

# Erdoğan's Electoral Success: Geopolitics, Social Class and New Nationalism

Gökhan Çinkara\* & Batu Çoşkun\*\*

## Abstract

This study investigates the re-election of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in the 2023 general and presidential elections within the context of multidimensional crises, including economic, geopolitical, and social challenges. The research identifies three core areas that were key to Erdoğan's electoral success. First, the government addressed economic issues such as welfare erosion, employment loss, and the lack of class mobility through the implementation of a novel class policy. Secondly, Erdoğan capitalized on rising nationalism driven by the influx of immigrants and therefore succeeded in establishing a new hegemonic space through a national identity narrative which he subsequently centered his political discourse on. Lastly, despite confrontations stemming from Türkiye's active and revisionist foreign policy orientation during the 2010s, Erdoğan managed to navigate the geopolitical crises beginning in 2020 with a fresh alliance strategy. This study outlines the essential mechanisms by which Erdoğan succeeded in maintaining political power amidst complex crises.

**Keywords:** Turkish Politics, Turkish Elections, Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

**Erdoğan'ın Seçim Başarısı: Jeopolitik, Sosyal Sınıf ve Yeni Milliyetçilik**

## Öz

Bu çalışma, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan'ın 2023 milletvekili ve Cumhurbaşkanlığı seçimlerinde yeniden seçilmesini ekonomik, jeopolitik ve sosyal zorlukları içeren çok boyutlu krizler bağlamında incelemektedir. Araştırma, Erdoğan'ın seçim başarısında kilit rol oynayan üç temel alanı tanımlamaktadır. Birincisi, hükümet yeni bir sınıf politikası uygulayarak refah erozyonu, istihdam kaybı ve sınıfsal hareketsizlik gibi ekonomik sorunları ele almıştır. İkinci olarak, Erdoğan göçmen akınıyla yükselen milliyetçilikten faydalanmış ve böylece daha sonra siyasi söylemini üzerine oturtacağı bir ulusal kimlik anlatısı aracılığıyla yeni bir hegemonik alan kurmayı başarmıştır. Son olarak, Türkiye'nin 2010'lardaki aktif ve revizyonist dış politika yöneliminden kaynaklanan çatışmalara rağmen, Erdoğan 2020'de başlayan jeopolitik krizleri yeni bir ittifak stratejisiyle yönetmeyi başarmıştır. Bu çalışma, Erdoğan'ın karmaşık krizlerin ortasında siyasi gücünü korumayı başardığı temel mekanizmaları ana hatlarıyla ortaya koymaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Türk Siyaseti, Türkiye'de Seçimler, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

\*Assistant Professor | Necmettin Erbakan University, Political Sciences Faculty

gokhan.cinkara@erbakan.edu.tr | ORCID: 0000-0001-8372-8571

\*\*Independent Researcher | Ankara | batucoskunn@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0001-5625-7209 | DOI: 10.36484/liberal.1527011

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## Introduction

The 2023 presidential and general elections in Türkiye represent a watershed moment in the country's political evolution, with implications that extend across leadership paradigms, institutional structures, and ideological frameworks (Laleoğlu & Özdemir, 2023: 41-43). Traditionally, securing the party presidency conferred a commanding role in national politics. However, this past maxim has been disrupted by recent political emergencies. Notably, since ascending to power in 2002, Erdoğan has succeeded in amalgamating his role as party leader with overarching national political influence, thereby eclipsing his competitors. Yet, the recent elections indicate an undeniable alteration in this pattern; no singular party, including Erdoğan's, can unilaterally shape the national political agenda. Consequently, all political forces, including opposition leaders have pivoted towards coalition-based strategies.

This changing character of political leadership, which now emphasizes pragmatism and an acute political expediency, can be directly attributed to a set of constitutional amendments enacted in 2017 (Grigoriadis, 2017; Hansen & Ghazal, 2020). Following these amendments, the 2018 transition to a presidential system established a new electoral threshold that requires a candidate to secure 50+1 % of total valid votes for the allocation of political power (Carkoglu & Yildirim, 2018; Taş, 2018). This pivotal shift redefined not only reshaped the structural foundations of Turkish politics but also displaced traditional ideological alignments, bringing societal and cultural divisions to the forefront.

Yet, the ramifications of this transformative shift on the nation's democratic fabric remain ambiguous. The polarizing "us versus them" binary, sustained by skillfully orchestrated narratives, has created a political milieu dominated by two irreconcilable worldviews. These divisive tactics extend beyond the Turkish context but resonate with strategies employed globally, reinforcing the universal applicability of such dynamics (Erçetin & Erdoğan, 2018: 14-15; Oner & Shehadeh, 2023: 28-54). Therefore, the political intricacies governing the 2023 presidential elections in Türkiye offer a fertile ground for academic exploration, warranting comprehensive analysis to decode the nuances of this complex transformation in global politics.

The configuration of recent political alignments in Türkiye is profoundly influenced by the stipulated parliamentary election threshold of 7 percent and the requirement of 50+1 votes for a presidential victory. This exceedingly majoritarian electoral structure, rooted in constitutional provisions, has

compelled minor political parties to forge alliances with larger counterparts, a trend evidenced by recent political developments. The implications of such alliances extend beyond mere political pragmatism and reshape the underlying structure of political competition in Türkiye.

Reflecting on the period governed by the parliamentary system, Türkiye's political spectrum was marked by rich ideological diversity manifest in the existence of a multiplicity of parties. The confluence of these varying ideological strands created significant challenges in the formation of coalitions and the execution of national politics. Political dissonance among leaders, historically rooted in the tensions of secular and religious forces, contributed to the transitory nature of coalition governments, ultimately distancing political processes from the citizenry.

This disconnect sowed the seeds of distrust in political parties, setting the stage for Erdoğan and the AKP's ascendancy in 2002, driven by Erdoğan's portrayal as a "political outsider" – a self-professed "Black Turk" in the racial analogy that contrasts with the former 'White Turks,' who represent the elite establishment political class (Güner, 2023; White, 2014: 46-53). The burgeoning discontent with traditional political institutions was reflected in the 2023 election strategy, wherein Erdoğan portrayed the presidential election as a referendum, symbolizing a critical transformation in Türkiye's political culture and reaffirming his innovative approach to governance.

In Türkiye's contemporary political environment, the goal of an electoral victory has necessitated the formation of extensive and heterogeneous coalitions. This trend, as exemplified in the 2023 elections, mirrors broader global shifts towards coalition politics, reflecting a nuanced change in democratic and pseudo-democratic policies. During this electoral cycle, the opposition's principal strategy focused on unseating Erdoğan, a goal that temporarily eclipsed other ideological disparities. Indeed, Türkiye's longstanding Kemalist CHP allied with minor Islamist and right-wing parties – and publicly advocated for an alliance with the People's Democratic Party (HDP) – the then representative of the Kurdish Nationalist Movement in Türkiye. The Republican People's Party (CHP) had traditionally been opposed to both the Kurdish Nationalist and Islamist strands in Turkish politics. Meanwhile, the ruling government concentrated its efforts on the maintaining stability, an endeavor underlined by its commitment to economic reform and regional diplomacy.

