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The Political Geography of Migration in Turkey: University Students' Perception of Afghan and Syrian Migrants

Türkiye'de Göçün Siyasi Coğrafyası: Üniversite Öğrencilerinin Afgan ve Suriyeli Göçmen Algısı

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Abstract

The phenomenon of [international] migration, which is defined as the spatial expression of the processes of control and conflict over power and parts of geographical space, has become a means of marginalization. Human mobility, which increases especially in different regions due to political and geographical developments such as war, terrorism, and climate change, leads to multidimensional opportunities and problems both in the source geography of migration and in the countries where migration takes place. At this point, Turkey has become the center of migration flows occurring in different geographies due to its geopolitical position. It has also become a country where problems arising from migration have increased in sociopolitical, cultural, and economic terms. In this context, this study aims to analyze local and international students' perception of the marginalization of Afghan and Syrian migrants in the relationship of political geography and migration. In the study, which is based on the quantitative research method, a total of 335 students, 217 Turkish citizens and 118 foreign nationals, from 16 different cities of Turkey, were included using non-random sampling. The survey data obtained from local and international students, using the scale of immigrant perception, were analyzed using SPSS software. The research revealed a significant difference in the perceptions between local participants and international students towards Afghan and Syrian immigrants. At this point, it was determined in the study that local participants came to the fore with the negative dimensions of marginalization (danger and social exclusion), while international students with the positive dimensions (humanism and social inclusion). In addition, there was a significant difference between local and international participants in t-test averages.

Keywords: Afghan, Migration, Migrant Perception, Political Geography and Migration, Syrian

Öz

Güç ve coğrafi alanın bölümleri üzerindeki kontrol ve çatışma süreçlerinin mekânsal ifadesi olarak tanımlanan [uluslararası] göç olgusu, günümüzde yoğun bir şekilde ötekileştirmenin bir aracı haline gelmiştir. Özellikle farklı bölgelerde savaş, terörizm, iklim değişikliği gibi siyasi ve coğrafi gelişmelerin etkisiyle artış gösteren insan hareketliliği hem göçün kaynak coğrafyasında hem de göçün gerçekleştiği ülkelerde çok boyutlu fırsatların ve sorunların ortaya çıkmasına neden olmaktadır. Bu noktada Türkiye, jeopolitik konumunun da etkisiyle farklı coğrafyalarda meydana gelen göç akışlarının merkezi haline gelerek sosyopolitik, kültürel ve ekonomik açılarla göçten kaynaklı problemlerin artış gösterdiği bir niteliğe sahip olmuştur. Bu kapsamda bu çalışmada, siyasi coğrafya ve göç ilişkiselinde yerel ve uluslararası öğrencilerin Afgan ve Suriyeli göçmenlere yönelik ötekileştirme algısının analizi amaçlanmaktadır. Nicel araştırma yönteminin temellendirildiği çalışmaya, tesadüfi olmayan örneklem türü kullanılarak Türkiye'nin 16 farklı şehriden 217 Türk vatandaşı ve 118 yabancı uyruklu olmak üzere toplam 335 öğrenci dahil edilmiştir. Araştırmada göçmen algısı ölçeği kullanılarak yerel ve uluslararası öğrencilerden elde edilen anket verileri SPSS uygulaması aracılığıyla analiz edilmiştir. Araştırma sonucunda, yerel katılımcılar ile uluslararası öğrencilerin Afgan ve Suriyeli göçmenlere yönelik algılarında anlamlı bir farklılığın olduğu ortaya konulmuştur. Bu noktada çalışmada yerel katılımcıların ötekileştirmenin negatif boyutlarıyla (tehlike ve sosyal dışlama) fakat uluslararası öğrencilerin olumlu boyutlarıyla (hümanizm ve sosyal içerme) ön plana çıktığı tespit edilmiştir. Ayrıca çalışmada t testi ortalamaları noktasında yerel ve uluslararası katılımcılar arasında anlamlı bir farklılığın ortaya çıktığı anlaşılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Afgan, Göç, Göçmen Algısı, Siyasi Coğrafya ve Göç, Suriyeli

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INTRODUCTION

In the historical process, societies have been displaced compulsorily due to war, conflict, natural disasters, terrorism, and colonialism. They also migrated voluntarily to obtain more reasonable living standards (Ünal, 2014). In the modern period, migration has played a major role in industrialization, the emergence of nation-states, and the development of the capitalist world market (Castles & Miller, 2014). Migration has evolved into a socioeconomically and politically important phenomenon, marking this era as the age of migration. Unlike previous migration cycles, the assumed mobility of migrants has intensified with the increase in climate crises and in geographies affected by war and conflict. International migration, which increased especially after 1945, became more intense in the 1980s and 1990s. In the following periods, the destinations, sizes, and origins of migrations have diversified, and thus international migrations have expanded beyond the Western geographies (Weiner, 1993). With the increase in migration, migration has gained a permanent dimension, affecting and transforming the structure, demographic characteristics, and sociopolitical, economic, and cultural dynamics of nations (Tümtaş & Ergun, 2016). This situation has had multidimensional consequences for migrants participating in mobility processes, especially for the local populations living in migration-receiving geographies.

The social fractures and problems resulting from the migration phenomenon have become an important context for geographical analysis in terms of drawing attention to the contradictions in migration policies (Megoran, 2005). At this point, geographers' rethinking of the current system regulating migration movements is also important in the context of socio-spatial analysis of irregular migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. At this level, geographers' examination of how citizenship, the construction of conflict spaces, and the penal system work together makes the archetypes of the spatiality of migration comprehensible (Bauder, 2003). However, the position of migration in the discipline of geography has begun to change significantly. Migration studies, once clearly located within population geography and analyzed in terms of their role in population change, have moved beyond the boundaries of this sub-discipline. Geographers studying migration now draw on a much wider range of influences, including labor geographies (King, 2012), legal geographies (Strauss, 2017), and political geographies (Buckley et al., 2017), along with cultural return, mobility return, and transnational approaches. At this point, two distinct focal points emerge: the first tackles the causes of migration. This is based on a concern that dates back to Ravenstein's (1885) formulation of immigration laws. However, the second emphasis is now increasingly shifting to broader issues of migration policy, that is, the political geography of migration (borders, control, power practices, marginalization, geographies of conflict) (Skeldon, 2008; Czaika & De Haas, 2013). At this point, the securitization of migration has become a defining feature of contemporary geopolitics. This has led to the development of a political and geographical perspective that is critical of deeply exclusionary and reactive spatial politics (Coleman, 2012).

