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Immigration Debates in Recent Turkish Politics and the Victory Party as an Example of an Anti-Immigrant Niche Party

Yakın Dönem Türk Siyasetinde Göç Tartışmaları ve Göçmen Karşıtı Niş Parti Örneği Olarak Zafer Partisi



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Abstract

Between 1923 and 1990, Türkiye primarily accepted migrants of Turkic descent and cultural background. Since 1990, however, Türkiye has become both a destination and transit country for asylum seekers and irregular migrants from the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. The asylum-driven migration from Syria has become a major topic of political debate in Turkish general elections since 2015. Founded in 2021, the Victory Party (Zafer Partisi) became the first political party in Türkiye to explicitly foreground anti-immigration policies and had a relatively tangible impact on the outcome of the 2023 general elections through the alliances it formed. This study analyzes the Victory Party's anti-immigration policy proposals within the broader context of recent Turkish political history. It argues that the party's anti-immigration discourse is structured around four main pillars: (1) the social position of the actor employing securitizing rhetoric; (2) the place of the perceived threat in historical memory; (3) prevailing economic conditions; and (4) the transformation of the electoral system. The analysis of the Victory Party's policies is based on thematic evaluations of party documents, including its program, parliamentary questions, election manifesto, and internal reports. The study contributes to the understanding of how niche parties articulate security-centered narratives and mobilize social discontent around immigration in contemporary Turkish politics.

Öz

Türkiye, 1923-1990 yılları arasında ağırlıklı olarak Türk soy ve kültüründen göçmenleri kabul etmiştir. Türkiye 1990 yılından bu yana Orta Doğu, Asya ve Afrika'dan gelen sığınmacılar ve düzensiz göçmenler için hedef ve transit ülke olmuştur. Suriye kökenli sığınma motivasyonlu göç hareketi ise 2015'ten bu yana Türkiye'deki genel seçimlerde önemli bir tartışma konusudur. Göç karşıtı politikalarıyla 2021 yılında kurulan ve 2023 genel seçimlerinde geliştirdiği ittifaklarla sonuç üzerinde nispi bir etki sahibi olan Zafer Partisi, ülkede doğrudan göç karşıtı politikalarla öne çıkan ilk partidir. Bu çalışma, Zafer Partisi'nin göç karşıtı politika önerilerini, yakın dönem Türkiye tarihinden hareketle analiz etmektedir. Çalışmada, partinin göç karşıtı politikalarının dört temel üzerine kurulu olduğu savunulmaktadır: "Güvenikleştirici söylemleri kullanan aktörün toplumsal konumu", "tehdidin tarihsel bellekteki yeri", "ekonomik koşullar" ve "değişen seçim sistemi". Zafer Partisi'nin politikalarının analizi; parti programı, soru önergeleri, seçim beyannamesi ve parti raporları gibi belge ve veri kaynaklarının tematik analizine dayanmaktadır.

Keywords

Migration · Single-Issue Party · Securitization · Syrians in Türkiye · Victory Party

Anahtar Kelimeler

Göç · Tek Sorun Partisi · Güvenikleştirme · Türkiye'deki Suriyeliler · Zafer Partisi



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Yazar Notu Bu çalışmanın ilk yazarı Dr. Ahmet Ceylan, ikinci yazarı ise İsa Uslu'dur. İlk yazar Dr. Ahmet Ceylan çalışmaya %50 oranında katkıda bulunurken, diğer yazarların her birinin katkı oranı %25'tir.

Introduction

Unlike the examples in Europe, Türkiye has not been a country where the issue of immigration is at the center of politics for many years. The most important reason for this situation was that Türkiye generally accepted immigrants from Turkish descent and culture until the 1990s. While the issue of immigration was discussed for the first time with different approaches on the political agenda in the 1990s, the issue of migration became one of the main discussion items of Turkish politics with the immigration movement of Syrian origin after 2011. The issue of immigration, which gained strength among the most important discussion topics of the country's politics after 2015, has had a special place in the programs and election manifestos of political parties. Subject-specific studies focused on the politicization of immigration¹ and the immigration policies of political parties.² In this research, the policies of the Victory Party, which is claimed to be the first immigration-oriented political party in Türkiye, will be discussed by making use of the relevant literature. The party's success in the first general elections was remarkable. The party dominated the election process with its anti-immigration policies and influenced the immigration policies of both centre-right and centre-left parties. In this respect, Victory Party is among the most unique political movements of recent Turkish political life. The main purpose of the research is to analyze the immigration-oriented policies of the Victory Party within the framework of the securitization theory and to reveal its original position in the political scene.

Methodology

The extreme/radical right has been described in detail in other studies.³ In this article, we focus only on the sample of anti-immigration niche parties in Türkiye. What we have analyzed here may provide examples for other countries. However, since we do not make any claims about other characteristics of far-right parties (anti-LGBT, Euroscepticism, etc.) in the case of the Victory Party, we avoid a comprehensive international analysis. However, in order to better understand the place of the Victory Party in European and Turkish politics, we also include a brief assessment of anti-immigrant far-right parties in Europe.

In this research, we examined the program of the Victory Party, the general election manifesto, some complementary statements of the party's leadership, and parliamentary questions submitted by the party's

¹Ahmet İçduygu, "Türkiye'deki Suriyeli Sığınmacılar: Siyasallaşan Bir Sürecin Analizi", *Toplum ve Bilim*, V. 140, 2017, pp. 27-41; Ahmet Ceylan, 1990 Sonrası Türkiye'ye Yönelik Göçlerin Değişen Yapısının Siyasal Partilerin Göç Politikalarına Etkileri, Doktora Tezi, Ege Üniversitesi, 2022, pp. 24-30.

²Yeşim Özer, *Türkiye ve Fransa Örnekleriyle Uluslararası Göç ve Yabancı Düşmanlığı*, Derin Yayınları, İstanbul, 2015, pp. 44-61; Tuğba Yolcu, "Türkiye'deki Muhalefet Partilerinin Göç Sorununa Yaklaşımlarına Yönelik İçerik Analizi", *Gazi Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, V. 5, I. 14, 2018, pp. 678-695; Ahmet Ceylan and İsa Uslu, "7 Haziran 2015 Genel Seçimlerinde Partilerin Uluslararası Göç Yaklaşımları Üzerine Karşılaştırmalı İnceleme", *Sosyal Bilimler Araştırma Dergisi*, Vol. 8, I. 1, 2019, pp. 97-114; Zeynep Yanaşmayan, Aysen Üstübcü, Zeynep Kaşlı, "Under the Shadow of Civilizationist Populist Discourses: Political Debates on Refugees in Turkey", *New Diversities*, Vol. 21, I. 2, 2019, pp. 37-51; Soner Akin, "Türkiye'deki Siyasal Partilerin Uluslararası Göç Dair Bakış Açılı ve Avrupa Parlamentosu Siyasal Parti Grupları ile Karşılaştırmalı Bir Analiz", *Yerel, Ulusal ve Küresel Boyutlarıyla Göç ve Mülteci Sorunu*, eds. Yakup Bulut, Soner Akin, Çizgi Kitapevi, Konya, 2020, pp. 307-330; Ahmet Ceylan, 1990 Sonrası Türkiye'ye Yönelik Göçlerin Değişen Yapısının Siyasal Partilerin Göç Politikalarına Etkileri; Deniz Taner, İnci Aksu Kargın, "Twitter'da Göçmen-Karşıtı Söylemlerin Yükselişi: Zafer Partisi Örneği", *Göç Dergisi*, Vol. 10, I. 2, 2023, pp. 215-231.

³Peter van der Veer, "Pim Fortuyn, Theo van Gogh, and the politics of tolerance in the Netherlands", *Public Culture*, V. 18, I. 1, 2006, pp. 111-124; Han Entzinger, "Changing the Rules While the Game Is on: From Multiculturalism to Assimilation in the Netherlands", *Migration, Citizenship, Ethnos: Incorporation Regimes in Germany, Western Europe and North America*, eds. Y. Michal Bodeman, Gökçe Yurdakul, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2006, pp. 121-144; Sarah L. de Lange, David Art, "Fortuyn versus Wilders: An Agency-Based Approach to Radical Right Party Building", *West European Politics*, V. 34, I. 6, 2011, pp. 1229-1249.



representatives. Between 23.11.2021 and 12.05.2022, there were 45 questions in the 12 questions signed by Özdağ.⁴ We focused on 45 questions in 12 parliamentary questions submitted by the party's parliamentary representatives to the parliament after the party's establishment (2021). We accessed the parliamentary questions from the parliamentary archives. We use parliamentary questions because they are written documents that are in line with the party's general policies. It is also important that these parliamentary questions were submitted to the parliament, which is the legislative body. In addition to this dataset, we also analyzed some reports that reflect the political spectrum in the country and are often used in academic studies. For example, we chose the Konda research firm's reports on the Victory Party because of their national impact and popularity.