This strategic shift resulted in the transformation of Türkiye's political fissures along cultural and conjunctural dimensions in the 2023 elections. This intersection between culture and politics has received increasing schol-

arly attention in recent years, offering a rich analytical framework for understanding profound shifts in Türkiye's political dynamics (Fırat, 2020: 81-100; Kalaycıoğlu, 2012:16; Türk, 2018: 9-14). The multifaceted dimensions of the 2023 elections in Türkiye illuminate a complex political landscape that is interwoven with historical, cultural, and socioeconomic elements. Delving into these elections not only enhances our understanding of Türkiye's political transformation but also contributes to the broader discourse on democratic governance, coalition politics, and political identity.

This article proposes the following queries, forming the core of our analytical lens: How did Erdoğan's redefinition of national identity, incorporation of class politics, and utilization of both culture and conjuncture lead to his victory in the 2023 Turkish elections, particularly considering the economic crisis, systemic challenges that emerged in the post-pandemic environment, and earthquake-related dilemmas? What role did specific discourses around "domestic and national-" themes play in challenging opposition narratives? What specific factors contributed to the opposition's inability to mobilize voter discontent over economic, societal, and geopolitical issues in the 2023 Turkish elections? How did Erdoğan's discursive strategies, including his acknowledgment of the economic crisis' effects and alignment with national identity production, influence voter behavior in working-class areas? How did his approach to foreign policy, especially concerning Israel, Saudi Arabia, Russia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar, contrast with opposition discourses, and what impact did this have on his electoral support?

The electoral victory of Erdoğan and the AKP in 2023 can be analyzed through multiple theoretical lenses. As Özişik (2021) argues, the "New Türkiye" narrative served as both a discursive instrument and superstructural element in establishing AK Parti's hegemonic position. He writes that "the political success of Erdoğan and the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AK Parti) is based on the progress made in the process of democratization and economic development policies as much as on their ability to align the popular masses with their political orientations and visions" (215). This aligns with what Aslan (2018) identifies as the "native and national politics" (Yerli ve Milli Siyaset) framework, which he argues helped consolidate power by "weakening all the elements resisting to the democratization process in Türkiye" (Özişik, 2021: 229). The effectiveness of this strategy became particularly evident in how the AKP navigated multiple challenges in 2023. Kahraman (2008) offers valuable insight into this dynamic through his concept of the "historical bloc" - an alliance between the army, bureaucracy, and secular intellectuals that characterized early Republican Türkiye. As

Özışık (2021) notes, Erdoğan's success lay partly in constructing an alternative bloc through "the coalition of the AKP with the media, conservative intellectuals and various actors working in the social and cultural fields" (237). This strategic realignment proved especially potent during times of crisis. As Özışık (2021) observes, the narrative evolved to incorporate both cultural elements and pragmatic responses to immediate challenges, allowing the AKP to "stabilize the uncertainties related to changing contexts" (217) - a capacity that proved crucial during the economic turbulence and natural disasters of 2023. The success of this approach demonstrates what Duran (2017) and Esayan (2016) describe as the power of "native and national" discourse to unite diverse constituencies under a shared vision of national development and cultural authenticity (Özışık, 2021). This ideological framework provided coherence to the AK Parti's response to multiple systemic challenges while maintaining its core narrative of national renewal and cultural restoration.

This study adopts a predominantly qualitative outlook aided by the supplemented by statistical data. The study begins with an acute discourse analysis of contemporary nationalist politics in Türkiye. This section serves as the foundation for the study's core, which is a qualitative analysis of Erdoğan's evolving political discourse in relation to the electoral dynamics of May 2023 elections. This section employs both conventional scrutinization of Erdoğan's rhetoric as well as historical conceptualization of evolving nationalist ideology in Türkiye. In this context the study embodies a historical comparative approach which provides a macro lens for the study of Turkish politics.

The quantitative component of this study's methodology is introduced in the second section which examines the political economy of Erdoğan's election success. Here this article draws connections between Erdoğan's mass appeal to the Turkish working-class population, election data and the overarching concept of Türkiye's new nationalism. This section again utilizes a comparative historical approach in likening Erdoğan's electoral machinations to global examples in the political right. The data-analysis of this section concludes by comparing the rise in new working-class and nationalist politics with the Turkish state budget - adding a layer of numerical depth to an otherwise discourse focused study.

The final section of this study which examines the geopolitical component of Erdoğan's electoral politics adopts a cross-disciplinary approach. This section integrates the fields of political science, foreign policy analysis, and securitization to explore Erdoğan's discourse, offering a unique perspective on the president's electoral strategy. This multi-pronged approach links voter behav-

ior to Türkiye's foreign policy and vice versa, emphasizing that these developments are taking place in a heightened environment of geopolitical insecurity.

## The New Nationalism in Türkiye: "Yerli ve Milli" – Indigenous and National

Erdoğan's foreign and domestic policy strategies interact in a nuanced manner, demonstrating a coherent approach that incorporates moral obligations within self-perceived historical and geopolitical contexts (Görener & Ucal, 2011: 373; Panayirci & Iseri, 2014: 64). Key principles, such as solidarity with the oppressed, reverence of the Ottoman legacy, and the development of a metaphorical "geography of the heart," along with the idea of "precious solitude," characterize this. Notably, these principles manifest in tangible policies, including Türkiye's involvement in Syria, its stance on the Palestinian Question, and the revival of Ottoman cultural symbols (Başkan, 2019: 88; Islam, 2016: 19-20; Karmon & Barak, 2018: 80; Volfová, 2016: 500). Collectively, these strategies signify Erdoğan's influence on the rising tide of nationalism within Türkiye's domestic politics. Moreover, as noted earlier, geopolitical shifts play a critical role in shaping domestic political landscapes. This interplay provides essential insights into the reconfiguration of national identity and nationalism, factors contributing to Erdoğan's electoral success.

Within this framework, Erdoğan's appeal as a world leader and Türkiye's potential return to global prominence stems from his strategic use of Ottoman symbolism to establish political legitimacy, such as aligning his image with Sultan Abdulhamid II. *The book Nostalgia for the Empire: The Politics of Neo-Ottomanism* by M. Hakan Yavuz provides significant insights into the historical context underpinning the appeal of Erdoğan's neo-Ottoman rhetoric among Turkish voters. Yavuz emphasizes that neo-Ottomanism serves as a bridge between contemporary Turkish identity to a romanticized vision of Ottoman-Islamic heritage. This identity is rooted in historical consciousness and positions Türkiye as the successor to Ottoman grandeur, appealing to conservative and religious segments of society. By invoking Ottoman symbolism and presenting the empire as a "golden age," Erdoğan effectively critiques the Kemalist secularist reforms while promoting an alternative vision of national dignity and self-determination (Yavuz, 2020: 12-14).

