Araştırma Makalesi ● Research Article

Migration Policies of Political Parties in Türkiye in the Dilemma of "Let Them Stay-Let Them Return"

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Abstract: In 2011, with the outbreak of events in Syria, millions of Syrians suddenly flocked to Türkiye. In the early years of migration, it could be said that the general perception of society was that migrants would return to their country after the war ended. However, over time, the perception that migrants would stay permanently has strengthened within society. With the economic crisis deepening further due to the pandemic, public resentment towards migrants began to emerge. One of the main issues of the 2023 general elections was immigration. During the elections, the idea of sending Syrians back voluntarily or by force was discussed. The aim of this study is to examine the migration-focused attitudes, discourses, and policies of political parties regarding the General Elections of May 14, 2023, in Türkiye, along with their official documents and texts concerning migration policies. We subjected the approaches of seven political parties -AKP, MHP, CHP, İYİP, ZP, HDP, and TİP- to analyze their current policies regarding immigration in their election campaigns. The discourse of political parties regarding migrants was subjected to critical discourse analysis, consisting of three main discourses: "Let them return", "Let them return voluntarily", and "Let them stay."

Keywords: 2023 General Elections, Political Parties, Migration, Refugee Politics, Human Rights.

"Kalsınlar-Gitsinler" İkileminde Türkiye'de Siyasi Partilerin Göç Politikaları

Öz: 2011'de Suriye'de olayların patlak vermesiyle bir anda milyonlarca Suriyeli Türkiye'ye akın etmiştir. Göçün ilk yıllarında, toplumun genel algısının savaş bittikten sonra göçmenlerin ülkelerine döneceği yönünde olduğu söylenebilir. Ancak zaman geçtikçe toplumda göçmenlerin kalıcı olacağı algısı güçlenmiştir. Pandemiyle daha da derinleşen ekonomik krizle birlikte halkta göçmenlere karşı tepki oluşmaya başlamıştır. 2023 genel seçimlerinin ana konularından biri göçmenlerdi. Seçimler sürecinde Suriyelilerin gönüllü olarak veya zorla gönderilmesi tartışıldı. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Türkiye'deki 14 Mayıs 2023 Genel Seçimleri'ne dair siyasi partilerin göç söylemlerini ve politikalarını; siyasi partilerin resmi belgeleri ve göç politikalarına dair metinleri üzerinden incelemektir. AKP, MHP, CHP, İYİ Parti, Zafer Partisi, HDP ve TİP olmak üzere yedi siyasi partinin seçim sürecindeki göç politikaları incelenecektir. Siyasi partilerin göçmenlere ilişkin söylemleri, "gitsinler", "gönüllü gitsinler" ve "kalsınlar" olmak üzere üç ana söylemle birlikte eleştirel bir söylem analiziyle ele alınacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: 2023 Genel Seçimleri, Siyasi Partiler, Göç, Mülteci Politikaları, İnsan Hakları.

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Introduction

In this study, we aimed to examine the migration discourse of political parties in Türkiye during the 2023 General Elections. Although the study focuses on immigration policies in general, since Syrian immigrants constitute the main mass of immigrants in Türkiye, this study focuses on the discourses of political parties on immigrants, especially Syrian immigrants. While drawing attention to the ruptures and continuities in the discourses of political parties, the most recent discourses on migrants are discussed. The political parties whose migration discourses are examined are the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP), the Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP), the Victory Party (*Zafer Partisi*, ZP), the Peoples' Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, HDP), the Workers' Party of Türkiye (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*, TİP), the general discourse of the *Millet İttifakı* (Nation Alliance), but especially the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP) and the Good Party (*İYİ Parti*, İYİP).

Objective

The unique value of the study is that the political party discourses of the seven parties in the election process are analyzed in terms of migration policy and there is no study in this context in the literature yet. In the context of the reviewed literature, studies on whether the migration and refugee discourses of political parties and anti-immigrant sentiments are effective in party preferences (Balta, Elçi & Sert, 2022) and the anti-immigrant policies of far-right parties in Europe are predominant (Akarçay, 2021; Aras & Sağıroğlu, 2018; Çolakoğlu, 2019). Due to the fact that our field of research is dynamic even at the time of finalizing this text, we set the end point of the study as April 11, 2023, the date of publication of the AKP election manifesto, paying attention to the completion of the election declarations and texts of all parties and alliances. Thus, we tried to specifically address the periods when the discourses of political parties on migration accelerated and intensified, addressing their causes. Therefore, we tried to turn the discourses of the seven political parties on migration, refugees, asylum seekers and Syrians into findings through critical discourse analysis, including the impact of their discourses on migration, refugees, asylum seekers and Syrians on the grassroots, the situations in which the grassroots transformed the discourses of the parties, and the documentary analysis of the documents of the parties during the election period, and to conceptualize them from a political and sociological perspective with existing theories. We know concepts such as asylum seeker, refugee and immigrant in the Foreigners and International Protection Law No. 6458 are defined, but the fact that these concepts are intertwined in this text and are used interchangeably from time to time is manifested in the documents and discourses of the political parties we examined. Therefore, in this text, the group we would like to draw attention to as the subject that political parties are trying to point out is "Syrians." Syrian immigrants were given the status of refugee under temporary protection because Türkiye has granted refugee status to individuals coming from Europe and having the conditions specified in the 1951 Convention. Temporary protection is defined at the Law on Foreigners and International Protection as follows: "Temporary protection may be provided for foreigners who have been forced to leave their country, cannot return to the country that they have left, and have arrived at or crossed the borders of Türkiye in a mass influx situation seeking immediate and temporary protection." Therefore, in this study, instead of asylum seeker, immigrant, refugee or refugee under temporary protection; we will use the expression "Syrian", which used by the political parties.