The geographical and political perspective has focused on geographies where geopolitical ruptures have increased. In today's world, which has witnessed mass migration with increasing intensity since the 1980s, Turkey has turned into a geography where international migrants have increased due to its geopolitical disadvantages. Turkey, with the effect of its historical heritage, hosted a total of 1,650,780 exchange migrants from the Balkans (Erder, 2014), and has experienced a continuous flow of migration from this process to the present day. Compared to migration experiences in other regions, Turkey has become a country characterized by continuous socio-spatial problems arising from its involvement in a multi-dimensional and multi-layered migration process (Erol & Göktuna Yaylacı, 2022). In addition, in the first quarter of the 21st century, due to wars and conflicts, the vast majority of Syrian (3,214,780) and Afghan (879,782) immigrants (Anadolu Ajansı, 2024) encounter immigration problems stemming from varied causes. On the one hand, this situation reveals the problem of adaptation, conflict, and exclusion between the local society and immigrants; on the other hand, it has built a categorical perception among immigrants. In this context, with the increase in the structure's attempts to control immigrants through political classifications, Syrians and Afghans have been considered a threat by other immigrant groups and have turned into a marginalized community. At this point, the increasing problems are in the literature, such as security, threat and crime (Erdoğan, 2014; Quadır & Çimen, 2018; Tamer, 2016; Süleymanov, 2017; Taş & Tekkanat, 2018; Çalışkan, 2019; Bayır & Aksu, 2020), discrimination and social exclusion (Yılmaz & Günay, 2022; Aktaş & Aksakal, 2021; Kaypak & Bimay, 2016; Gülerce & Çorlu, 2021), economic problems (Atasoy & Demir, 2015; Topkaya & Akdağ, 2016; Sümer, 2021; Sönmez & Adıgüzel, 2017; Aldemir, 2019; Şen & Keskin, 2019), and the role of the media (Başoğlu,

2023; Göker & Keskin, 2015; Göktuna Yaylacı, 2017), and were examined in the context of the subjects. Thus, the literature has diversified towards detailed analyses of different actors, such as the local community, students, and public employees, focusing on perceptions of Afghan and Syrian immigrants.

At this point, the main purpose of this research is to analyze both local and international students' perceptions of Afghan and Syrian migrants from the perspective of political geography, migration, and marginalization. Considering the impact of mobility in migration geographies, on the socio-spatial fabric, the analysis of marginalized "other" social groups among different social strata is important. Driven by this basic motivation, this research seeks to answer three main questions by comparatively analyzing both local and international students: The first question is whether there is a significant difference between local and international students' perceptions of immigrants? Second, is there a significant difference between the participants' perceptions of immigrants according to their political ideologies and ethnic origins? Third, how are the participants' views distributed between the negative (danger and social exclusion) and positive (social inclusion and humanism) subscales of the research scale? In this framework, the findings of the study make an important contribution to the literature by overcoming the one-dimensional analysis of immigrant studies. In addition, the study contributed to the literature by examining a significant difference between local and international students' perceptions, of marginalization towards Afghan and Syrian immigrants.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Political Geography and Migration

Migration and its political/spatial character, interacting with many different phenomena, have been of special interest to political geography. Because the future maps of power, space, and international relations reveal flows, not fixities, migration has emerged as the most symbolic and physical indicator of these flows. This makes migration a more important topic of research for political geographers, than it was in past periods when there was relatively little fluidity (Ehrkamp, 2017). So why critical geographies of migration? Although there are now a number of excellent monographs on migration, there is a growing interest in its enduring relevance, especially from a critical perspective, focusing on aspects such as the changing nature of borders, camps, and refugee management. Some emerging thematic areas also include the impact of new technologies on forms of communication, systems of surveillance and mapping, and a growing focus on embodiment and affective practices (Castles & Miller, 2014).

Critical political geographies of migration are not defined as spatially informed theories and practices that seek to understand and oppose migration as a site of exploitation. Rather, it is concerned with the causes of migration. In many cases, however, they focus on efforts to legally or physically restrict the movement of people across national borders. Moreover, greater emphasis is on the effects of migration, with a particular focus on the experiences of migrants who are vulnerable, marginalized, or exploited. These experiences are intersectional, and critical political geographies of migration increasingly address the relationship between migrant status, race, and practices of marginalization. Critical political geographies of migration contribute to the longstanding interest in migration and nationalism. Within this framework, the critical political geography of migration focuses on two key areas that marginalize and oppress migrants: the border and the body.

The border is more than just the physical barrier separating one nation-state from another. It is also a practice that is increasingly inscribed on migrants' bodies (Davies & Isakjee, 2015). Similarly, the migrant body is the object of geopolitical and geoeconomic processes through state-defined migrant statuses or increasing job insecurity. These processes intersect in migrants' bodily experiences (Griffiths, 2018). These two main emphases on migration in political geography again reflect two main theoretical approaches: geopolitics and biopolitics. In the last 30 years, however, there have been significant shifts in the foundations of the two theoretical frameworks. First, the scalar focus has shifted from the political-social regulation of migration by nation-state policies to supranational migration frameworks, and transnational practices and experiences. Second, the theoretical framework has shifted from geopolitics to biopolitics. Studies focus on the globally structured and managed micro-politics of migration, political-administrative spaces of uncertainty such as camps and detention centers, and the problems experienced by irregular migrants (Coleman & Stuesse, 2014). These studies draw heavily on the broader philosophical tradition of authors such as Agamben, Derrida, and Foucault. In particular, Agamben (2013), who radicalizes

Foucault's concept of biopolitics and theorizes human life as "bare life," a life that exists biologically but is deprived of political and legal protection by sovereign structures, also focuses on the political and spatial cosmology of biopolitics. For example, refugees held in border camps, attempts to gain absolute control over bodies as an extraordinary situation during the pandemic process, and migrants driven to death are the subjects of "bare life" that the structure excludes from the law. However, Massey's (2012) "geometry of power" approach, which analyzes how space is shaped by sociopolitical relations and how power inequalities determine spatial organization, provides a theoretical framework for political geography and body studies. Likewise, Massey emphasizes that space is not only a physical space but also a site of struggles over power relations. Thus, Massey reveals how space is socially produced and shaped by structural dynamics such as class, gender, race, and global inequalities. Especially regarding migration and border controls, the powerful move freely around the world, the restriction of refugees and social segregation spaces shaped by economic segregation in urban areas are produced as a multiplier of the geometry of power.