Furthermore, Yavuz discusses how Erdoğan's leadership utilizes this historical narrative to solidify political legitimacy and assert Türkiye's geopolitical aspirations. One example is the portrayal of Türkiye as a victim of Western imperialism during the collapse of the Ottoman Empire which serves

as a framework to justify current policies and foster a sense of unity among voters. Erdoğan's emphasis on Ottoman symbolism, including cultural restoration projects and foreign policy strategies inspired by Ottoman history, resonates with voters who perceive Türkiye's modern trajectory as a continuation of its imperial legacy (Yavuz, 2020: 8-10).

Erdoğan's nationalism, as observed in contemporary Türkiye, is deeply intertwined with the historical context of Ottoman nostalgia and the evolution of Turkish identity. Neo-Ottomanism, which underpins much of Erdoğan's rhetoric, reflects a longing to reconnect with the Ottoman Empire's grandeur and simultaneously aims to position Türkiye as a global leader in the Islamic world. This ideology seeks to redefine Türkiye's national identity by emphasizing its Ottoman-Islamic heritage, which in direct contrast to the secular and Western orientation established by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk during the Republic's foundation. Erdoğan's strategic invocation of this past serves dual purposes: to critique Kemalist secularism and to offer a vision of a resurgent Türkiye reclaiming its role as a hegemonic power in the Middle East and beyond. This approach resonates with conservative and nationalist sentiments within Türkiye, bringing together otherwise disparate societal groups under a shared historical and cultural pride (Yavuz, 2020:194 et al.).

The historical roots of this neo-Ottoman nationalism can be traced to the late Ottoman era and the early years of the Republic, marked by profound societal transformations and identity crises. Erdoğan's political strategy draws on these historical experiences, particularly the collective memory of the Ottoman declines and trauma of transitioning to a nation-state. Neo-Ottomanism, as articulated in Erdoğan's policies and public discourse, seeks to reestablish Türkiye as a leader in the Muslim world, countering perceived Western and Russian hegemonic influences. This vision, however, carries inherent contradictions. While it promotes pluralism and multiculturalism as key aspects of the Ottoman legacy, it often excludes non-Sunni and non-Turkish groups, revealing tensions between an inclusive identity and the realities of a hegemonic nationalist agenda. Erdoğan's nationalism, therefore, reflects a complex interplay of historical memory, contemporary political strategy, and socio-cultural aspirations, deeply rooted in the legacies of Ottomanism and modern Türkiye's contested identity (Yavuz, 2020: 144 vd.).

Building upon this historical foundation, transitioning to Erdoğan's domestic strategy, the introduction of the "indigenous and national" concept emerges as a shrewd political maneuver to secure loyalty from nationalist constituencies within conservative right-wing sectors (Tosun, 2016: 128;

Yüksel, 2022: 133). Rather than merely promoting nationalism within an ethnic-cultural framework, this discourse aims to unify various ethnic and religious groups under the aegis of the party and its leader. By framing “indigenous” as active engagement with the nation’s realities and “national” as a Türkiye-centric mode of thought and action, Erdoğan offers a novel interpretation of Turkish conservatism within the context of electoral politics. This focus on the indigenous serves as a counter-narrative to the founding ideology’s elitist republican perspective, carving out a distinctively Turkish pathway (Christofis, 2023: 2) as opposed to the Republican old guard’s staunch Westernism (Çoşkun, 2023a). Erdoğan strategically indigenizes various facets of public life—ranging from geography to production to politics—by emphasizing this revised form of nationalism. The comprehensive nature of this approach underscores Erdoğan’s understanding of Türkiye’s socio-political landscape, epitomizing his domestic-national discourse.

Indigenization, a cornerstone of Erdoğan’s strategic vision, is closely tied to the burgeoning development of Türkiye’s defense industry (Demir, 2020: 37). This comprehensive approach transcends mere economic or political posturing. Instead, it signifies a pronounced pivot toward national pride, realized through an increased localization rate in the production of defense products. The strategy’s successful implementation is exemplified by the international recognition garnered by Türkiye’s domestically produced drones, particularly in the context of the Russian Ukrainian War. Far from being merely an industrial achievement, this realization of indigenization symbolizes a broader paradigm shift in economic policy, advocating for a route characterized by resilience and national strength amid global challenges (Soyaltin-Colella & Demiryol, 2023: 732). Özişik (2023: 539) emphasizes that the “native and national” (*yerli ve milli*) narrative became a dominant reference framework under Erdoğan’s leadership, particularly in the defense industry sector after 2004. According to the author, the strategic shift is evidenced by significant growth in Türkiye’s defense industry, with total revenue increasing from 1.855 billion dollars in 2006 to 12.196 billion dollars in 2022 (541). Özişik underlines that this indigenization policy emerged from Türkiye’s experiences with unreliable Western partners and embargoes, leading to strategic decisions in 2004 that prioritized domestic production capabilities (540). The author further notes that this transformation aligns with what he describes as the “Türkiye Axis” (Türkiye Ekseni) foreign policy perspective, which emphasizes strategic autonomy and reduced foreign dependence in critical sectors (542-543).

Therefore, indigenization must be understood as a multifaceted strategy that extends across various domains, including geography, production, politics,

and broader public life, all of which are integrally aligned with Erdoğan's national vision. Intriguingly, Erdoğan's focus on domesticity and indigenization can be construed as a contemporary form of Turkification, albeit with significant qualifications to the ideology's original incarnation during the Republican/Kemalist period. Specifically, Erdoğan consciously avoids embedding his foreign policy engagements within an ethno-cultural frame, whilst skillfully navigating the intricate demographic balance in domestic politics. Consequently, the term "indigenization" emerges not merely as linguistic nuance but as a functional component within Erdoğan's broader political discourse. The continuity between these two conceptual foci—indigenization in the defense sector and the broader political lexicon—illuminates the sophisticated, multi-layered approach Erdoğan employs in steering Türkiye's national politics.

A critical juncture is marked for the conservative right-wing electorate as they seek to reconcile their past feelings of powerlessness and inadequacy through a revitalized interpretation of the imperial past (Çinkara, 2023: 567-568). This new interpretation, construed by Erdoğan, emphasizes a decisive approach to collective memory and creates a contrasting narrative to opposition proposals in the defense industry, defense technology related fairs, and the geopolitical status quo. The opposition's strategies clearly did not resonate with conservative right and center voters, signaling a failure to connect with the reimagined sense of national pride and strength. In this context, Erdoğan's reimagining of history plays a vital role in engaging the electorate, on fostering a sense of empowerment and establishing a stronger foundation for the conservative right's political positioning (Çinkara, 2023: 573).

