displays departures and arrivals of flights and there are also signs, big screens, well-situated cameras and advertisements, which show mobile phones, which are nearly offered to the market. Apart from the Turkish Airlines' ticket windows, there are other airlines' ticket windows in this terminal, such as Italian, Korean, Japanese, and French Airlines. This terminal is very crowded especially on certain days of the week, including, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. Except for these days, during the week days before 7 PM, the terminal has some densities, as well.

Police officers are rarely seen in the departure area. However, there are many TSA officers in this area. The majority of the TSA and Private Security (PS) officers are African American and Latin American. Like in the movie, Terminal (2004), porters and workers in JFK Airport who are responsible for cleaning services are also Indians and African Americans.

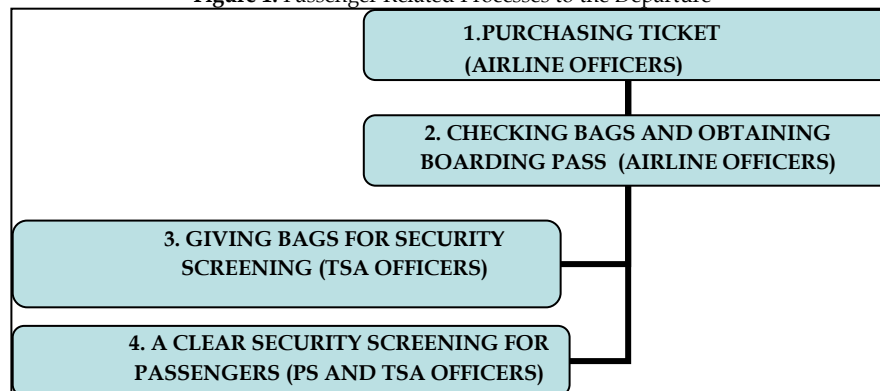
All field research activities have been conducted in an area where airport practices could be observed easily. In this respect, it can be claimed that airport practices include some processes. There are mainly five processes that are engaged with the airline passengers or passenger related activities. These are summarized as follows:

1. *Passenger check-in and ticketing process* involve obtaining boarding pass and checking bags.
2. *Passenger security screening process* includes screening of passengers and carry-ons.
3. *Federal inspections service* is the process conducted by custom and border security inspection services.
4. *Baggage claim* is the area of transferring bags and picking up bags by passengers.
5. *Enplaning and deplaning* is the activity of loading and unloading passengers and bags from aircraft (Transportation Research Board, 2009: 7).

Here, in this study, as the problem and research questions are related to security screening process in the departure area, the present researcher will focus more on this process and relevant activities. Thus, security process covers security check points and consists of lanes in which passengers first divest their belongings and place them on a belt for x-ray screening then proceed through metal detectors (Transportation Research Board, 2009: 32). Some checkpoints have a pair of x-ray machines serving only one metal detector.

As depicted in the below Figure-1, the passengers in the departure area initially start with check-in process by ticketing and obtaining boarding pass (Phase 1 and 2). Airline officers are primarily responsible for these two phases. After this process, passengers are expected to go through security screening process including screening and searching luggages and passengers (Phase 3 and 4). Private Security and Transportation Security Administration officers are in charge with the third and fourth phases of airport security practices.

Figure 1: Passenger Related Processes to the Departure



Security screening process mainly includes several activities, winding, pat-down, hand inspection and trace detection of bags (Transportation Research Board, 2009: 34). Typically, passengers are individually processed at security check-points except for babies and children.

In the departure area, there is no passport control since all controls concentrate on physical searching and screening passengers as well as luggages. Passengers, in this area, are being channeled in accordance with their flight status, such as business class and economy class. In rush hours, generally there emerges a long queue of passengers and passengers' waiting time for being searched or screened can take more than 40 to 50 minutes.