Based on the theoretical framework of political geography, as outlined in the metanarrative on migrant research, the study aims to clarify three main contexts. The first is to explain the relationship between the discourses and practices of political actors, structures and media channels regarding the categorisation of migrant bodies and the views of the participants. In this regard, the reflections of biopolitical practices are understood especially in the context of the sub-dimensions of danger, social exclusion, social inclusion, and humanism of the questionnaire used in the research. The second is to clarify the relationship between migrants included in the sample of this research as the subjects/bodies of "bare life" and migrants with legal status (international participants). At this point, the tendencies of the participants with legal status regarding the sub-dimensions of the research questionnaire will make the perception of the biopolitical geographical construction, designed through bare life, understandable. Finally, the symmetry of local participants' perceptions that position Syrian and Afghan migrants in peripheral spaces and international participants' emphasis on social inclusion and humanism arising from the experience of global mobility provides an important context for explaining the power geometry relationship.

Immigration and Immigrant Perception

Migration has been one of the main phenomena that has undergone continuous transformation while preserving its essential characteristics throughout history. These radical changes in the phenomenon of migration, which have developed in different ways from the traditional process to the modern period, including the reasons for its emergence as well as its forms and consequences, have caused the concept to evolve into a multidimensional and complex framework. At this point, migration can be a process that takes place due to sociopolitical reasons such as ethnic, theological, and ideological conflicts, interstate war, terrorism, regional violence, oppression, exile, forced displacement, and political domination. In addition, it represents the mobility where individuals leave their living spaces and settle in another area due to different factors such as obtaining better living conditions, benefiting from health, education, and economic opportunities, as well as geographical dynamics such as environmental problems, climate crisis, natural disasters, famine, and drought (Tümtaş & Ergun, 2016). In addition to the political, social, economic, and cultural reasons for migration, there are significant changes in migration status resulting from different mobility patterns. At this point, while the concepts of refugee and asylum seeker are used to recognize individuals who relocate due to compulsory reasons, people who move voluntarily without coercion are referred to as migrants (Çiçekli, 2009). Therefore, there is no theoretical unity to explain the causes and consequences of migration, a concept which does not have a generally accepted definition at the international level. Nevertheless, migration theories such as "Laws of Migration" (Ravenstein, 1885), "Push and Pull" (Lee, 1966), "Center-Periphery Theory" (Wallerstein, 2005), "Bifurcated Labor Market" (Piore, 1979), "Migration Systems" (Faist, 2003) and "Network of Relations" (Castles et al., 2008), which have different political and economic approaches, have tried, as much as possible, to present a holistic context by theorizing the migration phenomenon according to different dynamics.

Along with migration theories that affect mobility and explain migration dynamics, the relations between migrant communities and local societies are an important context. In this regard, the concept of "migrant perception" refers to migrant individuals trying to exist in the geographies where they settle in accordance with the cultural forms to which they belong. This situation is seen as a threat to local culture, ethnic homogeneity, and the distribution of economic resources (Friedman, 2002). At this point,

especially due to international migration, the perception of migrants has gained a different dimension with the acceleration in human mobility brought about by globalization and the emergence of fluid social structures. International migration, which has a different and chaotic nature from internal migration in terms of its consequences (Erder, 2000), has led to the development of a negative perception of migrants in the central countries hosting migration mobility, especially in the Western geography, under the influence of global economic, environmental, and political developments. The literature on the perception of immigrants has shown that distance and prejudice, especially exclusion, affect the dimensions of xenophobia. These have been revealed through different phenomena such as the decline in the welfare level of the local society (Bozkurt et al., 2021), the immigrant profile constructed in the media (Tecim & Karakoyunlu, 2021), and the practices of political structures (Görentaş & Özdemir Dal, 2022).

The perception of migrants as xenophobes for different reasons causes them to be considered as an element of danger due to security concerns and thus leads to the emergence of social polarization. This situation has made it possible to analyze the perception of immigrants according to different social variables. Studies analyzing the perception of immigrants according to ethnic identity and political ideologies aim to provide a perspective on the consequences of immigration. For example, Brooks et al. (2016), who analyzed the perception of immigrants in the context of political ideologies in the US local community, and Bloemraad et al. (2016), who measured the positive perception of immigrants by liberal and conservative identities, highlighted differences in perception of immigrants. Similarly, the findings of Hainmueller and Hopkins (2015), that liberals and conservatives exhibit negative attitudes towards immigrants were important in terms of showing the variability in the research scale. Again, Sniderman et al. (2004) revealed in their research analyzing the perception of Western European immigrants in the Dutch sample that the ethnic identity of the local population plays a dominant role in the exclusion and perception of immigrants as a threat. In this framework, the aim is to reveal significant differences by taking into account the variables of the participants in the research based on the threat (economic, environmental, social), security problem, and social polarisation that emerged as a result of the perception of immigrants. In the study, the results, especially those that will emerge in the perception of immigrants, according to the Turkish and Kurdish ethnic identity variable, will make the correlation between the majority and minority status and the perception of disadvantaged communities meaningful. Moreover, this will clarify the significant difference between the attitudes of local participants towards the perception of threat to the ethno-cultural imaginary of the super-identity. In addition, considering that the perception of immigrants varies according to political ideologies, this study will clarify whether there is a significant difference between the political ideologies of the participants regarding the perception of immigrants and the underlying reasons for this, with support from the literature.

Otherization

The indisputable quality of social and geographical reality is that it is a reflection of difference. Individuals who have lived throughout history in various spatial cosmologies have experienced intangible social differences based on their cultural, ethnic, religious, and sectarian characteristics, depending on this spatial quality. Although the social boundaries that have emerged in this context have created a distinction between the “self” and the “other,” this distinction has not led to conflict or psychosocial exclusion, and has instead showcased the moral richness of diversity. However, especially in the modern world, the acceleration of social flows and migrations due to human factors such as war, terrorism, environmental disasters, and technological advances that have increased informational networks, has caused the “other” to be perceived as a negative value. At this point, otherization, which has transformed from a factual (other) to a normative action, comes to the fore as a political and ideological practice that ignores diversity, assimilates cultural differences, and excludes plural identities based on historical accumulation (Habermas, 2019).