The opposition's attempts to court nationalist voters by emphasizing anti-immigrant sentiment were largely unsuccessful, signaling a misunderstanding of the rising nationalist wave in Türkiye. Their strategy of reducing nationalist politics to the issue of immigration failed to resonate with the electorate, given the complexities of conservatism as a significant factor in nationalist sectors. Moreover, unlike Western polities, where migrants are often visible in larger geographic spaces, the visibility of migrants in Türkiye is limited along the Syrian border and in the metropolitan areas of Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir. Access to migrant neighborhoods is often controlled by security forces, and migrants rarely play an active part in Turkish public life. Consequently, the opposition's anti-migrant rhetoric failed to resonate with voters in the Anatolian heartland, where Erdoğan derives most of his support. Large swathes of urban constituents had already pledged their support to the opposition, with the opposition's escalation of anti-migrant rhetoric only serving to consolidate their base with the miniscule addition of protest

right wing voters which provided no numeric advantage in the broader electoral arithmetic.

In contrast, Yanaşmayan, Üstübici, and Kaşlı illustrate how Erdoğan constructs migrant politics within a nationalist discourse through two key mechanisms: civilizational populism and selective inclusion. Yanaşmayan, Üstübici and Kaşlı argue that Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) employs a "civilizationist populist discourse," situating Türkiye's reception of Syrian refugees within the context of Ottoman heritage and Islamic heritage, or Çınar states that it serves as a means to create a new window of opportunity due to crisis-ridden relations with Europe (Yanaşmayan, Üstübici, and Kaşlı 2019: 40; Çınar, 2018: 10-11). This discourse constructs an image of Türkiye as morally superior to the West by emphasizing its hospitality toward refugees and contrasting it with the perceived indifference of Western nations. For example, during parliamentary discussions, AKP leaders frequently referred to Syrian refugees as "brothers" and celebrated Türkiye's role in "saving the honour of humanity" by hosting over 2 million Syrians and Iraqis (Yanaşmayan, Üstübici, and Kaşlı 2019: 47).

This nationalist framing is inherently selective, as it includes Syrian refugees (particularly Sunni Muslims) within the definition of "the people" while maintaining existing ethno-religious hierarchies. Yanaşmayan, Üstübici, and Kaşlı (2019: 43) note that AKP's "hegemonic populist discourse selectively includes and excludes migrants based on existing societal cleavages." This selective inclusion is evident in the government's portrayal of refugees as "guests" rather than individuals with rights, emphasizing religious and cultural ties through concepts like "umma" (community of believers) eschewing rights-based approaches to integration (Yanaşmayan, Üstübici, and Kaşlı 2019: 48). The authors argue that this selective nationalist framing allows Erdoğan to maintain populist appeal while distinguishing Türkiye's approach from the overtly anti-immigrant populism seen in Western Europe.

According to Tekinırk and Irons, Erdoğan's approach to migrant politics serves both pragmatic and ideological objectives within the context of Turkish domestic politics. The authors argue that Erdoğan's immigration and naturalization policies are designed to bolster his party's agenda of promoting Islamic values while simultaneously securing political longevity. This is primarily facilitated through the AKP's "stealth Islamization" strategy, which leverages the integration of predominantly Sunni Muslim migrants to consolidate sectarian influence and promote social conservatism within Turkish society (Tekinırk and Irons 2024).

The authors demonstrate how this nationalist approach fulfills several strategic objectives: First, it allows the AKP to strategically shape the electorate through selective naturalization of likely supporters. Second, it provides crucial labor resources to business allies, strengthening patron-client networks during economic challenges. Third, it advances Erdoğan's broader cultural-ideological project aimed at establishing a "distinctly Muslim Turkish society." Together, these elements reveal how immigration policy has become a key tool in Erdoğan's efforts to maintain power while pursuing his vision of cultural transformation in Türkiye.

According to Morgül, Erdoğan constructs migrant politics within a nationalist discourse through a unique form of "civilizationist populism" that selectively includes certain migrants while maintaining ethnocultural boundaries. At the core of this approach is Erdoğan's portrayal of Turkish-Syrian relations through an Ottoman-Islamic perspective, which highlights religious and historical ties. The author argues that "through his Muslim nationalist appeals, Erdoğan has called on Turkish citizens to display solidarity with their oppressed 'brothers and sisters' from the Middle East" (Morgül 2024: 161-162).

However, this inclusionary rhetoric has distinct limitations and serves specific political purposes. Morgül argues that Erdoğan's discourse establishes "a hierarchical relationship between the two groups, a relationship based on charity and paternalistic protection rather than equal status" (Morgül 2024: 157). The author argues that Erdoğan instrumentalizes Syrian refugees in two significant ways: domestically, to reinforce his Muslim nationalist vision of Türkiye, and internationally, as a bargaining chip in relations with the EU. By 2018, as economic conditions deteriorated and public sentiment turned against refugees, Erdoğan placed greater emphasis on repatriation while maintaining religious brotherhood rhetoric - revealing how his "civilizationist populism" adapts to political pressures while serving his broader ideological project of positioning Türkiye as a leader of the Muslim world.

Fundamentally, this failure of this strategy by the opposition highlights a wider trend in the Turkish political space, with Erdoğan and the AKP moving beyond the realm of electoral politics into the intricate sphere of identity formation shaped by an overwhelming consensus amongst the Turkish right. Erdoğan's long-term approach to nationalism has shaped a structural national identity, distinct from simple party affiliation, clearly aligning with his enduring maxim of "yerli ve milli" – indigenous and national. This evolution of national identity represents the pinnacle of Erdoğan's endeavors on shaping Turkish political culture and hence acts as the conveyor of his electoral success.

The opposition's fragmented structure and lack of cohesive political discourse on national identity contributed to their electoral failure. The structural constraints imposed by the 50% + 1 rule of the presidential system necessitated that the opposition coalesce around broad, often ambivalent discourses – hindered any unified position on national identity. While indeed this opposition coalition was the broadest in living memory – it failed to unite the electorate, even with the persistent deterioration of economic, social, and political conditions under the rule of Erdoğan since the enactment of the constitutional referendum in 2017. Thus, Erdoğan was able to limit the impact of the deterioration of particularly economic conditions – and successfully constructed a counternarrative that eclipsed the opposition's campaign which focused largely on poor governance.

The opposition's reluctance to focus on national identity stemmed from the fear of alienating constituents who did not embrace it, creating a dilemma that naturally worked in Erdoğan's favor. Furthermore, the inherent constraints and defining aspects of national identity allowed for political polarization which was particularly preferable for Erdoğan. In examining the multi-actor structure and varied political nature of the opposition, it becomes clear that the absence of a coherent and inclusive political discourse was a significant factor in their defeat, a fact that underscores the complexities of national identity in the Turkish political arena.

In the unfolding political theater of Türkiye, the first round of the presidential elections on May 14, 2023, delivered initially surprising results warranting meticulous analysis. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the candidate endorsed by the People's Alliance (Cumhur İttifakı), garnered 49.52 percent of the valid votes, while his main adversary, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu of the Nation Alliance (Millet İttifakı), trailed with 44.88 percent. Notably, the most arresting outcome emerged in the form of Sinan Oğan, the candidate representing the nationalist ATA Alliance (ATA İttifakı), who secured 5.17 percent of the total vote. With this margin, Oğan effectively ascended to the role of a king-maker, a dynamic that reconfigures the existing political equations.