In line with observations conducted at the JFK Airport, PS and TSA security officers have their ID cards and badges on their uniforms or suits. Private security officers wear navy blue jackets and they are the first officials who are dealing with the passengers. They channel passengers into business and economy

classes towards security screening area without having a look at the face of passengers rather than focusing on documents. In less crowded times security officers may smile or interact with passengers. The researcher also observed that security officers had no eye contacts with the passengers. There is a clear interaction among each other irrespective of density of passengers at certain times. This indicates the emergence of a subculture of TSA and PS officers between each other.

However, their interaction with passengers depends on the crowdedness of the airport. In their daily interactions with the passengers, they use generally the body language without applying other conversation skills. PS, TSA and the Police are very reluctant to speak and comment on security related issues.

TSA officers having blue gloves are professional in their daily job activities. They have no eye contact with the passengers. Probably, there might be some reasons for that. For example, they are having some shortcomings in terms of establishing public relations or community building skills in the sense that they seem to be unemotional, very certain, loutish, even though they are professional. They use special tools in order to screen documents and luggage of the passengers and they do physical search of passengers. In rush hours, TSA officers just focus on documents and passengers' items and belongings.

Security officers may intercept prohibited items at security checkpoints and this may create tensions among passengers. For example, it was observed that an arriving Turkish citizen to the airport had to pay a \$300 fine since he carried 1 Libra of fresh plum in his luggage. All aforementioned observations to the security practices are, to a considerable extent, compatible with the findings of interviews which imply that both the American and Turkish citizens have similar concerns with regard to the airport security practices though they retain distinctive characteristic features.

3. Policy Implications

Having considered the findings obtained from interviews and observations, some suggestions can be addressed in accordance with the given research questions. Since most of concerns concentrate on security measures at the departure area, same policy implications can be put forward. For example, while arguing the flaws of the TSA, Poole (2009) claims that every passenger poses the same risk of being a threat to airport security and long lines result from strict checkpoints and screening process, which happen in a limited airport area (Poole, 2009: 260-261).

The manpower reductions, combined with difficulties in hiring additional screeners, have resulted in several major airports being understaffed and in reports of long security lines, flight delays, and passengers missing flights (Blalock and et al., 2007: 734). Particularly, during rush hours, security personnel may feel under pressure to be hurry to reduce the crowd. However, there have been some concerns that the job couldn't be accomplished in time. Speeding up the processes depends on cooperation between significant numbers of people. Even today, most passengers arriving at airports completely understand that they will be subject to screening processes (Sweet, 2004: 166, 174).

There have been some complaints that the TSA are having difficulties in keeping up with big crowds, behaving in courtesy, applying security procedures, processing on time, and caring personal property. Complaints are mostly about the TSA personnel's level of courtesy to passengers and the duration of processing passengers taking more time than expected (McCartney, 2007). In order to overcome this kind of complaints and deal with these problems, there is a need to develop and enhance public relation activities through learning conversation and communication skills and joining in-service training programs.

It is also important for security officers to recognize special needs of vulnerable groups such as passengers having language barriers (Sweet, 2004: 173). Since announcements and warning signs are in English, communicating of the information to the non-English speaking passengers is becoming problematic. Therefore, apart from body language, basic foreign language education should be provided for the TSA officers. This will help overcome misunderstandings resulting from implementation of security procedures.

4. Conclusion

As understood from the findings of the research which are obtained from interviews and observations, the problem is about complaints, concerns and uneasiness of both groups as regard to airport security practices and this kind of shortcomings concentrate on officers of Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and private security officers. As one of reasons; behaviors of TSA or private security (PS) officers or their style of working and handling cases can be misunderstood. This issue can be handled through in-service training and public relation activities, which will be ensured to the TSA and PS officers. To do so and raise awareness, media coverage is also an important issue, which needs to be considered.

The density of the airport is another variable, which is observed. Due to rush hours, security officers may only focus on dealing with papers and other stuffs, including, searching and screening of belongings. The number of officers does not change whether in rush hours or regular hours. In this sense, management and working conditions of TSA and PS officers should be considered in order to provide better security services. Under certain conditions, likewise dealing with less passengers, attitudes or behaviors of security

officers may change in the sense that they don't just focus on searches or reducing the crowd of passengers, and they may also bear in mind of social interactions with passengers. They may use conversation skills, emotional reactions or less body language while there are fewer passengers. Therefore, there is a need to offer new approaches with regard to the human resource management of TSA and PS officers.

