

# **In Turkey, women are feeling the worst aftershocks of the earthquake disaster - this disparity may lead to dwindling trust in government**

Saturday 1 April 2023, by [BAGWELL Stephen](#), [KREUTZER Willow](#) (Date first published: 30 March 2023).

**When government responses to a natural disaster do not address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women and girls, women tend to lose trust in the institutions.**

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When natural disasters strike, [women and girls tend to experience](#) disproportionate [challenges and heightened risks](#).

They are much more likely than men to experience [sexual violence](#) and [health problems](#). Women and girls also [face greater professional](#) and educational setbacks.

So it should come as no surprise that challenges continue to mount for women in Turkey and Syria following a [7.8 magnitude earthquake](#) on Feb. 6, 2023, that [killed more than 50,000 people](#) and [displaced 3 million people](#).

Earthquake survivors in Turkey also include [356,000 pregnant women](#) who, at the end of February 2023, urgently needed medical care, according to the United Nations. Some women have had to give birth to their [children in collapsed buildings](#).

Women are also more likely than men to be [left out of government policies](#) and programs responding to the disaster, often forcing them to migrate away from disaster zones. Death rates are higher during disasters for women even in some cases of [rich countries](#), due in part to such factors as women not wanting to leave the home during an emergency.

We are [scholars of human rights](#) and [political science](#). It is important to keep in mind that as natural disasters take a disproportionate toll on women, these crises also tend to shift women's political attitudes. While the disproportionate impact of disasters on women has been well documented, a lesser-known imbalance is how such crises tend to shift political attitudes.

Research shows that [women's trust in government declines](#) after a natural disaster, while men's political trust increases - in both poor and rich countries.

In [countries like Turkey with multiple disasters](#) a year, studies show that [women's trust in](#)

[government](#) will likely decline over time. This includes their trust in government institutions, as well as their trust in those with power in government - political leaders, parties and parliament. When women do not see those in power as meeting their needs and trying to support and protect them, their trust wanes.

*Photo: A woman carries her baby along a flooded residential area after heavy rains in Chennai, India, in December 2021. Arun Sankar/AFP via Getty Images*

## **Why women are more vulnerable post-disaster**

There are a few main reasons why women tend to feel the worst effects of a natural disaster.

First, societal expectations placed on women as the main caretakers in the household in both more and less economically developed countries are [exacerbated following a disaster](#).

Women are often tasked with collecting and carrying food and water to their families, for example, as well as tending to their [children and other family members](#). Women's responsibilities as the primary caretaker often place them in dangerous settings after disasters, either traveling through rugged terrain to reach water and food or staying in unstable housing structures [to cook and help their families](#).

Second, governments tend not to prioritize women's particular health needs. Pregnant or nursing mothers may be unable to receive routine care, leading to an increase in risk of death or disease to [both mother and baby](#).

While there are some international relief groups and projects that [focus on providing menstrual health care](#) to women following a disaster, this kind of [response is not common](#).

Third, women are more likely to be living in poverty, with [fewer economic alternatives than men](#) following a disaster. They are slower to return to work, [if they can at all](#), and are often denied government relief under the assumption that their [husbands will support them](#). This further decreases women's overall safety.

## **A series of earthquakes in Turkey**

Following the February 2023 earthquake, advocacy groups and relief response agencies voiced concern that women and girls in Turkey were left in hastily constructed refugee camps that did not have [access to safe bathrooms, clean water](#) or [period products](#).

Women and especially young girls living in temporary shelters are at a higher risk of [gender-based violence](#) and early child marriage, according to humanitarian agencies like Plan International. This is especially true if women [do not have designated areas](#) separate from men - as is the case in Turkey.

The Turkish advocacy group [The Women's Coalition](#) has asked the government to remove preexisting obstacles to supporting women, like ending [bans on popular social media sites](#).

This is because social media can play a [vital role](#) in coordinating relief and rescue efforts, and these [bans are actively keeping](#) women and LGBTQ organizations from connecting with people and providing assistance in earthquake-affected areas.

Women and girls may also be wary of asking male relief workers for help with their [reproductive needs](#). Hesitancy to ask for help from male workers extends beyond reproductive needs.

Women's rights activists in Turkey have said that women who were caught naked or without headscarves under the rubble were less likely to ask for help or [rescue out of fear](#).

*Photo: A woman in Yaylakonak village in Turkey - destroyed by the February 2023 earthquake - bathes a child outside. Ugur Yildirim/dia images via Getty Images*

## Understanding the political ramifications

[People's trust](#) in the government in Turkey is generally low, and data demonstrates that Turkey could be doing significantly more with its available resources to guarantee respect for [human rights](#) overall. For example, recent reports by human rights groups indicate that Turkish authorities [do not always enforce laws](#) preventing domestic violence, [which is common](#) in the country.

Since people's trust in politics and government is shaped by lived experiences, we think that solutions to prevent a decline in trust logically involve minimizing the experiences that cause the decline. While governments can't control natural disasters, they can ensure that their responses are more inclusive of women's needs. <http://theconversation.com/republishing-guidelines> —>

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### **P.S.**

• The Conversation. Publié: 30 mars 2023, 19:29 CEST:

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Willow Kreutzer's research focuses on gender, conflict, and international institutions. Some of her current research projects include examining how states' commitments to the UN Treaty CEDAW influence women's rights over time; how rebel commitments to human rights affect violence against civilians, particularly violence against women; how natural disasters influence women's political trust in their government in post-disaster countries; and how different peace agreements after civil war can influence the duration of peace as well as create a sense of healing for citizens. Overall, she is curious about how gender influences and is influenced by institutions and the outcomes created by these institutions for women. She hopes to add to the current field by engaging on a deeper level with feminist literature and institutional design to help create solutions to issues for women.

Stephen Bagwell study the economic causes and consequences of political violence and human rights. My work has appears in the Journal of Global Security Studies, Social Sciences, and the Journal of Human Rights. I also work alongside the Human Rights Measurement Initiative (HRMI), a global network of practitioners, academics, and advocates dedicated towards providing quantitative

data on human rights performance for all rights found in international legal principles.

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