Method

Research question of the study are: (1) how do political parties in Türkiye address the "Syrians" issue in the 2023 general elections?; and (2) What discourses and in what context do these political parties produce especially about "Syrians" in the 2023 general elections? In this qualitative paradigm-based study, the election manifestos, media discourses and migration policies of the parties mentioned

in the introduction will be analyzed through van Dijk's (1998) and Ruth Wodak's (2001) critical discourse analysis (CDA) of all the texts. CDA focuses on the social problem and works with texts and conversations to reveal the discursive sources of social phenomena such as power, hegemony, inequality, and prejudice; it investigates how these discursive resources are maintained and reproduced in specific social, political, and historical contexts (van Dijk 1998). In other words, critical discourse analysis; attempts to reveal the structural relationships between power, control, domination, discrimination, and inequality; it critically problematizes the emergence, construction and legitimization of social inequality within the discourse of power and sovereignty (Wodak, 2001). CDA, which started with Fairclough in the 1980s, was developed by van Dijk and Wodak. Especially Wodak has conducted many studies on racism against immigrants. Wodak analyzed the election discourses of the FPÖ Party and the articles of the Austrian proposal in the 1999 election in Austria. In this direction, Wodak reveals the dominant ideology lying in the hidden-implicit messages within the discourse. She is a critical discourse analyst who analyzes the marginalizing and excluding elements in discourses by opening Teun van Dijk's socio-cognitive theory, and in this sense, proposes to consider the events in a historical context and thus identifies the discourses with the facts in their background.

Although there are several different approaches in Wodak's CDA, we use the discourse-historical approach (DHA) in this research. In summary, DHA tries to develop a theory of discourse by establishing relationships between genres, discourses, and texts. Although the discourse-historical approach is found within critical theories, it considers the content primarily historical. The discourse-historical approach opens up and connects with van Dijk's (1998) socio-cognitive theory, viewing "discourse" as structured forms of knowledge and memory of social practices, and "text" as embodied verbal discourses or written documents. In other words, he perceives spoken and written language as a form of social practice. Each macro-heading allows many subheadings. It includes "unemployment, market, unions, social welfare, global market, ups and downs politics" (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001: 94-96). As we discussed, the examples of the discourse-historical approach in critical discourse analysis, which provides the methodological basis of this research, are the discourses that form the main theme of the 2023 elections.

The political parties that are the subject of the analysis were selected among the parties with representation in the parliament. Thus, so-called 7 parties, which have representation in the parliament, constituted our research sample between 01/04/2023 and 28/05/2023. The migration policies of the *Millet İttifakı*, which signed the Joint Policies Memorandum of Understanding, are analyzed under a single heading, with special note being made to CHP and İYİP. Therefore, the migration policies of the Democracy and Development Party (*Demokrasi ve Atılım Partisi*, DEVAP), Future Party (*Gelecek Partisi*, GP), Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi*, SP) and Democratic Party (*Demokrat Parti*, DP), which are represented in the Parliament, are not specifically included, and their views are evaluated under the umbrella of the migration policies of the *Millet İttifakı*.

Considering the existing literature, the study was conducted from primary sources, that is, the documents separated according to their qualifications were analyzed using document analysis (Kıral, 2020), which is frequently seen in social sciences. Document analysis, also referred to as documentary scanning, entails acquiring data through the examination of pre-existing records and documents. It encompasses the tasks of discovering, reading, noting, and appraising sources with a particular objective (Karasar, 2005). Put differently, document analysis comprises a sequence of procedures involved in scrutinizing and assessing both printed and electronic materials, including those accessible through computers and the internet. (Bowen, 2009). Primary sources include the 2023 election declarations of political parties, official party statements, reports, books, workshop and conference final declarations, and the discourses of party leaders. The concepts of "migration, immigrant, refugee, asylum seeker, Syrian" mentioned in the aforementioned documents were underlined and document analysis was conducted. As a result of the document analysis, it was determined that political parties act on two basic discourses: "Let them stay" and "Let them return." Out of these two discourses, the main discourse of "let them return" created a sub-discourse and was divided into "let them return voluntarily" and "let them return." Therefore, these three discourses were taken into account in the analysis of the study in

order to identify the main themes and it was followed with which concepts the parties reflected their discourses in their reports and media discourse. Under the three discourses encountered, three main themes were identified based on the concepts that were most frequently encountered in the texts and media, and the discourses of political parties were analyzed under these main themes. These three themes are "Ansar-Muhajir", "survival" and "human rights." The trace of the concepts that emerged in the document analysis has continued in the media discourses and criticisms against them and has become the majority of election activities. In this direction, the course of the study continued with the emergence and definition of political parties, party typologies, criticisms against political parties and the functions of political parties in general, then the relationship between political parties and migration was discussed and finally, the migration discourses of political parties were analyzed through critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis is not just a method of analysis; it covers a broad field that brings together critical analysis, critical theory, and critical practices (van Dijk, 1998; Fairclough, 2005). Thus, critical discourse analysis views language as a social practice and focuses on the relations between language and power.

Findings

Political Parties and Migration: "Let Them Stay or Return"

We can define political parties as the main subject of democracies. In general, the concept of the political party as a permanent organization that has come together to obtain or share political power (Kapani, 2007: 176). While Sartori argues that political parties ensure the relationship between the state and citizens, Schattschneider (1942: 1) described political parties as the lifeblood of modern democracies and argued that modern democracies cannot be understood without them. Political parties are organized in line with a certain ideology and when they come to power through elections, they seek to transform the state and society in line with that ideology. In this context, political parties reflect economic and cultural divisions in society. Therefore, a certain ideology, organization, continuity, and stability constitute the basic elements of a political party.

Political parties have a number of functions in democracies. The most important of these is representation. In representative democracies, political parties represent the demands, interests, conflicts, and objections of society in the political arena since the masses cannot govern themselves directly. However, instead of directly incorporating citizens' demands into the mechanism of governance, a political party evaluates and shapes them, adapts them to its own worldview, ideology, and program, and represents them (Özdemir, 2021: 20). Since political parties shape politics with the authority they receive from the people, they give legitimacy to the regime. They also have the function of ensuring political participation in society, as they are the most basic means of public participation in politics. Finally, they have been the training grounds for political elites such as the selection of central and local executive cadres and the determination of leaders (Durgun, 2022: 338-341).