We analyzed parliamentary questions using a common code structure and employed thematic analysis.⁵ The data were coded using Atlas.ti software (version 8.4.23.0). The study first adopted a deductive approach to coding. Codes were selected with reference to policy areas (admission, migration control, protection, integration, legal status). These codes were created based on pre-analysis migration literature, current debates and the party's discourse in the national media. In addition, the content of the parliamentary questions had an impact on the extension of the coding process. In this context, the questions on migration were treated thematically and the titles under which the issue of migration was securitized were made meaningful. These findings allowed us to identify recurring themes such as security, concerns about sociological change, the economic cost of Syrians, and irregular migrants entering the country.

Table 1

Summary of Questions on Migration and Related Topics

Main Topic	Subcategory	Number of Questions
Questions related to non-immigration issues	-	20
Migration of companies originating from Russia and Ukraine	Economic benefits	3
Syrians and irregular migration	Security	10
	Birth rates and the risk of sociological change	6
	Economic costs of Syrians in Türkiye	5
	The ways of entry for irregular migration into the country	1
Total		45

The extent to which the results of this analysis can be generalized is another important point of discussion. The findings also support our analysis of party politics in the context of securitization theory. The emphasis on the risk of sociological change and the economic costs of migrants, which party officials often advocate, also plays an important role in these findings. As we have analyzed in this article, the Victory Party played an influential role in the 2023 parliamentary elections. However, the party failed to gain parliamentary representation in the new legislature. Therefore, it does not seem possible to generalize the findings of this thematic analysis to the new legislature in terms of parliamentary activity. On the other hand, the findings of this analysis continued to be repeated in the discourses of the party leadership and in the party's local

⁴TBMM, Yazılı Soru Önergeleri, <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/denetim/yazili-soru-onergeleri>.

⁵Virginia Braun, Victoria Clarke, *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*, Sage, London, 2022, pp. 3-117; Susanne Frieze, Jacks Soratto, Denise Pires, "Carrying Out a Computer-Aided Thematic Content Analysis with ATLAS.ti", MMG Working Paper 18-02, Göttingen, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, 2018, pp. 7-29.

election promises.⁶ This makes it possible to follow the continuity in the party's policy and points to the importance of the results of the previous parliamentary activities.

1. Immigration policies in the context of securitization theory

The concept of security, which was discussed with the axis of national security during the Cold War period, started to be discussed in the context of individual and social security, apart from the general approach, with the 1973 OPEC Oil Crisis.⁷ Problem areas such as gender-related pressures, poverty, climate and environmental problems, health, migration and population movements that lagged behind military issues during the Cold War took place at the center of security studies with the weakening of the Cold War process.⁸ "People, States and Fear", written by Barry Buzan in 1983, was the first important study to show the break in traditional security approaches. While Buzan emphasizes the "security in five sectors" approach in this study, these sectors are; military, social, political, economic and environmental.⁹ With the concept of security being discussed in a wider range, rather than being handled only with a military focus, immigration has become one of the topics discussed in the context of national security and human security.¹⁰

One of the prominent terms in dealing with the issue of immigration in the context of security, has been the concept of "securitization" developed by the Copenhagen School. The school, pioneered by Buzan, de Wilde, and Wæever, argued that the problems do not pose a security threat by themselves, but that the problems are securitized with the speech acts developed by the actors. According to this approach, actors emphasize that in the process of securitization of a subject, a reference object such as the state, land, society are under an existential and fundamental threat with the speech acts. Actors claim that it is imperative to take priority and extraordinary measures against this threat and aim to increase the legitimacy of these measures they want to develop. The fact that the speech acts of the actors are thought convincing by the audience, strengthens the securitization of the process. External and social conditions are other factors that affect the securitization of the subject with speech acts. The social position of the actor using securitizing speech acts and the place of the threat in historical memory are the factors that come to the fore in the context of external and social conditions.¹¹ The qualifications of political party representatives on immigration movements and immigrants are important in securitization of migration processes. Expressions such as "invasion", "influx", "occupation" are the most common speech acts in securitization of immigration movements.¹²

Papastergiadis discussed this discourse, which gained strength against immigrants after the 9/11 attack, in the context of the threat's place in historical memory. According to Papastergiadis, the invasion discourse developed for immigrants is related to the perception of Islam in the continent, specific to Europe, and the

⁶"Ümit Özdağ'dan yerel seçim hamlesi! Vaatleri madde madde sıraladı", *TGRT HABER*, 2023, <https://www.tgrthaber.com/politika/umit-ozdagdan-yerel-secim-hamlesi-vaatleri-madde-madde-siraladi-2895464?s=1>.

⁷Bahar Rumelili, Sibel Karadağ, "Göç ve Güvenlik: Eleştirel Yaklaşımlar", *Toplum ve Bilim*, V. 140, 2017, p. 8; Ole Wæever, "Toplumsal Güvenliğin Değişen Gündemi", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, V. 5, I. 18, 2008, pp. 151-178.

⁸Alexander Betts, *Zorunlu Göç ve Küresel Politika*, Hece Yayınları, Ankara, 2017, p. 106; Sinem Akgül Açıkmeşe, "Güvenlik, Güvenlik Çalışmaları ve Güvenleştirme", *Küresel Siyasete Giriş Uluslararası İlişkilerde Kavramlar, Teoriler, Süreçler*, ed. Evren Balta, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 2018, p. 242; Barry Buzan, Lene Hansen, *The Evolution of International Security Studies*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2009, p. 187.

⁹Barry Buzan, *People, State and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations*. Steve Smith, "The Contested Concept of Security", *Critical Security Studies and World Politics*, ed. Ken Booth, Lynne Rienner, London, 2004, pp. 33-34.

¹⁰Alexander Betts, *Zorunlu Göç...*, pp. 105-110.

¹¹Bahar Rumelili, Sibel Karadağ, "Göç ve Güvenlik: Eleştirel Yaklaşımlar", p. 75; Ole Wæever, "Toplumsal Güvenliğin Değişen Gündemi," pp. 151-178; Keith Krause, "Theorizing security, state formation and the 'Third World' in the post-Cold War world", *Review of International Studies*, V. 24, I. 1, 1998, pp. 125-136.

¹²Roxanne Lynn Doty, "Immigration and the Politics of Security", p. 73.

“invasion complex” was fed from a historical background.¹³ Although Islamophobia, which can be summarized as prejudice, fear, and hostility towards Islam, is a recent concept; its roots can be traced back to the positioning of Islam as the “other” for the Christian world. However, recent political and social developments have supported this view. 1979 Iranian Revolution, the negative repercussions of the death fatwa issued by Iran to the British citizen of Indian origin, Salman Rushdie, in the international public opinion, traces of developments such as terrorist acts and political assassinations have found a place in the securitization discourse. This situation has been an example that shows the relationship between historical memory, and current political and social developments with speech acts aimed at securitizing immigrations developed by political actors.¹⁴

As we have pointed out, empirical studies of securitisation theory have grown in number and importance in recent years. Most of these studies have focused on areas that were not prioritised during the Cold War, such as migration, environment and health. More recently, new securitisation issues such as energy have also come onto the agenda, influenced by international developments.¹⁵ Despite the strengths and recent popularity of securitisation theory, there are also some criticisms. One of the biggest criticisms of the theory is that it focuses too much on discourse and ignores complex power relations and the social foundations of these power relations because it is limited to the discourse level.¹⁶ According to McDonald¹⁷, the theory ignores important elements such as visual representations and other communication processes. Another criticism is the lack of audience analysis and insufficient consideration of contextual elements.¹⁸

The studies generally provide empirical data to better understand and develop securitisation theory. The practical approach shows that issues related to insecurity encompass other areas, and that issues such as migration and terrorism are only addressed from a security perspective. This leads to the neglect of other important issues such as social inequality or global injustice.¹⁹

The limitations of the Copenhagen School's securitisation theory have been the subject of extensive research. Emmers²⁰ contends that the distinction between securitisation and politicisation is indistinct, resulting in a narrowing of perspective. Dannreuther²¹ contends that the theory disregards the speech act, failing to consider its role within socio-political contexts and overlooking the impact of these contexts on securitisation processes. Furthermore, some scholars have criticised the Copenhagen School for ignoring the interactive nature of the securitisation process and the important role of the audience.²² Another significant debate within the theory concerns the manner in which the intersubjective persuasion process unfolds within diverse political regimes.²³

The anti-immigration policies of the political actor (the Victory Party and its leader) that we are dealing with in this research are conceptually quite suitable to be handled within the framework of securitisation

¹³Nikos Papastergiadis, “The Invasion Complex: The Abject Other and Spaces of Violence”, *Geografiska Annaler*, Vol. 88, I. 4, 2006, p. 429.