A dominant identity's attempt to construct a series of differences between itself and others by defining them as abnormal subjects who do not belong to “us” in terms of their cultural characteristics constitutes the primary practice of otherization. Plural identities make the existence of the other explicit by glorifying their belonging and construct the first step of negative categorization by highlighting the distinction of otherized groups (Arar & Bilgin, 2009). Thus, target individuals and groups are affirmed as illegitimate social strata in the eyes of society, and attitudes, meanings, and stereotypes are constructed around these groups. They are labeled as categories that are outside of clear normative boundaries (Bar-Tal, 1990). In societies where

social tensions and sensitive situations between cultural groups intensify, the media, non-governmental organizations, and political parties, which operate against different identities and try to expand their sphere of influence on this ground, are effective actors in othering different groups. Exclusion between different groups, resulting from actors who actively oppose a common goal, can turn into a security problem in the absence of legal measures (Sherif, 1966). Minority migrants, especially, are exposed to discriminatory discourses and practices and therefore face challenges to social cohesion. It limits access to opportunities such as work, health, education, and housing and prevents the smooth exercise of control over migrants' lives (Mawani, 2014). These negative dynamics arising from otherization are also closely related to both the type and intensity of migration and the perception of migrants. These phenomena, which affect the visibility of new social identities, cause the framework of sociocultural perception to be shaped on the basis of the categories put forward for migrant groups (Doise et al., 1999). This categorical distinction begins to take shape among migrants over time. Migrant groups marginalized by the local majority are subjected to a categorical marginalization among migrants, constructing a perception of migration in which the other is marginalized. The marginalization of migrant groups, which is seen as the main problem, causes different migrant groups to show a protective reflex due to the fear and anxiety created by panoptic control, and it reveals the "us" behavior patterns of the majority in opposition to the other.

The conceptual framework of marginalization will be used to assess how the increase in the presence of Syrian and Afghan immigrants, especially in Turkey, clarifies their belonging to a plural identity through the perceptions of the participants. Moreover, whether categorical marginalization depending on the type of migration among migrants will be understood through the threat and social exclusion dimensions of the research questionnaire for international participants. At this point, the analytical context of marginalization will be instrumental in revealing the dimensions in which local and international participants consolidate or diverge in their perceptions of Syrian and Afghan migrants. In addition, this situation provides an important context for understanding whether being plural or minority according to ethnic identity reflects a meaningful difference.

Turkey's Migration Experience

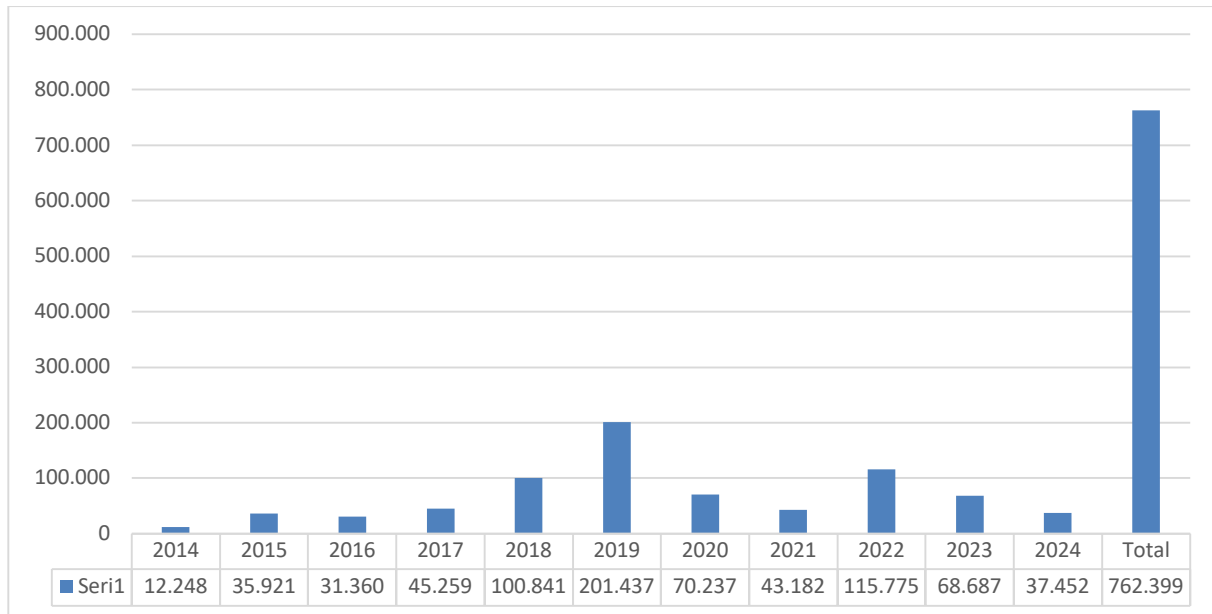
The socioeconomic and political dynamics that influence migration phenomena significantly affect the quality, quantity, and spatial cosmology of human mobility across different geographies and periods. At this point, the fact that Turkey is the continuation of the Ottoman Empire, is geopolitically located on migration routes, and is within the pioneering sphere of influence of the postcolonial process in terms of migration mobility, causes Turkey to be exposed to international migration flows (Kolukırmık, 2014). This characteristic of Turkey is why many migrants from Asia, the Middle East, and Africa see the country as a transit geography and a migratory area. In this context, when international migration to Turkey is divided into periods until today, it can be stated that four external migration movements occurred during the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic. The first is the exchange migration of cognates and co-religionists who were settled in the Balkans during the Ottoman period, and this began following the First World War (Karpas, 2009). Balkan migrations, which occurred through population exchange or forced displacement practices, continued especially until the 1960s, due to the varying intensities experienced from different countries over the years (Table 1).

