

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Analyzing X Posts of Political Figures Regarding Syrians Under Temporary Protection: The Case of Ümit Özdağ

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to analyze how political figures in Türkiye use social media to shape public opinion regarding Syrians under temporary protection. In this context, the study focuses on Ümit Özdağ, a prominent political figure known for his nationalist discourses, and examines his posts related to Syrians on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter). The research covers the period after 2011, when the Arab Spring and the Syrian civil war triggered large migration waves, resulting in more than three and a half million Syrians living in Türkiye under temporary protection. A literature review was conducted to provide background information on the situation of Syrians in Türkiye and the policies implemented by the Republic of Türkiye, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international institutions. The study employs qualitative content analysis to examine Özdağ's social media posts, focusing on the language and themes used in his discourse. The findings indicate that Özdağ frequently associates economic and social problems in Türkiye with Syrians under temporary protection and uses discriminatory and marginalizing rhetoric. It is also observed that after the establishment of the Victory Party (Zafer Partisi), of which he is the founder and chairman, his discourse became sharper and more polarized, with a clear focus on mobilizing political support through the refugee issue. These results highlight the role of political figures in influencing public perceptions of migration and emphasize the potential consequences of hate speech in the social and political landscape of Türkiye.

Keywords: Syrians Under Temporary Protection, Hate Speech, Turkish Politics, Migration and Politics, Ümit Özdağ

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Türkiye'deki siyasi figürlerin geçici koruma altındaki Suriyelilerle ilgili kamuoyunu şekillendirmek için sosyal medyayı nasıl kullandıklarını analiz etmektir. Bu bağlamda, çalışma milliyetçi söylemleriyle tanınan önde gelen siyasi figür Ümit Özdağ'a odaklanmakta ve sosyal medya platformu X'te (eski adıyla Twitter) Suriyelilerle ilgili paylaşımlarını incelemektedir. Araştırma, Arap Baharı ve Suriye iç savaşının büyük göç dalgalarını tetiklediği ve üç buçuk milyondan fazla Suriyelinin Türkiye'de geçici koruma altında yaşamasına neden olduğu 2011 sonrası dönemi kapsamaktadır. Türkiye'deki Suriyelilerin durumu ve Türkiye Cumhuriyeti, sivil toplum kuruluşları (STK'lar) ve uluslararası kurumlar tarafından uygulanan politikalar hakkında arka plan bilgisi sağlamak için bir literatür taraması yapılmıştır. Çalışma, Özdağ'ın sosyal medya paylaşımlarını incelemek için nitel içerik analizi kullanmakta ve söyleminde kullandığı dil ve temalara odaklanmaktadır. Bulgular, Özdağ'ın Türkiye'deki ekonomik ve sosyal sorunları sık sık geçici koruma altında bulunan Suriyelilerle ilişkilendirdiğini ve ayrımcı ve marjinalleştirici bir retorik kullandığını göstermektedir. Ayrıca, kurucusu ve başkanı olduğu Zafer Partisi'nin kurulmasından sonra, söyleminin daha keskin ve kutuplaşmış hale geldiği ve mülteci meselesi aracılığıyla siyasi destek toplamaya açıkça odaklandığı gözlemlenmiştir. Bu sonuçlar, siyasi figürlerin göçle ilgili kamuoyunun algısını etkilemedeki rolünü ortaya koymakta ve Türkiye'nin sosyal ve siyasi ortamında nefret söyleminin olası sonuçlarını vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Geçici Koruma Altındaki Suriyeliler, Nefret Söylemi, Türk Siyaseti, Göç ve Siyaset, Ümit Özdağ

Introduction

Migration has long been a central focus in the social sciences due to its transformative effects on societies, economies, and political systems. While migration can result from a range of factors such as economic hardship, environmental change, or social mobility, forced migration—particularly in the form of displacement caused by armed conflict—has gained increasing prominence in recent decades. One of the most striking examples of this phenomenon is the mass displacement triggered by the Syrian civil war (Özdağ, 2018, p. 16). Following the 2011 Arab Spring protests, Syria experienced a rapid descent into violent conflict as the regime responded harshly to demands for democracy and reform. Trapped between government forces and various armed factions such as ISIS and the Free Syrian Army, millions of Syrians were forced to abandon their homes in search of security.

In response, political narratives surrounding migration have become increasingly salient, with political leaders and parties framing refugee-related issues through ideological and strategic lenses—particularly in media and digital platforms. Atıcı (2022) evaluated political leaders' discourses on migration through internet news articles using Teun Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis model. The study found that these discourses shaped macro-level headlines and leads, while being constructed through micro-structural elements. It concluded that Turkey is portrayed as bearing a heavy migration burden and receiving insufficient support from European countries, while migrants are often represented as a threat. The tone of these narratives differed based on whether the political actors were in power or in opposition. Similarly, Mazlum (2024) analyzed anti-immigrant rhetoric during the 2023 general elections, particularly focusing on the Victory Party and its leader Ümit Özdağ. The study found that the party framed migration as a national crisis, opposing globalization and imperialist interventions in the Middle East, and positioned itself as a populist movement centered on refugee opposition.