Political parties, which represent the demands, conflicts, interests, and objections of the people in politics, have also started to focus on the migrant issue and produce policies on this issue. In other words, in the last two years, the migrant issue has become one of the main issues in politics. However, far-right parties were effective in mainstream political parties putting the immigration issue on their agenda. The far-right has been on the rise since the immigration to Europe after 1980, mostly from Muslim countries (Davies & Lynch, 2002: 162). Mainstream political parties, fearful of the popular support of the far-right parties' discourse, copied the anti-immigrant discourse, reproduced and presented it in certain forms. As a result, anti-immigrant discourse has become the norm in mostly Western countries and Turkish politics with its "contagion effect" (Schwörer, 2021: 24).

Political parties aim to persuade voters and motivate them to vote through political campaigns (Brady et al., 2006: 10). In general, there are two ways in political campaigns: negative and positive campaigns. It can be said that political parties use a "negative campaign" on immigration, which is one

of their key issues. Some studies show that mainstream parties were "the securitization of the migration" issue in the elections in some European countries (Žúborová & Borárosová, 2017; Práznovská, 2019; Greco & Polli, 2020; Leruth, 2019). Using the immigrant crisis, political parties have tried to create a "climate of fear" through immigrants: "In France, the immigration debate often equates the immigrant to terrorists. However, in Italy, it expresses concern about both the alleged violent attitude of immigrants towards women and the consequences for children (immigrant and resident alike) due to the possible onset of integration problems" (Greco & Polli, 2020: 131). Considering that negative campaigns are more successful than positive ones (Stockwell, 2006: 84), we can say that anti-immigrant parties that follow negative campaigns are effective. The rise of far-right parties and the increase in anti-immigrant sentiment are causing democracy to backslide (*V-Dem Institute,* 2023: 50). Thus, instead of multi-cultural democracy, there is a move towards homogeneous and majoritarian democracy that excludes immigrants and diversity.

With the outbreak of events in Syria in 2011, millions of Syrians suddenly flocked to Türkiye. In the first years of the migration, the general perception of the society was that the migrants would return to their country after the end of the war. The discourse that migrants are temporary and that they will return after the war is over is one of the main discourses of the AKP government towards migrants, as will be discussed later. However, as time passed, the perception that migrants would be permanently strengthened in society. With the economic crisis deepened by the pandemic, the public started to react against migrants. Migrants mostly live in cities, not in camps or rural areas, and we can say that migrants in Türkiye are 'urban refugees.' According to the data of the Presidency of Migration Management, the population of Syrians under temporary protection is roughly 3.2 million and the irregular migration population is 247 thousand. Although official figures, the number of people in Türkiye who say they are Syrians in their neighborhood is around 80 percent (Erdoğan, 2023: 101). Gorodzeisky and Semyonov emphasize that "misperceptions of the size of the immigrant population play a more important role than factual reality in shaping public views and attitudes toward immigration" (Gorodzeisky & Semyonov, 2001: 16). Therefore, people in Türkiye today live in contact with migrants, which increases their concerns. *The Syrians Barometer 2021* (Erdoğan, 2023: 135), which can be said to have the most comprehensive and up-to-date field data on Syrians, states that 70 percent of Turkish society is concerned about Syrians: In the study, it is stated that the Turkish people are concerned that immigrants, especially Syrians, will harm the economy, cause deterioration in public services, and have a negative impact on the social-cultural structure of Türkiye. As a result of all these concerns, 89.8 percent of CHP voters, 87.7 percent of HDP voters, 97.9 percent of İYİP voters, 84.5 percent of AKP voters, 62.3 percent of MHP voters and 81.7 percent of the Turkish public in total want the refugees to be sent back (*T24,* 2022).

Norberto Bobbio argues that right and left ideologies can be distinguished through the concept of "equality", according to which the left focuses on "the common things that unite people rather than the things that separate them", whereas the right argues that "what separates one person from another is politically more important than what unites them" (Bobbio, 1996: 60-71). According to this right-left distinction, left-wing parties are expected to include migrants, while right-wing parties are expected to segregate them. However, we can say that political parties in Türkiye generally address the issue of migration from two frameworks: 'human rights' and 'public concerns.' While HDP and TİP address the issue from the framework of human rights, AKP, MHP, CHP, İYİP and ZP address the issue through people's concerns (Balta et al., 2022; Elçi, 2022: 15-16). Particularly, ZP has played a leading role in getting other parties to address the migration issue through people's concerns. Political parties that address the issue of migration through concerns want migrants to leave voluntarily or forcibly, and in this context, they are positioned at an anti-immigrant point. Cas Mudde (2010: 1) argues that anti-immigrant sentiment is based on the assumption that immigrants pose a threat in cultural, security, economic and political areas. As a matter of fact, seeing immigrants as a threat in the economic and cultural spheres in the above-mentioned people forms the basis for this idea. Moreover, while anti-immigrant sentiment increases the emphasis on the native culture, that is, nationalism, it also marginalizes immigrants; it increases nationalism. As a matter of fact, we can say that nationalism is on

the rise in Türkiye; 48 percent of the Turkish public recently defined themselves as 'nationalist' (Kentel & Ete, 2022: 4). In this context, we can say that political parties that put forward inclusive policies on immigrants emphasize 'pluralism', while those who want immigrants to leave emphasize 'homogeneity.' In the next section, the migration discourse and policies of political parties will be discussed.

Discussion

The AKP's Discourse on Migration: "We are the Hosts; Syrians are the Refugees!"