Table 1: Immigrants by period and country of origin

Years	Bulgaria	Yugoslavia	Greece	Romania	Others	Total	Percentage
1923-49	220 085	117 212	394 753	121 339	10 109	825 022	52,1
1950-59	154 473	138 585	14 787	5	4 222	312 072	18,9
1960-69	2 582	42 512	2 081	259	1 047	48 481	2,9
1970-79	113 562	2 940	-	147	139	16 788	7,1
1980-89	225 892	2 550	4	686	4 457	233 589	14,2
1990-99	74 564	2 159	-	126	773	77 622	4,7
2000-07	138	1 548	-	2	49	1 731	0,1
Total	791 296	307 506	408 625	122 564	20 796	1650 787	100

Source: (Erder, 2014)

Table 1, which shows the migration mobility experienced with the establishment of the Republic, indicates that the temporal and statistical distribution of Balkan migrations is also categorized over two periods. At this point, while there was a significant flow of migration from Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Greece, Romania, and other Balkan countries in the period 1923-1949, intensive migration from Bulgaria and Yugoslavia took place in the period 1950-1959. The period between 1980 and 1989, covering the forced displacement process, marked the most intense migration flow to Turkey after 1950. Turkey's second external migration movement was due to geopolitical reasons, mainly the Gulf War (1990) and the US invasion of Iraq. During the war, hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees crossed into Turkey and started to live in protection centers and camps (Kavak, 2013; Kara & Korkut, 2010). The third migration movement is the migration to Turkey from Afghanistan, a country destabilized and occupied by major global powers (Russia, USA, UK). The main feature of this migration movement, which is distributed not only throughout the world but also in Turkey, is its long historical continuity. In this context, the other reasons for Afghan migration, which started in the 1970s and still continues, are lack of security and stability, along with economic factors. Other reasons for the intensity of Afghan migration in Turkey, which ranks third after Pakistan and Iran among the preferred countries with sociocultural and religious similarities, have included education, work, and use as a transit point to reach the target country (Europe, America), (Karakaya & Karakaya, 2021; Bozok & Bozok, 2018).



Graph 1: Distribution of irregular Afghan migrants by years (Göç İdaresi Müdürlüğü, 2024)

Afghans constitute the largest group of irregular migrants, apart from this basic characteristic. Irregular Afghan migrants have continued to increase, especially after 2014, due to the border tensions between Turkey and the European Union. The increase in the number of irregular migrants and the official Afghan migration data, and the fact that these irregular migrants will exceed 750 thousand by 2024 further reveals how Turkey is exposed to migration pressure (Graph 1). Finally, the fourth external migration movement, the most intense of the period marking Turkey's entry into the 21st century, was the migration from Syria. The number of asylum-seekers fleeing the Syrian civil war, which occurred as an extension of the Arab Spring starting in 2011, has been more than twice the total number of external migrations in the 20th century. Starting from 2011, the total number of Syrian migrants, which has been increasing continuously, reached 3,214,780 in 2023, while the regime changes in 2024 (Mülteci Derneği, 2024), this number was recorded as 2,901,478. Compared to Afghan migrants, a minority of Syrian migrants live in camps, while a majority reside in cities have become a significant presence that poses challenges in daily life (Emin, 2016). Followed by Istanbul (524,948), the provinces of Gaziantep (448,982), Hatay (435,885), Sanliurfa (423,490),

Adana (254,004), Mersin (228,136), Bursa (179,569), Izmir (148,144), and Kilis (105,869) have been the geographical areas where Syrian migrants live the most (Directorate of Migration Management, 2025). At this point, the significant increase in the number of Afghan and Syrian asylum-seekers, especially in the fourth period of external migration, has brought along problems such as xenophobia, discrimination, marginalization, and social exclusion (Ünal, 2014). This situation has led to social conflict and an increase in the perception of anti-immigrant sentiment, according to different variables (economic, cultural, etc.).

METHOD

The main purpose of this study is to comparatively analyze the perception of Syrian and Afghan immigrants among domestic and international university students. For this purpose, data obtained from a total of 335 students comprising 217 domestic and 118 international participants studying at public universities were analyzed using the quantitative research method. Within the framework of the research, a frequency analysis of demographic findings was conducted, along with the reliability analysis and the correlation analysis to determine the relational levels of scale dimensions, and the regression analysis to reveal the perception of migrants.

Population and Sample of the Study

The population of the study consists of domestic and international students studying at public universities. At this point, the sample size table put forward by Barlett et al. (2001), was used to determine the sample size of the participants who would represent the population of the study. According to the data determined in the relevant table, a sample size of 370 people will be sufficient for the population of 100,000 participants. However, in cases where the entire population determined in the study cannot be reached, the main factor is to determine the type of sample that will best represent the population. In this context, experts state that a sample size between 30 and 500 will be sufficient for research in the field of social sciences (Sait & Şahin, 2014). At this point, convenience sampling (Malhotra, 2004), where participants are selected based on ease of access, was preferred in determining the sample size. The main reason for choosing convenience sampling, which limits the research methodologically by preventing the generalizability of the findings obtained, is that international students are reluctant to participate in the surveys for different reasons. To overcome this situation, personal contacts at the universities identified in the study were used to ensure the participation of students in the survey. In this framework, a total of 335 students (217 Turkish citizens and 118 foreign nationals) from 16 different public universities in Turkey (Ankara University; Balıkesir University; Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy University; Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University; Çankırı Karatekin University; Erzurum Atatürk University; Eskişehir Osmangazi University; Fırat University; İstanbul University; İzmir Kâtip Çelebi University; Karabük University; Kırşehir Ahi Evran University; Manisa Celal Bayar University; Samsun Ondokuz Mayıs University; Sivas Cumhuriyet University; Trabzon University) were included in the sample group of the study. The study received ethical approval by the Kırşehir Ahi Evran University University Ethics Committee on 18.12.2024 with the decision number 2024/15/01. In addition, consent forms were obtained from the participants through an online survey shared via Google Forms.

Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire technique was used as a data collection tool in the study. In this framework, the “Perception of Immigrant” scale was used in the study. The questionnaire used in the research consists of two parts. The first part includes questions to collect data on the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants. In the second part, there are questions measuring positive and negative perceptions of immigrants across cultural, economic, and social dimensions. Survey questions with established validity and reliability from previous research were utilized when determining the survey questions. At this point, the survey questions were taken from the article “Development, Validity, and Reliability of the Immigrant Perception

Scale” developed by Tecim and Karakoyunlu (2021). The scale consists of 21 items in total and has four sub-dimensions: danger (items 1-5), social exclusion (items 6-11), social inclusion (items 12-18), and humanism (items 19-21). Items 19-21 in the scale consist of reverse expressions, and reverse coding was used when evaluating the scores. For each item in the questionnaire, responses were requested in the form of definitely disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, and definitely agree. The study’s analysis process was carried out after obtaining ethics committee permission. The questionnaire used in the study was sent to the participants via Google Forms. In this context, participants first gave their consent, ensuring voluntary participation in the survey. SPSS 20 was used to analyze and visualize the data obtained and to ensure statistical significance.