Deniz and Kargın (2023) examined the Victory Party's Twitter discourse, noting that although direct targeting of Syrians was limited, refugees were

indirectly framed as excluded and voiceless. The party's messaging portrayed Syrians as economic and security threats. Likewise, Bayram (2020) studied the social media discourse of politically engaged youth using the concepts of "crystallization" and social representations. Findings showed that youth participants internalized a crisis-based narrative around refugees, despite limited understanding of the phenomenon itself.

In recent years, the issue of Syrians under temporary protection has become central in the agendas of nationalist political parties. Public attitudes have increasingly shifted toward negativity, shaped in part by political discourse. Against this backdrop, this study analyzes the refugee-related social media posts of Ümit Özdağ—one of the most prominent nationalist figures in Turkish politics. The research builds its framework by first exploring the concept of migration, the origins of the Syrian conflict, and Turkey's legal and political position regarding temporary protection. Through a focused discourse analysis, it examines Özdağ's rhetoric and political messaging as reflected in his social media content.

Conceptual Framework

The Concept of Refugee

Migration has increasingly become a pressing global issue, particularly due to political conflicts and instability in various regions. Individuals who flee their home countries in search of safety are often classified as "asylum seekers" or "refugees." Although these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, they have distinct legal meanings. According to Pazarıcı (1990), "asylum" refers to the act of seeking protection from persecution or prosecution by taking refuge in the premises of a foreign state. In contrast, a "refugee" is defined by the 1951 Geneva Convention and its 1967 Protocol as someone with a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group, and who is therefore unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin (Directorate General of Migration Management, 2015; UNHCR, 2024). The United

Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), established in 1950, provides broader protection to individuals regardless of whether the host country is a party to the Convention or Protocol. Initially, the Convention limited the definition of refugees to events occurring in Europe before 1951; however, these temporal and geographical restrictions were removed by a 1976 revision (Özdal, 2018, p.16).

It is also important to differentiate between “refugees” and “migrants.” While migrants typically move within or between countries voluntarily—often for economic reasons—and may not require international protection, refugees are forcibly displaced and in need of legal and humanitarian safeguards (Özdal, 2018, p. 18). In recent years, especially due to war and terrorism in the Middle East, forced migration has reached unprecedented levels. One of the most prominent examples is the mass displacement of Syrians following the civil war, with Turkey becoming a key host country due to its geographic location and relatively favorable conditions. As refugee status is internationally recognized, developments concerning Syrian refugees are closely monitored by the global community.

Emergence of the Syrian Refugee Crisis

The wave of political mobilization known as the Arab Spring began in Tunisia in 2010, following Mohamed Bouazizi’s self-immolation in protest against socioeconomic grievances and state repression (Douglas et al., 2014, p. 3). This act ignited widespread demonstrations that quickly spread throughout the Arab world including Yemen, Bahrain, Libya, and Syria—resulting in considerable political upheaval and instability across the region (Lynch, Harding, & Andres, 2013, p. 1–2).

Among the affected countries, Syria experienced the most severe and protracted crisis, which rapidly escalated into a devastating civil war. The conflict produced one of the most significant refugee movements of the 21st century, displacing millions and giving rise to a major regional migration crisis (UNHCR, 2025).

These developments not only transformed the demographic landscape of the region but also generated substantial security concerns. Notably, Turkey’s early adoption of an open-door policy positioned it as the primary host country for Syrians under temporary protection.

Table 1. Number of Syrians Under Temporary Protection by Country

Country	Source of Data	Date of Data	Population
Turkey	Ministry of Interior Directorate General of Migration Management	April 21, 2021	2,829,266
Lebanon	UNHCR	March 31, 2021	755,426
Jordan	UNHCR	March 31, 2021	564,079
Iraq	UNHCR	March 31, 2021	304,409
Egypt	UNHCR	February 28, 2021	142,122
North African Countries	UNHCR	January 31, 2020	43,283

Source: Ministry of Interior Directorate General of Migration Management, 2025; UNHCR, 2025

The next section will examine the specific legal frameworks and contextual factors that facilitated the arrival and accommodation of Syrians in Turkey.

The Arrival of Syrians Under Temporary Protection to Turkey

Syria, which gained independence in 1946, came under the rule of the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party after a coup in 1963, and later under Hafez al-Assad in 1970. After his death in 2000, his son Bashar al-Assad succeeded him and has served as the President of Syria since then. Syria, which had turned into a realm of power for the Assad family, experienced major conflicts after the Arab Spring, and the civil war is still ongoing.