¹⁴Fatma Yılmaz, *Avrupa’da Irkçılık ve Yabancı Düşmanlığı*, Uluslararası Stratejik Araştırmalar Kurumu (USAK) Yayınları, İstanbul, 2008, pp. 86-87; Chris Allen, *Islamophobia*, Ashgate, Farnham, 2010, p. 83.

¹⁵Thierry Balzacq, Sarah Léonard, Jan Ruzicka, “‘Securitization’ revisited: theory and cases”, *International Relations*, V. 30, I. 4, 2016, p. 507.

¹⁶Bahar Rumelili, Sibel Karadağ, “Göç ve Güvenlik: Eleştirel Yaklaşımlar”, pp. 69-92.

¹⁷Matt McDonald, “Securitization and the Construction of Security”, *European Journal of International Relations*, V. 14, I. 4, 2008, p. 568.

¹⁸Başar Baysal, “20 Years of Securitization: Strengths, Limitations and A New Dual Framework”, *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, V. 17, I. 67, 2020, pp. 3-20.

¹⁹Thierry Balzacq, Sarah Léonard, Jan Ruzicka, “‘Securitization’ revisited: theory and cases”, p. 505.

²⁰Ralf Emmers, “Securitization”, *Contemporary Security Studies*, ed. Alan Collins, Oxford University Press, New York, 2013, pp. 173-188.

²¹Roland Dannreuther, *International Security: The Contemporary Agenda*, John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken, N.J., 2013.

²²Katerina Antoniou, “Beyond the speech act: contact, desecuritization, and peacebuilding in Cyprus”, *Securitization Revisited: Contemporary Applications and Insights*, ed. Michael J. Butler, Routledge, 2020, p. 168.

²³Holger Stritzel, “Towards a Theory of Securitization: Copenhagen and Beyond”, *European Journal of International Relations*, V. 13, I. 3, 2007, p. 372.

theory. In addition to this situation, the theory attributes importance to the social position of the actor. The social position of the actor in the issue we are analysing supports his anti-immigration discourses. For this reason, the political background of Ümit Özdağ, the chairman of the party, and his recognition in the field of nationalist politics are discussed in the relevant section from an academic perspective. According to this theory, the place of the issue (accepted immigrants), which is seen as a threat, in historical memory are factors that come to the fore in the context of external and social conditions. The importance that party representatives frequently attribute to the fear of division and sociological risks that are important in the historical memory of the country points to the necessity of this theoretical analysis. In this context, we deem it necessary to elaborate on the ‘Sevres syndrome’ in Türkiye in the relevant sections. As discussed, the excessive importance attributed to discourse in the securitisation theory is a major criticism in the literature.

In this study, we make use of the discourses of the party leadership, but as we emphasise in the methodology section, we prefer content analysis method rather than discourse analysis. Since the parliamentary questions submitted by the party in the legislative body are a suitable data source for content analysis, we support our theoretical discussion with thematic analysis. This will avoid the risk of focusing only on discourse. Thus, we make use of the party programme, election manifesto, discourses and critical activities of the party in the legislative body separately and have the opportunity to interpret them based on the theoretical background.

2. International immigration to Türkiye and its political reflections

Immigration from the lands lost in the last period of the Ottoman Empire was important in shaping the population structure of modern Türkiye. Mass immigration to Anatolia after the 1877-1878 Ottoman-Russian War and the First Balkan War brought about a decisive change in the population structure. As of 1923, when the new regime was implemented in Türkiye, approximately 25% of the population migrated to Anatolia in the last 10 years.²⁴

Between the years of 1923-1990, Türkiye encouraged immigration movements mainly from “Turkish origin and culture” within the framework of the search for a homogeneous society. With the Settlement Law No. 2510 adopted in 1934²⁵, internal and external migration was regulated, and the spirit of the law gave priority to the search for a homogeneous society. However, Jewish scientists accepted before the Second World War, Iranians who came for transit purposes during the 1979 Iranian Revolution and some of them became permanent were the exceptions to this policy. The new nation-state paved the way for minorities, especially Greeks, Armenians and Jews, to leave the country within the framework of the search for a homogeneous society. Immigration policy, which was considered as a state policy between 1923 and 1990, did not cause polarization between political parties and was not politicized.²⁶ However, the collapse of the Eastern Bloc after 1990, regional crises, and Türkiye’s relatively flexible visa regime compared to European countries, brought about Türkiye’s hosting of immigrants, most of whom came from outside of Turkish origin and culture. Türkiye has become both a transit and a destination country. Immigrants from former Eastern Bloc countries, mostly women, worked in areas such as sex work, domestic services, apparel, and textiles.²⁷ The

²⁴Tanıl Bora, *Cereyanlar: Türkiye’de Siyasi İdeolojiler*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 2017, p. 217.

²⁵2510 Sayılı İskân Kanunu”, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı İdari İşler Başkanlığı Hukuk ve Mevzuat Genel Müdürlüğü, *Resmî Gazete*, <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/arsiv/2733.pdf>.

²⁶Ahmet İçduygu, “Türkiye’deki Suriyeli Sığınmacılar: Siyasallaşan Bir Sürecin Analizi”, p. 38.

²⁷Barbara Pusch, Thomas Wilkozeeswki, *Türkiye’ye Uluslararası Göç Toplumsal Koşullar-Bireysel Yaşamlar, Türkiye’ye Uluslararası Göç*, Kitap Yayınevi, İstanbul, 2008, p. 75.

fact that this immigrant group was generally handled within the framework of sex work, especially by the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi, RP), and the problems experienced in the Black Sea Region became the priority agenda of the region in the 1994 local elections. In this context, the fact that the issue became the primary agenda item, created political polarization, took the agenda in parliamentary activities, and became the main topic of discussion in local elections was the first example of the politicization of migration movements in Türkiye. On the other hand, this politicization has been local.²⁸

Türkiye has been the target of immigration from Syria following the spread of the Arab Spring events to Syria and the protests in Syria gaining a civil war identity. Türkiye has followed an open door policy until 2016 in the migration movement that started in April 2011. The ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) has characterized the participants of the migration movement, as immigrants, in line with Islamic literature and cultural memory and named the host society as Ansar.²⁹ The Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP) have interpreted the issue of immigration as a result of the wrong foreign policy of the ruling party and discussed them from the perspective of public security. These parties argued that the ruling party aimed to change the sociological structure of Türkiye by granting citizenship to Syrians in Türkiye, to create a population with heavy Islamic sentiments and to create a voter group close to it. The Peoples' Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi, HDP), on the other hand, supported the Syrian immigrants which the ruling party embraced them with Islamic emphasis and reference to the former Ottoman geography, with a rights-based approach, and demanded the recognition of their refugee status.³⁰

The IYI Party, which was founded in 2017 and most of its founders are of MHP origin, has been the main sustainer of the anti-immigration discourse in Türkiye. The party, also defined as the party of urban secular nationalists, argued that granting citizenship to Syrians would mean the end of the nation-state. The party shared the declaration that the Syrians in Türkiye would be sent back to their countries with a three-stage plan. Istanbul Deputy Ümit Özdağ, who was among the founders of the party and also served as the vice chairman, turned the issue of migration into a doctrine. Özdağ and prominent IYI Party representatives argued that the immigrations from northern Syria to Türkiye were deliberately diverted to Türkiye. According to the leading representatives of the party, the aim of this policy is to create a "terror state" under PKK/YPG domination by changing the population structure in northern Syria and to create a civil war environment by changing the population structure in Türkiye. According to the data of the Presidency of Migration Management³¹, the number of registered Syrians in Türkiye is 3,143,635.

3. Türkiye's first anti-immigration niche party, the Victory Party

The definition and positioning of niche parties can have significant differences. Meguid³² defines niche

²⁸Ahmet Ceylan, 1990 Sonrası Türkiye'ye Yönelik Göçlerin Değişen Yapısının Siyasal Partilerin Göç Politikalarına Etkileri, 185-190.