Against the backdrop, to secure electoral victories, the alliance between the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) and the Justice and Development Party (AKP) must strategically emphasize unity and consolidate their shared nationalist-conservative voter base. The essay highlights that the MHP-AKP alliance capitalized on a portrayal of their camp as defenders of national values against opposition forces, effectively consolidating conservative voters. This alliance should further capitalize on President Erdoğan's widespread popular-

ity and framing electoral contests as a struggle to safeguard historical gains under the AKP's leadership. Additionally, employing media dominance and resource advantages can strengthen the alliance's campaign strategy (Esen & Yardımcı-Geyikçi, 2020: 686).

Furthermore, addressing economic challenges and socio-political concerns, such as rising unemployment and issues related to Syrian migrants, can help prevent the loss of public support. Improving media and public outreach to highlight past achievements and future promises may enhance voter confidence. The AKP-MHP alliance must also adapt its electoral tactics to counter vibrant opposition campaigns that focus on uniting disillusioned voters. By refining its nationalist-conservative narrative and addressing criticisms proactively, the alliance can maintain its competitive edge in Türkiye's evolving political landscape (Esen & Yardımcı-Geyikçi, 2020: 683).

The essay suggests that the alliance between the AKP and MHP can sustain electoral success by consolidating their nationalist and right-wing populist base, particularly through strategic use of authoritarian populism, especially during times of economic and social crisis. The MHP's traditional ultranationalist ideology aligns with the AKP's unique brand of right-wing populism, which combines neoliberal policies with pragmatic social assistance to garner support from diverse groups, including the working class and rural voters. To maintain dominance, the alliance should focus on leveraging its political influence and media control, while marginalizing opposition through restrictive measures. Addressing emerging rural and urban discontent through selective policies, particularly by framing economic struggles as external threats to the nation, could help solidify their narrative and electoral base (Karataşlı & Kumral, 2023: 28-29).

Moreover, emphasizing infrastructure projects and leveraging populist economic narratives remains central to the AKP-MHP strategy. These initiatives serve as a means of redistributing resources to loyal constituencies, consolidating their socio-political influence. However, growing rural resistance to environmental degradation and the commodification of natural resources presents a significant challenge to the alliance. By addressing these grievances through tailored support for agrarian communities and framing rural development as a nationalistic endeavor, the alliance could counter potential erosion of support. Striking a strategic balance between economic pragmatism and nationalist rhetoric is critical for sustaining the AKP-MHP's populist hegemony (Karataşlı & Kumral, 2023: 24-25).

Meanwhile, in tandem with Oğan's brief period of electoral success, the opposition cohort's pre-election calculations that the gap between Erdoğan and Kılıçdaroğlu would be slim failed. Erdoğan in practice was only shy a few hundred thousand votes from victory. This miscalculation on the opposition's part over-estimated societal discontent with Erdoğan – and failed to utilize the presidential system's electoral alliance structure to their advantage. Erdoğan retained his core constituents through an alliance with a minor Islamist party, the New Welfare Party (Yeniden Refah Partisi, YRP), ensuring even disgruntled voters sided with him despite grievances with his leadership and the sustained rule of the AKP (Çoşkun, 2023b). Erdoğan's electoral success therefore showcases an acute command of the Turkish right-wing – and solidifies his lasting imprint on majoritarian-style rule. Despite concerns over the erosion of democratic institutions, this style of governance remains validated in a purely electoral sense.

Subsequently, the second round of elections, held on May 28, 2023, further underscored the pivotal role nationalism played in shaping the outcome. Erdoğan ultimately triumphed with 52.2 percent of the vote, compared to Kılıçdaroğlu's 47.8 percent. The electoral data underscores the resurgent emphasis on nationalist sentiments, reflected in both the narrow margin of victory and the outsized influence wielded by smaller nationalist parties. Together, these electoral events shed light on the entangled relationship between nationalist currents and electoral politics in Türkiye. The role of Oğan as a kingmaker, alongside the marginal but decisive victory by Erdoğan, highlights the instrumental role of nationalist ideologies in not merely influencing, but indeed shaping, the nation's political landscape. This complex interplay between nationalism and electoral outcomes certainly invites deeper scholarly scrutiny to decode its broader implications for Türkiye's evolving political milieu – a question that will present itself in the short to medium term scenario where Erdoğan will step down from active politics.

### **Erdoğan's Working-Class Conservatism**

The discourse on counterintuitive voting behaviors among the working class has garnered intellectual interest, both in global contexts such as the election of Donald Trump and Brexit, and in localized settings like Türkiye's political landscape. In both cases, the tendency of working-class individuals to seemingly vote against their economic interests has prompted a reevaluation of from conventional analysis grounded in rational choice theory, which posit that material self-interest would naturally align the working class with

left-leaning ideologies (Carnes & Lupu, 2021: 59; Lamont et al., 2017: 165-166; Morgan & Lee, 2018: 234-241). Drawing parallels between these global and local phenomena, it is important to consider the influence of the “cultural turn” in academia. This epistemological shift has emphasized the importance of cultural constructs and subjective human experiences as analytical frameworks.

Thus, the working class's predilection for right-wing parties in Türkiye emerges not as an anomaly but as an echo of broader tendencies that prioritize cultural and identity issues over economic interests. As in the case of the 2016 U.S. Elections and Brexit, the Turkish working class's consistent support for right-wing political entities, despite these parties' endorsement of endorsing free-market policies that often undermine job security, cannot solely be understood through the lens of economic rationality (Aytürk & Esen, 2021: 525). Given the rising global significance of left-wing politics, the paradoxical political inclinations of the Turkish working class contribute to a larger debate, suggesting that traditional models of understanding voter behavior may be insufficient.

In the realm of political paradoxes, the electoral success of figures like Donald Trump in the United States and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Türkiye presents intriguing case studies. As Gabbatt identifies the influence of charismatic outsider figures, Erdoğan's appeal to the working classes similarly derives from his charismatic leadership style and his adeptness at portraying himself as a “man of the people” (Gabbatt, 2016). Much like Trump, who leveraged widespread distrust in bureaucratic institutions to his advantage, Erdoğan actively capitalizes on the dichotomy between “the people” and “the elites” during electoral campaigns. These charismatic leaders, regardless of their affluent backgrounds, resonate with working-class voters by stoking fears and frustrations related to economic decline and bureaucratic inefficiencies. Consequently, both Trump and Erdoğan exemplify how individual leadership can eclipse institutional party capacity in shaping voting behavior.