The AKP, which has been in power since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, has been the main actor in determining policies on Syrian migrants. After the Syrian civil war in 2011, the AKP established the Presidency of Migration Management in 2014 as a result of massive Syrian out-migration and cooperated with many international organizations, particularly the United Nations. The government saw the conflict in Syria, which is normally a foreign policy issue, as a 'domestic issue' (*Birgün,* 08.08.2011) and took an active role in this conflict. Within the framework of the idea of neo-Ottomanism, the government evaluated the Syrian issue within the framework of the Ottoman legacy territories; in 2012, Erdoğan even said, "We will pray at the Umayyad Mosque." Moreover, especially by getting involved in the Syrian issue, he claimed that "Türkiye has become a country that can stand on its own feet and have a say in the region" (Çakır-Demirhan, 2020: 178), or in other words, that it has transformed from an "agenda-determining country" to an "agenda-setting country." The AKP has 'embraced' Syrian migrants with an open-door policy to our 'brothers and sisters in religion' fleeing 'Assad's oppression' with the claim of historical responsibility (Çakır-Demirhan, 2020: 178). Therefore, we can say that the AKP's general policy towards Syrian migrants in the first process approached within the framework of human rights with religious references, as emphasized in the expression 'Ansar-Muhajir.' However, it was constantly emphasized with the concept of 'guest' that the migrants were temporary, and it was said that they would go back once the war in Syria ended.

However, the fact that the migrants did not return over the years strengthened the public's perception that the migrants would become permanent, and with the deepening of the economic crisis, the reaction against them increased. In this framework, reactions against the AKP's Syria policy have started to increase among the public in general. As a matter of fact, in *the Syrians Barometer 2021*, 70 percent of the Turkish public responded to the question "How do you find the state's policies regarding Syrians?" as "very wrong" or "wrong" (Erdoğan, 2023: 183). In addition, the government's discourse that "Syrians are our religious brothers and sisters" did not find a response among the public; in the same study, when the Turkish society was asked "How culturally similar do you think you are to Syrians?", a high rate of 81 percent answered "not similar at all" or "not similar" (Erdoğan, 2023: 111). Therefore, it can be said that the AKP's policies regarding Syrians are generally not embraced and criticized by the public. In fact, as negative attitudes toward immigrants increase, voting for the AK Party decreases (Elçi, 2022: 64). Türkiye has an advantage when compared to the European case because Syrian refugees are mostly coreligionists with the majority Muslim population of Türkiye in contrast to the Christian majority European cases that receive Muslim immigrants (Çarkoğlu and Elçi, 2021: 203). And contrary to Western nations, Türkiye demonstrated hospitality towards its religious brothers (Yanaşmayan et al., 2019: 40). Although Muslim identity initially enabled positive intergroup relationship between Turkish and Syrian communities, Syrians began to be seen as a "burden" especially with the economic crisis. Therefore, we can state that the effect of the discourse of religious brotherhood has decreased, and Syrians have begun to be marginalized. After opposition political parties have made anti-immigrant sentiment a political issue, AKP has changed its policies on this issue especially in recent years.

As Erdoğan's words in the 2018 General Elections, "We will not keep 3.5 million here forever" (*Cumhuriyet,* 08.02.2018), we can state that the AKP abandoned its human rights policies with strong

religious references and started to consider the anti-immigrant sentiment in the public. In this context, the open-door policy applied to Syrians was abandoned, and then a dilution policy was implemented to ensure that the rate of immigrants in neighborhoods and districts did not exceed 20 percent, and some neighborhoods were closed to immigrant registration. In addition, within the framework of security policies, military operations were carried out in northern Syria with the aim of creating safe zones and settling migrants in these zones. It can be stated that the AKP government's start to create safe zones in northern Syria through military operations was a breaking point in terms of its policies regarding Syrian migrants (Çakır-Demirhan, 2020: 114). On October 28, 2022, at the 'Century of Türkiye' meeting, it was stated that safe zones were created in the north of Syria through military operations such as Euphrates Shield, Olive Branch, Claw, Peace Spring and that 530 thousand migrants returned to Syria (Erdoğan, 28.10.2022). Again, in this text, it was stated that 30 removal centers with a capacity of 18 thousand people were established to combat 'irregular migration.' In the 2023 Election Declaration titled 'Türkiye's Century' announced on April 11, 2023, it was stated that the priority in migration management was "preventing new waves of migration and ensuring the voluntary and safe return of Syrians under temporary protection to their homeland in accordance with international law" (*AKP,* 11.04.2023: 433). Minister of Interior Süleyman Soylu also stated that they are carrying out a housing project in Syria for the return of 1 million Syrians. Finally, diplomatic relations with Syria were resumed and Erdoğan stated that these diplomatic contacts would increase the number of returning Syrians. Indeed, the 2023 Election Declaration promised to intensify "contacts with all parties to stop the bloodshed in Syria" (*AKP,* 11.04.2023: 423). Therefore, we can say that the AKP has recently changed its policies in response to 'public concerns' and has advocated for the 'voluntary, safe and dignified return' of Syrians; has introduced 'preventive migration' policies to prevent new migration; and has focused on diplomatic negotiations with the Syrian government to increase returns. Thus, the AKP placed less emphasis on the "Muslim brotherhood" and began to talk about the "voluntarily return of Syrians."

The MHP's Discourse on Migration: "Migrants Should Return for Türkiye's Security!"

Under the leadership of Devlet Bahçeli, the MHP criticized the government's migration policies in general from 2011, when the Syrian crisis began, to early 2018, when the *Cumhur İttifakı* (People's Alliance) was established. In particular, the MHP criticized the policies of Ahmet Davutoğlu during his tenure as Prime Minister, arguing that the government created a 'survival' problem in the country with its immigration policies (Çakır-Demirhan, 2020: 129). In this process, it addressed the issue in terms of internal and external security and argued that migrants should leave. However, since 2018, when the *Cumhur İttifakı* was established, it can be said that the MHP supported the government's migration policies, and therefore, the MHP's alliance with the AKP was the main reason for the policy change on migration.

The Commission on Migration Beyond Borders (*MHP,* 2018), which was chaired by İzzet Ulvi Yönter, Deputy Chairman in charge of R&D, prepared a report in 2018. In this study, which was later turned into a book, İlyas Topsakal, Veysel Bozkurt, Hayati Beşerli, Kutlu Kağan Sümer, Akif Karaca, Fahrettin Oğuz Tor wrote a chapter each. The report discussed the economic burden of immigrants on the country and especially the security problem that the country was facing due to immigrants. In this context, MHP had a negative approach towards immigrants and claimed that Syrians threatened the security of the country and were an economic burden. Accordingly, it is emphasized that the 'Ansar-Muhajir' discourse no longer resonates with the public due to reasons such as the extraordinary increase in the number of migrants, the longer-than-expected duration of the Syrian crisis and the competition in the labor market, and even the tension between locals and migrants has increased. It is pointed out that if no measures are taken and the tension between migrants and locals continues, conflicts may arise. As a solution, the report emphasized that migrants should be sent back to their countries (*MHP,* 2018: 165).