Due to its geographical location and the living conditions it offers, the Republic of Turkey has become the most preferred country for Syrians under temporary protection. In particular, the Regulation on Temporary Protection, which came into force in 2014, is considered a significant milestone in Tur-

key's migration management for all refugees, including those coming from Syria. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2025), the Turkish government describes this regulation on its website FAQ section as follows:

Table 2. Who Are the Syrians? (UNHCR, 2021)

Year	Dangerous People Who Will Cause Problems in the Future (%)	People Who Are a Burden to Us (%)	People Who Cannot Protect Their Country (%)	People Fleeing Oppression/War (%)
2017	39.0	43.0	39.5	57.8
2019	42.0	41.4	35.0	39.5
2020	24.7	33.4	22.9	38.2
2021	40.7	38.1	33.6	37.5

"Under the Regulation on Temporary Protection, published in the Official Gazette dated 22/10/2014 and numbered 29153, individuals who have come or crossed into Turkey en masse or individually from the Syrian Arab Republic due to events occurring since 28/04/2011 — including Syrian citizens, stateless persons, and refugees — have been placed under temporary protection, even if they have applied for international protection."

Table 4. Turkish Citizens' Views on Syrians Sharing Living Spaces

Year	They Should Be Sent Back (Total) (%)	They Should Be Sent Back to Safe Zones (%)	They Should Be Sent Back Under Any Circumstance (%)	They Should Live Only in Camps (%)	Special Should Be Built for Them in Turkey (%)	Cities Should Be Built in Turkey (%)	They Should Live Wherever They Want (%)	They Should Be Evenly Distributed Across Turkey (%)
2017	48.9	37.4	11.5	7.7	7.9		4.8	2.8
2019	69.8	44.8	25.0	5.5	5.3		2.4	1.0
2020	80.5	40.0	38.0	3.1	6.1		6.8	1.0
2021	82.0	32.3	49.7	1.0	7.5		4.8	1.0

The efforts of the Republic of Turkey regarding Syrians under temporary protection have been criticized in the report "Struggling to Survive: Refugees from Syria in Turkey" published by Amnesty International. These criticisms concern Turkey's geographical anxieties and the precautions it has taken against Syrians under temporary protection (Amnesty International, 2014).

With a population nearing 4 million, Syrian migrants have also begun to raise concerns among the Turkish population. Political factions in Turkey seem to capitalize on these concerns. The UNHCR prepared a comprehensive report in 2021 on the Syrian issue, which affects Turkey's demographic

structure. Based on interviews with Syrian migrants and members of Turkish society, the report examined the public's perception of Syrian integration from 2011 to 2021:

In the 10-year period between 2011 and 2021, the UNHCR examined the large migration wave from Syria to Turkey by conducting interviews with both Syrian migrants and Turkish citizens. Based on these interviews, the UNHCR's report titled "Total Persons of Concern by Country of Asylum, 2021" presents the responses of Turkish citizens to the question of whether Syrians have been able to integrate into Turkish society:

Table 3. According to Turkish Society, How Well Have Syrians Integrated? (UNHCR, 2021)

Year	Fully Largely Adapted (%)	& Did Not Adapt & Very Little (%)	Neither Adapted Nor Did Not Adapt (%)
2019	13.2	64.4	19.9
2020	11.0	69.9	16.4
2021	10.5	74.1	13.5

One of the key questions in the report titled "Syrian Barometer" was directed at Turkish citizens: "Is it possible to live together with Syrians?"

An analysis of the report's findings shows that, over the years, the Turkish public has become increasingly reluctant about the continued presence of Syrians in Turkey. The survey results are presented as follows:

Over time, it becomes evident that Turkish citizens' attitudes toward Syrians have become more negative. The report also indicates that the same applies to Syrians themselves. As years have passed, more Syrians have expressed a desire to leave Turkey. This trend is supported by survey results presented in the report:

Table 5. Do Syrians Living in Turkey Want to Return? (UNHCR, 2021)

Year	I Absolutely Do Not Consider Returning to Syria (%)	I Would Return If the War Ends and a Government We Want Is Established (%)	I Would Return If a Safe Zone Is Established in Syria (%)
2017	16.7	59.6	5.9
2019	51.8	30.3	5.9
2020	77.8	16.0	2.3
2021	60.8	33.1	1.7

The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Activities of International Organizations

Syrians under temporary and international protection are entitled to a wide range of rights, including protection from deportation or refoulement, access to social assistance, freedom of thought, the right to establish associations, and safeguards against arbitrary detention. Due to its cultural characteristics and geographical proximity, Turkey began providing protection to Syrians early in the conflict, particularly following the enactment of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection in 2014. The development of relevant legislation was influenced both by Turkey's lack of prior experience with large-scale migration and by the requirements of its EU accession process (Tamer, 2020, p. 12).