²⁹Gülay Uğur Göksel, *Göçmen Entegrasyonu ve Tanınma Teorisi "Adil Entegrasyon"*, Pinhan Yayınları, 2019, pp. 192-193; Ayhan Kaya, "Migration as a Leverage Tool in International Relations: Turkey as a Case Study", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 17, I. 68, 2020, p. 24.

³⁰Soner Akın, "Türkiye'deki Siyasal Partilerin Uluslararası Göçe Dair Bakış Açıları ve Avrupa Parlamentosu Siyasi Parti Grupları ile Karşılaştırmalı Bir Analiz," pp. 309-316; Ahmet Ceylan, 1990 Sonrası Türkiye'ye Yönelik Göçlerin Değişen Yapısının Siyasal Partilerin Göç Politikalarına Etkileri, p. 314-322.

³¹Presidency Migration Management, "Geçici Koruma", 2022, <https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638>.

³²Bonnie Meguid, "Competition between Unequals: The Role of Mainstream Party Strategy and Niche Party Success", *American Political Science Review* V. 99, I. 3, 2005, pp. 347-360; Bonnie Meguid, *Party Competition between Unequals: Strategies and Electoral Fortunes in Western Europe*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008, pp. 91-109.

parties based on the salience theory³³ as parties emphasizing a limited set of new issues that do not coincide with the predominant economic left–right division. In other prominent studies, the definition is based on party ideology, counting Communist, Green and nationalist parties as niche parties.³⁴ Bonnie Meguid³⁵ defines them along three criteria: (1) niche parties reject the traditional class-based orientation of politics, (2) the issues raised by niche parties are not only novel, but often do not coincide with the existing left–right lines of political division, and (3) niche parties have been perceived largely as single-issue parties by the voters and other parties.³⁶ When niche parties compromise on their harsh and radical political discourse and actions that differentiate them from mainstream parties, they are systematically punished by voters at the ballot box.³⁷ Various extreme/radical/populist right-wing political parties established in European countries have centered the immigration-oriented debates with a securitization-oriented approach. The Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) in Austria and the National Front (FN) in France were the first examples of such parties. Examples such as the Alternative for Germany (AfD) in Germany, the Freedom Party (PVV) in the Netherlands, the Danish People's Party (DF) in Denmark, and the Northern League in Italy have addressed the issue of migration in terms of securitization and evaluated it among the priority agenda items of the country's politics. These parties both bring many issues to the political agenda, sometimes including a populist language of discourse, and anti-immigration is among the main features of these parties.³⁸

Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the attacks in Madrid and London, Istanbul, Paris and Brussels were also important breaks in Europe and influenced the EU's stance on migration management prior to the refugee crisis in 2015-2016. Since 2015, the debate on migration has intensified in EU member states. While new anti-immigration policies have become widespread in the EU in recent years, the right to free movement in the Schengen agreement has also been among the topics discussed. During this period, parties with an anti-immigration agenda gained strength and became government partners in many countries. The parliamentary representation of the far right also increased steadily across the continent.³⁹

Looking at the populist parties of the 1990s, one can observe a new populist right that was not primarily Eurosceptic, but whose agenda was predominantly anti-immigration and anti-establishment. These parties were programmatically shaped by neoliberal economic ideas and cultural protectionism. Left-populist parties, on the other hand, have remained more liberal in terms of cultural values and have mostly addressed distributional conflicts in the economic sphere or class-based polarization. Since the 1990s, however, these positions have changed. The populist right has significantly weakened its neoliberal line and moved towards social protectionism.⁴⁰ Nativism, authoritarianism, and populism are the ideologies on which populist right-

³³Ian Budge, Dennis J. Farlie, *Voting and Party Competition: A Theoretical Critique and Synthesis Applied to Surveys from Ten Democracies*, Wiley, New York, 1977, pp. 304-455; Ian Budge and Dennis J. Farlie, *Explaining and Predicting Elections: Issue Effects and Party Strategies in Twenty-three Democracies*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1983, p. 41.

³⁴Lawrence Ezrow, *Linking Citizens and Parties: How Electoral Systems Matter for Political Representation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010, pp. 4-12; Lawrence, Ezrow, Catherine De Vries, Marco Steenbergen, Erica Edwards, "Mean voter representation and partisan constituency representation: Do parties respond to the mean voter position or to their supporters?", *Party Politics* 17, 2010, pp. 275-301; Thomas M. Meyer, Miller Bernhard, "The niche party concept and its measurement", *Party Politics*, Vol. 21, I. 2, 2015, p. 259.

³⁵Bonnie Meguid, "Competition between Unequals: The Role of Mainstream Party Strategy and Niche Party Success", pp. 347-360. Bonnie Meguid, *Party Competition between Unequals: Strategies and Electoral Fortunes in Western Europe*, pp. 91-109.

³⁶Thomas M. Meyer, Miller Bernhard, "The niche party concept and its measurement", p. 260.

³⁷Lawrence, Ezrow, James Adams, Michael Clark, Garrett, Glasgow. "Are niche parties fundamentally different from mainstream parties? The causes and electoral consequences of Western European parties' policy shifts", *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 50, I. 3, 2006, p. 514.

³⁸Ruud Koopmans, Muis Jasper, "The Rise of Right-Wing populist Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands: A discursive opportunity approach", *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 48, I. 5, 2009, pp. 642-664; Martin Schain, "The State Strikes Back: Immigration Policy in the European Union", *European Journal of International Law*, Vol. 20, I. 1, 2009, pp. 93-109; Joost Van Spanje, "Contagious Parties: Anti-Immigration Parties and Their Impact on Other Parties Immigration Stances in Contemporary Western Europe", *Party Politics*, 16, 2010, pp. 563-586.

³⁹Bruno Oliveira Martins, Michael Strange, "Rethinking EU external migration policy: contestation and critique", *Global Affairs*, 5/3, 2019, p. 196.

⁴⁰Marianne Kneuer, "The tandem of populism and Euroscepticism: a comparative perspective in the light of the European crises", *Contemporary Social Science*, 14, 2018, pp. 26-42.

wing parties are based. These parties harshly criticize the established order on the grounds that the will of the inhabitants is neglected in favor of the interests of immigrants. In this context, right-wing populist parties use the politicization of migration to win the votes of anti-immigrant and anti-immigrant communities.⁴¹

Some of the far-right anti-immigrant parties that have emerged in Europe have not made migration a priority issue in their early years. For example, even the FN, one of the pioneers of the new wave of far-right parties in France, politicized anti-communism as a priority issue over migration in the 1970s. In the 1973 elections, with the slogan "Defend France," the issue of immigration became one of the party's major agendas.⁴² Another prominent example in this regard is the FPÖ in Austria. The FPÖ, which has been in politics since 1956 as a continuation of the "Association of Independents," has had a personnel structure that includes representatives who participated in the Hitler administration and were sympathetic to the fascist regime. There were periodic splits and divergent ideological approaches within the party.

However, the election of Jörg Haider as party leader in 1986 was an important turning point that determined the direction of the movement. Haider, who addressed the problem of unemployment by identifying it with immigrants under the slogan "Austria First," developed a critical and security-oriented discourse on the increase in the proportion of children of foreign origin in schools.⁴³ The exceptional situation, which the German political system achieved after World War II by preventing the emergence of a successful far-right party, came to an end with the founding of the AfD in 2013. With the AfD's approach to migration as a political problem, migration-oriented debates in German politics gained strength.⁴⁴ The Victory Party, on the other hand, stands out as a political movement founded on anti-immigration policies in the unique political conjuncture of Türkiye.

A comparison of the similarities and differences between the Victory Party and far-right parties in Europe is not one of the main objectives of this study. However, the party has adopted an anti-immigration political line since its inception and has similarities with European far-right examples in this line. It can also be argued that the migration process in Türkiye was already politicized before the establishment of the Victory Party and that the party represents the most extreme point in this politicized ground with a securitist language.⁴⁵

The Victory Party was founded on August 26, 2021, with a nationalist view, under the leadership of Ümit Özdağ, who left the İYİ Party. The founding date of the party was consciously chosen as August 26, which has an important place in the collective memory of Turkish nationalists.⁴⁶ Although the Victory Party has a strong nationalist rhetoric, the party leadership argues that they are not racist. Basically, in the founding manifesto of the party, the "Islamic" emphasis in the traditional Turkish right-wing parties was limited, while the emphasis on "Turkishness" was highlighted. While the expression "Syrian" 34 times, "refugee" 16 times, "Afghan" 9 times was included in the party's founding manifesto, the expression "refugee" indicating a legal status and the concept of "immigrant" were not included. The expression "invasion", which is frequently used in the securitization of migration movements, took part 5 times and it has been claimed that the country is

⁴¹Bekir Halhallı, "Göç, Popülizm ve Büyük İkame Teorisi", *Göç Yönetiminde, Politikasında ve Kuramında Güncel Gelişmeler*, eds. Ahmet Vedat Koçal, Bekir Halhallı, Damla Mursül, Nobel Yayınları, Ankara, 2024, p. 147.