Specifically, in Türkiye, Erdoğan's populism functions not merely as rhetorical flourish but as a substantive political strategy that bridges the divide between party elites and the working classes. He engages the electorate within a shared cultural and symbolic framework, similar to how Trump appealed to economic disenfranchisement and anti-establishment sentiments in the U.S. Erdoğan has successfully.

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's enduring political tenure epitomizes a potent amalgamation of personal charisma and discursive strategy (Çay, 2022: 218). Astutely framing Türkiye's cultural fissures within a class-political context,

he neutralizes the opposition's attempts to leverage economic crises. By adeptly fusing political rhetoric with cultural identity, Erdoğan solidifies his grip on power and frequently undermining the opposition's efforts to construct an alternative narrative resonant with the working class. Notably, the allure of his political language and strategic allocation of economic resources have fostered a close and enduring relationship with this portion of the electorate (Kocamaner, 2018: 36-37). Furthermore, the opposition's narrow focus on material interests in its characterization of the electorate's affiliation with Erdoğan, often framed in disparaging terms, inadvertently strengthens voter inclinations toward him. This is noteworthy because, since the inception of modern Türkiye, elites who self-identify as regime guardians have enshrined these cultural divisions as criteria for ideal citizenship (Güzel, 2022: 117). While they align themselves with left-wing ideology, this does not naturally translate into a cooperative relationship with the working class.

This phenomenon mirrors global trends, where left-wing politics is increasingly entangled with culture wars, creating a discord between the material needs of the working class and the ideological stances of the left. Moreover, the opposition's insistence on framing the cultural struggle in terms of the nation's founding ideology fosters an exclusionary atmosphere for voters. Such an approach ignores the deep historical traumas that these ideologies, with their stringent secularism and Westernized citizen-building projects, have inflicted upon society's marginalized sectors. In contrast, Erdoğan astutely positions himself as the guardian of these peripheral communities, invoking historical contexts throughout electoral campaigns (Göksu, 2019: 1078; Korkin, 2020: 262). In sum, the symbiosis of Erdoğan's charisma and the cultural division within Türkiye signifies a pivotal development in the nation's political evolution, with far-reaching implications for its domestic political landscape.

The electoral support for Erdoğan among the working class in Türkiye is deeply intertwined with the emergence of new industrial cities and the demographic transformations within them. For instance, in the industrial areas of Gaziantep and Tekirdağ, overwhelming support of the working class for Erdoğan is not only evident but indicative of a broader trend (Soydan, 2018a, 2018b). These areas, marked by dense labor migration, witnessed a significant increase in voter share for Erdoğan, reflecting a disconnection between the working class and the traditional left. Such voting patterns reveal an evolving landscape where old alignments are being replaced by new affiliations, driven by factors that transcend the conventional concept of "class consciousness." This shift points to the complex interplay between urbanization,

industrialization, and political allegiance, further emphasizing the nuanced relationship between Erdoğan and the working class in modern Türkiye.

Erdoğan's core constituency of working class, lower to middle income multi-generational households has therefore endured and indeed proliferated since the inception of the AKP in 2001. This is particularly striking, as the AKP's leadership, including Erdoğan's inner circle, has become linked to the accumulation of illicit wealth—giving rise to a new class of economic elites—an emerging elite that contrasts sharply with Erdoğan's traditional supporter base. This dichotomy between the upper echelons of the AKP and its large constituent base has not created friction in the electoral sphere. In contrast Erdoğan has managed to strike a delicate balance between the diverse economic strata that make up the AKP's political milieu.

The interplay between Erdoğan's government and the working class in Türkiye manifests as a complex, multi-layered relationship, transcending simple electoral calculations. Erdoğan's political vision has fostered a targeted approach to welfare, specifically designed to ensure political inclusion and mobilization. This tactical implementation of social assistance serves not merely as a mechanism for immediate relief but as a potent tool for political engagement. The strategy, which has garnered considerable attention, offers a tailored solution for the working classes, addressing a gap by the opposition's lack of effective policies and communication strategies for this demographic. This dynamic intertwines material provisions with cultural and social resonance, strengthening Erdoğan's political support within the working class.

Building on this notion, fiscal data further illuminates the government's strategic focus on welfare initiatives. Recent trends in Türkiye's budget policy affirm the administration's increased emphasis on social assistance. Expenditures in this domain escalated from 74.488 billion TL in 2020 to 103.228 billion TL and 148.962 billion TL in the subsequent years of 2021 and 2022, respectively (SES, 2022). Significantly, the budgetary proposal for 2023 envisages an unprecedented allocation of 258.437 billion TL towards social assistance (SES, 2022). This consistent upward trajectory not only supports the government's sustained investment in welfare programs but also underscores the material scope of its strategy for political inclusion and mobilization within the working class. The data serves as a tangible indicator, reinforcing the intricacy and deliberation behind Erdoğan's engagement with this crucial societal sector. Indeed, this budgetary commitment, though significant, must be understood within a broader analytical framework.

However, Tuğal (2009) underlines that AKP's hegemonic success stems from a complex interaction between political society, civil society, and the state. He emphasizes that the party achieved popular consent not merely through social assistance, but through what he terms a "mobilization of demobilization" in which existing mobilization reinforced hegemony and encouraged popular passivity. According to Tuğal, this was possible "because of Islamic activists' and pious people's increasing integration with the state through identification with the party and its leaders" (239). He underscores how Islamic civil society and political society were reintegrated under AKP rule, noting that "religious people sought upward mobility and happiness at work using the political party, Sufi communities, associations, and networks" (249).

Tuğal further emphasizes that this hegemonic project operated across multiple interconnected domains. He illustrates how "the political party, municipal authorities, imams, media channels, friends, kin, and co-locals merged to build bourgeois Islamic ethics through preaching that working hard and privatization are an integral part of religion" (249). Moreover, he stresses that "workers consented to the rule of experts, as these experts and the politicians who appointed them were good Muslims" (249). Thus, Tuğal demonstrates that AKP's success lay in its nuanced strategy of integrating political society with civil society while infusing Islamic spirit into existing political structures, rather than relying primarily on welfare provision.

Ultimately, the convergence of political strategies, societal dynamics, and the economic landscape in Türkiye has forged a complex bond between the working class and right-wing political entities. This relationship, shaped by Erdoğan's charismatic leadership, targeted welfare policies, and the opposition's shortcomings, not only explains the voting preferences of the working classes but also underscores a nuanced political landscape. The intricate interaction between class politics, identity, and economic considerations offers a compelling framework for understanding contemporary Turkish politics. The insights gained from this analysis may serve as an essential reference for political scientists, policymakers, and scholars seeking to unravel the complexities of political behavior and the enduring influence of leadership in shaping electoral outcomes. Moreover, these trends offer a new lens for scrutiny regarding the transforming nature of class politics within the traditional right-left dichotomy.

## Geopolitics in the Domestic Context

Türkiye's foreign policy, shaped by various domestic and international factors, has undergone a multifaceted reorientation that transcends tradition-

al political boundaries. This transformation is not solely rooted in domestic politics but also reflects broader regional and global developments. Economic opportunities, combined with the potential to exert power and influence, have determined the fundamental direction of the foreign policy pursued in the last two decades.