The large influx of Syrians into Turkey quickly gained an international dimension. According to Dönmez (2015, p. 343), the Syrian migration crisis has prompted increased international cooperation and shaped Turkey's migration policies through alignment with EU law, institutional reforms, and global agreements. As a result, Turkey has become a key host country not only for Syrians but also for migrants of other nationalities.

Since 2011, Turkey has implemented various initiatives to address the needs of Syrians under temporary protection and promote their integration. Erdoğan (2018), in his study *Syrians in Turkey*, emphasized that both the Turkish public and the state have taken significant steps in this regard. These efforts have focused on areas such as shelter, nutrition, healthcare, and education. The UNHCR's Syrian Barometer Report (2021) presents comprehensive data on the status of Syrian migrants in Turkey.

Table 6. Evaluation of Services Provided by the Republic of Turkey to Syrians under Temporary Protection by the Beneficiaries Themselves

Support Type	Completely Insufficient + Insufficient (%)	Very Sufficient + Sufficient (%)	Neither Sufficient nor Insufficient (%)
Health Support	17.3	64.0	16.2
Legal Support / Protection Support	27.4	53.3	12.5
Educational Support	27.8	37.2	19.8
Food Aid	71.6	10.8	12.7
Shelter Support	73.2	10.0	11.5
Financial Aid	72.5	9.2	13.7

Effective migration governance and improved living conditions for refugees require collaboration among public institutions, civil society organizations, and international actors. Among the most significant support mechanisms is the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), which addresses the needs of Syrian refugees in Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt, and Jordan. The 3RP is implemented in Turkey by UNHCR and UNDP, with an emphasis on protection services, education, healthcare, and social inclusion (3RP Turkey Chapter, 2022, p. 4). It is aligned with the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, which prioritize dignity, equality, and access to essential resources for all, regardless of identity (United Nations, 2015, p. 1; Peynirci, 2020, p. 13).

Ümit Özdağ and the Refugee Crisis

Ümit Özdağ is a prominent figure in Turkish politics and the founder and leader of the Victory Party (Zafer Partisi), which was established on August 26, 2021. The party has drawn attention primarily through its strong stance on migration and refugee policies. Its charter emphasizes key principles such as preserving Turkey's unitary structure, rule of law, equality, and human rights (Victory Party Charter, 2021).

Özdağ has become well-known for his statements regarding Syrians under temporary protection. In his speeches, he often highlights the economic challenges faced by Turkish citizens and frames Syrians as contributing to these difficulties.

According to Özdağ, the resources allocated to Syrians negatively affect the rights and welfare of Turkish citizens. He specifically criticizes policies that provide Syrians with benefits related to employment, education, and healthcare, arguing that these resources should instead be directed toward Turkish citizens.

A key element of Özdağ's political discourse is his firm opposition to granting citizenship to Syrians. He views this step as a threat to Turkey's demographic balance and national security, insisting that Syrians should return to their home country. Özdağ calls for decisive state action to facilitate this return, framing it as essential for protecting Turkey's sovereignty and social stability.

In addition, Özdağ has criticized international organizations, particularly the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN), for failing to provide Turkey with sufficient financial and logistical support in addressing the refugee crisis. This perspective aligns with claims made by several academics and politicians who argue that the international community has fallen short in burden-sharing, especially in economic terms (Güzel, 2017, p.113; Erdoğan, 2018).

Anti-Immigrant Sentiment: Comparison of EU Countries and the Victory Party

Anti-immigrant sentiment in Europe rose sharply after the 2015 European Refugee Crisis. During this period, right-wing populist parties framed migrants and refugees as a "threat," focusing on two main arguments: economic burden and cultural identity loss (Mudde, 2004). Populist rhetoric typically sets up a conflict between the "pure people" and the "corrupt elite," but in recent years it has increasingly targeted vulnerable groups such as migrants (Wodak, 2015). This narrative gains strength during times of economic stagnation and high unemployment.

Many right-wing parties promote the idea of "welfare chauvinism," arguing that social benefits should be reserved for native citizens, excluding migrants (Keskinen, 2016). For instance, Germany's AfD focuses on anti-immigrant policies, France's RN portrays migrants as a threat to national values (Betz, 2019), and Hungary's Viktor

Orbán has tightened border controls while labeling refugees as a danger to national survival (Pirro & Taggart, 2018). Social media amplifies these messages, spreading digital hate speech and deepening societal polarization (Citron & Norton, 2011).

In Turkey, anti-immigrant discourse has followed a similar trajectory since the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011. As of 2025, 2.82 million Syrians live in Turkey under temporary protection (DGMM, 2025). This demographic shift has fueled political debates, especially around economic and social pressures (Erdoğan, 2018).

The Victory Party (Zafer Partisi), founded in 2021, has centered its political agenda on sending refugees back to Syria, echoing European right-wing populist strategies (Yaşlı, 2023). Party leader Ümit Özdağ often highlights demographic concerns, citing areas like Kilis and Hatay where Syrian populations outnumber or approach the local population (Turkish Grand National Assembly, 2019).