⁴²Cihan Uzunçayır, *Neo Faşizmden Popülizme: Avrupa'da Aşırı Sağ: Almanya ve İtalya Örnekleri*, Liberus Yayınları, 2021, p. 61.

⁴³Bekir Halhallı, *Avrupa'da Radikal Sağ Ötekini İnşasında İslam, Yabancı ve Göç*, 2020, p. 151; Kemal Boztepe, "Avusturya'da 'Aşırı Sağ'ın Önlene-meyen Yükselişi", *Toplumbilim*, 7, 1997, pp. 96-100.

⁴⁴Marcel Lewandowsky, "Alternative für Deutschland (AfD): A New Actor in the German Party System", *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*, 2014, pp. 1-7.

⁴⁵Ahmet Ceylan, *1990 Sonrası Türkiye'ye Yönelik Göçlerin Değişen Yapısının Siyasal Partilerin Göç Politikalarına Etkileri*, 2022, pp. 322-324.

⁴⁶H. Bahadır Türk, "Populist Nationalism and Anti-refugee Sentiment in Turkey: The Case of the Victory Party", *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 30, I. 2, pp. 271-295.

under the invasion of around 8 million asylum seekers and illegal immigrants.⁴⁷ The party evaluated Syrians and irregular migrants in Türkiye, in the context of economic problems, public security, health, education problems and national security problems. The party said:

*"...With the return of the refugees to their country, Türkiye will leap forward like a horse freed from its chains; He will fill his lungs with clean oxygen like a person breathing after his head is kept under water for a long time..." and declared that asylum seekers and immigrants, whom he saw as Türkiye's primary problem, would be sent back.*⁴⁸

The party shared the Anatolian Fortress project with the public, similar to the European Fortress metaphor, in order to send back the Syrians under temporary protection and irregular immigrants in Türkiye, as well as to prevent new migration movements in the future. This proposal, developed by the party, aims to implement various measures such as EURODAC and Frontex, which come to the fore in the protection of the EU borders, and are also considered as the European Fortress; specific to Türkiye and in a very strict manner. The party declared that within the framework of the Anatolian Fortress project, an area extending from the Mersin border to the Black Sea, including the borders of the Southern and Eastern Anatolian provinces, would be taken under control and a "unified intelligence fusion center" would be established. It has been emphasized that this system will be used both in the fight against terrorism and in the protection of borders against illegal immigration.⁴⁹

It has been declared that the return of Syrians and irregular immigrants in Türkiye will be carried out in accordance with national and international law, with a human rights-oriented approach. Stating that military, political, legal, diplomatic and intelligence measures will be implemented for the success of the Anatolian Fortress implementation, the party stated that the aim of this project is to protect the borders from terrorist organizations, asylum seekers and irregular immigrants. This situation has been an important example showing that the party evaluates irregular immigrants in the same way as terrorist organizations within the framework of its securitization strategy. In the party's founding manifesto, "Don't you have a policy other than sending the Syrians back?" In the answer given to the question, it was stated that sending the Syrians in Türkiye is the first step in solving all of Türkiye's problems.⁵⁰ Stating that a solution can be found for the solution of Türkiye's other important problems, primarily by sending Syrians back to their countries, has been among the most important indicators that the Victory Party is a niche party that is mainly focused on immigration.

The Victory Party was represented in the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM) only by its chairman, Ümit Özdağ. It has been determined that Özdağ has submitted 12 questions to be answered by the ministries since the establishment of the party. Between 23.11.2021 and 12.05.2022, there were 45 questions in the 12 questions signed by Özdağ. 6 of the questionnaires were related to immigration, 5 of them focused on other social and political issues, and 1 of the parliamentary questions included questions dealing with both immigration and other issues. One of the questions directly related to immigrations, unlike traditional issues; dealt with the immigration of companies from Russia and Ukraine to Türkiye after the war.

A total of 45 questions were included in these 12 questions submitted since the establishment of the party. While 20 of the 45 questions consist of questions related to non-immigration issues, 3 questions are about the immigration of companies originating from Russia and Ukraine, as mentioned. The number of

⁴⁷Victory Party, *Kuruluş Manifestosu*, 2022, <https://zaferpartisi.org.tr/kurulus-manifestosu/>.

⁴⁸Victory Party, *Kuruluş Manifestosu*.

⁴⁹Victory Party, *Kuruluş Manifestosu*; "Ayyıldız Hareketi Lideri: Göçe karşı çözüm: Anadolu Kalesi", *Milliyet*, (Online) <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/siyaset/ayyildiz-hareketi-lideri-goce-karsi-cozum-anadolu-kalesi-6578163>, August 19, 2021.

⁵⁰Victory Party, *Kuruluş Manifestosu*.

questions focusing on Syrians and irregular migration was 22 and constituted the most crowded content. This is an important example showing that the party gives priority to the issue of migration in also the activities of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM). While 10 of 22 questions focused on security in various ways, 6 questions were related to the number of immigrants, birth rates and the risk of sociological change. In 5 questions, the economic costs of Syrians in Türkiye were questioned. In one question, the ways of entry of irregular migrants into the country were discussed.

The Victory Party evaluated the other political parties as the “Party of the Syrians”, pointing out that their most fundamental difference with the rival political parties is their immigration policy.⁵¹ In the party program, the current situation of Türkiye was discussed within the framework of four crises. In the party program; In addition to the titles of “state crisis”, “national unity crisis”, “economic crisis”; the Syrians in Türkiye were pointed out by the naming of the “crisis of the people under temporary protection” as the fourth most important crisis of Türkiye. The party argued that Syria was made insecure to make Syrians to migrate to Türkiye by foreign powers called imperialism and claimed that the aim was to start a civil war on Turkish land. The party stated that Türkiye is under the invasion of immigration and evaluated this situation as a priority national security problem. In the party program, the issue of immigration was considered as the country's top priority agenda item. The party argued that Arab nationalist organizations that demanded land from Türkiye had begun to be established and pointed to the fear of division, referring to historical memory. While the expression “Syrian” is used 38 times, “refugee” is used 22 times, and “Afghan” is used 3 times, the definition of “refugee” is not used.⁵² In the party program, the issue of migration was evaluated as a national security issue as follows;

“...The aim is to remove Türkiye from being a Turkish country. Starting from the places where foreigners, especially Syrians, have taken over the population dominance, after a civil war to be started in the coming years, the goal of so-called “Kurdistan” leaving from Türkiye is being tried to be realised...”⁵³

In its party program, the Victory Party emphasizes that it will stop and reverse irregular migration to Türkiye, which it sees as the biggest problem facing the Turkish nation and threatening its existence, unity and future, with the “Anatolian Fortress” Project.⁵⁴ The emotional response to this Victory Party discourse, especially among young voters, is remarkable. The fact that the party's leader, Ümit Özdağ, constructs his discourses and campaigns through the youth and his nationalist emphasis on sending migrants back gives the Victory Party the opportunity to reach a significant audience.⁵⁵

4. 2023 general elections and Victory Party

The economic crisis, which had a global impact in the 2008-2009 period, had a triggering effect on the decline of democratic practices in Türkiye. The Gezi protests (2013) and the rising social opposition accelerated the AKP and Erdoğan's anti-democratic governance approach.⁵⁶ With the 2016 military coup attempt and the subsequent referendum on regime change (2017), Erdoğan established a system that completely abolished the separation of powers.

⁵¹Victory Party, *Kuruluş Manifestosu*.

⁵²Victory Party, *Parti Programı*, 2022, <https://zaferpartisi.org.tr/parti-programi/>.

⁵³Victory Party, *Kuruluş Manifestosu*.

⁵⁴Victory Party, *Parti Programı*.

⁵⁵KONDA, “Gençlerin Politik Tercihleri Araştırması”, 2024, <https://konda.com.tr/rapor/182/genclerin-politik-tercihleri-arastirmasi>.

⁵⁶Berk Esen, “Türkiye’de Rekabetçi Otoriter Rejimin Yükselişi ve Düşüşü”, *Türkiye’de Siyasetin Sınırları, Siyasal Davranış, Kurumlar ve Kültür Ersin Kalaycıoğlu’na Armağan*, eds. Ali Çarkoğlu, Emre Erdoğan, Mert Moral, İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, İstanbul, 2023, p. 271.