Security measures are not the only measures or solutions to identify the problem. Apart from security measures, tools, and means, public support is also important in terms of solving problems. Furthermore, building communication with passengers can impact on reducing polarization, marginalization or even radicalization. All interviews and observations indicate that the frequency of security measures is being criticized though these measures are understood or internalized by both groups (American and Turkish citizens).

Having considered the discussions of the study it can be argued that airline passengers differ in their perceptions on airports and airport practices due to the diverse cultural, social and/or educational backgrounds. However, airline passengers, to some extent, have some common feelings on airport security practices despite of the fact that they are different in nature such as culturally, socially and/or educationally.

In the present study, cultural or behavioral differences or similarities of airline passengers with regard to the airport practices are examined. All field researches demonstrate that the provisional hypothesis of the study has been proven by the gathered and analyzed data. In line with the given hypothesis, there is a correlation between American and Turkish citizens' behavioral reactions towards the airport security practices, especially concentrating on security screening process. Stated provisional hypothesis have been confirmed in accordance with the findings acquired from interviews and observations.

To conclude, one can argue that security perceptions of airline passengers have dramatically shifted since 9/11 terrorist attacks which have had devastating impacts over our daily lives particularly concerning to airport security practices. It is also obvious from the interview findings that the concept of security is considered to be a commonly spoken concept by all nationals that one hasn't witnessed before. Thus, the speech act pertaining to the security as analyzed within the present research would shape and enhance national, regional and even global security policy aspects which are merely designed for securing the national identity against foreigners, immigrants and refugees.

REFERENCES

- BLALOCK, Garrick, KADIYALI Vrinda and DANIEL H. Simon (2007). "The Impact of Post-9/11 Airport Security Measures on the Demand for Air Travel", *Journal of Law and Economics*, vol. 50, pp. 731-755.
- CORBIN, Juliet and STRAUSS, Anselm L. (2008). *Basics of Qualitative Research Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, 3rd Edition, Sage Publications.
- GENDEL, L. Howard (1987). *Qualitative Research Newark Airport User Attitudes: Directional Signage*.
- GLASER, Barney G. and STRAUSS, Anselm L. (1967). *Generating Theory and The Constant Comparative Method of Qualitative Analysis, The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, Chicago: Aldine.
- HOLBROOK, Emily (2010). "Airport Security: Privacy vs. Safety", *Risk Management*, 57, No: 2, pp. 12-14.
- MCCARTNEY, Scott (2007). "The Middle Seat: Complaints Against Airport Security Surge", *The Wall Street Journal*.
- NYIRI, Zsolt (2007). "Muslims in Berlin, London, and Paris: Bridges and Gaps in Public Opinion", *Gallup World Poll*.
- POOLE, Robert. W. (2009). "Airport Security Time for a New Model", in (eds.) SEIDENSTAT, Paul and SPLANE, Francis, X., *Protecting Airline Passengers in the Age of Terrorism*.
- RYAN, W. Gery and BERNARD, H. Russel (2000). "Data Management and Analysis Methods", in (eds.) Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2nd Edition, Sage Publications.
- SWEET, M. Kathleen (2004). *Aviation and Airport Security, Terrorism and Safety Concerns*: New Jersey.
- SEIDENSTAT, Paul (2009). "Protecting Airline Passengers: An Overview", in (eds.) SEIDENSTAT, Paul and SPLANE, Francis, X., *Protecting Airline Passengers in the Age of Terrorism*.
- TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH BOARD (2003). *Airport Research Needs Cooperative Solutions*: Washington.
- TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH BOARD (2007). *A Synthesis of Airport Practices, General Aviation Safety and Security Practices, Airport Cooperative Research Program*: Washington.
- TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH BOARD (2009). *Airport Passenger-Related Processing Rates Guide Book, Airport Cooperative Research Program*: Washington.