While European right-wing parties focus on restricting immigration and protecting national sovereignty, the Victory Party emphasizes "return" and "protecting national identity." Both, however, frame migrants as the cause of economic problems. Özdağ frequently claims that Syrians are taking jobs from Turkey's 7 million unemployed citizens, mirroring European welfare chauvinism narratives (Betz, 2019; Mudde, 2004).

Populism, Digital Hate Speech and Anti-Refugeeism

In contemporary politics, populism has emerged as a dominant discourse, especially in contexts marked by economic insecurity and migration-related tensions. Populist rhetoric often constructs a binary opposition between the "pure people" and the "corrupt elite," but increasingly targets vulnerable out-groups such as refugees (Mudde, 2004, p. 543). In Turkey, this dynamic is evident in the portrayal of Syrian refugees as scapegoats for broader societal grievances.

Parallel to this, digital hate speech has become a powerful tool for disseminating anti-refugee narratives. Social media platforms amplify discriminatory discourse by enabling rapid and wide-

reaching circulation of content that dehumanizes migrants. Such rhetoric reinforces exclusionary nationalism and legitimizes policies aimed at restricting refugee rights (Citron & Norton, 2011, p. 1437).

The convergence of populist discourse and digital hate speech has significantly contributed to the rise of refugee opposition in Turkey. This opposition often manifests through the politicization of refugee presence, framing them as both economic and cultural threats. In this study, the case of Ümit Özdağ is examined as a central figure who strategically employs nationalist and populist rhetoric in digital spaces to construct a narrative of refugee hostility.

Method and Findings

This study is based on a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the most highly engaged posts shared by Ümit Özdağ on X (formerly Twitter) between the years 2021 and 2025, focusing on the refugee crisis in Turkey. The research universe consists solely of X, while the sample includes eight posts containing content related to refugees that received significant public attention. Posts were selected using engagement metrics such as the number of likes, reposts, and comments to ensure that the most influential and widely circulated content was analyzed.

The study follows a qualitative research design, adopting the critical discourse analysis framework developed by Wood and Kroger (2000), which emphasizes the role of discourse in constructing social meaning and shaping public perception. This approach was chosen because it allows for the examination of how political actors use language and visuals to influence societal attitudes toward marginalized groups, particularly refugees.

Data Collection and Preparation

The analysis began with the systematic collection of all refugee-related posts shared by Ümit Özdağ within the specified timeframe. Each post was archived as a screenshot to preserve both its textual content and visual elements. This ensured that the study could capture the multimodal nature of political communication on X.

Analytical Procedure

The analytical process was conducted in four stages:

1. **Initial Screening and Selection** Posts were first screened to identify those directly addressing the refugee issue. Only posts explicitly related to Syrians under temporary protection or migration policies were included.
2. **Coding and Thematic Categorization** The textual and visual content of each post was coded using key thematic categories. These included:
 - **Construction of Social Identity** – narratives defining the boundaries of the “nation” and “citizenship,”
 - **Othering** – discourses portraying refugees as outsiders or threats,
 - **National Belonging** – rhetoric emphasizing unity and exclusion based on national identity.
3. **Multimodal Analysis** Both the language and imagery of the posts were examined to understand how symbols, metaphors, and visual cues reinforced nationalist or exclusionary narratives. This stage focused on identifying rhetorical strategies such as fear appeals, symbolic framing, and calls for collective action.
4. **Synthesis of Findings** Finally, the identified patterns were synthesized to reveal how political discourse on X contributes to shaping public opinion and fostering societal polarization.

Theoretical Foundation

Discourse analysis, as applied in this study, draws upon speech-act theory, which highlights the social function of language, and ethnomethodology, which examines how individuals construct meaning through everyday linguistic practices. Within this framework, discourse analysis is understood as a method that evaluates the variability and diversity of meaning in social interactions (Elliott, 1996).

Positioning in the Literature

This methodological approach is consistent with previous research analyzing political discourse and migration-related narratives on digital platforms. For example, Mendelsohn, Budak, and Jurgens (2021) conducted framing analysis of immigration-related tweets, demonstrating how different types of frames affect audience engagement. Similarly, Sutkutė (2019) explored how refugee-related narratives were shaped through Facebook posts using a mixed-method approach that integrated qualitative and quantitative data. KhosraviNik (2014) provided a foundational CDA study of immigration discourses in the British press, focusing on processes of othering and media representation. More recently, Gür-Şeker (2023) examined how refugees and migrants are represented in Turkish online media discourse, emphasizing the value of multimodal analysis. By aligning with these established studies, the present research gains theoretical grounding and methodological credibility, offering a nuanced examination of how a prominent political figure uses digital platforms to construct and disseminate narratives about refugees.