Validity and Reliability

According to the results of the exploratory factor analysis of the immigrant perception scale, the KMO value was found to be 0.958, which is well above the acceptability limit. In addition, Bartlett’s test yielded $p = 0.000 < 0.05$, and factor analysis is valid according to the results obtained. According to the results of the factor analysis conducted in the research, the total variance explained by 4 factors, was 78.788%. The explained variance determined at this point is above the 67% limit value, which is generally expressed as the acceptable limit in the literature. As a result of the factor analysis, the factor loadings of the variables for four factors are given in Table 2.

After the factor analysis, to test the validity of the immigrant perception scale, a reliability analysis was conducted (Table 2). As a result of the reliability analysis, the Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient for the scale was found to be 0.662. Although a value of 0.7 is generally given for the reliability coefficient in the literature, many studies state that a reliability coefficient above 0.6 indicates that the scale is reliable (Kalaycı, 2010, p. 405). At this point, the reliability coefficient in the scale of migrant perception was calculated with the sub-dimensions of social exclusion (0.959), threat (0.952), social inclusion (0.766); and humanism, respectively.

Table 2: Validity and reliability analysis results of the immigrant perception scale

	Danger	Social Exclusion	Social Inclusion	Humanism
T1	0,838			
T2	0,806			
T3	0,875			
T4	0,842			
T5	0,798			
SE1		0,661		
SE2		0,82		
SE3		0,686		
SE4		0,751		
SE5		0,712		
SE6		0,548		
SI1			0,707	
SI2			0,824	
SI3			0,679	
SI4			0,556	
SI5			0,72	
SI6			0,567	
H1				0,819
H2				0,78
H3				0,743
H4				0,773
Güv.	0,952	0,959	0,766	0,619

FINDINGS

To analyze university students' perceptions of Syrian and Afghan immigrants comparatively, the data obtained from the participants for the research were examined, and the main differences regarding the views of the participants were revealed, consistent with the findings.

Table 3: Socio-demographic characteristics of the participants

Political Ideologies of Local Students	
Islamist	46
Conservative	11
Nationalist	77
Liberal	5
Socialist	8
Atatürkist	63
Other	7
Political Ideologies of International Students	
Islamist	83
Conservative	5
Nationalist	7
Liberal	10
Socialist	7
Other	6
Region of Origin of International Students	
Asia	9
Central Asia	55
Middle East	18
Africa	36
Ethnicity of Local Citizens	
Turkish	188
Kurdish	29
Gender	
Woman	194
Male	141

Upon examining Table 3, which shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants, it was determined that five independent variables were prominently associated with the results of the scale. In this context, it was determined that there was a significant difference in the political ideologies of local and international students. The first three political ideologies in which local students are most concentrated are nationalist (77), Kemalist (63), and Islamist (46). In addition, it is revealed, that local students are concentrated in the conservative (11), socialist (8), other (7), and liberal (5) categories. On the other hand, international students are concentrated in the ideologies ranked first and second: Islamist (83), and liberal (10), with other political ideologies and share the independent variable of nationalist and socialist with seven equal participants. In addition, 'other' and 'conservative' political ideologies were the least preferred by the participants, with 6 and 5 participants choosing them, respectively. When the distribution of the regions from which international students come, is analyzed in Table 3, it is determined that Central Asia (55) ranks first, followed by Africa (36), the Middle East (18), and Asia (9). In addition, when the ethnic distribution of local citizens was analyzed, it was understood that 188 participants expressed a Turkish and 29 participants expressed a Kurdish ethnic identity. Finally, when the gender variable was analyzed for all participants, it was found that the number of female participants (199) was higher than the number of male participants (141).

Table 4: Immigrant perception scale factor averages

Sub Dimensions	Average	Variance	Std. Deviation
Danger	3,7516	1,23259	1,519
Social Exclusion	3,3229	1,26936	1,611
Social Inclusion	2,2995	1,09737	1,204
Humanism	2,8575	1,16226	1,351

The average factor values for the four sub-dimensions of the migrant perception scale are given in Table 4. At this point, analysis of the participants' factor averages on the migrant perception scale determined that the danger dimension has the highest average of 3.7516. The social exclusion dimension ranked second with a factor mean of 3.3229 and social inclusion ranked third with a mean of 2.2995. In addition, it was understood that the humanism dimension had the lowest factor mean of 2.8575. The high factor averages obtained from the participant data in terms of negative dimensions can be explained by three main reasons in the context of Turkey: First, it is because the fourth period of external migration mobility, especially, does not have a certain formal quality and quantity due to geopolitical reasons. In this regard, it can be stated that the main reason is the negative impression on social perception caused by the border crossings of Afghan and Syrian migrants, especially irregular migrants. Secondly, the spread of migrants across all regions, particularly in metropolitan areas within Turkey, along with their sociocultural productions in concentrated areas that hinder social integration, are reflected in negative dimensions. Thirdly, the economic downturn on a global scale and the developments brought about by the pandemic process, combined with the pressure of migration, combine to affect social welfare and life.

Table 5: Differences in scale subdimension means according to domestic and international students

Dimensions	Levene Test		Average Difference		Average of local Students	International Average of Students
	f	p	t	p		
Danger	3,334	0,067	16,891	0	4,304	2,736
Social Exclusion	0,008	0,929	13,893	0	3,846	2,36
Social Inclusion	5,946	0,015	-8,585	0	1,991	2,867
Humanism	9,5	0,012	-6,02	0	2,619	3,299

The difference in the averages of the sub-dimensions of the scale for local and international students is analyzed in Table 5. According to the results of the independent sample t test for the four sub-dimensions given in Table 5, the independent sample t test for all variables was found to be $p=0.000 < 0.05$. In terms of all sub-dimension averages, a significant difference was found between the perceptions of migrant students who are local citizens and those of international students. According to the independent sample t-test results, it was determined that local students concentrated on the sub-dimensions of danger (4.304), social exclusion (3.846), humanism (2.619) and social inclusion (1.99), respectively. International students, on the other hand, concentrated on the sub-dimensions of humanism (3.299), social inclusion (2.867), danger (2.736) and social exclusion (3.360), respectively. At this point, it was concluded that local students had higher mean values for the sub-dimensions expressing negative immigrant perception, while international students had higher mean values for humanism, and social inclusion dimensions, which can be expressed as positive immigrant perception. Nevertheless, the proximity of the negative sub-dimension averages of international students to the positive sub-dimension average of social inclusion indicates that the negative immigrant perception of Afghans and Syrians has a common semiology.