In addition to the report, Bahçeli has framed the MHP's migration discourse with his statements. Bahçeli emphasized 'security' especially on migration and supported the government's military

operations such as Euphrates Shield, Olive Branch and Peace Spring in the context of border security. In addition, he has also approved of the resettlement of 500,000 Syrians in the safe zones created after these operations. Similar to the AKP discourse, Bahçeli emphasized that Syrians are 'guests' and pointed out that they are 'temporary.' He also stated that Turkishness "will not be a stranger in its own land and a pariah in its own homeland, neither today nor in the future" (*Anadolu Ajansı,* 11.04.2022), in other words, he drew attention to the difficulties that Turks have suffered in the face of immigrants due to the policies pursued and said that they will not be in the minority demographically. He also stated that the refugee problem is no longer a problem that Türkiye can bear and tolerate for many years and that Syrians should return to their country in accordance with 'international law' and in a 'safe' manner. Bahçeli objected to Syrians traveling back and forth to their country for the holidays or as tourists; he said that there was no need for refugees who went to Syria for the holidays to 'come back again' (*Anadolu Ajansı,* 11.04.2022); thus, he emphasized that Syrians should no longer cross the border freely and come back. The MHP leadership sees the migrant issue as Türkiye's "soft underbelly." He criticized the opposition for "exploiting" migration policies and argued that migration policies should be handled with a "non-partisan" approach (*Gazete Duvar,* 10.05.2022). He also considered the government's initiation of diplomatic relations with Syria noteworthy and said that this would accelerate the return of migrants to their countries. Therefore, especially with its participation in the *Cumhur İttifakı*, the MHP has changed its policy in a populist and pragmatic way and pursued a discourse supporting the AKP government's migration policies.

The Millet İttifakı's (Nation Alliance) Discourse on Migration: "We Will Send Syrians Back Within Two Years!"

The *Millet İttifakı* was established by CHP, İYİP, SP and DP in cooperation against the *Cumhur İttifakı* in the 2018 General Elections. Afterwards, the formation called the Six Table, which included the DEVAP and the GP, which held its first meeting on February 12, 2022, started to define itself as the *Millet İttifakı* on January 20, 2023. Therefore, today, the *Millet İttifakı* consists of CHP, İYİP, SP, DP, DEVAP and GP. On January 30, 2023, the *Millet İttifakı* published the Common Policies Consensus Text, which it claims to be the main backbone of the election manifesto and the government program to be implemented after the elections (*Millet İttifakı,* 01.01.2023: 11). In the text, which consists of 9 main headings such as law, public administration, anti-corruption, economy, education, social policy, social policy, foreign policy, defense, security and migration and proposes more than 2300 policies, it is stated that the country is experiencing one of the 'deepest administrative and economic crises in the history of the republic' and it is claimed that the main reason for this situation is the Presidential Government System. In this context, in order to overcome the 'survival' crisis the state is in, it is proposed to switch to a 'strengthened parliamentary system' and it is emphasized that the rule of law will be restored and a pluralist and participatory administration will be adopted (*Millet İttifakı,* 01.01.2023: 11). One of the important topics of this text is the policies towards migrants.

The *Millet İttifakı* criticizes the AKP for its immigration policies, stating that the country has turned into an inn on the road as a result of the wrong policies of the government. We can say that the *Millet İttifakı* has determined two general policies on "migration and asylum seekers": stopping new migration and returning the migrants in the country. Firstly, as emphasized in the phrase 'the border is honor', borders will be made more secure and new migrations will be stopped with tools such as 'electro-optical towers, lighting systems, night vision cameras, unmanned aerial vehicles, integrated security systems' (*Millet İttifakı,* 01.01.2023: 237). Secondly, as stated by the *Millet İttifakı*'s joint presidential candidate Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, within two years of coming to power, they will "reunite Syrian migrants with their homeland in accordance with domestic and international law" (*VoaTürkçe,* 18.01.2023) The text also stated that diplomatic relations with the Damascus administration would be initiated in order to speed up returns, and that 'readmission agreements' would be made with the countries of origin for irregular migrants, especially those arriving via Iran. Thus, the country will be "cleansed" of migrants

and Türkiye will get rid of its position as a "buffer country" (*Millet İttifakı,* 01.01.2023: 237). The Return Agreement signed with the European Union in 2016 was also criticized in this text, and it was promised that this agreement would be reviewed when they came to power. The *Millet İttifakı* also stated that it would put an end to the AKP government's practice of "granting citizenship of the Republic of Türkiye in exchange for the purchase of real estate, government debt securities, investment funds or the opening of foreign currency deposits or individual pension accounts" (*Millet İttifakı,* 01.01.2023: 238). The issue of granting citizenship to Syrian migrants was frequently discussed in the public opinion; the opposition made statements such as "AKP's votes are falling, they will be made citizens and made to vote" (Çakır-Demirhan, 2020: 123). The public was also negative towards the citizenship of Syrians; more than 80 percent of the society stated that Syrians "should not be given any political rights" or "none of them should be naturalized" (Erdoğan, 2023: 175-176). According to data from the beginning of 2023, the number of Syrian migrants who received citizenship is around 230 thousand. The citizenship issue relatively faded after the government launched military operations against Syria and established a safe zone there (Çakır-Demirhan, 2020: 179), as the government started to advocate for the 'voluntary' departure of Syrians. In general, we can say that the *Millet İttifakı* strongly advocated for the removal of Syrian migrants, taking into account the 'concerns of the people.'