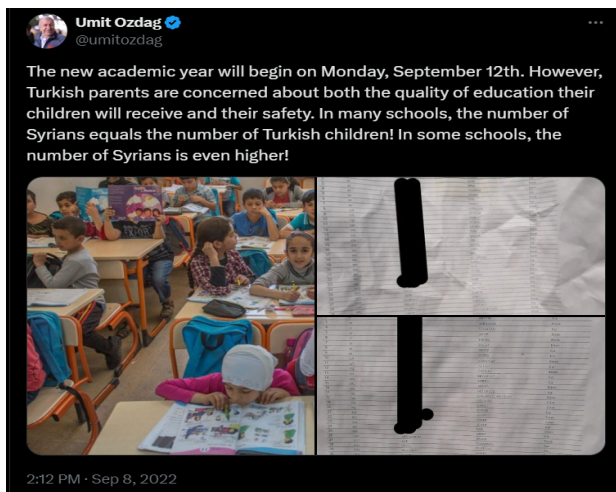


Figure 1. Ümit Özdağ's Post Regarding the High Number of Refugee Children Within the Context of the Refugee Crisis (<https://twitter.com/umitozdog/status/156783335777510401>)

In the post shown above, Ümit Özdağ criticizes the educational services provided to the children under temporary protection and establishes a hierarchical distinction between Syrian and Turkish students. Through this statement, Özdağ not only keeps the refugee crisis in the public discourse but

also uses his rhetoric to criticize the ruling government. Moreover, he politicizes the right to education for those under temporary protection, framing it as a point of contention within broader political debates.

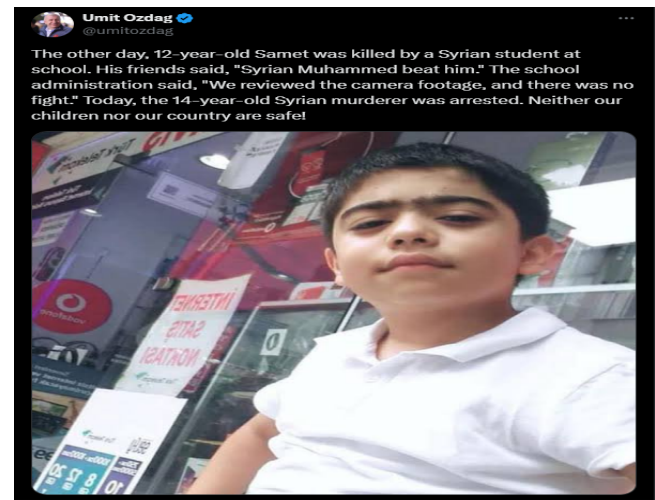


Figure 2. Ümit Özdağ's Post Concerning a Criminal Incident (<https://twitter.com/umitozdog/status/1573309696437637120>)

In this post, Özdağ shares a criminal incident involving elementary school-aged children without referencing any official document or authority. By doing so, he contributes to social division among the Turkish public and targets the entire Syrian population. Through this rhetoric, Özdağ generalizes the actions of a few individuals to an entire group, thus reinforcing negative stereotypes against those under temporary protection.

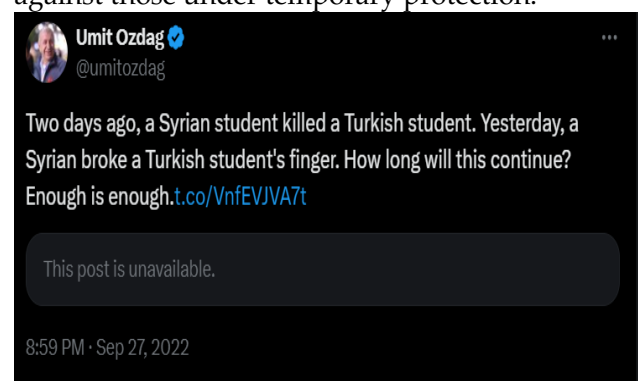


Figure 3. Ümit Özdağ's Divisive Post Regarding the Turkish Nation and Syrians (<https://twitter.com/umitozdog/status/1574821028026613762?lang=tr>)

In this post, Ümit Özdağ criticizes the policies of the Republic of Turkey concerning individuals under temporary protection. His language emphasizes a distinction between the Turkish nation and

Syrians, contributing to a polarizing and exclusionary narrative within the public discourse.



Figure 4. Ümit Özdağ's Video Post on the Temporary Protection Crisis Involving Syrians (https://twitter.com/umitozdog/status/1570294418195759104)

In this post, Özdağ criticizes the support provided to Syrian jewelers, claiming that Turkish citizens are being treated as second-class in their own country. Through this message, he argues that greater assistance should be directed toward Turkish nationals and reveals an expectation of preferential treatment for them within the Republic of Turkey.