Since the ascension of the AKP in 2002, with the subsequent consolidation of Erdoğan's leadership, there has been a strategic alignment of Middle Eastern interests within Türkiye's foreign policy objectives. This alignment has not only shaped the priorities but also required the construction of an appropriate political language in domestic politics, highlighting the complexity and dynamism that characterize Türkiye's contemporary political landscape (Barkey, 2021: 171). This in turn has been coupled with the vast financialization and subsequent securitization of foreign policy matters, paralleling Türkiye's increasing foreign policy activism in its region. Turkish foreign policy now views regions of influence as markets in which Türkiye can showcase its military prowess by seeking lucrative arms transfer agreements with host governments. This has contributed to the formation of a real economy around foreign policy, with defense firms taking center stage.

The expansion of Turkish foreign policy has necessitated a reconstruction of its associated discourse, reflecting the broader complexity of both regional and global dynamics. In contrast to a traditional and status quo-oriented approach that shuns interventionism, the inclusion of diverse geographies, as well as their respective historical-social dynamics, has broadened the practical and discursive capacities of Turkish foreign policymakers (Balta, 2018: 14). Under Erdoğan's leadership, this divergence from past practices has been strategically utilized to legitimize his domestic political position, employing a language that critiques the previous paths by pejorative terms such as "monarchist." The adaptation to a more varied and complex geopolitical landscape thus marks a significant departure from traditional Turkish foreign policy, one which echoes through both domestic politics and the nation's global stance.

Erdoğan's utilization of personalized alliance systems in foreign policy is a strategic factor that has significantly contributed to his domestic political success (Ülgül, 2019: 173). This innovative approach transcends the limitations of conventional institutional protocols, achieving notable gains through an emphasis on personal relationships. The perception of indispensability of Erdoğan's leadership in maintaining the momentum and rewards in foreign policy has only strengthened within his electoral base. Prior to the 2023 elections, the opposition's focus on institutionalism, championed by the presidential candidate Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, met with rejection from centrist

and right-wing voters. Erdoğan's framing of foreign policy as an extension of domestic politics, a divergence from opposition's emphasis on reactive position, appears to be instrumental in consolidating his support. This approach has also facilitated his ability to engage conservative and nationalist voter groups on a more expansive scale.

Erdoğan's integration of foreign policy into the national identity narrative serves as an influential tool in alleviating domestic class tensions, even in the face of potential material losses. Despite the escalating economic challenges that impact the middle and lower classes, his voter base has remained resilient. The opposition's tendency to either marginalize foreign policy or treat it as a negligible component of its political platform inadvertently underscores the dichotomy between national identity and class dynamics. Moreover, the implication of this policy extends to the economic opportunities generated through personal relationships with other nations, affecting the domestic class dynamics and establishing a new framework for economic policy that includes emerging markets such as Russia, China, and the Arab Gulf states. This alignment with such nations play a critical role in the economic advancement of the Anatolian region, which constitutes a significant segment of the AKP's voting pool, meaning that any development in these relationships has a broad economic impact in the region.

The opposition's approach to foreign policy, focusing exclusively on bureaucratic transformation and disregarding its social dimension, stands in stark contrast to Erdoğan's utilization of foreign policy as a mechanism for redefining Türkiye's global stance and national identity. Within Erdoğan's framework, foreign policy offers not only tangible economic benefits, -such as expanded access to international markets and energy resource transfers— but also profound psychological impacts, particularly resonating within the AKP's broad voter base. A compelling example of this dynamic emerged following the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War between Azerbaijan and Armenia. During this period, widespread Turkish public support for Azerbaijan underscored the perception of the conflict as a pressing security issue directly tied to Türkiye's interests. Such mass solidarity signals a transformation in the understanding of national identity, extending beyond historical-social sympathy for Azerbaijan, and indicates the increasing weight of national power's influence beyond state territoriality.

A profound change in voter behavior, arising from the diminishing distinction between domestic and foreign policy, reflects a shift in the national consciousness. This shift transcends the historical and social sympathy for

Azerbaijan and highlights the influence of national power beyond state territoriality. Within the electorate, any political initiative perceived as a retreat is synonymous with loss. Factors such as economic erosion, particularly inflation, may contribute to this perception, amplifying the desire to protect and preserve existing gains. Developments in the defense industry, marked by its transformation into a form of technological nationalism, have further underscored Türkiye's geopolitical ambitions. Consequently, foreign policy in Türkiye has transcended its traditional role, performed by technical cadres, and become an essential lever in domestic politics. This is clear in Erdoğan's utilization of foreign policy in shaping a new nationalism, grounded in the geopolitical character ascribed to this rhetoric (Saraçoğlu & Demirkol, 2015: 302). Under the AKP administration, Türkiye's foreign policy has transcended its traditional technocratic boundaries and emerged as a vital tool in shaping domestic political dynamics. Saraçoğlu and Demirkol (2015) argue that the AKP's foreign policy is not merely a reaction to international developments but a central component of its nationalist project (302). This transformation, they explain, is grounded in the AKP's reformulation of national identity, which integrates Ottoman history and Sunni-Islamic values (Saraçoğlu & Demirkol, 2015: 307). The authors emphasize that Erdoğan's government uses foreign policy as an ideological platform to legitimize and substantiate its new nationalist vision, drawing on Ahmet Davutoğlu's Strategic Depth to position Türkiye as a central power within its historical and geographical 'sphere of influence (Saraçoğlu & Demirkol, 2015: 313-314).' They further contend that this strategy not only reinforces Türkiye's regional ambitions but also serves to consolidate the AKP's domestic hegemony by creating a coherent narrative of national history and interests (Saraçoğlu & Demirkol, 2015:310). Thus, as Saraçoğlu and Demirkol assert, foreign policy under Erdoğan has evolved into a critical lever for redefining Türkiye's national identity and advancing the AKP's ideological project (Saraçoğlu & Demirkol, 2015: 313-314).

The opposition's attempts to create new alliance systems and restructure the defense industry have met with disapproval among center-right voters, bolstering the argument that Erdoğan's foreign policy has been an effective tool in domestic politics due to its linkage with national identity and emerging class policies. In Türkiye's new evolving political landscape, foreign policy actors such as the security bureaucracy and representatives of the defense industry are essential members of Erdoğan's nationalist coalition. Attempts by the Turkish opposition to challenge this coalition has been unsuccessful owing to the group's largescale approval by the electorate.