Although the components of the *Millet İttifakı* have agreed on migration policies in the Common Policies Memorandum, they have not advocated the same policies since the beginning of the Syrian crisis. In 2016, the CHP's Migration and Migrant Problems Investigation Commission published the report "Between Borders: From Human Tragedy to Test of Humanity", a report was published in 2016. The report emphasized that both migrants and locals were victimized as a result of the AKP's 'wrong', 'aggressive' and 'warmongering' policies and stated that the CHP was against "policies that produce problems, not asylum seekers." (*Indyturk,* 19.05.2020). The noteworthy point in the report is that it should be accepted that 'refugees are permanent' and that it is time to create integration policies (*CHP,* 2016: 143). CHP Deputy Chairman Veli Ağbaba, who is the chairman of the commission that prepared the report, stated that the report was written "with the aim of finding modern solutions to the problems of refugees on the basis of human rights and universal values" and claimed that the backbone of the text is integration policies that are addressed with a "social democratic vision" (*Cumhuriyet* 20.06.2016). The report underlined that the integration of asylum seekers and refugees is of key importance for a pluralistic, democratic and free society and stated that the Ministry of Migration and Integration should be established for the integration of migrants (*CHP,* 2016: 143). It was also stated that the "geographical reservation" Türkiye had placed on the Geneva Convention of 1951 should be removed so that migrants from the East, especially Syrians, could also be granted 'refugee' status (*CHP,* 2016: 144). Therefore, we can say that the CHP approached the issue of migrants on the basis of 'human rights' in this process. However, in the text published on the CHP website on August 1, 2022, a change of policy on migrants was put forward and it was stated that they would send Syrians within 2 years 'without racism.' In this text, which is more or less the same as the Common Policies Consensus Text, it is stated that they will sit down with the Syrian administration, rebuild Syrian cities, ensure the safety of those returning and support investment in Syria (*CHP,* 01.08.2022). Therefore, we can say that especially from 2022 onwards, the CHP changed its policy in favor of the departure of migrants. CHP's transition from pro-immigrant to anti-immigrant due to anti-immigrant sentiment among the public. In other words, CHP has become anti-immigrant due to the "contagion effect." Thus, CHP abandoned its social democratic identity on the issue of immigrants and adopted the discourse of the far-right.

The İYİP, founded in 2017 under the leadership of Meral Akşener, has been relatively consistent on the issue of migration and has addressed the issue within the framework of 'national security.' In 2022, the party's National Security Policies Directorate outlined the party's migration policy in a report titled National Migration Doctrine, noting that asylum-seekers and fugitives create internal and external security gaps in the country. In this report, which was in line with the Joint Policies Memorandum, it was emphasized that it was Erdoğan who turned Türkiye into a 'trench country' with at least 8 million asylum seekers and fugitives, and Erdoğan's immigration policies were described as 'a destructive attempt against the fundamental qualities of the republic' (*İYİ Parti,* 2022a: 4). It was argued that

migrants have led the country to economic destruction, disrupted the demographic balance of the country and created a security gap in the country. In this framework, the party based its migration policies on 4 basic principles: (i) border security, (ii) return, (iii) preventive migration and (iv) international consensus (*İYİ Parti,* 2022b: 3-5). The party stated that when it comes to power, it will realize the "decisive and planned return of migrants" and that by implementing the National Migration Doctrine, it will 'reunite all Syrian asylum seekers with their homeland' on September 1, 2026. İYİP prepared action plans such as "measures to be taken on the first day", "measures to be taken within the first month", "measures to be taken within the first year' in order to save the country from becoming an 'immigrant warehouse" (*İYİ Parti,* 2022b: 5-7). Arguing that the people have fallen into a difficult situation due to immigrants, the İYİP has advocated the decisive removal of immigrants in line with the 'concerns of the people.' Therefore, İYİP had a negative approach towards immigrants; claimed that they threatened the security of the country. As a matter of fact, İYİP increased its votes due to its immigration discourse; some voters who were angry with AKP's immigration policy started to prefer İYİP (Elçi, 2022: 59).

The ZP's Discourse on Migration: "Refugees and Illegal Immigrants are a Security Issue!"

While Ümit Özdağ was a member of the İYİP, after a while he accused the İYİP of being a "soft opposition" and acting together with "those who do not oppose the covert invasion of Türkiye with Syrian refugees" (*BBC,* 04.03.2021) and resigned and founded the ZP on August 26, 2021. ZP can be defined as the first example of the far-right parties established in Europe after 1980 in Türkiye. Far-right parties, which basically make politics on the basis of anti-immigrant sentiments, have risen in the Western world, fed by the September 11 terrorist attacks, the economic crisis in 2008 and the refugee influx crisis in 2015 (Mudde, 2019: 28). The far-right has become a political concept that is in power in some countries, in opposition in others, but has generally become mainstream. We can say that the ZP intends to be the representative of the far-right in Türkiye. This party has positioned itself mainly on the basis of anti-immigrant and anti-foreigner sentiment and has stated that their main promise is to send all immigrants back to their countries within 365 days if they come to power.

The ZP argues that Türkiye faces four main crises: (i) a crisis of the state, (ii) a crisis of national unity, (iii) an economic crisis and (iv) a crisis of asylum seekers and fugitives (*ZP,* 2021b: 25-32). It claims that the first three crises can be dealt with in some way, but all crises will be aggravated by the change in the demographic structure of the country due to asylum seekers and fugitives, and therefore the main crisis of the country is asylum seekers and fugitives. According to this party, "imperialists", through "strategic migration engineering", want to "drag Türkiye into internal conflict over asylum seekers, and while Türkiye is struggling with internal conflict, to tear southern and eastern Anatolia away from Türkiye" (*ZP,* 2021a: 6). In order to fight against the migrants, there is a need to unite around them in the spirit of the *Kuvai Milliye*, since the other parties are the 'palace regime' and the 'yellow opposition' that want to maintain the 'established order.' In order to stop migration to Türkiye and to send migrants out of Türkiye, they claim that they will implement the Fortress Anatolia project when they come to power. This project aims to send migrants back to their homeland in accordance with 'domestic and international law' and prevent new migration to Türkiye.