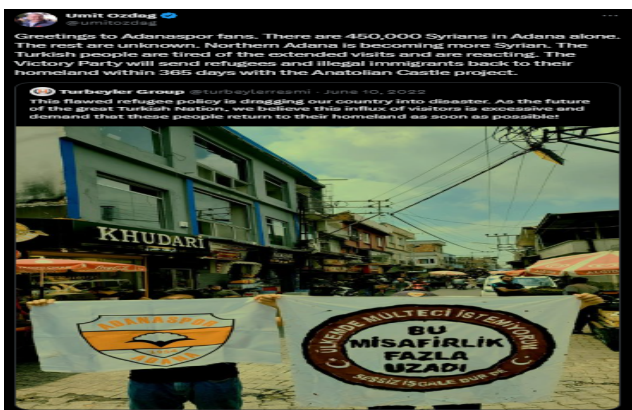


Figure 5. Ümit Özdağ's Post Sharing Content from a Supporters' Group on X (https://twitter.com/umitozdog/status/1535327082791809024)

In this post, Ümit Özdağ shares a visual originally published by a supporter group, using it to reinforce his anti-refugee discourse. The image and content aim to generate nationalistic sentiment by emphasizing a collective stance against the pres-

ence of Syrian refugees. By amplifying such messages, Özdağ integrates public and grassroots expressions into his political rhetoric on migration and national identity.

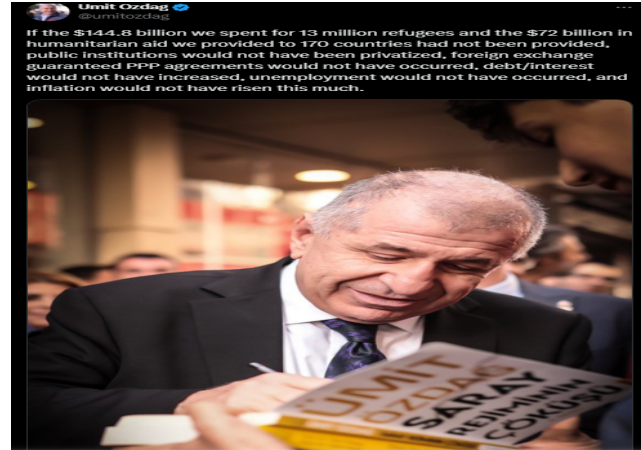


Figure 6. Ümit Özdağ's Post Criticizing Turkey's Aid to Syrians Under Temporary Protection (https://x.com/umitozdog/status/1597985191964086273?s=46)

In this post, Ümit Özdağ openly criticizes the Turkish government's assistance programs directed at Syrians under temporary protection. By highlighting what he perceives as the disproportionate allocation of state resources, Özdağ emphasizes the idea that Turkish citizens are being economically disadvantaged. This post reflects his recurring discourse that portrays Syrian refugees as a burden on the national economy and as recipients of unjustified privileges, reinforcing a hierarchical distinction between citizens and refugees.



Figure 7. Ümit Özdağ's Divisive Post Targeting the Turkish Nation and Syrians Under Temporary Protection (https://x.com/umitozdog/status/152283156101-1388417?s=46)

In this post, Ümit Özdağ draws a clear line between the Turkish nation and Syrians under temporary protection, using language that promotes societal division. His rhetoric frames the refugee population as fundamentally incompatible with Turkish national identity and interests. By amplifying nationalist sentiments, Özdağ appeals to fears regarding demographic change and cultural displacement, reinforcing exclusionary and oppositional narratives toward Syrians in Turkey.

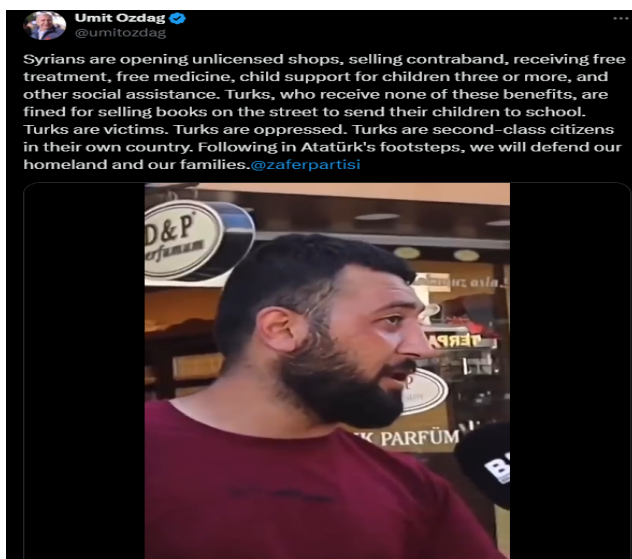


Figure 8. Ümit Özdağ's Video Post Containing Divisive Rhetoric Regarding the Crisis of Syrians Under Temporary Protection (<https://x.com/umitozdog/status/1702691301605441884?s=46>)

In this video post, Ümit Özdağ once again uses divisive language to construct a binary opposition between the Turkish population and Syrians under temporary protection. By portraying Syrians as a threat to public order and national unity, Özdağ reinforces populist and nationalist discourse. The post instrumentalizes refugee-related issues for political gain, using emotionally charged visuals and rhetoric to deepen societal polarization and fuel anti-refugee sentiment.