Türkiye transitioned to a presidential system through a referendum held in April 2017, which came into full effect after the 2018 presidential elections.⁵⁷ Turkish presidentialism increases the prominence of the executive at the expense of the legislative branch and concentrates power in the office of the president. Hence, the power of the parliament has significantly declined.⁵⁸ The transition to the presidential system introduced the alliance logic as the new parameter in electoral rivalry because in the new system any candidate requires at least 50 percent +1 of the votes to be elected as president in the first round.⁵⁹ With the changed electoral system, the electoral threshold across the country has been reduced from 10 percent to 7 percent and the requirement of at least 50 +1 percent of the votes to be elected as president has put small parties in a more assertive position in Türkiye. The requirement of 3 percent of the vote in order to benefit from treasury aid has been another important factor fuelling alliances.

The first electoral experience of Victory Party, which stands out with its nationalist identity and anti-immigration policies, was the Presidential and 28th term parliamentary elections on 14 May 2023.⁶⁰ Therefore, the party has become one of the most important of the small parties ambitious in the new system.

Victory Party participated in the elections under the umbrella of the ATA Alliance. The Alliance nominated Sinan Oğan, a former deputy of the MHP and a well-known figure in the nationalist community, as its presidential candidate. Similar to the policies of the Victory Party, the alliance prioritised the fight against terrorism, national security and immigration during the election process. The Alliance and Sinan Oğan promised that all irregular immigrants and "asylum seekers" in Türkiye would be returned within one year. To emphasise the importance he attached to the situation, Oğan declared that the first decree he would sign if elected President would be focused on repatriation. Reverse brain drain policies were also among the issues that the alliance attached importance to. Moreover, the party frequently repeats that all asylum seekers and illegal immigrants in Türkiye will be repatriated within the scope of the project it calls the Anatolian Fortress.⁶¹ In the general elections held on 14 May 2023, the Victory Party received 1,216,399 votes with a rate of 2,23%. Sinan Oğan, the Presidential Candidate of the ATA Alliance, played a critical role in the second round of the presidential elections with 5,17% of the votes. Following the 14 May elections, the ATA Alliance disbanded and Sinan Oğan, the Presidential candidate of the alliance, decided to support President Erdoğan in the second round elections.⁶²

On the other hand, the most important stakeholder of the alliance, Victory Party Chairman Ümit Özdağ and the opposition's presidential candidate Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu agreed on a 7-point protocol for the second round of the election and Ümit Özdağ adopted a position in favour of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the candidate of the Millet Alliance. The acceptance by the CHP of the red lines set by the Victory Party, especially its anti-immigration policies, was among the factors that strengthened the legitimacy of the party, which faced criticisms of extremism, in the eyes of the centre politics. In fact, the "criticisms of racism" against the party, which were also expressed in the party's founding manifesto, were relatively pushed into the background with this alliance. The fact that the Victory Party's sensitivities on the nation state were accepted by the CHP,

⁵⁷Alper Yağcı, "Cumhurbaşkanlığı Hükümet Sisteminin Tasarımı ve İktidarın Muhafazası: Siyaset Bilimi Açısından Bir İnceleme", *Türkiye'de Siyasetin Sınırları, Siyasal Davranış, Kurumlar ve Kültür Ersin Kalaycıoğlu'na Armağan*, eds. Ali Çarkoğlu, Emre Erdoğan, Mert Moral, İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, İstanbul, 2023, p. 617.

⁵⁸Ali Çarkoğlu, Kerem Yıldırım, "Change and continuity in Turkey's June 2018 elections", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 20, I. 4, 2018, pp. 153-183.

⁵⁹Sinem Adar, Gunter Seufert, "Turkey's presidential system after two and a half years: an overview of institutions and politics", *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik Research Paper*, April, 2021, p. 23.

⁶⁰In the local elections held on 31 March 2024, the Victory Party received 2.57% of the vote in the race for municipal councillor. However, the party did not win any municipalities in these elections. Yüksek Seçim Kurulu, *31 Mart Mahalli İdareler Seçimleri*, 2024.

⁶¹"14 Mayıs Seçimlerinde hangi parti hangi ittifakta yer alıyor? Kim dışarıdan destek veriyor", *Euronews*, 2023, <https://tr.euronews.com/2023/03/29/14-mayis-secimlerinde-hangi-parti-hangi-ittifakta-yer-alıyor-kim-disaridan-destek-veriyor>.

⁶²Yüksek Seçim Kurulu, *Cumhurbaşkanı Seçimi ve 28. Dönem Milletvekili Genel Seçimi*, 2023.

which defines itself as the founder of the nation state, through a protocol is another factor that increased the party's moral strength.⁶³ During the election process, streets and avenues were filled with posters proclaiming 'Border is honour' and 'Syrians will leave'.⁶⁴ In the second round, all centrist political parties, especially the CHP, emphasised their anti-immigration policies. The other candidate, President Erdoğan, stated that they were preparing projects for the construction of housing in Syria for the return of nearly 1 million refugees and promised that they would ensure the return of Syrians to their country.⁶⁵ These examples demonstrate that the Victory Party has influenced both centre-right and centre-left parties to adopt more hawkish migration policies due to the electoral system in Türkiye.

Moreover, the sharp stance of the Victory Party on immigration policies had a triggering effect on the hawkishness of the CHP's immigration policies during the election period, and at times crystallised the heated relationship between the traditional nation-state sensitive wing of the CHP and its social democratic line. The current position of the Victory Party on immigration policies has influenced and transformed the mainstream parties at the centre of Turkish politics on this issue - especially the AKP and CHP - more profoundly than their European counterparts.

5. Evaluation of Victory Party's migration policies in the context of securitization based on the past of the political actor and social memory

As discussed in the relevant section, actors emphasize that an object of reference such as the state, land, society is under an existential and deep-rooted threat with speech acts in the process of securitization of an issue. Actors claim that it is imperative to take priority and extraordinary measures against this threat and aims to increase the legitimacy of these measures they want to develop. The claim that the issue of immigration is an extraordinary and priority problem with the risk of civil war is strongly defended in the party program of the Victory Party, its founding manifesto and the speeches of its chairman Ümit Özdağ. The issue of immigration is defined as an existential threat that can change the borders of the country and pores the risk of division.⁶⁶ As it has been discussed, the fact that the speech acts of the actors are convincing by the audience strengthens the securitization of the process. Expressions such as "invasion", "occupation", "influx" are frequently used by actors in the securitization process. Victory Party officials define the migration movements faced by Türkiye as "covered invasion". Arguing that this "covered invasion" poses a risk of civil war, the party shares its extraordinary solution proposals with the public within the framework of its securitization strategy. As a solution to this extraordinary danger, Anatolian Fortress project is proposed with a security-oriented approach. It has been announced that the project will continue with military, political, legal, diplomatic and intelligence methods.⁶⁷ Within the scope of the project, it was stated that all Syrians in Türkiye would be sent in one year, and irregular immigrants would be deported, with a three-stage plan. In the party program, in which it was declared that diplomatic relations with Syria would be re-established, it is stated that "Turkish state officials who will be sent to geographies considering/ being

⁶³ Ahmet Ceylan, İsa Uslu, "14-28 Mayıs 2023 Genel Seçim Sonuçları Üzerine: Zafer Partisi ve Ata İttifakı, Uluslararası Politika Akademisi", 2023, <https://politikaakademisi.org/2023/07/03/14-28-mayis-2023-genel-secim-sonuclari-uzerine-zafer-partisi-ve-ata-ittifaki/>.

⁶⁴ "Suriyeliler gidecek" söylemi sığınmacıları nasıl etkiliyor?", *Euronews*, 2023, <https://tr.euronews.com/2023/05/26/suriyeliler-gidecek-soylemi-siginmacilari-nasil-etkiliyor>.

⁶⁵ "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: 1 milyon mültecinin ülkelerine dönmelerini sağlayacağız", *Euronews*, 2023, <https://tr.euronews.com/2023/05/19/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-1-milyon-multecinin-ulkelerine-donmesini-saglayacağız>.

⁶⁶ Ahmet Ceylan, *İdeoloji, Tarihsel Bellek ve Travma Ekseninde Türkiye'de Siyasal Partilerin Göç Politikaları*, Nobel Yayınları, Ankara, 2022, p. 298.