Özdağ sees immigrants as the source of almost all problems in Türkiye, especially economic, political, and social ones. He argues that with the departure of immigrants, the country will rise like a horse freed from its chains (*ZP,* 2021a: 15). Moreover, ZP has the most negative approach towards immigrants among the political parties; it approached the immigrant issue within the framework of "the survival of the country." The Party coded immigrants as "others" trying to destroy "us."

However, we can say that the ZP played a role in the politicization of the migrant issue and paved the way for the government and the opposition to address this issue. Since ZP feeds on the anti-immigrant sentiment in society, it tries to increase the anti-immigrant sentiment in the public with its discourse. It also tries to attract other parties to anti-immigrant sentiment. As a matter of fact, with the

influence of Özdağ's outbursts, we can state that the government and the opposition published texts and made discourses on the issue of migration. Therefore, ZP, as the most ardent advocate of anti-immigrant sentiment in Türkiye, has played a role in the politicization of this issue, especially in the last two years.

The HDP's Discourse on Migration: "Treating Migrants with Dignity"

HDP is one of the parties that draws attention to the migrant issue by organizing conferences and workshops from time to time. A commission on migrants and refugees has also been established within the party. Through its discussions on migrants, the party aims to move the refugee issue "from regional constraints and borders to a national platform and to explain that the issue is Türkiye's issue"; in this context, the party proposes the establishment of a Refugee Council that includes civil society organizations (*HDP,* 2012: 69). As a matter of fact, the party defines itself as a "party of common struggle" where the oppressed, workers, laborers, immigrants, refugees, women and LGBT individuals meet (*HDP,* 2012: 69). The main theme of the 2023 Election Declaration[1] is "We are here! We will change together", addressing different segments of society (*YSP,* 2023).

The HDP has generally approached the migrant issue within the framework of "human rights" and has drawn attention to the need to produce policies for migrants to achieve a life "worthy of human dignity" (*HDP,* 22.06.2021). In the 2023 Election Declaration, they said that asylum seekers should first be granted 'refugee' status by removing the 'geographical annotation' in the Geneva Convention. The party stated that it would be based on international conventions, especially the European Convention on Human Rights, and would act in accordance with the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary. They promised to establish a Ministry of Migration and Refugees instead of the Directorate of Migration Management in order to discuss refugee issues (*YSP,* 2023: 74).

HDP focused on the problems faced by migrants living in Türkiye; however, instead of evaluating migrants as a homogeneous group such as 'Syrians' or 'immigrants', it drew attention to different religious groups, different ethnicities, women, children, LGBT individuals among migrants and addressed the problems of each segment separately (*HDP,* 22.06.2021). They emphasized that the definitions of 'migration' and 'refugee' are the product of the capitalist system and that migrants are 'exploited' by being seen as 'cheap labor' and brought a class approach to the issue of migrants. In this framework, they stated that they would regulate the work permits of migrants and secure their right to organize in trade unions. They also aimed to overcome the 'language barrier', which is one of the main problems of immigrants, by including the promises to initiate multilingualism in the public sector and to provide education to immigrants in their mother tongue in the 2023 Election Declaration (*YSP,* 2023: 74). They also stated that they would put an end to 'inhumane practices' and 'lawlessness' against migrants in Removal Centers. HDP believes that refugees are permanent in Türkiye and therefore emphasizes the need to implement long-term, permanent integration policies.

HDP has also criticized the "discriminatory" language that has emerged in public opinion against immigrants in recent years and stated that they will fight against "racism" against immigrants and that they are here to "defend the right to a humane life for all groups living in the country and to secure equal and coexistence" (*YSP,* 2023: 61). The party uses the slogan "Together we will change!" to lay the foundations of the Democratic Republic at the beginning of the second century and to defend the rights of everyone living in this land against racism and xenophobia.

HDP opposed the government's military operations in Iraq and Syria and advocated a "peaceful foreign policy" (*YSP,* 2023: 11). They stated that they would fight for the peoples living in Syria to freely determine their own future. The party also argued that the government is organizing operations in the Kurdish regions in northern Syria under the name of establishing a "safe zone"; in fact, it is

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[1] HDP decided to enter the 2023 General Elections under the Green and Left Future Party (Yeşil ve Sol Gelecek Partisi, YSP), in case it is closed by the Constitutional Court, and declared the election declaration under the name of this party.

targeting the Kurdish population there and wants to change the demographic structure by "ethnic cleansing" (Çakır-Demirhan, 2020: 149). Therefore, HDP was one of the parties that approaches immigrants positively and criticized the migrant discourse of the government and the opposition, approached the issue within the framework of human rights, and drew attention to the problems and integration of migrants.

The TİP's Discourse on Migration: "We Will Free Migrants from Being Slaves to Capital!"

Besides HDP, TİP is the other party that looks at the migrant issue from a 'human rights' perspective. As a matter of fact, TİP and HDP are acting together in the 2023 General Elections under the Labor and Freedom Alliance (*Emek ve Özgürlük İttifakı*). The TİP, which defines itself as a 'socialist party', has approached the immigration issue mainly from a class perspective, addressing the issue from the oppressor-oppressed equation.

The TİP addresses the 'immigrant and refugee policy' in six articles. The first article states that Türkiye will get out of the vortex of war in the Middle East (TİP, 09.05.2022). The AKP's involvement in the Syrian war in line with its 'Neo-Ottomanist dreams' is cited as one of the important reasons for migration in Türkiye. When they came to power, they said that Türkiye would no longer be a part of the war in Syria and that they would stand against imperialist interventions that lead to conflicts in the Middle East. They also state that they will contribute to the establishment of peace and stability in Syria by initiating diplomatic talks with the Damascus administration and that they will then pursue a policy line that supports migrants who want to return 'voluntarily' from Türkiye.

As the second item, it was stated that border crossings would not be left to the whim of the AKP (TİP, 09.05.2022). The inconsistent and non-transparent practices of the government in border crossings in line with its own ideological preferences and political calculations were criticized; it was stated that a policy would be pursued to prevent criminals and warrior groups from crossing the border. In accordance with the principles of the United Nations, those who fear for their lives and face discrimination will be allowed to cross the border unconditionally. However, the TİP pointed out that it was unrealistic for Türkiye to pursue an 'open door policy' while the EU and the US closed their borders to migrants in violation of international law, and that it was imperative to develop a border and migration policy that defends refugee rights and takes into account public interest and security.