Table 6: Differences in scale subdimension means according to the ethnic identity of local students

Dimensions	Levene Test		Average Difference		Turkish Average	Kurdish Average
	F	Sig.	t	p		
Danger	0,02	0,889	2,423	0,016	4,352	3,993
Social Exclusion	0,237	0,627	3,445	0,001	3,932	3,293
Social Inclusion	0,53	0,468	-2,759	0,006	1,925	2,42
Humanism	0,947	0,331	-1,586	0,114	2,573	2,914

According to the results of the independent sample t-test (Table 6), since $p < 0.05$ was obtained for the dimensions of danger, social exclusion, and social inclusion, a significant difference was found between the evaluations of students of Turkish origin and students of Kurdish origin. In terms of the dimensions of danger and social exclusion, which express the negative perception of immigrants, Turkish students had an average of 4.352 and 3.932, respectively, according to the independent sample t-test. In contrast, the positive sub-dimensions of humanism and social inclusion had averages of 2.573 and 1.925, respectively. On the other hand, students of Kurdish origin had independent sample t-test means of 3.993 and 3.293 in the sub-dimensions of danger and social exclusion, respectively, while they had means of 2.914 and 2.420 in the sub-dimensions of humanism and social inclusion. At this point, it is revealed that the average of Turkish students is higher than the mean of Kurdish students regarding the sub-dimensions expressing negative immigrant perception. The mean variable of social inclusion, which is one of the dimensions expressing positive immigrant perception, was higher in students of Kurdish origin. Although the mean of the humanism dimension was higher in students of Kurdish origin, the difference was not statistically significant, as $p > 0.05$.

The difference in the mean scores of the sub-dimensions of the immigrant perception scale among students with Turkish citizenship was also analyzed, according to their ideologies. But according to the results of the one-way analysis of variance, contrary to the expectation, no significant difference was found for all four sub-dimensions across ideologies. In addition, the difference in foreign students' perceptions of immigrants according to their regions of origin was analyzed. Nevertheless, according to the results of one-way analysis of variance for four sub-dimensions, no significant difference was found in terms of the regions of origin of the students.

DISCUSSION

In this study, the aim is to analyze university students' perception of Syrian and Afghan immigrants in a comparative manner. In this direction, the data obtained from a total of 335 students, 217 Turkish citizens, and 118 foreign nationals were analyzed with the online survey technique. In this context, mean difference tests were applied to the data obtained. Differences in the averages of the dimensions of danger, social exclusion, social inclusion, and humanism—which are sub-dimensions of the migrant perception scale—were analyzed according to ideology, ethnic identity, gender, and the regions from which foreign students come. The findings were interpreted. As a result of the research, it was determined that there was a significant difference in the perceptions of local and international students towards Syrian and Afghan immigrants.

One of the two primary research dimensions of political geography in migration analysis that comes to the fore is the biopolitical approach (Amoore, 2006; Coleman & Stuesse, 2014; Mitchell et al., 2020). Biopolitical practices explain the discourses that these structures, particularly political actors and institutions, construct on social forms. They also address the spatialization and geographical circulation of these discourses by social strata, thereby manipulating bodies by marginalizing them under contradictory categories (Ar, 2020). These practices are widely applied for migrants today. As the main subjects of mobility at the intersection of politics and space, migrants are otherized and shaped into legitimate targets as a result of biopolitical practices. They are also encoded using new representations within certain boundaries. At this point, one of the most important findings is reflected in the factor dimensions. As a result of the analysis of the data obtained from the participant questionnaires; the dimension with the highest factor average is the danger factor (3.7516), whereas the dimension with the lowest factor average is humanism (2.8575). This discrepancy reveals two basic results regarding the biopolitical construction. The first is the impact of anti-immigrant policies and discourses, especially by political actors and structures such as (parties, MPs, think tanks), and popular media channels, on different social strata. This situation has caused the exclusionary political discourses against Syrian and Afghan migrants to evolve dangerously within social perception. This finding is in line with the findings of studies on Afghan and Syrian immigrants in Turkey (Akkaş & Aksakal, 2021; Süleymanov, 2017; Bayır & Aksu, 2020; Dilaver, 2020). Similar findings were found in the relevant literature in studies conducted on university students, in accordance with the sample of this study (Şengül, 2022), that Afghan and Syrian immigrants have become a threat factor. However, there are also studies in the literature with findings contrary to the research findings. Sümer (2021), who analyzed

graduate students' perception of Syrian immigrants, concluded that 41.7% of the participants were undecided and 37.5% did not see Syrians as a threat. Again, according to the results of the study conducted by Quadir and Çimen (2018) in Konya, the finding that local people do not see immigrants as a threat is also important for demonstrating changing attitudes according to geographical scale.

Second, international students had an impact on the factor value of the danger dimension, 3.7516. This can be explained by their tendency to show conservative responses against marginalized main group migrants or against other migrant groups within the group or identity. Doğanoglu (2022) analyzed the perceptions of intra-identity marginalization of Syrian migrants in Turkey, and found that the participants attributed blame to some Syrians instead of problematizing the majority identity that is prone to marginalization. This finding is in line with the main result of this study. The main original finding that emerged in this study based on the second main dimension which differs from political geography, migration studies (Davies & Isakjee, 2015; Mitchell et al., 2020), and biopolitics studies in particular (Amoore, 2006; Coleman & Stuesse, 2014) was the reflection of political discourse on social consciousness. At this point, it can be stated that the biopolitical perception of social groups, which develops due to inequalities arising from the consequences of migration (geopolitics from below), resonates with the anti-immigrant policies of elitist geopolitics, defined as geopolitics from above. This situation leads to the development of a categorical othering among the local community, in particular, but also among communities considered minorities, thereby leading to the biopolitical construction of segregation.

One of the key original findings of the study was the difference in the mean scores of the sub-dimensions between local students and international students. This original finding, which can be defined as the perception of immigrants by immigrants, has been important in terms of advancing beyond the comparative analyses of the existing literature focused on comparisons between the local society and immigrants' perceptions. According to this basic result, it was concluded that the independent sample t-test averages of the sub-dimensions of the immigrant perception scale (danger, social exclusion, social inclusion, humanism) reflected a significant difference between local and international students, such that $p=0.000 < 0.05$. At this point, it was determined that marginalization came to the fore with negative dimensions (danger and social exclusion) in the context of local students, but reflected positive dimensions for international students.