Global Perspective

While this study primarily focuses on Ümit Özdağ and the Victory Party's discourse on refugees in Turkey, it is important to situate these findings within a broader global context. Across the world, far-right and populist political movements have

increasingly framed migration as a challenge to national identity, cultural homogeneity, and security. Similar to Özdağ's rhetoric, these movements construct narratives that portray migrants as a burden on public resources and a threat to social cohesion. In Europe, leaders such as Marine Le Pen in France and Matteo Salvini in Italy, as well as parties like Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in Germany, have utilized social media platforms to amplify anti-immigration messages and mobilize public sentiment. Likewise, in the United States, Donald Trump's "Build the Wall" campaign exemplifies how digital platforms are leveraged to promote exclusionary and polarizing narratives (Wodak, 2015; Mudde, 2019).

By comparing Özdağ's discourse with these international examples, this section highlights both the shared global strategies of contemporary right-wing populism and the unique features of the Turkish context. This comparison allows for a deeper understanding of how political rhetoric around migration and refugees operates across different cultural and political landscapes.



Figure 9. Figure 1. Marine Le Pen's Tweet Opposing Mass Immigration (2017) (https://x.com/mlp_officiel/status/854056552763990016)

Marine Le Pen's post frames mass immigration as an "oppression" and a "tragedy," portraying migrants as a source of threat. This discourse reinforces the idea of protecting national identity and

aims to unite the French public around a collective sense of “us.”



Figure 10. Donald Trump’s “Build the Wall” Tweet Emphasizing Border Security (2017) (<https://x.com/realdonaldtrump/status/878013639613186049>)

Donald Trump’s tweet frames Mexico as a dangerous external threat, directly linking the issue to drug trade and violence. By invoking the slogan “BUILD THE WALL,” Trump offers a symbolic and physical solution that reinforces the idea of protecting the nation through strict border control.

This rhetoric mirrors strategies used by other right-wing populist leaders, such as Marine Le Pen and Ümit Özdağ, who similarly portray migration as a danger to national security and social order, albeit in different political and cultural contexts.

Marine Le Pen, Donald Trump, and Ümit Özdağ each employ similar rhetorical strategies to frame migration as a pressing national issue. Le Pen emphasizes mass immigration as a “tragedy,” focusing on cultural homogeneity and national identity. Trump frames immigration as an external threat, symbolically and physically addressed through his “Build the Wall” slogan, emphasizing border security and sovereignty. Özdağ’s discourse parallels these narratives by portraying Syrian refugees as both an economic and social burden, positioning their presence as a threat to Turkey’s stability. While the cultural and political contexts differ, all three leaders utilize othering to mobilize public sentiment, reinforce in-group identity, and advance nationalist political agendas.

Conclusion

Migration has been a recurring phenomenon throughout human history, often driven by war, economic hardship, and other crises. The Syrian

civil war, which began in 2011, created one of the largest refugee movements in recent decades. Due to its geographical proximity and open-door policy, Turkey became a primary destination for Syrians seeking safety. As of today, Turkey continues to host a significant population under temporary protection, which has generated complex social, economic, and political challenges.

This study analyzed a selection of highly engaged posts shared by Ümit Özdağ on X (formerly Twitter), focusing on his discourse regarding Syrians under temporary protection. Through critical discourse analysis, it was observed that Özdağ frequently employs language that frames Syrians as a threat to national unity and public order. In several posts, he constructs a binary opposition between the Turkish population and Syrians, often emphasizing themes of national identity, security concerns, and demographic change. Some posts included visual materials originally created by supporter groups, which were integrated into his messaging to strengthen nationalist narratives and amplify public opposition to refugees.

The findings indicate that such digital discourse can play a role in shaping public perceptions and fostering societal polarization. Politicians, as influential public figures, have the capacity to amplify fears and concerns through their online activity. In the case of Özdağ, his posts contribute to exclusionary narratives that may influence attitudes toward refugees and the broader migration debate in Turkey.

By combining perspectives from political communication, migration studies, and digital discourse analysis, this research provides a comprehensive view of how political rhetoric surrounding refugees is constructed and disseminated through digital platforms. The study highlights the importance of critically examining how online narratives are used to mobilize public opinion, revealing the potential of digital discourse to both reflect and intensify socio-political tensions.

Declarations

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Ethical Approval: *This article does not involve any studies with human participants or animals conducted by the author. Therefore, ethical approval was not required.*

Informed Consent: Not applicable.

Data Availability: *All data analyzed in this study were obtained from publicly accessible posts on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter).*

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