The third article of the TİP's migrant and asylum-seeker policies is its declaration that the Readmission Agreement signed with the EU in 2016 will be canceled (TİP, 09.05.2022). It interprets this agreement as a means of keeping the migrant mobility, which is a result of the US and EU's own policies, out of its own territory 'with the advantage of its imperialist position.' Fourthly, it is promised that migrants will be removed from being "slaves of capital" (TİP, 09.05.2022). Accordingly, the strategy of seeing migrants as 'cheap labor' and of pitting the native worker against the migrant worker was opposed; the foundations of a working life with 'decent wages' would be laid by providing migrants with job security and self-organization channels.

In the fifth article, the TİP believes that in order to have equal social, political and civil rights, everyone, regardless of ethnicity, origin, or religious belief, who lives off their labor must "unite in struggle" (TİP, 09.05.2022). It sees immigrants as part of this struggle and argues that the integration program for immigrants who want to stay in the country can emerge from this holistic struggle. It is believed that the tensions between the locals and immigrants will end in line with the struggle to be waged together and the rights to be gained. The last article of the TİP's 'immigrant and refugee policy' is "We will establish a Türkiye of brotherhood, not enmity!" (TİP, 09.05.2022). It was stated that the people were worried about the sudden influx of millions of migrants as a result of the AKP's wrong policies, but that the bosses, not the migrants, were to blame: "What we need to stand against is the political power that sows seeds of hatred between peoples, feeds on chaos, and the bosses who exploit our labor and steal our future regardless of religion, language and race." It also considers the

government's and some opposition parties' targeting of migrants and saying 'we will send them away' as a deception and an 'electoral investment'; it argues that migrants are not the cause of the crisis in the country, but the result. Therefore, the TİP approached the migrant issue from a human rights and class perspective and drew attention to the oppression of migrants.

Conclusion

One of the main issues of the 2023 general elections was immigrants. During the elections, sending Syrians voluntarily or by force was discussed. Political parties saw immigrants as "scapegoat" or "pharmakos", and immigrants were chosen as sacrifices to purify society from their sins (Karaman, 2022). ZP plays a significant role in mainstream political parties adopting anti-immigrant rhetoric. ZP's anti-immigrant discourse was adopted by other parties due to the contagion effect. ZP thinks that the use of anti-immigrant rhetoric by other parties will increase its own vote base.

Opposition parties' discourses (except HDP and TİP) indicate that they have characterized the significant influx of refugees as an existential threat to Türkiye's economy, culture, and security (Saylan & Aknur, 2023: 275). It has been claimed that by "sacrifice" or sending the immigrants, peace and abundance will come to the country. Especially in the second round of the Presidential elections, which was a kind of referendum on whether to send Syrians or not. Therefore, mainstream political parties, except for TİP and HDP, have adopted the discourse of the far-right and ran negative campaign about immigrants. Thus, a political discourse that emphasized homogeneity and nativism and excluded diversity and multiculturalism began to dominate Turkish politics.

Today, we can say that mainstream political parties in Türkiye have turned the anti-immigrant sentiment in the public into political discourse in a populist and pragmatic way. Although political parties are the representatives of the people in politics, they do not directly turn their demands and requests into a discourse; instead, they evaluate them, shape them in line with their own ideology and then turn them into political discourse. In addition to the public influencing political parties, political parties can also influence, change, and transform the public. In other words, this process of influence can be top-down, bottom-up and bilateral. In this context, the fact that TİP and HDP approach the issue within the framework of 'human rights' in line with their own ideologies and programs, even though the public's opposition to immigrants is around 80 percent, can be read as an attempt to transform their own base. Therefore, political parties trying to understand the issue based on 'human rights' and producing solutions instead of simply embracing anti-immigrant sentiment can contribute to the development of a pluralist political culture in Türkiye.

Recommendations

The fact that the majority of the society is against immigrants reveals that public concerns about immigrants need to be addressed. After the arrival of millions of migrants in a very short period, problems have arisen in areas such as economy, education, and health. Moreover, as a case study that can be the subject of another study, we can say that tensions between migrants and locals increased after the Kahramanmaraş earthquake on February 6, 2023. The cities affected by the earthquake are on the border with Syria and are densely populated by immigrants. In this context, the earthquake added to the existing problems between immigrants and locals. In addition, especially after the earthquake, ZP's hate speech and targeting of refugees led to attack attempts and even deaths against refugees (Sert et al., 2023). Therefore, instead of discussing the issue in the form of 'let them return' - 'let them stay' - 'let them return voluntarily', political parties coming together and putting the complicated issue of immigration on the table with realistic elements can contribute to the solution of the problem and social peace.

Disclosure Statements

1. Declaration of the contribution of the researchers: Both authors contributed equally to every   stage of the research.

2. Conflict of interest: No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

3. Ethics Report: There is no need for an ethics report for this study.

4. Research Model: In this qualitative paradigm-based research article, the election manifestos, media discourses and migration policies of the parties are analyzed critical discourse analysis (CDA). This study was conducted using primary sources and CDA method was used to analyze the migration discourse of political parties.

Beyan ve Açıklamalar

1. Araştırmacıların katkı oranı beyanı: Her iki yazar da araştırmanın her aşamasına eşit derecede katkıda bulunmuştur.

2. Çıkar çatışması: Yazarlar tarafından herhangi bir çıkar çatışması olasılığı bildirilmemiştir.

3. Etik Raporu: Bu çalışma için etik raporuna gerek yoktur.

4. Araştırmanın Modeli: Nitel paradigmaya dayalı bu araştırma makalesinde, partilerin seçim beyannameleri, medya söylemleri ve göç politikaları eleştirel söylem analizi (KDS) yöntemiyle analiz edilmektedir. Bu çalışma birincil kaynaklar üzerinden yürütülmüş olup Siyasi partilerin göç söylemini analiz için CDA yöntemi kullanılmıştır

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