Contrary to Akkaş and Aksakal's (2021) finding that there was no significant difference in the perception of Afghan immigrants according to the ethnicity variable (Sig. 2-tailed=0.153) because the value was greater than 0.05. A significant difference was found among local students in terms of sub-dimensions according to the ethnic identity independent variable. This main finding, which shows that there is a significant difference in the perception of immigrants between social strata, reveals that the perception of marginalization towards immigrants varies according to the minority and majority status established in the social structure. It is also understood that groups that are disadvantaged in the dualistic social construction of "me" and "us" are more tolerant, transcending the socioeconomic and political context of the spatial fabric. This situation can be read as a reflection of the historical experience of marginalization. Starting from the process of nation-building, the marginalization practices faced by minority identities in society and the dominant intellectual codes that elements of the majority attribute to the super-identity are effective in shaping their perceptions towards immigrant groups. This basic finding explains the variability of marginalization according to the social context, which is different from the results of the studies put forward by Bar-Tal (1990), Doise et al. (1999), and Arar and Bilgin (2009), in the literature. These studies discuss factors such as the hegemonic effectiveness of the dominant identity, the glorification of plural identities, the practices of making other groups prominent, and the exclusion practices due to the type and intensity of migration.

The ideologies of local participants are another variable in which a significant difference is expected regarding their perceptions of immigrants. In this regard, it is expected that the imagination of ummahism within Islamist thought, particularly the perception of coexistence with cultural differences while maintaining an Islamic identity, is more intense. In contrast, participants with a political ideology of nationalism are expected to be less accepting of Syrian and Afghan immigrants due to the polarization caused by ethnic differences. However, the results of one-way analysis of variance in the study did not reflect a significant difference among ideologies across four sub-dimensions. This situation shows that news and propaganda aimed

towards immigrants are successful in creating negative perceptions in society in general. The studies on the role of the media in the literature (Göker & Keskin, 2015; Erdoğan et al., 2017; Göktuna Yaylacı, 2017) clearly reveal this situation. Moreover, the study by Erol and Göktuna Yaylacı (2022), which found that Afghan asylum-seekers are generally represented through the words “fugitive, “ suspect, “murderer” and that humiliating elements are included in the news news analyzed in the media, reveals how society consolidates anti-immigrant sentiments by overcoming political differences.

The results obtained in the study also support the interpretations that the problems affecting all ideological segments of society due to migration contribute to the formation of a negative perception toward immigrants in all ideological segments of society. Moreover, based on results showing no significant difference based on the ideology variable, it can be stated that the pressure of migration leads to the development of a sociopolitically apolitical approach. Likewise, the cultural, economic, and socio-spatial inequalities experienced by social strata, due to the increase in the migrant population, cause individuals to become alienated from their daily life practices (Ar, 2025). This situation creates space for political-ideological structures with different intellectual approaches to cluster around the same problem they experience and develop a common discourse. However, contrary to the literature (Ennsner, 2012; Malka et al., 2014), the fact that no ideologically significant difference emerged from the variance analysis results of the study, reveals that the increasing migrant mobility and social pressure across Turkey has transformed anti-immigrant sentiment into a widespread social attitude.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study explain the anti-immigrant sentiment and marginalization among social groups resulting from international migration mobility due to geopolitical reasons such as war and conflict. These basic findings show that migration has evolved beyond being merely a subject of global-political discourse and practices. It now has a multidimensional character, revealing different social and geographical archetypes that develop between politics and space on a national scale. In particular, migration mobility, which is subjected to a categorical analysis between the border and the body in geopolitical research, has a feature that activates socioeconomic, cultural, and political factors in connection with local and national dynamics that cross the borders. This basic axiom has emerged as a political and geographical reflection of the multidimensional interaction between the body and politics, which arise from migration and the spatial reorganization of the social structure in this context.

The impact of migration on the existing sociocultural and economic order is a factor in the evolution of political discourses and practices to rebuild social consciousness. This situation leads to the emergence of migrant perception at different levels depending on the geographical context. Turkey faces numerous political and spatial problems due to its geographical location as a key location in the political geography of migration and has faced different levels of political and spatial problems involving local society and migrant communities. The the perception of othering against these migrant communities to radicalize in society. This situation, intensely reflected in the dimensions of social exclusion and danger in the research, manifests in domestic society's anti-immigrant discourse and practices on a geographical scale. Concurrently, it causes immigrant groups perceived as the other to adopt a conservative attitude. At this point, immigrant communities, which tend to be otherized by others with protectionist reflexes, are socially excluded, considered a potential danger, , and defined as the main actors of geographical inequality in the political context.

The main limitations of the study were related to the research population and the analysis tests. At this point, international and domestic students did not participate at the level of all universities due to time and access constraints, constituting a limitation of the study's scope. Similarly, since the data obtained from the questionnaire administered to domestic and international students in the study aimed to measure the level of difference comparatively, it was deemed sufficient to use mean tests. These basic limitations reveal important research directions for future studies. In particular, analyzing the perceptions of Syrian and Afghan immigrants towards the local population and the belonging of immigrant communities due to the attitudes of the local community will make important contributions to the literature in this context. In addition, data from universities with different geographical areas, along with sociocultural and economic profiles, will contribute significantly to the findings on the perception of migrants.

SUGGESTIONS

Findings from the research and studies in the literature show that negative attitudes towards immigrants increase in societies that host immigrant mobility. This situation can turn into an even more important problem, especially in countries like Turkey, where the issue of immigration is used as a apparatus for political discourse and media tools are instrumentalized. At this point, taking into account the concentration of migrants and the socioeconomic, cultural, and political repercussions, the following suggestions can be put forward to build a culture of political and social consensus:

- Migration policies should be treated as a supra-political phenomenon rather than a discourse of political struggle.
- Preventing irregular migration flows by controlling migrant mobility and planning for the post-acceptance of legal migrants.
- Elimination of information production in the media and representations that increase anti-migrant sentiment.
- Realizing socio-economic integration by organizing labor markets for migrants.
- Accelerating the social acceptance of migrants through language training, cultural integration projects, and revision of education curricula to integrate migrants.

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