⁶⁷ Victory Party, *Parti Programı*; Victory Party, *Kuruluş Manifestosu*.

considered to migrate to Türkiye will make propaganda to discourage immigration.” Party leader Ümit Özdağ withdrew from the Ottawa Treaty and demanded that the borders with migration potential be re-mined.⁶⁸

External and social conditions are other factors that affect the securitization of the subject with speech acts. This situation is related to the social response of the migration movement and the background and social position of the actor who uses securitizing speech acts. Although political parties focuses directly on migration do not exist in Türkiye, it is known that the issue has had an impact on the country's politics since the 7 June 2015 general elections. This effect reached its most important position in the general elections in 2018 and 2023 and also the local elections in 2019. The fact that all of the political parties established after 2017 have gained institutional identity by adding their immigration-oriented policies to their party programs is the most important example showing the importance of the issue in Turkish politics. In addition to this situation, the social position and background of the actor is another factor that feeds securitization. Ümit Özdağ is the son of Muzaffer Özdağ, a former senior soldier who took part in the May 27, 1960 military intervention and is one of the founders of the MHP and the traditional representative of the nationalist view in Turkish politics.⁶⁹ Özdağ's mother is also one of the founders of the women's branch of the MHP. Ümit Özdağ is known as a nationalist theorist. He served as a senior manager in the Party MHP, became a candidate for the chairmanship and was elected as a member of parliament. Ümit Özdağ is also among the founding leaders of the İYİ Party, which is known as a secular nationalist. This situation has formed the reason why Özdağ has a prominent position in both the MHP and the İYİ Party base. Among the most important achievements of anti-immigration political parties in Europe, are bringing the issue to the priority agenda of politics and the central political parties drawing their immigration policies to a restrictive line.⁷⁰ In the case of Türkiye, this situation comes to prominence, due to Özdağ's respected past in the nationalist community, especially with the possibility of influencing the immigration policies of the MHP and İYİ Party more effectively.

According to the securitization theory, in the process of securitization of a subject; besides the security-oriented discourse, the place of used threat object in the historical memory has a special importance. While interpreting the migration issue as a national security problem, the Victory Party develops a discourse based on the fear of partition and the establishment of a “Kurdistan” state that can divide Türkiye, especially based on Arab organizations that can claim land. It argued that Arab nationalist organizations demanding land from Türkiye, began to be established and drew attention to the fear of division, referring to the historical memory. This situation is directly related to Türkiye's recent political past and the historical memory of Turkish society. The uprisings that took place in the Arab geography of the Ottoman Empire during the First World War, took part in the social memory as the “Arab revolt”. The attacks and the uprising against the Turkish military units in 1916 took an important part in the memory of the army. The uprisings, in which wounded soldiers called “Gazi” were killed in a way that hasn't seen before in Turkish military customs, left traumatic effects on the officer corps of the Turkish army. As a result of these attacks, the lands considered sacred in terms of Islam were lost. This rebellion was accepted by the Turkish army as a grave betrayal that left the southern border of the Anatolian geography, the only remaining piece of land from the Empire, vulnerable. Kemalist commanders who won the Turkish national Independence War, took critical positions with the establishment of the Turkish Republic and carried the strong memory of the subject in the army

⁶⁸“Zafer Partisi Genel Başkanı Ümit Özdağ, Hatay'da konuştu”, *Habertürk*, (Online), <https://www.haberturk.com/zafer-partisi-genel-baskani-ozdag-hatay-da-konustu-3473099>, June 28, 2022.

⁶⁹Tanıl Bora, *Cereyanlar: Türkiye'de Siyasi İdeolojiler*, p. 315.

⁷⁰Jef Huysmans, “The European Union and the Securitization of Migration”, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 38, I. 5, 2000, pp. 751-777; Mehlika Özlem Ultan, *Avrupa Birliği'nde Yasa Dışı Göçün Önlenmesi ve Ülke Uygulamaları*, Nobel Yayınları, Ankara, 2016, pp. 86-96.

to the highest levels of the state.⁷¹ This situation has been repeated by the nation state for many years as “Arab betrayal” in Türkiye and has been included in the curriculum of the Ministry of National Education.⁷²

The disagreement with Iraq and Syria in the Mosul and Hatay issues, which were the first foreign political problems in the founding process of the Republic of Türkiye, reinforced the trauma of “Arab betrayal” from the years of the First World War.⁷³ The claim of the Victory Party and its founding leader, Ümit Özdağ, about the establishment of Arab organizations demanding land from Türkiye, and the discourses they have developed regarding Türkiye’s southern borders, especially Hatay, are supported from this background. In addition, Hatay is the only piece of land belonging to the former Ottoman Empire, which the Republic of Türkiye included in its borders after the Treaty of Lausanne and this city is shown on the borders of Syria in various official posts by Syria. The high number of Syrians in the city is addressed by party representatives with the concern that this city may be lost in the coming years. The place of the threat in the securitization theory in historical memory is not fed only by the perception of “Arab betrayal” as an other identity, in the example of Türkiye and the Victory Party.

In addition to this perception, it is observed that there is a strong fear of division in the texts of the party and the discourses of the party representatives. Following the failure of the Second Siege of Vienna in 1683 by the Ottoman Empire, territorial losses began and the peak point of these losses was the Treaty of Sevres, which was signed as a result of the First World War. With the Treaty of Sevres signed on 10 August 1920, the Ottomans completely lost their sovereignty, except for a small region in Central and Northern Anatolia. The sovereignty of the Straits and Istanbul was lost. The establishment of Armenian and Kurdish states in the Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia Regions was envisaged.⁷⁴ This treaty was not implemented and with the Turkish national struggle, Anatolia and Eastern Thrace remained under the sovereignty of the Turks. However, the Turks in the center of the Ottoman Empire felt humiliated by this treaty and the Treaty of Sevres took its part in the social memory as a trauma. Ahmad interpreted this traumatic situation with this expression; “The Spaniards retreated to Spain, the English to England, the others to their homeland; but where could the Ottomans go?”⁷⁵ The sudden loss of Rumelia, especially in the Balkan War, came as a great shock. This defeat led to the expulsion of the Muslim population from Rumelia as well as the loss of lands that were considered the heart of the Ottoman Empire. The state shifted its entire weight to Anatolia with the fear of survival.⁷⁶ This process made the Ottoman intellectuals feel the threat of extinction very vividly and led to a deep-rooted panic, the effects of which were lasting. Although the victorious outcome of the War of Independence was a breath of fresh air, the fear of losing the gains and returning to the old dark days symbolized by Sevres became an important part of Türkiye’s political culture.⁷⁷ The “Sevres Syndrome” and the fear of partition have been a constant fear in Turkish political life. Pope and Pope stated that the concern for partition in Türkiye has historically developed in the context of loss of territory against Armenian and possible Kurdish states. Again, according to Pope and Pope, there are 14 articles related to the concept of

⁷¹Kemal Karpat, *Osmanlı’dan Günümüze Etnik Yapılanma ve Göçler*, Timaş Yayınları, İstanbul, 2017, p. 254.

⁷²Etienne Copeaux, *Tarih Ders Kitaplarında (1931-1993) Türk Tarih Tezinden Türk-İslam Sentezine*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 2016, pp. 56-321.

⁷³Tanıl Bora, *Türk Sağının Üç Hali Milliyetçilik, Muhafazakarlık, İslamcılık*, Birikim Yayınları, İstanbul, 2014, pp. 42-43; Kemal Karpat, *Osmanlı’dan Günümüze Etnik Yapılanma ve Göçler*, pp. 257-266.

⁷⁴Fatma Müge Göçek, “Türkiye’de Çoğunluk, Azınlık ve Kimlik Anlayışı”, *Türkiye’de Çoğunluk ve Azınlık Politikaları: AB Sürecinde Yurttaşlık Tartışmaları*, eds. Ayhan Kaya, Turgut Tarhanlı, Tesev Yayınları, İstanbul, 2008, p. 77; J. Erik Zürcher, *Modernleşen Türkiye’nin Tarihi*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 2015, pp. 220-221.

⁷⁵Feroz Ahmad, *Bir Kimlik Peşinde Türkiye*, İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, İstanbul, 2014, p. 84.

⁷⁶Fuat Dündar, *İttihat ve Terakki’nin Müslümanları İskân Politikası 1913-1918*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, p. 31; Taner Akçam, “Türk Ulusal Kimliği Üzerine Bazı Tezler”, *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce Cilt 4 Milliyetçilik*, eds. Tanıl Bora, Murat Gültekinçil, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 2008, p. 59.

⁷⁷Hasan Ünder, “Türkiye’de Sosyal Darwinizm Düşüncesi”, *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce Cilt 4 Milliyetçilik*, eds. Tanıl Bora, Murat Gültekinçil, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 2008, p. 429.