Through a comprehensive assessment of Türkiye's geopolitical landscape, President Erdoğan's foreign policy emerges as a groundbreaking and successful instrument in domestic politics, intertwining elements of national identity and newly formed class policies. The financialization of foreign policy objectives, such as securing cash payouts and large-scale investments from the Arab-Gulf, serve to alleviate class tension and economic hardship – creating a lasting imprint on the electorate of financial success. Furthermore, the securitization of foreign policy, manifest largely in the vast expansion of the military industrial complex in Türkiye, constitutes a core element of Erdoğan's new nationalist framework. Therefore geopolitics, the dissemination of foreign policy rhetoric and its practical applications form the culmination of Erdoğan's efforts to build a political culture that ensures his majoritarian grip on the electorate and complements simultaneous efforts within the economic and national spheres of policy.

The intricate convergence of domestic and foreign policy under Erdoğan's leadership illustrates a generational transformation in Türkiye's political landscape. The carefully cultivated alignment between foreign policy initiatives and domestic political objectives has expanded the traditional borders of national power beyond state territoriality. This alignment transcends mere political strategy, functioning as a profound reflection of national identity and global aspirations, intricately woven into a more enduring and significant political culture. The reaction among center-right voters, the developments in defense industry, and the geopolitical extensions all attest to the pivotal role of foreign policy nation's contemporary political environment. Ultimately, this study underscores the complex interplay between national identity, class politics, and foreign policy, providing a compelling perspective on the dynamics of modern Turkish society.

## Conclusion

Contrary to expectations predicated on Türkiye's multifaceted crises, the 2023 general and presidential elections culminated in a victory for incumbent President Erdoğan rather than the opposition. This research article argues that Erdoğan's electoral success is attributable to three pivotal dynamics: the emergence of new class politics, the instrumentalization of geopolitics, and a redefined conceptualization of nationalism.

Erdoğan, a seasoned politician with more than two decades at the helm of Türkiye's government, possesses well-cultivated political reflexes and acumen and a sharp understanding of the Turkish right. Such attributes con-

fer upon him a unique capacity to devise practical and innovative political solutions, setting him apart from his adversaries. This analytical framework suggests that his electoral resilience, despite Türkiye grappling with escalating economic, geopolitical, and social dilemmas, can be traced back to this unique form of governance.

In an ongoing environment of burgeoning economic challenges, Erdoğan's discourses have emphasized his cognizance of such complexities. Employing the machinery of state, he leveraged state resources and power in a manner that favored the working classes, thereby positioning himself amongst those marginalized in Türkiye's socio-economic landscape. Concurrently, his economic policy directives offered incentives to capitalist entities, thereby sustaining a dual relationship that averted any incipient class antagonism. Furthermore, Erdoğan managed to craft narratives that constrict the opposition's political latitude, particularly within the contours of the prevailing culture war in Türkiye. All of this was achieved amidst an environment of deteriorating judicial independence, increasing state oppression and overall trends of poor governance. Nonetheless, Erdoğan's electorate appears undeterred in their support for the incumbent, and place little to no emphasis on the aforementioned conditions.

In the geopolitical domain, Türkiye has experienced a certain degree of isolation and confrontation, most prominently in the aftermath of the Arab Spring.

President Erdoğan's revisionist recalibration of Turkish foreign policy during this period triggered a consolidation among status quo actors in the region. Originally, foreign policy strategists in Türkiye envisaged the country as a potential model for democratic governance during the societal upheavals in the Middle East and North Africa. This vision manifested in Türkiye's role in the so-called "Arab Spring" of 2011, where Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party was viewed as a potential model for the region, particularly as it had managed to reconcile Islam with democracy and the West (Tocci et al., 2011: 39). However, this aspiration faced challenges due to evolving regional dynamics. As Blanchard et al. (2012: 17) note, U.S. concerns were being addressed in an environment where various global and regional powers, including Russia, China, and emerging powers like Türkiye, sought to shape events in the Middle East, often with competing visions. The U.S. approach also shifted, with the Obama administration adopting what Blanchard et al. (2012: 18) describe as a "varied approach to different cases of unrest and change in the region," operating on the belief that heavy-handed direct responses by

outside powers might prove counterproductive. This represented a step back from more ambitious efforts at regional transformation.

The emergent geopolitical realities, particularly the augmented influence of Gulf Arab states, have compelled Türkiye to reassess its foreign policy objectives. Erdoğan has henceforth navigated beyond the dichotomy of revisionism and statism, initiating dialogues with regional adversaries such as Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. This strategic adaptation facilitated Erdoğan's circumvention of geopolitical isolation, while simultaneously neutralizing opposition critiques that accused him of policy inefficiency and institutional inadequacy. Importantly, Erdoğan reframed these policy shifts within an economic narrative, asserting that these foreign policy realignments would ultimately enhance the well-being of the Turkish populace. This strategy—arguably a form of socializing foreign policy garnered further potency due to the opposition's nebulous stance on international matters. This is clearly exemplified in Erdoğan's construction of a nationalist discourse, which blends several fields into a new iteration of Turkish patriotism, shaped by the AKP's own ideology and class consciousness. In effect, this is a nationalism that appeals to a broader base and is negotiated with geosocial and geopolitical concepts. Reflecting this perspective, Erdoğan remarked:

"We had the opportunity to evaluate global and regional developments among ourselves. We focused on important and comprehensive cooperation projects within the framework of a win-win approach. Our cooperation with these countries will develop further with concrete projects in the coming period. Hopefully, we will see the positive effects of this on our economy very soon. We will swiftly implement the decisions we have made, particularly in fields such as the defense industry, energy, tourism, and contracting" (Gündoğmuş & Akan, 2023).

Complementing these geopolitical and economic strategies, Erdoğan's electoral successes also find explanation in his rearticulation of Turkish nationalism. The political and social capital of nationalism in Türkiye is notably robust, as evidenced by the existence of two nationalist parties in the parliament and the rise of nationalist political figures such as Oğan. Factors contributing to the resurgent nationalism include the increased visibility of refugees, exacerbated by economic anxieties. Erdoğan deftly restructured nationalist discourse, shifting focus from ethno-cultural dimensions to incorporate economic, geopolitical, and military facets. Throughout the election campaign, he accentuated Türkiye's defense capabilities, its automotive industry exemplified by the brand TOGG, and military interventions in Azerbaijan and Libya.

Erdoğan's triumph in the electoral arena can be attributed his pragmatic approach and preference for practical solutions —traits that have consistently marked his political trajectory. The opposition's inability to secure electoral gains, despite the facade of unity, stems from their failure to offer a cogent, populist alternative to Erdoğan's well-calibrated formulations across economic, geopolitical, and identarian dimensions.

Erdoğan's electoral success paints a complex picture spanning foreign policy, nationalism, and a unique view on class struggles. While Erdoğan's political machinations and swift shifts in domestic and international policy have been attributed to simple pragmatism and electoral calculations, this more comprehensive rationale points to an intricate strategy seeking to shape the political arena. The seamless connections in the fields of the economic, national, and international have allowed Erdoğan to re-design the electorate in a manner that has ensured uninterrupted electoral success over the past last two decades. In doing so, Erdoğan and the AKP, and now the wider People's Alliance, have established a lasting model within the right-wing politics.

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