“territorial integrity” in the Constitution of the Republic of Türkiye and this situation is related to the social trauma discussed.⁷⁸

The founding elites of the Republic of Türkiye did not forget the period from the Balkan War to Sevres. A certain understanding of nationalism, the foundations of which were laid by a group of intellectuals familiar with Western culture in the late Ottoman Empire, was adopted by the military bureaucracy that founded the Republic. This nationalism was imposed on society by state institutions. In a phrase often used in literature, the nation was created after the state. Since this understanding of nationalism envisioned a homogeneous social structure, ethnic, religious, and class differences were quickly eradicated.⁷⁹ The international migration policy pursued after the proclamation of the Republic continued in this context for many years. Priority in migration to Türkiye was given to people of Turkish origin and culture. The migration of non-Muslims to Türkiye was generally encouraged. This historical memory has persisted in Türkiye for many years. For example, during the mass migrations from Iraq in 1988 and 1991, the security bureaucracy and politicians emphasized Sevres in the context of historical references.⁸⁰

Ümit Özdağ argues that the migration movements accepted by Türkiye in the last 10 years are strategic engineering, states that international forces are behind this engineering and points to the fear of partition. The fact that the Victory Party often says that a civil war is planned as a result of this migration movement and that a “Kurdistan” will be wanted to be separated from Türkiye as a result of this war, is fed from this historical background. The Victory Party argues that the issue of immigration is a continuation of the Treaty of Sevres. At the same time, Özdağ argues that Türkiye’s economic problems are related to recent immigrations. The party discusses the sharp fluctuations in the Turkish economy in the context of the economic costs of migration. The party’s programme and election manifesto argue that there is a link between migration and the economic crisis in Türkiye. The party claims that migrants working informally cause unemployment. It also cites the allocated to migrants as one of the reasons for the economic crisis.⁸¹

Conclusion

In this article, an attempt is made to comprehend the origins of the Victory Party’s anti-immigration policies, alongside conducting a theoretical analysis. A thorough evaluation of the leader’s discourses, programme and parliamentary activities reveals that the Victory Party, established in 2021, possesses an anti-immigration identity that is informed by both historical and contemporary justifications. As previously discussed, securitisation theory as a concept attaches importance to discourse, the social position of those who produce it, and the historical background. The party interprets the migration movement faced by Türkiye as a ‘covert invasion’ and considers it as the country’s number one security problem. The party’s programme, election manifesto and the discourse of the party elites address the issue of migration in a securitising context. The proposed solution to this securitisation policy is embodied in the Fortress of Anatolia project, which is intended to counteract the aforementioned migration movements, which the party refers to as an ‘invasion’.

The party leadership has argued that this problem carries the risk of division and civil war, citing the trauma of Sevres and the historical background. In addition to this, the findings of our analysis of the parliamentary questions submitted by the party also support this observation. The risk of sociological change,

⁷⁸Nicole Pope, Hüge Pope, *Çıplak Türkiye*, Gelenek Yayıncılık, 2004, pp. 151-152.

⁷⁹Umut Özkırımlı, “Türkiye’de Gayriresmî ve Popüler Milliyetçilik”, *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce Cilt 4 Milliyetçilik*, eds. Tanıl Bora, Murat Gültekinil, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 2008, p. 713.

⁸⁰Ahmet Ceylan, 1990 *Sonrası Türkiye’ye Yönelik Göçlerin Değişen Yapısının Siyasal Partilerin Göç Politikalarına Etkileri*, pp. 173-179.

⁸¹Victory Party, *Parti Programı*.

which party officials frequently advocate, also occupies an important place in parliamentary activities with the claim of a migration-oriented survival problem. These examples demonstrate that the Victory Party tries to base its anti-immigration policy on the developments in the last period of the Ottoman Empire and traumatic events associated with the fear of division in the social memory.

Another aspect of our theoretical analysis was the social position of the discourse producers. Party leader Ümit Özdağ's family background and his strong position in nationalist politics are important in terms of the status and position of the discourse producer, although this situation is not empirically measurable in our study. On the other hand, the respected position of the party leader's family and himself in the nationalist base, as well as the discourse consistency in his political career, are among the important elements that attract attention. As Özdağ has previously emphasised his anti-immigration discourses in a similar line and with great conviction in his two previous political parties (MHP and IYI Party), he is positioned in a consistent manner within the nationalist political base.

The party considers the fluctuations in the Turkish economy to be a negative consequence of migration, as outlined in its programme and election manifesto. The party asserts that there is a relationship between migration and the economic crisis in Türkiye, citing unregistered migrants as a contributing factor to unemployment problems and the economic crisis. Furthermore, the funds allocated to migrants are identified as a contributing factor to the economic crisis. This situation is significant in understanding the impact of the economic conditions in the country on the party's migration policies. The emphasis on the economic cost of migrants identified in the parliamentary question analysis also underscores the significance of this issue. A preliminary evaluation of the factors influencing the party's migration policies can be outlined as follows: firstly, the social position of the actor who employs securitising discourses (i.e., Özdağ's family background and his strong image in nationalist politics); secondly, the place of the threat in historical memory (i.e., the risk of sociological change, civil war and the fear of division of the country); and thirdly, economic conditions (i.e., economic fluctuations in Türkiye, unemployment and claims about the funds allocated to migrants).

In 2011, with the migration movements from Syria to Türkiye seeking asylum, the issue of migration became one of Türkiye's priority agenda items and was politicised at the national level in the following years.⁸² Migration has emerged as a salient topic in electoral politics and public discourse. The politicisation of migration is intricately linked to broader political developments in Türkiye. For instance, the system of governance in Türkiye underwent a transformation following the 16 April 2017 referendum, resulting in the emergence of electoral alliances. The significant rise in influence of parties that received low votes in the new system played a pivotal role in the formation of niche political parties that specialise in specific issues. The reduction of the nationwide electoral threshold from 10 per cent to 7 per cent, the 50+1 per cent vote requirement for presidential elections, and the representation of low-voting political movements in parliament through alliances are developments that support the existence of political parties focusing on specific issues such as migration. In addition to the three aforementioned factors, the changing electoral system, which increases the power of niche parties, is another fundamental factor that has an impact on the anti-immigration policies of the Victory Party.

Although it is not the primary aim of this study to compare the Victory Party with far-right parties in Europe, it is clear that the party has adopted an anti-immigration political stance since its inception and in this respect shares similarities with far-right parties in Europe. As with some anti-immigrant political parties in Europe, the Victory Party has influenced the anti-immigration policies of the central political parties. Conversely, political movements in European countries that prioritise migration and are regarded as

⁸²Ahmet İçduygu, "Türkiye'deki Suriyeli Sığınmacılar: Siyasallaşan Bir Sürecin Analizi," pp. 27-41; Ahmet Ceylan, 1990 *Sonrası Türkiye'ye Yönelik Göçlerin Değişen Yapısının Siyasal Partilerin Göç Politikalarına Etkileri*, pp. 255.





niche parties often exert influence over the migration policies of centre-right political parties. In Türkiye's distinctive political landscape, the Victory Party holds the capacity to impact both the centre-right political parties and the migration policies of the social democratic CHP. The prevailing anti-immigrant discourse among CHP elites, characterised by a sensitivity towards nation-state issues, is a salient factor in this regard. A notable illustration of this phenomenon occurred during the 2023 general elections, where the Victory Party's initial success in the two-round electoral process augmented its bargaining prowess. In the subsequent second round, all major political parties, notably the CHP, which had received support from the Victory Party, placed significant emphasis on anti-immigration policies, though with varying degrees of intensity. This example demonstrates that the Victory Party exerted its influence on both centre-right and centre-left parties, prompting them to adopt more hawkish migration policies. While the considerable impact of the Victory Party's anti-immigration policies on centre-right and centre-left parties is noteworthy, the potential ramifications of this impact on democracy and human rights in Türkiye have not been the subject of extensive discussion in the literature.

In this study, the foundations of the Victory Party's anti-immigration identity have been analysed, and the impact of the party's policies on the immigration policies of the central political parties has been discussed in detail. The literature on the subject is limited, but it draws attention to the emotional impact of the anti-immigration policy pursued by the party, especially on young voters. In this respect, the effects of Victory Party's policies on voter behaviour and its vote share are important topics that need to be addressed with both theoretical and empirical research. In addition, new studies that will analyse the similarities and differences of Victory Party with the anti-immigration far-right political parties in Europe in all aspects will contribute to the literature. Furthermore, further studies analysing the organisational and cadre structure of the Victory Party will facilitate analysis of this party in the context of political party typologies.



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